FLN

The FLN uprising presented nationalist groups with the question of whether to adopt armed revolt as the main course of action. During the first year of the war, Ferhat Abbas's Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto (UDMA), the ulema, and the Algerian Communist Party (PCA) maintained a friendly neutrality toward the FLN. The communists, who had made no move to cooperate in the uprising at the start, later tried to infiltrate the FLN, but FLN leaders publicly repudiated the support of the party. In April 1956, Abbas flew to Cairo, where he formally joined the FLN. This action brought in many évolués who had supported the UDMA in the past. The AUMA also threw the full weight of its prestige behind the FLN. Bendjelloul and the pro-integrationist moderates had already abandoned their efforts to mediate between the French and the rebels.

After the collapse of the MTLD, the veteran nationalist Messali Hadj formed the leftist Mouvement National Algérien (MNA), which advocated a policy of violent revolution and total independence similar to that of the FLN, but aimed to compete with that organisation. The Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN), the military wing of the FLN, subsequently wiped out the MNA guerrilla operation in Algeria, and Messali Hadj's movement lost what little influence it had had there. However, the MNA retained the support of many Algerian workers in France through the Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Algériens (the Union of Algerian Workers). The FLN also established a strong organization in France to oppose the MNA. The "Café wars", resulting in nearly 5,000 deaths, were waged in France between the two rebel groups throughout the years of the War of Independence.

On the political front, the FLN worked to persuade—and to coerce—the Algerian masses to support the aims of the independence movement through contributions. FLN-influenced labor unions, professional associations, and students' and women's organizations were created to lead opinion in diverse segments of the population, but here too, violent coercion was widely used. Frantz Fanon, a

psychiatrist from Martinique who became the FLN's leading political theorist, provided a sophisticated intellectual justification for the use of violence in achieving national liberation.[51] From Cairo, Ahmed Ben Bella ordered the liquidation of potential interlocuteurs valables, those independent representatives of the Muslim community acceptable to the French through whom a compromise or reforms within the system might be achieved.

As the FLN campaign of influence spread through the countryside, many European farmers in the interior (called Pieds-Noirs), many of whom lived on lands taken from Muslim communities during the nineteenth century,[52] sold their holdings and sought refuge in Algiers and other Algerian cities. After a series of bloody, random massacres and bombings by Muslim Algerians in several towns and cities, the French Pieds-Noirs and urban French population began to demand that the French government engage in sterner countermeasures, including the proclamation of a state of emergency, capital punishment for political crimes, denunciation of all separatists, and most ominously, a call for 'tit-for-tat' reprisal operations by police, military, and para-military forces. Colon vigilante units, whose unauthorized activities were conducted with the passive cooperation of police authorities, carried out ratonnades (literally, rat-hunts, raton being a racist term for denigrating Muslim Algerians) against suspected FLN members of the Muslim community.

By 1955, effective political action groups within the Algerian colonial community succeeded in convincing many of the Governors General sent by Paris that the military was not the way to resolve the conflict. A major success was the conversion of Jacques Soustelle, who went to Algeria as governor general in January 1955 determined to restore peace. Soustelle, a one-time leftist and by 1955 an ardent Gaullist, began an ambitious reform program (the Soustelle Plan) aimed at improving economic conditions among the Muslim population.

After the Philippeville massacre

The FLN adopted tactics similar to those of nationalist groups in Asia, and the French did not realize the seriousness of the challenge they faced until 1955, when the FLN moved into urbanized areas. "An important watershed in the War of Independence was the massacre of Pieds-Noirs civilians by the FLN near the town of Philippeville (now known as Skikda) in August 1955. Before this operation, FLN policy was to attack only military and government-related targets. The commander of the Constantine wilaya/region, however, decided a drastic escalation was needed. The killing by the FLN and its supporters of 123 people, including 71 French including old women and babies, shocked Jacques Soustelle into calling for more repressive measures against the rebels. The French authorities stated that 1,273 guerrillas died in what Soustelle admitted were "severe" reprisals. The FLN subsequently claimed that 12,000 Muslims were killed.:122 Soustelle's repression was an early cause of the Algerian population's rallying to the FLN. After Philippeville, Soustelle declared sterner measures and an all-out war began. In 1956, demonstrations by French Algerians caused the French government to not make reforms.

