

The background is a detailed map of Central Asia and the Middle East. Visible regions include Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Iran and India. Key cities like Ashgabat, Mashhad, Kabul, Islamabad, and Karachi are labeled. The map also shows geographical features like the Hindu Kush mountains, the Amu Darya river, and the Persian Gulf. A blue banner with a white crescent and star symbol is positioned behind the main title.

GALULA IN ALGERIA

COUNTERINSURGENCY *Practice versus Theory*

GRÉGOR MATHIAS

Galula in Algeria

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*Counterinsurgency
Practice versus Theory*

GRÉGOR MATHIAS

Translated by Neal Durando

Foreword by David H. Ucko

Praeger Security International



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It is certainly easier to launch an insurgency than it is to repress it.

—David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* FM 3–24.22, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, April 2009, chapter 2, “Foundations of Insurgency,” pp. 2–139

In the fight between a fly and a lion, the fly cannot deliver a knock-out blow and the lion cannot fly. It is the same war for both camps in terms of space and time, yet there are two distinct warfares—the revolutionary’s and, shall we say, the counterrevolutionary’s.

—Mao, quoted by Galula in *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, “Introduction”

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Foreword

Mark Twain apparently quipped that while the past does not repeat itself, it certainly rhymes. So, 30 years after it had left the jungles of Vietnam and forgot all about insurgency, the U.S. military again faced the same problem, though in Iraq this time, following its invasion of the country in 2003. Counterinsurgency had been under-researched if not deliberately neglected between these two wars, so it was only natural that when it came to studying and learning about this concept many officers and scholars would turn to the 1950s and 1960s for advice. For better and for worse, insights were drawn from Vietnam and made to apply to the war in Iraq, though notable attention was also given to other countries' experiences with these types of campaigns: the British in Malaysia; the French in Algeria.

This intellectual rediscovery of counterinsurgency elevated an unlikely group of experts mostly forgotten since their heyday of the 1960s. Foremost among this group stood David Galula, a French military officer whose combat experience in Algeria and writings on counterinsurgency were viewed as particularly instructive to understanding the challenges of modern counterinsurgency. When doctrine writers from the U.S. Army and Marine Corps got together to write their new counterinsurgency doctrine in 2006, Galula's influence was evident, not least because his *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* was one of three works cited in the field manual's final preface.

To those in the U.S. military seeking to gain a better understanding of counterinsurgency, Galula offered an accessible guide to the difficulties and dilemmas typical of these campaigns. From his experience in Algeria

he derived and illustrated various counterinsurgency principles that have not only been found to apply elsewhere, but were now picked up on and reiterated in the most recent doctrine. These touch upon the importance of achieving a nuanced political understanding of the campaign, operating under unified command, using intelligence to guide operations, isolating insurgents from the population, using the minimum amount of force necessary to achieve security, and assuring and maintaining the perceived legitimacy of the counterinsurgency effort in the eyes of the populace. Galula's writings offered a clear illustration of how these time-tested principles could be implemented based on his own experience in Algeria.

Counterinsurgency Warfare soon earned the reputation of a classic in the field, though it would be fair to say that far more people had heard of the book than actually studied it; indeed, it is another of Mark Twain's sayings that a classic is a "book which people praise and don't read." Far less attention still has been paid to Galula's own life and *practical* record as a counterinsurgent, of which little is known besides that which he himself shared in his books. The result of this curious neglect has been a tendency toward hagiography in much of the writing on Galula, underpinned by a fundamental uncertainty of how this maverick officer himself handled the problem of insurgency in his day.

This is where Grégor Mathias steps in, providing us with a carefully researched, densely packed and in many ways unique account of Galula's own practical experience with counterinsurgency. The picture that emerges is of a remarkable and intellectually hungry French officer, a polyglot, a traveler, explorer, and keen learner. His most formative experience with counterinsurgency was his command of a French company in the Djebel Aïssa Mimoun subdistrict of Kabylia, Algeria, in 1956–57; though as Mathias makes clear, much of what he later taught derived equally from his time as a military attaché in China during the civil war; as a member of the UN commission in Greece during its civil war; and from his visits the Philippines, where he observed ongoing counterinsurgencies without himself participating.

It is said that it is a curse to live in interesting times, yet Galula appears to have taken this fate in his stride. Indeed, his international exposure and encounters not only help explain his fine grasp of political violence, but also provide a fascinating narrative intertwined with major historical events. Still, perhaps this book's greatest service to counterinsurgency scholars today is to provide a more comprehensive account of how Galula fared when seeking to put into practice the very theory for which he is now so famous.

It soon emerges that even for Galula, it was far easier to derive principles from ongoing campaigns than to make sure they were properly implemented. Indeed, Mathias's account reveals a company commander grappling with many of the same dilemmas facing today's military

leaders—in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. While Galula was comparatively successful as a commander, his time in Algeria clearly shows the limited ability of an outside force to exert legitimate influence and pressure on a local population. It also shows the difficulty of honoring the principle of civil-military unity of command when there are tangible differences in priority and approach between these two sets of actors. Like many commanders today, Galula struggled with troop shortages, wrestled with a domestic press unconvinced of his operational gains, and outright stumbled in the delicate transition from French to Algerian control and governance. Not all of Galula's setbacks can be placed at his own doormat: after all, a company commander can only wield so much control. Even so, perhaps one of the more interesting insights in Mathias's account regards the difficulties of determining success in counterinsurgency campaigns and the related tendency, one certainly shared by Galula, for unwarranted optimism in the face of short-term gains.

