



# BOOKS

## Look Who's Telling Our Story...

### Through Their Eyes: Foreign Correspondents in the United States

Stephen Hess, Brookings Institution Press, 2005, \$18.95, paperback, 195 pages.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER L. TEAL

*Through Their Eyes: Foreign Correspondents in the United States* addresses a topic I was interested in well before I began working at the Foreign Press Center in Washington this summer. The center is an excellent resource that countless foreign reporters have used over the past six decades. By describing its workings, Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Stephen Hess continues his decades-long project to lay out how the government and media interact, beginning with his seminal earlier works: *The Washington Reporters* (1981) and *The Government/Press Connection* (1984). This latest installment in that series centers on a crucial but overlooked actor in this interplay: the foreign press based in the U.S.

Hess prepared questionnaires for the more than 2,000 foreign journalists residing here. Almost a quarter of them responded, and he conducted over 100 supplemental interviews to add more detail. What he gives us is a snapshot of the reporters who help feed the information machine, providing a unique and enlightening

*Hess helps us see how foreign correspondents explain for their audience of billions what makes the United States tick.*



glimpse into their minds, expectations and work.

Not surprisingly, Hess' research confirms what we've known all along: the U.S. media often set the agenda internationally. Whether a correspondent picks up what *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* or the major wire services have already run, or their editors overseas read those same articles online, it exponentially extends the axiom that foreign reporters are "only as good as the local press."

In fact, in the age of instant access across the globe via television and the Internet, foreign editors who were once much more dependent on their eyes and ears in America are now not so reliant. Now that reporters no longer file their stories by mail, their expertise can seem diminished by the constant needs and biases of the "home office." However, the advantage a reporter in the U.S. offers is context, not simply immediate re-packaging. U.S.-based journalists can sort out which stories or sources are

credible, something very difficult to do from 12 time zones away. In the post-9/11 world, it is crucial to better understand the vantage point of this influential group, one that tries to explain for their audience of billions what makes the United States tick.

Hess also provides a brief history of foreign journalists, examines their changing demographics (now less dominated by European men), and focuses on their issues (long hours, odd deadlines and the struggle for access being perennial concerns). As he notes, their numbers only continue to grow. From just over 200 registered in the aftermath of the Second World War, to over 10 times that today, they constitute a resource too important for the American public and government to miss in shaping foreign public opinion.

Hess and his research team do a tremendous job of gathering and presenting the data on this unique breed. For a wider audience, this book may lack the kind of easy flow that his earlier works exemplified. But for practitioners of public diplomacy, *Through Their Eyes* will certainly be a resource to turn to again and again.

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*Christopher Teal, an FSO since 1999, has served in Santo Domingo, Lima and the European Bureau; he now works in the Foreign Press Center in Washington, D.C. He has been a member of the FSJ Editorial Board since 2004. The opinions expressed herein are his own, not those of the Journal or the State Department.*

## Lessons from 50 Years Ago

### My Battle of Algiers

Ted Morgan, *Smithsonian Books*, 2005, \$24.95, hardcover, 284 pages.

REVIEWED BY DAVID T. JONES

Almost 50 years ago, the nexus between East and West; colonialism and liberation; and communism and NATO lay in Algeria, where the French struggled to suppress terrorism.

The era and the struggle spawned serious history (Paul Henissart's *Wolves in the City*), muscular fiction (Jean Larteguy's *The Praetorians*), and memorable cinema ("The Battle of Algiers"). In the subsequent half-century, an almost endless line of struggles from Vietnam through the Persian Gulf War and the current conflict in Iraq, as well as various insurgencies around the globe, have left Algeria's French legacy in the dusty memory of aging combatants. Fortunately, Ted Morgan has revisited the topic, bringing a thought-provoking memoir into topical review.

Morgan, a naturalized U.S. citizen, was born Sanche de Gramont. Son of a French diplomat killed in World War II, he was educated at Yale. In 1969 he produced a clever, catty, insightful study (*The French*) that sliced and diced his native land and its citizens to the delight of Anglo-Saxons, as well as books on espionage and French history. As Ted Morgan (an anagram of "de Gramont"), he has written many books, including biographies of Somerset Maugham, Winston Churchill and FDR, and a fine U.S. colonial-era history (*Wilderness at Dawn*). A previous memoir, *On Becoming American*, discussed his decision to become a U.S. citizen in the mid-1970s.

*They say that everyone is a hero in his own autobiography, but Morgan tries hard to gainsay that adage.*

*My Battle of Algiers* describes Morgan's experiences as a young army officer who returned home in 1956 to perform his obligatory military service. Like many other French soldiers, he was assigned to a yearlong tour in Algeria. There the French army suppressed the resistance forces through two brutal episodes of counterinsurgency, fighting first in the countryside and then within the capital.

They say that everyone is a hero in his own autobiography, but Morgan tries hard to gainsay that adage. He enjoys his landlady's favors (and enjoys free accommodations during her husband's absence); beats to death a suspect that he is questioning; and helps a buddy who has deserted the army to evade military police. As for the larger context, in wry, reflective prose he unflinchingly examines conditions in post-World War II France and colonial Algeria — and leaves the reader the opportunity to extrapolate some conclusions from his experience.

