

with his commanding general Salan and the hawkish Soustelle, he addressed a crowd very much like the one that set the coup in motion weeks before. Introduced amid oceanic cries “long live Algérie Française,” he replied, famously, “*Je vous ai compris*”—“I have understood you.” He would later write that those words, “seemingly spontaneous but in reality carefully calculated” would fire the crowd without committing him to any further action. In the same speech, he spoke of “ten million French citizens of Algeria” who would decide their own destiny. Already he was using a formulation too liberal in its implications for any French politician in power to have uttered before. Then came a nearly heretical reference to the courage of the FLN guerillas. Their struggle, he said, “I personally recognize is courageous . . . however cruel and fratricidal.” Before the cheering stopped, some in the crowd must have wondered what exactly they were cheering for.

During his first year, de Gaulle set his generals to winning the war. France had by then completed the Morice Line, a complex of electrified fence and minefields that cut off the rebels from their sanctuaries in Tunisia and Morocco. Gen. Maurice Challe, the new commander of the French forces, developed tactics to keep the guerrillas on the run, and France had learned to induce more Algerians to fight alongside its own forces, the so-called harkis. By every statistical measure—insurgents killed, weapons captured, harkis recruited—the war was being won. All that was remained was for the guerrillas to seek surrender terms.

The army was not only winning, it was highly conscious that its honor was at stake. Soustelle explained it best, in a book published after he had broken with de Gaulle: the French army had made an oath to the Algerians and was bound by it. Every Algerian notable had asked the commanding officer of every village post

The existential “axis of evil” threat from North Korea has turned out to be no threat at all.

After evaluation of all the intelligence collection data obtained over the past five years, Department of Energy analysts have concluded that North Korea has never succeeded in making a nuclear device in spite of its frequent claims. The underground nuclear test staged last October was, in particular, a major failure in that Pyongyang could not get the weapon to detonate even under the ideal conditions of a test. The levels of radioactivity detected and other data show that most of the blast came from the conventional explosive material that normally serves as a trigger. The final test demonstrated that Pyongyang has not made a working nuclear bomb, and unless it bought them or stole them, probably does not have the warheads that intelligence analysts previously concluded were in the North Korean stockpile. The intelligence on Pyongyang’s failure was available to President Bush before the six-party agreement in February that ended North Korea’s nuclear program in return for massive economic aid. Over the heated objections of the National Security Council’s Elliott Abrams and other neoconservatives like John Bolton, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice argued successfully that the timing was right to reach a deal and put an end to North Korea’s attempts to obtain a functioning nuclear device.



California Congressman Henry Waxman’s Oversight and Government Reform and Oversight Committee has been investigating allegations that the Bush administration might be concealing something about the Niger document forgeries,

that it maliciously outed CIA operative Valerie Plame, and that it has looked the other way over massive fraudulent contracting in Iraq. These investigations are admirable and very much in the public interest. He has been less interested in pursuing another matter, however. FBI whistleblower Sibel Edmonds and her numerous supporters both inside and outside of government have been urging Waxman to hold open hearings on her claims regarding malfeasance and corruption among high-level government officials. Edmonds is subject to a State Secrets Privilege gag order initiated at the request of the Pentagon and State Department, but she has recently elaborated on her allegations, stating that investigations already carried out by the FBI would demonstrate that three former senior officials were involved in illegal weapons sales and other activities that would justify charges of espionage or possibly even treason against them. The three men are leading Pentagon neoconservatives Douglas Feith and Richard Perle as well as former State Department number three Marc Grossman. Edmonds is no crackpot and is considered to be a credible witness, most of whose charges were substantiated both by former FBI officials in 2002 and by the Department of Justice itself in 2005. Waxman appears to be uninterested in pursuing the matter, however, possibly because Israeli officials and the country’s defense industry are believed to have been involved in the weapons diversion activity. Congressman Waxman is regarded as close to Israel’s principal lobby, AIPAC, and even promised Jewish voters back in November 2006 that there would be no Democratic congressional committee chairmen involved with Middle Eastern policy who were not completely supportive of Israel.

