

# Other writings

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## Extracts from *Getting By*

### ***Introduction***

*I have been writing “Getting By” over the past twenty years, on and off. Structurally, “Getting By” consists of 26 chapters, one for each letter of the alphabet. And in turn, each chapter contains many entries, most of them short, some very short, few longer than a page. This format has made it possible for me to write bits at airports, in hotels, on planes, trains, even on occasion in taxis. I have now reached my target length – some 130,000 words – but there are still some entries that I need to complete, and a small number more that I wish to write from scratch.*

*As to content, well, as I explain in the entry ‘Getting By’ below, the subjects range from forecasting to choosing the right length of shoelace; from bookshelves to religion; from how to read a map to how to pack a suitcase; from how to avoid premature death to how to choose a good corkscrew; from how to choose a good woman to how to take a good photograph; and from how to avoid getting dysentery to how to boil an egg just right. And, just in case all that seems just a little bit rational, some of the entries are there just because I damn well felt like it.*

*All that said, and although I would not want to overstate it, there is a philosophy to the book too: that is to be found principally in the entries Avoiding problems; Dealing with problems; Enjoying life between problems; Getting By; Laughing at problems; and Preface.*

*I have pasted these, together with a small illustrative selection of other entries, below – without the references/end-notes. Should you have any comments, feel free to send them to me. My good friend Gordon Murray has already commented, at length and in depth, on a complete, though somewhat earlier version, for which I shall always be grateful.*

### **Accounts, adding up**

There are two ways of adding up a column of figures: my father's way, and my mother's way. My father's way involves setting about getting the calculation right to the last cent, centime, or penny. He used to do it by paper and pencil; in later years on a calculator. The trouble that he had with his method was that he concentrated so hard on the detail that he did not always see if his answer was implausibly large, or ridiculously small. Typically, he got an answer that was either exactly right, or miles off. But he did not know. His answers were precise, but not necessarily accurate. So he had to undertake the summation twice, to check that it was right: and then he got a different answer. Maybe a little different, maybe a lot different. Therefore, he had to do it a third time, and hope that two of the answers were identical.

My mother's way, which she used to employ with devastating effect in the days of the absurd imperial system of pounds, shillings and pence, and which works just as well, or perhaps even better, with decimal money, involves the making of approximations, which balance out, more or less. If the number of cents, centimes, pennies in any row is more than 50, count it as a dollar, a franc, a pound, or whatever. If it is less than 50, disregard it. Thus \$2.51 is counted as \$3; \$2.49 as \$2.

Mother would employ her method extremely quickly. She would zip down a column of figures at the speed almost of light, and then announce the total with a degree of confidence that was both impressive and more or less warranted. My scientist father, meanwhile, would be solemnly entering his numbers one by one, ultimately to produce an answer in which he had no confidence whatever. Unless it was close to my mother's.

Thus my mother's method truly exemplified the proposition widely attributed to English economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) that:

“It is better to be roughly right than precisely wrong.”

The results obtained by my mother’s method cannot in all honesty be said to have exhibited **Precision**. And neither **Accuracy**, except, occasionally, by chance. However, provided that there are at least ten or so figures to be added up, the answer is almost invariably near enough. So try it for yourself. Magic.

One small problem, however. When I was a child, I used to worry about what to do if the number of cents, centimes, pence, was exactly 50. I still do.■

## Avoiding Problems

The second element in *Getting By* consists of actively seeking to avoid problems (the others being **Enjoying life between problems**, **Dealing with problems**, and **Laughing at problems**). The knack has two components, two stages. The first involves recognising that, though life is indeed “one damn thing after another”, many of the problems that are heading our way can in practice, or with practice, be foreseen. The second component involves taking steps to avoid, or deflect, these problems as they hurtle towards us.

The first step, thus, is to forecast. We all make forecasts, because the future is where we are headed. As American inventor C.F. Kettering put it:

"My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there."

We have to forecast the weather in order to decide what clothes to wear. We have to forecast the traffic in order to decide which route to take to work. We have to forecast how long a journey will take in order to judge whether there will be time for a coffee. We have to forecast whether real estate prices are going to go up or down; what is likely to happen to mortgage rates or the stock market; even, sometimes, how long we are likely to live.

We may seek to avoid making a forecast, but we often end up making one nevertheless. By opting not to take a raincoat, we are forecasting, albeit implicitly, that it will not rain.

**Forecasting** does not always come easily, of course. As British diplomat Nicholas Henderson observed:

“The truth is that it is extremely difficult to predict unpredictability.”

However, it is surprising how easily one can get into the habit, simply by asking oneself questions such as ‘I wonder what the consequence of that will be?’ or ‘That was unusual: I wonder what will happen next?’ No observer of the British can ever fail to be amazed by the way that island race are taken by surprise each year by the onset of cold (which is to say colder) weather. Without fail, it takes them by surprise. Then they simply complain about it. Americans and Canadians, by contrast, are not surprised by their weather; and they do something about it. They design and wear proper clothing, they install central heating, and they insulate their houses.

Which is of course the point: the second step in avoiding problems is anticipation – taking action, in advance of the problem’s manifesting itself. Forecasting and anticipation are not only both vital: they need to be closely linked. Consider, in programming steps, what you do when someone hurls a ball at you. First, you forecast, to the best of your ability, whether the ball will hit you. If the answer is ‘yes’, you then anticipate the event: you make to catch the ball, or to get out of its way. Generally, acting on instinct rather than conscious thought, you get it right. And impressively quickly!

The ball example, though instructive, does not involve a particularly serious event, but the principle can be extremely important. As French sociologist Raymond Aron put it:

“Foreknowledge of the future makes it possible to manipulate both enemies and supporters.”

Not that Forecasting and anticipation will always succeed: there are margins of error around any forecast. In many cases it is possible to have at least some idea of their size (see **Uncertainty**), but in other cases they may be unknowable (see **Risk**), particularly when the circumstances are novel, or the problem is new. As US novelist Leo Rosten put it:

“Some things are so unexpected that no one is prepared for them.”

Nevertheless, forecasting so as to avoid problems is generally worth the effort, as French mathematician and philosopher, Henri Poincaré, one of the foundation builders of **Chaos** theory, concluded pragmatically:

"It is far better to foresee even without certainty than not to foresee at all."

If, however, best efforts notwithstanding, problems nevertheless do still arrive – and they will – then there is no alternative but to proceed to the next step, **Dealing with problems.**■

## Back

You can't go.■

## Civics

It was 1958, I was fourteen, and it was my first week of three months as a guest 7<sup>th</sup> grader at Wayzata Junior High School in Minnesota. The class was Civics, taught to us by a Miss Shafer – button-nosed, blonde-pony-tailed, tight-sweatered Miss Shafer, with whom all the boys in the class were in love.

