



SMALL WARS ⁽¹⁾

JOURNAL

BERNARD FALL AS AN ANDREW MARSHALL AVANT LA LETTRE (PART II)

Articles

Bernard Fall as an Andrew Marshall avant la lettre (Part II)

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SWJ interview with Nathaniel L. Moir, Ph.D., an Ernest May Postdoctoral Fellow in History and Policy at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School. Dr. Moir is completing a book manuscript on Bernard Fall for publication.

Bernard Fall should definitely be understood in the context of his epoch. So I am wondering how did he approach and perceive other archetypal COIN campaigns of his time - the one in Philippines and the one in Malaya? In the end some of the architects of these particular campaigns, Edward Lansdale as well as Robert Thompson, will exert a big influence over the different stages of the Vietnam campaign.

I agree that the best analysis of Fall demands contextualization of his scholarship and experiences. He did not, nor could he know, everything. It is important to remind readers that Fall died on February 21, 1967 at the age of 40. He definitely was wrong in suggesting that the National Liberation Front might negotiate but, so were others. I would argue, however, that Fall was the most perceptive and important scholar on conflict in Vietnam after War broke out between the French and Viet Minh in 1946 period. This was also acknowledged by others at the time. For example, Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee recorded in the *Congressional Senate Record* from Feb 24, 1967, only days after Fall's death, stated: "Bernard Fall has played a more important part in the Vietnam War than any other writer. He not only wrote history but also participated in its making; he was a historian who looked to the future as well as to the past." [i] David Halberstam, Peter Arnett, Walter Cronkite, I.F. Stone, and others all looked to Fall as a guiding authority in their journalism and that is consequential when you see the importance of these individuals' writing and scope of influence.

Lansdale and Fall had a complicated and passive aggressive relationship. Fall genuinely admired Lansdale for his effective work in the Philippines in support of Magsaysay, but quickly recognized that Lansdale's relationship with Ngo Dinh Diem was not similar to that Lansdale had with Magsaysay. Diem was not open to Lansdale except when it came to tapping Lansdale for U.S. financial support. Fall and Lansdale's contentious relationship really began over the issue of payments to the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen for their support of the Diem administration in 1955. Fall believed that Ngo Dinh Diem only received support from these groups through bribery, whereas Edward Lansdale attempted to portray payments to these groups as back-pay for services, thus reflecting a "sincere allegiance" to the Diem administration. Fall described payments, and backed his statements with evidence, that Diem received over 12 million USD from the U.S. by the late Spring 1955 to make these payments to the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen. The bigger strategic issue concerned the fact that these religious groups still revolted against Diem in what is known as the battle of Saigon over that summer. Diem eventually suppressed this revolt and it improved his standing with the U.S. which then threw its full support behind Diem. Lansdale, not surprisingly, did not appreciate Fall questioning Diem's bribery of these religious groups (the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao) and a criminal syndicate (the Binh Xuyen) because it undermined Lansdale's portrayal of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao as supportive of Diem because of their anti-communism.

Fall and Lansdale continued to have a difficult relationship up to 1966. At one point, during a 1966 lecture at the Far East Training Center in Hawaii, Fall claimed that "The Americans have an emotional hang-up on the word 'colonialism.' That's why this place here [Hawaii] wasn't called a colony but a territory, right? Of course, it's six of one, half dozen of another." Lansdale responded to this by writing to a friend: "On Indo-China, I feel strongly that any listening we do to the French (and Bernard Fall in particular) be done with a highly critical ear. The French went from a glorious defeat to a glorious defeat (Indo-China to Algeria), while being highly articulate on how to win a war. It's a bad habit, a contagious one, and all too easy for Americans to catch." [ii] Ironically, both Fall and Lansdale recognized the importance of political strategy in Vietnam and both had problems with the overmilitarized intervention after 1965. They had shared goals but different approaches and how to handle Diem was the single biggest contention between them.

