The Road to Algiers: The FLN Challenge and the French Response, 1954-1957

by
Jeffrey W. Mott

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Supervisor: Sean Kennedy PhD, History

Examining Board: Sean Kennedy PhD, History, Chair
David Charters PhD, History
Mark Jarman PhD, English

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Abstract

The Battle of Algiers (1956-1957) represents the turning point of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). During 1956 the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) shifted its strategy from rural guerilla operations to a campaign of urban terrorism in the capital of Algiers, where it expected that an increased exposure to international media would assist in its efforts to win international sympathy and diplomatic support. In response to the FLN challenge, French authorities deployed the 10th Parachute Division to Algiers, where it brutally suppressed the FLN, but alienated much international and domestic French public opinion because its members resorted to torture on a wide scale. Thus, politically, the Paras played into the hands of the FLN.

In order to explain why this happened, this thesis addresses three issues. First, by examining the formation and evolution of the FLN strategy, it provides a basis for assessing the accuracy of French intelligence assessments of the FLN's strategy and tactics. Second, through the examination of archival evidence, the thesis contends that French intelligence was generally accurate in its assessment of the FLN's strategy. Third, the thesis finds that while the French had a good understanding of the FLN's goals and tactics, the actual French response to the FLN was hindered by time constraints resulting from the FLN's campaign for international support. As a result, the French were forced to resort to cruder methods which ultimately contributed to their military success, but also their general political failure, in the Battle of Algiers.

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Introduction

On 6 January 1957 General Jacques Massu, the commanding officer of the 10th Parachute Division (DP), left a meeting with the Tenth Military Region commander General Raoul Salan. Massu had just received his orders to move the 10th DP into Algiers to take over police functions. The Front de Libération National (FLN), the Algerian revolutionary group, had been waging a brutal urban terror campaign since the fall of 1956. Faced with a deteriorating situation and the prospect of a general strike that was to coincide with an approaching United Nations General Assembly session to be held in the Fall of 1956, the Resident Minister handed over power to Salan, who in turn ordered Massu to deploy into Algiers. Massu called Colonel Yves Godard, his chief of staff, shortly after the meeting and added after explaining the orders that "I can tell you right away we are going to have heaps of *emmerdments*" to which Godard responded by saying "Yes general and much worse".[1] The conversation has a prophetic ring in light of the course of events which came to be known as the Battle of Algiers. The bombings, assassinations, torture and extrajudicial killings of that battle would become the main exhibit of the brutality of the Algerian conflict, which would earn the sobriquet *La Sale Guerre*, the dirty war.

The Algerian War of Independence began 1 November 1954 and lasted nearly eight years until 1962 when the Evian accords ended the conflict and gave birth to a free Algeria. The result was a paradox; the FLN did not exercise sovereignty over a single acre of Algerian territory. Their military wing, the *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN) was at its lowest ebb, having been sealed off in neighbouring

[1] Yves Godard, *Les Paras dans la Ville*, Fayard, 1972 "Je peux vous dire en ce moment que nous allons avoir des tas des emmerdements!" to which Godard responded "Oui mon general et tant pis".

Morocco and Tunisia and having suffered grievous casualties in actions against the French army, most notably during the Challe Offensive of 1959. Thus at the moment it ascended to statehood, the FLN's Algeria did not have the look of a modern state, namely physical control over a defined area. The FLN had, however, gained a priceless asset: legitimacy. The world and the majority of France conceded that the FLN had the right to govern a free and independent Algeria. The birth of Algeria arose from this conceptual victory rather than a material reality. The FLN's political victory spoke more to the fact that the movement had launched a sophisticated campaign to achieve its goal of independence, and while suffering grievously it had gained the initiative while the French, unable to adapt to the FLN strategy, lost legitimacy. The methods by which the French had attained preponderance over the FLN would be the root of their downfall. Victory in the realm of control led to defeat in the realm of legitimacy, which in turn brought down the whole house of cards of *Algérie Francaise*.

In retrospect, such an outcome might not seem suprising. During the Second World War millions of Europeans, including the French nation, had experienced the brutality of occupation and of the rise of resistance movements. While the French populace of the 1950s may not have explicitly recognized the relationship between control and legitimacy, their memories of the German occupation of 1940 and the atrocities of the Gestapo meant that a generation of Frenchmen needed no philosophical explanation; they had lived it. This raises the question as to why the French acted the way they did in Algeria. The Battle of Algiers marks the turning point of the struggle for legitimacy. The apparent French victory proved to be in fact

a decisive defeat for French claims to legitimacy. It gave the FLN an advantage in opinion which it did not relinquish, despite the defeats it would face in the years to come. The results of the battle are now well known. However, the question as to why the French failed to avoid bringing heaps of *emmerdements* onto the legitimacy of their cause contains to attract the attention of historians.

Sir Alistair Horne remarked that the sheer scope of the French Algerian war "presents a canvas of daunting size" for historian of the conflict.[2] The central place of the war in the history of post-war France and Algeria has ensured that a myriad of studies has been published. Few, however, are as ambitious as Horne's 1977 *A Savage war of Peace*, which remains the standard single volume narrative of the war.[3] The principle theme of Horne's work is that there were in fact several distinct conflicts occurring at the same time.[4] The war between the French and FLN was accompanied by internal conflicts on both sides and efforts in the international sphere. The work does not contain much in the way of in depth analysis due to its large scope. However, Horne's awareness of the multiple conflicts which took place during the war, pointed the way forward for subsequent scholarship.

Many of the published works on the Algerian War focus on one or more of the conflicts discussed by Horne, while treating the others more cursorily. John Talbott's

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[2] Sir Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, Pan Macmillan Ltd. London, 1977 p. 13

[3] Horne borrows heavily from journalist Yves Courriere's four volume history *La Guerre d'Algerie* Originally published 1968.1969,1970, 1971 respectively. Yves Courriere. Les Fils de la Toussaint, Editions Roberts Laffont, Paris, 1990, Yves Courriere, Le Temps des Leopards, Editions Roberts Laffont, Paris, 1990, Yves Courriere, L'Heure des Colonels, Editions Roberts Laffont, Paris, 1990. Yves Courriere ,Les Feux du Desespoir, Editions Roberts Laffont, Paris, 1990

[4] In a later work Horne categorizes 7 distinct conflicts: The fighting war itself, the political war for the "middle ground" in Algeria, a civil war between Algerians, a struggle within the FLN leadership, the external war fought on platforms of the outside world, a struggle between the Pied Noirs and metropolitan France, and the struggle between the French army in Algeria and the government in Paris. Sir Alistair Horne *The French Army and Politics from 1870-1970*, New York, Bedrick Books, 1984, pp. 77-78

The War without a Name covers a number of the issues pertaining to the French side of the conflict. Talbott's focus is on "those Frenchmen whose convictions on the Algerian question impelled them to take action."[5] The actions of French officers, politicians, antiwar activists, colonial leaders and writers attract the most attention in the work, while the FLN and international community figure only on the periphery. The core of Talbott's argument is that the French pursued a policy of repression and reform consistently until the decision was made by de Gaulle to disengage and that repression then came to be the dominant policy.[6] The general interpretation that the French increasingly focused more on the symptoms than on the underlying conditions of the revolt is representative of and largely upheld by the broader historiography.

The explanation of this policy drift towards repression is fairly consistent among the various works. The nature of the Fourth Republic's National Assembly created an institutional block to reforms due to the fact that it was elected on the basis of proportional representation. Governments invariably were based on coalitions and voting margins were narrow. The presence of a "settler lobby" meant that the *pied noirs* could block reform initiatives at the National Assembly level. The Algerian assembly was based on two electoral colleges, one European and one Muslim, with an equal number of votes. The requirement that decisions receive a two thirds majority essentially meant that the pied noirs had a *de facto* veto.[7] These institutional barriers denied successive French governments the ability to deal with endemic economic and racial disparities between Muslims and Europeans effectively.

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[5] John Talbot, *The War without a Name* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1980
[6] *Ibid*
[7] Horne p. 108.

The international dimension of the conflict has received attention in recent years As its title suggests, Irwin Wall's *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* focuses upon the significance of US-French relations, and the dynamics of the NATO alliance, for the Algerian war.[8] Wall emphasizes several key themes. The first is that during this time Algeria was the central problem of French diplomacy both for France and for those dealing with France. The second is that the internal dynamics of France added confusion to the practice of French diplomacy, again both for France and for those dealing with France. The third consists of an explanation of how and why the US lost interest in and concern for the Fourth Republic.

The third theme forms the core of Wall's analysis. From the beginning of hostilities in Algeria US support for the French was limited because communism was not a salient issue there. Without the specter of communism, the traditionally anti-colonialist Americans viewed Algeria as simply a colonial conflict, and were thus reluctant to support the French. This was notably in contrast to what had happened in Vietnam, where the issue of containing Communism, diluted the Americans' anti-colonialist stance. In the Algerian case, the US was particularly concerned with the weakening of NATO forces as more and more French troops were deployed to Algeria. The fear of losing the support of the Arab nations and the emerging Third World due to conciliatory policies if not outright support for France haunted US officials such as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and led to an increasingly negative American attitude towards French policy in Algeria.

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[8] Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States and the Algerian War* , University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001.

Martin Thomas's *The French North African Crisis: Colonial Breakdown and Anglo-French Relations, 1945-1962* provides an analysis of relations between fellow colonial powers Britain and France. Thomas argues that official British policy was to regard Algeria as an internal French issue, and to argue that as such the United Nations was unfit to intervene in the matter. However, privately the British were concerned with the crisis, and viewed it as part of a broader sequence of colonial turbulence.[9] The pragmatic view Britain took in their own colonies meant that they neither understood nor accepted France's emphasis on the distinct constitutional status of Algeria, which was considered an integral part of French territory, and was run through the Ministry of the Interior, rather than the Ministry of Colonies. Relations between the two countries deteriorated following their failed attempt to cooperate during the Suez Crisis in 1956. Thereafter the British became more cautious and concentrated on repairing relations with the US, while the French responded with increased military assertiveness and intensified the struggle within Algeria.Thomas concludes the British were relieved that France took on the role of imperial 'bogeyman' after Suez. Though Britain itself was engaged in many conflicts during the era of decolonization, notably campaigns in Palestine, Malaysia and Kenya, Thomas, like most historians of decolonization, concludes that compared to France these were less costly, and less destructive. "Algeria was a conflict apart, more brutal, more expensive and more divisive at home and abroad than anything in Britain's postwar experience of decolonization."[10]

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[9] Martin Thomas, *The French North African Crisis*, MacMillan Press, London, 2000, p.12
[10] Thomas p. 213

The two works discussed above are both Franco-centric: in them the FLN plays a very minor role internationally compared to the diplomacy between the major western powers. Matthew Connelly's *A Diplomatic Revolution* takes a different tack, by focusing on FLN diplomacy and its efforts to garner support in the UN and among the emerging Third World. Connelly shows that "For weapons the Algerians employed human rights reports, press conferences, and youth congresses, fighting over world opinion and international law more than conventional military objectives."[11] While this aspect of the FLN's activities has been previously acknowledged, Connelly's extensive research across multiple national archives gives his analysis hitherto unequalled depth. He shows how the FLN sought to shift the struggle from a military one to a battle for international support and sympathy. Connelly points out that, paradoxically, the more France tried to isolate Algeria the more it internationalized the conflict, the prime example of their involvement in the Suez crisis, motivated in part by Egypt's support of the FLN.[12] Indeed, Connelly see the internationalization of the Algerian War as an example of how "'globalization' through integrating markets, migrations, and new means of mass communication exacerbated cultural conflicts and caused increasing political fragmentation."[13] At the height of the Cold War, he suggests, developments that many consider to mark the post-Cold War era were already evident. That the FLN was successful was a testament to its position on the crest of this wave of change. Connelly, however, does

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[11] Connelly, Matthew, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post Cold War Era*, Oxford University Press, 2003 p. 4

[12] *Ibid* p. 5

[13] *Ibid*

not give the French army much credit for recognizing the importance of the international dimension of the conflict. Yet the archival evidence presented in this thesis suggests that the French army was well aware of the FLN's international strategy, though it proved unable to counter it effectively.

In sum, recent studies of the Algerian War which emphasize its international dimension tend to reinforce the conclusion that the FLN won on diplomatic grounds. Wall contends that Dulles's concern that the US prestige in Africa and the Middle East was being diminished by its close, if muted, support for France was a leading factor in worsening US-French relations. In turn, Dulles's concern reflects the growing influence of a Third World that was itself being influenced by the FLN's diplomatic efforts, as described by Connelly.

France's increasingly repressive Algerian policy led to a growing role for the military. One of the earliest works to consider the role of the French Army was George Armstrong Kelly's *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis 1947-1962.* In his work Kelly identifies eight threads running through the history of the French army after the Second World War. The first two are the themes of decolonization and the deterioration of the national political institutions of the Fourth Republic, which proved unable to extricate the country from colonial quagmires. The next two deal with the progressive alienation of the military from the *métropole* and the experience of defeat in ambiguous battles such Indochina and Suez. The Cold War and the rejection of military opinion that Algeria was the latest front of the Cold War by the civilian government form the next two threads. Having faced repeated defeats, feeling alienated from the civilian government, and growing increasingly

obsessed with defeating Communist insurgency. French officers articulated the doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire*, which was essentially Maoist revolution in reverse and increased the Army's involvement in politics to the point of threatening the survival of the democratic regime. This in turn led to the final thread explored by Kelly, the return of Charles de Gaulle as French president, and his growing clashes with the army.[14]

Kelly's work exhibits some problems that are addressed in a recent collection of essays concerning the military aspects of the war. Martin Alexander and John Keiger argue for the importance of looking at war as just that and therefore "analyzing the adversaries' war aims and thus diplomatic efforts, war strategies, and war making."[15] They see two distorting themes present in the historiography of the military. First is the concentration on political interventionism by a small but influential minority of the army. The second is the tendency in Kelly's work to consider only the extremes of the army, namely the militant Parachutists and the Foreign Legion – those elements that played the biggest role in political intervention – on the one hand, and the mass of unwilling conscripts on the other.[16] The essays in the collection paint a more complex picture of the French military. In "Seeking France's 'Lost Soldiers' Reflections on the French Military in Crisis in Algeria" Martin Alexander proposes a three-fold typology of the "armies within the army."[17]

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[14] George Armstrong Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis 1947-1962*, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1965, p. 12

[15] Martin S. Alexander & J.F.K Keiger, *France and the Algerian War 1954-62: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy* Frank Cass, London, 2002, p. 3

[16] *Ibid* p. 20

[17] Martin S. Alexander, "Seeking Frances Lost Soldiers: Reflections on the French Military Crisis in Algeria", from Movre, Kenneth, & Alexander, Martin S. Eds, Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918-1962 Beghahn Books, New York, 2002, p. 242

The first is the traditional officer corps, many of whom had served in colonial units for the duration of their careers and who held senior rank during the war. The next category is the warrior caste. They were younger officers who had come of age during the Second World War and in Indochina. They were the group that created the doctrine of *la guerre révolutionnaire*. The final group is the reservists and conscripts. Studies like this and others cited by Alexander have begun to sort through the myriad of layers within the army. The upshot of all this is that while proponents of *guerre revolutionaire* were a politically active minority they were not the only part of the army. Even those of the 'warrior caste' were not all rigid adherents.

Indeed, some historians have reassessed the role of *guerre révolutionnaire* doctrine altogether. A recent article by Christopher Cradock and M.L.R. Smith, for example, explores the actual influence of the theory of *guerre révolutionnaire* on the conduct of the Battle of Algiers. They conclude that the French conduct in Algiers was influenced by exigency and recent experience rather than doctrinal orthodoxy.[18] The mass of writings on 'revolutionary war' did not translate into implementation of the theory. However, James McDougall has taken issue with Cradock and Smith's argument. Firstly, he notes that the doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire* was "no more relevant than were equally elegant, but equally fantastic theories of 'civilizing mission' or 'assimilation'"[19] Moreover, he turns Cradock and Smith's argument, that the prevalence of torture among the police led to its adoption by the army as an

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[18] Christopher, Cradock, and M.L.R., Smith, "'No Fixed Values': A reinterpretation of the influence of the Theory of guerre révolutionaire and the Battle of Algiers, 1956-1957". *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9:4 (Fall 2007),pp. 68-105, p. 105

[19] *Ibid* p. 2

expedient necessity, on its head by noting that the practice long predated the conflict, and can be situated in a much longer history of colonial repression.[20] While this critique is well placed, it too is problematic in that it imposes a uniform continuity of some 130 years onto the French forces. Many if not most of the French soldiers who served in Algeria had no connection to Algeria or the *pied noirs*. The tension between even the units of the *Réserve Générale* and the *pied noirs* is well established in the historiography. All of this casts doubt on the McDougall's emphasis upon continuity.

