

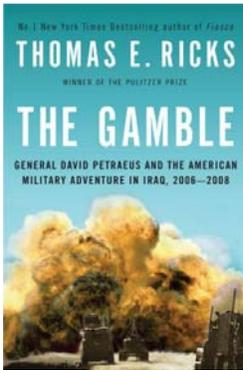


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Counterinsurgency Insights by Tom Ricks

Octavian Manea



David Galula:

I think it is fair to see him as a rediscovered founding father. I think the two most significant beliefs he offered were his insistence on the primacy of politics over military operations, and on making the population the focus of military operations, rather than the enemy.

The US Army Organizational Culture before Emphasis on COIN:

What I saw in Iraq in 2003-06 was a US Army that was focused on destroying the enemy by killing or capturing him. The population was seen as the playing field, not the prize.

The Surge:

The surge achieved its military or tactical goal of improving security. But its stated goal was the larger, strategic one of creating a breathing space in which a political breakthrough could occur. The strategic rationale was to create a breathing space for Iraqi political leaders in which they could move forward. I think it is too early to tell if that really happened. But my gut feeling is that it didn't.

FM 3-24 COIN Manual Shortcomings:

I think the biggest problem is that it isn't clear how a COIN campaign ends, especially for a nation that is fighting to leave, as I think the United States is doing in Iraq and Afghanistan, rather than fighting to stay, as the French and British were in their colonial COIN campaigns. Campaign termination is an area where, as my CNAS colleague Andrew Exum points out, the American COIN manual falls short. That is ironic because it was General Petraeus who oversaw the writing of that manual—and who years earlier, famously asked in Iraq, how does this end?

US Military Culture Today:

I would say the culture is divided. On the one hand, an entire generation of younger officers is comfortable with the idea that they need to fight for the support of the population, and that doing anything that alienates the population is probably a bad idea. On the other hand, there is a lot of

concern in the Army over the loss of basic military skills, such as coordinating artillery fire with ground attacks. But, there is a lot of ambivalence about COIN in the Army. As one thoughtful retired general said to me recently, there are several parts of the U.S. government in which officials should be competent to negotiate with a sheikh, but there is only one part of the U.S. government that should be competent to fire artillery.

Community Defense Initiatives:

I actually think this is a good idea, empowering locals. John Lennon said think globally but act locally. I think that is basically good advice. It is local acts that ultimately provide sustainable solutions. But if there are grievances between the locals and the central government, yes, this will be seen as destabilizing. The job of counterinsurgents is first to knit together those local effects into a national trend, and secondly to encourage a resolution of grievances—or a change in the central government.

The Most Important Lesson the US Military Learned in Iraq and Afghanistan:

Be humble, or you will be humbled.

Thomas Ricks is a Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) and he writes an online blog for ForeignPolicy.com called, "The Best Defense," for which he won the 2010 National Magazine Award as the best blog of the year. His latest book is The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-08, published on February 10, 2009 by The Penguin Press.

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