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“Are you leaving or staying?” If the notables refused to help the rebels, would the army protect them from reprisals? The army had always answered, “France remains and will remain,” Soustelle wrote. He concluded, “So don’t let anyone say that in committing themselves the officers committed only themselves. It was the whole army that made that oath, an oath that no one had the right or power to untie.” This powerfully emotive argument was impossible for many French officers to ignore and explains how perilous de Gaulle’s process of disentanglement would prove to be.

He began the task the following year. His cabinet was roughly evenly divided. His prime minister, longtime Gaullist Michel Debré, was an *Algérie Française* hawk. Even his closest ministers could only guess at de Gaulle’s own thinking. In September 1959, he spoke of Algerian “self-determination”—a process whereby the Algerian people would choose, through universal suffrage ballot, between independence, which he depicted as “cruel and impoverished,” a formal linking to France, or some less binding form of association. The FLN recognized that with these words, de Gaulle had acknowledged the legitimacy of their aim.

From that point forward, de Gaulle’s main adversary was the French Right. General Massu, the hero of the Battle of Algiers, denounced de Gaulle as a “man of the Left” in January 1960, and in the next two years de Gaulle faced down two coup attempts instigated by *piéd noirs* allied with high-ranking dissident officers. He could not have squelched both without taking to the airwaves, appealing in a visceral and heartfelt language to the French people on television and to the army’s enlisted men, who heard him on transistor radios. Their loyalty, he intoned, was to France, not to their commanders. Both coups were

close-run things; both could have easily succeeded, giving France a Franco-style military dictatorship and slow bleed in Algeria that might have endured for a decade or more.

De Gaulle fashioned a referendum to legitimize the path of negotiations he had embarked upon, and by 1961, the French people overwhelmingly backed “the bill concerning self-determination.” He remained utterly, coldly realist: he did not want the Algerians to become part of France any more than the FLN wanted to. (In 1959, he privately remarked that under the full integration with France envisioned by some partisans of *Algérie Française*, his native village of Colombey-Les-Deux-Eglises would be turned into Colombey-Les-Deux-Mosquées.)

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Rhetorically zigging and zagging, conscious always that he needed to maintain a certain baseline of military support to survive in power, de Gaulle moved toward negotiations with the FLN. After the collapse of the second coup attempt in 1961, the army and settler diehards of French Algeria formed their own terrorist organization, the *Organisation Armée Secrète*, and set out to assassinate de Gaulle while fomenting as much chaos as possible within Algeria to render the colony ungovernable. To what end? The best they could imagine was that some sort of apartheid solution could be created in Algeria. Some styled themselves a sort of *piéd-noir* Hagganah. The broader strategy was never clear. But such was the rage against de Gaulle, and the number of officers who felt betrayed by him, that the OAS could carry out actions in both France and Algeria for over a year. They

barely missed de Gaulle several times, and their terrorist “successes” in Algeria so poisoned the atmosphere that no settlers could remain there after independence. They brought terror to France as well. Jean Paul Sartre survived when a bomb meant for his apartment was placed on the wrong floor. André Malraux, the novelist who was de Gaulle’s culture minister, was a target as well, but a *plastique* intended for him maimed a four-year-old girl instead. By the end, OAS activities only increased the majority of Frenchmen who just wanted to be done with Algeria.

This Algeria fatigue was a sentiment de Gaulle nurtured, coaxing it along with his rhetoric. Asked at a press conference in 1961 whether the withdrawal of France from Algeria would open the colony to

exploitation by the Soviet Union and the United States, he replied, with lofty formality, “I hope they both enjoy themselves there.” Or again, at a 1961 press conference, “Algeria costs us, it’s the least one can say, dearer than she brings in. . . . In sum, decolonization is in our interest, and consequently, our policy.”

At the final cabinet meeting, signing off on a negotiated settlement that essentially met all of the FLN demands (including the ceding of the disputed oil and gas rich Sahara), André Malraux declared that the end of the war marked a sort of liberation of France. Debré, overcome with emotion and still a fierce partisan of *Algérie Française* concurred, “It’s a victory over ourselves.” De Gaulle concluded, “It was vital to free France from a situation that had brought her so much misfortune.” No one in authority had any illusions that the agreements would be airtight in their application or

that the new Algeria would be any better than a revolutionary totalitarian regime.