Inevitably, any discussion of the Algerian war comes to the widespread use of torture by French forces. That torture was considered immoral at the time is not in doubt; one only has to look at the trials of the Nazis after the Second World War to establish that. Torture's moral position meant its practice was damaging in the long-term to French legitimacy, no matter how expedient it may or may not have been. The question then becomes: why did elements of the forces of order choose to practice torture when it was not morally or pragmatically in the interest of the French. In her book *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War* Rita Maran argues that it was the French colonial concept of the civilizing mission – i.e., that France had a right, and a duty, to bring its values to its colonial peoples - which ultimately led to torture. Maran argues that the ideology of the civilizing mission was "simultaneously drawn from and undercutting the doctrine of the "rights of man."[21] The French believed that they had a duty to crush the insurrection, because it imperiled the

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[20] *Ibid* p. 6

[21] Rita Maran. *Torture: The role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War*, Praeger, New York, 1989, p. 188

survival of civilized values, and hence the salvation of colonial peoples. Those who stood in the way of this process had to be neutralized, even if meant torture.

Maran's interpretation situates torture within the broader history of French colonialism, but it too risks oversimplifying the situation. Archival documents suggest a more complicated picture. They suggest that the army was mindful of the negative effects of harsh methods. Moreover various military officials suggested alternatives, emphasizing methodical intelligence collection instead of crude ad hoc responses. However, a recurring theme in the records is the pressure of time. While the French understood the danger posed by ruthless methods, the pressure placed on them by the FLN's strategy led them to place a premium on rapid action. While the various ideological explanations have their place the prime motivation was grounded in operational imperative.

While it is clear that historians have explored French military policy in greater depth, what of the FLN? One impediment to exploring the history of the war is the disparity between French and Algerian sources. The FLN was a clandestine group, always on the move: written records were liabilities, and are therefore in shorter supply. Additionally, as will be seen, the decentralized nature of the organization also discouraged comprehensive record keeping.[22] Nevertheless, a number of important works on the Algerian side of the conflict have been published. Edgar O'Ballance's *The Algerian Insurrection* presents a history of the conflict with a large focus on the FLN. His core theme is that the insurrection "was instigated and motivated by a small group of power-hungry, determined individuals who forced the Muslim population,

[22] *Ibid* p. 14

initially by terrorist methods, to adopt and help further their program. This was the seizure of total power, the ejection of the French and the subjugation of the Europeans in the country."[23] O'Ballance argues that in the opening years of the war, the FLN and its armed wing, the Armèe de Libération Nationale (ALN), adopted a primarily military approach, but as the war progressed political and diplomatic mobilization were more important, and ultimately provided the key to victory.[24]

Terror was part of the FLN's strategy, and for Martha Crenshaw the movement is an important example of the phenomenon of revolutionary terrorism. According to Crenshaw revolutionary terrorism is a drive for political power with logical objectives and observable consequences.[25] She defines different types of terrorism within this framework, largely by their target and desired audience. Like O'Ballance, Crenshaw looks at what she calls compliance terrorism that was used to gain adherents to the FLN program. Other acts were designed to gain international exposure for the FLN, such as the attacks that comprised the Battle of Algiers. Her work illustrates the theoretical underpinnings of terrorism, but it does not provide a detailed exploration of conflicting opinions within the FLN, nor the imperfect comprehension of the principles of revolutionary terrorism by FLN leaders.

By contrast, William Quandt discusses the internal divisions, and shifting composition, of the FLN leaders in *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria, 1954-1968*. Quandt notes that earlier generations of Algerian nationalists were

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[23] *Ibid* p. 9

[24] Edgar O'Ballance, *The Algerian Insurrection, 1954-1962*, Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1967 p. 220

[25] Martha Crenshaw, *Revolutionary Terrorism*, Hoover Institution press, Stanford, 1978p. 130

mostly liberals who favored assimilation. They were succeeded by radicals who sought to gain independence through mass mobilization and violence, but at the end of the Second World War the radicals were greatly weakened by French repression. One infamous example was the killing of thousands of Algerians in the wake of nationalist demonstrations, and the killing of French settlers, at the village of Sétif on 8 May 1945. After the war, a new generation, the militants, who relied on violence alone, came to the fore, and eventually formed the core of the FLN.[26] Once the 1954 uprising had begun, other groups were absorbed into the FLN either through cooption or terror. Within the FLN there were also conflicts, notably between the interior and external factions (those operating inside Algeria and those living in exile) as well as between the political and military leaders. The decentralized command structure of the FLN – each regional commander was eventually put in charge of a *wilayah* (district) – led to further competition for resources and influence.

Once the FLN began its uprising in 1954 and the war got underway, attrition led to the rise of a new generation of leaders, who in their turn altered the FLN's strategy over time. O'Ballance's observation of the initial focus on military action being replaced over time by political action directly correlates with FLN membership patterns. All of the themes introduced in Quandt's and O'Ballance's work are analyzed in greater depth in Gilbert Meynier's *Histoire Intérieure de la FLN* which has the advantage of access to FLN document collections extant in both Algeria and

[26] William B. Quandt, *Revolutionary Leadership*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1969 p. 278

in France.[27] Increased insight into the FLN not only gives greater context to the French actions in Algeria but also to the broader historiography of the war.

The Battle of Algiers, which lasted from October 1956 to October 1957, represented the turning point in the FLN's struggle for legitimacy. Growing public awareness of French atrocities committed during the battle allowed the FLN to reach its audience in metropolitan France and around the world. Having gained growing support and legitimacy, the FLN was able to focus more on political tasks, and not solely mere survival. The Battle of Algiers was a costly victory for the movement, but a decisive one. But how did the FLN 'win' the battle, and how did the French lose it? How smooth was the development of FLN strategy? Did the French understand the kind of enemy they were facing? If so, then why were they unable to defeat the FLN? These are the questions explored in the following chapters.

On the issue of the nature and development of FLN strategy, contemporary sources and recent historiography emphasizes that the movement had deep divisions, and that its approach evolved in a gradual, sometimes disorderly fashion. While most of the FLN leadership believed it was necessary to internationalize the conflict while they struggled against the French, the opinions on how to achieve internationalization were diverse. The gravity of provoking reprisals by the French in response to FLN attacks was not lost on the leadership who had lived through other uprisings and repressions. Initial French reactions led the FLN to adopt greater use of terror to provoke their enemies, lest their rebellion become isolated and then die a slow death. The murky environment of the FLN presented a barrier for French intelligence

[27] Gilbert Meynier, *L'Historie Interieure du FLN 1954-1962*, Fayard, Paris, 2002

seeking to discern the FLN's intentions, which leads to the second question: how well did the French understand their enemy?

Answering this question entails an exploration of what historian Martin Thomas calls the cognitive map of the French security services.[28] Contemporary intelligence assessments provide great insight into determining what the French knew or thought they knew about the FLN's intentions. The French interpretations of the the FLN's strategy were fairly accurate from a relatively early point in the conflict, around the time of the FLN's shift in focus towards urban terror in 1956. Nor was French intelligence hopelessly compromised by looking at developments from a rigidly ideological lens. Most of the military intelligence reports assessed in this thesis, for example, did not fall prey to labeling the rebellion as pan-Arab or Communist. The evidence contradicts the notion that French actions in Algiers were essentially the result of misunderstanding the nature of the FLN challenge. This raises the final issue of how the French tried to respond and what factors affected their response, from conception to execution.

The root of the French failure is the third and final issue of the formulation and execution of the French response. The FLN's multifaceted strategy – its recourse to terror, its efforts at popular mobilization, and its quest for international sympathy through the UN and other methods – led the French to operate under major time constraints, and to decide to rely upon harsh methods. Moreover, the struggle for adequate manpower meant that the French presence could not extend everywhere: this created intelligence gaps, but also encouraged a sense of desperation, and thus the

[28] Martin Thomas, Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914 University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008, p.9

willingness to use extreme measures. In particular, while French manpower levels had surged in the summer of 1956 they were beginning to decline with the end of reserve terms by the fall of that year. This happened at a time when the FLN was beginning to increase the intensity of its urban terror campaign in Algiers in the lead up to a United Nations General Assembly meeting, and when the French were redeploying assets, notably the 10th Parachute Division (DP), for the Suez operation of October 1956.

In addition to these problems, the French army's response was undermined by a progressive diffusion of authority. Increasingly, the civil authorities in Algeria abrogated control to the military, which was ill-prepared for the assumption of such tasks. The FLN had struck the Achilles heel of the French. They moved the battle to a location and changed its dynamics to the point where the French could not adapt. By adopting urban terrorism the FLN gained the upper hand politically. The more problems they created, the stronger the French response had to be. The French army's shortcomings in this realm were not primarily ideological, or reflective of a long unbroken tradition. The immediate mindset of the soldiers, the lack of urban training, coupled with an abrupt change of the nature of operations, led the French military to engage in increasing numbers of atrocities. Despite their understanding of the enemy, and some appreciation of the benefits of a pragmatic response, the French failed to adapt to the challenge of urban terrorism, a challenge that still bedevils nations in the present.

Chapter 1: The Origins and Development of FLN Strategy

On 1 November 1 1954, *Toussaint* or All Saints day, the opening gambit of the FLN played out across Algeria. Small bands of rebels launched sporadic attacks. These attacks achieved negligible results in spite of high hopes by their architects, who had optimistically hoped that they would inspire a general uprising.[1] The inauspicious results of the *Toussaint* uprising belied the future historical auspiciousness of the date that marked the beginning of the Algerian War of Independence. The FLN managed to achieve victory against great odds, challenging French power and paradoxically defeating France without defeating French forces. The FLN were able to achieve this paradoxical victory by expanding the struggle beyond the borders of both Algeria and the scope of conventional conflict. By attacking the legitimacy of the French cause internationally the FLN was able to overcome their lack of success in wresting physical control of Algeria from the French.[2]

The key point in the battle for legitimacy was the Battle of Algiers in 1956-57. The battle exposed the vicious means employed by both the French and FLN to the world. The success of the French effort to regain control of Algiers initially overshadowed the significant effect the battle had on their legitimacy. Like a ferocious body blow in a boxing match that drains the pugilist of his reserves but does not knock him out, the FLN had scored a decisive blow against France that would only tell in subsequent years. The lens of history shows that the victory in Algiers clearly belonged to the FLN and stands as a validation of their strategic approach. Moreover this strategic

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[1] William B. Quandt, *Revolutionary Leadership*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. 93.
[2] Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post Cold War Era*, Oxford University Press, Oxford? 2003, p. 5.

approach was not a product of blind luck but rather the result of a carefully conceived plan by men who had plotted the overthrow of French colonial rule long before 1 November 1954. However it was not an approach that was unanimously supported by all of the revolutionaries, and as such its unfolding and success require analysis of the internal disputes which took place within the revolutionary cadre that shaped it.

There are three dominant themes shaping the development of the FLN strategy and organization. The first is the conflict between legalist and activist strategies, which is to say between legal actions such as participation in elections versus armed uprisings, in the pre-*Toussaint* revolutionary cadre. After the *Toussaint* uprising the debate shifted to those who favoured limited action versus those who advocated unlimited action. This division was the principal driving force of change within the revolutionary movement. The second theme is the contest for direction of the FLN between the internal and external delegations, those located in war torn Algeria and those beyond, particularly in Egypt. The difficulty in moving and coordinating men and material between Algeria, where the fighting was actually happening, and the international arena where both means and support were to be procured, affected the conduct and coordination of the war. The conflict was resolved for a time in favour of the internal representatives at a conference held in the Soummamm valley in August 1956. The Soummamm conference also helped resolve the third theme, the conflict between the militants and politicians.[3] The FLN's ranks grew from the initial cadre of militants, as members of other nationalist organizations either rallied to the FLN banner or were coerced to join. The friction between the original revolutionaries and the *tard venus*[4] was placated at the conference

[3] Quandt, *op.cit*, pp. 85-86
[4] Trans. literally "late comers."

and the experience of the politicians was blended with the activism of the militants. This conflict was also linked to the debate between the proponents of legalism and the activists. Out of these disputes emerged the FLN strategy in Algiers.

The roots of Algerian resistance can be found within three distinct strands: the Association of Ulema, led by Sheikh Abdulhamid Ben Badis, the liberals led by Ferhat Abbas, and the revolutionaries led by Messali Hadj. The Ulema represented the spiritual center of Algerian nationalism, emphasizing the centrality of Islam to Algerian national identity. One historian summed up the Ulema's position as follows: "Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, Algeria is my country."[5] The liberals led by Ferhat Abbas, were predominantly made up of members of the intelligentsia who supported a middle of the road approach, advocating "neither force nor base submission" to the colonial regime.[6] The final group, the revolutionaries, was led by Messali Hadj, often referred to as simply Messali, who initially operated under the pan-Maghrebian banner of the *Étoile Nord Africain* (ENA). The ENA's platform called for the independence of all three Maghreb nations (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia).[5] After this party was dismantled by the French, Messali founded the *Parti Progressiste d'Algérie* (PPA) which focused on Algeria alone. As will be seen this group balkanized in the aftermath of the Second World War. The catalyst for the breakdown of the revolutionaries cohesion was the Sétif uprising and subsequent bloody repression.

The Second World War and the humiliating defeat of France raised the hopes of both the liberals and the revolutionaries. However the bloody sacrifices of the Algerian soldiers under the French banner in Italy and France brought Abbas to declare that "the

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[5] Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, Pan Macmillan Ltd. London, 1977, p. 38.
[6] *Ibid* p. 73.
[5] Quandt, *op.cit*, p.39

French colony only admits equality with Muslim Algerians on one level: sacrifice on the battlefields."[6] As the war came to an end, the French seemed to make concessions. At the opening of the 1944 Brazzaville Conference which dealt with French colonial relations, for instance, General de Gaulle declared:

> ...in French Africa, as in all the other countries where men live under our flag, no progress will be possible if the men and women on their native soil do not benefit materially and spiritually and if they are not able to raise themselves to the point where they are capable of taking a hand in the running of their countries. It is France's duty to see that this comes about.[7]

For the Algerian Nationalist this was too little too late, and despite differences in views Abbas soon aligned with Messali's PPA and formed the *Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté* (AML).[8] The stage was set for the Sétif uprising.

