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Japanese Counterinsurgency in the Philippines: 1942-45

Brian Hardesty

The first Japanese attack on the Philippines in World War II (WWII) was on December 8, 1941, only hours after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The Japanese occupied the islands from 1942 until 1945. Much of the conflict was a conventional war for territory, remembered for the Battles of Bataan, Corregidor, and the Bataan Death March much more than actions afterwards, at least until MacArthur's return. Yet one could argue that there was a nascent insurgency in the Philippines during this period: In fact, post war studies suggested that as many as 260,000 people were in guerrilla organizations.¹ The fact that the fall of the Japanese occupation ultimately depended on returning American forces, rather than strategic victory through insurgency, might limit the insurgency's historical significance, but does not diminish its value as a case worthy of study.

The theory of counterinsurgency warfare that David Galula explained in his influential book *Counterinsurgency Warfare* provides a lens through which to view the internal conflict in the Philippines during WWII. In this way, one can analyze the Japanese successes and failures. I argue that the Japanese counterinsurgency methods in the Philippines were largely ineffective because of the excessive use of military force and political mistakes. This case may suggest that Galula's theory has some explanatory power for insurgency/counterinsurgency during a hot war between great powers.²

Galula's thesis is that insurgency is a "*protracted struggle*" between asymmetric forces (with different assets) for control of and support from the population.³ Insurgents have few if any "tangible assets" at the start of an insurgency, while counterinsurgents have the tremendous military, civil and economic resources of the state. While the insurgents have tremendous ideological power in the form of a cause, the counterinsurgents have the liability of having to maintain security throughout the country and being judged on what they do, not what they say.⁴ The insurgents strive to turn their intangible assets into tangible ones, through forming a political party, gaining allies, conducting guerilla warfare, and eventually developing armed forces and

¹ US Library of Congress Country Studies. "Philippines: World War II, 1941-45." June 1991. WWW Available: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/phtoc.html>. See also: Rottman, Gordon L. *World War II Pacific Island Guide : A Geo-Military Study*, Greenwood: Westport, CT, 2001, pp 288.

² Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006, pp *xvi*.

³ Galula, pp 2-4.

⁴ Galula, pp 3-6, 9.

overpowering the opponent.⁵ Galula offers four laws of counterinsurgency, which he translates into eight steps in a procedure: destroy the main insurgent forces; deploy static units with the population; contact and control the population; destroy local insurgent political groups; have local elections; test local leaders; organize a national political party; win over or suppress last guerrillas.⁶

The diverse groups of insurgents and nascent insurgents during the Japanese occupation had a variety of causes—prerequisites for insurgents, according to Galula.⁷ These groups included the Huks in central Luzon, guerrillas connected to the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), some former politicians, Filipino individuals,⁸ US citizens living in the Philippines,⁹ and ethnic Chinese.¹⁰ The Huks were under the leadership of Luis Taruc, a Communist, in a pre-existing (but adapted) insurgency.¹¹ Many of the other groups maintained straightforward and salient anti-Japanese causes as a result of the invasion, brutality,¹² and the unconvincing Japanese justification of guaranteeing “the Philippines for Filipinos,”¹³ given the previously promised independence from the United States.¹⁴

The diverse insurgent groups failed, however, to establish a united front, living instead with “hostile relations”¹⁵ and fear of “internecine war among guerrillas.”¹⁶ The failure to establish a united front could explain the insurgents’ inability to proceed beyond guerrilla warfare, based on Galula’s theory that an individual party cannot overpower the counterinsurgent “by itself,” but needs allies.¹⁷ This would explain the limited effectiveness of the massive number of guerrillas: one could say there was not one insurgency, but several, spread across an immense archipelago of over 7000 islands. Perhaps as a result, open war and an annihilation campaign against the counterinsurgent forces in the Philippines took the return of US forces.

Luzon-based insurgents conducted numerous guerrilla actions, including “burning bridges, staging ambushes, destroying gasoline, raiding supply depots . . . stealing or sabotaging telephone apparatus and wire, and capturing enemy troops.” Some of the actions do not seem to completely fit with Galula’s view that the actions should be planned “to organize the population,” probably because of the wartime need to affect Japanese industry--mining was a

⁵ Galula, pp 30-39.

⁶ Galula, pp 55-6, 76-96.

⁷ Galula, pp 11.

⁸ Ikehata Setsuho & Ricardo Trota Jose. *The Philippines Under Japan : Occupation Policy and Reaction*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999; pp 1-2.

⁹ Norling, Bernard. *The Intrepid Guerrillas of North Luzon*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999; pp viii.

