Algerian Independence, 1954–1962

Case Outcome: COIN Loss

Case Summary

The French-Algerian conflict, which has been described as the "last, the greatest and the most dramatic of colonial war," was launched in 1954 with a series of uncoordinated bombing attacks by 300 members of the National Liberation Front (FLN) guerrilla movement.[195] Initially dismissed as "traditional banditry," the FLN attacks drew an increasingly forceful response from the French army as the insurgency gained strength and began targeting civilians in the French settler community, known as *colons*, or colonists. In response, the French military increased its presence in the region and imposed brutal COIN tactics against Algeria's native Muslim population and FLN leaders.

France became more entrenched in battle in 1957 after the FLN initiated a campaign of urban terrorism in the city of Algiers, which intentionally provoked a violent overreaction from the French army. French special forces were notorious for their roundups of innocent civilians, illegal executions, and forced disappearances, and they roused international condemnation for their systematic use of torture in conducting interrogations. While the army was able to make significant tactical gains against the insurgency in its military operations and its subsequent employment of effective COIN techniques, including a system of quadrillage and the construction of *cordons sanitaires* along Algeria's borders, the military was unable to recover from the political losses that resulted from its engagement in the Battle for Algiers.

A change of power in Paris, due largely to the turmoil created by French actions in the Algerian war, led to the ascendancy of President Charles de Gaulle in 1958. De Gaulle instituted more effective COIN tactics and eventually announced his support for Algerian autonomy. This decision was violently opposed by members of the French settler community and radical army officers and led to the outbreak of a wave

[195] Paul-Marie de la Gorce, *The French Army: A Military-Political History*, New York: George Braziller, 1963, p. 447, quoted in Joes, 1996.

of attacks against Algerian Muslims and French officials. The violence ultimately failed to impede negotiations on France's withdrawal, however. After eight years of brutal conflict, the French government was forced to succumb to the growing pressure from the Algerian population, the public in metropolitan France, and the international community to end the war and concede its political, if not its military, defeat.

Case Narrative

Phase I: "Insurgent 'Bandits' Gain Strength and Draw a Brutal Response" (1954–September 1956)

Phase Outcome: COIN Loss (Mixed, Favoring Insurgents)

Key Factors: Insurgency motive: war of liberation/independence; In area of conflict, COIN force *not* perceived as worse than insurgents; COIN force *failed* to adapt to changes in insurgent strategy, operations, or tactics

Local opposition to France's harsh colonial rule began soon after the French army invaded Algeria in 1830 and incorporated the country into metropolitan France in 1848. An organized movement calling for Algerian independence first formed in 1926 with the goal of defending "the material, moral, and social interests of North African Muslims," which it claimed were being unfairly abused by the French colonial powers.[196] These early efforts to achieve autonomy were suppressed by the French government and a minority of French settlers, or *colons*, who dominated Algerian political and economic life.[197] The movement sparked sporadic unrest and further acts of repression over the next two

[196] In 1909, Muslims, who made up almost 90 percent of the population but produced 20 percent of Algeria's income, paid 70 percent of direct taxes and 45 percent of the total taxes collected. GlobalSecurity.org, "Algerian National Liberation (1954–1962)," web page, last updated July 11, 2011a.

[197] By 1954, the Muslim population was approximately 8.4 million, while the *colons* numbered less than 1 million. The *colons* owned most of the land in Algeria and dominated the Algerian political assembly. Ian F. W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents Since 1790*, New York: Routledge, 2001, pp. 160–161.

decades. [198] After WWII, tensions increased as a sense of nationalism developed among the Algerian population, and France struggled to maintain control over its colonial empire.