Regarding Malaya and Robert Thompson, Fall recognized that Malaya was as he said it, "one shade closer to the physical environment of the fighting in Vietnam but is totally different in the sociological, political, and ethnic factors to sinning such a battle." He discussed differences between Vietnam and Malaya at length in his book, *The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis* published in 1963. His discussion is found in chapter 16 "Insurgency and Myths" which I highly recommend to your readers for Fall's comprehensive thought on revolutionary warfare and the insurgency/counterinsurgency debate as he saw them. Regarding Robert Thompson, Fall only thought of him as "one of the chief authors of Operation Sunrise that swept Vietnamese Communists from the Ben Cat forest in the Cu Chi region near Saigon in the spring of 1962. Fall knew of his experience in Malaya but mostly wrote about him in terms of the strategic hamlets plan in South Vietnam," and, in Fall's perspective, the Strategic Hamlet was not only a complete Sham but it was detrimental to the United States efforts in South Vietnam. He saw it as an extension of President Diem's authoritarian rule that increased support for the National Liberation Front among Vietnamese more than anything else.

Fall occupies a space that is different from later Orthodox views, in which other writers and scholars viewed the war as misguided or immoral, and later Revisionist views through which scholars claimed the war was winnable had it been fought differently or better. Since Fall was a scholar living and analyzing war in Southeast Asia as it was in progress, these competing interpretations were obviously not distinct to him. What is clear is that Fall did view the war as misguided because the North Vietnamese did not pose an existential threat to the United States. Domino theory – thinking was, in my interpretation of how Fall perceived it, more to gain political votes than something to fear. His best articulation of this was "We do not have to fear losing Southeast Asia by losing Vietnam any more than we have to fear losing Europe because we lost Czechoslovakia," and Czechoslovakia, of course, was conceded to the Eastern Bloc in 1958. The mindset Fall demonstrated by stating this was simply not one that Edward Lansdale shared, nor was it shared by probably a vast majority of establishment military personnel. If military leaders want real insight, one lesson from all this, is to accept views that work against the grain and to support junior officers' opportunity to study and promote

countervailing views. General H.R. McMaster and Secretary Mattis are a couple of my favorite leader because of their courage to demand this from junior officers. I wonder how much their being historians has to do with their ability to be openminded, my guess is quite a bit.

What would Bernard Fall have thought of the Robert Komer's CORDS program?

Fall had a cordial relationship with Robert Komer, believe it or not, and Fall also had a respectful relationship with William Bundy too. These were claims that Fall's friend, Francois Sully, a journalist for *Newsweek* who died in 1972, made in 1966 that surprised me during the course of my research. As to CORDS, I believe *Fall would have been a supporter of the program and he would have appreciated the effort to create a whole of government approach that focused on developing a stronger political rationale among Vietnamese allies* who the United States absolutely needed for any continued intervention to make sense. The problem was -- and this is something I go into at length in my book in progress on Bernard Fall -- by 1956 it was already too late for the United States to create a strong political rationale for South Vietnamese people to rally sufficiently to not only the United States, but most critically to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).

The central problem Fall identified in 1956 centered on RVN President Ngo Dinh Diem's decision to dissolve South Vietnamese village councils and get rid of village governance in South Vietnam. Diem then replaced locally elected officials with his appointees which you don't need to be a historian to know, did not go well. Fall often referred to this decision by Diem, along with his communist denunciation campaigns and several other government decrees as important factors, among others, that contributed to the creation of the National Liberation Front. Unfortunately, after Diem was long gone, there were many efforts to resuscitate the RVN and, to this day, one can still go to places in the United States where Vietnamese emigres settled in the United States and still see Republic of Vietnam flag on stickers in restaurants or in other places of business. CORDS gave many South Vietnamese understandable hope but, Fall would have argued, it all came far too late. *Had CORDS been implement at the time MAAG was advising the French in the early 1950s or at the very founding of the Republic of Vietnam in 1955, there might have been a seriously different outcome than the defeat of the RVN and the United States that occurred.*

It seems to me that Bernard Fall sounded very early the alarm on the role of the territorial active sanctuaries that can provide oxygen to insurgent movements in neighboring countries. Is this something that US should have learned and consider in its post 9/11 campaigns?

Our contemporary use of sanctuary has adopted different and more manipulated meanings that include its use for threat inflation and other reasons that involve politics with allies. A recent example of this stem from issues that existed with Pakistan during so many years of the United States' operations in Afghanistan. I remember, for example, the serious problems Terhik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) gave the United States in RC-East in 2009 and 2011 since TTP would lob mortars into Kunar and then backpedal back across the PK border. Generally, historians too often miss the opportunity to examine how terms like Sanctuary change over time, even though that is their supposedly specific task.