If Galula's own record mirrors many of the frustrations felt by today's commanders, does he nonetheless merit the reputation and influence that he has now earned posthumously? Certainly. His writing offers one of the most lucid and accessible treatises on counterinsurgency, helpful to any student and practitioner seeking to understand the difficult dilemmas common to these campaigns. His principles, while difficult to implement, nonetheless provide a foundation upon which to base action. That Galula's own record as a counterinsurgent is more mixed should not surprise, but rather act as a helpful reminder that this form of warfare is never easy, but rather "messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife."¹ Arguably, it is precisely because Galula struggled with the same challenges that we see today that makes his record and his writings so relevant.

For this reason, Mathias's account is also a helpful corrective to some of the overblown and under-researched portrayals of Galula in recent years. Neither Galula's writings, nor his experience in Algeria, were ever going to provide us with the right answers, but rather help us ask the right questions. As Mathias persuasively shows in this book, there is no master key to these types of operations, and Galula's principles provide no checklist for success. This is something the French counterinsurgency expert would no doubt have agreed with: counterinsurgency, he noted, "may be sound in theory but dangerous when applied rigidly to a specific case."²

All of this—Galula's mixed record and his tentativeness in proposing his concept—should instill a much-needed measure of humility about

¹ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1997), p. 182.

² David Galula, *Contre-insurrection: théorie et pratique* (New York: Praeger, 1964; re-published Paris: Economica, 2008), p. 56.

what is possible in counterinsurgency operations, and through military intervention writ large. For this very reason, it is incumbent on those militaries with expeditionary ambitions to study the history of their intellectual forefathers, to learn from their experiences, and try not to repeat their mistakes.

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Preface

During the Algerian War, in 1956–57, Captain Galula was ordered to pacify the subdistrict Djebel Aïssa Mimoun. Galula's pacification operations in Kabylia were completely forgotten until rediscovered by U.S. general Petraeus. Petraeus and Lieutenant Colonel Nagl consider him "the Clausewitz of counterinsurgency" and speak of his book, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, as "the greatest book written on unconventional warfare." In any case this work served as the basis for the new counterinsurgency doctrine represented by U.S. Field Manual 3-24, published in December 2006 by Petraeus and Nagl. Petraeus subsequently encouraged officers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan to read it. Since January 2007, he has successfully applied Galula's ideas in Iraq and, since October 2008, at U.S. Central Command in the Middle East. General McChrystal, American and NATO force commander in Afghanistan from June 2009 to June 2010, was inspired explicitly by "the lessons taught by Lyautey and Galula on the subject of counterinsurgency" in his fight against the Taliban.¹ Major Philippe de Monteton's 2008 French translation of Galula's theoretical work demonstrates the French army's interest in the stored experiences of one of their own. The greatest tribute comes from General Ollivier,² commander of the Centre de Doctrine et d'Emploi des Forces (CDEF), who told a journalist: "We reread David Galula, Roger Trinquier, and Lawrence of Arabia," the principal counterinsurgency thinkers.

Even if Galula's counterinsurgency theory has reached the informed public the implementation of it in Algeria is much less known. *Pacification in Algeria* had not yet been translated into French, even though it was more frequently read in the American army than his theoretical work,

Counterinsurgency Warfare. Galula's operations described in the English-language work *Pacification in Algeria*³ need to be made known to French speakers just as English speakers must be made aware of the French administrative and military archival records of Galula's area of operations. Moreover, Galula's is still the only analysis available, as no other objective analysis of operations in Djebel Aïssa Mimoun exists. If Galula is recognized as an excellent theoretician, it should be worthwhile considering whether he was also a good practitioner when evaluating his own operations, with respect to sources other than those he cites.⁴ Therefore, it is worth analyzing exactly how Galula's actions were undertaken in his sector over the long and short term. This book was undertaken to fill the gap in the record of what happened on the ground at Djebel Aïssa Mimoun by going to the archives of the *Section administrative spécialisée* (SAS), the unit history of Galula's regiment, and reactions in the press about pacification in Kabylia.

In his preface to *Contre-insurrection*, Galula's translator, de Montenenon, called for more French participation in the debate surrounding the implications of French experience fighting the *Armée de libération nationale* (ALN) in Algeria.⁵ This work is intended as a contribution to the debate about Galula's counterinsurgency methods in Algeria.

To understand Galula's operations, it is necessary to retrace the atypical career of this officer before his time in Algeria and to explain the administrative, geographical, human, and security contexts of Djebel Aïssa Mimoun, especially as he was not alone in wanting to resolve the population's problems. In his theoretical work, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, Galula describes a sequence of eight operations necessary to pacify insurgent activity within a region. This study takes up the eight steps and compares them to methods used by Galula at Djebel Aïssa Mimoun that are described in his account *Pacification in Algeria*, his journalism, as well as in the SAS archives and unit histories.⁶ Galula also pays a great deal of attention to the media, the importance of whose influence on the French and Algerian population he knew well. It is worthwhile analyzing the manner in which Galula tries to wrong foot the media or use it to his advantage. Galula's time in the Djebel Aïssa Mimoun sector lasted a little over a year. Studying the evolution of the sector after his departure reveals how long the effects of his operations lasted.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For the English-speaking public, Algerian geographical place-names are translated to conform with *Pacification in Algeria*. In some cases they are spelled differently in French and in official documents.

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