The armistice celebrations of May 8 1945 were a time a celebration through much of Europe and among those nations involved in the Second World War. Algeria was no different and in much of the country Algerian nationalist slogans and banners were tolerated without serious incident.[9] In the town of Sétif the demonstrations were allowed, but the display of banners was not permitted. However, banners calling for the liberation of the imprisoned Messali and for independence for Algeria made an appearance. So did the first green and white Algerian flag, apparently on the orders of the PPA in defiance of advice given by the AML to the contrary.[10] The gendarme in charge ordered the flag seized and in the ensuing struggle gunshots of unknown origin rang out, sparking

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[6] *Ibid* p.42.
[7] http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/article.php3?id_article=512give Accessed 9 May 2009
[8] Horne, *op. cit*, p.42.
[9] Gilbert Meynier, *L'Historie Interieure du FLN 1954-1962*, Fayard, Paris, 2002, p. 66.
[10] *Ibid.;* see also Quandt, *op.cit*, p. 51.

widespread violence.[11] Despite interdictions by the AML to the contrary many of the demonstrators were armed and in short order 29 were killed and dozens wounded: the violence spread into the surrounding areas as Muslim Algerians fell upon the *colons* with ferocity. Messali and the AML leadership then sought to capitalize on the improvised uprising by ordering a general uprising on 23 May.[12] However as the order for insurrection was being given the French authorities were regaining control, and they soon launched a massive counter-attack. While the final total of European casualties was put at 103, the Algerian death toll was much higher, ranging from French estimates of around 1300 to as high as 45,000 announced by Radio Cairo. As one historian notes, even if one accepts the French estimate there is a 10-1 disparity between European and Algerian casualties.[13] The French general in charge of the operation prophetically remarked that he had probably secured peace for about ten years.[14]

The Sétif uprising and its aftermath cast a long shadow over the Algerian revolutionary movement. The ensuing repression caused a split among revolutionaries as to the way forward. For many armed action was now firmly associated with massive repression, rendering it an unviable option. However, the fraudulent elections of the late 1940s, most notably the 1948 Algeria Assembly elections, which were rigged in favour of pro-French candidates at the expense of the nationalist parties, meant that in the view of the nationalists armed action was the increasingly the only option.[15]

The alliance between the liberal moderates and revolutionaries ended with the dissolution of the AML. Abbas founded the *Union Démocratique pour la Manifeste*

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[11] Horne, *op.cit*, p. 25. See also Meynier, *op.cit*, pp. 66-67.
[12] Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 66.
[13] Horne, *op.cit*, p. 27.
[14] Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 68.
[15] Horne, op. cit, pp. 70-71

Algérien (UDMA) which renounced the armed approach to independence.[16] Messali resurrected his organization as the *Mouvement pour la triomphe des libertés démocratiques* (MTLD) and shifted his focus to the education of the population and elections rather than armed insurrection.[17] Messali's move to participate in elections drew criticism from the radical elements of the MTLD, who perceived participation as tantamount to cooperation with colonialism.[18] The radicals' reticence was reinforced by the endemic fraud and intimidation of Muslim candidates that plagued Algerian electoral politics.[19] The MTLD was divided on the question of means and methods of achieving independence.[20] These differences were present at the first MTLD conference held on 15 February 1947. There a radical by the name of Hocine Aït Ahmed presented a report which argued for clandestine and armed action, holding that war with France was inevitable. Messali countered by arguing that the moment had come and gone with the Operation Torch landing in 1942 and that the political conditions were not yet ready for such an endeavor.[21] However as a compromise with the radicals a new clandestine armed wing, the *Organisation Spéciale* (OS), was established in order to shore up party unity. Messali, while not rejecting armed struggle outright, remained reticent, as the risk of a new repression like that at Sétif in May 1945 was a distinct possibility.[22]

The OS was comprised of young militants who were drawn from the middle class and as such tended to be better educated than the average Muslim Algerian.[23] They were personally religious but most of the leadership held modern views on Islam, and their

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[16] Meynier, op. cit, p. 69, see also Quandt p. 53.
[17] *Ibid*, p. 80. see also Quandt p.54.
[18] *Ibid*, p. 76.
[19] *Ibid*, p. 77. see also Quandt, pp. 54-58.
[20] *Ibid*, p. 79.
[21] *Ibid*, p. 79, see also Quandt pp. 60-61.
[22] *Ibid*, p. 80.
[23] Quandt, p. 75.

political ideology showed many secular influences. The leadership was versed in the Irish, Mexican and Russian Revolutions, as well as recent developments in Vietnam. Its members shared a fascination with organization, techniques, and the art of war: Aït Ahmed in particular was very familiar with Clauswitz.[24] Messali had supported the Sétif uprising in a limited tactical sense as a provocation for Anglo-American intervention.[25] Aït Ahmed took this further, concluding, on the basis of previous revolutionary situations, that Algeria faced unprecedented obstacles, principally a large and powerful settler population.[26] In light of these impediments Aït Ahmed concluded that a sophisticated international strategy was required, involving a flexible diplomatic balancing act between East and West.[27] Part and parcel of this strategy would be to appeal to the Afro-Asiatic bloc, using Islam as a mobilizing factor. As the war approached the revolutionaries worked to prepare their international strategy.

Some of these assessments, most notably those concerning the attitude of the US, were flawed. For instance, the revolutionaries concluded that the US was favorably disposed to anti-imperialism. But in spite of the revolutionaries' hopes, the US was cautious with respect to the Maghreb, as it was not willing to destabilize Franco-American relations, especially with respect to NATO.[28] Nevertheless, the hope of an alliance with the US caused the MTLD to position itself as anticommunist. MTLD deputies remained silent on the Indochina question in the National Assembly. Such anticommunism was extended to labour issues, as links were sought with the

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[24] *Ibid*, pp. 83-84.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 80.
[26] Connelly, *op.cit*, p. 47.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 75, see also Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States and the Algerian War* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001

Confédération internationale des syndicates libres (CISL) and not the communist *Fédération syndicale mondiale* (FSM).[29] Ironically, as will be seen in the next chapter, this stance would not prevent some French officials from attempt to cast the FLN as a communist threat.

The OS was dissolved in 1951-52 by a series of arrests; however it made several contributions to the revolutionary organization.[30] First and foremost were the analyses of previous and contemporary struggles and the application of the lessons learned in assessing Algeria's revolutionary potential. The primary example of this is Aït Ahmed's report discussed above. In addition, the OS adopted a compartmentalized cellular structure, which enhanced secrecy as well as imposing a hierarchy; the FLN would later benefit from these innovations.[31] Systemic planning was emphasized, as evident in the adoption of the "Law of three phases" which was a progression of stages starting with propaganda and agitation, leading to organization, and finally armed insurrection.[32] The influence of Maoist theory is readily apparent here.[33] More generally, while the OS was suppressed and many of its members were arrested, as a whole the influence of the militants was growing while the fortunes of the moderates were diminishing.

Meanwhile, a schism between Messali's followers and the centralist faction of the MTLD had developed by the early 1950s. The rise of a cult of personality around Messali rankled many in the MTLD, and was the principle source of tension. The aversion to charismatic leaders continued to be a factor within the revolutionary movement and as a result the militants favoured collegial decision-making. The rise of anti-Messalism

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[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid*, p. 87, see also Quandt, *op.cit*, p. 83
[31] *Ibid*, p. 82.
[32] *Ibid*, p. 81.
[33] See Ian F. W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* Routledge, New York, 2001

among the centralists brought them into an alliance with the militants, who had long been discouraged by Messali's reticence about an armed uprising. Together they founded the *Comité révolutionnaire d'unité et d'action* (CRUA). The centralists felt that by adding the voices of the "*lourds*," or militants, Messali could be contained. This stance undermined chances of restoring unity to the MTLD. The CRUA was further radicalized as former OS members joined its ranks, and the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in Indochina on 8 May 1954 raised hopes of successful armed insurrection.[34] However the failure to resolve the differences between Messalist and centralist factions at the conference of Hornu in July resulted in the dissolution of the CRUA, as the militants began to move towards active rebellion.[35] The centralists passed a resolution shortly after the dissolution to:

> Continue accelerating preparations for the fight in case North African or international events create favorable conditions for the stronger and effective fight towards achieving the objectives of the party and Algerian people, and to enable the party to play its historic role in this process.[36]

The shift from legalism towards militant action on part of the centralists is clearly evident. However, while the centralists adopted a more bellicose tone the militants were already in the process of launching an insurrection.

The militants then gained the support of Belkacem Krim, a Kabyle (Berber) veteran of the French resistance, after negotiations which assuaged Krim's misgivings over Arab domination of the militant group, by assenting to establish Kabylie as an independent zone.[37] This, however, precipitated the division of territory into *wilayahs* and

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[34] *Ibid*, p. 122.
[35] *Ibid*, p. 123.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid*, p. 124, see also Horne, *op.cit*, pp. 77-78.

would cause coordination problems. The break of the militants from the CRUA challenges the notion that the organization was the direct progenitor of the FLN.[38] In fact the remnants of the CRUA were completely comprised of ex-OS members and Kabyles led by Krim who had hitherto been largely uninvolved in the various permutations of nationalist organizations.[39] Intended as vehicle for reconciliation of the various factions of the MTLD, the CRUA had served only to allow the militants to move to the forefront and ensure that the insurrection would be launched in short order. The militants did so by forming a new group, the FLN, whose formation coincided with the *Toussaint* attacks. The influence of the OS is undeniable when the backgrounds of the *neuf historiques*, the original leadership of the FLN, are examined; of the nine chiefs eight were ex OS members.[40]

The launch of the insurrection on 1 November 1954 represented the victory of the proponents of armed action over legalism. The process by which that victory had been achieved had several important effects. The first and foremost was that the FLN was anything but a mass movement. In fact, within the context of the entire population of Algeria it was in fact a minority of a minority.[41] While the rest of the nationalist movement was caught off guard by the outbreak of hostilities they still remained potent rivals to the militants' leadership, especially Messali, who would form yet another organization, the *Mouvement Nord Africain* (MNA). As a result, some veteran revolutionaries were left on the outside looking in during the initial months of the

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[38] Quandt, *op.cit*, pp. 88-92,see also Horne, *op.cit*, pp. 83-84.
[39] Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 124.
[40] Horne, *op.cit*, p. 76, Quandt, *op.cit*, p. 92, The nine were Hocine Aït Ahmed, Ahmed Ben Bella, Mostefa Ben Boulaid, Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Rabah Bitat, Mohamed Boudiaf, Mourad Didouche, Mohamed Khider, Belkacem Krim.
[41] Edgar, O'Ballance, *The Algerian Insurrection, 1954-1962*, Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1967

insurrection. When they began to rally to the FLN they brought their experience, but also inspired friction, as they were regarded as *tard venus* by the original militants. At this point little was certain beyond the fact that the conflict had begun. The structure of the FLN was still in flux, and its strategic plan envisioned little beyond survival. However in a short two years the FLN would gain the structure and strategic direction that would allow it to turn the tide.

The revolutionaries set out their platform in a short communiqué issued concurrently with the 1 November attacks. The tract identified two sets of objectives, internal and external. The internal objectives were in essence attacks on the rest of the nationalist movement. The first spoke of political housecleaning to put the Algerian nationalist movement back on the proper path and to remove the corruption and reformism that had led to its regression.[42] In other words the message was that the FLN would tolerate no rivals, who would be eliminated. The communiqué then adopted a more neutral tone as it called for the organization of all Algerians to further the struggle. The explanation of the external objectives began with a vague call to internationalize the Algerian problem. The communiqué then called for North African unity and finished with a resolution to gain sympathy for the Algerian cause from the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The tract closed with a summation:

> [The FLN will] conform to its revolutionary principles while taking into account the interior and exterior situations by continuing the fight by any means until the realization of our goals. To reach that end the FLN has two essential tasks that shall be acted upon simultaneously: an internal action as much political as it is armed action and an external action to make the Algerian problem a reality to the world with the support of our natural allies.[43]

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[42]Mohammed Harbi & Gilbert Meynier, *Le FLN: Documents et Histoire 1954-1962*, Fayard, 2004 ; Harbi, *op.cit.*, p. 37.
[43] *Ibid.*

While the impressive rhetoric of the 1 November proclamation was not matched by initial military successes, it did articulate the way forward and was largely followed, with varying degrees of success, until the FLN attained Algerian independence.

The principal obstacle to realizing the proclamation's goals during the early years of the revolt was the lack of a stable organizational and decision-making structure. The outbreak of hostilities had two significant effects on the FLN. The first was that when the revolution began they represented only a fraction of the Algerian nationalists. In addition, casualties and arrests during and after the *Toussaint* uprising denuded the FLN of what little leadership it had.[44] The only solution was to bring other nationalists under the aegis of the FLN in order to shore up the organizational structure. French crackdowns on the MTLD and its successor the MNA severely limited the FLN's main rival for leadership of the Algerian nationalist cause movement.[45] This set the stage to attract other nationalists as individuals, even though they were dubbed *tard venus*.[46] The ensuing friction between the original FLN members and the *tard venus*, however, went beyond the difference of the timing of membership. The *tard venus* brought organizational and political skills with them, something the action-oriented original members of the FLN lacked.

The most significant of the *tard venus* was Ramdane Abane. A veteran of the OS, Abane was in prison when the rebellion broke out. However he was released in early 1955 after serving a 5 year sentence, and quickly rose through the ranks of the FLN.[47] His immediate influence was discernable in the increasingly violent rhetoric of FLN tracts, causing one French observer to remark "Something has changed in the management of

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[44] Quandt, *op.cit*, p. 94.
[45] Alf Andrew, Heggoy, *Insurgency and Counter Insurgency in Algeria* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1972
[46] Meynier, *op.cit*, xxxx, see also Quandt, *op.cit*, p. 97.
[47] Horne, *op.cit*, p. 132.

the rebellion."[48] Abane quickly made his mark on all aspects of the FLN due to his recognized organizational skills.[49]

Another key factor limiting FLN success was the division between the internal leadership, those in Algeria proper, and those outside of Algeria. Once the hostilities began, travel into and out of Algeria became more difficult, as did the coordination of the internal and external struggles as spelt out in the 1 November Proclamation. The core aspect of the internal/external divide, however, was the question of arms procurement. The FLN was in desperate need of arms and the external delegation – Khider, Ait Ahmed, Ben Bella, and others - had the responsibility of procuring them, in particular from President Nasser in Egypt. The lack of arms prompted Bachir Chihani to write a letter accusing Khider and Ait Ahmed, the two principle chiefs in Cairo, of corruption and of being under the influence of Messalistes.[50] At the heart of the internal-external dispute was the question of where direction should come from. This is evident in a letter from Ramdane Abbane dated November 4, 1955 in which he sharply criticizes Ben Bella, one of the external leaders, for issuing proclamations as the representative of the ALN, the military wing of the FLN, formed concurrently on 1 November 1954 with the FLN. Abbane issued the following rebuke. "Ben Bella is not the representative of the ALN in Cairo, neither are the others... The FLN/ALN has charged you with work in the exterior, that's all."[51] In a letter dated 13 March 1956 Abbane continued the dispute. He began by criticizing the external delegation's focus on North Africa, and argued instead for a heavy focus on Algeria itself. He concluded with the following chastisement:

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[48] *Ibid*, p. 133.
[49] O'Ballance, *op.cit*, p.30
[50] Harbi & Meynier, *op.cit*, pp. 333-334.
[51] *Ibid*, p. 336.

> Instead of passing the time dissipating your efforts and energy in fighting in Tunisia and Morocco, you could better direct your efforts towards Algeria. Month after month we have waited for the promised armaments, but none have arrived...you would do better than to have but one goal: the procurement of armaments. For us the only problem is getting arms, all the rest is bla bla bla. Our main focus, whether you like it or not, is the maquis.[ALN Cadres] The maquis is in the process of suffocating for lack of oxygen...[52]

While the leadership of the FLN squabbled over protocol, the ALN found itself on the defensive after the outbreak of hostilities across Algeria. In particular, elite French parachute regiments under the command of Colonel Ducourneau, an Indochina veteran, inflicted significant losses on the beleaguered ALN, including from among its leadership. By the summer of 1955 the FLN had lost five of ten w*ilayah* commanders and deputy commanders.[53] To make matters worse, *wilayah* 1 in the Aures was plagued by internecine fighting in addition to the depradations of the French Paras.[54] Faced with strangulation *wilayah* 1 contacted the new commander of *wilayah* 2 (based in the Constantinois), Zighout Youssef, to ask for help in breaking the siege.[55] In response Zighout launched an offensive in the Phillipeville-El Halia area - which included attacks on civilians - to relieve the pressure and expand the revolt.

Such an offensive was a departure from previous FLN efforts, which had been limited in conception and scope. Despite the death of a European teacher during the *Toussaint* attacks the FLN assiduously avoided targeting *pied noir* (European settler) civilians for fear of a Sétif-like reprisal. Initial instructions to the FLN/ALN cadres forbid rape, killing women, children and the old, the desecration of religious symbols, and the

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[52] *Ibid*, p. 337.
[53] Quandt, *op.cit*, p. 94, Ben Abdelmalek, and Didouch were killed, Suidini, Bitat and Ben Boulaid were captured.
[54] Harbi & Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 39.
[55] *Ibid.*

killing of unarmed men. These instructions were followed with few exceptions.[56] Zighout, however, argued that due to the tremendous pressure from the French, the point of no return had arrived to expand the war and make it a people's war, which implied greater ruthlessness. Zighout and his subordinates were under no illusions as to the consequences of their actions, but felt compelled to take such a path.[57] However their attacks on French civilians and elements of the Muslim community were not simply an ad hoc response to events; they were carefully planned, with multiple objectives.