In May 1945, a parade to celebrate the surrender of Nazi Germany in the town of Setif turned violent when French police attempted to seize banners criticizing French colonial rule and triggered an anti-French riot in which 100 European settlers were killed. French colonial forces responded by launching a major crackdown against several Algerian cities that left tens of thousands dead. (European historians put the figure at between 15,000 and 20,000, while Algerian sources maintain that 45,000 were killed.)[199] This event, which became known as the Setif Massacre, prompted more widespread demonstrations and the creation of an armed insurrection movement in Algeria. By the 1950s, drawing inspiration from the pan-Arab nationalist movement led by Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, various Algerian nationalist groups mobilized to form the FLN, which assumed the leadership of the armed struggle to achieve a sovereign Algerian state. The FLN called for a general insurrection on All Saints' Day in October 1954.

Growing opposition to French rule in Algeria corresponded with a series strategic losses for France, both during and after WWII. France's defeat in the battle of Dien Bein Phu in Indochina and its subsequent withdrawal from the Morocco and Tunisia were considered a severe blow to the country's colonial influence and national prestige. The French army was particularly humiliated by the losses and betrayal of the pro-French regimes that had committed their support. At the same time, members of the French settler community in Algeria felt threatened by the loss of French colonial influence and the potential for the Muslim population to gain political power at its expense. As a result, the French government became increasingly intransigent in its position on Algerian autonomy and was unwilling to consider any form of compromise or retreat.

Against this backdrop of growing tensions, a group of 300 FLN guerrillas launched a series of coordinated attacks on French secu-

198 GlobalSecurity.org, 2011a.

199 Reuters, "Algerians Remember Massacres of 1945," *Washington Post*, May 9, 2005.

rity force installations, police posts, and communication facilities in November 1954, marking the beginning of the Algerian insurgency. The FLN justified its actions as a legitimate struggle for independence from France and broadcast a proclamation from Cairo calling on all Muslims to join in the effort to "restore the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic and social within the framework of the principles of Islam."[200]

Armed only with hunting rifles, shotguns, and homemade bombs, most of the FLN's operations were limited to hit-and-run assaults that allowed the rebels to avoid contact with French firepower and incurred few French casualties. To the FLN's surprise, the local Muslim population remained largely apathetic and failed to endorse the group's call to arms. Thus, the initial attacks failed to have the decisive impact on the French occupation that the insurgent leaders had anticipated. French security forces quickly disbursed the guerrillas, dismissing their attacks as traditional banditry.

The FLN, recognizing its need to gain greater popular support, then retreated to the mountainous interior of Algeria and refocused its efforts on creating resistance groups and cells whose main task was to recruit new members and to develop support for independence among the Algerian Muslim community.[201] Gradually, the FLN grew in strength and organization, enabling it to gain a dominant presence in the regions of Aures and Kabylie and in the mountainous areas around Constantine, Algiers, and Oran. By 1956, the FLN established military and civil committees that raised taxes and served as an alternative administration to the French. The insurgency also developed a growing base of external support, with Egypt and Syria providing training and arms and other members of the Arab League providing funding. More significantly, Morocco and Tunisia began to provide safe havens for the FLN, where the group's members were able to build

[200] Peter Chalk, "Algeria 1954–1962," in Angel Rabasa, Lesley Anne Warner, Peter Chalk, Ivan Khilko, and Paraag Shukla, *Money in the Bank: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-185-OSD, 2007.

[201] Chalk, 2007, p. 18.

operational bases, and to facilitate the transit of personnel and materiel across the border, which greatly enhanced its military capabilities.

By 1955, the group also began to shift its tactics from limited guerrilla strikes against military and government targets to a large-scale terrorist campaign against the French *colons* and their Algerian supporters. [202] This campaign of violence succeeded in terrorizing the Muslim population into compliance and tacit support. It also provoked French authorities to initiate harsh reprisals and to impose tighter restrictions on the Muslim community, which drove more native Algerians to the insurgent movement.[203]

A watershed event occurred in August 1955, when the FLN initiated a massacre of civilians near the town of Philippeville in which 123 people were killed. The French governor general responded by killing 1,273 guerrillas and Algerian villagers in retaliation, which, in turn, touched off a cycle of bloodletting that resulted in the murder of more than 12,000 Muslims by French military and police forces and *colon* "vigilante committees."[204] Most of those killed by the French were innocent of wrongdoing, as the French followed the doctrine of collective responsibility in fighting the insurgency.[205] Rather than containing the insurgency, however, such indiscriminate acts of violence served to the benefit of the FLN, and its leadership soon realized that such acts only led the Algerian people to "hate the French more."[206]

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[202] Mounir Elkhamri, Lester Grau, Laurie King-Irani, Amanda S. Mitchell, and Lenny Tasa-Bennett, *Urban Population Control in a Counterinsurgency*, Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Foreign Military Studies Office, 2005.

