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French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria

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Paret, Peter. *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria*. New York: Praeger, 1964. 163p.

Published for the Center of International Studies, Princeton University, this book traces the development of the French theory—or doctrine—of *guerre révolutionnaire*, which was initially formulated by French officers whose experiences in Indochina led them to seek new ways of countering anticolonial insurrections. Recognizing the interdependence of the guerrilla, the civil population, and social administration, the French theorists submit as a major tenet that the Army must therefore control the total administration of an area subjected to insurrection. One of the most illuminating chapters is devoted to a French experiment along these lines in a small coastal area in Algeria in 1957 and 1958. Basically, it was an application of the 'Oil Slick' tactic, which was evaluated by the French as only encouraging. In fact, large-scale fighting in the area was ended, the area was secured from outside attacks, and the slow work of administrative organization could proceed. The potential results of applying such tactics on a larger scale can be only speculative. The author concludes his analysis by noting that the role of civilians in revolutionary warfare remained largely unexplored in Indochina and Algeria, as the French experience was almost wholly military in character. He further notes that such an approach did not lead to satisfactory settlements there, but did push the country to the edge of revolution. One French officer argued that although the armed forces could and should fight against the effects of subversion, they were neither organized nor equipped to combat the causes, and concluded: 'To recognize that war has become total is implicitly to recognize that the Army can no longer handle more than a part of war.' This conclusion was reached on the American scene somewhat earlier, without benefit of near civil war, and expressed somewhat cavalierly as, 'War is too important for Generals to conduct.' Professor Paret's book is a thorough analysis of the French experience and interest in this important field of revolutionary warfare, worthy of serious consideration by the student of small wars, which appear more likely to develop than the confrontation of major powers.

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