First and foremost Zighout wanted to polarize the population by drawing a "red line" for the indecisive and eliminate those who would not rally to the cause. By attacking in broad daylight and involving the masses the FLN would implicate the people in their struggle and thus pass the point of no return.[58] The timing of the attacks coincided with the anniversary of the deposition of the Moroccan sultan by the French as well as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting 20 August 1955, with the aim of breaking the silence surrounding the Algerian question and bringing the fight to the rest of the world as originally spelt out in the *Toussaint* Declaration.[59] Zighout laid out three essential conditions for success, the first of which was that the repercussions must be widespread and felt. To this end he contacted the adjoining *wilayah* commanders to coordinate actions, though he did not receive positive responses. Secondly the insurgents should arm themselves discreetly and retreat as necessary. The final and key objective was to sow panic, fear and insecurity.[60]

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[56] *Ibid*, p. 32, see also Horne, op.cit, pp. 91-93.
[57] *Ibid*, p. 40, see also Horne, *op.cit*, p. 119.
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*

The attacks began the morning of 20 August 1955 in Phillipeville and the surrounding areas, with mobs of Algerians armed with makeshift weapons joining ALN cadres, shouting cries of "Jihad" and "the Americans are with us, The Egyptian army has landed."[61] All told the August 20th attacks claimed 123 lives: 71 European civilians, 21 Algerian civilians and 31 soldiers and gendarmes.[62] The French reaction was swift and brutal. The official French figure of 1 273 deaths is countered by the official Algerian total of 12 000 while, other studies put the figure at between 2 000 to 5 000.[63] The figures, reminiscent of Sétif, caused recriminations by other FLN figures: one went so far as to label it a suicide mission.[64] Others deplored the lack of consultation by Zighout prior to the operation; however, the isolation of the various *wilayahs* during this period left him no choice but to take independent action.[65] While the cost was high, Zighout's operational goals were met. The "red line" was firmly drawn between the European and Algerians populations. Jacques Soustelle, the Governor General, had this to say after visiting Phillipeville in the wake of the attacks:

> One could not imagine anything more lugubrious than the atmosphere prevailing at Phillipeville. It was a season of storms, and somber clouds filled the sky. The streets were almost deserted, with the exception of armed patrols. The Europeans saw terrorists in every Muslim, the Muslims fear reprisals by the Europeans...[66]

The cohesion of the people had been shattered along with hope for a moderate third force to negotiate with; the line had been drawn.[67]

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[61] Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 280, see also Quandt, *op.cit*, pp.98-99 and Horne, *op.cit*, pp.118-122.
[62] *Ibid*, p. 281.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] Horne, *op.cit*, p. 123.
[67] Harbi & Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 43.

Moreover, the Phillippeville attacks drew international attention to the conflict in Algeria. The 'Algerian Question' made its first appearance on the UNGA docket and although it was tabled due to French pressure, the international front of the FLN's struggle against the French had been opened. An invitation to the Bandung conference, held in Indonesia and attended by nations of the Third World to discuss their place in the escalating bipolar cold war, provided quicker dividends in the form of support of the emerging Afro Asiatic bloc.[68] Such developments indicate that the debate between internalists and externalists was in some ways misguided. While individuals like Abbane stressed the importance of the struggle in Algeria itself, this struggle drew attention on the international stage, which in turn bolstered the internal rebellion.

The FLN external delegation demonstrated increasingly adept diplomacy both with the United States and at the UNGA. In a memorandum cosigned by 15 of the nations involved in the Bandung conference to the Secretary General of the UN dated 22 October 1956, Ait Ahmed elaborated a number of persuasive arguments for the FLN cause. Primarily he called to question the tabling of the Algerian Question at the 10th UNGA session. The question was tabled on the French promise to in good faith seek a solution which respected the principle of self determination. Ait Ahmed argued that on the contrary the French had used the delay to strengthen their position, increasing manpower as well as spending levels.[69] Moreover, Ait Ahmed argued that while France maintained the position that Algeria was an internal issue and thereby beyond the UN's purview, they had, by use of French forces earmarked for NATO, allowing ICRC inspection of

[68] Connelly , *op.cit*, p. 93. See also Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 99-103.
[69] Harbi & Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 787.

prisons and camps as well as diplomatic discussions on Algeria with Moscow, Belgrade and Delhi, made a de facto admission to the contrary.[70]

The invocation of NATO was aimed squarely at the US. The French relied on the US for much of their war materiel, and for support within the UNGA. However both Dulles and Eisenhower had growing reservations over the dilemma facing them: to continue to support the French would lower US prestige in the Middle East. On the other hand, to neglect France would be to undermine continental defenses.[71] Ben Bella invoked both sides of the dilemma by suggesting that not only did the US risk losing North African influence but also that the war weakened west European defenses.[72]

It took time to achieve results on the diplomatic front, and results tended to be gradual rather than dramatic, which led some FLN cadres to question its importance. For Abbane and others the struggle in Algeria remained paramount; without the actions of the maquis the diplomatic efforts would have been stillborn. The FLN's efforts remained uncoordinated in no small part due to the continuing internal-external feud. The fallout from Phillipeville resulted in an increased focus by the French on military operations, as revealed in Ait Ahmed's memorandum. These difficulties prompted Abbane to begin plans for a summit meeting of the FLN leadership to resolve these lingering issues. In a letter dated 3 April 56, Abbane succinctly stated the challenges at hand, discussing the crises in *wilayahs* 2 and 3, and making a case for the primacy of the internal leadership..[73]

The Soummam conference, held 20 August 1956, is seen by many as a turning point in the FLN's development. The conference gave structure to the organization after a

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[70] *Ibid*, p. 788.
[71] See Wall, *op.cit*, and Connelly, *op.cit*.
[72] Connelly, *op.cit*, p. 97.
[73] Harbi and Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 239.

tumultuous 20 months. As the architect of the Soummam conference, Abbane's importance to the development of the FLN cannot be overstated. The conference resolved the internal-external conflict as well as providing a clear course of action which ultimately led the FLN to open the Battle of Algiers. Most histories tend to focus on the settlement of the internal-external conflict and on Abbane's exclusion of the external delegation.[74] Of greater significance for the strategic development of the FLN was the debate between the political and military leaders of the rebellion.[75] The legacy of Sétif still weighed on the leadership of the FLN; the repression that followed the Phillipeville attacks only strengthened the reticence towards unmitigated violence. Zighout Youssef was rebuked at the conference as much for taking an independent tack as for the violent repercussions of his actions. Amirouche, a leader in wilayah 3, was also reproached for his role carrying out the so called *nuit rouge* on 13 April 1956 where the entire village of Tifraten was liquidated.[76] However for the military leaders the need for an Algerian Dien Bien Phu, a potentially decisive battle, outweighed the risks of another Sétif.

Abane is presented by some as a whole-hearted partisan of violence and a prime supporter of taking the fight to Algiers.[77] Recent scholarship suggests a more pragmatic Abane, cautious over the outcomes of a violent course of action.[78] Both Abbane and Yacef Saadi, the leader of the armed groups in Algiers, felt that to launch an offensive in Algiers would implicate the wider population, especially once the planned general strike

[74] Horne, *op.cit*, pp 145-146, see also Quandt, *op.cit*, pp 99-101
[75] Quandt, *op.cit*, 99-101.
[76] Harbi & Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 199.
[77] Horne, op.cit, pp. 132-134.
[78] Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 323.

went into effect, exposing them to repression.[79] Nonetheless Abbane felt the timing was right, arguing that:

> ... the French state for the next six months will be unable to support further military expenditures, it follows that the continuation of the war means the bankruptcy of the French state. Therefore it is in our interest to intensify the pressure of our urban armed groups against the French.[80]

Whatever Abbane's reticence, for him the course was clear, as he plainly stated:

> Is it preferable for our cause to kill ten enemies in some riverbed in Telegarma, which no one will talk about, or rather a single one in Algiers, which the American press will report the next day? Though we are taking some risks, we must make our struggle known.[81]

The resolution at the Soummam conference brought together the various strands that had influenced Algerian nationalist strategy. The hopes of a legalist approach had been dampened by the outbreak of the rebellion and extinguished by the Phillipeville attacks. The caution inspired by the legacy of the Sétif repression had been replaced by a far more violent strategy, in the space of a few months after the outbreak of hostilities. By asserting the primacy of the interior, the FLN managed to centralize its control and give shape and organizational backing to its embattled fighters. The fusion of political and military aims ensured an effective direction to FLN strategy. With direction emanating from the interior, multiple actions in multiple theatres could be coordinated. While armed action in Algiers increased, so too did diplomatic efforts in New York.

As has been demonstrated it would be a mistake to view the development of the FLN strategy as a smooth process. The evolution of the FLN occurred in a remarkably short period of time, and was shaped by sharply conflicting points of view. The example

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[79] *Ibid.*
[80] *Ibid*, p. 322.
[81] Connelly, *op.cit*, p. 119.

of Aït Ahmed provides a prime example. It was Aït Ahmed who first articulated the international approach as a way to outflank French military dominance in Algeria. However by the time of the Soummam conference, he and the rest of the external delegation were at odds with Abbane and the internal leadership and alienated from the strategic direction of the FLN. If the internal workings of the FLN were Byzantine, then such confusion would have been amplified for those looking in from the outside, notably French intelligence. Moreover the consensus reached at the Soummam conference had its limits. Further attrition and infighting meant that the FLN could at best only aspire to stability, which again made things more difficult for those seeking to divine its workings and its course of action.

The preamble of the proceedings of the Soummam succinctly summed up the history of the FLN and their future course:

> In a short time, after being initially localized in the Aures and Kabylie, the ALN has achieved success against encirclement by a large modern army. In spite of meager armaments the ALN launched a guerilla campaign, adapted, improved and passed rapidly from guerilla to partial war.
>
> We will form an urban maquis to perform attacks against the police and acts of sabotage. This will weaken the colonial regime, disperse forces and accentuate the deterioration of the morale of the troops, keeping them in a state of nervousness and fatigue, change the political climate and provoke psychological shock.[82]

The success the FLN achieved in with the Battle of Algiers went far beyond what they could have hoped for and cost what they feared.

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[82] Harbi & Meynier, *op.cit*, p. 246.

Chapter 2: The French Cognitive Map

Understanding is the essential weapon - Chantranj Namak

"Intelligence is Capital."[1] These words, spoken by Colonel Yves Goddard, succinctly state a cardinal concept of low intensity warfare. Tasked with defeating a covert enemy, the principal obstacle facing the French in Algeria was in discerning the activities of the FLN, and developing an interpretation of its intentions and the development of its strategy, then it would be possible to find and neutralize them. While the 1 November 1954 proclamation stated in broad terms the methods by which the FLN would seek to gain its objectives, exactly how they would be executed was not clear. In order to counter the FLN's bid for independence the French had to acquire intelligence about the organization and then interpret its strategy. An analysis of French intelligence reveals that the French had an excellent understanding of the development of FLN strategy, but were ultimately unable to build upon that understanding to forge a winning military and political strategy.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the development of FLN strategy was marked by three interconnected trends. First the growing internal divisions among Algerian nationalists, and within the FLN itself. The most serious of these divisions was the rivalry between the external and internal leadership.[2] The second trend was the adoption of increasingly violent methods. The Philippeville attacks of 20 August 1955 marked a growing willingness to strike at civilians, and with the decision to bring the war into Algiers the FLN abandoned all reservations in this regard. The final trend shaping

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[1] Horne, *op.cit*, pp.198
[2] See Chapter 1
[5] Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008, pg. 1.

the development of FLN strategy was the development of external support in terms of material aid and, more importantly, in diplomatic support. The FLN received support and sanctuary from neighboring Morocco and Tunisia, especially after those two French protectorates gained independence in 1956. The level of support coming from the Arab world led by Nasser's Egypt was despite fervent rhetoric decidedly less than that hoped for by the FLN. These three trends of FLN strategic development converged at the Soummam conference of August 1956, which gave the FLN a coherent strategy but also set it on a collision course with the French in Algiers.

While the course and development of FLN strategy is now well-understood by historians, there remains the question as to how much did the French know at the time. More importantly, did the French accurately interpret FLN strategic intentions in the lead up to the Battle of Algiers, since this intelligence defined the options and policy decisions undertaken by the forces of order?[5] In order to adequately explore the evolution of French military intelligence assessments it is necessary to start by assessing the state of French perceptions *ante bellum*. From there intelligence assessments before and after key events in the evolution of the FLN's strategy, such as the Phillipeville attacks and the Soummam conference, shed light on French understanding of the FLN's intentions.

Ever since the French first landed at Sidi Ferruch in 1830 and began their conquest of Algeria, they had been faced with opposition to their presence in various forms and of various intensities.[6] Given the size of Algeria and a persistent lack of sufficient numbers of military and security personnel, intelligence always played a crucial role in maintaining order for the French.[7] The makeup of the intelligence structure of

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[6] Horne, op.cit, pp. 28-30.
[7] Thomas, *op.cit*, p. 6.

Algeria was dominated by the French military, but civilian intelligence organs, including the *Sûréte*, figured in the mix.[8] The French Intelligence apparatus began with the First Category assets, consisting of the regular police, who answered to the Minister of Interior, as did the *Sûréte* (Special Branch). Second Category troops included the Gendarmerie, which was controlled by the Minister of Armed Forces. The Third Category consisted of the regular army, including both metropolitan and colonial troops. [9] As will be seen in Chapter 3 responsibility for the maintenance of order progressively passed from civilian organs to military ones.

Pre-1954 French intelligence in Algeria was characterized by manpower shortages and a preoccupation with external causes of disorder. The manpower establishments of the pre-rebellion period were quite limited. Jean Vaujour, the head of the *Sûreté*, placed the numbers at 10,500 for all departments in 1953.[10] On the eve of the rebellion the police numbered 6836, the majority of whom held administrative posts.[11] Of this meager number most were concentrated in the urban centers, meaning that the *bled* (countryside) received little coverage despite the advent of motorized transport.[13] Even in the urban centers, the concentrations were lower than the average police presence in comparable French jurisdictions. Furthermore, Jean Vaujour notes that while nominally the Renseignements Généraux (RG) carried out intelligence tasks and the Police Judiciaire (PJ) carried out direct actions, such as arrests based on the intelligence

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[8] *Ibid.*. p. 54.
[9] George Armstrong Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army in Crisis 1947-1962*, The M.I.T. Press. Cambridge, 1965, pp. 6-7.
[10] Jean Vaujour, *De la Révolte à la Révolution*, Albin Michel, Paris 1985, p. 31.
[11] Maurice Faivre, " Le Reseignement dans la Guerre d'Algerie," in Jean-Charles Jauffret and Maurice Vaïsse Maurice, eds., *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d'Algérie*, Editions Complexe, Brussels, 2001, p. 291.
[13] Vaujour, *op.cit*, pp. 32, 29.

provided by the RG , in practice the lines between the two functions and departments were blurred.[14] As Martin Thomas has observed, this made for a problematic lack of separation between the intelligence provider and the vehicle of repression.[15]

This line was further blurred by the dominant role played by the army in intelligence functions in Algeria.[16] During the decades between the two world wars the French military had become increasingly called upon to act as adjuncts to the police in the metropole, and in the case of Algeria were at the forefront of the intelligence state.[17] Thus they were in the position of both using intelligence to preempt violence as well as guide its use by the forces of order.[18] However, like the gendarmerie the army was lacking in numbers. On the eve of the rebellion the army mustered 49,500 effectives in Algeria, of which only 15,500 were in a combat role.[19] A broad mandate, combined with thinness on the ground, made the task of the army quite challenging.

While the intelligence and executive functions were unified in the Army, they will be dealt with separately, starting with intelligence in this chapter. Before the rebellion the intelligence services tended to be preoccupied with external influences on Algerian developments, especially with respect to pan-Arabism and communism.[20] The ability of each of these ideologies to mobilize support was a source of continuing concern.[21] Thomas argues that during various crises, especially those in which available intelligence was lacking, information panics occurred and the French reverted to stereotypes,

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[15] Thomas, *op.cit*, p. 6.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 54.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[19] Vaujour, *op.cit*, p. 56.
[20] Thomas, *op.cit*, p. 74-76.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

stressing the nefarious role of outside instigators.[22] Several authors have remarked at the propensity of the Army to emphasize the communist connection in particular, citing the recent conflict and French defeat in Indochina, where the army encountered a communist foe, as having a lasting influence upon the French army's outlook .[23] The main external preoccupation, however, was pan-Arabism, in particular the role of Egypt in encouraging such notions.