¹⁰ Li, Yung. *The Huaqiao Warriors: Chinese Resistance Movement in the Philippines: 1942-45*. Hong Kong University Press: Hong Kong, 1995.

¹¹ US Library of Congress Country Studies.

¹² Joes, James. “Counterinsurgency in the Philippines,” Ch. 2 in: in Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*. New York: Osprey, 2008, pp 47.

¹³ Japanese Military Administration of the Philippines. *The Official Journal*. Vol. 1, 2nd edition. Manila: Nichi Nichi Shimbun Sha Inc. 1942, pp v.

¹⁴ Ikehata and Jose, pp 1-2.

¹⁵ Ikehata and Jose; pp 7.

¹⁶ Norling; pp 103.

¹⁷ Galula, pp 31.

special target in Luzon.¹⁸ The fact that USAFFE-connected insurgent organizations were largely wiped out by September 1943 suggests that Galula's thesis may hold explanatory power even in this situation—as insurgents, they might have benefited from a different approach, despite wartime goals.¹⁹ Filipino guerrillas, in contrast, were expanding in this time period.

Many Filipinos became insurgents—and the population's support for insurgency grew—because of the Japanese military's "policy of oppression through violence, massacre, abuse and plunder."²⁰ This was especially true in and after 1943, as conditions in the Philippines grew worse and the Japanese took offensive measures against growing numbers of guerrillas, hurting the population.²¹ In 1944, "the whole island chain became hostile territory."²² These developments were connected to outside events, as the Japanese counterinsurgents lost what Galula would call the "will, the means, and the ability to win" in the eyes of the population.²³ Indeed, after American forces returned to the islands, "guerrilla forces rose up everywhere."²⁴

Although events outside the spectrum of insurgency were decisive for Japan's defeat in the Philippines, it is worth examining the contributing factors in their counterinsurgency campaign. The first seven steps Galula theorizes as necessary for successful counterinsurgency (outlined above) were carried out to varying degrees and in a different order in the Philippines. The Japanese campaign was not effective enough to eliminate the last guerrillas, Galula's eighth step.

Galula's explanation of the destruction of insurgent forces in the selected area is contingent on his preconditions for how the insurgency would start, grow, and only then reveal itself.²⁵ This evolution was not the case in the wartime Philippines, especially since the Japanese were a new occupying power and the insurgents started attacking sooner than Galula recommends. The propaganda of the Japanese Military Administration (JMA), the initial Japanese authority after the invasion, followed Galula's advice to ask for neutrality to a degree, but with additional brutality.²⁶ Although the JMA did call for cooperation (in line with their racial discourse), there was initial emphasis on punishing 17 kinds of broad guerrilla and non-neutral behavior with the death penalty.²⁷

The Japanese do not seem to have deployed static units, but instead formed "neighborhood associations" in the Philippines, which were intended to incentivize spying on each other and reporting to the authorities (as in Japan). Although Galula notes that such organizations helped to prevent insurgency in Communist countries,²⁸ their "corrupt" behavior in the Philippines seems to have undermined their intent to a degree.²⁹ The failure to deploy static units may have

¹⁸ Galula, pp 34.

¹⁹ Some Filipinos who had been connected to these units regrouped further South. Norling; pp *viii*, 239– 240.

²⁰ Ikehata and Jose; pp 10.

²¹ Dowlen, Dorothy Dore. *Enduring What Cannot Be Endured : Memoir of a Woman Medical Aide in the Philippines in World War II*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2001, pp 131-3.

²² Ienaga, Saburo. *The Pacific War 1931-1945*. New York: Pantheon, 1978, pp 172.

²³ Galula, pp 55.

²⁴ US Library of Congress Country Studies.

²⁵ Galula, pp 75.

²⁶ Galula, pp 77.

²⁷ *Official Journal*, Vol. 1, pp 12, 32-33.

²⁸ Galula, pp 18-19,

²⁹ Agoncillo, Vol. 1, pp 355.

been a key failure, not convincing the population that the occupiers were “there to stay,” in Galula’s terms.³⁰

Contact with the population was a key problem for the Japanese counterinsurgency efforts. The population suffered a punishing response from the Japanese as a result of the guerillas and the American return, with an estimated 1,000,000 Filipinos dead by the end of the war. The fact that most of these deaths came near the end of the war—after MacArthur returned—may suggest that the deaths cannot be accounted for within the counterinsurgency paradigm, but rather as part of a conventional war for territory.³² According to the scholar Theodore Friend, the Japanese also behaved as if the “political and geographic identity, flag, anthem, and a constitution” of the Philippines had never existed, which proved to be “counterproductive.”³³

