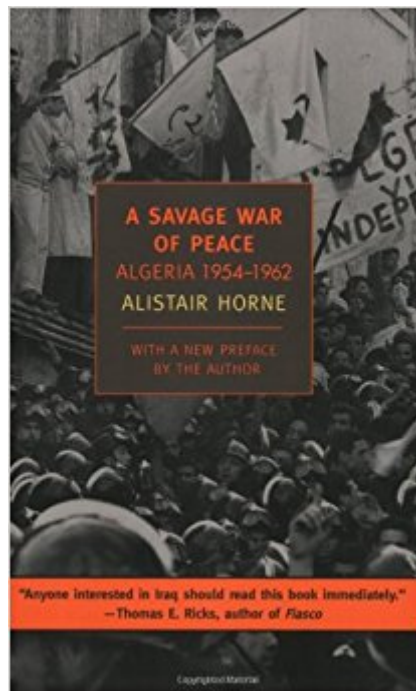




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A Savage War Of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962 (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

The Algerian War lasted from 1954 to 1962. It brought down six French governments, led to the collapse of the Fourth Republic, returned de Gaulle to power, and came close to provoking a civil war on French soil. More than a million Muslim Algerians died in the conflict and as many European settlers were driven into exile. Above all, the war was marked by an unholy marriage of revolutionary terror and repressive torture. Nearly a half century has passed since this savagely fought war ended in Algeria's independence, and yet—as Alistair Horne argues in his new preface to his now-classic work of history—its repercussions continue to be felt not only in Algeria and France, but throughout the world. Indeed from today's vantage point the Algerian War looks like a full-dress rehearsal for the sort of amorphous struggle that convulsed the Balkans in the 1990s and that now ravages the Middle East, from Beirut to Baghdad—struggles in which questions of religion, nationalism, imperialism, and terrorism take on a new and increasingly lethal intensity. *A Savage War of Peace* is the definitive history of the Algerian War, a book that brings that terrible and complicated struggle to life with intelligence, assurance, and unflagging momentum. It is essential reading for our own violent times as well as a lasting monument to the historian's art.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“He brings a long historical perspective and six decades of experience to bear on the affairs of the day.”
—Salon.com“First the Pentagon plugged the movie, now President

Bush is reading the book...A Savage War of Peace, British historian Alistair Horne's celebrated 1977 account of the [Algerian] war...Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who recommended A Savage War of Peace to Bush, said recently on PBS' Charlie Rose Show that he did not believe 'that the French experience could be applied precisely to the United States. But I thought there were enough similarities and enough complexities and enough tragedy for the president to gain a perspective on his own period.'" [Associated Press](#)"Anyone interested in Iraq should read this book immediately." [Thomas Ricks, The Washington Post](#)"[Horne's] tome is so well written it reads more like a novel but is, in fact, a work of superior historical narrative" [\[There are few historical works that provide so comprehensive a treatment of revolutionary and counterinsurgency warfare, domestic and international politics, and economics and ideology.\]](#) [Marine Corps Gazette](#)"When Horne's book first appeared, it seemed to be an account of one major, but now largely closed, chapter in the history of postwar decolonization. Subsequent developments in Algeria and elsewhere have made the past prologue. [It] has become a de facto textbook for American Military officers facing time in Iraq..." [Scott McLemee, Inside Higher Ed](#)"This thirty-year-old history, written before the Iranian revolution, the Algerian civil war, and Al Qaeda, captures a contingent moment in the conflict between the West and the Arab world, when present-day dogmas were hardly imagined by most. It provides a much needed reminder that modern history is not made by the 'clash of civilizations' but by people." [Harper's Magazine](#)"The present conflict in the Middle East is frighteningly similar, making this book a good volume to have on library shelves. Horne provides a new preface." [Library Journal \(Classic Returns\)](#)"[T]he read of choice for many U.S. military officers serving in Iraq...[this] universally acclaimed history...should have been mandatory reading for the civilian and military leaders who opted to invade Iraq" [The Washington Times](#)"There is enough to make this the most complete history of the Algerian war yet written, one which will be indispensable for future historians. It is compelling reading, filled with intimate detail about characters and situations that have served as inspiration for a dozen novels from The Day of the Jackal on." [The Los Angeles Times](#) "highly readable, toughly edited history that blends the pace and sweep of a work of fiction with a relentless pursuit of every main actor still alive and willing to talk about the war." [The Washington Post Book World](#)"Alistair Horne is one of the best writers of history in the English speaking world. A Savage War of Peace shows him at the peak of his powers." [The Financial Times](#)"An awesome and superlative piece of historical