This chapter argues, however, that French intelligence did not misunderstand the actual, quite limited, extent of communist influence; when the communist threat was emphasized, this was often done for tactical or propaganda purposes. The situation with Egypt turned out to be more complicated. Despite their propensity to ascribe pan-Arab influence as a driving factor, the French did not inflate the role of Egypt in their assessments. Egypt did play an important role as a material and more importantly a moral supporter of the FLN, notwithstanding the differences in opinions between the internal and external FLN leadership. However, the French determination to undermine Nasser's support of Pan-Arabism led to their disastrous involvement in the Suez Crisis and a severe degradation of their diplomatic position, especially vis-à-vis the United States, on the eve of the Battle of Algiers.

The historiography of the outbreak of the Algerian rebellion holds that the French were caught by surprise.[24] In fact, the evidence suggests that while the broader French reaction may have been one of surprise, the pre-war assessments of French intelligence painted an accurate picture of the nationalist movements. A report dated 30 August 1954,

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[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 76.
[23] Raphaëlle Branche, *La Torture et l'Armée pendant la Guerre d'Algérie*, Gallinard, Paris, 2001, p. 30; Horne, *op.cit,* pp. 174-176; Kelly, *op.cit,* p. 9.
[24] Horne, *op.cit*, p. 96.

for General Paul Cherrière, remarks upon the calm that prevailed within Algeria and correctly ascribed this to the internal disorder of the nationalist movement.[25] The report identified the three main factions of the MTLD; the Messalist and Lahouel groups, and the CRUA. It also acknowledged the dominance of OS veterans within the CRUA ranks, and the organization's general desire for direct action.[26] The report depicts the CRUA as a neutral observer to the factional conflict, but adds that it is unlikely to "submit passively." It prophetically concluded that the CRUA, due to its history of violence, was the group most likely to "manifest itself in a tangible manner."[27]

On the issue of external influences, the report notes that the Parti Communiste Algérien (PCA) had failed to achieve broader cooperation with the other nationalist parties.[28] Interestingly, the author of the report does not even mention international communist support. On the issue of pan-Islam and pan-Arabism the report contains a good deal of content. In terms of the Algerian leadership it notes that the MTLD was appealing more to desires for social change, as opposed to making religious arguments. However, in spite of the secular nature of the leadership and the illiteracy of the militants, they did not completely abandon the "façade" of defending Islam.[29] The report noted the influence of Cairo as a unifying factor of nationalist groups across the Maghreb, but viewed the situations in Morocco and Tunisia as posing the greatest threat to the stability of Algeria. Significantly it noted the potential hazard of coordinated domestic and

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[25] Service Historique de la Defence (SHD) 1 H 1678/1 « Synthese du Reseignements sur la Situation en Afrique du Nord. ».
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] SHD 1 H 1678/1 «Synthese du Reseignements Mois du Juiliet 1954. »
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*

international actions placing the French in bad light, if the situation in Algeria was to be brought to the attention of the United Nations.[30]

Overall, on the eve of the FLN uprising the French intelligence apparatus had a rather good grasp of the threats facing Algeria. The lack of clarity that does sometimes emerge within these reports is largely a reflection of the internal turmoil of the Algerian nationalist movements themselves. Not even the outbreak of the rebellion resolved the factional splits within the Algerian nationalist movements, although it did give the initiative to the CRUA - reborn on 1 November 1954 as the FLN. The French assessment largely discounted communist involvement, and while it notes the influence of Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia it does so more in terms of their potential, rather than ongoing, interference in the situation.

After the initial outbreak of hostilities on 1 November 1954, the FLN had to regroup, since a general rebellion failed to materialize. As such they were forced to alter their strategy to build up support.[31] A French assessment of the evolving situation in Algeria, prepared in July 1955 by Colonel de Schackes , provides insight into the authorities' apprehension of their nationalist opponents, as it argues that launching hostilities was premature and constituted an error. However, the author concedes that the error was explicable, given the dissension within the MTLD.[32] The report notes that the rebel forces soon lost cohesion and coordination and were soon restricted to the Aures and the Grand Kabylie mountains.[33] Nevertheless, the author of the report concluded that despite these problems the FLN had nevertheless begun to create an atmosphere of

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[30] *Ibid.*
[31] See Chapter 1
[32] SHD 1 H 1678/3, "Etude de Col de Schackes sur evolution situation en Algerie July 1955."
[33] *Ibid.*

insecurity, and to reinforce its influence upon the Muslim population through intimidation.[34] This scenario was precisely the one feared in another intelligence report completed in April 1955, which noted that the majority of rebel action seemed to be directed towards indigenous elements favorable to a French solution. It also noted that this approach, coupled with an "undeniable admiration for the rebels by the masses," risked eroding support for the French, which it placed at 80%, compared to 10% neutral opinion and 10% for the FLN.[35]

The FLN was not only competing with the French and general lassitude of the population to gain support. Several organizations still existed as potential rivals to its growing domination of the Algerian nationalist movement, and the divisions which existed had been deepened by the CRUA's decision to launch hostilities. A French report prepared on 24 June 1955 continued to characterize the MTLD as being divided into three factions, just as the prewar assessments had.[36] It added the important distinction that the MTLD was "by no means a communist vassal."[37] The report also notes the growing conflict between the FLN and the Mouvement Nationaliste d'Algérie (MNA), the successor to the MTLD after the latter was dissolved shortly after the outbreak of rebellion.[38] Despite these rivalries, even at this early point the FLN was regarded as the most significant of the nationalist groups.[39] Reports from later in the summer of 1955

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[34] *Ibid.*
[35] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note sur l'evolution de la situation en Afrique du Nord entre le 1er Mars et le 15 avril 1955."
[36] SHD 1 H 1678/3 "Etude de Col de Schackes.", *op.cit*
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*

noted the continuation of the FLN-MNA conflict as well as the continued *attentisme* of the liberal, more moderate UDMA.[40]

French intelligence also paid careful attention to the evolving tactics of the FLN, and understood that the organization was quite adaptable. Analysts noted, for instance, how the trend of FLN attacks against potential French sympathizers was augmented with raids against agricultural and infrastructure targets by the late summer. An intelligence report from August noted that unlike the nationalist movement in neighboring Morocco, the Algerian rebels were limited to the countryside. However the report perceptively added that they displayed a potential to shift their fight to the cities. The French were also able to discern the uneven development of the rebellion, noticing a marked difference in the quality of resistance between North and South Constantinois. Additionally, the report notes that the use of terrorism, at this point still limited to infrastructure and Muslim supporters of France, was prevalent at unequal levels across various regions. The report concluded by voicing concerns about the potential for the rebellion to spread into hitherto unaffected areas and including significantly, the extension of terrorism into the urban centers.[43]

The French assessments of external factors during this period also reflect a clear understanding of the FLN's diplomatic intent. Reports identified the external delegation of the FLN as the principle source of these efforts. They correctly noted the three goals of the exterior delegation; to obtain the moral support of the international community, to

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[40] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note sur l'evolution de la situation en Afrique du Nord entre le 15 Juin et le 10 aout 1955."
[43] *Ibid.*

obtain material support for the rebellion, and finally to secure the intervention of the UN. They noted the participation of the Algerians at the Bandung conference as evidence of the increased efficacy of the FLN's propaganda efforts. Among the various propaganda points brought up by the FLN was to stress the "mass" nature of the uprising. A particular theme that caught the attention of French intelligence analysts was the extent to which the FLN called attention to the French use in Algeria of troops earmarked for NATO. [46]

As previously noted, communist involvement in the Algerian nationalist rebellion was rarely mentioned in French intelligence assessments. When it was discussed it was to highlight the weakness and the isolation of the PCA, or to emphasize the independence of the Algerian nationalists from Soviet influence. However, French officials did invoke Cold War rhetoric and reasoning if they deemed the circumstances warranted it. A briefing presented in Washington on 8 July 1955, during which the French tried to justify the use of forces intended for NATO in Algeria instead, clearly illustrates this. The briefing stresses the military importance of the Maghreb not only in terms of as a source of manpower but invoked Operation Torch – the Anglo-American landings in French North Africa carried out in 1942 - to underpin the region's geographical importance as potential launching point to retake the European continent in the event of war with the Soviet Bloc.[47] The briefing reminded the audience that this was why the area was included in the Atlantic treaty. The troubles in North Africa therefore became a potential prelude to the Soviet envelopment of Europe. In the analysis the Arab League was

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[46] *Ibid.*
[47] SHD 1 H 1102/1 « Expose sur La Situation Actuelle de l'Afrique du Nord, Washington 8 July 1955. »
[50] *Ibid.*

depicted as the "sorcerer's apprentice, consciously or unconsciously in this plot," with Egypt identified as the leading culprit.[50] The briefing closed with the warning that despite the local problems, "one perceives the great line of the Soviet plan to destabilize the defense of Western Europe." Because the stability of Algeria secures the rear approaches to Europe, the use of French troops previously intended for NATO duty there is justified.[51]

The stark difference between this briefing and the internal French intelligence assessments discussed above reveals the extent to which France had to engage in a diplomatic war with the Algerian nationalists. The briefing was designed to address the challenge posed by the FLN propaganda, which aimed to exploit alliance politics to weaken the French position in Algeria. Lieutenant General Jacques Allard made the diplomatic point clear in a briefing to the Americans when he insisted that "French forces have not been diverted from the defense of Europe, for without North Africa European Defense means nothing."[52] The focus on the Cold War dimension is not therefore indicative of the French intelligence's understanding of the Algerian situation; instead, it served as a means to defuse FLN propaganda efforts to drive a wedge between the United States and France.

As noted earlier the Phillippeville attacks of 20 August 1955 marked a change in the direction of FLN strategy, and indeed the whole tenor of the war. A report dated 20 October 1955, prepared for the Minister of Defence, noted that the Phillippeville attacks involved widespread popular participation, which implicated the whole population in

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[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Lt Gen. Jean Allard, "NATO and North Africa" in Charles S. Maier and Dan S. White, eds., , *The Thirteenth of May: The Advent of de Gaulle's Republic*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968, p. 108.
[54] SHD 1 H 1678/2 "Visite de la Ministre de Defence Nationale et des Forces d'Armées Situation d'Algerie le 20 Octobre 1955. "

rebellion.[54] Moreover the intensity of attacks increased in the aftermath of the massacre, not only in North Constantinois but into Kabylie as well.[55] Despite these developments the report suggested that the FLN seemed incapable of igniting a general insurrection and had instead shifted to an "oil spot" approach, hoping to gradually expand the scope of the rebellion.[56] Nevertheless the Phillipeville attacks represented a move on the part of the FLN towards unrestricted force and a major escalation in the rebellion. The implications of the shift towards direct action were discussed during a presentation by General Lorillot to the Comité des Hautes Études de la Défense Nationale on 16 November 1955. The report of that presentation noted, as did earlier reports, that the FLN was targeting Muslim supporters of France in order to create a "wall of silence" by intimidating the population against cooperation with the French. [57] Additionally the report observed that terror targeting *pieds noirs* was calculated to provoke an excessive response in order to create a "chasm between the two populations."[58]

The intelligence reports of late 1955 noted the continued fissures within the rebellion. However by this point the FLN was recognized as the motor of the uprising.[59] French analysts drew attention to a rapidly evolving political situation. The rejection of Governor General Jacques Soustelle's reform program by moderate Algerian nationalists, in addition to pressure from the FLN and the MNA, contributed to the polarization of the

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[55] *Ibid.*
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] SHD 1 H 1678/2 "Conference: Situation en Algerie Novembre 1955 du General Lorillot le 16 Novembre 1955 devant la Comite Haut Etudes de Defence Nationale (CHEDN)."
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Ibid.*

nationalists.[60] A report dated 8 December 1955, succinctly summed up the difference; the FLN is fighting for independence, the MNA for influence.[61]

Clearly, by early 1956 the FLN had established itself as the dominant nationalist group. The French reported with that "under an empire of terror, the various groups of nationalists and potential interlocutors have been effaced to the benefit of the FLN, who remain as the veritable leader of the rebellion."[62] The sustained campaign of terror against their opponents had finally paid dividends, with all rallying to their banner, including Ferhat Abbas, the leader of the hitherto moderate UDMA.[63] Ferhat Abbas himself summed up the effect when he explained to a Tunisian newspaper that he no longer considered himself a potential interlocutor for dealing with the government and that the sole right to negotiate lay with the armed resistance, the FLN.[64]

French intelligence analysis during late 1955 and early 1956 noted the important role played by external supporters, notably the Arab nations and Egypt in particular, in sustaining the rebellion. They also commented on the role of Morocco and Tunisia in the funneling of arms to the maquis.[65]Egyptian aid included support for the FLN's diplomatic efforts in the UN.[66] Indeed it was the support in this later venue which proved the most fruitful for the FLN's cause, something that was acknowledged in an assessment dated 8 February 1956, which opined that of all the aid provided by external sources, material aid

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[60] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 8 Décembre 1955."
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 1 Février 1956."
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] SHD 1 H 1678/3 "Etude des Possibilites de la Rebellion Algerienne dans le cadre d'un Conflit avec le Maroc, la Tunisie et les Pays Arabe du Moyen Orient."
[66] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 8 Décembre 1955."

was not as decisive as the moral aid such benefactors gave to the ALN operating within Algeria, and in diplomatic interventions on behalf of the FLN.[67]

After Morocco and then Tunisia attained independence in 1956 it was even easier for the FLN to receive external support. French intelligence agencies were quick to realize this, noting that while France would look to assist these former protectorates to eliminate subversive elements and would encourage them to follow pro-Western foreign policies, they feared that they would secretly join other Arab nations in aiding the FLN in Algeria.[68] The same report expressed the potential for the "young" nations of Morocco and Tunisia to fall under Soviet influence.[69] In terms of actual aid received the French suggested that Egypt provided most of the training and contraband arms, while Soviet bloc support remained more diplomatic in nature.[70] It remains unclear as to whether the USSR was in fact looking to exploit the situation in North Africa, but the specter of arms deals with Egypt and the potential for other nations to follow suit suggests that it was in fact the policy of the Soviet Union to undermine western influence in the area.[71] Though the French worried about the three Maghreb nations making common cause against them, Moroccan and Tunisian independence also allowed them to concentrate more on Algeria.

France's own external support also received attention in the intelligence assessments. A report of 13 June 1956 described the country as being diplomatically isolated, a problem reinforced by the impotence of the French regime. Additionally,

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[67] SHD 1 H 1102/1 Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 1 Février 1956.
[68] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 8 Mars 1956."
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Connelly, *op.cit*, p. 93.
[75] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 10 Juin 1956."