CITY OF MANILA No. 02 3
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
Identification Card
BACUMBUHAY Date Feb. 19, 1944, 94
Name Epifanio Solano Santos
(Given) (Maternal) (Surname)
Present address 2014-G Juan Luna Gagalangin
(No.) (Street) (District)
N. A. No. Occupation Student, Age 14 Sex M
Visible marks Mole on left side of face
Certified by: [Signature]
N. A. Leader
D. A. President
(Left thumb mark)
Epifanio S. Santos
(Signature of holder)
3796-24

*The Japanese attempted to control the population with identity documents.*³¹

There were some more productive attempts in this area: the Japanese attempted to control the movement of people in goods, especially in Manila.³⁴ Where and when neighborhood associations functioned, they would have probably been the counterinsurgents’ first line of defense. Americans were interned in camps like Santo Tomas, keeping them separate from the population. Identity documents were issued to the population, which Galula says is “essential.”³⁵ The Japanese used divisions in the Philippines to their advantage, organizing Japanese immigrants to Davao, the Ricartistas, Sakdals, and Ganaps to support their efforts and collect intelligence, as part of what Galula might call an active minority.³⁶ This groups

were unpopular in the Philippines, however, so they may not have been the most beneficial to organize.³⁷ Nevertheless, these efforts seem completely overshadowed by the suffering inflicted on the population, a sign that *protecting* the population was not an overarching goal.

Likely to their detriment, the Japanese failed to carry out Galula’s political steps completely or in order. They did not destroy the prewar political class, but rather attempted to co-opt it for their own purposes. The Japanese sought to “patronize this already existing Philippine political elite,” in a country with sharp class differences and a relatively small political class. The Japanese may have thought this approach to be necessary because the Philippines had already been promised independence from the United States.³⁸ At the elite level, the Japanese did abolish political

³⁰ Galula, pp 80.

³¹ Hollis P. Allen Materials. Honold-Mudd Library: Special Collections. Claremont, CA.

³² Norling, pp xi. See also: US Library of Congress Country Studies.

³³ Friend, Theodore. *The Blue-Eyed Enemy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp 121.

³⁴ *Official Journal*. Vol. 1, pp 10.

³⁵ Galula, pp 82.

³⁶ Galula, pp 53.

³⁷ Ikehata and Jose, pp 11, 16-17.

³⁸ Ikehata and Jose, pp 3-4. See also: Friend, pp 84-6.

parties and formed the Executive Commission, which worked under the JMA's pressure, issuing edicts along with the JMA.³⁹ But they accepted the mayor of Manila--who had been appointed by the previous president--as Chairman of the Executive Commission until 1943, when Japan proclaimed the Philippines to be an independent republic.⁴⁰ These steps do not amount to the full destruction of the insurgent political organization, which Galula calls a "necessity."⁴¹

The counterinsurgents did create a national political party, but it does not follow Galula's theory because it was not preceded by free local elections, probably hurting the party's credibility. The Japanese established the KALIBAPI, or Association for Service to the New Philippines, as the only Filipino political party in 1943, which was directed through the Tokyo-based Imperial Rule Assistance Association.⁴² This discrepancy can be easily explained due to the authoritarian nature of the Japanese regime, which would of course be unlikely to have free elections.

Japan did have limited, controlled elections for the Preparatory Commission for Philippine Independence and the national assembly. The national assembly, under Japanese pressure, elected Jose P. Laurel president of the new republic. The Japanese had kept incumbent mayors and governors as half of the assembly, perhaps trying to draw on their legitimacy.⁴³ This approach is another sign of the incomplete destruction of the prewar political machinery. At least in some cases, the results of the Japanese political approach were deleterious for their counterinsurgency efforts: political factions sent some members to both the guerrillas and the Japanese side.⁴⁴

The leaders were tested to some degree, but under Japanese domination they lacked the freedom to be truly tested. Japanese control may have contributed to their problems based on Galula's theory: testing the leaders is metric by which the counterinsurgent can judge if he is "an outsider vis-à-vis the population" and gauge the situation.⁴⁵ Before assuming office, Laurel published a book that praised the Japanese and their ideology.⁴⁶ This may have been a test of his loyalty, or a step to make it clear that he had come out on the side of the counterinsurgents, a sign of "irreversibility."⁴⁷ The KALIBAPI were charged with much responsibility for propaganda: a test and a counterinsurgency necessity.⁴⁸

³⁹ Japanese Military Administration of the Philippines. *The Official Journal*. Vol. 2, 2nd edition. Manila: Nichi Nichi Shimbun Sha Inc. 1942, pp 29.

⁴⁰ Malay, Armando, J. *Occupied Philippines: The Role of Jorge B. Vargas during the Japanese Occupation*. Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1967, 14.