The subject was “The Press” and Miss Shafer dutifully read out to us from the civics text book: America was the only country in the world that had a free press and a free judiciary.

I put up my hand. “Please, Miss Shafer,” I ventured, “I am not absolutely sure about England and Australia, but I am sure that we have a free press and a free judiciary in my country, New Zealand.”

Miss Shafer paused, not quite certain how to deal with this new and evidently misguided boy from a far-off country. A nice lady, she merely murmured “No, John, I am afraid that you are not right there. Only America has a truly free press and judiciary.”

I put my hand up again. “Honestly, Miss Shafer, “I know that we have a free press in New Zealand. We have lots and lots of newspapers. And I am sure that we have a free judiciary, because my Father knows a judge, and I have met him too, and, well, everyone knows that the judges in New Zealand are free.”

Miss Shafer paused, and then spoke, rather more firmly this time. She did not want to hurt, but I had to be told the truth. “You make *think* they are free,” she said. “But they are not.”

I nearly put my hand up again, but I thought better of it – perhaps the first wisdom I had ever exhibited.■

## Dealing with Problems

The third element of ‘Getting By’ involves dealing appropriately with the actual, unavoids, problems that have got through despite one’s best efforts (the others being **Enjoying life between problems**; **Avoiding problems**; and **Laughing at problems**). To do this it is essential to be in the right frame of mind. Fundamentally, it requires the recognition that life is not fair – just as neither is it intrinsically unfair. Life simply is what it is. Justice plays no part in determining what problems will hit. The shafts that may seem to have been thrown with such accuracy, because they strike with such apparent precision, have nearly always been tossed randomly.

Hence, beware undue backward wishfulness – no “I wish this had not happened.” In its right place, it may provide solace: grieving is the most obvious case. But it is all too easy, in everyday life, to waste scarce time, emotions, or energies wishing that things had not been as they were – let alone wishing that there were justice in the world. My father, ever the rational scientist, drummed this most basic of views into me: and it was one of his most important gifts.

If the root of the problem of problems is intrinsically mental, with unhappiness caused not so much by the problems themselves as by one’s **Perception**, or **Attitude**, then the right approach to dealing with them is usually a mental one. As Bertrand Russell argued in *The Conquest of Happiness*:

“...the proper course with every kind of fear is to think about it rationally and calmly, but with great concentration, until it has become completely familiar. In the end familiarity will blunt its terrors; the whole subject will become boring, and our thoughts will turn away from it...When you find yourself inclined to brood on anything, no matter what, the best plan is to think about it even more than you naturally would, until at last its morbid fascination is worn off.”

If, however, the root of a problem is not one’s perception of it, but rather its own reality, the right place to start is with the recognition that problems should not be accepted, unless there is absolutely no alternative. Rather they should be dealt with, to the best of our ability. There are many elements to so dealing with them, and my list is doubtless not exhaustive. However, elements that I have found systematically and frequently to be important include:

- Never readily accept “No” for an answer;
- Do not limit your ambition. As a successful US banker acquaintance of mine, Jim Howell, once observed after a lifetime in the industry, “I have never turned down a loan application because it exhibited an excess of imagination.”; and
- When all else fails, reason the problem through.

Sometimes, thinking things through rationally does not have to involve much thought: someone somewhere has probably done the job for you – ‘When all else fails, read the instructions.’ Draw on the experience of others. It is a hallmark of the educated person that he or she recognises the limits of his or her knowledge, and is both able and willing to look to where the answer is likely to be found. Turn to people and, most importantly, to the experience and wisdom that they have distilled in books. French philosopher René Descartes was, I believe, making that point at least implicitly when he wrote, in 1637,

“The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest men of past centuries.”

On other occasions, however, **Reasoning** things through can be demanding. Almost always it requires intellectual honesty, logic, and mental toughness. Being in the necessary frame of mind is thus central to ‘Getting By’. But that is not to advocate, for one moment, any element of **Fatalism**. It is one thing to accept as a general, non-specific, proposition that problems will inevitably arise: it would be quite another to believe that nothing could be done about them. On the contrary: much can be done to overcome problems. Resignation is to be avoided.■

## Deformation professionnelle

This French concept captures a phenomenon that can produce real unhappiness. Defined variously as “Mistaken understanding resulting from the practicing of certain professions” (Petit Larousse – my translation) and “Completely conditioned by one’s job (Collins/Le Petit Robert Dictionnaire – again, my translation) it is best explained by example.

Early one sunny, and already hot, August morning in 2004, after having breakfasted on coffee and croissants on the tree-shaded terrace of a charming hotel, Les Touristiques in Prats de Mollo, Catalonia, I complimented the proprietor, Mademoiselle Marie-Louise Pouliquen, on her hotel and the life that went with it. She was dismissive. “All that I see is shutters that need painting.” I demurred that, while doubtless her shutters did need painting, the extremely pretty postcards of her hotel that were on display at her concierge’s desk surely showed her how lovely her hotel looked. She disagreed. “All that I see in that photograph is shutters that need painting,” she insisted. Then she laughed. “A case of *déformation professionnelle*.”

Or take another – sadder – example. One Friday night in December 1985, at the end of a heavy week in which I had edited the whole of the 38<sup>th</sup> edition of the forthcoming *OECD Economic Outlook*, I found myself picking up my 4-colour pen to edit an article that I was reading. No problem with that, perhaps, except that the article was in a newspaper.

*Déformation professionnelle* is a sad state. I always feel particularly sorry for plastic surgeons and gynaecologists. ■

## Enjoying Life between problems

The first element in “Getting By” is enjoying life between problems. And this is also by far the most important: it is taken as axiomatic that a principal aim in life is to make **Happiness** not only the natural, but indeed the predominant, state of affairs. As Russell says in *The Conquest of Happiness*:

“Very few men, I believe, will deliberately choose unhappiness if they see a way of being happy.”

Accordingly, “Getting By” is studded throughout with propositions, suggestions, and tips that I, or others, have found helpful in fostering happiness.

This principal aim in life in turn interacts with the remaining three elements in ‘Getting By’:

- **Avoiding problems**, so as to decrease the frequency of bouts of unhappiness, and hence to increase the length of the periods of happiness.
- **Dealing with problems**, so as to get them out of the way and pave the return to another period of happiness; and
- **Laughing at problems**, so as to minimise the severity of problems that have not been avoided, and cannot be wholly satisfactorily dealt with.

In the modern injunction, ‘Enjoy.’ ■

## Factoid

We live, it is said, in an age of factoids. But what exactly is a factoid? Like so many words, this one seems to be undergoing an evolution of meaning.

A frequently-heard meaning today is that given by Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (curiously, the word does not appear in my trusty *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*): "A brief and usually trivial news item."