France's powerful allies were hesitant to align themselves with the French position, while neutral nations offering to act as mediators raised the specter of an imposed solution counter to French interests. The report essentially attributed these problems to France's failure to insulate the Algerian population from external influences, and a failure to press home convincing arguments with their powerful Atlantic allies. The importance of winning the battle for international support was highlighted by the recognition that the FLN was preoccupied with the external theatre, notably winning support in the UN for negotiations. [75]

Within Algeria itself the FLN, having established dominance over its main rivals, still lacked the ability to score major successes against the French forces. While the organization gained valuable skills and personnel from co-opted rival groups, most notably in the case of communist bomb-makers, such advances were offset by increasing French forces.[77] In the face of increased French qualitative and quantitative military strength French intelligence argued that the FLN would need to shift their actions by building up the number of regulars and increasing their supply of arms. Significantly, the French noted that the FLN would need to avoid contact with the better equipped and trained French forces, and broaden the use of general terror, in order to fix French forces in stationary protection roles, diffuse their manpower and incite overreaction.[78]

Paradoxically, while the FLN in Algeria was steadily weakening, foreign support for the movement was growing. Nevertheless, a report dated 27 July 1956 noted that it was too early for the increased French forces to redress the military situation, due to the fact that the rebellion had now been implanted by terror and would require a long, patient

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[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*

effort to dislodge. The status quo was one of equilibrium for both sides. This led Ait Ahmed to declare to the Americans that sole hope of ending the war would be through UN intervention, which would require American support. Despite the deadlock the French reports emphasized that their FLN adversaries were ceaselessly modifying their tactics and strategy. The most recent modification to the FLN's approach, the report warned, was its increasing orientation towards urban terrorism, which would necessitate placing regular units in the areas of the cities that served as refuge. [81]

Up to this point French intelligence assessments demonstrated a clear understanding of the FLNs strategic intentions, as well as the constraints affecting French policy. As far as international support was concerned the French did not overestimate the support given by the Soviet bloc, or the Arab bloc led by Egypt. However by the time the next intelligence summary was released in September 1956, the situation had changed markedly due to the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Nasser, and the international crisis which had ensued.[83]

The Suez crisis firmly linked Egypt to the Algerian question for the French. An assessment dated 5 September 1956 explored three effects of the crisis. First, the attentions of the Arab world were shifted from Algiers to Cairo.[84] Second, the incident gave France partners in Britain and Israel in its fight against the pan-Arabists. Finally, the

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[81] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 27 Julliet 1956."
[83] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 5 Septembre 1956."
[84] *Ibid.*

report argued that the crisis clarified for French public opinion the true nature of the conflict France was facing in Algeria.[85] The last point suggests that the Algerian conflict was linked to pan-Arabism. This particular report represented a marked increase in the focus on exterior influences than hitherto evident in the French assessments. It is important to note, however, that the timing of the crisis corresponded with the split between the interior and exterior leadership of the FLN, which as we have seen was resolved in favour of the interior leadership at the Soummam conference of 20 August. Thus, while the report noted that the exterior delegation strongly supported Egypt's position, declaring "that the Algerian cause and the Canal cause form one in the same concern," it failed to reflect that the exterior delegation was no longer the prime leadership of the FLN.[87]

French intelligence was aware of an ongoing power struggle within the FLN. Significantly they noted the tendency of the Kabyle chiefs towards dissociation from Egypt, reflecting the role of Abane in formulating the Soummam conference.[88] Additionally, one report noted the attempts to rein in the power of the chiefs in Algeria, in order to encourage greater unity within the FLN, and which the French also attributed to a desire to move towards negotiations.[89] The perceived motivation for this course of action was the declining morale of the FLN forces within Algeria. FLN activity was reportedly in decline in all areas with the exception of urban terror, an eventuality predicted due to continued FLN weakness and French successes in previous reports.

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[85] *Ibid.*
[87] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 5 Septembre 1956."
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] *Ibid.*

Despite the apparent weakness of the FLN at the time, the reports once again warned of the organization's adaptability, and the threat posed by its terrorist actions in European areas and the reactions provoked by those attacks. Yet in spite of paying considerable attention to these internal factors the report concluded that the Egyptian issue was paramount, arguing that it confirmed the potency of pan-Arabism. The French went even so far as to warn of a potential declaration of holy war by Egypt.[92] Taken by itself the report reveals that the French got caught up in the crisis following the nationalization of the Suez Canal, suggesting the tendency to revert to stereotype observed by Thomas. However when analyzed alongside the broader intelligence picture the report stands as an aberration, a temporary panic amidst generally balanced analysis.

The French maintained the advantage into the fall. However, a report dated 10 October 1956 noted that this was due to the internal weakness of the FLN, which was going through reorganization and a shift in strategy, which would concentrate upon producing a psychological shock in Algiers and internationally. Additionally the report surmised that the situation would become more precarious as serving French reserve classes ended their terms.[93] In the interim, though, the situation facing the FLN was grave; the French were able to score several coups and were able, through good intelligence work, to disrupt FLN operations.[94] The French had an impressive picture of the woes befalling the FLN effort including the external-internal debate between Abane

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[92] *Ibid.*
[93] SHD 1 H 1102/1 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 10 Octobre 1956."
[94] *Ibid.*

on one side and Ben Bella and his supporters on the other, as well as the chaos in the Aures-Nementchas *wilayah* leadership due to succession issues.[95]

Yet despite the successes obtained by the French forces, intelligence analysts did not think that these had achieved decisive results. They noted that external aid still flowed to the FLN and that French manpower levels were due to drop precipitously with the end of the reserve terms.[97] Significantly they warned that although the FLN found that it could not mount operations in strength, the organization nevertheless proved able to extend its influence among the population through smaller-scale actions.[98] The report admitted that this meant that the confrontation was transforming from a military one into a psychological one, one that the army was ill-equipped to fight.[99]

As part of this shift, the French noted that the FLN's actions in October 1956 seemed to be directed towards setting the stage for the upcoming UN session and taking advantage of what the FLN perceived as a drop in French public support for the war. The report noted that the FLN had achieved its greatest successes whenever it was able to accentuate urban terrorism, most notably in Algiers. The French immediately recognized the potential of such a strategy, having experienced urban terrorism in Morocco. They identified three major effects of the urban terror strategy. First, it would demoralize the *pied noirs*. Second, it would strengthen those voices in the metropole calling for a negotiated settlement. Finally, it would reinforce to the international community how severe the crisis was. The report even noted the role of the press as part of this strategy, in

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[95] *Ibid.*
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] *Ibid.*
[99] *Ibid.*

amplifying the psychological impact of terror attacks both in France itself and internationally. The report commented that it did not seem that the press either in Algeria or in the metropole understood the role it played in this regard.[99]

The overall picture of the situation painted by French intelligence reveals a great degree of understanding of the challenge mounted by the FLN. The recognition of the shift towards psychological objectives by the FLN, and the increasing international pressure brought about by the approach of the UN session, demonstrated a lucid assessment of the danger facing the French in Algeria. At the same time, the significant diminution of French effectives by an estimated 100,000 men would entail a rollback and abandoning of some zones. This represented a considerable challenge to maintaining and consolidating the gains made over the summer of 1956. The fact that the replacements would require some time to achieve the efficiency of those who had just departed meant some difficult weeks lay ahead for the French.[100]

The difficulty facing the French in last quarter of 1956 was compounded by several factors, first and foremost the ignominious withdrawal from Egypt under intense US pressure, which demoralized the French as well as adversely affected their prestige, while simultaneously providing a boost in spirits to the FLN. Secondly the successes gained by the French were reversed after the release of the reserves and the reorganization of the FLN on the ground in Algeria started to take effect. Moreover, from the French perspective the psychological climate in Algeria was deteriorating. The retreat from Egypt, alongside increasing urban terrorism as the UN session approached, greatly affected the morale of the *pied noirs*. In addition, a reported dated 1 January 1957

[100] *Ibid.* The difficulty was in part due to a disparity in officers between the elite units of the Reserve Generale and regular army units. For example the 1 RCP had 53 officers for 550 effectives while those regular units which had 19 officers for 700 effectives. See Yves Courriere, *Le Temps des Léopards*, p. 679.

detected increasing lassitude among the Muslim population, for the same reasons the European community was affected. In this climate, French analysts feared the possibility of a spectacular action immediately prior to the opening of the UN session.[101] A quote emanating from the FLN delegation in New York summed up the mood of the Metropole which read:

> We have no doubt that victory is certain and soon. While this victory arises from the courage of our partisans in Algeria it is more so due to the attitude in France where those who think like us are gaining in numbers. The weariness for the Algerian conflict felt by the French means that they work for us consciously or unconsciously.[102]

The French Resident Minister, Robert Lacoste, gave credence to the FLN assessments when he observed: "Incapable of delivering decisive blows in spite of external aid, the rebels seek to gain through political means in Paris but most of all at the UN the decision they cannot gain in combat...it is not in Algiers where Algeria will be lost."[103] The FLN's allies included not only the Arab nations and the Soviet bloc; it also aimed to add the US to the list of France's critics at the UN. FLN diplomacy in this effort mirrored the French invocation of a Communist threat in dealing with the US, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Abbas argued that for Algeria there were two options; the aid of the US or the aid of the USSR. If aid were not forthcoming from the US then the FLN would have no choice but to seek it from the USSR.[104] Unmentioned in the 1 January 1957 report, but certainly weighing upon French planning, was the knowledge of US anger towards France over the entire Suez affair.

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[101] SHD 1 H 1102/2 "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 1 Janvier 1957."
[102] *Ibid.*.
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Ibid.*

The situation in Algeria hung in the balance on the eve of the deployment of the 10th Parachute Division (DP) in Algiers. The French were well aware of the FLN's intentions and of the danger the organization's strategy posed to the French position both in Algeria, in France, and internationally. From the outbreak of the rebellion up to the eve of the Battle of Algiers, the French had a generally accurate view of the challenge the FLN was mounting. However a clear understanding of the FLN's intent was not enough to allow the French to parry the FLN thrust. While Lacoste believed that Algeria would not be lost in Algiers, that was precisely where France's failure to adapt was manifestly and brutally revealed and the FLN gained their biggest, if costliest, victory.

Chapter 3:The French Response

You may ask me for anything you like except time.
- Napoleon Bonaparte

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From the initial *Toussaint* attacks onward, culminating in the Battle of Algiers, the French Army in Algeria ran out of options and was unable to adapt its practices. As we saw in chapter 1, the FLN was able to develop a coherent strategy based on exploiting domestic and international opinion against the French presence in Algeria. Yet the French failure to adapt to the FLN challenge did not derive from a systemic misunderstanding of its opponents' intentions or strategy. As argued in chapter 2, the contemporary documents reveal a high level of understanding on the part of French intelligence.

Historians have focused on various explanations for the French actions. Some have chosen to look at ideological explanations such as the notion of a civilizing mission.[1] Other explanations have revolved around the doctrine of *la guerre révolutionnaire,* arguing that the radical counter revolutionary doctrine countenanced excessive force.[2] Still others reject ideological and doctrinal explanations, pointing to the long history of colonial violence to explain the French actions.[3] The specter of defeat in Indochina, Suez and even the 1940 French defeat by Germany, and the subsequent desire of the French Army to avoid further defeat at all costs are cited as another explanation.[4] While the ideological, doctrinal, colonial legacy and psychological explanations each of have their merits and detractions, the role of strategy has been overlooked. The FLN strategy of synchronizing urban terrorism

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1 Rita Maran, Torture: The role of Ideology in thew French-Algerian War Praeger, New York, 1989
2 Kelly, *op.cit*, pp. 196-205.
3 Mcdougall, *op.cit*..
4 Horne, *op.cit*, pp.174-176; Kelly, *op.cit*, pp 11-12; Craddock and Smith, *op.cit*, pp. 104-105.

with international opinion, specifically timed with the UNGA 11th session which convened 1 November 1956 gave a sense of urgency to the context in which the French response was formulated and executed.

The French failure to adapt to the FLN challenge was rooted in a number of problems. First and foremost was the pressure of time. It was by design that the FLN ramped up its campaign of urban terror in the lead up to the UNGA 11th session in the fall. Thanks to their intelligence efforts, the French anticipated this course of action well in advance, and in the summer of 1956 greatly increased their troop levels in Algeria. They then launched a major effort to quash the rebellion in advance of the meeting. However, French resources and efforts were divided between the need to protect property and civilians and the need to hunt down bands of the ALN. This led to the development of what Jean-Charles Jauffret calls the two-speed army.[5] The elite parachute and legionnaire regiments formed the Réserve Générale, which was responsible for mobile search and destroy operations against the ALN. The rest of the army, including reserve units, performed *quadrillage*, which basically meant occupying and providing security in a defined area.

Aggression and rapidity of action were the defining attributes desired for the destruction of guerilla bands, whereas *quadrillage* was supposed to be defined by patient pacification. Both tasks required substantial numbers of personnel, yet even at the height of their manpower surge in 1956 the French did not possess sufficient numbers to perform both missions effectively. Crucially, in the latter stages of 1956,

[5] Jean-Charles Jauffret, "Une Armée a deux vitesse en Algérie (1954-1962):Réserves générale et troupes de secteur," in Jean-Charles Jauffret and Maurice Vaïsse, eds., *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d'Algérie*, Editions Complexe, Brussels, 2001, pp. 21-38.

at the very moment when the FLN campaign in Algiers was reaching its zenith, the French lost around 100,000 effectives as the terms of the reserves called up at the beginning of the surge ended.[6] Before long, the French began to emphasize rapid results; aggressive operations became paramount in order to compensate for their lack of means. When the FLN began to shift towards urban terrorism in 1956, the 10th Parachute Division (DP) was the unit that was ordered in to respond. However, the paratroopers would find their mission radically different from the ones they had trained for.

In retrospect, at least, the increasing delegation of powers from Paris to the authorities in Algeria, which was paralleled by an increasing shift of authority from civilian to military authorities, and from higher to lower echelons, also created major problems for the French. Despite official recognition that the civilian authorities and their organs of action, the police and the gendarmerie, were the most capable of carrying out the pacification measures, the army found itself increasingly burdened with the responsibility of maintaining order. This militarization of policing culminated in the assumption of power in Algiers by General Jacques Massu, the commander of the 10th DP, on 7 January 1957.

In order to trace the development of the French response, the structure and evolution of the chain of command must be discussed. Then, beginning with pre-1954 directives emanating from the chain of command, the evolution of the French response, with a focus on operational priorities, shall be examined. Finally, this

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[6] SHD 1 H 1102, "Note d'information sur la situation de l'Afrique du Nord établie à la date 10 Octobre 1956." In reality this meant a change from 404,287 effectives in 1 October 1956 to 340,551 in 1 December 1956. Alban Mahieu, "Les Effectifs de l'armée Français en Algérie (1954-1962)," in Jauffret and Vaïsse, eds., *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d'Algérie*, pp. 39-48

chapter will assess the activities of the 10th DP in the lead up to its entry into Algiers, in order to illuminate the character and shortcomings of the French response.

Overall authority in Algeria rested with the civilian Governor General (GG), whose title was changed to Resident Minister (MR) on 15 February 1956.[7] Previously, the Governor General had reported to the Minister of the Interior in Paris. Beginning in 1956, the MR, as he was now known, was in theory to report directly to the *président du conseil*, i.e. the French prime minister. However, in practice the *président du conseil* delegated his authority and signing power to a *secretaire d'état à l'interieure des affaires algériennes*, who in turn delegated authority and signing power to the MR.[8] Subordinate, in war and peace, to the GG and then MR was the general commanding the 19th Corps. In 1956 this title was altered as well, to the *commandant supérieure interarmée* (CSI), commander Tenth Military Region (X RM).[9] All divisional commanders of the three corps areas, *corps d'armée d'Oran* (CAO), *corps d'Armée d'Algiers* (CAA) and *corps d'Armée de Constantine* (CAC) were responsible to the CSI.[10] On the civilian side, the MR oversaw three *inspecteurs généraux d'administration mission extraordinaire* (IGAME), one for each corps area, who in turn supervised the various prefects. On paper, then, the chain of command ran in a direct line from the *président du conseil*, through the MR to the CSI, then onto the divisional commanders and IGAMEs. Notionally, authority rested with the civil authorities, but in 1956 through a special powers act, the MR could turn civilian control over to the military, and increasingly he did so.

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[7] SHD 1 H 1091 ""Attributions de Gouverneur Generale en matiere de defense. Devolution de ces pouvoirs, Loi N 47. 1853," 20 Septembre 1947, "Decret," 15 Fevrier 1956."
[8] SHD 1 H 1091, "Decret N 56194 du 16 Fevrier 1956."
[9] SHD 1 H 1091, "Decret N 56196 du 16 Fevrier 1956."
[10] SHD 1 H 1091, "Decret N 56272 du 17 Mars 1956."

The processes for civil-military cooperation were laid out well before the start of the 1 November 1954 hostilities. A note from the GG to the prefects dated 4 March 1952 indicated that the civil authorities could call upon the army not only to bolster the police but also for more energetic actions to protect civilians or "*les biens*."[11] However, the GG added, such actions must be conducted in the spirit that "the adversary was not the enemy but just temporarily misled."[12] Therefore, individual and collective reprisals were forbidden, and every effort was to be made to prevent well intentioned but misinformed, read vigilante, action by civilians.[13] In such actions the coordination of military and political activities was deemed indispensable.

