Book Review by Daniel Moran of: The Battle of Casbah: Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Algeria written by Robert L. Miller
and excessive government power, he can go no further before remarking “that if, among so many pathologies, twentieth-century Europe has left any decent legacy to the future, the ‘mixed system’ and the welfare state are certainly the more humane and compassionate of them” (p. 237). Quite so. It made me reflect that what is most notably absent in this lively book is a study of the proselytization of an American economic philosophy designed to exalt a particular model of American society and to be-atify its preachers. In bringing simpletons to power in the Soviet Union, this served the interests of the United States and perhaps the “West” much more successfully than did any form of the Christian religion, but its tendency to increase the influence of similar simpletons throughout Europe may not serve either side of the Atlantic so well.


Reviewed by Daniel Moran, Naval Postgraduate School

In 1957, French soldiers tortured approximately 40 percent of the male population of the Muslim quarter of Algiers to try to root out the terrorist network of the Algerian National Liberation Front (known to history as the FLN). This campaign, although shadowy and shrouded in euphemism, was not, strictly speaking, secret. Systematic torture in Algeria was the subject of widespread public comment at the time—one French general was relieved of his command after condemning it in the press—and it has attracted a good deal of scholarly investigation since. Several major participants, including the commanding officer in Algiers, General Jacques Massu, have written about it, for the most part unapologetically. Their frankness has been facilitated by the blanket amnesty issued by the French government in 1968, absolving all those who served in Algeria of whatever crimes they may have committed there.

Among professional scholars, the notion that widespread torture occurred during the Algerian War is no more controversial than the notion that Japanese troops brutally occupied China in the 1930s and 1940s or that Turks massacred Armenians during and immediately after World War I. But in the same way that the “rape of Nan-king” and the slaughter of Armenians are still glossed over in current-day Japan and Turkey, so public consciousness in France of this dark passage in the nation’s history has been distorted by systematic obfuscation and denial on the part of the govern-ment, with the perhaps predictable result, in the French case, that whenever the officially applied bandage is torn off the wound the bleeding and weeping are profuse. How else can one explain the extraordinary indignation that has greeted the appearance of Paul Aussaresses’s memoir *The Battle of the Casbah?* By any reckoning it tells a familiar story, albeit from an unusual point of view. Aussaresses, an intelligence
officer on General Massu’s staff, was personally responsible for the torture and execution of dozens of suspects, including several senior figures whose deaths have long been officially ascribed to suicide. Aussaresses’s book is undoubtedly the most hands-on account of the so-called “Battle of Algiers” to have made it into mainstream print, and its effect on French opinion has been galvanic. Amid much uproar, Aussaresses, his publisher, and his editor have all been tried, convicted, and fined on charges of complicity in justifying war crimes—evidently a crime in France, even if having perpetrated them is not. Aussaresses, who retired as a general, has also been forbidden to wear his uniform and was suspended from membership in the Legion d’Honneur at the demand of President Jacques Chirac (who, like Aussaresses, served in Algeria as a captain). But Chirac’s government has rejected demands from human rights organizations that Aussaresses be tried under international law for crimes against humanity, on the grounds that such a proceeding would abridge French sovereignty.

The most disconcerting feature of Aussaresses’s account is undoubtedly its tone, which not only is unabashed but incorporates a fine shading of Gallic sangfroid that does get under the skin, even if you know what lies ahead. This is the story of a fit, intelligent young man doing hard but important work in interesting places, a young man who parachutes for relaxation on the weekends. The story is replete with invented dialogue and unconvincing scenes in which the hero shouts down his commanding officers, slaps and humiliates underlings, and generally behaves like a character in the novels of Jean Lartéguy. Aussaresses’s most sensational factual claim—that the notorious Casbah bomber Ali-la-Pointe was betrayed to the French by the leader of the Algiers rebellion, Saadi Yacef—has (unsurprisingly) been denied by Yacef himself. Absent some sort of corroborating evidence, the issue must remain unresolved. The book’s value as a source on the Algerian war is therefore limited, though it is worth the attention of those who study how torture and atrocity are remembered by the perpetrators. The Battle of the Casbah has the merit of emphasizing that French torture was indeed terrible. Jacques Massu famously declared in his memoirs, La vraie bataille d’Alger (Paris: Plon, 1971), that on one occasion he had had the electrodes attached to himself to verify that what was being done to his prisoners did not exceed the bounds of humanity. Aussaresses observes that if he had been working the generator that day, his commandant would have come to a different conclusion.

The interest that Aussaresses’s story holds for most English-speaking readers will presumably have less to do with Algeria than with the light it purports to shine on the moral calculus of the “war on terror.” Aussaresses, appearing on the CBS television program Sixty Minutes, was asked whether, in the framework of a “ticking bomb” scenario, he would torture a suspected terrorist for information. Aussaresses replied that he believed the answer was obvious, and perhaps so, but then he makes the question too easy. If a cause is worth the torture of the guilty, why not the innocent? After all, other forms of military operation accept the baleful necessity of “collateral damage.” Not the least interesting feature of Aussaresses’s account is his insistence that all of those he tormented had blood on their hands.