However, the first of the definitions offered by Merriam-Webster's Collegiate is "An invented fact believed to be true because of its appearance in print." This is similar to the definition in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: "An assumption or speculation that is reported and repeated so often that it becomes accepted as a fact." Apparently, the word was coined by the American author and playwright Norman Mailer in his 1973 biography of American actress Marilyn Monroe. What he did, of course, was to take "fact" and add the suffix "oid" – which means resembling, having the form or appearance of – as in anthropoid, crystalloid, humanoid, ovoid, or spheroid. But not haemorrhoid.

Whatever the most widely accepted meaning of the word today, it is the latter sense that works for me. Certainly that is the sense in which I first heard the word used, by my learned American friend Val Koromzay. Like me, Val is an economist; and we need a word for that concept. ■

## Feminism

As someone who was brought up by parents who believed fundamentally in treating the sexes equally, albeit not identically, it was a surprise to me, upon arriving at university, to encounter the issue of feminism – just one example amongst countless of why it is so important that the young should live away from home when they attend college or university.

Perhaps because I did not encounter gender prejudice early, I was not quite sure exactly what feminism really was, a failing which perhaps contributed to my marrying, too young, a woman who always seemed to me to be rather longer on rights than on obligations.

Ultimately, I found a good summary of feminism, as of so many things, in the **Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought** – and also a woman who is a true feminist, and thereby much easier to live with. I console myself with the observation that I have not been entirely alone in my modest bewilderment, sharing it at least with Rebecca West:

"I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute." ■

## Getting By

*Getting By* is concerned with living **Life**. So what, for the purposes of this book, is 'Life'?

"Life," according to the American writer and editor Elbert Hubbard (1859-1915), "is just one damned thing after another."

And so, basically, it is, with many of these 'damned things' implicitly at least being problems. Up to a point, that is valid. From the teens onwards comes the realisation that continual problems are the rule, rather than the exception: that periodic problems are the natural state of affairs. However to mark, let alone to define, life by the milestones of its problems would be far too negative. If the passage of life is to be defined by markers, why not by pleasurable ones instead?

Based on this constructive premise, there are four, or rather three plus one, principal elements to "Getting By":

- Enjoying Life between problems
- Avoiding problems – making the 'damned things' as infrequent as possible; and

- Dealing with problems – despatching expeditiously those “dammed things” that one has not succeeded in avoiding.

That, essentially, is what is to be understood by ‘Getting By’. However, there is also the fourth element. Sometimes, notwithstanding all one’s best efforts, life just does go badly for a stretch. To cope with this, there is one important weapon left, and that is humour – the device that, directed at problems, denies them their true horror, thereby making them bearable. Hence the final element in ‘Getting By’:

- Laughing at problems

In short, *Getting By* is concerned with nothing less than the pursuit of happiness throughout the entirety of one’s life: but this should be an intelligent pursuit, in which we recognise that, while life is not always plain sailing, we can nevertheless do more than might be supposed to avoid the rocks with which the sea is strewn.

Thus, *Getting By* details the best approaches, schemes, devices, dodges, tricks, stratagems, aphorisms and jokes that I have found useful in sixty-odd years odd of ‘Getting By’. Some ideas were given to me; some I gleaned from observing other, evidently successful, practitioners of the art; and some I managed to work out for myself.

The entries cover all four elements of ‘Getting By’, with many on each of: Enjoying Life between Problems; Avoiding Problems; Dealing with Problems; and Laughing at Problems. Thus the entries range from forecasting to choosing the right length of shoelace; from bookshelves to religion; from how to read a map to how to pack a suitcase; from how to avoid premature death to how to choose a good corkscrew; from how to choose a good woman to how to take a good photograph; and from how to avoid getting dysentery to how to boil an egg just right. And, just in case all that seems just a little bit rational, some of the entries are there just because I damn well felt like it.

I have sought, to the greatest extent possible, to reference all the important statements, and cite all the quotations, except where to do so might hurt some living person. In the (relatively few) cases where it has not proved possible to provide a reference, that is indicated. ■

## **In my view**

The corporate scandals of the late 1990s, the passing of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, and Eliot Spitzer’s Global Settlement with several investment banks led, in my view, to many consequential changes. One is that investment banks now have to employ so-called ‘supervisory analysts’ to vet every piece of financial and economic analysis that the banks intend to publish, in order to remove any possibility of any part of any report misleading a reader.

It is hard not to agree, in my view, that people should be held accountable for the accuracy and truthfulness of what they say and write. Indeed, it would, in my view, be a good thing if the principle were to be extended more widely, to include, for example, politicians.

However, it is possible, in my view, to have too much of a good thing, and Sarbanes-Oxley and Spitzer have resulted, in my view, in most research reports looking rather idiotic. Supervisory analysts, like anyone else, look to do their work as quickly and as easily as possible, and one phrase that they have alighted upon is ‘in my view.’ This phrase now gets sprinkled, like pepper from a mill, through analysts’ texts, the frequency increasing to a crescendo wherever the supervisory analyst is a little unsure exactly what the technicalities of the text amount to.

The analysts themselves have got caught up in the mania, in my view, and experience a nagging background feeling of guilt and anxiety whenever they go for more than four or five lines without inserting an ‘in my view.’



One of the delights in writing *Getting By*, almost all of which is, by virtue of its subject, an exposition of personal views, has been being able to pen getting on for 150,000 words without having to submit a single one of them to a supervisory analyst, and without having to pepper in a single ‘in my view.’ Indeed, there is no ‘in my view’ anywhere in *Getting By* other than in this entry, where there are ten, with at least one in each paragraph. In my view.■

## Laughing at problems

The fourth, and final, element in ‘Getting By’ involves laughter (the first three being **Enjoying life between problems**, **Avoiding problems**, and **Dealing with problems**). The reality is that, despite all one’s best efforts at avoiding problems, as well as dealing as effectively as possible with the minority that get through, life can be grim on occasions. That is when one needs to resort to laughter as a weapon. Thus Horace:

“A jest often decides matters of importance more effectually and happily than seriousness.”

And British Rabbi, author, and broadcaster Lionel Blue:

“When I was a young Rabbi, I thought that all problems were solvable. They’re not. But you can tell a joke about them, which helps.”

Humour directed at problems denies them their true horror, and this can become progressively more important. Problems tend to get bigger, and more frequent, as part of the natural process of becoming an adult and, finally, growing old. It was doubtless this pair of considerations that led American editor, essayist, and novelist Ed Howe to observe:

“If you don’t learn to laugh at troubles, you won’t have anything to laugh at when you grow old.”

By being treated as absurd, problems are made more bearable. This is not to say that the sole purpose of humour is to minimise the pain from problems. Humour has a much bigger place in life than that, a place in its own right, that includes, most importantly, helping to make the spaces between problems as enjoyable as possible; and making the circle of *Getting By* complete.