The theme of the enemy as 'temporarily misled' was continued in a note from the GG to the prefects dating 5 April 1955. The GG noted that the indigenous population was still largely loyal, suggested that they generally opposed the terrorist policies of the rebels. Moreover, he warned, the tendency to lump the entire Muslim population together would endanger French-Muslim fraternity, and negate a valuable intelligence source. The Governor warned of the negative effects of a French superiority complex, which was bound to offend a Muslim population that desired equality, and called upon the authorities to lead by example. To overlook infractions would undermine the rule of law, while to punish the community as a whole would be an injustice. Both kinds of behaviour had to be avoided. [14]

These themes were taken up again later that year, in a circular dated 22 November 1955 from the governor to both the civil and military authorities, on the

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[11] SHD 1 H 1094, "Mission de Police confiées à la Troupe, Circulaire 401/C.M., au 4 Mars 1952, Gouverneur Generale aux Préfets."
[12] *Ibid.*.
[13] *Ibid.*.
[14] SHD 1 H 1094, "Gouverneur Générale aux Préfets 5 Avril 1955."

subject of attitudes to adopt towards the Muslim population. In it the governor denounced as oversimplified and dangerous the idea that there were two sides in the conflict, the Muslims versus the French. Instead, he emphasized that the rebels represented but a small minority. While some villages supported the FLN, many of them did so only because of its policies of intimidation and terror.[15] Thus "it would be a grave error to display towards this population by our attitude and acts and general suspicions; it would only serve to dissuade those disposed towards our cause and play into the hands of the rebels...While repression must be rapid and vigorous against the terrorists, it must also be just since all errors alienated the population."[16]

The role of the army in dealing with the FLN was defined in various documents, including a note from Minister of Defense Pierre Koenig dated 1 July 1955. In it the minister argued that the rebels ought to be fought uniformly across all of Algeria, and that the experiences of the Constantine division, as outlined in divisional instruction Number 11, provided guidelines for action.[17] The issue facing the French forces in Constantine was that the fight was more political than military. While the army carried pursued its missions its efforts were undermined by a lack of clear military objectives.[18] While the French faced only a few hundred rebels in the area, they found it difficult to bring them to battle. In order to capitalize upon their

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[15] SHD 1 H 1094, "Attitude à observer à l'égard des populations musulmanes dans la lutte contre le terrorisme," Circulaire N688 EMM/D, du 22 Novembre 1955, Gouverneur Générale aux autorité civiles et militaires.
[16] *Ibid.*.
[17] SHD 1 H 1929, Ministre de la Defence Nationale aux Général Commandant la 10eme Région Militaire et le Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie, 1 Juillet 1955
[18] *Ibid.*.

numerical superiority, the French prescribed fast, strong action, while respecting the humanitarian regulations of the army.[19]

In terms of civil-military relations, the note indicated that the directives for missions were to come from the civilian authorities, whereas the military authorities would choose the means to accomplish those directives.[20] In the case of an ambush "the most brutal means should be employed without delay."[21] This included the use of air support, which should remain on alert. The use of air mobile troops would be required, in order to ensure that rebel bands, once engaged, could not escape.[22] The rules of engagement were quite clear; troops were instructed to engage without hesitation all armed rebels, or those appeared to be armed, with all available firepower.[23] All those accomplices who survived to be captured were to be handed over to the civil authorities. In short the minister opined "our action must be most brutal, rapid and complete."[24] The comments by the minister, which focused upon operational efficiency, contrasted significantly with those of the GG in 1955, who had stressed the need for judicious conduct. As the insurrection went on, operational efficiency overshadowed judicious restraint, which led in turn to growing Muslim alienation and further problems.

An operational instruction, dated 4 January 1956, broadened the scope of the army's mission by requiring it to dismantle the underlying administrative structure of the rebels. While the destruction of armed bands was to remain the primary mission,

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[19] *Ibid.*
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*

the separation between the *quadrillage* role, which included dismantling the administrative structure of the FLN, and the intervention role, which consisted of finding and destroying the ALN cadres, was to be heightened.[25] In order to accomplish the mission the note recommended the constitution at all echelons of mobile reserves. These forces were intended for rapid reaction missions based on timely exploitation of intelligence, as well as planned operations.[26] A rapid pace of operations was further promoted by operational directive 4/56, dated 15 March 1956. It called for an aggressive attitude and firm application of the rules of engagement. Air mobile assets were to be used to launch operations at a rate of one every fifteen days.[27]

A study dated 17 March 1956 classified the army's mission as threefold. The first aspect was the search for and destruction of rebel bands. The second was the protection of the lives and property of the *biens:* of Europeans as well as those Muslims friendly to the French cause. The third aspect was simply classified as pacification, which involved the return of civilian control and services to areas cleared of major rebel presence.[28] The first encompassed the intervention mission, while the second and third encompassed the *quadrillage* mission. This framework confirmed what was in practice and confirmed the army's view that the twin missions of *quadrillage* and mobile intervention were complementary.

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[25] SHD 1 H 1929, "Instruction opérationnelle et secrète 1/56 pour les Généraux Noiret, Delange, de Widerspach-Thor," N43/RM.10/3.OPE, 4 Janvier 1956.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] SHD 1 H 1929 Directive d'opération 4/56, N1054/RM.10/3.OPE/TS
[28] SHD 1 H 1929 "Etudes sur l'orientation à donner à la politique des matériels de la troupe de la 10ème Region Militaires," N51/CAB/TS

However, the French military did not have the resources to support its expanding mandate. For example, a major obstacle to the drive for more mobility was a lack of helicopter assets. A note from the 27th Alpine infantry Division (DIA) succinctly summed up the issue, stating that there were only enough helicopters available to allow for evacuations.[30] Moreover, changes in the FLN strategy threatened to exploit French shortages. An instructional note from General Leonard to his subordinates, dated 28 March 1956, warned that the FLN might launch a generalized campaign, both in the *bled* and in the cities, to influence public opinion.[31] There was therefore an urgent need to establish a defense plan for the urban areas. Given the lack of manpower this meant the establishment of *unités territoriales* (UT) – which were essentially armed local militias.[32] The establishment of the UTs meant an abandonment of the Governor General's 1952 directive, which sought to avoid delegating authority to local civilians since it increased the potential for vigilantism.

The French manpower situation had improved somewhat by end of May 1956, according to Operational Directive 6/56. Significantly, that directive began with a sense of urgency, emphasizing the need to deploy the reinforcements rapidly over the next four months, before the United Nations meeting in the fall of that year.[33] The arrival of the reinforcements allowed the establishment of greater mobile reserves, and bolstered pacification efforts.[34] A 27th DIA note on pacification dated 5 May 1956 classifies the mission of pacification as having a military and a psychological

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[30] SHD 1 H 1929, "Fiche au sujet des moyens aeriens," 27th DIA, Etat-Major 3e Bureau, 4 Mai 1956.
[31] SHD 1 H 1929, Instruction operationnelle personelle et secrète 2/56 pour les Généraux Noiret, Delange, de Widerspach-Thor, de Maricourt, Quenard, et Contre-Amiral Geli, N197/RM.10/3.OPE, 20 Mars 1956
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] SHD 1 H 1929 Directive d'opérations 6/56 à compter du 1 Juin 1956, N2040/RM.10/3.OPE/31 TS.
[34] *Ibid.*

dimension.[35] Both missions were linked; the note argued that the residents of the zone were terrorized by the FLN into cooperation. Therefore, in order to rally them, they needed to be protected.[36] To maintain the support of the population effective propaganda, backed up by prompt action, was necessary. However, such action needed to measured, as well as energetic. Arrests of suspects needed to be limited, since the arbitrary nature of arrests had a very negative effect and limited the amount of intelligence available to mount interventions.[37]

During this period the French authorities also tried to instruct newly arriving troops on how to 'pacify' the population effectively. An orientation note destined for newly arrived members of the 27th DIA clearly emphasized that the power to arrest remained with the gendarmerie.[38] Suspects could only be arrested for committing a crime, or for political reasons, the later reason rather vaguely defined. In the latter case the order had to come from the civil authorities and suspects must be turned over to them upon capture.[39] In terms of relations with the population, the note echoed earlier calls to be just and humane. It noted that breaches were more often than not the work of mediocre troops lacking in discipline.[40] Outside of combat, the note permitted collective sanctions, such as imposition of a curfew or route interdiction, but only in cases of extreme urgency and in accord with the civil authorities.[41] The note closed with an appeal to continuous action, perseverance and intelligent work towards achieving these objectives.

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[35] SHD 1 H 1929, "Note sur la pacification," 27th DIA, 5 Mai 1956, N584/3.OPE/S
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] SHD 1 H 1929, "Note d'orientation destiné aux unités nouvellement affectées à la zZone Opérationnelle de Kabylie," 27th DIA, 23 Avril 1956, N528/3OPE/S
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid.*

In response to the FLN, which was shifting its strategy towards galvanizing public support through increased propaganda and terror, French authorities placed growing emphasis on psychological action, mainly in the form of pacification and propaganda. A note circulated 7 July 1956 focused on the psychological aspect of the campaign in considerable depth. It began by reciting the theme that reconciliation was the final goal.[42] Various problems – rising violence, a slander campaign against the French army, and rumours of negotiations – heightened the need for psychological initiatives. The French were completely convinced that if they were to succeed, they could not allow skepticism, whether it emanated from Europeans or Muslims, to increase. Significantly, the note highlighted the fact that the FLN sought to provoke greater repression through increased terrorism, and thereby gain greater sympathy by condemning French actions as crimes against humanity. In order to combat this threat the note proposed several remedial measures. First and foremost, officers had to be on guard for provocations and keep a firm grasp on the troops under their command. When dealing with the population all efforts were to be taken to avoid blunders and useless brutality, and to respect local culture. Finally all troops should be given pacification tasks as much as possible. Such work should be with and for the Muslim population. The need for these measures to be permanent was emphasized with a quote from the Minister of Defense, who warned that "If we reduce the rebels with rapid operations and defeat terrorism without making friends of the Algerian population we will risk new rebellions."[43]

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[42] SHD 1 H 1929, " Note d'Orientation N5, directives d'action psychologique et documentation pour Juillet-Août 1956," 7 Juillet 1956, N342/EM.10/EP/DR

[43] *Ibid.*

This same document also noted the changing nature of the FLN's psychological strategy. It observed that, as a result of its relative weakness, the FLN was redoubling its terrorism efforts by increasingly targeting Europeans. The situation in the capital of Algiers was further inflamed by the execution of two criminals on 18 June 1956. Now the French had to implement *quadrillage* in the city itself to maintain order.[44] While the gendarmerie and police were still considered the first choice to deal with urban terrorism, problems with the number of available troops and police plagued French efforts in this regard.[45] An instructional note dated 1 September 1956 noted the approach of the UN meeting, as well as the fact that this was the highpoint of French effectives before reserve terms began to expire.[46] Since the FLN was seeking to launch ambushes and terrorize the European population in order to affect public opinion, the CSI called for an amplified effort for the month of September to carry the fight to the Algerian nationalists.[47] As the United Nations meetings approached FLN terror efforts intensified; the first bombings executed by Yacef Saadi went off on 30 September 1956.[48]

Any gains made by the September operations were short lived, as General Operational Directive 12/56, issued at the end of September, noted that the FLN was beginning to launch actions to retake the initiative. The tempo of urban terror was increasing, and was now accompanied by the threat of a general strike.[49] Building

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[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] SHD 1 H 1929, "Instruction Personnelle et Secrète pour les Généraux Commandant les Divisions Militaires d'Alger, d'Oran, et de Constantine," 1 Septembre 1956, N3520/RM.10/3.OPE/169 TS.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Horne, op.cit, pp.183-187.
[49] SHD 1 H 1929, "Directive Generale d'Operations 12/56 pour les Généraux Commandant les Divisions Militaire de Constantine, d'Alger, et d'Oran," 30 September 1956, N3903/RM.10/3.OPE/216 TS.

upon the measures outlined in the 1 September 1956 directive, new orders called for a further acceleration in the pace of operations, and for preventative measures to be taken against the specter of urban terror, in the form of increased intelligence gathering and intelligence-led preventative operations.[50] The theme of maintaining pressure on the FLN as the UN meetings loomed was repeated in a further general directive dated 2 November 1956.[51]

The inherent tension between the army's efforts to destroy rebel bands and pacify Algeria bears further consideration. Military efforts in the *bled* were supposed to be fast and aggressive, while pacification had to be patient and measured. French authorities tried to present these two missions as complementary, but in fact they were vastly different in terms of the challenges they posed. Reports on the campaigns of 1956 reveal a great deal, immediately after the events, about the difficulties the French faced in the lead up to the Battle of Algiers, and thus merit a closer analysis.

In a report from the CSI General Henri Lorillot to the Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, it was argued that the key to the French army's effectiveness lay in its growing acclimatization to subversive warfare, to the point where it could shift between intervention and *quadrillage*.[52] Subversive war for the French encompassed military, political, psychological, and economic aspects. In order to counter the FLN, the report argued that the French must operate on the same terrain and with similar procedures.[53] Here we can see an early, rudimentary articulation of the French

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[50] *Ibid.*
[51] SHD 1 H 1929, "Directive Générale 14/56 pour les Généraux Commandant les Divisions Militaire d'Alger, d'Oran, Constantine," 2 Novembre 1956, N4397/RM.10/3.OPE/196 TS.
[52] SHD 1 H 1904/1, "Note pour le Secrétaire d'Etat aux Forces Armées, Rapports sur la campagne d'Algérie," Reference Note N31.047 SEFAT/CAB/EMP/OE du 29 Septembre 1956, 16 Mai 1957
[53] *Ibid.*

conception of subversive warfare which was eventually embodied in the concept of *guerre révolutionnaire* (GR) by military officers and analysts in the aftermath of the Battle of Algiers.[54] However, in 1956 the ideas that would form the core of GR were only in the initial stages of being formulated and disseminated throughout the army.

However, while officers were developing their strategic concepts, the quality of their troops remained uneven, to the point that of 222 battalions present in Algeria, only fifteen were considered to be of the highest quality. These were the Reserve Générale units, including the Foreign Legion and Parachute Regiments.[55] Most units, by contrast, contained large numbers of reservists lacking the élan of the RG. Moreover, as previously noted these units were subject to turnover as reserve terms expired; the loss of 100,000 troops in this manner at the end of 1956 was particularly significant. Uneven quality led to the specialization of units, with the Reserve Générale units taking the lead in the intervention role. Such specialization meant however that the Reserve Générale units were less equipped to fulfill the *quadrillage* role, which had to be assumed by less capable troops.[56] In general, while the French tried to allocate units in parallel to changing FLN strategy, they consistently lacked sufficient numbers of troops both to protect and to attack a fluid enemy over large swathes of territory.[57]

In order to mitigate the unsustainable manpower demands, effective intelligence gathering needed to be in place. Such intelligence organs could help to

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[54] See discussion on this subject in the Introduction, see also Kelly, *op.cit* and Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine*, Praeger, New York, 1964.
[55] SHD 1 H 1904/1, "Note pour le Secrétaire d'Etat aux Forces Armées," *op.cit.*
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*

avoid costly errors and a reliance on airpower which, the report noted, alienated the local population.[58] Intelligence therefore played an important role not only in aiding the conduct of operations but also in orienting political action. However the report noted that traditional military intelligence was poorly adapted to subversive warfare. By contrast, the police and the gendarmerie were better placed to provide local intelligence since they lived amongst and had regular contact with the population. However, they too were overstretched, which led to the military stepping in a critical junctures. Those units assigned to *quadrillage* duty, living amongst the population, thus had to provide the bulk of intelligence. The emphasis on the population was the key. In a passage that echoed Mao the report opined that "It is in the population where the war will be won and where we must focus our research. The people know who the fish are and where they can be found."[59] It was a mission best suited to the units which contained a high proportion of reserves, who were not capable of the high intensity intervention operations conducted by the troops of the Reserve Générale.

