

On War

An analysis of 'counter-insurgency' operations in a context of general military engagements {from 2007-2008; *update* appended below}.

Basic Points:

1. Wars on foreign soil are either quick and brutal or colonialist to the locals.
2. Use of Special Forces, (Paratroops, Marines, Rangers, etc.) are often used as *expendable* forces when a nation or society is uncertain about committing to the use of force.
3. Why fight asymmetric wars in a linear fashion?
4. Winning armies in conventional conflicts are those with the superior tactics, training, technology, intelligence and logistics.
5. Winning armies in non-conventional wars are those with superior *motivation*.
6. The 'mission:' --If friendly-forces are all potential targets and tactical goals are either hard to formulate or defensive in nature; and strategic goals are 'glittering generalities' (translating to a hopeful *they will eventually like us or become like us*) and is fairly divorced from any way to achieve it, the 'mission' will fail.
7. The two ways of conquering enemies or 'insurgents' on foreign soil; and the suggestion of a third way.

The United States and counter-insurgency:

Western Powers in particular have had limited experience in successful counter-insurgency operations. The Malayan Emergency of the late 1940s through the 1950s is often cited as the yardstick for counter-insurgency operations, but in effect it was an *insurgency* (or subversive rebellion) confined to a minority of the population, the ethnic Chinese. These rebels had little international support and lacked sophistication in many other areas.

Similar shortcomings were common to our adversaries in the 'Banana-Wars' of Central America / Caribbean and the Philippine Insurrection.

While we may have enjoyed "successful" interventions (in the short term) in Haiti, the Dominican Republic (before the Second World War) and Nicaragua, our total fatalities amounted to less than 300 dead for all of these conflicts over a decade and a half. We had the authority to set up and control proxy armies (National Guards, Constabularies etc.) who, even if they lacked expertise, were able to absorb most of the punishment, elicit engagements and provide tactical intelligence. Over the long-term Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua continue to harbor instability and often desperation up to the present day.

In the Philippines, as we ushered in the Twentieth Century, conflict was against an enemy with limited resources for weapons and a misunderstanding of tactics. That conflict occurred in a nation that had been ruled by the Spanish Empire for 350 years. We succeeded by way of the enemy's failures, our use of brutality, and the silence of world powers (Colonialist Europe) which accepted that sort of war as lawful if not typical. {General Smith's order to "kill everyone over the age of ten" on Samar, was challenged, but nonetheless issued.}

Point: In the early Twentieth Century there were no world, or regional powers championing

“anti-imperialism.” Munitions and military advisors were not flowing into troubled areas offering assistance to underprivileged rebel forces with no bank accounts.

Which brings me to an often overlooked point: What exactly is the difference between counter-insurgency and colonial war; the means of achieving use of a resource; owning mines and plantations outright versus, participation in joint ventures? To the local inhabitants there is no difference.

People have been invading and conquering other peoples since time began. In recent history the conquest of one people by another is often limited to the time it takes for one or the other party to become sophisticated toward the occupation's rewards or limitations. Thus the Europeans physically left Africa leaving their companies behind and the British had to depart a recalcitrant India. But there is one colonization from historical times which yet persists and that is the Iberians conquest of South America. It was a conquest which endures because of its scope. The Spanish (and Portuguese in Brazil), changed the language, religion and in large part the genetics of the local population. They conquered the culture as well as the land. This is an important feature to remember while being a student of conquest. (The conquest of North America was more of a conquest of *the land*; the indigenous population was pushed aside or absorbed *-at best*.)

Vietnam and Iraq

During my “visit” to Vietnam (1970-71) much of the populated areas were relatively secure during daylight hours. Apparently the same can not be said about Iraq (2007). On the other hand we applied a great deal of resources to Vietnam and did not have to invent a country overnight. They had a government, an army and several layers of police. That these elements may have been incompetent or corrupt or sometimes unreliable is another matter. In the end we were unable to make the South Vietnamese willing and able to resist the North Vietnamese on their own, and after 12-15 years of trying we gave up.

