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Martin S. Alexander and J. F. V. Keiger, Eds., *France and the Algerian War, 1954-62: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy*. London and Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 2002. xviii + 213 pp. Chronology, maps, figures, abstracts, and index. \$59.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-7146-5297-0; \$26.50 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-7146-8264-0.

Review by Michael Creswell, The Florida State University.

The Algerian War toppled France's Fourth Republic (1946-1958), triggered a diplomatic revolution, and stirred great passion worldwide. *France and the Algerian War (1954-62): Strategy, Operations, and Diplomacy* brings together twelve scholars to examine the relatively overlooked prosecution of the war and the diplomatic context in which it occurred.[1]

The opening chapter, penned by the two editors, Martin S. Alexander and J.F.V. Kreiger, provides a valuable overview of the Algerian war and the scholarly debates that it has prompted. The remaining chapters assess the political, military, and diplomatic issues that France faced, including relations with Britain and the United States.

Part one of the book, "Strategy and Operations," begins with Lt. Colonel Frédéric Guelton's essay, "The French Army Centre for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerrilla Warfare (CIPCG) at Arzew." Although France fought its previous conflicts in a conventional style, this one would require counter-guerilla methods. France established the CIPCG in spring 1956 to instruct soldiers in such techniques. The CIPCG lasted but four years, overtaken by events and having lost its *raison d'être*. Field commanders' complaints over the long training period led the center to cut the length of its program, thus undermining its effectiveness. The high command sought military victory before beginning a campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Algerian people. And veterans of the Indochina war assumed that little difference existed between the *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN) in Algeria and the Viet Minh, hence there was no need to alter their tactics. Psychological warfare training ended after a study indicated that the vast majority of soldiers arriving in Algeria did not know why they were there or what they were fighting for. But for the officers at Arzew, Algeria was and would always be France, a sentiment that would eventually put them at odds with the new civilian leadership that came to power in December 1958. This case illustrates in miniature the problems facing the French army in Algeria as a whole.

One of the most interesting essays, "A Case of Successful Pacification: the 584th Bataillon du Train at Bordj de l'Agha (1956-57)," tells the story of Major Jean Pouget. The author, Alexander Zervoudakis, relies heavily on Pouget's memoirs as well as interviews with him, thus readers might take his essay with a grain of salt. But in the author's retelling, rather than alienating the local population with heavy-handed tactics, Pouget's men listened to its needs and wants, thus gaining its trust. And when one soldier violated this approach by placing his hand on the daughter of a local dignitary, the major publicly punished the soldier and made reparation to the father. Pouget seemingly understood that the use of force must be balanced by establishing good relations with the local population.

Marie-Catherine and Paul Villatoux note the vital place that aerial intelligence has come to play in warfare since its introduction in the First World War. Their essay, "Aerial Intelligence during the Algerian War," indicates the obstacles that face such information gathering in guerilla wars. Among these are a "hostile geographical environment... with the particular characteristics of guerilla warfare (a mobile adversary blending into the civilian population, moving around principally at night and hiding arms dumps and military positions)" (p. 67). They explain how the French air force learned from its experience in Indochina and created decentralized air units to track the movements of an elusive enemy in Algeria. The air force also abandoned long distance reconnaissance, instead pinpointing specific areas for shorter missions. Intelligence analysts also recognized the futility of searching for large ALN units. Instead, they looked for signs of fresh footprints, burned out campfires, the movement of livestock, felled trees, and sought to gauge the attitude of the local population to detect enemy movements. Despite scarce resources and a marked lack of interest by army officers, the air force proved the usefulness of aerial intelligence

gathering by helping the army to undertake a series of successful large-scale operations, as during Operation “Jumelles,” which took place from mid-1959 to early 1960.

France’s navy played a key role in the Algerian conflict, as Rear Admiral Bernard Estival writes in “The Navy and the Algerian War.” The navy’s primary mission was to carry out coastal surveillance to prevent the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN)/ALN from receiving arms from abroad. The navy successfully seized ten ships carrying a total of 1,350 tons of military equipment, and perhaps deterring many other would-be gunrunners, it also built an electrified fence to seal the Moroccan border, enabling operations that wiped out the larger bands of rebel fighters. Overall, the navy made a significant contribution to the war effort ashore, aloft, and afloat.

Part two of the book, “Diplomacy,” opens by discussing civil-military relations and the plans by senior army officers in early 1958 to engineer a *coup d’état*. They hoped to replace what they saw as feckless French governments with one that would adopt a stronger policy toward Algeria. The attitude of Charles de Gaulle toward Algeria before and after his return to power in December 1958 has generated much speculation. That speculation has been fueled by the lack of access to de Gaulle’s personal papers and the fact that he withdrew from politics before the uprising began on November 1, 1954. Coupled with the tendency of conspirators to not leave a paper trail, scholars have offered varied interpretations. Stephen Tyre tackles this issue and others in “The Gaullists, the French Army and Algeria before 1958: Common Cause or Marriage of Convenience?” Tyre attempts to overcome the evidentiary obstacles in determining a “Gaullist policy” toward Algeria by examining “the role of the principal Gaullist leaders and activists in formulating policy” (p. 98). He argues that de Gaulle adopted an ambiguous stance toward Algeria in the hope of appeasing elements in his own Gaullist movement and the general public. The general later came down on the side of reform, which angered key French army officers, four of whom responded by leading a failed *coup d’état* in April 1961.