[203] Anton Menning, "Counterinsurgency in the Battle of the Casbah: A Reassessment for the New Millennium and Its New Wars," *Small Wars Journal*, October 2006.

[204] Armed Conflict Events Database, "Algerian War of Independence 1954–1962," last updated November 27, 2003.

[205] The principle of collective responsibility was applied by French military officials in Philippeville based on the establishment of an extralegal regime in Algeria. In response to "terrorist acts" initiated by the FLN in August 1955, responsibility was attributed to nearby villages, which would be subject to brutal reprisals, including widespread torture and executions.

[206] Corum and Johnson, 2003 p. 165.

The increasing level of violence in the Algerian countryside led the French to abandon any hope of accommodation with the insurgents. After the Phillippeville massacre, the French government abolished the Algerian Assembly and ruled Algeria by decree law, which granted the French military nearly total power.[207] French Premier Pierre Mendès-France, declared to the French National Assembly, "One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and integrity of the Republic. . . . Between them and metropolitan France there can be no conceivable secession."[208] Moreover, militants in the *colon* community assumed free reign to carry out attacks on suspected FLN members and their Muslim supporters.

No longer dismissing the FLN attacks as banditry, the French began to view the insurgency as a significant challenge to French rule.[209] Fearing that the insurgents were gaining the upper hand, the army ordered a rapid increase in forces to Algeria, raising the number of troops from 150,000 to 400,000 over the course of a year.[210] The intensity of military operations heightened, and the French began to launch increasingly brutal reprisals against the FLN leadership. However, these attacks often instigated further violence. In June 1956, when French COIN forces executed two FLN fighters by guillotine, the FLN leadership took a more radical turn, vowing that for every FLN fighter executed 100 Frenchmen would meet a similar fate and thus committing to even more violent attacks against civilian targets. [211]

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[207] Anthony Toth, "Phillippeville," *A Country Study: Algeria*, Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994.

[208] Armed Conflict Events Database, 2003.

[209] Martha Crenshaw, "The Effectiveness of Terrorism in the Algerian War," in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context*, State College, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1995, p. 488; David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1954–1962*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-478-1/ARPA/RC [1963] 2006, p. 18

[210] Galula, 2006, p. 25; Corum and Johnson, 2003 p. 166.

[211] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 58.

Phase II: "The Battle for Algiers and the Court of Public Opinion" (September 1956–1957)

Phase Outcome: COIN Win (Mixed, Favoring COIN)

Key Factors: Conflict had significant urban component; COIN force employed escalating repression; COIN force employed collective punishment; Intelligence adequate to support kill/capture or engagements on COIN force's terms; Intelligence adequate to allow COIN forces to disrupt insurgent processes or operations; COIN force engaged in more coercion/intimidation than insurgents; COIN force employed practices considered beyond the pale by contemporary U.S. ethical standards; Change in level of popular support for insurgents during this phase

The FLN sought revenge against the French by adopting a new tactic of urban-based terrorism in 1956. Recognizing that they could not compete with the French army in a direct military confrontation, the insurgents decided to attack civilian targets in the heart of Algiers in an effort to provoke an overreaction by French security forces. Their intention was to drive a wedge between the local population and the colonial administration and draw the attention of metropolitan France and the international community to their cause; thus, they attempted to use terror to alter the political context of the Algerian conflict.

