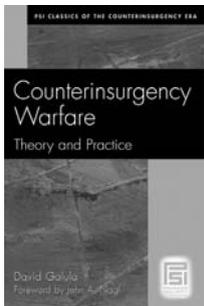


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## MR Classics Revisited



**Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice**, David Galula, reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Terence J. Daly, U.S. Army Reserve, Retired

When reading *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* for the first time, most

people have what could be called the Galula Moment: “That’s it! He gets it!” French Army Lieutenant Colonel David Galula’s book, first published in 1964, is quite simply the definitive work, the primer, of classic counterinsurgency doctrine.<sup>1</sup> It is the one book on counterinsurgency that everyone, from policymakers to fire-team leaders, should read and understand.

Galula’s globe-trotting military career gave him numerous opportunities to study war, conventional and unconventional, close up. During World War II he fought in campaigns in North Africa, Italy, and Germany, became a military attaché, and then, in the immediate post-war period, served as an observer. He would later work as an assistant

military attaché in China during that country’s civil war and as a UN observer in Greece during the Greek civil war. Posted to Hong Kong on attaché duty, he developed and maintained contact with officers fighting insurgencies in Indochina, Malaya, and the Philippines. In 1956, Galula was assigned to the 45th Colonial Infantry Battalion, with which he spent the next two years fighting Algerian rebels, first as a company commander and then as an assistant battalion commander.

With all this experience under his belt, Galula was sent to Harvard’s Center for International Affairs in 1962. While participating in a RAND Corporation symposium on counterinsurgency, he made such an impression that he was asked to write a treatise about his experiences in Algeria. The ensuing work was published in 1963 as *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-58*.<sup>2</sup> The following year, Galula produced his seminal *Counterinsurgency Warfare*. He died in 1967.

We know that Galula’s main claim—you defeat an insurgency by controlling the target population—works. It worked for Galula

when he commanded an understrength French infantry company in the harsh terrain of the Kabylia in Algeria, and it worked for the U.S. 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) in Tal Afar in Iraq.<sup>3</sup>

The 3d ACR was required to read *Counterinsurgency Warfare* before it deployed. The book’s lessons were suitably modified for the conditions the regiment was about to face, and then used to inform the planning and execution of their successful campaign to subdue the insurgency in Tal Afar. Currently, Galula’s ideas pervade the new counterinsurgency manuals that are being developed for the U.S. Army and Marine Corps.

### The Basics

Galula’s basic insight into insurgency (which he terms “revolutionary war”) is that “Revolutionary war is political war.” The objective of the counterinsurgent must therefore be to win the population’s support. According to Galula, French and American traditions stipulating that “military” activities should be handled only by Soldiers and Marines and “civilian” activities should be handled only by politicians and bureaucrats is

fallacious. “Every military action,” he asserts, “has to be weighed with regard to its political effects and vice versa.” This means that every sweep, every search-and-destroy mission, every convoy operation has to be planned with uppermost consideration for the effects it will have on the population’s support; conversely, every new sewage system or classroom has to be examined for its military impact.<sup>4</sup>

According to Galula, the greatest advantage insurgents have over Western democracies, especially the United States, is that “an insurgency is a protracted struggle conducted...to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order.” For the counterinsurgent, “the operations needed to relieve the population from the insurgent’s threat and to convince it that the counterinsurgent will ultimately win are necessarily of an intensive nature and of long duration.” Galula emphasizes that to fight a successful counterinsurgency, it is important to have a national consensus and a resolute political leadership.<sup>5</sup> In *Pacification in Algeria* he stresses that when the French Government was strong, insurgent recruiting dropped off because it looked like the counterinsurgents would win; however, when the French Government was weak and it looked like the French would leave Algeria, insurgent recruiting increased.<sup>6</sup>

As promulgated in the 1960s by Galula and Britain’s Sir Robert Thompson (author of *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*), classic counterinsurgency theory is often criticized.<sup>7</sup> Detractors argue that fighting rural Marxist-Leninist insurgents is much different than fighting today’s urban-based Muslim extremists. With the caveat that his concepts may be dangerous if applied rigidly to a specific case, Galula notes that it is difficult to deny the logic on which his concepts are based because they can be recognized easily in everyday political life.<sup>8</sup> He addresses a universal human condition when he lays out the essence of defeating an insurgency: “In any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause.” In any insurgency, then, urban or rural, communist or confessional (religion-based),

each side must weaken or eliminate the opposition, strengthen its own backers among the populace, and win over the uncommitted.

