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# FOOTNOTES

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## THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR AND THE PHILIPPINE WAR

By Brian McAllister Linn

In teaching the “unknown wars” that straddle the 19th and 20th centuries, one encounters numerous problems. First, many Americans nowadays have as much difficulty finding the Philippines on a map as they did in 1898. Especially people living in inland states have difficulty understanding the isolated island culture. The Philippines comprise hundreds of islands, dozens of dialects and cultures, at least five distinct “tribes” on the main island of Luzon alone. A single island can have mountains, jungles, swamps, and grass fields. Communication and transportation are essentially along rivers or the coast. Because we tend to think about peoples in a nation-state context where people have been a nation for a long time, it’s hard to explain that when Americans were fighting in the Philippines, they were not just fighting nationalists with a concept of a Philippine nation.

Much of what we read about this war, including in virtually every textbook, is deeply flawed. Even the web-based primary sources teachers often use have been carefully selected to present only the juiciest atrocity stories. So a great deal of ideological baggage goes along with this subject. Students also find it hard to understand the complexity of the military missions involved in these wars. They don’t necessarily understand nation-building, civic action, building roads and schools, all the things the army did. In some places the U.S. Army was restoring peace and order and was welcomed as a liberator, in others it ran into a great deal of opposition. The army itself didn’t always understand its mission. And President William McKinley was so good at hiding his ideas that after the commander of the Philippine mission met with him in Washington for several hours, he still didn’t understand whether he was supposed to take just Manila or the entire Philippines.

### SITUATION IN 1898

For years, Americans had watched an endemic war in Cuba between Cuban nationalists and Spanish forces. Spanish atrocities against Cubans were widely publicized in America’s “Yellow Press.” The turmoil threatened U.S. investments in Cuba, and there was concern that this would destabilize the entire Caribbean area, invite European intervention, and thus threaten the Monroe Doctrine. McKinley’s administration therefore increased pressure on Spain to find some solution to the Cuban war.

McKinley sent an American warship, the USS *Maine*, to serve as a reminder that the U.S. could impose militarily if Spain did not reach a quick solution to the problem. However, on February 15, the *Maine* was destroyed by an explosion. American newspapers whipped up stories blaming Spain (actually, if anyone had anything to gain, it was the Cuban rebels), and it quickly became accepted that Spain had done this. Historians still have trouble making sense of the ensuing rush to war. What Walter Millis called the “martial spirit” in his 1931 book of that name seemed to seize the nation. McKinley tried to restrain the war sentiment in Congress. But the cry “Remember the Maine, to hell with Spain!” was loudly proclaimed in public meetings, the press demanded retaliation, and on April 19 Congress took the initiative and proclaimed Cuba free. It demanded Spain’s immediate withdrawal and authorized McKinley to use force to achieve this. War was declared on April 25, 1898.

In 1898, the U.S. hadn’t been at war with a European power for almost eighty years. But its navy was quite confident. It had developed a simple war plan against Spain: it would deploy its fleet and blockade Cuba, preventing Spain from reinforcing it. It also planned a diversionary attack on the Spanish squadron in Manila Bay. It didn’t make extensive plans for an invasion of Cuba because it didn’t think that was going to be necessary; in any event, that was the Army’s job. Unfortunately, it didn’t tell the Army what its plan was.

The Navy’s plan worked quite well at first. Just days after the declaration of war, on May 1, 1898, Commodore George Dewey’s small squadron wiped out the decrepit Spanish squadron at Manila Bay without a single American battle death. This victory rallied public opinion and U.S. financial interests, who had been very worried about the war, and set off an even huger explosion of public support for the war. It also set off a series of very serious events in the Philippines. With the Spanish squadron destroyed, Spain could not prevent Philippine insurgents from throwing Spain’s isolated garrisons out. The garrisons were quickly overwhelmed by Filipino forces, most of them operating on their own, fighting for local causes. Emilio Aguinaldo, who had taken a large sum of money and left the Philippines, returned and declared Philippine independence.