However, the fact is that many problems are not as serious as they may at first appear, and laughing at them, or at oneself, can help to take off the edge. Like most medicines, laughing at problems needs to be taken with care. It must not degenerate into Pollyanna-ism, the achievement of spurious happiness through self-delusion. But, that risk aside, laughter is a weapon that should be used widely and often.■

## Moral Hazard

It sounds like something a father should warn his son about. I first came across moral hazard at university – not in the student bar, but in my economics lectures. And, notwithstanding its unfortunate name, there is within it a concept that is struggling to get out, even if that concept is a bit elusive. Try as I have, I have not been able to find a simple, clear definition. When that happens, it usually means that the concept is not fully clear: and certainly it has developed and changed its meaning, particularly over the past twenty years or so. The entry on ‘Moral Hazard@’ in *The New Palgrave* opens with a quotation from the Scottish political economist Adam Smith (1723-90), writing in 1776:

“The directors of ... companies, however, being the managers rather of other peoples’ money than of their own, it cannot be well expected that they should watch over it with the same anxious vigilance with which the partners in a private copartnery frequently watch over their own ... Negligence and profusion, therefore, must always prevail, more or less, in the management of the affairs of such a company.”

It is not obvious, however, that this is an example of moral hazard. Of course one looks after one's own money more carefully than someone else's. But that does not necessarily mean that money managers are careless.

In modern-day thinking moral hazard arises when the interests of the individual differ from those of the person who is paying, such as for example where an insured person can affect the likelihood of the insured event. Under a national insurance system, for example, the cost to the individual of "consuming" more medical cost may be less than the cost to society. The issue is also sometimes considered to arise in banking, where state insurance of individuals' deposits may make bank managers and depositors take more risks than they would take were they to bear the consequence of risky loans turning sour and the bank going into liquidation. Or, to take one final example, it is sometimes asserted that the governments of some developing countries take undue risks in the management of their economies in the knowledge that, because the consequences of their defaulting would be serious for the world financial system, the large countries will bail them out if things go seriously wrong.

People of a conservative persuasion often find such arguments compelling: liberals generally do not. Technicians generally adopt neither extreme position, preferring to judge each issue on its merits.

I always enjoyed the quip of British economist Andrew Crocket about the condemned man on the scaffold who, on being asked if he had any last words, said:

"This is certainly going to teach me a lesson."■

## Preface

Skip this Preface, is my advice.

Prefaces are nearly always boring, being a sort of literary attic into which authors toss the things that they cannot bring themselves to discard, but for which they have no real place. So it is odd that prefaces are placed at the front of books, for this induces authors to write them at greater length, and to attribute to them more importance, than their content generally warrants. That is why – following the excellent suggestion of my good friend Gordon Murray – this preface is hidden away, neither at the front nor at the back, but under "P", where most readers will probably never discover it, except by chance. And even if you do happen upon this preface, I suggest that you read it when you have finished the book. Which you probably never will, because *Getting By* is designed to be dipped into, not read from cover to cover.

Anyway. *Getting By* is a book about Life – that thing, whatever it is, that we all live, day in, day out, until one day we stop. How we live it, and by what principles, if any, is at least in part up to us. Yet we seldom get around to thinking about how we should live life, because we are too busy living it. And by the time that we do start to think about a philosophy for living life, we are generally a fair way through having lived it, so the exercise is rather pointless.

It would be absurd to pretend that it is possible to present, in one little book – even if one had the mental and moral capacity, which I do not – an all-encompassing philosophy of life: most of us have far too limited an experience. I myself have lived and worked in only a handful of countries: New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Mexico, France, and the United States. And, having lived my life to date only as a white so-called Anglo Saxon boy and man, I cannot in any way claim to know what philosophy would prove workable for a girl or a woman, let alone a black or a Muslim. At root, we are all different: what suits one will likely not suit another. Moreover, as if all that were not enough, the world changes so fast that what works for a given person today may not work for him or her tomorrow. No wonder therefore that devising a philosophy of life is a continuing, empirical process, habitually involving trying new things to find out what works, more or less well, under the circumstances.

Another limitation of *Getting By* is that it is really only about living life from the standpoint of the individual. Ideally, there should be a logical relationship between the philosophy of life for the individual

and that for society as a whole: top-down and bottom-up approaches should mesh. But this book is not fundamentally about society. Rather, it takes society largely as a given, and considers only how the individual can best strive to ‘Get By’ within it. It is however reasonable to require of the personal, bottom-up, approach that, in working for the individual, it does not impinge unacceptably on others in society. I have always sought to bear this requirement in mind: but I am far from sure that I have honoured it.

What I have sought to do therefore is fundamentally limited. *Getting By* does not present a philosophy of life: and most certainly not a philosophy for society. Rather, it is a simple book, devoted to the pragmatic art of ‘Getting By’, as practised by me but, more importantly, by successful practitioners whom I have observed, read, or from whom I have otherwise learned.■

## Writing

Many people who have an urge to communicate their thoughts are nevertheless checked from writing them down by the even stronger sentiment that “I would be no good at it.”

The rise of email has loosened the constraint for some, permitting a less formal style than that which most of us were taught at school as “good” writing. But the fact is that true writing is indeed difficult. It is hard to exaggerate the effort, the time, and above all the pain that is involved. Thus Thomas Mann:

“A writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.”

Even professional writing is demanding, notwithstanding the enormous advantage conferred (it is to be supposed) by knowing what one has to say. I wrote at my easiest and fastest when I was in my thirties, and in charge of economic forecasting at the OECD in Paris. I lived with those forecasts, day in day out, for months at a time. I knew them, and the arguments that underpinned their construction, better than I knew my then wife. Considerably better, as it turned out. Yet the fastest that I could ever write clean, professional text was about a page – 200 words or so – per hour. And even that was painful work.

How dramatically harder therefore it must be for creative writers, who also have to compose their thoughts as they go. Feel the pain in this quotation from James Michener’s novel *The Novel*:

“Benno was struggling with a complete rewrite of his novel, entitled *Green Hell* at my suggestion, and the labor was proving its own special Gehenna, one known by writers whose efforts are becoming so tangled they often feel they are doubling back on themselves while dragging behind them some fearful incubus that will not break loose.”

Or British prime minister Winston Churchill (1874-1965):

“Writing a book is an adventure: it begins as an amusement, then it becomes a mistress, and finally a tyrant.”