The new urban campaign began on September 30, 1956, with a series of bombings at public venues in the European sector of Algiers. Civilian targets included two restaurants frequented by *colons* and the Air France terminal at Algiers airport. These attacks were followed by the assassination of the city's mayor and the killing of several other high-ranking officials in the colonial administration, as well as a general strike that disrupted Algiers's communication and transportation services for several days.[212] The FLN carried out an average of 800 shootings and bombings per month from the fall of 1956 to the spring of 1957, resulting in a high number of civilian casualties. [213]

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[212] Chalk, 2007, pp. 18–19.

[213] GlobalSecurity.org, 2011a.

As the insurgents anticipated, France responded forcefully to the urban terrorist campaign, launching what came to be known as the Battle for Algiers in January 1957. In a change of tactics, the French army engaged its elite 10th Parachute Division and allowed it full authority to restore order to the city.[214] The elite forces conducted roundups of entire neighborhoods, ordering widespread summary executions and extrajudicial preemptive detentions of FLN suspects. Over the course of only nine months, the French arrested 24,000 men, 3,000 of whom disappeared while they were in detention.[215] The parachute regiment relied heavily on torture to extract information from suspects, becoming notorious for institutionalizing this technique into a systematic form of interrogation.[216] Electrocution, simulated drowning, and abuse aimed at degrading human dignity were heavily utilized, and detainees who refused to talk or who died during questioning were commonly disposed of in what became commonly known as "work in the woods."[217] Such brutal tactics enabled the French to break the FLN's urban campaign by eliminating its leadership base in Algiers, but they also alienated much of the population and fostered greater sympathy for the insurgents. Despite carrying out its own atrocities, the FLN was increasingly viewed as "defenders of the rights of the people" against the abuse of French security forces in Algiers.[218]

Outside the city of Algiers the French undertook a parallel effort to increase their force levels and crush the insurgency in the countryside. By 1957, France had committed more than 400,000 troops to Algeria. In addition to the elite French parachute regiments, Foreign Legion forces, and regular air force and naval units, France recruited

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214 Crenshaw, 1995, pp. 489–490.

215 The total number of men arrested over a four-month period accounted for almost 40 percent of the population of the Arab quarter in Algiers. Chalk, 2007; Corum and Johnson, 2003, p. 165

216 Jacques Massu, *The True Battle of Algiers*, 1972, pp. 166–170, quoted in Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962*, New York: New York Review of Books, 2006, pp. 196–201.

217 Horne, 2006, pp. 196–201.

218 Chalk, 2007, p. 19.

and trained an irregular force of over 150,000 Algerian Muslims who volunteered to assist in the COIN effort. The Muslim fighters, known as *harkis*, were armed with shotguns and used guerrilla tactics, making them highly effective in conducting COIN missions.[219]

This increase in military manpower enabled the French to establish a stronger physical presence throughout the country. In late 1957, the French army instituted a system of quadrillage, by which it divided the country into sectors and permanently garrisoned troops in each of the assigned territories. This effective use of static defense sharply reduced the number of FLN attacks. The French also established large areas as *zone interdites*, or forbidden zones, by evacuating farms and villages and resettling the population in large "self-defense villages" under strict military supervision. This resettlement effort, which was an attempt to cut off local support for the FLN, resulted in the movement of more than 1.3 million Algerians, approximately 10 percent of the population, into overcrowded, poorly maintained camps, with mixed effects.

The French army had more success in a major undertaking to disrupt the FLN's source of external support by constructing a system of barriers to limit the infiltration of insurgents from their safe havens in Tunisia and Morocco. Along the borders, they built eight-foot electric fences that were illuminated by searchlights and surrounded by minefields. The Morice Line along the Tunisian border, which was completed in 1957, required 40,000 troops to patrol but had a kill ratio of 85 percent among those trying to breach the barrier to enter Algeria. From March to May 1958, repeated attempts by the FLN to punch through the line were beaten back, resulting in 3,000 guerrilla casualties. As a result, 20,000 insurgents remained confined to Tunisia until the end of the war.[220] The Pedron Line, along the Moroccan border, was completed a short time after and was similarly effective.[221]

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219 GlobalSecurity.org, 2011a.