## THE WAR EXPANDS, MAY-JUNE 1898

In the weeks after Manila Bay, the war rapidly became a fiasco for the U.S. The U.S. Army was prepared for frontier wars and defending the Atlantic coast. With its initial defense appropriation, it started fortifying the Atlantic coast lest Spain send a fleet against it. It only had about 2,800 troops, most scattered out west. Disregarding his generals' advice, McKinley called up over 200,000 volunteers, a move that aroused huge public enthusiasm. Theodore Roosevelt, then the assistant secretary of the Navy, resigned and formed the Rough Riders, composed of everyone from college athletes to cowboys. As these thousands of volunteers poured into the training camps, they discovered that the camps really didn't exist. They were just big tracts of territory. There were no weapons, tents, or food. Thousands of volunteers fell sick and hundreds died.

Despite this confusion, the war was really over before it began. The Spanish relief squadron did elude the U.S. Navy, but once it got to Cuba, it couldn't do anything. So it sailed into Santiago Harbor, where the U.S. Navy bottled it up. The U.S. Marines seized Guantanamo as an advanced naval base. After a chaotic departure from Tampa with troops scrambling onto transports, 18,000 troops landed at Daiquiri and moved to besiege Santiago. In the Battle of San Juan Heights on July 1, the U.S. forces suffered 243 killed and over 1,400 wounded--roughly 10 percent of the forces engaged. They captured two relatively insignificant outposts, but the main Spanish fortifications were untouched. It was only later, thanks to Roosevelt, that these became glorious attacks. At the time, even Roosevelt's own correspondence indicates that everyone thought it had been a disaster. The battle resolved nothing, and the 5th Corps began to suffer from malaria, dysentery, and other diseases.

On August 2, the commander of the 5th Corps wrote to Washington that three quarters of his soldiers were sick, his army was too weak to operate in Cuba, and unless they were withdrawn, the entire corps could be lost. Fortunately for the army, the Spanish were in even worse shape and lacked knowledge of the true situation within the American forces. The Americans controlled the water supply, and people in Santiago were reduced to eating rodents. On August 16 the Spanish surrendered, probably a week before the U.S. would have had to.

It's hard for us to imagine now such an enormously popular war. Men fought to get into the service, even those under age 21. Boys read gripping yarns of young glory defeating the evil Spaniards. Roosevelt's serialized memoirs of the Rough Riders were wildly popular. The possessions had broken their shackles, and Cuba, Puerto Rico and Hawaii were welcomed in by Columbia. But the Spanish-American War also was followed by another far less splendid war.

## THE PHILIPPINE WAR, 1892-1902

Following Dewey's victory in Manila Bay, U.S. ground troops arrived in the Philippines in June 1898. In August they captured Manila. But in the process they excluded Aguinaldo--the self-proclaimed president of the self-proclaimed Philippine republic--and his army from taking part in the occupation of Manila. The Spaniards essentially struck a deal with America to move in and then turn around and face off Aguinaldo.

In December 1898, McKinley finally outlined his plan for occupying and administering the archipelago, announcing that the U.S. intended to annex the Philippines. He sent his commanders what became known as the Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation. The U.S. Army was to be the forefront of an American mission to help the Filipinos after 400 years of Spanish mismanagement and tyranny. The Army would secure private property, suppress crime, establish a judicial system, ensure religious freedom, protect local customs and traditions, build schools and roads, restore trade, and perform a host of other civic reform duties. McKinley intended thereafter to appoint a civilian governor to administer the Philippines. For the Americans, this was a civilizing mission. The Army's job was to act in such a way that it would win Filipino support for American sovereignty. So from the beginning, McKinley established what in Iraq parlance would be a Phase IV military strategy. He did not think there would be any fighting. When his military commanders asked him under what circumstances they could go to war, McKinley responded that they were not there to fight, but to show the Filipinos that American rule would be a good thing and comport themselves in such a way as to gain the affection and trust of the Filipino people.