No wonder, therefore, that most people do not write, even when they have important things to say. Obstacles, which can include normal life, all too easily get in the way, as in the immortal phrase of Cyril Connolly:

“There is no more sombre enemy of good art than a pram in the hall.”<sup>i</sup>

Yet somehow, if the compulsion is sufficiently strong, the writing gets done, pram notwithstanding. J. K. Rowling, single-mother of Jessica, then only three months old, wrote much of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* longhand, on scraps of paper, in a café:

“It was the lowest point in my life. My self-respect was on the floor. I didn't want Jessica to grow up this way. She became my inspiration, and writing about Harry became a safe haven, someplace I could go. So, my daughter and Harry kept me going. I made a vow to myself. In one year I would finish the book and try to get it published. I knew once I got a teaching job, there would be no time for writing. My back was up against the wall. I could not afford the luxury of writer's block, so I wrote with intensity.”

Not that writing is necessarily unrewarding. Indeed, reading something that one has written can on occasion induce a feeling of considerable satisfaction. The problem is simply that the balance between the satisfaction from the re-reading seems insufficient to counterbalance the original pain of the writing. And yet writers keep writing.

Perhaps the ultimate reasons why writers continue plying their trade is that writing can be revealing. Particularly when one starts out, writing and thinking are intertwined, the act of putting words on paper as much a voyage of discovery for the author as it is, subsequently, for the reader. In the words, immortal to all writers, of E. M. Forster:

“How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?” ■

## War: Iraq and Afghanistan

*Written, with John Dew, in June 2004.  
[Details, including sources, are available on request]*

### **Introduction**

The history of post-WWII occupations suggests that there are at least two necessary conditions for success in effecting a transition to democracy.

- First, there is a need for a sufficiently large, well-conducted military operation, backed up by adequate police or paramilitary resources, to bring about and thereafter maintain order and stability.
- Second, and in parallel, is the need to demonstrate a credible intention to effect a transition to an acceptable political outcome. This typically involves a range of political reforms, supported by a range of administrative and economic reforms.

### **The size of the requisite stability force**

Post-World War II experience is that, in no case where significant parts of the population have been hostile to the occupying power, has a foreign force brought about order and stability with a ‘force ratio’ of less than 20 troops per thousand of population, the ratio in situations as diverse as Malaya, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Furthermore, depending upon the strength and determination of the opposition, it has in important cases proved impossible – notably Algeria and South Vietnam – to achieve order and stability even with a force ratio approaching 30 or even 40.

Technology can help, by making the occupying force more efficient, but, in contrast to the combat phase, there seems to be no substitute for sheer numbers.

The population of Iraq today is around 25 million. A force ratio of 20 (troops, paramilitaries, and policemen) per thousand of population, quite possibly the minimum necessary to provide a reasonable chance of success, would require 500,000 security personnel.

At present, there are around 135,000 US troops, 7,500 British troops, and around 14,300 troops from other countries, making a total of 157,000, a troop force ratio of around 6.5 per thousand of population – see Table 1.

**Table 1. Peak Force Ratios in Major Stability and Control Operations**

Country episode	Date	Troops (Thousand)	Paramilitaries and Police (Thousand)	Population (Million)	Peak Force ratio	
					Troops	Total
Germany, West	1945	400	-	46.19	8.7	-
Japan	1946-47	350	-	84.10	4.2	-
Malaya	1948-60	40	71.1	5.51	7.3	20.2
Algeria	1954-62	400	-	10.9	36.6	-
South Vietnam	1955-75	524	-	18.00	29.1	-
Dominican Republic	1965	24	0.0	3.80	6.3	6.3
Northern Ireland	1970s-present	26	3.5	1.52	16.9	19.2

Afghanistan	1979-89	115	-	15.10	7.6	-
Lebanon	1982-84	6	-	3.09	1.8	-
Cambodia	1992-93	16	3.4	10.07	1.6	1.9
India, Punjab region	1992	← 115 →		20.20	-	5.7
Somalia	1992-95	16	0.0	6.06	2.6	2.6
Haiti	1995-96	23	0	6.50	3.5	3.5
Bosnia	1996-present	60	16	3.25	18.5	23.4
East Timor	1999-2002	6	1.3	0.85	7.4	8.9
Kosovo	2000-present	45	4.5	1.90	23.7	26.1
Afghanistan	Present	23	-	28.51	0.8	-
Iraq	Present	157	2.9	25.37	6.2	6.3

*Sources and methods: Obtainable on request.*

The effective size of Iraq's own security forces is a matter of judgement. In principle, the Iraqi Police Service currently numbers around 73,000, and the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps around 33,000. However, few of these are adequately trained. It has been stated, for example, that by early in May 2004, only half of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps remained at their posts. The number of 'academy-trained' Iraqis in the Iraqi Police Service was only of the order of 2,900 in April 2004. Without further training and recruitment, Iraq's own security forces will not be able to make a significant constructive contribution for some years.

On the basis of such numbers, Iraq probably currently has around 160,000 effective security personnel. This is only one-third that implied by a force ratio of 20.

On the face of it, therefore, the Coalition lacks sufficient security personnel in Iraq to have a reasonable chance of achieving and maintaining order and stability in the face of even moderate opposition from insurgents.

It can be argued that the true force ratio in Iraq is higher than 20, because, for example, the Kurds in the north of Iraq are not resisting the occupation forces, who are thereby left free to concentrate, in a markedly higher force ratio, on the troublesome parts, most notably the so-called 'Sunni triangle' in central Iraq. However, that argument is misleading, because it could equally well be applied to regions such as Northern Ireland. There, too, the bulk of the population was quiescent, with trouble concentrated in certain key areas. But the force ratio of 20, which was required for many years, applied to the region as a whole, with the actual ratio in the hot spots correspondingly much higher.

The 'Rule of Five,' whereby a modern professional army can keep its troops in the theatre of operations only for about 6 months in every 30, implies that keeping 500,000 troops in Iraq would require a troop base of 2.5 million. This is about the size of the combined ground (army) forces of for example, the US (659), Turkey (402), Germany (191), France (137), the UK (117), and Italy (116) (Table 2).

**Table 2. 25 Largest armed forces and 25 largest economies**

Country	Armed Forces			Paramilitary (000)	GDP (\$ million)
	Total (000)	of army (000)	which, Estimated Reservists (000)		
China	2,270	1,700	550	1,500	48,380
United States	1,414	6,591	1,259	53	329,616
India	1,298	1,100	535	1,090	13,073
Korea, North	1,082	950	4,700	189	4,728
Russia	988	321	2,400	409	48,040

Korea, South	686	560	4,500	5	12,615
Pakistan	620	550	513	289	2,541
Iran	520	350	350	40	4,865
Turkey	515	402	379	150	8,727
Vietnam	484	412	3,000	40	2,286
Myanmar	444	350	n.a.	100	2,837
Egypt	443	320	254	330	3,121
Taiwan	370	200	1,657	27	7,479
Syria	319	215	354	108	1,819
Thailand	306	190	200	113	1,730
Ukraine	302	148	1,000	113	4,728
Indonesia	297	230	400	195	6,245
Germany	296	191	390	n.a.	31,465
Brazil	288	189	1,115	386	9,651
France	260	137	100	101	38,005
Ethiopia	253	160	n.a.	n.a.	442
Japan	240	148	47	12	37,070
Italy	217	116	65	254	24,210
United Kingdom	210	117	257	n.a.	35,249
Saudi Arabia	200	75	n.a.	16	20,981

1. Includes Marine Corps.

*Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The Military Balance: 2003•2004" (2003). The figures should be regarded as indicative only. They include troops of differing quality, and give no indication about different degrees of combat readiness or availability for deployment. GDP data are from Datastream.*

## The cost of the requisite stability force

Calculations of the true cost of war and of peacekeeping are fraught with difficulty. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish between 'budgetary' and 'economic' cost.