The struggle will be waged ruthlessly, and it will be deadly. Galula makes no distinction between city or village dweller, ideologue, or religious fanatic when he states: “All wars are cruel, the revolutionary war perhaps most of all because every citizen, whatever his wish, is or will be directly and actively involved in it by the insurgent who needs him and cannot afford to let him remain neutral. The cruelty of the revolutionary war is not a mass, anonymous cruelty but a highly personalized, individual one.”<sup>9</sup>

The struggle for influence is therefore dominated by another condition universal to all human beings in all insurgencies regardless of the environment: fear. Galula writes: “The population’s attitude . . . is dictated not so much by the relative popularity and merits of the opponents as by the more primitive concern for safety. Which side gives the best protection, which side threatens the most, which one is likely to win; these are the criteria governing the population’s stand.” Meanwhile, “political, social, economic, and other reforms, however much they ought to be wanted and popular, are inoperative when offered while the insurgent still controls the population.”

For Galula, control over the population is the key to success. Only by gaining and keeping control of the population can the counterinsurgent establish the secure environment in which those who support the counterinsurgent and his cause can come forward to organize for their own governance and eventual self-protection.

Galula describes, in detail, the steps by which the counterinsurgent can gain control of the population. Designed specifically for political effect, these steps comprise a coordinated, multifaceted process that provides the populace security in order to gain and keep its support. The counterinsurgent must use all his assets: “His administrative capabilities, his economic resources, his information and propaganda media, his military superiority due to heavy weapons and large units.” Military, police, and judicial and political operations blend: “The expected result—final defeat of the insurgents—is not an addition but a

multiplication of these various operations; they all are essential and if one is nil, the product will be zero.”<sup>10</sup>

## The Need for Unity of Command

Galula is adamant about the necessity of heeding the military principle of unity of command: “A single boss must direct the operations from beginning to end.” Further, the “boss” must be a representative of the political side: “That the political power is the undisputed boss is a matter of both principle and practicality. What is at stake is the country’s political regime and to defend it is a political affair. Even if this requires military action, the action is directed toward a political goal.”<sup>11</sup> If we read Galula correctly, then one major deficiency in the U.S. Government’s current counterinsurgent effort is that no government department or agency is capable of exercising this authority.

## The Strategy

According to Galula, in devising a countrywide strategic plan, it is best to begin by pacifying the quieter areas and then progressing to the more difficult ones. First, doing so gives the counterinsurgent “a clear-cut, even if geographically limited, success as soon as possible,” which demonstrates that he has the will, the means, and the ability to win. Second, “the counterinsurgent, who usually has no practical experience in the nonmilitary operations required in counterinsurgency warfare, must acquire it fast,” and that is much easier to do in a relatively calm area. Of course, this strategy is risky: by concentrating on the easy areas, the counterinsurgent leaves the insurgent alone to progress into other areas.<sup>12</sup> The counterinsurgent must, however, accept that risk.

## The Phased Approach

In Galula’s multi-phased approach to prosecuting this strategy, phase one, *concentrating enough armed forces to destroy or expel the main body of armed insurgents*, is undertaken to prepare the area for the rest of the counterinsurgency process. It is complete only when the forces that will garrison the area can safely deploy to the extent necessary. Military forces must prevent armed insurgents who have been scattered from regrouping; if the armed insurgents

have been expelled from the area, they must be prevented from returning. In this phase, the counterinsurgent must be prepared to fight conventional battles to dominate the area completely. Aggressive, carefully planned, and flexible information operations directed at the insurgents, the counterinsurgent's own forces, and the population must be thoroughly integrated into this and each succeeding phase of the operation.<sup>13</sup>

In phase two, *the counterinsurgent switches targets from the armed insurgents to the population*. He maintains strong military forces in the area, though, because the "support of the population is conditional." The people know they are being watched by the insurgency's supporters and are still threatened with punishment by armed guerrillas. Counterinsurgent forces are assigned to sectors, subsectors, and other divisions with the principal mission of protecting the population and civic action teams. The troops are deployed to locations where the people are, not to locations deemed to possess military value.<sup>14</sup>

Phase three, *maintain contact with and control of the population*, is the most critical phase because it involves transitioning from military to political operations. Galula's objectives include reestablishing the counterinsurgent's authority over the population, physically isolating the population from the guerrillas, and gathering intelligence that will lead to the next step: the elimination of insurgent cells.