Perhaps the most disconcerting lesson Morgan offers is that torture works — not every time or with every individual, but frequently enough and rapidly enough for its use to be justified. It is fair to say that torture was the principal means by which the ter-

rorist networks in Algiers were identified and destroyed. The human toll was gruesome, to be sure: of over 24,000 suspects transferred to military custody rather than the courts, more than 3,000 "disappeared" — that is, they were murdered during or following torture. Still, on the evidence Morgan presents here, critics of whatever U.S. forces have or may have done in the five years since the 9/11 attacks to fight our enemies are arguing for humanitarian principles against practical realities.

But perhaps the chief place to apply the lessons of Algeria is not in Iraq, but in the Middle East's Occupied Territories (stemming from the 1967 Six Days War). The French experience in Algeria suggests that no matter the depth or historical value of a people's claim on an area, the subjugation of a hostile population requires full political support from the "homeland" and a willingness to pay whatever price is required to continue the subjugation.

As Morgan recounts, France had held Algeria since 1830. The colony even elected deputies to the National Assembly; Algiers, with a population over 900,000 (two-thirds French) was the second-largest city in France, behind only Paris. But, unwilling to pay the price in blood and treasure required to vanquish a determined resistance movement, France cut its losses and departed after only a few years of fighting. From this optic, it appears as if Tel Aviv has made a comparable decision regarding Gaza and the vast bulk of the West Bank.

De Gramont/Morgan does not pronounce on current-day parallels in *My Battle of Algiers*, but such questions nonetheless hang in the air.

*David T. Jones, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer, is a frequent contributor to the Journal.*



## Islamism in the Context of Democracy

### God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh

Ali Riaz, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, \$28.95, paperback, 230 pages.

REVIEWED BY KAPIL GUPTA

I recommend *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh* to readers interested in the relationship between political Islam and democracy. Although the author's patchwork of writing styles — historical narrative, academesque, poetry and thick description — sometimes compromises readability, he still succeeds in illuminating several points that may be of particular interest to a general foreign-policy audience.

Dr. Ali Riaz, a professor at Illinois State University, begins by dismissing prevalent “theologocentric” cultural and religious essentializations that lead to trite conclusions about political Islam. He deplores a diminished sophistication in public discourse following the 9/11 attacks: “The demarcation between Islam (a faith), Islamism (a political ideology), Islamic revivalism (a social movement), and Islamic fundamentalism (a transnational religio-political movement) became blurred almost instantly.”

Riaz makes two key distinctions to frame the discussion. First, Islamism is inherently a political phenomenon and by no means something Islamic. A second, no less important point is particularly relevant to the project of countering Islamism: “Islamists who have a nationalist and country-specific

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rejecting democracy  
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agenda, as in Bangladesh, need to be seen in a different light than those who have a transnational agenda.” Instead of seeing manifestations of Islamism as evidence of an ineluctable transnational “green tide,” Riaz argues for a focus on national particularities.

He then describes how Bangladesh’s Islamist forces are inherently linked to local conditions and national characteristics. “It is the specific dynamics of domestic politics that allowed the pre-eminence of Islamic forces in politics and their successes in the electoral process,” he writes. Citing Islamist-backed attacks on religious minorities, women, the press, NGOs, artists and intellectuals there, Riaz vividly illustrates how Islamism threatens democratic liberalism and pluralism — the very freedoms and social relations that empower democracy with popular vitality.

*God Willing* describes how Islamism can emerge “as a legitimate political force through democratic means,” but warns: “In the event of the collapse of a hegemonic ideology and a hegemonic order, if a strong secular alternative fails to assert itself, religion

as a political ideology fills the void.”

Riaz supplements his central analysis of Bangladesh with a comparative discussion of Pakistan and Indonesia. Through analysis of these Muslim states, he portrays a growing dichotomy between substantive and formal democracy. A substantive democracy is characterized by political freedoms, legal rights and a vibrant civil society; formal democracy is more focused on electoral processes and institutions of representative government. Clearly, part of our challenge as U.S. diplomats is advancing both of these aspects of democracy.

Democratic competition can unleash destructive sociopolitical forces (such as Islamism) that the state or civil society may be unwilling or unable to mitigate. However, agents of Islamism do not always oppose democracy per se. Combining both religion and democracy as a means to power, Islamists may instead seek to change the very definition of democracy.

Relevant for those working on any Muslim-majority country, this book serves as a contextual manual for understanding the inherent tensions within our mission of creating a more secure, democratic and prosperous world. Two practical suggestions for readers: start by reading the final chapter and appendices before reading the introduction. In addition, the 2002 film “Matir Moina” (The Clay Bird) by Tareque Masud provides a rich background for understanding Riaz’s analysis of Bangladesh. ■

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*Prior to joining the Foreign Service in 2005, Kapil Gupta was a country director for Afghanistan in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He is currently a vice consul in Dhaka.*