As to Fall's take on sanctuary. Fall first used and articulated what he meant by Sanctuary, specifically "Active Sanctuary," in 1961 with the first edition of *Street Without Joy*. See his section "Active Sanctuary" in the chapter "The Future of Revolutionary Warfare." He describes it writing "An active sanctuary is a territory contiguous to a rebellious area which, though ostensibly not involved in the conflict, provides the rebel side with shelter, training facilities, equipment, and - if it can get away with it - troops." He then goes on to describe how this specific use of the term and the idea of sanctuary during the Vietnam War era directly came from the Cold War when communist forces in Korea and Indochina relied upon sanctuary in "Red China." So Fall was very specific about the political genealogy of the term. His use of the term, therefore, stems directly from the use of the "superpowers to protect Communists in Korea and Indochina from the direct reprisals that would have been their fate at almost any other moment of history." He went on to claim later that unless they are solved politically, as well as militarily, that the West best get used to endless "brushfire wars."

It is interesting to see how his idea of sanctuary changed as a term. In his first book, *The Viet-Minh Regime*, published in 1954, Fall does not use “Sanctuary” but he did often use the terms "redoubt", "rear areas", and "quiet garrison" which are analogous to sanctuary. The changes in world politics as the Cold War evolved certainly guided his thoughts on the idea. In terms of Vietnam, at the end of the day, the “sanctuary” that existed along the Ho Chi Minh Trail was a smaller sanctuary in terms of acting as a corridor through which supplies were funneled to the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam. Instead, over 70% of Communist material support transited through the Port of Sihanoukville in Cambodia despite the largest naval blockade of any country by the United States since the Union blockaded the Confederate States of America.

The thing that really interests me is Fall's preoccupation with administration of people, obviously since people occupied all these protected "spaces" anyway. He describes how the Meo tribes (derisively termed "Montagnards") occupied the highground in the hinterlands while the T'ai occupied the "vital midlands" from the Mekong Valley well into northern Viet-Nam and into Yunnan. He describes how the GCMA's (like Group Mobile 100) used the T'ai in the French war against the Viet Minh but that a stronger T'ai federation-ally was not explored by the US after 1954 effectively...Fall suggested that if this had been accomplished, it might have changed things for the US and South Vietnam significantly. The Nung Chinese in Northeast North Vietnam were another group (that hated the Vietnamese communists) and fled south after 1954 and US SOF did work with Nung forces a great deal. In conclusion, I think Fall saw sanctuary as people dependent more than territory dependent...I mean this only in the sense that territory is allegiance dependent and true "empty" spaces are rare.

There were other French theorists and practitioners (in particular Trinquier or Galula) that had an influence on shaping COIN doctrine. What sets Bernard Fall apart from them? What elements of divergence or convergence can be identified?

It is important to describe briefly, broader differences between Fall and other French theorists who were his contemporaries. The most fundamental difference between them was that Fall remained focused on applying his thought to warfare in Indochina. In contrast, though French officers and theorists of *la guerre révolutionnaire* based their ideas on their experiences in Indochina, they developed these ideas for use in the war in Algeria that began in later 1954. As historian Peter Paret writes, theorists of *la guerre révolutionnaire* were not interested in “understanding the complex origins of the Indochinese War’ but rather developed their theories to gain insights that could be turned to operational use in other contexts.”[iii] In contrast, Fall was critically concerned with the complex origins of the Indochinese War and he described how his peers characterized Revolutionary War:

“A nucleus of French officers around Colonels Lacheroy and Gardes, now assigned to the Psychological Warfare Section of the French Army in Algeria, began to transform the Communist weapon of yesterday into a weapon of their own. Probably more articles were written in France on Communist Psychological warfare (and studiously left unread over here) than in any other country outside the Soviet bloc. Finally, in 1958, Colonel Bonnet, a former professor at the French Higher War College, wrote a book which was to become the ‘bible’ of the new school of thought. It was simply a history of insurrections and revolutions from 3000 B.C. to Algeria...In it, it was for the first time recognized that ‘guerrilla warfare’ and ‘revolutionary warfare’ are not interchangeable and that the major danger of the West is faced with today is not one of being able to cope with the armed forces of a revolution but with its spirit.”[iv]