Soustelle's successor, Governor General Lacoste, a socialist, abolished the Algerian Assembly. Lacoste saw the assembly, which was dominated by pieds-noirs, as hindering the work of his administration, and he undertook the rule of Algeria by decree. He favored stepping up French military operations and granted the army exceptional police powers—a concession of dubious legality under French law—to deal with the mounting political violence. At the same time, Lacoste proposed a new administrative structure to give Algeria some autonomy and a decentralized government. Whilst remaining an integral part of France, Algeria was to be divided into five districts, each of which would have a territorial assembly elected from a single slate of candidates. Until 1958, deputies representing Algerian districts were able to delay the passage of the measure by the National Assembly of France.

In August and September 1956, the leadership of the FLN guerrillas operating within Algeria (popularly known as "internals") met to organize a formal policy-making body to synchronize the movement's political and military activities. The highest authority of the FLN was vested in the thirty-four member National Council of the Algerian Revolution (Conseil National de la Révolution Algérienne, CNRA), within which the five-man Committee of Coordination and Enforcement (Comité de Coordination et d'Exécution, CCE) formed the executive. The leadership of the regular FLN forces based in Tunisia and Morocco ("externals"), including Ben Bella, knew the conference was taking place but by chance or design on the part of the "internals" were unable to attend.

In October 1956, the French Air Force intercepted a Moroccan DC-3 bound for Tunis, carrying Ahmed Ben Bella, Mohammed Boudiaf, Mohamed Khider and Hocine Aït Ahmed, and forced it to land in Algiers. Lacoste had the FLN external political leaders arrested and imprisoned for the duration of the war. This action caused the remaining rebel leaders to harden their stance.

France opposed Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's material and political assistance to the FLN, which some French analysts believed was the revolution's main sustenance. This attitude was a factor in persuading France to participate in the November 1956 British attempt to seize the Suez Canal during the Suez Crisis.

During 1957, support for the FLN weakened as the breach between the internals and externals widened. To halt the drift, the FLN expanded its executive committee to include Abbas, as well as imprisoned political leaders such as Ben Bella. It also convinced communist and Arab members of the United Nations (UN) to put diplomatic pressure on the French government to negotiate a cease-fire. In 1957, it became common knowledge in France that the French Army was routinely using torture to extract information from suspected FLN members.[54] Hubert Beuve-Méry, the editor of Le Monde, declared in an edition on 13 March 1957: "From now on, Frenchman must know

that they don't have the right to condemn in the same terms as ten years ago the destruction of Oradour and the torture by the Gestapo." Another case that attracted much media attention was the murder of Maurice Audin, a Communist mathematics professor at the University of Algiers and a suspected FLN member whom the French Army arrested in June 1957.:224 Audin was tortured and killed and his body was never found.[54] As Audin was French rather than Algerian, his "disappearance" while in the custody of the French Army led to the case becoming a cause célèbre as his widow aided by the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet determinedly sought to have the men responsible for her husband's death prosecuted.

Existentialist writer, philosopher and playwright Albert Camus, native of Algiers, tried unsuccessfully to persuade both sides to at least leave civilians alone, writing editorials against the use of torture in Combat newspaper. The FLN considered him a fool, and some Pieds-Noirs considered him a traitor. Nevertheless, in his speech when he received the Nobel Prize in Literature, Camus said that when faced with a radical choice he would eventually support his community. This statement made him lose his status among left-wing intellectuals; when he died in 1960 in a car crash, the official thesis of an ordinary accident (a quick open-and-shut case) left more than a few observers doubtful. His widow claimed that Camus, though discreet, was in fact an ardent supporter of French Algeria in the last years of his life.