The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

# THE FRENCH IN ALGERIA, 1954-1962 MILITARY SUCCESS FAILURE OF GRAND STRATEGY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN W. TOWERS
United States Army

# **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:**

Approved for public release.

Distribution is unlimited

**USAWC CLASS OF 2002** 



U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5050

20020806 218

#### USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

The French in Algeria, 1954-1962
Military Success
Failure of Grand Strategy

by

Lieutenant Colonel John W. Towers United States Army

Colonel Michael R. Kershner Project Advisor

The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

U.S. Army War College CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:
Approved for public release.
Distribution is unlimited.

#### **ABSTRACT**

AUTHOR:

John W. Towers

TITLE: The French in Algeria, 1954-1962, Military Success, Failure of Grand Strategy

FORMAT:

Strategy Research Project

DATE:

09 April 2002

PAGES: 25

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

After the Second World War, movements to separate former colonies from their past rulers, by political means or force, acquired an international momentum that reverberated around the globe. In Algeria, a popular and militant organization advocating complete independence from France was reinvigorated by both the international sentiment and by a perception of French impotence. France had lost a war. Her economy was in ruin, and the government of the Fourth Republic teetered uncertainly. There was a bitter struggle being waged in Indochina. The international humiliation of losing there, especially the dramatic fall of Dien Bien Phu, in concert with a still moribund economy and a fragmented domestic and political scene including a large, aggressive Communist Party, again demonstrated a level of impotence in France that stirred Algerian nationalists.

The French Army, disgusted with the results in Indochina, was determined to "get it right" in Algeria. There would be victory, whatever the cost. Yet, eight years later, Algeria was lost. The French Army suffered 18,000 killed and 65,000 wounded. Four General Officers were court-martialed for an attempted coup. In the words of noted historian Alistair Horne, writing the classic outline of the struggle, <u>A Savage War of Peace</u>: "The war in Algeria toppled six French prime ministers and the Fourth Republic itself. It came close to bringing down General de Gaulle and his Fifth Republic and confronted metropolitan France with the threat of civil war"

In 1962, after eight years of combat, including terrorism on a scale previously unknown in the western world, Algeria became an independent nation. The last vestige of the French Empire had violently gone its own way. How did it happen? What prompted such extreme emotions and subsequent extreme acts? How did the traditionalist and rich-in-magnificent-history French Army become so alienated from mainstream France? How can we avoid the same circumstances? This case study will attempt to answer those questions.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	
THE FRENCH IN ALGERIA	1
THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS	2
THE EARLY WAR YEARS, 1954-1957	3
THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS, 1957	5
THE LATER WAR YEARS, 1958-1961	8
THE GENERALS' REVOLT	13
CONCLUSIONS	15
ENDNOTES	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY	19

vi ·

#### THE FRENCH IN ALGERIA

The years following the Second World War have been characterized as a period of "decolonization." Decolonization acquired an international momentum that reverberated around the globe<sup>2</sup>. In Algeria, a popular and militant organization advocating complete independence from France was inspired by both the international sentiment and by a perception of French impotence. France had been subjugated, savaged by land combat, and saved only by the United States. Her economy was in ruin, and the government of the Fourth Republic teetered uncertainly. On 8 May 1945, Victory in Europe Day, a rally in the predominantly Muslim Algerian town of Setif exploded into violence. Although the sequence of events that ignited the tragedy has been lost in the past, after five days, there were over one hundred Europeans killed and another one hundred wounded. Perhaps more sensationally, there were numerous accounts of brutal rapes and the horrible mutilation of corpses.<sup>3</sup> There was general outrage in France, and in Algeria there was a severe repression of the Muslim population by the police, the Army, and also by a particularly ferocious militia of European settlers. The uprising was ruthlessly crushed, the nationalist movement fragmented, and the European community settled into undisputed supremacy. But, though the nationalists had been defeated, the seeds of future discontent were sown in fertile fields, and it could be only a matter of time before the false sense of security would again be shattered. 1954 would be that time.

France was reeling from nine years of a disastrous colonial war in Indochina. The international humiliation of "losing," especially the dramatic fall of Dien Bien Phu, in concert with a still moribund economy and a fragmented domestic and political scene including a large, aggressive Communist Party, again demonstrated a level of impotence in France that stirred Algerian nationalists.