Fortunately for McKinley, he had a very able military commander in the Philippines, Elwell S. Otis. Otis was a highly competent officer, a Civil War hero, and also a Harvard-trained lawyer. He accepted the Benevolent Assimilation mission and set out to make Manila a test case for it. Manila had been one of the most filthy and disease-ridden cities in the Far East. Under Otis, the streets were swept, sewer lines were dug, markets were inspected, and there were new rules about, for example, killing livestock and hanging it. Schools were opened and Manila went from being one of the most unhealthy cities to one of the healthiest in about two years. Even within six months, people could not believe the dramatic changes.

But on the other side, Benevolent Assimilation did not resolve the issue of the Filipino independence movement led by Aguinaldo, a very controversial figure. The anti-imperialists termed him the George Washington of the Philippines--ignoring his tendency to kill off his opponents. He was very good at putting together coalitions of the regional elites, the landowners, merchants, etc., predominantly in the Tagalog area around Manila. His support came from people like him, a very small group representing perhaps one percent of the population. The Philippine republic had an assembly in which representatives of all the islands appeared, but many of these representatives had never been to those islands, they were just appointed by Aguinaldo. Since the Great Powers recognized only nations supported by Western-style armies, Aguinaldo organized the Army of Liberation, with generals, colonels, and a complicated organization chart. But his army was really a group of local militias gathered together under local elites and held together very much by personal bonds and loyalties.

Relations between Aguinaldo and his forces were always tenuous, and he eventually killed his commander-in-chief. Relations

between Aguinaldo and his army and the American army were also tenuous. On the evening of February 4, 1899, one of a series of skirmishes and alarms outside of Manila escalated beyond the control of either Aguinaldo or Otis into full-fledged fighting and a three-week battle. This was the biggest battle by far of the war, and probably the most decisive, as well. It represented the best chance Aguinaldo had for either expelling the Americans or at least confining them to Manila. Instead the opposite happened. Not only were Aguinaldo's forces defeated in battle, but American troops were able to march to the lake beyond Manila and split his army in half, into the southern and northern factions. It was impossible for the two forces to cooperate. Many of Aguinaldo's trained soldiers, who fought extremely bravely, were killed, and he lost most of his modern ammunition and his weapons. And so this was an absolutely devastating battle for the cause of Philippine independence.

After this the Americans developed a three-part strategy. First, they would continue Benevolent Assimilation to try to stave off the war by continuing to show Filipinos that the Americans were there to help them. The conflict was now being called an insurrection, both because we were now in charge and because under the U.S. constitution, the militia can only be deployed to suppress invasion and insurrection. Most of the U.S. troops were national guard or militia, and thus had a somewhat uncertain legal status now that the war with Spain was over. Calling it an insurrection solved this thorny constitutional question.

Benevolent Assimilation continued, the hope being that Filipinos would recognize that Aguinaldo was a bad person and while the Americans were good people. A naval blockade was imposed, cutting off inter-island communications and preventing Aguinaldo from shifting troops, or even other guerilla groups from moving within one island. The blockade isolated all the various independence movements and local rebellions in their areas, preventing them from spreading. The final part of the strategy was that the Army would move north along the railroad to try to smash Aguinaldo's army in one decisive battle in Central Luzon and end armed resistance.

Americans quickly recognized that campaigning in the Philippines was extremely costly in terms of disease and fatigue. The troops essentially out-marched their logistical line, Carabao, within the first day. By the second day they were living on what they could carry. In the tropics, they could only carry about 40 pounds without collapsing, and that included their rifles. By the third day they began to forage and drink polluted water, and then the entire expedition began to break down. Within a week 30-40 percent of the troops had been lost. So essentially the Americans would launch an attack, fail to encircle Aguinaldo's forces, who would slip out of the trap, and then break down and have to take several weeks to rebuild their strength before going on the offensive again.