It was neither the War Powers Act of 1973 nor the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 that 'lost' Vietnam. In June 1972 President Nixon sent National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger (*assisted by John Negroponte and Winston Lord*) to persuade the Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai to assist us in getting out of Indochina with less humiliation. As Kissinger said to Chou En-lai: *"And while we cannot bring a communist government to power, if, as a result of historical evolution it should happen over a period of time, if we can live with a communist government in China, we ought to be able to accept it in Indochina."*¹ The war was 'lost' because the United States could see no justification to start a major land war in Asia, by putting 10 or 15 million personnel under arms, devoting a huge investment of our national wealth and possibly incur a nuclear conflict over 'communist' imbalances in the region. The war was 'lost' because people as diverse as George W. Bush, Dan Quayle, Bill Clinton and Dick Cheney did not want to go there. We, the American people, had limited tolerance to make the fight 'our-war' forever. {Nixon apparently realized that supporting a weak Saigon against a determined Hanoi was a poorer strategy than supporting a strong Beijing against a stronger Moscow.}

Our conventional military strategy prevailed in Iraq (March 2003) in large part because the technology we possessed had pinpointed where the antiquated Iraqi armored forces were and they did not know what hour and what direction we were coming from. Once our boots were on the ground the intelligence asset reversed. The Insurgents (whoever they were/are) knew where we were sleeping and what roads we were using. Our forces became targets. Our tactical objectives became defensive. Whatever areas that were eventually 'secured' had to be given back. We did not have the force structure to hold very much of the country.

Iraq is a country of about 430,000 square kilometers with approximately 27,000,000 people. It is not an historic country, but one drawn on a map by colonialist European powers in the last century. It does not have a homogeneous population but one made up of elements that are inclined toward violent hatreds. There are also 3,600 kilometers of land borders in Iraq.

There are several ways to conquer such places. There is the Roman way which doesn't require an enormous legion of troops. It operates on the principal of giving up nothing. An area in contention such as Fallujah or Ramadi would be handled one objective at a time. The Roman forces would lay siege to the city. Starve the population, then attack the weakened forces (usually in disarray among themselves after the siege), kill or brutalize nearly everyone, yet saving some captured remnant for painful, public execution. Then they would burn the city and move to the next objective. Suicide attack? No problem. Destroy the village of the attackers. Eventually either the revolt dies out or the revolters do. A remaining population that they did not trust would be evacuated elsewhere in slavery. While a slap on the face breeds contempt, a foot on one's neck breeds submission. After five thousand years of slavery as an institution it was ended in the United States and Russia (*serfdom*) only in the Nineteenth century! But we are not Romans. As one Marine Corps establishment in Iraq put into writing recently: "America is not at war; we are at war. America is at the mall."

America has been successful in foreign wars. In 1945 Eisenhower moved into the western sector of Germany with 90 divisions, approximately two million men. Western Germany was approximately 250,000 square kilometers with a population of about 30-35 million people. But we had been at war with them for years. It was not a war against Hitler; it was a war against Germany. We had bombed their cities into rubble, and the Soviets were advancing from the East with six million men and harsh intentions. After the German armies were defeated there was no fight left in the population and little avenue to oppose us, there were too many of us, and U.S. and British Commonwealth forces represented a benevolent presence in comparison with Soviet forces.

A better example is Japan. We destroyed their fleets, annihilated their garrisons across the Pacific, starved them, fire-bombed their cities and used nuclear weapons. Their living god the Emperor ordered the population to surrender (a divine command). They were an island nation of about 370,000 square kilometers and maybe 60 million souls (no borders). One would think that no large occupation was needed, yet by 1946 there were 390,000 Allied occupation troops in Japan. American success in foreign war has been derived from massive quantities of men and material. We did not win World War Two on a tax-cut but on an expenditure of a significant portion of our total national resources. And yes, there were justifications the population could make about that war. It did not involve a perception of possible threat or potential imbalance, but of outright *Casus belli*.

