

Battle of Algiers

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 and also to plant bombs in public places. The most notable instance was the Battle of Algiers, which began on September 30, 1956, when three women, including Djamila Bouhired and Zohra Drif, simultaneously placed bombs at three sites including the downtown office of Air France. The FLN carried out shootings and bombings in the spring of 1957, resulting in civilian casualties and a crushing response from the authorities.

General Jacques Massu was instructed to use whatever methods deemed necessary to restore order in the city and to find and eliminate terrorists. Using paratroopers, he broke the strike and, in the succeeding months, destroyed the FLN infrastructure in Algiers. But the FLN had succeeded in showing its ability to strike at the heart of French Algeria and to assemble a mass response to its demands among urban Muslims. The publicity given to the brutal methods used by the army to win the Battle of Algiers, including the use of torture, strong movement control and curfew called *quadrillage* and where all authority was under the military, created doubt in France about its role in Algeria. What was originally "pacification" or a "public order operation" had turned into a colonial war accompanied by torture.

Guerrilla war

During 1956 and 1957, the FLN successfully applied hit-and-run tactics in accordance with guerrilla warfare theory. Whilst some of this was aimed at military targets, a significant amount was invested in a terror campaign against those in any way deemed to support or encourage French authority. This resulted in acts of sadistic torture and brutal violence against all, including women and children. 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 colonial 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, in accordance with Mao's theories. Kidnapping was commonplace, as were the ritual murder and mutilation of civilians[55][dubious – discuss] (see Torture section).

Although successfully provoking fear and uncertainty within both communities in Algeria, the revolutionaries' coercive tactics suggested that they had not yet inspired the bulk of the Muslim people to revolt against French colonial rule. Gradually, however, the FLN gained control in certain sectors of the Aurès, the Kabylie, and other mountainous areas around Constantine and south of Algiers and Oran. In these places, the FLN established a simple but effective—although frequently temporary—military administration that was able to collect taxes and food and to recruit manpower. But it was never able to hold large, fixed positions.

The loss of competent field commanders both on the battlefield and through defections and political purges created difficulties for the FLN. Moreover, power struggles in the early years of the war split leadership in the wilayat, particularly in the Aurès. Some officers created their own fiefdoms, using units under their command to settle old scores and engage in private wars against military rivals within the FLN.

French counter-insurgency operations

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 war. By 1956, there were more than 400,000 French troops in Algeria. Although the elite colonial infantry airborne units and the Foreign Legion bore the brunt of offensive counterinsurgency combat operations, approximately 170,000 Muslim Algerians also served in the regular French army, most of them volunteers. France also sent air force and naval units to the Algerian theater, including helicopters. In addition to service as a

flying ambulance and cargo carrier, French forces utilized the helicopter for the first time in a ground attack role in order to pursue and destroy fleeing FLN guerrilla units. The American military later used the same helicopter combat methods in the Vietnam War. The French also used napalm,[56] which was depicted for the first time in the 2007 film *L'Ennemi intime* (Intimate Enemies) by Florent Emilio Siri.[56]

The French army resumed an important role in local Algerian administration through the Special Administration Section (Section Administrative Spécialisée, SAS), created in 1955. The SAS's mission was to establish contact with the Muslim population and weaken nationalist influence in the rural areas by asserting the "French presence" there. SAS officers—called *képis bleus* (blue caps)—also recruited and trained bands of loyal Muslim irregulars, known as *harkis*. Armed with shotguns and using guerrilla tactics similar to those of the FLN, the *harkis*, who eventually numbered about 180,000 volunteers, more than the FLN activists,[57] were an ideal instrument of counterinsurgency warfare.

Harkis were mostly used in conventional formations, either in all-Algerian units commanded by French officers or in mixed units. Other uses included platoon or smaller size units, attached to French battalions, in a similar way as the Kit Carson Scouts by the U.S. in Vietnam. A third use was an intelligence gathering role, with some reported minor pseudo-operations in support of their intelligence collection.[58] U.S. military expert Lawrence E. Cline stated, "The extent of these pseudo-operations appears to have been very limited both in time and scope. ... The most widespread use of pseudo type operations was during the 'Battle of Algiers' in 1957. The principal French employer of covert agents in Algiers was the Fifth Bureau, the psychological warfare branch. "The Fifth Bureau" made extensive use of 'turned' FLN members, one such network being run by Captain Paul-Alain Leger of the 10th Paras. "Persuaded" to work for the French forces included by the use of torture and threats against their family; these agents "mingled with FLN cadres. They

planted incriminating forged documents, spread false rumors of treachery and fomented distrust. ... As a frenzy of throat-cutting and disemboweling broke out among confused and suspicious FLN cadres, nationalist slaughtered nationalist from April to September 1957 and did France's work for her." [59] But this type of operation involved individual operatives rather than organized covert units.

One organized pseudo-guerrilla unit, however, was created in December 1956 by the French DST domestic intelligence agency. The Organization of the French Algerian Resistance (ORAF), a group of counter-terrorists had as its mission to carry out false flag terrorist attacks with the aim of quashing any hopes of political compromise. [60] But it seemed that, as in Indochina, "the French focused on developing native guerrilla groups that would fight against the FLN", one of whom fought in the Southern Atlas Mountains, equipped by the French Army. [61]

The FLN also used pseudo-guerrilla strategies against the French Army on one occasion, with Force K, a group of 1,000 Algerians who volunteered to serve in Force K as guerrillas for the French. But most of these members were either already FLN members or were turned by the FLN once enlisted. Corpses of purported FLN members displayed by the unit were in fact those of dissidents and members of other Algerian groups killed by the FLN. The French Army finally discovered the war ruse and tried to hunt down Force K members. However, some 600 managed to escape and join the FLN with weapons and equipment. [61][16]:255–7

Late in 1957, General Raoul Salan, commanding the French Army in Algeria, instituted a system of quadrillage (surveillance using a grid pattern), dividing the country into sectors, each permanently garrisoned by troops responsible for suppressing rebel operations in their assigned territory. Salan's methods sharply reduced the instances of FLN terrorism but tied down a large number of troops in static defense. Salan also constructed a heavily patrolled system of barriers to limit infiltration from Tunisia and Morocco. The best known of these was the Morice Line (named for the French defense

minister, André Morice), which consisted of an electrified fence, barbed wire, and mines over a 320-kilometer stretch of the Tunisian border.

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. FLN guerrillas that fled to caves or other remote hiding places were tracked and hunted down. In one episode, FLN guerrillas who refused to surrender and withdraw from a cave complex were dealt with by French Foreign Legion Pioneer troops, who, lacking flamethrowers or explosives, simply bricked up each cave, leaving the residents to die of suffocation.[62]

Finding it impossible to control all of Algeria's remote farms and villages, the French government 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. In the three years (1957–60) during which the regroupement program was followed, more than 2 million Algerians[24] were removed from their villages, mostly in the mountainous areas, and resettled in the plains, where it was difficult to reestablish their previous economic and social systems. Living conditions in the fortified villages were poor. In hundreds of villages, orchards and croplands not already burned by French troops went to seed for lack of care. These population transfers effectively denied the use of remote villages to FLN guerrillas, who had used them as a source of rations and manpower, but also caused significant resentment on the part of the displaced villagers. Relocation's social and economic disruption continued to be felt a generation later.

The French Army shifted its tactics at the end of 1958 from dependence on quadrillage to the use of mobile forces deployed on massive search-and-destroy missions against FLN strongholds. In 1959, Salan's successor, General Maurice Challe, appeared to have suppressed major rebel resistance, but political developments had already overtaken the French Army's successes.