The French Army, disgusted with the strategic outcome in Indochina despite dramatic tactical and operational success, was determined to "get it right" in Algeria. There would be victory, whatever the cost. Yet, eight years later, Algeria was lost. The French Army suffered 18,000 killed and 65,000 wounded. Four General Officers were court-martialed for an attempted coup. In the words of noted historian Alistair Horne: "The war in Algeria toppled six French prime ministers and the Fourth Republic itself. It came close to bringing down General de Gaulle and his Fifth Republic and confronted metropolitan France with the threat of civil war<sup>4</sup>"

How did it happen? How did the traditionalist and history-rich French Army become so alienated from mainstream France? How can we avoid the same circumstances?

#### THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS

Prior to 1830, Algeria was a Turkish domain. There was little national identity, tribal custom was the law, and Algeria was essentially a "backward and imperfect civilization5". It did however, offer ports for the lucrative Mediterranean maritime trade and locations for the stationing of naval vessels. An insult to the French consul by the reigning Dey of Algiers in 1827 provided a suitable pretext for military action in 1830. With ladies booking passage to observe the bombardment of Algiers, the conquest of Algeria demonstrated the "Glory of France" for the world to see. In reality, it was seventeen years before the indigenous tribes were actually conquered and the territory secured, a precursor for events of the next century. With the natives subdued, the French immigrant population increased rapidly. Trade and agriculture, coupled with a temperate climate and low cost of living, made moving to Algeria an attractive proposition for the middle class French. In the 1870s the vineyards of France were decimated by an infestation of phylloxera, a plant louse that attacked the roots and leaves of grape vines. It proved to be an economic boom for the Algerian settlers. Unfortunately for indigenous population, they saw little benefit from this influx. The traditional colonial structure meant that the land, wealth and profit were totally in the hands of the Europeans, and the local labor force was bound in poverty. There was little contact between the two groups and the Europeans settlers, disdainful referred to in France as Pied Noirs or black feet (a reference to going barefoot in the sun), increasingly became a privileged class, despite their relatively humble origins. In a telling retrospection, historian John Talbott observed: "Two cultures inhabited the same soil in the relation of conqueror and conquered, occupier and occupied."6

Despite the tranquil surface, there were nationalists determined to throw off the yoke of Imperial France. Ferhat Abbas, a liberal; Abdelhamid Ben Badis, a Muslim fundamentalist; and Messali Hadj, a charismatic former soldier whose revolutionary fervor and skilled oratory made him particularly attractive to the masses, each crafted agendas and pursued popular support. The upheavals of the Second World War produced the circumstances all the nationalists had been waiting for and, with an unrealistic optimism, the events in Setif transpired, introducing a new and violent aspect to the struggle.

In 1947, followers of Messali Hadj formed the Organisation Secrete (OS) and began to train in guerilla warfare. One of the founding members, Ahmed Ben Bella, was a former soldier in the French Army, awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Medaille Militaire (personally presented by General de Gaulle) during WW II. What irony that the disillusioned young hero would become the first president of an independent Algeria. The chilling slogan of the OS,

often heard in the time of the 1947 municipal elections was "the suitcase or the coffin" Clearly the radical element was becoming preeminent. Although the OS produced little political impact, they served as a model for all the emerging factions.

In the spring of 1954 an umbrella organization appeared. Though not representing all factions, the Comite Revolutionnaire d'Unite et d'Action, or C. R. U. A., was the broadest representation of Muslim Algerians yet assembled. The leaders were young, well-educated and sincere admirers of Ho Chi Minh. Inspired by the Vietnamese victory, they began planning in earnest for their own war. Their task was made easier by the wild rumors that swirled through North Africa, the most popular of which was that the French Army had been destroyed at Dien Bien Phu<sup>8</sup>. The C. R. U. A. issued an edict: "Arm, train and prepare." A new name for the revolutionary movement was chosen: the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), and most significantly, a date was chosen for a country-wide uprising: "All Saints" Day, 1 November 1954. It was to be the beginning of real war.