**Budgetary cost.** The straight wage and salary cost of US soldiers in Iraq is probably around \$40,000 per soldier per year. To this figure must be added, however, all the other costs associated with peacekeeping, including food, accommodation, ammunition, transport, accelerated wear and tear on equipment, and the periodic rotation of occupation personnel and equipment. These additional costs are considerable. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) works with an all-up cost for recent peacekeeping operations, for example in Bosnia and Kosovo, of \$240,000 per US soldier per year – although the costs seem to be working out higher in Iraq. The costs of UK peacekeeping operations – and, by implication, of other European peacekeeping forces – while substantial, are somewhat less than half that, being estimated at between £50,000 and £75,000 (mid point about \$100,000) per soldier per year.

**Economic cost.** To the extent that, had these soldiers not been in Iraq or Afghanistan, they would have been in military employment somewhere else in the world, and that at least their basic wages and salaries would have been paid in any event, the 'budgetary cost' figures overstate the 'economic' cost. The true, or 'economic,' cost of peacekeeping operations arguably should be calculated as the extra, or marginal, costs of having the armed forces carry out their peacekeeping duties, rather than those that they would have carried out otherwise, together with resulting lost private sector output. These figures would need to include, importantly, the extra cost incurred through calling up reservists. In normal times, reservists are paid what is in effect a retainer: when they are called up to active service, however, they are paid a full salary.

In practice, however, it is difficult to disentangle those expenditures that have been incurred as a result of the troops being in Iraq and Afghanistan from those that would have been incurred had they not been.

One potential way of calculating the true 'economic' cost of US peacekeeping activities is to take the supplemental amounts that have been voted by Congress. However, it is at present impossible to

disentangle the money that was voted for reconstruction from that which was voted to cover pure extra troop costs. On the face of it, it seems that around \$125bn may end up having been voted for Iraq and Afghanistan, taken together, for 2004, with the great bulk of the expenditure being in and on Iraq.

On this basis, the present true, or 'economic', cost of US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is already around 1% of US GDP, with the great bulk of the expenditure being in Iraq. For the purposes of calibration, this compares with a cost of:

- Around 2% of GDP on average for the two peak years of the Vietnam War. One of the reasons that the peacekeeping operations in Iraq, which involve 135,000 soldiers, are so expensive relative to the US military operations in South Vietnam, which involved over 500,000 troops at the peak, is that the US forces in South Vietnam were largely low-paid draftees, whereas those in Iraq are professional soldiers; and
- A little under 3% of GDP for the tax cuts enacted to date.

Any estimate of what 500,000 security personnel would cost depends importantly on which countries provide the troops. In contrast with the \$40,000 US wage and salary cost figure cited above, the average salary cost (including hazardous-duty pay) of a high-grade sergeant in the new Iraqi army is around \$1,200 per year, and the cost of a mid-grade lieutenant colonel is about \$2,400. Thus the average, \$1,800 per Iraqi soldier per year, is less than a twentieth of the cost of a US soldier.

Hence, a long-stay stability force of 500,000 personnel could cost the following:

- If composed entirely of US troops – although this is not feasible, given that the total strength of the US army is around 659,000 – the all-up cost would be of the order of \$120bn.
- If composed of European peacekeeping soldiers, the all-up cost would probably be somewhat less than half that, at around \$50bn per year.
- If composed entirely of personnel from developing countries, the all-up cost might be say \$6bn, one twentieth of the \$120bn cost of an entirely US force. And in practice the cost could well be lower than that, because it would not be necessary to pay for certain costs, such as rotation.
- If, as would seem most credible for success, a stability force were to be composed of say 100,000 non-US personnel from G7 countries, and 400,000 other personnel, mainly from Iraq but perhaps from some other developing countries also, the all-up cost could be of the order of \$11bn.

### **Afghanistan**

The number of foreign troops in Afghanistan is currently around 23,000. The US has 17,000 troops in the country, and the 18-country International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led by the United Kingdom, which currently provides 1,700 troops, consists of some 6,000 troops in total.

With the estimated population of Afghanistan today a little under 30 million, this represents a troop force ratio of under 1 per thousand of population, or less than one twentieth of the number of security personnel that history suggests would be the minimum necessary to achieve order and stability in the country as a whole.

US troops, by far the largest element in the international military presence, are concerned mainly with operations against Taliban and Al-Qaeda remnants, not the stability or good government of Afghanistan itself. The Afghan government is able to exercise little effective control over much of the country outside Kabul, and has to tolerate a number of regional warlords. Elections originally due in June of this year have had to be postponed, due to the security situation, and because administrative arrangements for a vote were behind schedule. According to the UK charity Christian Aid, only 1.5 million of the 10.5 million people eligible to vote had been registered by March 2004. A UK parliamentary Committee that has recently



visited Afghanistan is expected to present a report in July criticising the lack of international troops and resources available to provide essential security.

Given the estimated population of Afghanistan of 28.5m people, a force ratio of 20 would imply the presence 570,000 troops – approximately the same as required in Iraq. The costs of that force could be expected to be similar also. And the ‘Rule of Five’ would require that that force be drawn from a pool of around 3 million security forces – in addition to the pool required for Iraq.

### **Economic assistance**

Conceptually, there are two major categories of expenditure, in addition to those of funding order and stability, that will need to be financed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The first is the one-off cost of reconstructing Iraq’s infrastructure; the second is the recurrent cost of the government’s operations.

### **Reconstruction costs**

The most comprehensive estimate to date of the total cost of reconstructing Iraq’s infrastructure has been made by the United Nations and the World Bank in their joint *Iraq Needs Assessment*. This study makes a distinction between ‘immediate needs’ for 2004, which it puts at around \$17.5bn, and ‘medium-term priorities’ for 2005 through 2007, which it puts at \$37.7bn, for a grand total of around \$55bn.

The United States has voted to provide more than \$18bn in grants to assist that reconstruction, and other countries and organizations have pledged a similar amount, mostly in the form of loans. All together, projected and pledged amounts approach at least the lower end of Iraq’s projected needs.

