



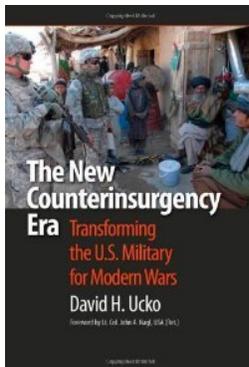
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Interview with Dr. David Ucko

Octavian Manea

“The conceptual and institutional advances within the US military since Iraq are the product of a whole COIN community”



Interview with Dr. David Ucko conducted by Octavian Manea (Editor of *FP Romania*, the Romanian edition of *Foreign Policy*).

What was the role of David Galula in shaping the mind of the US Army or the Army Concept? Could we see him as an intellectual founding father? And what specific beliefs do you have in mind when you assess his role in shaping the organizational culture of the US military?

As certain individuals and groups within the US military again became interested in counterinsurgency, this time as a result of the persistent violence in 'post-war' Iraq, one of the more immediate reference points for how to understand this type of political violence were the scholars and theorists who had marked the US military's previous 'counterinsurgency eras', during the 1960s primarily, but also during the 1980s. In the former camp, the thinkers of the 1960s, David Galula stands as an intellectual forefather to much that was finally included in the US Army and Marine Corps' FM 3-24 counterinsurgency field manual; indeed I believe his book is one of the three works cited in the manual's acknowledgements. I think it is fair to say far fewer people have read than heard of Galula, and it would be an interesting study to go through his writings more carefully and see to what degree they apply to our understanding of counterinsurgency today. Nonetheless, even at a cursory level, Galula has been extremely helpful in conceptualizing some of the typical conundrums, dilemmas and complexities of these types of campaigns: the civilian capability gaps in theater; the political nature of counterinsurgency; the importance of popular support, etc. These were issues that US soldiers and Marines were confronting in Iraq and struggling to find answers to; Galula's seminal texts were in that context helpful.

In terms of influencing US counterinsurgency doctrine, perhaps one of Galula's main contributions is the emphasis on the political nature of these types of campaigns, and - importantly - his concomitant warning that although the fight is primarily more political than military, the military will be the most represented agency, resulting in a capability gap. Galula's answer to this conundrum is explicitly not to restrict military forces to military duties, a notion picked up on in US doctrine, which also asks the US military to go far beyond its traditional remit where and when necessary. In a sense, this line of thinking is one of the greatest

distinctions between the Army's first interim COIN manual in 2004 and the final version in 2006: in doctrine (if not necessarily in other areas, such as force structure), Galula's view of military forces filling civilian capability gaps had been accepted. Of course, it should be added that all of this is much easier said than done, and perhaps some of the implications of involving military forces in civilian tasks (agriculture, sewage, project management) have not been thoroughly thought through - do the armed forces have the requires skills, the training, and how much civilian capability can one realistically expect them to fill? Also, the danger with following Galula on this point is that by doing what's necessary in the field, the armed forces may also be deterring the development of the very civilian capabilities they reluctantly usurp.

It is my understanding what General David Petraeus transformed an entire organization. He changed the instincts of the US army. Is that correct? How would you describe the “AD” (After Dave) US Army’s organizational & operational culture?

Because Gen. David Petraeus was instrumental in drafting the counterinsurgency manual and because he also helped implement certain counterinsurgency principles in Iraq as part of 'surge' there is a tendency to make him the spearhead of all counterinsurgency-related changes to have occurred within the US military since its invasion of Iraq. I would counter that view, although I admit that as shorthand it does reduce the messiness of what is otherwise quite a complex situation. So if we are to look less at who did it but at what was done, can we now say, as you suggest that the 'entire organization' that is the US military has been transformed? I would say no, and even more so if you ask me whether it was David Petraeus who did it. Why? I've already dealt with the reasons why we must look beyond Petraeus, but let me elaborate: the conceptual and institutional advances within the US military vis-a-vis COIN since the Iraq invasion are the product of a whole 'counterinsurgency community', comprising officers, civilians, academics, policy-makers, and soldiers. For the neatness of theory, it is tempting to see it as the product of one man, the 'maverick', but I believe the reality is often more complex, even though Petraeus' influence has of course been very substantial. Second, I do not think that the advances the US military have made conceptually are necessarily reflected in other areas, particularly in regards to budgetary priorities and force structure. Here Secretary of Defence Robert Gates has been very active in pushing the armed services (and the Senate, let us not forget) to change their priorities, sacrifice 'sacred cow' defense projects and adapt in line with the requirements of today's and tomorrow's likely campaigns. But change is very, very slow. There are strong institutional, cultural, financial, industrial and profile-related factors militating against any real change, particularly as it is becoming more difficult to add new priorities without removing or downgrading an old one. The imperatives of operational effectiveness, what one may have thought would be the prime motivating factor behind all of this, often gets lost in the mix, particularly given the surprisingly prevalent view of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan as anomalies that will not be repeated. There is even a risk that the learning that people like David Petraeus has championed will be scaled back or negated as the current campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan draw to a close, as several influential people within the US defense establishment try to refocus on traditional competences and/or dismantle the structures and capabilities associated with these very frustrating campaigns (often a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater).

Dr. David Ucko is the Programme Coordinator and Research Fellow for the Conflict, Security and Development Research Group (CSDRG), King's College London. He is the author of The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars (Georgetown University Press, 2009).

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