During the years of the Fourth Republic, the Gaullist view of Algeria wavered between reform and authoritarianism. De Gaulle himself laid out his views in 1943-44, when he suggested extending citizenship to Algerian Muslims. Even so, de Gaulle and the Gaullists believed that France would need to retain its influence in Africa to remain a world power. Gaullists saw Africa as a region in which to confront rising Soviet influence in the Third World. They were also determined to keep French influence intact in North Africa. Stung by Anglo-American criticism over the Algerian war, many Gaullists decided that France needed to achieve military self-reliance by developing its own nuclear arsenal. The Sahara would provide the resources necessary to develop these weapons and serve as an eventual test site.

Jacques Soustelle, the Governor General of Algeria in 1955-1956 and a leading Gaullist, proposed a policy of “integration.” Yet de Gaulle never really took this concept to heart. As he told a colleague, “They [supporters of integration] are dreaming . . . They are forgetting that there are one million Muslims. Integration means eighty Muslim deputies in the Assembly. It will be them [sic] who will make the law...” (p. 99). Instead, de Gaulle seemed to prefer a federal system in which the two communities, French and Algerian, would coexist, each with its own set of institutions, in a kind of semi-independence.

Even though the Algerian insurrection helped return de Gaulle to power, over time the Gaullist movement splintered. Its political arm, the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* (RPF), disbanded and de Gaulle himself withdrew from politics. The seeming vacuum led many Gaullists to go their own way on colonial policy, some favoring *Algérie française*, others favoring semi-independence. Surprisingly, the military establishment and the RPF were not on the best of terms. Senior officers joined the RPF not out of love of de Gaulle but fear of the programs of other parties, such as the French Communist Party. The RPF, in turn, gladly accepted as members these uniformed politicians, who boosted the party’s prestige. This relationship exacted a price, however, as the military men in the RPF used their influential positions to press for policies deemed desirable by the military establishment, thus muddying the waters of political authority.

The final four essays of the book explain how France lost a war that it had won on the battlefield. Irwin M. Wall disputes the growing scholarly perception that de Gaulle played a skillful diplomatic hand that granted France greater independence in the Cold War.[2] De Gaulle’s primary diplomatic goals called for establishing a neo-colonial relationship with Algeria, assuming leadership of Europe, and achieving equal footing with American and

Britain within the ranks of NATO. In “De Gaulle, the ‘Anglo-Saxons’ and the Algerian War,” Wall argues persuasively that de Gaulle failed to attain these objectives largely due to his own actions.

De Gaulle’s 1958 proposal for France, Britain, and the United States to oversee the entire free world also sought Anglo-American and NATO aid to perpetuate French control over Algeria. U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower disliked the French proposal, but he did not reject it out hand because he wanted to avoid aggravating de Gaulle and perhaps prompting him to withdraw French forces from NATO. British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had to be much more cautious. He opposed France’s prosecution of the Algerian War and colonialism in general but could not voice his concerns too loudly lest the French denounce British influence over Cyprus and Southern Rhodesia. In addition, Britain’s government feared that angering France might lead it to boycott British goods.

Wall argues that the Algerian war is the key to understanding how America, Britain, and the other members of NATO received de Gaulle’s far-reaching initiatives both before and after 1962. Wall believes that de Gaulle’s pre-1958 views on Algeria tended toward *Algérie française* rather than true independence. In fact, the sort of relationship de Gaulle had in mind could accurately be characterized as “neo-colonial.” It would not be an equal partnership; France would remain dominant.

Charles G. Cogan’s “France, the United States and the Invisible Algerian Outcome” shows American officials’ split on policy toward France. Although the African Bureau of the State Department encouraged high-level U.S. contacts with the FLN, the European Bureau cautioned against offending the French. Other unnamed U.S. officials recommended to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that he take a strong stand against France, which would then cooperate, they believed, to avoid becoming isolated.

The Algerian problem riveted U.S. attention because it came in the midst of a long period of decolonization and the rise of an Afro-Asian neutralist bloc, which America hoped to prevent from siding with the Soviet Union. The Suez Crisis lent urgency to these concerns and thus raised the stakes over the Algerian crisis. Worry that the Arab world might turn against the United States persuaded American officials to talk with the FLN. The United States also fretted that the Algerian war siphoned French military resources away from NATO.

