



## David Galula, from Capitol Hill to Tarpeian Rock? 1/4

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Monsieur Matthieu MEISSONNIER

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**Matthieu Meissonnier is a graduate of the Institut d'études politiques de Paris and holds a master's degree in international relations. He is a director of the French Senate. He is also a member of the Groupe Réflexion Terre (GRT), auditor of the 63rd session of the IHEDN and reserve officer (Orsem).**

Under the pretext of Galula's evocation, the author denounces the error of "tackling" concepts in the conduct of military operations by ignoring the consideration of environmental parameters in the theatre of operations. Furthermore, he explains that, today, the mere application of "military art" cannot be fully effective without a complementary political aspect.

"It is not far from the Capitol to the Tarpeian Rock; but the man who fights for reason, for the fatherland, does not so easily stand for defeat," Mirabeau replied to his accusers in a famous speech to the tribune of the National Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

Wouldn't those words apply to David Galula...<sup>2</sup> ? Adulated yesterday, his theses would have become unworkable and useless.

Ten years ago, the world of French strategic thinking discovered David Galula thanks to Colonel Philippe de Monteton's translation of his theoretical book *Counterinsurgency, Theory and Practice*<sup>3</sup>. In this book, he drew lessons from his observations as a defence attaché in Asia and Europe during the wars against the communist movements and from his experience as a company commander in Algeria (1956- 1958). He had been brought out of oblivion not long before, almost by chance, at a Rand Corporation symposium, by Fred C. Iklé, former head of his social sciences department. At the time, General Petraeus, at the height of his fame, had made this unknown French lieutenant-colonel the obligatory reading for trainees at the Command and General Staff College and for officers

leaving for Iraq or Afghanistan . He wrote in the preface of the French edition : " Galula's work can be said to be both the greatest and the only great book ever written on unconventional warfare [...] It will one day be considered the most important French military writing of the last century. This is already the case in the United States .

Since then, the American intervention in Iraq has opened the door to the Islamic state. In Afghanistan, the United States seems to be trying to negotiate their exit and power-sharing with the Taliban... Could it be Galula's fault?

Before pronouncing sentence, has he really only been read for what he is, a tool and not a martingale? Has he not yet held up the mirror to us, revealing the stumbling blocks to today's counter-insurgency operations in Iraq or the Sahel?

Let us read it again and examine, aware of the limits of his reflections, how they shed light on the operations underway and how Galula poses the ever-present question of political-military relations.

**1** Mirabeau's second speech on the law of peace and war, in response to Barnave's, session of 22 May 1790.

**2** Born at Sfax (Tunisia) in 1919 into an important family of the Jewish community, a Saint-Cyr citizen of the "Franco-British Friendship" class (1940), he was struck off the army's roll for Jewishness. Reintegrated in 1943, he took part in the liberation of France and the German campaign. After the war, he was posted in the Far East and in the Balkans as defence attaché where he observed the successes or failures of communist and nationalist insurrections (China, Malaysia, Philippines, Greece). This experience led him to request a posting to Algeria (1956-1958) where he successfully put pacification into practice. Noticed during a conference, Harvard University offers him a research position and then the Rand Corporation. Following the refusal of the French authorities to second him to the United States, he left the army in 1962. He then published his testimony in English, followed by his theoretical reflections. Having refused an advantageous position at BP, which was conditional on his relinquishing his French citizenship, he returned to France where he worked at Thomson. He died of cancer in 1967 at the age of 48.

**3** Paris, Economica, 2008, 213 p. of "Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice", 1963.

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**Title :** Monsieur Matthieu MEISSONNIER

**Author (s) :** Monsieur Matthieu MEISSONNIER

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