220 H. Canuel, "French Counterinsurgency in Algeria: Forgotten Lessons from a Misunderstood Conflict," *Small Wars Journal*, March 2010, p. 7.

221 The French took more dramatic actions to reduce border traffic, such as forcing down a Moroccan plane in Algeria and bombing Tunisian village as a warning against FLN raids into Algeria.

By 1958, the combined efforts of the French special forces and the country's conventional air and land forces made great strides in destroying the FLN's infrastructure in Algiers and reducing its operational capabilities. Yet, while it won a tactical advantage, the French military lost a great deal of public support. Moderate Muslims were alienated after the Battle of Algiers and increasingly sided with the insurgency. Criticism of the French military's actions in Algeria continued to grow within metropolitan France, leading many to question the country's investment in the war effort. Moreover, the brutal methods of the French army and its widespread use of torture elicited opprobrium in international forums, which became increasingly difficult for Paris to ignore.[222] (The Algerian conflict was the subject of considerable debate in the UN, and support for the COIN effort declined in the Arab world as well as in the United States and Great Britain, placing French arms sales at risk.)

Phase III: "De Gaulle Takes Charge, Achieves a Military Victory but Ultimately Concedes to a Political Defeat" (1958–1959)

Phase Outcome: COIN Win (Mixed, Favoring COIN)

Key Factors: COIN force effectively disrupted insurgent materiel acquisition; COIN campaign included significant (not necessarily primary) focus on physically denying the insurgents access to supportive populations (for example, through removal/resettlement or interdiction); Active minority in area of conflict supported/favored COIN force or insurgents (wanted them to win)

The FLN adjusted to its operational losses by abandoning large-scale urban operations and resuming rural-based hit-and-run tactics on a much smaller scale than in the past. Politically, however, the insurgent leadership was determined to take more initiative and established a government-in-exile, known as the Provisional Government of the

[222] Hoffman, 2006, pp. 63–64; Chalk, 2007, p. 19.

Algerian Republic in Tunis, which received widespread international recognition.[223]

Changes in the public's perception of the Algerian war had a much more dramatic impact on French COIN policy and the government of France itself. Soon after the French parliament installed a new cabinet that was committed to negotiating with the FLN, riots broke out in protest. *Colons* seized control of government buildings in Algiers, and a faction of French army officers from Algeria took over the island of Corsica and threatened to march on Paris. General Charles de Gaulle was subsequently asked to come out of retirement to form a new government in an effort to restore army discipline and avoid a civil war in France.[224]

Under de Gaulle's leadership, the French army adopted a number of new tactics in Algeria in an attempt to defeat the insurgents and win over the general population. In late 1958, the French reduced their dependence on the quadrillage technique and deployed mobile "hunting commandos" in U.S. helicopters, conducting large-scale sweeping missions against FLN strongholds in the mountains.[225] This military effort, which engaged more than 500,000 French troops, was intended to strike its harshest blows against the insurgents and force its leadership to negotiate for the conditions set by France.[226]

At the same time, the government offered humanitarian assistance to local communities as part of a five-year economic and infrastructure program to rebuild popular support on the ground. Such efforts were

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[223] The Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic was originally established in Cairo but was headquartered in Tunis. The government-in-exile was formally recognized by 39 states. Stefan Talmon, "Who Is a Legitimate Government in Exile? Towards Normative Criteria for Governmental Legitimacy in International Law," in Guy Goodwin-Gill and Stefan Talmon, eds., *The Reality of International Law: Essays in Honour of Ian Brownlie*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999.

[224] Joes, 1996; Beckett, 2001, p. 162.

[225] Jeffrey James Byrne, "'*Je ne vous ai pas compris*': De Gaulle's Decade of Negotiation with the Algerian FLN, 1958–1969," in Christian Locher, Anna Nuenlist, and Garret Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958–1969*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010, p. 228.