## THE EARLY WAR YEARS, 1954-1957

The raids, ambushes and sniping in the early hours of 1 November were less than successful. Some were aborted, others comically bungled, and none provided a rallying point or even a propaganda coup for the F.L.N. But of import was the simple fact that a coordinated effort, encompassing all of Algeria, had begun. French political reaction was swift. In response to F.L.N. proclamations and demands for independence posted throughout Algeria, Premier Mendes-France delivered a fighting speech including the following: "One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and the integrity of the Republic. The Algerian departments are part of the French Republic. They have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French..." His Minister of the Interior, future premier Francois Mitterrand, echoed those sentiments. His statements included "Algeria is France," and the extremely bellicose "the only possible negotiation is war. 10" In opposition, Abdul Nasser, self-appointed spokesman of the Arab world, publicly supported the insurrection. Radio Cairo announced that it was for "Algerian Freedom against French Imperialism."

Despite Mitterand's aggressive talk, the French Army was ill-prepared to conduct counter-insurgency operations. The in-country Army primarily consisted of conventional units, accustomed only to garrison duty and poorly prepared for counterinsurgency operations. They reluctantly ventured from the coastal areas, while the majority of the insurgents sought sanctuary in the inhospitable interior, the *bled*.

The arrival of the first parachute infantry units was a significant change in French capability and tactics. The "paras," as the elite French airborne units were affectionately (or fearfully) nicknamed were, almost to a man, veterans of Indochina. They proved fearless, committed to victory and, of most importance, familiar with counter insurgency operations and the tactics the Algerians were learning from Vietnamese communists. The first paras, under the aggressive command of WW II and Indochina veteran Colonel Dicournau, immediately began to pursue the rebels into their sanctuaries. The insurgents, never numbering above 5,000 by even the highest estimates, were short of supplies, particularly weapons. They remained in the interior, for the most part avoiding engagements with the French. At this point it appeared that the FLN had little chance of surviving the winter. In retrospect, the Algerians refer to this period of time as the "heroic years" 12

As the number and effectiveness of French units rose, the FLN shifted from targeting government connected people and facilities to strictly civilian targets. Adopting the strategy espoused by the Brazilian guerilla leader Carlos Marighela , the FLN technique of "blind terrorism" was intended to provoke further repression by the French, in a spiral that could only incite all Algerians.<sup>13</sup>

The conflict was escalating. In May of 1955 there were about 100,000 French soldiers in Algeria. By the autumn of 1956, that number had grown to 500,000. Significantly, included in this total were both conscripts and reservists.<sup>14</sup> The average citizen of metropolitan France was now conscious of the "Algerian problem"

The increased military effort was linked to a decision by the new Prime Minister, Socialist Guy Mollet in February of 1956. Visiting Algeria just one week after taking office, he reversed his previously held opinion that a few wealthy landowners were the only agitators for maintaining the status quo and saw that Algeria's "little whites" (people the Socialists traditionally supported) were passionate and committed to their life in Algeria. As a result, the French government abandoned the existing policy of repressing the rebellion and instituting reform simultaneously, and determined to crush the insurgency before making any effort to reform Algerian society as a whole. <sup>15</sup> In a dramatic gesture he rescinded the nomination of a liberal, George Catroux (who had negotiated the withdrawal of French troops from Morocco), as resident minister of Algeria, and replaced him with Robert LaCoste, a Army veteran and man of renowned stubbornness. <sup>16</sup> Of long-term consequence for the remainder of the war, Mollet's flipflop convinced the European community in Algeria that they were powerful enough to dictate to the "Motherland," an attitude that would manifest itself in increasingly acrimonious ways.

To this point there was little disagreement between the Army and the government (both in France and Algeria) regarding the conduct of the war. The arrival of more and more units, notably the veterans of Indochina, allowed the Army to pursue a new course of action. The quadrillage (grid) system replaced the mobile column as the basis for operations. With large numbers of troops available, it was possible to garrison all cities and most towns, at strengths dictated by local population and expected threat. Cooperation among local governments, law enforcement agencies and the Army was effective, and not only action but even movement by the FLN was stifled. In the words of Edgar O'Ballance: "...the quadrillage strategy lay heavily on the country like a wet blanket..." The countryside was relatively secure, and it appeared the French were winning the war.

# THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS, 1957

As the success of the quadrillage made the rural sanctuary of the FLN less secure and usable, it was logical for the FLN to seek an alternative locale for continuing the revolution. The cities, Algiers in particular, proved an accommodating venue. The native quarter of Algiers, the Casbah, provided an added bonus as a fertile recruiting ground for FLN members. There were 80,000 Arabs in the Casbah, making it one of the most densely populated slums in the world. Half the men were out of work, and half the population was lest han twenty years of age. Riddled with secret passageways, narrow alleys and flat roofs, the hit-and-run terrorists could not have asked for friendlier terrain. As FLN was increasingly frustrated in the *bled*, the frequency of incidents in Algiers began to climb. In a particularly horrifying incident in September of 1956, three young Arab girls, dressed in European-style clothing, planted bombs at locations in the heart of European Algiers. One of the bombs exploded in the Milk Bar, a popular sweet shop and favorite stop for European families and young couples returning from a day at the beach. Three people were killed, and over fifty injured, including several children who lost limbs. Needless to say, the outcry of horror and rage from the *pieds noir* was immediate and strident.

Terror and tension continued to escalate. In December, the Mayor of Algiers was assassinated. Most of the European population of Algiers attended the funeral, "seething with anger," to quote Alistair Horne<sup>20</sup>. A bomb exploded at the cemetery only minutes before the funeral party arrived, driving many of the attendees into a frenzy. The mob rampaged through the streets, dragging Muslims, including several veiled women, from their cars and beating them

with iron bars. Four Muslims were killed, and more than fifty injured. It was a grim Christmas in the city. In all, there were over seventy separate terrorist incidents in December.<sup>21</sup>

Resident Minister LaCoste had had enough. On 7 January, he summoned the new Commander-in-Chief, General Raoul Salan, and General Jacques Massu, Commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division, to his residence. There he gave Massu "full responsibility for maintenance of order in the city,"<sup>22</sup> an order that was to have lasting effect on the relationship between the Army and the government. Alistair Horne maintains that the cession of civil authority to the military would not be reversed until the end of the war.<sup>23</sup> Massu and his four para regiments occupied Algiers within a week. The proven and successful quadrillage technique was applied, with each regiment of the division assigned to a designated sector of the city.

The Casbah was assigned to the famous, almost mythical Colonel Marcel Bigeard, commanding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Colonial Parachutists (R.P.C.). Bigeard was a larger-than-life figure, unquestionably a man of personal courage and capability, and a true hero of the French Republic. A veteran who rose through the ranks, Bigeard (as a sergeant) had been captured on the Maginot Line in 1940, escaped through Poland in 1943, received a commission and parachuted back into France in 1944. He was a ferocious leader at Dien Bien Phu, commanding a parachute battalion throughout the fight and conducting the only successful counterattack to regain a fallen strongpoint in the face of an overwhelming Viet Mihn force. After the surrender, he was a prisoner of the Vietnamese for three months. Repatriated, he arrived in Algiers with a clear grasp of subversive warfare and a loathing for insurgents, particularly Communists. Assuming command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> R.P.C., he immediately deployed the entire regiment to the *bled* for sixty days of intensive training. The regiment returned from the bled as the best combat force in Algeria, and became a model for other French Army units, especially the paras.<sup>24</sup> The assignment of Bigeard and the 3<sup>rd</sup> R. P. C. to the Casbah pitted strength against strength in The Battle of Algiers.

General Massu and Colonel Bigeard were a formidable combination. With almost absolute powers over the city's inhabitants, they essentially applied a stranglehold without regard for civil liberties and with total disregard for the civilian authorities. Confiscating police dossiers on anyone even remotely suspected of sympathizing with the FLN, the paras rounded-up and incarcerated several thousand Algerians. There were no warrants or formal preferral of charges, it was simply a matter of capturing and transporting them to central facilities for interrogation. It is at this point that the first widespread and pervasive rumors of torture came to

the surface. Over 5,000 people were imprisoned and over 3,000 disappeared during the battle of Algiers.<sup>25</sup>

The first major challenge to the occupation of the city was a general strike called by the FLN at the end of January. LaCoste ordered Massu to break the strike "at all costs – and by any means." Again, the Army was directed to act without regard to the traditions of civil liberty and encouraged to ignore civil authorities. The paras employed two simple strong-arm tactics to break the strike. First, the shuttered and locked shops were forcibly opened. There was even one instance of a tank round fired into a gate to open the gate and cow the proprietor. Shop owners had no choice; either they conducted business or lost their merchandise to looters, who acted with relative impunity in the presence of the paras. The second tactic was to collect laborers at their homes and deliver them to their appointed workplace. Refusal to work at that point meant jail, and probably a beating. The same techniques were used the second day, and by the third day the strike was over.