If successful armies in conventional conflicts are those with the superior tactics, training, technology, intelligence and logistics, what were our forces missing in containing the nascent insurgency in Iraq? --People. I would offer a guess that to secure the borders, all military depots, all centers of infrastructure AND to pacify the entire population (no one assault rifle *-or machine gun-* per family!) would have taken approximately 900,000 troops. More troops than our standing Army has, and more than our nation would consider for a war undertaken as *preventative*.

What then might we now do about Iraq? General James Gavin and Ambassador George Kennan's enclave strategy for Vietnam in 1966 comes to mind. If we have geopolitical interests in the region (and we do) and need to be concerned about the territorial integrity of Iraq why stay with a losing mission in the midst of a conflicted populace? Why fight an *asymmetric* war in a linear fashion? Why ride, or patrol on foot, in circles waiting to be fired on? Why wait for the arrival of a mythical moment when hostilities will end in our favor? (Asymmetric war implies two separate

rule sets. The military with supreme conventional power [the *Gorilla* force!] must restrain itself in order to limit civilian casualties and avoid the hatred of the population; while the guerrilla warriors maximize their use of force to spread terror and instability).

Withdraw some forces to hardened bases that can be supplied by sea or air, and re-deploy the remainder of the forces for refurbishment both physical and psychological, and then utilize them elsewhere. At this point we are unable to stop the carnage between parties in Iraq and while we may bear a moral responsibility for starting the reactions and counter reactions --the moral responsibility must shift to those doing the carnage. Our response to the Iraq insurgency is analogous to someone entering a pool hall and without even surveying the skills of the players at the tables challenging everyone to a game. We need to put our money on the table, watch, learn and wait as we prepare to challenge the winner. (A *note* concerning troop morale: Discussion of mission or tactics by politicians at home will have minimal effect on troop morale as compared to the devastating impact that tour-extensions and frequent & lengthy deployments have.)

Even if the human spies we leave behind, as we withdraw from the fray in the populated zones, provide incomplete and distorted intelligence, by sorting one claim against another some congruity may be discerned. More-over we need to look at new models of intelligence gathering against a low-technology foe.

In Vietnam we pioneered a strategy in which thousands of listening devices were dropped over areas like the Ho Chi Minh trail, and transmissions were monitored (Black Bat?) and relayed to Seventh Air Force command and control (Blue Chip) at Ton Son Nhut Air Base outside of Saigon. In the age of micro devices millions of listening devices can be dropped over vast areas and together with aerial-drone-monitoring-craft, computers can be used to track individuals in any given area. High speed computers could also translate conversations from foreign dialog-to-English text and use algorithms to search for hostile intent. Tracking two individuals setting up an exploding device could over weeks lead to hundreds of potential "targets" in a data-base. Once we know the identities and locations of the 'enemy' the intelligence and initiative asset swing back to our favor, a least temporarily.

Longer term strategic objectives are another matter. Perhaps the world of Islam needs another Renaissance, its first Reformation, a second enlightenment and equality of the genders. Bringing this about is not in *our* capability. If the fuel (*and wealth*) of our civilization did not lie beneath its sands we would not be in the Persian Gulf in the first place. We could radically adjust our dependence on petroleum with fuel taxes, vehicle consumption taxes, mileage standards and massive investment into alternative energy protected from excessive downside risk by government incentive. (This is how the transcontinental rails were built and later the automobile age created, or does one think that Ford, General Motors and Chrysler paved the roads and constructed the bridges and highways? -No, it was government at *all* levels.) We can only address the shorter-term tactical issues in Iraq. The longer-term issues are something we must solve for ourselves at home. These are the real 'tough decisions' that politicians are hesitant to deal with.

The problem of 'sitting out' a few rounds in Iraq is a political problem. By continuing to plow-the-sea with go-nowhere tactics the Bush Administration faces growing opposition to its war-making powers. If the Administration remains inflexible it will not have any options regarding Iraq. To those concerned that it is impossible to render any facility completely safe from attack in Iraq; some military activity on the perimeter of an established base is actually an incentive to recruitment in the same way that every worthy anti-war film brings a renewed interest to military endeavors on the part of young men in the audience. On the other hand multiple deployments, elongated tours and perplexing combat involving mistakes, mis-identity, friendly fire, corruption and betrayal on the part of 'allies' is hurtful not only to recruitment but more importantly to retention which is more immediately vital in maintaining a professional force.