[226] Michael Webber, *Algerian War Reading*, undated.

reinforced at the political level with a referendum in December 1958 that extended the right to vote to all Muslim Algerians (a right that had previously been restricted to Algerians of European descent). De Gaulle also offered unconditional amnesty to members of the FLN, a move he called "peace of the brave" that was largely rejected by the FLN leadership.[227]

De Gaulle's COIN efforts still could not change the course of the insurgency. Although the army's sweeping operations effectively destroyed the FLN's bases of operation in the mountains of Kabylia and Aures to the point that the insurgents experienced—by their own admission—a grave reduction in both combat potential and organizational structure, the army's "pacification" efforts had a limited impact among the Muslim population, particularly those living in the thousands of resettlement villages across the country.[228] After years of conflict, most Algerians saw independence from France as the only viable solution. More significantly, domestic and international pressure on the French government to withdraw from the Algerian conflict continued to grow.[229] Political developments had already overtaken French army successes.[230]

An official acknowledgement of changing political realities came when now-President de Gaulle reversed his stance on the Algerian conflict in a speech in September 1959, explicitly recognizing the possibility of self-determination and subsequently promising a referendum on Algerian autonomy and majority rule within four years.[231] De Gaulle thus modified his strategic objectives and became committed to insti-

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227 Webber, undated

228 Upward of 2 million Algerians had been displaced by 1959. Webber, undated; Galula, 2006, p. 244.

229 France took a beating on the world stage as Algeria was repeatedly the subject of discussion at the UN. Corum and Johnson, 2003, p. 173.

230 Elkhamri et al., 2005.

231 De Gaulle began to realize that the war in Algeria was becoming too great a risk to the French economy and the political fabric of the French nation. Corum and Johnson, 2003, p. 173; Elkhamri et al., 2005.

tuting a policy of disengagement from Algeria—a stance that was not universally accepted among the French community in Algeria.

Phase IV: "The* Colons' *Last Stand" (1960–1962)
Phase Outcome: COIN Loss

Key Factors: Conclusion/suspension externally imposed or due to international pressure or other exogenous event; Case fought against the tide of history (end of colonialism, end of apartheid); *At end of the conflict*, separatists got: their own country or de facto administratively separate territory

While the FLN continued to engage in attacks against the French military after de Gaulle announced his willingness to negotiate a ceasefire and to hold a referendum on Algerian autonomy, a far more violent battle erupted between the French government and radical groups opposed to the French withdrawal after 1959. The change in the president's position on Algeria sparked an insurrection by *colons* and hardline elements within the French army who were determined to prevent France from retreating from Algeria as it had from Indochina. In January 1960, passive resistance quickly evolved into a direct confrontation in what became known as "Barricade Week," when right-wing settlers began rioting in protest of the firing of French General Massu, who was critical of de Gaulle's polices. After setting up of blockades, the protestors began taking control of government buildings and firing on French security forces, who returned fire and killed a number of *colons*. This engagement led to an escalation of violent protests by yet more radical elements opposed to the French withdrawal. Unlike the in previous insurrection, the *colons* and army officers who led the attacks did not receive widespread public support, and most of the military remained loyal to de Gaulle, yet they were still able to disrupt civic and political life in both Algeria and metropolitan France.

A year after Barricade Week, an extremist group of army officers in Algiers formed an "ultra" terrorist organization, known as Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS). The OAS was committed to engaging in terrorist activity against both Algerian Muslims and French officials in an attempt to provoke an ethnic war in Algeria and a political crisis

in Paris that it believed would halt the French withdrawal.[232] The group carried out a bloody wave of attacks in Algeria that averaged as many as 120 a day before it was contained by French forces.[233] Violent protests also spread to Paris, when four generals tied to the OAS launched a coup attempt against President de Gaulle in April 1961, only to fail for lack of support among the troops in Paris.[234] In 1962, the OAS grew bold enough to try to assassinate de Gaulle and to conduct bombing attacks against French conscripts, but with each attack, the OAS alienated the French public; even some officers who had opposed French withdrawal were becoming increasingly eager to end the violence associated with the conflict in Algeria. Thus, within two years, the French government was able to contain the OAS and ultimately win greater public support for its engagement in negotiations for Algerian autonomy.