narrative. Mr. Horne has a terrible and tremendous tale to tell, one full of omen for posterity. The Times (London) "An accomplished historian of earlier French wars has written an admirably impartial, lucid and readable book as full and objective a history of the Algerian war as we are likely to see for some years. The New York Times Book Review "A book of compelling power magnificent. It has the poetic sense of place without which no great work of history can be written. The Spectator "brilliantly and compassionately told by an historian whose mastery of this subject is complete. The Washington Post

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A book from a good historian writer. Sometimes has the British tendency to pick on the French while forgetting that the Brits were just as bad, or sometimes worse, colonists. Nevertheless the author relies on chronological facts in an excellent way for this last struggle of France's attempt to preserve a colony. I was there in Great Kabylia, conscripted two and half years in the marines, during the later part of the war. We rebelled in vain against De Gaulle and his mignons imposing stupid edicts towards the native population.

This easily for me could have been a four or even higher rating. The reason for downgrading is that so very often in the book he will be quoting verbatim from a French source in French, WITH NO TRANSLATION. I do not know nor have taken French. So you are left to guess as to what was said. Also the author to me seems to favor both the insurgents and any Socialist whom he mentions. I do think he tries to be fair to both sides as far as he can, with his prejudices.

Not an easy read with a lot of foreign names and places that were challenging to remember but, nonetheless, is very informative. If you are like me in that you have very little knowledge about the French-Algerian War you will come out of the book affected by the extraordinary events that took place. I also highly recommend checking out the movie Battle of Algiers. The movie was made 3-4 years after the war ended and includes a disk in which some of the actual participants in the war are interviewed. The movie really helps make the book even more moving. The events in the book are especially relevant to those that have since and continue to take place in that part of the world - the elusive matter of how to get a timely and fair treatment of a situation before violent actions cascade out of control.

Alistair Horne provides the reader with an extensive and very detailed narrative of the Algerian War. His familiarity with the subject matter is plainly evident. On the down side, the book can be slow and confusing in certain parts. It is long at 566 pages and is divided into three parts. The author does a superb job in describing all aspects of this conflict. The first three chapters are focused on the period of 1830 to 1854. This part provides a good understanding of the problems surrounding French colonialism, the European settlers in Algeria (the *pied noirs*), and why the F.L.N. began the war. Part two focuses on the actual war years of 1954 - 1958. The detail provided in this part, especially the chapter on the Battle of Algiers, is very informative. Part three covers the period from 1958 to 1962. This includes not only the peace negotiations, but also such events as Barricades Week and the General's putsch. The author not only does an excellent job of describing these events, he also explains why so many high ranking French officers turned against De Gaulle. The author also describes the internal conflicts within the F.L.N. as well as the rise of the O.A.S., the French rebel group that fought against Algerian independence. Of particular interest is the fact that the author interviewed several people who participated, and also survived, the war. On the down side, the book is slightly difficult to read. Although some parts flow well, other parts seem to drag. One confusing aspect is the author's tendency to use French phrases without providing a translation. In some instances, he will use a French term when an English term would have served equally well. For example, on page 179, he describes the "*presence francaise*" in Indochina as opposed to simply using "French presence." In other cases, the reader will simply not understand what is being said unless they speak French. For example, the author uses the term "*Ce-con-la*" in a sentence on page 181. The term is not further explained. Finally, he will add references that do not contribute to the story. Mr. Horne quotes Jean Paul Sartre on page 196 even though it really adds nothing. He also makes references to other people's memoirs and the movie "Battle of Algiers." Such references are indeed useful, albeit at the end of the book, not scattered through the text. Bottom line: this is an extremely detailed account of the Algerian War. Mr. Horne does a good job of bringing many of the main characters, such as Ben Bella, Ali La Pointe, Generals Massu and Salan to life. The difficulty of reading this book can be found in its writing style and sheer length. That said, any reader who can overcome these minor difficulties, will come away with an excellent understanding of this forgotten conflict.