Freed of its colony, France quickly began to modernize its own economy (which grew at an amazing 6.8 percent in 1962 after the armistice). Algeria remained full of French teachers, doctors, and technicians. The French constructed a flattering narrative for themselves: they had “given” Algeria its independence because they wanted to, thus providing for the world a model for decolonization and modernization.

To the surprise of few, a darkness descended on Algeria. The first victims were the harkis, those who had served in the French army. Perhaps as many 100,000 were slaughtered, often with great sadism, being made to swallow their French medals before execution. Then the revolution turned on itself: Ben Bella, the country’s first president, spent most of the 1960s in an Algerian prison, as he had spent much of the 1950s in a French one. But France was done with it.

So how could the Algerian war not speak to us? Its example has long resonated in Israel, and many even hoped that Sharon—a successful military man of the Right—could do what no liberal Israeli leader could accomplish and withdraw Israel from the West Bank.

But now its lessons are dear to America as well as we search the horizon for a leader who can explain to the country—especially to the military and to the Republican Party—that its destiny doesn’t lie in the long-term occupation of Arab lands. The rhetoric that justifies the Iraq War as part of colossal battle against “Islamofascism” could be lifted almost directly from the French colonial intellectual slogans of the 1950s—and is no less self-deluding. To leave Vietnam, America needed a man of the Right, Richard Nixon. Today, when we need our own de Gaulle to achieve a “victory over ourselves,” we don’t even have a Nixon. ■

Reality Cinema

Soldiers armed with cameras make gritty, if conflicted, auteurs.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

The popular D.C. rock club, the Black Cat, is a place young Washingtonians go to forget about politics. Among indie-rock aficionados, it is known for introducing alternative bands to the federal city before they get their big break or, more likely, break up. But lately, instead of dancing to punk music, hipsters in tight black jeans and horn-rimmed glasses are sitting down with their pints of Guinness to take in a movie.

The documentary being screened, “The War Tapes,” is composed of footage captured by three New Hampshire National Guardsmen while they were stationed in Iraq in 2004. The opening scene takes place in Fallujah as troops clear out buildings after the bombardment of the insurgent-controlled city. The audience isn’t quite sure how the camera is attached to the soldiers’ gear, but the perspective is eerily like that of a video game: a gun juts out from the bottom of the screen. The squad enters a building. Ambush! The gunfire is overwhelming, and the camera jerks desperately to the right, searching for the source of the attack. This audience has probably spent hundreds of hours watching action films, but no Hollywood tricks can capture the kinetic energy of having the cameraman battle for his life.

This frantic scene dissolves into the opening credits, and we are introduced to our three subjects—Sgt. Steve Pink, Sgt. Zack Bazzi, and Spec. Mike Moriarty, who were offered cameras to document

their experience. Director Deborah Scranton assembled the documentary out of the tapes she received from the soldiers interspersed with footage of family members at home.

The soldiers’ politics are only glancingly referred to in the film. Pink laughingly pointed out that his decision to join the Guard was less than well thought out: “I saw this poster ... and I needed help with tuition and I made a rash decision.” Bazzi reads *The Nation* even while on base and constantly refers to his love of being a soldier. Moriarty drove himself to Ground Zero in 2001 to film the debris and demanded of his military recruiter, “You slot me into a unit only if it will go into Iraq.” All three were stationed in the Sunni Triangle at Camp Anaconda, which soldiers commonly call “Mortaritaville.” They spend their time guarding convoys of contractor trucks and dreading IEDs.

Sergeant Pink is humanized through his expressive writing. Pictures of carnage are narrated with excerpts from his diary, in which he compares flesh hanging off bones to cheese sliding off pizza. While some audience members hissed when “Halliburton” was mentioned, the soldiers’ words were treated with silent respect, no matter how much they offended our civilian sensibilities. Recalling the broken bodies of insurgents being eaten by dogs, Pink said he didn’t want to stop them: “I’m glad these guys are dead. Let [the dogs] fill their bellies.”