Throughout the period from 1960 to 1962, representatives of the French government and the FLN met in secret to work out the terms of an agreement for a cease-fire and an eventual withdrawal of forces. Several areas of contention, including the status of the oil-rich Sahara region, which France ceded to Algeria, and the civil rights and protection of members of the *colon* community, which the Algerians guaranteed, were eventually resolved and an agreement was signed in Evian in March 1962. It granted a full range of civil, political, economic, and cultural rights to the Algerians and guaranteed a popular referendum to decide whether the region should be a component of France or a sovereign state.[235] Independence for Algeria was achieved a few months later, in July 1962, when the referendum resulted in a near-unanimous vote in favor of independence.[236] After eight years of fighting and an

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[232] According to Alistair Horne, the OAS's objective was to render peace talks impossible by killing the remaining "men of good will" on both sides and conducing random outrages against the Muslim population, creating an atmosphere conducive to neither negotiation nor compromise. Horne, 2006; Beckett, 2001, p. 167.

[233] Chalk, 2007, p. 19.

[234] De Gaulle directly challenged the leaders of the coup by broadcasting to French conscripts over the heads of the rebel officers, urging them to remain loyal to the nation.

[235] Guy Arnold, *Wars in the Third World Since 1945*, London: Cassell Publishers, 1991, p. 8.

[236] Chalk, 2007, p. 20.

estimated 17,500 French soldiers killed and 65,000 wounded, in addition to between 200,000 and 1,000,000 Muslim deaths, France relinquished power in Algeria and conceded political defeat.[237]

Conventional Explanations

The success of the FLN in defeating the French army is often attributed to the insurgents' ability to effectively combine guerrilla strategies with a campaign of urban terrorism that discredited the French position in Algeria and ultimately overcame France's determination to maintain control over the region.[238] While the French invested heavily in the conflict and were able to destroy much of the insurgents' operational capability over the course of the eight-year war, this could not surmount the political advantage that the FLN achieved.

The FLN did not initially maintain a strong base of public support and was unable to draw significant attention to its cause. It was only during the second phase of the conflict that the insurgents realized that they could achieve a greater impact by pursuing terrorism as a tactic designed primarily to provoke an overreaction by French security forces, and they began to focus their efforts on civilian targets in the city of Algiers. As French Lieutenant Colonel David Galula, explained, the FLN found that "a grenade or bomb in a café [in Algiers] would produce far more noise than an obscure ambush against French soldiers in the Ouarsenis Mountains."[239]

Indeed, the French exhibited their greatest weakness in their response to the FLN terrorism campaign in Algiers. By undertaking reprisals against the civilian population and instituting widespread torture and abuse, the French allowed their rule to be defined as being morally corrupt and themselves as perpetrators of a brutal occupation. They not only estranged themselves from the Muslim population in Algiers, but they also disillusioned the public in metropolitan France and led international public opinion to shift more radically in sup-

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237 Horne, 2006, p. 538.

238 Chalk, 2007, p. 17.

239 Galula, 2006, p. v.

port of decolonization.[240] As Alistair Horne explained, "In the Algerian War what led—probably more than any other single factor—to the ultimate defeat of France was the realization in France and the world at large that methods of interrogation were being used that had been condemned under Nazi occupation."[241] Thus, French actions in Algiers succeeded in dismantling the legitimacy of French rule and exposing the insurgency to favorable world attention, just as the FLN leaders had intended.[242]

After the Battle of Algiers, the French employed a number of COIN techniques that were effective in reducing the military capacity of the FLN, yet in many ways, their impact was too little and too late. France's attempt to pacify the population by providing humanitarian and civic action assistance improved relations with the native population to some degree, but these initiatives could not overcome the lingering effects of the brutal campaign in Algiers or the subsequent agitation generated by radical *colons* who rejected any form of accommodation with the local population. The French army had more success in its effort to engage local Muslim fighters, or *harkis*, and in employing joint air-ground mobile defense units to attack insurgent bases. Moreover, interdiction efforts, including the well-patrolled electrified fences along the Tunisian and Moroccan borders, essentially cut off all cross-border traffic and nearly destroyed the FLN's organizational structure by the late 1950s. Because the French never truly addressed the political nature of the Algerian insurgency, however, such military victories had little bearing on the outcome of the war.