On the contrary the troops of the Reserve Générale, including the Paras of the 10th DP, unlike the units assigned the *quadrillage* duty, were rarely in one place for long enough to discern the "fish," since they performed the intervention role. Moreover with the approach of the Suez crisis they were further removed from involvement since they were training for the more conventional operation against the Egyptians. The transient nature of the Paras' mission attracted official attention from an early point and sparked a debate over how they could best be employed. A memo dated 7 October 1955 argued that the Paras were the best infantry and gained the best

[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Ibid.*

results on the ground, and that their primary focus was on mobile missions.[60] By contrast, a letter to the Commandant GPI dated 3 October 1955 stressed that the Paras had a role to play in the pacification aspect of the French mission. The letter noted that that the "incrustation" of the Paras in a surface role, in lieu of an air mobile role posed a significant change for them.[61] By the fall the Paras had taken on a dual role as both the region's air mobile reserve, ready on twelve hours notice, as well as that of a local ground-based reserve able to assist the local commanders.[62] Assisting the Paras in the adaptation to the new state of affairs was the advent of the helicopter, which added considerably more flexibility than air drops via parachute, and allowed for quicker vertical envelopment of rebel forces.[63] A memo dated 22 February 1955 summarized the evolution succinctly, stating that the advent of the helicopter and greater surface role meant that the parachute regiments were undergoing a massive change, similar to the one experienced by cavalry regiments during the First World War.[64]

The divisional war diaries of the Paras reveal that they remained predominantly a short-term intervention force, operating at a high operational pace. Their frequent missions were supplemented with the preparations for Operation Amilcar, the name for the French Suez operation.[65] This meant that a significant proportion of the Paras' time was taken up with training in various conventional war

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[60] SHD 1 H 4263, "Note à l'attention de Général, Commandant du GPI et des TAP," 7 Octobre 1955.
[61] SHD 1 H 4263, Général Gilles aux Général Commandant le GPI, 3 Octobre 1955, N2395/E.
[62] SHD 1 H 4263 Général de Brigade Massu, Commandant GPI, à Général Commandant le 10ème Region Militaire, "Emploi des unites aéroportées," 2 Novembre 1955, N275/GPI/3OPE/S
[63] SHD 1 H 4263, "Réflexions au sujet de le fiche de Général Noiret sur l'emploi des TAP dans l'est Algérien," 29 Mars 1956, N1324/ROT/D.
[64] SHD 1 H 4263, "Pour le Général Commandant le GPI, emploi des troupes aéroportées dan l'Est Algérien," 22 Fevrier 1956, N78/CAB.
[65] SHD 1 H 4677 Journal de Marche de Commandant 10th DP, Periode 1/7/1956 au 30/9/1956, N60/QC.

disciplines such as anti-aircraft and anti-armour procedures, which were of little use against the FLN.[66] The 1 REP even underwent amphibious training starting in late August, in preparation for its seaborne arrival in Port Said.[67] Overall, the Egyptian mission occupied the attention of the Paras from August to December 1956, when the last elements returned from Egypt.[68]

The timing of the Operation Amilcar overlapped with the beginning of the FLN gambit in Algiers. Despite being preoccupied with the preparations for Amilcar, units of the 10th DP were placed on alert to intervene in city. On 12 August 1956, elements of the 1st REP were placed on alert for an eventual intervention into the Casbah, following a bombing in the Rue Thebes by extremist *pied noirs*.[69] On 2 October 1956, the 3rd RPC was placed on a 48-hour alert following the 30 September FLN bombings of the Milk Bar and Caféteria in Algiers.[70] Several more alerts followed, and while none of them triggered a large-scale response, they were a portent of things to come. Meanwhile, the principal focus of the 10th DP remained Operation Amilcar. Thus, when the order was received on 6 January 1957 to go into Algiers, the Paras had very little training in urban *quadrillage* missions.

The assumption of civil power by General Jacques Massu, commander of 10th DP, on 7 January 1957, represented the final delegation of authority to the military which had begun with the 17 March 1956 Decree. The decision was not universally met with enthusiasm. Paul Teitgen, the Secretary General of the Prefecture, was

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[66] *Ibid.*
[67] SHD 1 H 4677, Journal de Marche, *op.cit.*
[68] SHD 1 H 4265, " Note de Service, Exercise Amphibie des 9 et 10 Octobre 1956," 8 Octobre 1956, N8022/OPS
[69] SHD 1 H 4677 Journal de Marche, *op.cit*; Horne, *op.cit*, p. 184.
[70] SHD 1 H 4677 Journal de Marche, *op.cit*; Horne, *op.cit*, p. 185.

suspicious of the newly arrived General Raoul Salan as CSI, and was fearful of various plots for the assumption of civil power by the military.[71] For his part, Salan was reticent about using the Paras in the role of police, but MR Lacoste, faced with repeated FLN attacks for several months, had "decided to win the battle."[72] Massu had no illusions that an urban campaign against the FLN would entail controversial actions, and remarked to his chief of Staff Yves Godard that "I can tell you right away we are going to have lots of *emmerdements*."[73]

The initial orientation instructions for the Paras revealed how much had changed since the beginning of the war. First and foremost was the extent of local control assumed by the 10th DP. Even though the Paras were not accustomed to *quadrillage* duty, they were granted full civil powers, a significant departure from regular operating procedures.[74] While civilian elements were incorporated into the 10th DP mission, particularly in the form of a mixed staff which included Teitgen, there was little doubt as to who was leading the efforts.[75]

Massu took to preparing for this unenviable task with professionalism. In an instruction to his troops dated 15 January 1957 he coined the term "offensive *quadrillage*" to describe the mission, thereby fusing the intervention role with the *quadrillage* role.[76] He did temper the offensive part of the strategy by noting that it was often enough simply to reassure the French population by showing that troops were present in the city.[77] Massu was well aware of the psychological role of

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[71] Horne, *op.cit*, pp. 180-181.
[72] Colonel Yves Godard, *Les Paras dans la Ville*, Fayard, Paris, 1972, p. 226.
[73] *Ibid.*, pg. 227.
[74] SHD 1 H 4677, Journal de Marche, premier trimestre de 1957, 6 Jan 1957
[75] *Ibid.*
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*

appearances, as he made clear in a note to his troops dated 22 Sept 1955, in which he noted that the media was depicting the Paras as a "unit of repression" whose brutal acts were designed to assuage the fears of the *pied noirs*.[78] To counter this image, he argued that the role of the Paras in the pacification mission should be paramount. However in order to be effective he noted they would need to be implanted within the community so that they could know perfectly the terrain and their habitants.[79] This of course reflects the debate over the role of the Paras discussed above.

Therein, lay the paradox of the French response. In order to be effective, familiarity with the local area and people was necessary, and such familiarity could only be developed with time. However with the international efforts by the FLN to link their campaign with the UNGA meeting meant that time was lacking. The 10th DP, having spent four months preparing for and executing the conventional mission in Egypt, had no time to reorient and adjust to the mission in Algiers.

This begs the question as to why the 10th DP was selected for this mission. There seem to have been two key reasons. The first factor was the manpower issues facing the French in the latter half of 1956 discussed in this chapter. The second reason involved the p*ied noirs* and the FLN effort to drive a wedge between them and the Muslim population through terror. This provoked a violent reaction by extremist *pied noirs*, most notably in the aftermath of the assassination of Amedée Froger, the mayor of Boufarik, during which an angry mob of *pieds noirs* attacked Muslim civilians unfortunate enough to be in the area of the protests.[80] As for the the Algiers police, they were hardly a neutral force, as their personnel came from a population

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[78] *Ibid.*
[79] *Ibid.*
[80] Pierre Pelisser, *La Bataille d'Alger*, Perrin, Paris, 2002, pp. 13-14, Horne, *op.cit*, pp. 187-188.

which had close ties to the extremist *pied noirs*.[81] The Paras, by contrast, were outsiders, who also possessed a certain élan which made them well respected and idolized by some.[82] Perhaps the Muslim population would be less suspicious of them, while the psychological effect of their presence would assuage pied noirs concerns.

The French response was thus constrained by the element of time, manpower and authority. The FLN strategy of linking their international diplomatic campaign to a terror campaign designed to separate the European and Muslim communities proved to be a potent challenge to French authority. Essentially, the FLN forced the French to delegate authority to Massu and the 10th DP, who had been training for and executing entirely different missions. While the French recognized and proclaimed the need to avoid excesses, the pressure created by the FLN meant that shortcuts were taken, with deadly results for those caught by the French and for the French Algerian cause.

[81] Pelisser, *op.cit.*, p. 17.
[82] Horne, *op.cit.* pp. 167-168.

Conclusion

"A colonial officer defines himself above all by his social role" – Marshal Lyautey

The French conquest of Algeria, which began in 1830, initiated a pattern that would be echoed in their later struggles to maintain control of the colony. The conquest was accomplished in brutal fashion under the leadership of Thomas Robert Bugeaud, who made extensive use of the *Razzia*[1] to force the population to "accept the yoke of conquest."[2] Even in the 1800s, the gap between the official rhetoric of civilization, and the brutal reality of the campaigns in Algeria, stirred up controversy in France. As the century wore on pure aggression was no longer acceptable to the French public and they began to voice opposition, particularly when they learned that the army had lit fires at the mouth of a cave where 500 men women and children had taken refuge, asphyxiating all but ten of them.[3] As such, later French policy makers sought other options for the expansion of colonial power. Chief among the architects of this new strategy was Marshal Hubert Lyautey, who argued that in the colonies the military ought to be a constructive force. While his ideas were predominantly based on his service in Morocco, they were widely read and adopted by the colonial army. The army subsequently employed a variety of economic, political and diplomatic strategies to minimize the violence of conquest.[4] However, while Lyautey preached the use of minimum force and peaceful penetration in his writings, his ideas proved far more difficult to apply in practice.

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[1] 'War ride' or 'scorched earth.'
[2] Douglas Porch, "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: The development of French Colonial Warfare," in Paret, Peter, ed. *The Makers of Modern Strategy* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986. p. 381.
[3] Horne, *op.cit*, p. 30.
[4] Porch, *op.cit*, p. 390.

The FLN provided a more significant challenge to French suzerainty than Abd el Kader, the principal leader of Algerian resistance in the nineteenth century, ever did. With the advent of mass communication, the actions of the French were increasingly coming under public scrutiny. By the 1950s, photographs accompanying accounts of French brutality only amplified the effect on opinion, both in France and abroad. However while the vast *bled* of Algeria offered sanctuary to armed rebels, it also remained untouched by media coverage as Abane rightly pointed out.[5] By moving the fight into Algiers the FLN not only gained greater exposure but also synchronized its external diplomatic strategy and its internal war against French security forces. By closely linking the two strategies they ensured that the sacrifices made the rebels in Algeria would not be in vain or go unnoticed. The significance of the FLNs diplomatic strategy is well laid out by Matthew Connelly, who shows how both sides fought for international support, as well as on the ground.[6]

This point was not lost on the French Army. As we saw in chapter 2 French intelligence had a clear and accurate picture of the FLN's general strategic intentions. The intelligence assessments show a nuanced view of the FLN, a view which did not reductively depict the movement as the creature of international communism or pan Arabism. The archival evidence shows that the French understood the motives behind the FLN's shift towards urban terrorism, and its links to their diplomatic efforts.

French records also reveal the extent to which the FLN's complex strategy dictated the French response. The latter was characterized by the tension between the need for patience and restraint in order to mollify local Muslim sentiment, and the

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[5] See chapter 1.
[6] Connelly, *op.cit*, p. 82.

need to suppress the rebellion before the FLN could make its case at the UN in October 1956. The time-sensitive nature of the FLN's offensive soon obliged the French to adopt a more aggressive approach, which had its own pitfalls.

The French reinforced their troop levels during the summer of 1956, in order to rein in the FLN prior to the opening of the UN General Assembly. However, even with a surge in manpower the requirements for effective *quadrillage* were immense. Without troops on the ground intelligence networks atrophied. The French were unable to suppress the rebellion in the summer time and additionally had become involved in the Suez, further exacerbating manpower pressure. In the fall, just as the FLN was increasing the tempo of its operations within Algiers, French troop levels were falling as reserve terms finished. By the New Year it was clear to the French that they needed to regain the initiative in Algiers and were thus forced to call in the 10th DP, a unit coming back from a conventional operation in Egypt that it had trained for since August of 1956. General Jacques Massu and others were reticent to use the Paras in an urban role since they were familiar with an intervention role, but they were deployed in this capacity nevertheless.[7]

The progressive diffusion of authority down the chain of command, and from civil to military officials, culminated with the deployment of the Paras in Algiers and the granting of complete civil and military powers to General Massu. Faced with an unenviable task Massu gave free rein to his soldiers, and countenanced torture with the alleged backing of higher French authorities, according to General Paul Aussaresses, who as a major helped to organize interrogations and extrajudicial

[7] Godard, *op.cit*, p. 226.

killings.[8] James McDougall rightly points out that torture was in practice long before the Paras marched in Algiers.[9] Indeed, Aussaresses recalls that it was from the police that the Army learned to adopt torture.[10]

While this heritage of violence is a compelling explanation of the French actions, it is more of an enabling factor than a prime driver of French behavior. Few soldiers had extensive experience in Algeria prior to deployment there and therefore would have been largely ignorant of previous torture by colonial security forces. Another explanation for the prevalence of terror in Algeria, which is rooted in a belief that it can be explained by the tendency to submit to authority, is a very generalized one, and is also unconvincing on account of the many examples of resorting to torture without authorization.[11]

While torture on the part of the French in Algeria was widespread to the point of being institutionalized, it was not practiced by everyone. The case of the 584th Battalion du Train provides a useful example of how control could be established. The battalion was undisciplined to the point of anarchy when a new commanding officer, Major Jean Pouget, was brought in restore order In 1956 In one illuminating example of what was possible with effective leadership, Pouget requested a prisoner be brought to him for questioning and when the prisoner arrived he had been beaten. Furious, Pouget asked who was responsible. When the culprit, a conscript, presented himself Pouget immediately punched him, saying:

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[8] Gen. Paul Aussaresses, *The Battle of the Casbah: Counter-Terrorism and Torture* Enigma Books, New York, 2005, pp. 124 131.
[9] McDougall, *op.cit*, p. 6.
[10] Aussaresses, *op.cit*, pp. 14-16.
[11] Branche, *op.cit*, pg. 95, See also Ted Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers* Smithsonian Books, New York, 2005, p. 91, and David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria 1956-58*, Rand Corporation, 1963, pp. 115-119.

> This is on behalf of the Prisoner...do not forget that a prisoner is a disarmed soldier. He is no longer an enemy and could be a friend tomorrow. So long as I am in command of this battalion the prisoners will be treated as if they were already our comrades."[12]

After this display, the Algerian prisoner in question, duly impressed, provided a torrent of information without coercion and eventually joined the French.

But there were not enough Pougets in the French army at the time. Torture was widespread, to the point that it irrevocably tainted the French cause. Moreoever, since the threat of torture was in itself illegal, one did not have to torture to be guilty. Lieutenant-Colonel David Galula was able to achieve results in one case only after one of his subordinates locked a suspect in a large oven and threatened to stoke a fire. Galula allowed the 'interrogation' to go this far, though he was concerned that it would undermine efforts at local pacification. Ironically, Galula had only been able to arrest the suspect in the first place because of information provided by a walk-in informant, the kind of person that pacification, rather than torture, was intended to encourage.[13]

The principle obstacle to the French was that intelligence arising from the pacification efforts of the *quadrillage* troops, was slow to arrive; collecting it required patience and restraint, which the circumstances of the fighting did not encourage.. The archival evidence paints a picture of an organizational culture predicated on rapid results, which resulted in the paradoxical French response. As the FLN stepped up its

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[12] Alexander Zervoudakis, "A Case of Successful Pacification: The 584th Bataillon du Train at Bordj de l'Agha", in Martin S. Alexander, and J.F.V. Keiger, eds. *France and the Algerian War 1954-62: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy* London: Frank Cass, 2002.

[13] Galula, *op.cit*, pp. 115-119.

diplomatic campaign, this meant that every French excess would negatively affect the country's international and political status. The French military, despite being aware of this problem, abandoned more measured responses in search of a rapid resolution and nullification of the FLN challenge. The ultimately self-defeating French response was therefore not the product of faulty intelligence, but in the weaknesses of France's diplomatic and military position, and the fact that its colonial rule in Algeria had grown discredited, and could not counteract an effective, if ruthless, FLN strategy. Quite simply, time had run out for *Algérie Française*.

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Curriculum Vitae

Jeffrey Winston Mott

University of New Brunswick, BA 2006