### **Recurrent costs**

The Congressional Budget Office has projected the recurrent cost of financing the future Iraqi government’s operating expenses at around \$12-13bn per year, and payments on Iraq’s international debt and claims stemming from Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait at around \$1bn per year.

Iraqi oil exports should be able to cover all of these expenditures, and possibly, depending on the prevailing price of internationally traded oil, with some revenue left over. In January 2004, Iraq was producing about 2.1 million barrels per day (mbd), and exporting around 1.6 mbd of that. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) hopes to maintain exports at about that rate this year, and increase them thereafter, to reach 2.5 mbd by 2006. The CPA does not intend to privatise the oil sector so, at an oil price of around \$31 per barrel – the present average future price for this year and next – oil export revenues accruing to the CPA can be expected to be of the order of \$18bn this year, rising to perhaps \$28bn by 2006.

This would leave a net surplus of revenue over operating expenditure, this year and next, of the order of \$4bn per year. This is significantly greater than the estimates published in January 2003 by the Congressional Budget Office, which, on the basis of an assumed oil price of \$21 per barrel, yielded only a small (less than \$1bn) projected surplus.<sup>87</sup>

### **The Importance Of A Complete Vision**

It is evident that so far, no complete, credible vision for political, administrative, and economic reform has been communicated to, let alone accepted by, the Iraqi people. At the same time, it is worth recognising that the initial visions in both Germany and Japan were far from appropriate, and underwent quite fundamental change during the years of occupation. While the Coalition can therefore be faulted for its initial lack of an appropriate vision and overall plan, it would not be inconsistent with past experience were it ultimately to produce a workable plan for self-sustaining democracy administration, and economic development.

### **Conclusions – Iraq**

- Significantly more – quite possibly three times more – foreign troops are likely to be needed than the 160,000 that are there at present. It will take some years to build up Iraq's own security forces.
- The requisite pool of 500,000-odd troops for Iraq would have to be drawn from a pool of approximately 2.5 million soldiers.
- The presence of foreign security forces is likely to be required for at least five years, assuming that political and economic development proceed successfully, and progress is made in building an effective domestic police force and army. Progressively, the prevention of crime should be taken over by the police, with the principal role of the army moving to the protection of the police.
- Multilateral command would make it easier for a wide range of countries to contribute troops, even if the United States remained an important contributor. This is an important consideration, given that the numbers of troops likely to be needed, especially if they are to be rotated frequently enough to enable such numbers to be sustained for the length of time needed, will be beyond the effective military capacity of any narrow group of countries, including the US.
- Multilateral command, even though difficult to effect, would be likely to be more politically acceptable to the majority of Iraqis than would a continuation of US and UK command.
- To be accepted in Iraq, and to achieve results that will in time permit its orderly withdrawal, the military presence will need to be seen to be motivated by a genuine and credible desire to help Iraq determine its own future, including training Iraq's own army and police.
- Given the potentially conflicting political ambitions of the major groups, such a process will need strong multilateral guidance and support, to provide a secure framework within which major differences can be reconciled.
- While five years is likely to be the minimum period to achieve and demonstrably maintain order and stability, a full transition to democracy, effective civil administration, and self-sustaining economic growth could well take ten years or more.
- While economic assistance can be important in alleviating bottlenecks that might otherwise slow or halt economic growth, money is unlikely to be the most pressing issue. More important is likely to be Iraq's need for assistance from skilled manpower from the G7 countries and beyond.
- Perhaps the two most telling cases in the context of present-day Iraq are Algeria (pessimistic) and Kosovo (more optimistic, within limits).

Algeria showed that even the highest-ever force ratio, of nearly 40 security forces per thousand of population, cannot produce order and stability when a large proportion of the population is against the occupying forces. And that is particularly so if the occupying power, through the excessive use of force and degeneration into brutality and torture, loses its moral authority. If order and stability cannot be established and maintained, it is impossible to proceed to the next stages of nation-building. Yet if there is insufficient prospect of political, administrative, and economic reform, resistance to the occupying force grows yet stronger, making order and stability even harder to establish and maintain.

Kosovo, by contrast, has arguably been a success, even if so far only partial and (as events in March this year showed) still precarious. This success has been felt much more in the region as a whole than in Kosovo itself. The international community had an agreed vision of what it wanted to achieve; and the initial, multinational, mid-20s force ratio was sufficient to establish and maintain order and stability, through a functioning relationship between troops and the (newly established) police force. Political reform has permitted local elections to be held, and administrative and economic reform has made worthwhile progress. Significant international economic assistance has helped.

That said, the fundamental political problem remains unresolved, so that the international military presence is as necessary as ever. Hopes that international help with economic and political reform could, with the stability provided by international troops, make the political problem somehow less dominant or pressing, and thereby easier to resolve or sidestep, have been disappointed. But at least Kosovo has not blown up, even if it appeared to come close in March this year, and the situation remains under control.

### **Conclusions - Afghanistan**

- Troop numbers are too low to allow the government in Kabul to control the country effectively, enforce the rule of law, or provide basic security. Until it can do so, the kind of progress that the international community wants to see will be difficult to achieve.
- Unless the local warlords and criminal groups can be controlled, the government will be unable to stop the widespread cultivation of heroin poppies, which has increased dramatically since the defeat of the Taliban.
- If political change is to be sustained, more international military support will be needed than is currently available, with better resources.
- The security situation is critical if the planned election, postponed from June this year until September, is to provide the full democratic validation that the government in Kabul so badly needs.
- Significant multilateral help will be needed with the rebuilding of the economy, infrastructure and social, political and legal institutions. ■

## War – Algeria

*The following are extracts from the extensive United States Library of Congress Country Study on Algeria. The explanatory notes in square brackets have been added by me.*

“In the early morning hours of All Saints’ Day, November 1, 1954, FLN [National Liberation Front – Front de Libération Nationale] ...maquisards (guerrillas) launched attacks in various parts of Algeria against military installations, police posts, warehouses, communications facilities, and public utilities. From Cairo, the FLN broadcast a proclamation calling on Muslims in Algeria to join in a national struggle for the ‘restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam.’ .... It was the reaction of Premier Pierre Mendès-France, who only a few months before had completed the liquidation of France’s empire in Indochina, that set the tone of French policy for the next five years. On November 12, he declared in the National Assembly: ‘One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and integrity of the Republic. The Algerian departments are part of the French Republic. They have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French ... Between them and metropolitan France there can be no conceivable secession.’” ...

“An important watershed in the War of Independence was the massacre of civilians by the FLN near the town of Philippeville in August 1955. Before this operation FLN policy was to attack only military and government-related targets.”...