Finally, in the fall of 1899, Aguinaldo's army ran out of room. It ran into the ocean in the north and dispersed--the troops took their weapons and went back home, and Aguinaldo became a fugitive up in the mountains of Luzon. U.S. forces then swept south, all the way to Tawitawi, establishing almost 500 American garrisons throughout the Philippines.

As the U.S. Army prepared to hand off governance to the civilian colonial government McKinley was forming to come out and take over. As far as everyone was concerned, the mission had been accomplished, the war was over, and all that remained was to hold on for a few more months until the civilian government could come in and take over.

Unfortunately, as in Iraq in our time, the conventional operations were the easy part of the war. What followed was the difficult and controversial part. As the Americans spread throughout the archipelago and began to garrison villages and towns, they attracted a great deal of resistance, often from people who had no connection with Aguinaldo, even from local elites who had opposed Aguinaldo's government. The soldiers in the field appreciated this very quickly, but it took Manila and Washington a long time to learn it.

The guerrilla warfare was very decentralized. A local leader, a jefe, who had political and military authority, often acted as both the governor and general. The local forces spoke the dialect, knew the terrain and had close family connections among the villagers. Tactics were hit-and-run--attack supply convoys and messengers, harass the troops, but avoid battle, because the Filipinos had learned that Americans were always going to win in battle.

As the Americans began to impose government, they replaced or became another layer on top of insurgent or revolutionary governments that had existed since the Spanish had withdrawn. Many of these governments became "shadow governments." They replicated the American system. Americans would appoint a mayor, a police chief, and tax collector, and the insurgents would too. Often the same people served both sides, not seeing a conflict.

Filipino resistance had political as well as military goals. The insurgents recognized that this war was controversial in the U.S., that many Americans were unhappy about the U.S. having an empire, and so they sought to remove collaboration. Terrorism and assassination became common in many villages. The resistance staged military operations to influence the U.S. public going into the 1900 elections, knowing that William Jennings Bryan was running on an anti-imperialist platform.

There was a great deal of rivalry among the villages, so it was hard for guerrillas from one village to cooperate with other guerrilla bands. They had poor weapons and no sanctuaries. They were also very dependent on their leadership. The death or capture of the jefe would often lead to factional fighting, because most of them lived in the villages under the American garrison. They couldn't form sanctuaries out in the jungle, since the Americans were being effective. Thus one informant in the village could point out all the guerrillas and where the weapons were, and so the guerrillas were highly vulnerable to any form of collaboration. Guerrillas are a predatory fish swimming in the population, extracting taxes, bringing danger to the village, taking young males, and terrorizing people who threaten collaboration. So sooner or later guerrilla exactions are going to alienate the population. Sooner or later they irritate enough people that there's one person who will denounce them. Once

that happened, the Americans could roll up the guerrilla infrastructure. Owing to its local nature, if a guerrilla group was driven out of its village, it couldn't easily move into a new area. Either there was already another guerrilla group there or it didn't know the terrain or speak the same language. It became an outside group, and the locals would cooperate with the Americans to wipe them out. So once a group was driven out of an area, it often couldn't spread, and it had to surrender.

The U.S. counterinsurgency program in the Philippines is very interesting, especially in view of the current surge in Iraq. First, the Americans always continued Benevolent Assimilation. American military personnel from the top down had both political and military duties. The commanding general was also the governor general. Lieutenants and captains in villages not only led their units, but also served as town mayors, customs officials, police chiefs, tax collectors, judges, and in dozens of other functions as well. Most officers proved highly effective administrators, in part because they were citizen-soldiers. They were very capable of taking over local duties. The one thing they couldn't stand was inaction. They were problem solvers.