Fall's focus upon the “spirit” of Vietnamese Revolutionary Warfare, and his building upon Gabriel Bonnet and others' ideas, set his work apart. This is why Revolutionary Warfare is more of a philosophy than anything else. Colonel Gabriel Bonnet's book, to which Fall referred was *Les Guerres insurrectionnelles et révolutionnaires* (Paris: Plon, 1958). The complexity of the “Spirit” of RW partly explains why Fall devoted so much effort to understanding Viet Minh organization, the importance of Vietnamese village life and leadership, the multiple and diverse cultures making up Vietnam, and the methods the Viet Minh developed to gain control over Vietnamese society. He explained, “The Communists have correctly identified as the central objective of revolutionary warfare the human beings which make up a nation; while on our side, the securing of communication lines, the control of crops and industrial installations, and the protection of one small power group to the exclusion of all others seem to be overriding considerations.” He added, “the

population as such can only become an ‘object’ – something that gets shoved out of the way because it ‘impedes’ military operations; whereas the Communists build the civilian population right into their battle plan and make utmost use of it, from the simple 10-year old who becomes a messenger to the hapless villagers who are rounded up to serve as bullet shields in an attack.”[v]

Regarding some of the key differences between Bernard Fall and the practitioners of the *guerre révolutionnaire*, Trinquier was a crony of Raoul Salan the founder of OAS who attempted to overthrow Charles de Gaulle and the French Republic. Overall Trinquier was an imperialist and he really thought in an autocratic manner to control order. Lastly, Trinquier was prescriptive in his work laying out a doctrine whereas Fall was really more diagnostic and descriptive in his analysis.

Bernard Fall really admired David Galula and thought highly of his work. They both were aware of the relationship between population and the counterinsurgent. Galula had formerly military training whereas Fall didn't. Galula really derived a lot of his material from Fall's previous research. Fall's analysis of revolutionary warfare predated David Galula's by 10 years. Galula is also general in the overall ethnographic aspects of counterinsurgency whereas Bernard Fall really emphasized those details that mattered. When Galula does mention Vietnam it is only really in general and superficial terms. He draws most of his examples from the Chinese communism and less so from the Vietnam War.

Overall Trinquier and Galula were really laying out a doctrine whereas Fall was really more diagnostic.

What specific Bernard Fall influences should have shaped the contemporary COIN doctrine, in particular the FM 3-24? What is Bernard Fall's relevance today?

In 2007, counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen explained that the hardest task in counterinsurgency is figuring out what is actually going on[vi]. Fall, perhaps more than any other observer writing in English before large-scale U.S. intervention in 1965, achieved the goal of explaining what was really happening in terms of Vietnamese Revolutionary Warfare in Southeast Asia. This is why I stress that ***Fall's great contribution to the overall COIN debate is his diagnostic skill.*** Unlike Galula or Trinquier, Fall was not prescriptive in his work which is why his scholarship is difficult to use for the creation of doctrine.

As to Fall's potential contribution to COIN doctrine, or FM 3-24, there are several points to consider. First, the most critical contribution Fall made to the study of warfare in Indochina was in his role diagnosing the agency of Vietnamese society in changing warfare to achieve decolonization of Indochina and its political goal of a united Vietnam. Fall was, in many respects, similar to Andrew Marshall who led the Office of Net Assessment. ***Fall, like Marshall, did not prescribe what the United States should do in terms of policies or create doctrine that its military should follow. Fall's greatest contributions, like Andrew Marshall's effort, was in diagnosing problems and increasing our understanding of them so that better informed policy could address such complex problems*** as the United States and our NATO allied faced in the past, and face today as well.