While fighting between the FLN and the French continued until 1962, spurred by violence initiated by the French intransigent settler population, most analysts mark the turning point in the war to be the Battle for Algiers, in which French policy first put brutal repression ahead of political accommodation. From that time on, France was in a position in which it could win military battles but could never win the war. While it took five years to gain significant force, pressure from the

240 Chalk, 2007, p. 24.

241 Horne, 2006, p. 19.

242 Hoffman, 2006, p. 64.

native population in Algeria, as well as from members of the public in Paris and global leaders in the UN, ultimately led President de Gaulle to grant Algeria full autonomy.

It has also been argued that, regardless of the approach the French took against the Algerian insurgency, they would have failed. Indeed, no COIN strategy or investment in military, political, or economic resources would likely have enabled the French (or any great power) to hold onto a colonial territory indefinitely against a determined national liberation movement in the second half of the 20th century and thus succeed against the sweeping tide of history.

Distinctive Characteristics

- Algeria was not only a colony, but it was also an incorporated region of France. Since 1848, French Algerians (members of the colon community) maintained representation in the national government and close political ties to metropolitan France. The region also had strategic value due to its location on the southern flank of Europe and the discovery of oil in the Sahara. The long history of association between France and Algeria led the French government (and its citizens) to become more committed to maintaining control over Algeria than of more remote colonial territories in sub-Saharan Africa and Indochina.[243] In 1954, French Interior Minister Francois Mitterand expressed such feelings in his plea to the National Assembly to support the Algerian war, stating, "Algeria is France. And who amongst you . . . would hesitate to employ all methods to preserve France?"[244]
- Nationalism among the native population was not inherently strong. Historically, the region was divided among Arabs and ethnic Berbers and had never been a unified Algerian nation. Even in the early stages of the war, a significant portion of the native population supported the French, who provided improvements

[243] Canuel, 2010.

[244] *Journal Officiel de la Republique Francaise*, 1954, quoted in Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 124.

in socioeconomic conditions and allowed for the continuation of local customs and traditions. Radical nationalist movements did not gain widespread support immediately after WWII as they had in the neighboring Arab countries of Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. Over time, however, a sense of Algerian nationalism grew stronger, nurtured by the rise of the Third World movement in 1950s and 1960s, and even more so by France's brutal repression, which led many native Algerians to believe that political autonomy for the nation was the only way to secure a peaceful future.

- The presence of a significant minority population in Algeria, descendants of French settlers, helped to solidify France's commitment to the region and initially aided in its COIN efforts. However, as the settlers, better known as *colons*, grew more radical, their demands to maintain full control over the country and to reject any form of compromise with the Muslim population proved to be a detriment to the French position in Algeria and prolonged the resolution of the conflict. The French settler movement grew so strong that it contributed to the collapse of the French Fourth Republic in 1958 and ultimately required the engagement of the army to contain its most radical forces.
- The FLN was one of the first insurgent groups to recognize the publicity value of terrorism to mobilize sympathy and support from broader audiences outside its theater of operations. FLN theoreticians, such as Ramdane Abane, saw calculated acts of terrorism as their ultimate weapon and a means of drawing international attention to the Algerian cause. The insurgents' urban terrorism campaign in Algiers, for example, was deliberately planned to coincide with the General Assembly's annual opening session.[245] Their success in developing the political dimension of terrorism became a model for subsequent national liberation movements, such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the African National Congress, by teaching that "international

[245] Hoffman, 2006, p. 54.

(and domestic) opinion . . . is sometimes worth more than a fleet of jetfighters."[246]

Figure 8
Map of Algeria

SOURCE: CIA, 2013.
RAND *RR291/2-8*

246 Hoffman, 2006, p. 61.