A solidly presented look at the conflict between Algeria and France leading to the former nation's independence in 1962, in turns fascinating and frustrating -- not because of the author's efforts,

although I will list a few quibbles below, but rather because of the lessons unlearned. In the preface to the 2006 edition, Alistair Horne relates that, at his staff's request a copy of *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* was sent to U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2005. This would be around the time the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal was dominating headlines around the world, and Horne thought -- at least -- reviewing the French experience with torture in Algeria may prove useful. Unsurprisingly, given a propensity for arrogance that is the downfall of an otherwise brilliant mind, Rumsfeld's response was courteous but uninterested. That the Secretary of Defense's staff wanted him to read the book is not surprising. Much as Bernard Fall's *Hell In A Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* became a hot commodity in the hands of U.S. policy and military types in Washington and Vietnam during the Battle of Khe Sanh in 1968, so too was Horne's tome mined for information that would prevent a disaster during our failure to win the peace in Iraq following the 2003 invasion. A direct comparison between Algeria and Iraq simply can't be made, however there are several striking similarities between the conflicts which Horne summarizes in the 2006 preface and careful readers will find for themselves throughout the text. History doesn't often repeat itself verbatim, but some themes are universal enough that careful study by later leaders should lead to the avoidance of pitfalls. This conflict was indeed savage, with all the hallmarks of terrorism and brutality we have become all too familiar with in this day and age: Bombings, many aimed solely at civilians in both Algeria and France; assassinations; extensive collateral deaths of civilians during military operations; and the organized torture of suspects and prisoners. I was just six months old when the French flag was lowered for the final time in Algiers, so I found it interesting to learn more about this time period. Much was going on, from Dien Bien Phu and the Suez Crisis in 1956 (both had ramifications for the French military in Algeria) to the building of the Berlin Wall and its concomitant Cold War fears. Horne presents information in a non-linear way, shifting focus between the French and rebel FLN, but he carefully retraces his steps to cover bypassed events of importance. The first of three parts, which provides the exposition and context for the conflict as well as initial actions, is a bit of a slog. Once the stage is set however, the second (1954-1958) and third (1958-1962) parts of the book move crisply. Two other quibbles I had are the frequent use of French phrases, mostly in quotes, and a muddled conclusion. It is perfectly understandable that a book on a conflict where both sides used the same language would include statements in that language, and there is certainly something to be said for using verbatim quotes in the original tongue. However, in those instances I would suggest including an English translation; I don't speak French and it was annoying to frequently shift from the text to Google Translate to ensure something important was not missed. The book has been revised twice (1996 and 2006) since being originally published in

1977, and the final chapter which summarizes the conflict and addresses post-war Algeria certainly bears the most obvious scars of these updates, with abrupt shifts in tone and content. It is as if rather than a complete re-write the decision was made to simply tack on new information. As a side note, it was fascinating to read the three prefaces as each provides a snapshot of editorial style for the period. The original from 1977 is quite heavy and scholarly, with numerous sub-clauses while the later revisions are successively more direct and streamlined. I'm not sure if this is a function of the author or editor, but it was interesting to me.

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