While the culture, especially the media, is fond of the notion of *Special Forces*: Green Berets, Commandos, Special Air Service, SEALs, Paratroops, Marines, Rangers, Combat Control and Recon Forces, very often they represent a military option that is short of national commitment. Sending the equivalent of a company or light-battalion to a trouble spot does not involve the same dedication of a nation-state to put its prestige and steadfastness on the line and raise a large multi-service force to be placed *on the ground* in harm's way. The latter would involve political embarrassment should priorities shift and a large force need to be evacuated. Special Forces are more expendable and have been given classified cover so that they may be deniable as having been engaged. While some missions require such cover it also enables politicians to play at pseudo objectives that have the permanence of vapor.

This writer harbors doubt that the current Administration is still keen on its stated objectives regarding Iraq. I would entertain the notion that they might be looking for some other U.S. political body or party to take ownership of this war and thereby become the excuse for the Iraq war's failure. As retired Lt. General William Odom said so presciently *before* we invaded, there is nothing to win in Iraq.

I have not dealt with military error regarding counter-insurgency because I think much of it is counter-intuitive. In Vietnam Marine Corps General Victor Krulak was a champion of pacification, and Army General Frederick Weyand a secret critic of conventional strategy. Pacification programs still require large quick-reaction forces to offer protection, and in the final analysis no one has suggested a low-cost, effective strategy to fight counter-insurgency. Ultimately, indigenous forces live there and our supreme motivation is to go home.

Also, we found ourselves fighting on behalf of our *proxies*; making us the proxy of our proxies. Ultimately this failed in Vietnam; but who, exactly, are our proxies in Iraq?

*1 Memorandum of Conversation, White House June 20, 1972. Declassified May 2006

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Iraq 2011

The rationale for the 'Surge' which took place in Iraq 2007 was initially to inhibit the ethnic cleansing taking place in the Baghdad area. By the time the troops were mobilized most of the ethnic division had already taken place as there were millions of Iraqi refugees both internal and expatriate. At any given time there was probably less than an additional 2,000 troops available for patrol -or action- as a result of the surge. But it took place against a broad co-incidence of other factors: 1.) The Sunni insurgency realized they were a minority in a losing position being led into a holy-war of self-annihilation by foreign militants {who were also marrying local women; always a no-no for maintaining alliances}. 2.) Iran recognized they had two irons in the same fire: The Central Shi'ite-led government was dominated by the Islamic Dawa party, a long-time ally of the Guardian Council of the Iranian religious revolution {and a formerly branded terrorist organization by the West}; yet Iran also backed the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr in Baghdad. -
- Iran probably reviewed its goals for Iraq: Yes, they wished to add to the discomfort of the American occupation, but why stop the United States from finishing the job of turning Iraq into a Shia Republic? The Mahdi Army was either integrated into the Iraqi military and police or publicly disarmed as Muqtada al-Sadr was recalled to Iran. Thus, as forces shifted sides an equilibrium took hold. Integration of conflicted ethnic, religious and regional forces are, at present, still left to future reckoning.

This writer assumes that in 2003 Iraq represented the following conundrums: 1.) Maintaining the no-fly zones was a strain. 2.) How was Saddam going to be let 'out of the box' {the way Gaddafi was in 2008 and put back in three years later} in order to develop Iraqi oil reserves; if the French and Chinese got the contracts could this lead to pricing of oil on the Euro versus the dollar? {The Euro was strong then and the dollar becoming uncertain} 3.) Unlike Afghanistan Iraq was a 'target-rich' environment. 4.) Did anyone **believe** that Saddam could develop a nuclear bomb? {He used poison-gas while a de-facto American ally during the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988; and had allied assistance with his unconventional armaments} I doubt it, but it's possible.

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