For Massu and Bigeard, the success validated their approach. Through February and March, they applied relentless pressure to the insurgents and their supporters. With a pervasive intelligence network, including an extensive web of informants, the French were able to construct a remarkably accurate picture of the FLN organization in Algiers. Helicopters were used innovatively to deliver paras to rooftops over suspected hide outs, and swift and brutal raids crippled the FLN leadership. By the end of March, the remaining FLN leaders made the decision to get out of Algeria, and the battle was over. The10th Division returned to the bed, and considered their time well spent. However, not all members of the FLN were prepared to cease operations, and bombings and ambushes began again. The paras returned and, with the same procedures as before, completed eliminating the FLN in Algiers. There was no surrender, or even public acknowledgement by any Algerians, but by September the FLN had been soundly defeated, and the French Army was victorious. But it was a short term victory, and with it were sown the seeds of defeat.

The Battle of Algiers revealed the growing rift between the Army and civilian authorities. The Army's success promulgated the "might is right" attitude that would later prove so difficult to correct. The issue of torture was particularly divisive and, extreme in itself, the debate drove parties of all factions to further extremism. Use of extreme measures was rationalized because of the French need for and dependence on good intelligence. Accurate intelligence was the only way they could effectively target the FLN in the Casbah, and the best way to uncover bomb plots before the explosives could be planted. Massu's Division Chief of Staff, Colonel Yves Godard, (another product of the war in Indochina) was a devoted advocate of "know your

enemy." He was absolutely determined to know the FLN in Algiers. Due to the unsophisticated methods of the FLN, human intelligence was the primary source of that knowledge. Without civil restraints, French intelligence operatives were free to detain and interrogate whomever they chose. The interrogations became increasingly more physical and, perhaps inevitably, torture more common. Although there is little evidence that there was "institutionalized torture," it was not simply an isolated mistake either.<sup>27</sup> Without digressing into the morality of torture, the subject and the accusations further alienated the Army from the government in France and the average French citizen. In an indirect comment on the subject, Massu himself said in referring to the battle of Algiers, "In a secret war, the 10<sup>th</sup> D. P. [Parachute Division] answered with secret methods." In contrast, Paul Teitgen, the French Secretary-General in Algeria at the time, and himself a victim of torture in the Nazi camp at Dachau, said "All right, Massu won the Battle of Algiers; but that meant losing the war."

The Battle of Algiers was a pivotal point in the relationship between the Army and civilian authorities. Following LaCoste's decision to hand absolute power to Massu, the idea that the Army "knew best" became increasingly inculcated into the officers of the Army in Algeria. They saw little worth in the civil structure that had brought the situation to its current point. This was a dangerous concept for democracy; the result in Algeria would be tragic in the extreme.

### THE LATER WAR YEARS, 1958-1961

1958 dawned with the French Army confident and in control. The complete suppression of the FLN in Algiers, however, had produced an unintended consequence. The FLN leaders had fled to Tunisia, recently granted independence from France, and led by the long serving, internationally renowned Habib Bourguiba. Ruling Tunisia for more than twenty years, and having guided the country down a difficult path to independence, he was committed to Arab solidarity and Algerian independence. Therefore, when the efficiency of the French Army forced the headquarters of the FLN to run, most of the top personnel found a safe haven in Tunisia. Tunisia became a sanctuary and, with the open support of Bourguiba, the FLN came out of the closet. Appeals to the international community were easily orchestrated. More importantly in the immediate fight, the FLN was allowed to marshal forces, equip them from both Arab and eastern Bloc countries, and train them for operations in Algeria, sometimes within sight of the French soldiers guarding the border<sup>30</sup>.