Along with Benevolent Assimilation there was also a great deal of repression. We can't cloak this as a splendid little war. Americans in areas in which they faced great resistance increasingly took to punitive raids: burning crops and houses to punish civilians for collaborating with the guerrillas. They required police and political leaders to cooperate against insurgents. Americans were not averse to encouraging inter-tribal and inter-town rivalry, pitting them against each other. And there was a great deal to be gained by cooperating with the Americans. After all, who was reading the land grants but the U.S. authorities? As the areas that were pro-American essentially became pacified and got turned over to civil governments, the Americans took a harder and harder line on those areas that remained recalcitrant. So after December 1900, when several provinces had already been pacified, the Americans intensified the property destruction and coercion. The last campaigns were grim indeed.

Americans also turned increasingly to using Filipino auxiliaries. The Macabebes Scouts became the foundation of the Philippine scouts who fought so well for us in WWII. Thousands of Filipinos served as porters, auxiliaries, militia, and other paramilitary forces, and were indispensable. By mid-1901 there were more Filipinos serving with the U.S. than with nationalist guerrillas.

The Navy was extremely important. Guerrillas can only survive if they have access to weapons and supplies. The Navy provided interdiction of the islands. It destroyed all coastal commerce, making severe hardships for the civilian population, until a town capitulated and was pacified. It suppressed piracy, particularly from the Muslims in Mindanao and Jolo, and used amphibious operations, landing troops all over the coast. One such operation captured Aguinaldo.

In U.S. counterinsurgency in the Philippines, if the army was the stick, civil government became the carrot, once a province was pacified. William H. Taft made his reputation as the first civilian governor in the Philippines and the Commission's constabulary took over from the Army in policing the archipelago.

The dominant interpretation in textbooks is that the Philippine War was America's first My Lai, first Vietnam, first war of terrorism. The American "Kill and Burn" tactics are said to have suppressed Aguinaldo's legitimate nationalist revolution. The war is depicted as a race war, and proof that foreign interventions and imperialism inevitably breed atrocities. The neoconservative interpretation popular with Max Boot and others is that the Philippine war is the ideal template campaign for how to impose U.S. rule across the world today. In "Supremacy by Stealth: Ten Rules for Managing the World" (*Atlantic Monthly*), Robert Kaplan lists as #7 "remembering the Philippines." Max Boot refers to the Philippines in *Savage Wars of Peace* and several op-eds. A *USA Today* editorial in June reminds us that we stayed the course there and didn't vote for an antiwar candidate. The Philippines become the ideal way to wage a counterinsurgency. But what these authors often really mean is how to impose American control over much of the world.

The impacts of 1898 are huge. From a military non-entity in 1897, the U.S. emerged as a global power, by 1917 holding in the balance who would win WWI. But it also led to Americans being increasingly pulled into Caribbean interventions (Haiti, Santa Domingo, Nicaragua, Panama Canal, and Mexico), and ultimately would lead to conflict with Japan and also to what we now accept as a norm: a large military state. After this war, the U.S. was largely committed to a global presence and the military forces to go with it.

*Brian McAllister Linn is Professor of History at Texas A & M University. This essay is based on his presentation at the FPRI Wachman Center's July 26-27, 2008 history institute, What Students Need To Know About America's Wars, Part I: 1622-1919. The Institute was co-sponsored and hosted by the Cantigny First Division Foundation of the McCormick Foundation in Wheaton, Ill. It was webcast to registrants worldwide. For videocasts and texts of lectures, see <http://www.fpri.org/education/americaswars1>. Core support for the History Institute is provided by the Annenberg Foundation. Funding for the military history program is provided by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation as part of its support for FPRI's Center for the Study of America and the West. The next history weekend is Teaching the Nuclear Age, March 28-29, 2009, at the Atomic Testing Museum in Las Vegas.*

FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684.

For information, contact Alan Luxenberg at 215-732-3774, ext. 105 or email [fpri@fpri.org](mailto:fpri@fpri.org) or visit us at [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org).