

**Lessons Learned from Counterinsurgencies of America to the Philippines Applied to Today's -
Battlefields -**

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[REDACTED]

05/01/09

Unclassified

I believe that the methods and tactics employed in both America from 1777-1783 and the Philippines in 1898-1902 have lessons to teach us for today's battlefield. These counterinsurgencies were very different but have similarities in what techniques and tactics were effective. By studying these lessons we can apply them to historical battles as well as to the battlefields of today and the future. There are certain aspects of counterinsurgency that remain constant and certain core values that must be understood and respected. An insurgency is able to be successful against a superior force because it relies on an indigenous force, the support of the people, and a common goal or culture. This will also be the key to defeating the insurgents and leading a path to peace.

The main complaint in America in 1763 was related to paying taxes and not being represented in the system of Government set up in Britain. "Ironically enough, British victory in the Seven Years' War set the stage for the revolt, for it freed the colonists from the need of British protection."¹ The Colonies in America were not looking to overthrow the British Government but were merely looking for concessions on some of their legitimate complaints. The military was then used to quell these protests which added to the insult of paying for protection and having it used against the citizenry. Although, the Government in England and the American Colonies shared a common language and culture, the settlers that went to America were seeking opportunity, freedom, and a new way of life.

The Philippine Government in 1898 was experiencing a Moro population on the island of Mindanao that was looking to secede and create their own nation. The

¹ *The American Revolution, First Phase* p. 45

residents of the Island of Mindanao were primarily Muslim and many had emigrated from the islands of Malaysia. The people in this region did not share the language or culture of the rest of the Philippine Islands. They also were not well represented in the system of Government that ran the Philippines. The Philippine Military was supported by the American Military and worked together to quell this uprising. The American Military was putting down insurgencies in Mexico and Cuba and had some idea of what strategies would be successful.

The policies of attraction and chastisement, in countering insurgent operations, are effective when employed together. These policies can be thought of as the carrot-and-stick approach. “But in reality, he said, the best policy was to treat the good man very well indeed and the bad man very harshly.”² The British military would utilize the policy of chastisement quite effectively, but never attempted to use the policy of attraction. The British military was trying to fight a conventional battle against a population of citizen/Soldiers that were farmers by trade but could be quickly mobilized to fight. This adversary was supported by the population and could easily blend back into the countryside. If the invading force had utilized the policy of attraction it is easy to imagine how they could have eroded the support of the population. By providing services and protection, that the insurgents could not provide, would have won public support and changed the outcome of the war. The British actually engaged Indians to help fight the unconventional warfare which had the opposite effect of protecting the populace from a violent third party.

² *Cuba and the Philippines 1898-1902 p.136*

The Troops in the Philippines had started utilizing just the policy of attraction in winning popular support of the residents. Major Bullard was a prime example of how learning the language and culture could help in the policy of attraction. “The most impressive moment of his first meeting, Bullard believed, was when he explained in Moro how boiling water rid it of the evil spirits of cholera.”³ They were building roads, distributing food, and attempting to show that the Philippine Government was effective in meeting the needs of the people. However, it wasn’t until they added in the policy of chastisement that they began to win the war. “The principal lesson of the war had been that decisive military action and the policies of chastisement, rather than policies of attraction, were the ultimate keys to a successful counterinsurgency campaign.”⁴

News reports of violations of the Laws of War or violations of moral conduct may inflame the populace and weaken the counterinsurgency. The story of the scalping of Jenny McCrea by Indians, hired by the British military, was significant in showing that the British were not able to protect the population from Indians. There was another widely spread story of American patriots that were attempting to surrender when they were massacred by the redcoats. “This brutality shocked most Americans and, as had happened with the Jenny McCrea incident, motivated the militia forces to take to the field in ever-increasing numbers.”⁵ While the effects of these transgressions were minor in scope they were major in the effects against the counterinsurgency effort.

The Philippines had stories of atrocities that also worked to turn the population

³ *Mindanao: The Road, the Lake, and the Moros 1902-1904 p. 171*

⁴ *Cuba and the Philippines 1898-1902 p.135*

⁵ *The Winning of Independence, 1777-1783 p.92*

against the efforts of the counterinsurgency. The first story had to do with John "Black Jack" Pershing burying the dead of the Muslim enemy with pig carcasses and dipping bullets in pig blood. Although this was never verified it was detrimental in losing public support. It may have scared the enemy but this is usually found to actually embolden the enemy and increase their ability to recruit fighters. The other story has to do with Philippine Soldiers mistreating the population and destroying villages. "They first looted and then burned every shack in sight."⁶ While these incidents might be few and rare, they provide fuel to the insurgents and draw support towards their cause.

The military needs to be flexible in adapting new tactics to fight tomorrow's wars. The British refused to hide behind trees and shoot at individuals. They considered the "skulking" type of fighting by the Americans and the Indians to be dishonorable. The tactics that worked in Europe were ineffective on the terrain of the New World. The old method was adhered to, resulting in dire consequences, merely because it was deemed more honorable.

In the Philippines the American Army would build large outposts that were well protected and fortified. They eventually learned to leave their forts and interact more regularly with the local population. They found the language and culture to be instrumental in winning support, and eventually the war. This same lesson was re-learned in Iraq when the surge provided the strength needed to leave the military compounds and socialize with the populace.

Some may think that the lessons learned have gone stale since they were from over one hundred years ago. It is wrong to think that they are irrelevant to anything we

⁶ *Mindanao: The Road, the Lake, and the Moros 1902-1904 p. 230*

experience today. While technology, nations, and people may advance through time, the things worth fighting for remain constant. By understanding what causes an insurrection we can learn how to defeat it. People are driven by their common desires and will rise up against a superior force when pushed. This same experience is likely to repeat itself continually throughout human history.

America has grown to be very strong however; it is not too strong to be defeated by an insurgency. To think otherwise is naïve and short-sighted. “Today many scholars stress not the astonishment that Washington felt at the victory of a weak and divided confederation of American states over the greatest power of the age but the practical difficulties the British faced in suppressing the revolt.”⁷ In order to remain powerful America has to gain the knowledge of what causes an insurgency and defeat it with the policies of attraction and chastisement. Military power alone will not defeat an insurgency and will likely embolden the enemy and lose a Nation’s will to fight.

The things that define an insurgency are the facts that it uses an indigenous force, support of the population, and has a common goal. The policies of attraction and chastisement can break the back of this relationship. “It is evident that the insurrection has been brought to an end both by making a war distressing and hopeless on the one hand and by making peace attractive.”⁸ This then is a very effective way to run counter-insurgency operations.

While applying these policies the counter-insurgent must be mindful of their

⁷ *The Winning of Independence, 1777-1783* p. 103

⁸ *Cuba and the Philippines 1898-1902* p.135

perceived behavior. News of small violations, or indiscretions, goes a long way to building support for the opposition and deteriorating support for the cause. They must also be flexible and able to adjust their techniques, tactics, and procedures to meet the needs of the ever-changing battlefield environment.

There are many examples from these two historical conflicts that we can apply to today's battlefields. We can see successes in Iraq and Afghanistan that directly correlate to successes from our past. There is nothing new in the human condition and we can learn from our history, if we take the time to study it.

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