The counter to Tunisian support for the FLN was the Morice Line, a Maginot Line in the Sahara Desert. It extended two hundred miles from the coast south into the bled, and was the largest concentration of French soldiers in Algeria<sup>31</sup>. More than 80,000 soldiers were stationed along the border, determined to stem the flow of personnel and supplies to the insurgents in Algeria. Employing the latest in technology, the line was an effective barrier, and once again the military solution was successful. But, as was increasingly the case, that very success produced a backlash that undermined the French position. In February of 1958, in retaliation for machine gun fire that had downed two aircraft in two days, the French launched a squadron of American-built B-26 bombers and leveled the Tunisian village of Sakiet. It was a market day, and the village was crowded with Tunisians. Even more sensationally, a school and a hospital were hit. Eighty Tunisians, including women and children, were killed. Hundreds were injured, and photographs of maimed children produced an immediate international uproar. The Algerian war had appeared on the world stage.

The uproar over Sakiet was one of many incidents that captured international interest and sparked a groundswell of sympathy for the Algerian independence movement. Labor unions in Britain and the United States, particularly George Meany's powerful American Federation of Laborers, protested the suppression of unions in Algeria. Correspondents wrote articles increasingly sympathetic to the Algerian cause. To New York City, the FLN wisely sent, as representatives to the United Nations (and really the world press), two western-educated and cosmopolitan individuals skilled in lobbying efforts and media relations. The "...antithesis of the hard-eyed revolutionaries," Abdelkader Chanderli and M'hammed Yazid skillfully marshaled support for their cause. Their personal charisma influenced notable Americans, including John Kenneth Galbraith of Harvard and the junior senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy. Kennedy, in fact, became a vocal advocate for Algerian self-determination, and was instrumental in a subtle but significant shift in the official policy of the United States regarding Algeria. The French were finding themselves more and more alone regarding their position in Algeria.

As international disapproval grew, there was at the same time an increasing sentiment in France that opposed the war in Algeria. The emotional debate over torture caught public opinion, of course, but historian John Talbott maintains "None of the available evidence establishes a link between revelations on the conduct of the war and diminution of public support for keeping Algeria French<sup>33</sup>" What it did do, however, was provide a rallying point that allowed any group or organization to protest French policy, whatever their private agenda.

The French government was increasingly stressed by the circumstances. The government of Felix Gaillard fell, due in part to the international furor over Sakiet. There was no central government for 37 days. Eventually a government was formed, with Charles de Gaulle as Prime Minister, but it proved no more effective that its predecessor. The economy was a shambles. There was an increasing perception within the Army that they were the last hope for the Republic. In the words of General Jacques Allard, the military:

"...felt themselves neither aided, nor encouraged, nor supported. It seemed to them that those responsible had not the courage to look at the situation in the face and to fight the war with a will to win, but perhaps rather to put an end to it by some kind of negotiation....After Sakiet, the army felt itself betrayed. It lost confidence, not in itself, but in the effectiveness of the regime. From then on it was ready to welcome, and to take advantage of, any event announcing a change that would force fate....<sup>34</sup>"

The Army was clearly approaching a crisis point. In both relations with the government in France and its own institutional identity, the Army's objectives far different than the nation's strategic goals. In Algeria, it appears the Army was considering taking the matter into their own hands. Prompted by the F.L.N. execution of three French soldiers, General Salan sent General Ely, the Chief of the General Staff in Paris, a lengthy telegram. The ominous phrases: "...risking a useless sacrifice if the representatives of the nation are not determined to maintain Algeris francaise; The French army...would feel outraged by the abandonment; One cannot predict how it would react in its despair..."35 Although the governance of France had certainly been tempestuous since the World War, this veiled threat from one of France's most distinguished generals was clearly a low water mark for civil-military relations. In a related incident, soldiers from the 10<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division, famous for victory in the recent fighting in Algiers, actually seized power from the French civil authorities in Corsica. The crisis was defused, but it was the closest France had been to a civil war in almost two hundred years. President Pflimlin resigned, and De Gaulle promised to assume the Presidency and form a new government. Across the Army, there was hope and an expectation that General De Gaulle would unconditionally back the military, and would never abandon French Algeria.