Control of the population begins with a census and issuance of identity documents. A curfew is an integral part of phase three, as are other movement controls. Intelligence gathering is enhanced by increasing contact between the population and counterinsurgent personnel, each of whom must be imbued with the idea that he is an intelligence collector. Galula notes that because insurgents are human, they have differing degrees of commitment to the insurgent cause. The counterinsurgent therefore must attempt to divide the insurgents by creating dissension between the lower ranks and their leaders, which he then exploits by luring away the disaffected.<sup>15</sup>

Phase four, *eradicating insurgent secret political organizations*, is a sensitive area for the counterinsurgent. Secret insurgents are often

prominent local people with local connections and family ties. Secret organizations must be eradicated to remove the threat they pose to counterinsurgent supporters and to keep the insurgency from reestablishing itself. Galula suggests an indirect approach, in which cell members are arrested based on their disclosures.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the counterinsurgent is deeply involved in recruiting, training, and vetting local supporters for the remaining parts of his program. These parts are built on the elections of provisional local officials, and they include testing the new officials, formation of self defense units, grouping new leaders into a national movement, and final eradication of insurgent remnants.<sup>17</sup>

### The Myth of Sisyphus

For Galula, victory can be declared only when the local people cut off contact with the insurgents and keep them cut off of their own will, using their own resources. However, the myth of Sisyphus is a recurring nightmare for the counterinsurgent, as he must try to build in irreversibility at every step. The turning point will occur only after leaders emerge from the population, commit themselves to the side of the counterinsurgent, and form an organization that can protect them and the population. The leaders must prove their loyalty with deeds, not words, and they must have everything to lose if the insurgents return. Still, as Galula observes, even when the responsibility for the area is turned over to the local people, leaders, and security forces, the main counterinsurgent force must be able to return quickly to protect what it has left behind.

### The Possible Drawback

Galula seems to provide a clear, comprehensive blueprint that democracies such as the United States can use to defeat an insurgency. His work has one major gap, however, as far as the United States is concerned: he attaches too little weight to the importance of the counterinsurgent's cause. Galula continually stresses that a cause is vital for the insurgent, but pays little attention to the counterinsurgent's motivation. Either the counterinsurgent simply wants to retain power, or he has a competing cause that Galula dismisses because it will lead to civil war. Even when

he notes that the British promised independence to Malaya during the Emergency, a move that cemented the loyalty of the majority ethnic Malay population, Galula seems to draw no particular conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the counterinsurgent's appropriating the insurgents' cause. For Galula, reforms are to be carefully titrated for tactical advantage.

Unlike Galula's France, the United States in the 21st century is not a colonial power, and our counterinsurgencies during the past 40 years have been well intentioned and prosecuted with a clear political aim—what Sir Robert Thompson calls "To establish and maintain a free, independent and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable."<sup>18</sup> The United States possesses one of the most powerful political slogans ever devised: "the legitimacy of a government derives from the consent of the governed." On a less exalted level, we are the leading exporter of modern mass consumer culture, the "Universal Solvent"—the magical fluid ancient alchemists sought that made old substances disappear and new ones form. It behooves us to understand how our cause, or causes, are viewed by the people whose hearts and minds Galula tells us we should fight for.

In the Long War we are now facing, we have to consider whether our difficulties stem from the strategic problem that Robert B. Asprey defines in his magisterial *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*.<sup>18</sup> Asprey theorizes that French counterinsurgency doctrine in the Algerian rebellion "failed from the beginning, because, it ignored Mao's first lesson: 'If the political objectives that one seeks to attain are not the secret and profound aspirations of the masses, all is lost from the beginning.'"

As described by Galula and Thompson and tailored to fit each situation, classical counterinsurgency can be a sound guide to successful counterinsurgency if we are confronting a population whose "secret and profound aspirations" are to live in a state where "the legitimacy of the government derives from the consent of the governed." The unanswered question, however, is, Do we need a guide for doing so if the population's "secret and profound aspirations" are to live in the 7th century? **MR**