



David Galula, from the Capitol to the Tarpeian Rock?

2/4

Pacification and incomprehension - Military Review n°55

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Published on 26/10/2019

Histoire & stratégie

David Galula himself sets the limits of his approach: "No chess player has ever found an opening that guarantees victory, and no one will ever find one. If there is no panacea in the conduct of war, it is nevertheless possible to draw practical and theoretical lessons from experience and observation without making them, in his own words, "supposedly inescapable doctrines erected as articles of faith".

In fact, by the time Galula publishes memories and theories, France has already lost the Algerian War. Many Kabyles, who played the game of pacification in the sector he was leading, died murdered or found refuge in France. David Galula knows this and mentions it. He even goes so far as to underline his esteem for an officer who refused pacification, convinced of the fatal outcome.

These facts are important. Galula was convinced that victory was possible in view of the British success in Malaysia and his own experience. However, when he writes, he knows that he failed to convince both the military and civilian hierarchy of the merits of his action and that the successes he achieved were only limited and temporary. This puts his approach in a rather novel perspective. Galula is a thinker who seeks to learn at least as much from his successes as from his failures. While he gives recommendations and even instructions for use, they are not to be applied indiscriminately - quite the contrary.

In making Galula a systematic academic teaching, some may have fallen into the trap he himself denounced: "The army officer has learned in military academies that combat consists of several distinct phases [...] that each phase corresponds to a standard maneuver [...] in accordance with the doctrine of the moment. Thus, in conventional combat, the officer's intellectual challenge...is to identify the phase in which he is in. Then, all that remains is to apply the technique that corresponds...If he has a good memory, he cannot really make a mistake. Unfortunately, such a procedure cannot be applied to counter-insurgency".

It was then sought to make Galula, in France at least, the continuator of the great colonials Gallieni and Lyautey, the word "pacification", making one believe in an identity

of method and vision. It is striking to note that at no time did Galula base his approach on one or the other of these predecessors. He does not even mention them. Is it ignorance or amnesia on his part? Probably not.

This is because he believes that the counter-revolutionary war that must be fought is profoundly different from the colonial war. If Lyautey and Gallieni had rebels or potentates to subdue, they did not have an ideology such as communism in front of them. This observation should lead us to wonder about the differences between the counter-insurgency theatres of the 1950s and 1960s that Galula experienced (China, Malaysia, Philippines, Greece, Algeria, Cuba...) and those of today.

What is the consistency of the enemy? Is the ideological factor as important? To what extent does the religious factor modify positions? What is the share of banditry? Local conflicts? Nationalism? Ethnic groups and clans? It must be said that it is infinitely composite.

How is the friend, the "loyalist " in Galula's terminology, composed? In Algeria at the end of the 1950s, organized into departments, things are simple. It is exactly, or almost exactly, as in metropolitan Algeria: an army, an administration, entirely French. In the BSS, in Iraq or Afghanistan, everything is different. The French army intervenes with others (allies, UN, NATO...), as a framework nation or only as a contributor. The operation takes place in a foreign country with its own institutions, laws and customs, even if it is a failed state. What's more, it is not a matter of the French army "pacifying" to convince that it and France will stay, but that local institutions will regain their rights and offer the population a better future.

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Release date 21/10/2019

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