By late 1959, both French and U.S. policy toward Algeria faced internal contradictions. De Gaulle spoke in favor of Algerian self-determination,[3] but he refused to talk to the FLN, the main rebel group. Eisenhower, at least rhetorically, wanted to support the rights of colonial peoples, yet he did not want to push France too hard on the issue. De Gaulle considered Algeria an “internal” problem yet wanted international help. This delicate game played itself out at the United Nations. There, Third World nations presented resolutions supporting the FLN and condemned France. The United States, however, tried to side with the Algerians (and, by extension, the Arab and Muslim world) and yet not come out against the French.

Eisenhower’s successor, John F. Kennedy, encountered fewer difficult problems because de Gaulle had jettisoned his more extreme positions and opened the door, albeit slowly, to eventual talks between the FLN and France. Although Cogan asserts that the new U.S. administration “deferred” to de Gaulle, he also contends that it sought to establish relations with the FLN at even higher levels, angering the French government. Ultimately, both the French government and the FLN criticized U.S. policy. France disliked America’s increasingly close contacts with the FLN, which itself balked at the support the United States provided de Gaulle.

Cogan concludes that the period following the March 1962 Evian Accords, which ended the war, was one of inevitable disappointment. The agreement gave Europeans in Algeria three years to decide whether to adopt French or Algerian citizenship. The Europeans, however, left Algeria in numbers far surpassing what either France or the FLN anticipated. Those who remained faced discrimination. Cogan blames the failure of the accords on an “Islamic tradition that is foreign to the functioning of minorities in a democratic society” (p. 155).

The final two essays focus on Britain. Christopher Goldsmith’s “The British Embassy in Paris and the Algerian War: An Uncomfortable Partner?” details the role British officials serving in Paris played in shaping Anglo-French relations. He cites three factors that pushed successive Conservative governments to support France’s position in North Africa: fear that the Algerian war would require France to withdraw troops from NATO; fear that rebellion

would spread to a region central to British foreign policy; and fear that the Soviet Union might extend its influence to the Middle East.

Britain believed that attempts to quash growing Arab nationalism would fail and that the best solution would be for France to grant its colonies "home rule." London realized, however, that French opinion would prevent France's government from adopting such a policy. Britain's Paris embassy played a key role in moderating British policy toward France and pushing for a public show of support. Yet the British declined to publicly support an *Algérie française* so as to avoid alienating America and soiling Britain's reputation in the Arab world. Gladwyn Jebb, Britain's ambassador to France, therefore, became Britain's most visible supporter of France.

The final contribution is Martin Thomas' "The British Government and the End of French Algeria, 1958-62." It discusses both British and French colonial policy. Although British hands were not entirely clean on the subject, British politicians comforted themselves with the belief that they had never faced a situation as nightmarish as that in Algeria. In short, London knew when to say when. The Foreign Office rejected out of hand the French contention that Algeria represented a front-line of the Cold War. British officials viewed the Algerian war as an old-fashioned colonial conflict that while winnable militarily, would have to be settled at the negotiating table, not the battlefield. Moreover, London worried that the French army was growing increasingly independent of civilian control.

In short, part two demonstrates that the FLN bested France in the court of international opinion, a victory that trumped the French military triumph. FLN spokesmen expertly engineered a wave of criticism in the United Nations and among French allies that France could not withstand

The book includes a chronology of the war, as well as helpful maps and abstracts. Curiously, it contains no master list of acronyms though it is littered with them. Small quibbles aside, the book is written clearly--though it is a bit dry at times--and is organized logically. Overall, it provides sufficient sustenance for the specialized scholar yet is easily digestible by graduate students.

The editors enjoin historians to study the victors in this conflict, the FLN. Unfortunately, the documentary trail is meager because the FLN did not hold cabinet meetings, write reports, or tape their phone conversations. Moreover, the grave has claimed many Algerian witnesses. Despite these obstacles, the editors encourage scholars to take up this challenge. To truly understand the meaning of the Algerian war requires viewing it from all sides. After all, it is equally important to ponder why the FLN won, as it is to ask why France lost.[4]

Finally, policy makers should read this timely book for its discussion of Arab nationalism, the battle for hearts and minds, the role of the United Nations, counter-terrorism, and human rights' abuses. It drives home the axiom that triumph on the battlefield does not guarantee political victory, a lesson that recent events show must sometimes be learned the hard way.

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- Martin Thomas, “The British Government and the End of French Algeria, 1958-62.”

NOTES

[1] Published to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the war’s end, the book’s contributions first saw print as a special issue of *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, “France and the Algerian War (1954-62): Strategy, Operations, and Diplomacy” 25/2 (June 2002).

[2] Maurice Vaisse speaks of a “Copernican revolution” in French diplomacy. See *La France et l’OTAN*, eds. Maurice Vaisse, Pierre Mélandri and Frédéric Bozo (Brussels: Complexe, 1996), 219-45.

[3] De Gaulle did so in a September 16, 1959 speech.

[4] See Matthew Connelly’s magisterial *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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