Let me demonstrate what I mean by describing Fall's work as diagnostic and pointing out his Fall's relevance for today and tomorrow. For readers unfamiliar with Bernard Fall, he was among the first, if not the first writing in English, who described the historical origins of the Viet Minh after 1941, the establishment of the Indochinese Communist Party and its later re-branding at the Lao – Dong (Workers) Party, and one of the first to describe events through World War II leading to the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2, 1945. Fall's first publication that explored these developments was published in 1954 and was entitled, “the Viet-Minh Regime.” Fall possessed not only historical knowledge that might have helped US policy during the First Indochina War period but he also demonstrated a historical sensibility on how to use knowledge of the Viet Minh effectively in context of evolving conflict in Southeast Asia as framed against the broader Cold War. His scholarship, in my view, exemplifies what the concept of Applied History is all about. Applied history is about using history not as a recipe book from which to draw, but as a guide to think about current problems with a historical sensibility. This is something that only really comes through serious reading and discussion of contemporary problems that share characteristics with others from past conflicts. This is where Fall's scholarship is so critical: one has to face squarely the exact reality and context in which military operations are

contemplated. The idea that the U.S. can go into any country and be greeted by liberators, to Bernard Fall, would have been ignorant and demonstrated a profound lack of historical sensibility that is fundamental to the development of sound foreign policy.

I used to think that Fall's work, instead of David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, should have been used as a guiding force in the development of FM 3-24. I have changed my mind on that and understand why Galula made sense. However, what I have learned from reading and studying Bernard Fall at such length is that ***the only way to create truly sound doctrine for real war, especially Revolutionary Warfare, is developing it specifically for a specific context and that means understanding the society and history where any potential intervention potentially occurs.*** FM 3-0 (Operations) and FM 2-0 (Intelligence) are critical to understand to get the overall idea of how the U.S. Army functions. However, applying that doctrine, let alone FM 3-24, to any potential conflict demands far more and, in my opinion, far greater integration of historians, anthropologists, and other social scientists in the development of policy where conflict occurs or may occur.

As we enter a world increasingly shaped by the great power competition what is the future of Revolutionary Warfare?

Fall would recognize the critical importance of economics and technology, particularly in the information domain, as it relates to great power competition. Yet, he would emphasize that Revolutionary Warfare is neither about tactics, techniques, and procedures, nor is it about technological innovations, such as Artificial Intelligence or Quantum Computing. ***His most fundamental point about warfare, in his own words, was "the primacy of the political factor in revolutionary warfare operations."*** Economics, more than ideology, is the fundamental driver for great power politics today and he would likely drill down into the political economy of great power competition more than anything else. At the same time, he would remind readers to remember that ideological rationales are fundamental for many non-state, and aspiring state actors.

It is important to remember that Fall was living and writing at the height of the Cold War so great power competition involved super power-sponsored proxy war and other phenomena, such as Active Sanctuary. With the exception of Taliban sanctuary in Pakistan, the issue of sanctuary was even more pronounced in his day even though the idea still shapes how we think of conflict in many respects. Mike Innes is a scholar currently doing fascinating work on the subject of Sanctuary. In Fall's perspective, Active Sanctuary concerned Laos and Cambodia and communist Vietnamese' dependence on material support from China and the Soviet Union. As suggested, the most identifiable correlation today is the relationship between the Taliban and Pakistan on one hand and the United States relationship with Pakistan on the other. This all points to how political factors configured the evolution of America's war in Afghanistan.

In closing, Fall would stress is the importance of applying history to the formation of Foreign Policy. He would encourage every policy institute in the United States and Europe to include some form of applied history as part of its curriculum. Further, he would emphasize the importance of personal interaction and dialogue to better inform policy makers. Samantha Power, the former US Ambassador to the UN, described in her recent book how she went to every representative in the UN, except North Korea, to get to know them and gain a better sense of their country's history. This is the kind of thing Fall would applaud and he would advocate similar approaches to building relationships. At the end of the day, Fall would probably tell every person involved in National Security to read Lederer and Burdick's *The Ugly American*. Finding some empathy with others, Fall believed, could solve problems far more effectively than anything else.

End Notes

[i] "Congressional Senate Record – Statement," February 24, 1967, S 2609, JWFP, Series 71, Box 32.

[ii] Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 234-235.

[iii] Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 7.

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[v] Bernard Fall, "Books by Fall-Two Viet-Nam's Draft Critique, p. 309" Series 1.02, Box B-3, BBF, JFKL.

[vi] David Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice, 2007," Presentation, Quantico, Virginia, September 26, 2007, available at <http://smallwarjournal.com/documents/kilcullencoinbrief26sep07.ppt>
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