Whatever else one might make of it, this is not the argument of a soldier who suf-
fers and inflicts injury and death without reference to the personal qualities of his foe. Aussaresses’s outlook is that of the renegade cop or vigilante, who takes the law into his own hands because he believes the courts or the “system” will betray him. Aussaresses does not consider the extent to which the sometimes atrocious conduct of the French army in Algeria was intended to intimidate the general population, which French authorities always judged, on scant evidence, to be on the verge of mass upheaval. After the war the French would claim to have inflicted 140,000 casualties on the FLN. Charles de Gaulle, speaking off the cuff, once referred to 200,000 dead, whereas French intelligence during the war never estimated FLN strength to be higher than 25,000. The FLN finally won because they calculated, correctly, that their own appalling conduct would inspire a disproportionate and indiscriminate response, the effect of which on opinion in France and internationally would make the French position untenable. Aussaresses ended up on the losing side because he and others like him agreed to inhabit the moral universe their adversary created. Their conduct, to recall the words of another smart and devious Frenchman, was worse than a crime. It was a mistake.

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Reviewed by Renate Holub, University of California at Berkeley

Many publications in recent decades have focused on the traditions and institutions of modernity in Europe and North America, but few of these have taken account of Italy’s experiences of modernity. A book that focuses on an important strand of modernity’s complex trajectory in Italy, in this case on the Marxist revolutionary tradition, is therefore bound to enrich a relatively neglected chapter of modern European history. The task Richard Drake sets for himself is clear: Through a historical examination of the writings and careers of major Italian Marxist thinkers and activists, he seeks to retrace the development of Italy’s Marxist revolutionary tradition. In the eight chapters of the book, Drake combines biographical data with an analysis of the revolutionary theories of political activists such as Karl Marx, Carlo Cafiero, Antonio Labriola, Arturo Labriola, Benito Mussolini, Amadeo Bordiga, Antonio Gramsci, and Palmiro Togliatti. The last three are linked to the development of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), whereas Mussolini embodies Italian fascism, both philosophically and institutionally. Carlo Cafiero represents the link with the theory of anarchism in late nineteenth-century Italy, and the two Labriolas were standard-bearers of Italian socialism before the advent of Communism. What links these various figures with Marx is not so much Marx’s economic analysis and theory of capitalism but a particular aspect of his political theory, namely, the need for a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” a principle that inspired the political theories of the revolutionary activists discussed in the book.
Terrorist rebellions, in all their configurations, constitute first order national security threats facing the international community. This listing of top 150 books is intended to provide an overview of many of the discipline’s pre-eminent books, but space considerations limit coverage of additional topics and the dozens of worthy books that cover all these topics. Readers are encouraged to nominate additional topics and books for inclusion in future lists. Qaida; narco-terrorism and insurgency; the nature of suicide terrorism; the components of counterterrorism, and future trends in terrorism, including WMD warfare. Brigitte L. Nacos, Terrorism and Counterterrorism [Fourth Edition] (Boston, MA: Longman, 2011), 352 pages, $64.40. Seventh review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The UN General Assembly reviews the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy every two years, making it a living document attuned to Member States’ counter-terrorism priorities. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the General Assembly decided in May 2020 (A/DEC/74/556) to postpone the seventh biennial review of the Strategy to its seventy-fifth session. The review will thus coincide with the landmark UN75 anniversary of the Organization but also the fifteenth anniversary of the Strategy, and the twentieth anniversary.

Readers are encouraged to nominate additional topics and books for inclusion in future lists. Afterall, it is hard for one to embrace the author’s premise that physical torture and summary executions were the only way to effectively deal with Algerian insurgents. Although one may not want to accept this methodology, many influential members in French military and political circles accepted this as the price to pay to keep Algeria French. General Paul Aussaresses’ memoir “The Battle of the Casbah: Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Algeria, 1955-1957” details the brutal counter-terrorist campaign against Algerian insurgents during the Algerian War. His controversial, and some argue failed, methods include torture and summary execution. The prevention of terrorism also includes the formulation of the so-called counter-terrorism ideology that could unite the international community to realize a common goal: combating any terrorist acts and eliminating sources of the spread of extremist ideas. It would be advisable to lay the following key provisions to the basis of counter-terrorism ideology: 1) The rejection of any extremist ideas. 2) Avoiding the exploitation of religious, cultural and other differences to provoke ethnic hatred. 3) Extensive promotion of tolerance and the unacceptability of violence in the resolution of This essay reviews the current state of knowledge and systematic research on oppositional terrorism and asks how the enterprise might be improved, with particular attention to the questions raised and the methods that are most suitable for answering them. Keywords. Terrorist Group Political Violence American Political Science Review Rand Corporation International Terrorism. These keywords were added by machine and not by the authors. This process is experimental and the keywords may be updated as the learning algorithm improves. This is a revised version of a paper given to the Symposium on In