“Governor General Robert Lacoste, a socialist, abolished the Algerian Assembly. Lacoste saw the assembly, which was dominated by colons [European colonialists], as hindering the work of the administration, and he undertook to rule Algeria by decree law. He favored stepping up French military operations and granted the army exceptional policy powers – a concession of dubious legality under French law – to deal with the mounting terrorism. At the same time, Lacoste proposed a new administrative structure that would give Algeria a degree of autonomy and a decentralized government.” ...

“Meanwhile, in October 1956 Lacoste had the FLN external political leaders who were in Algeria at the time arrested and imprisoned for the duration of the war. This action caused the remaining rebel leaders to harden their stance.” ...

“France took a more openly hostile view of President Nasser’s [Gamal Abdul Nasser, President of Egypt from 1954-70] material and political assistance to the FLN, which some French analysts believed was the most important element in sustaining continued rebel activity in Algeria. This attitude was a factor in persuading France to participate in the November 1956 AngloSuez Campaign, meant to topple Nasser from power.” ...

“From its origins in 1954 as ragtag maquisards numbering in the hundreds and armed with a motley assortment of hunting rifles and discarded French, German, and United States light weapons, the ALN [the National Liberation Army (Armée de Libération Nationale), the FLN’s military arm] had evolved by 1957 into a disciplined fighting force of nearly 40,000. .... The brunt of the fighting was borne by ... estimates ... range from 6,000 to more than 25,000...”

“During 1956 and 1957, the ALN successfully applied hit-and-run tactics according to the classic canons of guerrilla warfare. Specializing in ambushes and night raids and avoiding direct contact with superior French firepower, the internal forces targeted army patrols, military encampments, police posts, and colon farms, mines, and factories, as well as transportation and communications facilities. Once an engagement was broken off, the guerrillas merged with the population in the countryside. Kidnapping was commonplace, as were the ritual murder and mutilation of captured French military, ....”

“Although successful in engendering an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty within both communities in Algeria, the revolutionaries’ coercive tactics suggested that they had not as yet inspired the bulk of the

Muslim people to revolt against French colonial rule. Gradually, however, the FLN/ALN gained control in certain sectors .... But it was never able to hold large fixed positions.” ...

“To increase international and domestic French attention to their struggle, the FLN decided to bring the conflict to the cities and to call a nationwide general strike. The most notable manifestation of the new urban campaign was the Battle of Algiers, which began on September 30, 1956, when three women placed bombs at three sites including the downtown office of Air France. ... the publicity given the brutal methods used by the army to win the Battle of Algiers, including the widespread use of torture, cast doubt in France about its role in Algeria.”

“Despite complaints from the military command in Algiers, the French government was reluctant for many months to admit that the Algerian situation was out of control and that what was viewed officially as a pacification operation had developed into a major colonial war. By 1956 France had committed more than 400,000 troops to Algeria ... France also sent air force and naval units to the Algerian theatre.” ...

“The French military command ruthlessly applied the principle of collective responsibility to villages suspected of sheltering, supplying, or in any way cooperating with the guerrillas. Villages that could not be reached by mobile units were subject to aerial bombardment. The French also initiated a program of concentrating large segments of the rural population, including whole villages, in camps under military supervision to prevent them from aiding the rebels .... These population transfers apparently had little strategic effect on the outcome of the war, but the disruptive social and economic effects of this massive program continued to be felt a generation later.”

“The French army shifted its tactics at the end of 1958 to the use of mobile forces deployed on massive search-and-destroy missions against ALN strongholds. Within the next year, ... General Maurice Challe appeared to have suppressed major rebel resistance. But political developments had already overtaken the French army’s successes.” ...

“Europeans as well as many Muslims greeted de Gaulle’s return to power as the breakthrough needed to end of the hostilities.” ...

“De Gaulle immediately appointed a committee to draft a new constitution for France’s Fifth Republic, which would be declared early the next year, with which Algeria would be associated but of which it would not form an integral part.” ...

“De Gaulle’s initiative threatened the FLN with the prospect of losing the support of the growing numbers of Muslims who were tired of the war and had never been more than lukewarm in their commitment to a totally independent Algeria.” ...

“ALN commandos committed numerous acts of sabotage in France in August, and the FLN mounted a desperate campaign of terror in Algeria to intimate Muslims into boycotting the referendum. Despite threats of reprisal, however, 80 percent of the Muslim electorate turned out to vote in September, and of these 96 percent approved the constitution.” ...

“In 1958-59 the French army had won military control in Algeria and was the closest it would be to victory. During that period in France, however, opposition to the conflict was growing among many segments of the population. ... relatives of conscripts and reserve soldiers suffered loss and pain; revelations of torture and the indiscriminate brutality the army visited on the Muslim population prompted widespread revulsion; ... International pressure was also building on France to grant Algeria independence ... France’s seeming intransigence in settling a colonial war that tied down half the manpower of its armed forces was also a source of concern to its North American Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies. In a September 1959 statement, de Gaulle dramatically reversed his stand and uttered the words ‘self-determination,’ which he envisioned as leading to majority rule in an Algeria formally associated with France.” ...

“Claiming that de Gaulle had betrayed them, the colons, backed by units of the army, staged an insurrection in Algiers in January 1960 that won mass support in Europe.” ...

“Important elements of the French army ... joined in another insurrection in April 1961. The leaders of this ‘generals’ putsch’ intended to seize control of Algeria as well as topple the de Gaulle regime. Units of the Foreign Legion offered prominent support, and the well-armed Secret Army Organization (Organisation de l’Armée Secrète – OAS) coordinated the participation of colon vigilantes.” ...

“The ‘generals’ putsch’ marked the turning point in the official attitude toward the Algerian war. De Gaulle was now prepared to abandon the colons, the group that no previous French government could have written off. The army had been discredited by the putsch and kept a low profile politically throughout the rest of France’s involvement with Algeria. ... after several false starts the French government decreed that a cease-fire would take effect on March 19, 1962.” ...

“During the three months between the case-fire and the French referendum on Algeria, the OAS unleashed a new terrorist campaign.” ...

“On July 1, 1962, some 6 million of a total Algerian electorate of 6.5 million cast their ballots in the referendum on independence. The vote was nearly unanimous. De Gaulle pronounced Algeria an independent country on July 3.” ...

“French military authorities listed their losses at nearly 18,000 dead ... and 65,000 wounded. According to French figures, security forces killed 141,000 rebel combatants, and more than 12,000 Algerians died in internal FLN purges during the war. An additional 5,000 died in the ‘café wars’ in France between the FLN and rival Algerian groups. French sources also estimated that 70,000 Muslim civilians were killed, or abducted and presumed killed, by the FLN.”

“Historian Alistair Horne considers that the actual figure of war dead is far higher than the original FLN and official French estimates, even if it does not reach the 1 million adopted by the Algerian government.■

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