⁴¹ Galula, pp 87-89.

⁴² Jose, Ricardo Trota. "The KALIBAPI (Association for Service to the New Philippines) during the Japanese Occupation." Asian Studies Conference Japan, 23 June 2002. WWW Available: <http://www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/~ascj/2002/200229.htm>.

⁴³ "Japanese Occupation of the Philippines During World War II." January 3, 2009. WWW Available: <http://www.philippine-history.org/japanese-occupation.htm>.

⁴⁴ Ikehata and Jose, pp 3-4.

⁴⁵ Galula, pp 90.

⁴⁶ Laurel, Jose P. *Forces that Make a Nation Great*. Bureau of Information and Public Security, Ministry of the Interior. Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1943.

⁴⁷ Galula, pp 57.

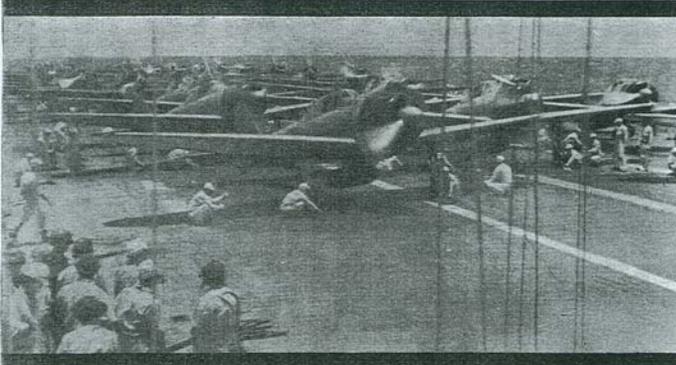
⁴⁸ "Japanese Occupation of the Philippines During World War II." January 3, 2009. WWW Available: <http://www.philippine-history.org/japanese-occupation.htm>.

The failure of the Japanese in the Philippines can be attributed to the military's overreactions and political mistakes. Political mistakes can be attributed to the nature of the Japanese regime, but it is harder to explain *why* the military would overreact: For that one can turn to Galula, who posits that being "aware of the strategy and tactics" of counterinsurgency, having the ability to "cope," and "adapting" minds to counterinsurgency are clear needs for fighting a counterinsurgency.⁵⁰ The Japanese military was sorely deficient in these key areas, according to a leading Japanese historian, Saburo Ienaga, who wrote that Japanese military culture after the Meiji Restoration "stifled creative research" and led to "impoverished strategic thinking and military doctrine," in a system where officers were akin to "feudal lords" over privates who "had no human rights."⁵¹ The Japanese Army, resolute, secure at home, and controlling abroad, may

have been susceptible to "infection" in part because they did not have the structure or culture to adapt and learn.⁵²

By and large, variables in the case of the Philippines during World War II play the roles Galula suggests they would. Although there were discrepancies with the timeline and order of some of the steps on both sides, perhaps due to the quick formation of the occupying regime, both sides benefited from successfully conducting Galula's steps and suffered when they did not. As a result, this case supports Galula's theory, even after the Japanese invasion and with the Tokyo's focus on the broader war effort. The basics of Galula's theory alone have explanatory power for the counterinsurgents' most important failure: not understanding counterinsurgency, the Japanese did not seek the support of the population, let alone try to protect it, and instead left a million dead in their wake.

**TO DEAL THE FOE
THE FATAL BLOW**



Monday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Friday—these constitute a week in the Nippon Navy calendar. Neither officers nor sailors have no holidays or half-holidays during naval training and practice which are carried on day and night, whether in peace or war.

The Imperial Navy of Nippon does not make a fuss about enemy's challenge for petty guerrilla warfare. Intact, and even more powerful than ever with the addition of the latest warships and warplanes and men, the Nippon fleet is awaiting the best time to give the Anglo-American combined fleet the coup de grâce in the final and decisive battle.

The Japanese did not adapt to the challenges of guerrilla warfare, calling it "petty" in this propaganda poster.⁴⁹

Brian Hardesty is in his final semester in Georgetown's Security Studies Program. He first studied the Japanese occupation of the Philippines at the Claremont Colleges' library, which has two special collections on the subject thanks to the generous contributions of Hollis P. Allen and William B. Simpson. Dr. John Nagl's class on counterinsurgency at Georgetown rekindled Brian's passion for the case.

⁴⁹ Hollis P. Allen Materials. Honold-Mudd Library: Special Collections. Claremont, CA.

⁵⁰ Galula, pp 17, 65-66.

⁵¹ Ienaga, pp 48-51.

⁵² Galula, pp 17.

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