Ironically, the army apparently chose to ignore many of De Gaulle's earlier statements related to the Algerian situation. In January 1944, De Gaulle had spoken in Brazzaville of leading the colonial peoples "...to administer themselves, and, later, to govern themselves..." More recently, in a interview with the Austrian journalist Artur Rosenberg in 1958 (before becoming Prime Minister), he blandly declared "Certainly Algeria will be independent." For the

army to think De Gaulle was committed to *Algerie Francaise* was an egregious error, one with ramifications that could only exacerbate an already volatile situation. In the first week of June, De Gaulle visited Algeria. He told the largely *pieds noir* crowds that he understood them, and in one single instance actually shouted "*Vive l'Algerie francaise*," a phrase he would later dismiss as superficial, a phrase that simply "escaped" from him.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of his intent, the visit was interpreted by the French in Algeria as a promise to stay the course. Tragically, the next year would prove that assumption false.

Military operations continued as almost unqualified successes. As the civil-military relationship continued to spiral downward, the performance of the Army continued to suppress the F.L.N. The number of insurgents in Algeria was at an all-time low, and only the sanctuary of Tunisia allowed the F.L.N. to avoid complete destruction. There were still terrorist incidents, but they were limited in scope, and the great masses of Muslims seemed to be waiting for a resolution, simply tired of five years of horror.

In October, De Gaulle made a speech in Constantine that was to precipitate the hardening of the extremist position of both the Army in Algeria and the *Pieds Noir*. While proposing an ambition five-year plan to prompt recovery in Algeria (the Constantine Plan), he spoke of a "paix des braves," a conciliatory gesture toward the F.L.N., and also a cease-fire, two subjects that soldiers and civilians committed to French Algeria found intolerable. At the same time, remembering events in Corsica and the public expressions of numerous French officers, De Gaulle recalled over 1,500 officers in what amounted to a purge of the force. In December, General Salan, author of the notorious cautionary telegram to General Ely, was "promoted" out of Algeria, to become military governor of Paris. The lines were being drawn, and the potential for a showdown between de Gaulle and the Army was growing.

Salan was replaced by Air Force General Maurice Challe. Challe too was a hero of the Resistance, personally decorated by Winston Churchill at the conclusion of the war. A competent and aggressive leader, Challe immediately set out to build on the successes of the army and completely eradicate the insurgents. The "Challe Plan" supplemented the *quadrillage* with a light, mobile force to take the fight deep into the *bled*. Featuring Muslim trackers, the *Commandos de Chasse* not only attacked any size insurgent force, but pursued that force until all were killed or captured. Methodically, the insurgents remaining in Algeria were being destroyed. According to Alistair Horne, the F.L.N. "…looked defeated." Despite the military triumphs, the political scene was deteriorating. On the alert since the *paix des braves* speech, the right wing in Algeria was increasingly dissatisfied by De Gaulle's words and actions. Jo Ortiz, a bar owner in Algiers, created the Front National Francais (FNF), a paramilitary

organization that he hoped would unite all factions of the Algerie française hard-liners. Heavily armed and including many veterans of WWII, Indochina and Algeria, the several thousand members frequently paraded through the streets and were pledged to exterminate the opposition. The faction committed to opposing De Gaulle was coalescing into a dangerous and extremist element. Ortiz and his cronies were able to convince the politically naive General Massu, former commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division and now the super-prefecture of Algiers and the surrounding countryside, that De Gaulle had become "...a man of the Left" and enlist his sympathy to their cause. After finding that one of his junior officers, wounded in Algiers and recovering in a hospital, had been questioned by a civil judge and might be accused of atrocities, Massu was enraged. Unfortunately, his rage coincided with the arrival of a West German correspondent. The correspondent was also a former paratrooper, and the normally quarded Massu spoke candidly about a variety of matters, including the French President. His comments included the extreme pronouncement that he "...and the majority of officers in a position of command, will not execute unconditionally the orders of the Head of State."41 Needless to say, the published interview created a furor. Massu denied the statement, and maintained the interview was "off the record." However, the damage was done, and De Gaulle, himself in a rage, recalled Massu and assigned him as the garrison commander in the nondescript city of Metz.

Ortiz and the FNF seized the opportunity as a chance to further incite resistance. A general strike was called to begin January 24, and Muslims "encouraged" to abide by the instructions the pieds noir so readily embraced. The city dissolved into chaos, and the FNF began erecting barricades (reminiscent of Paris in 1870) and made plans to march on the city headquarters. The gendarmes were instructed to disperse the crowd, and began moving toward the assembly. Shots were fired, to include reports of machinegun fire from the balcony of Ortiz's headquarters, and the surprised gendarmes fired back. The end result was 14 dead policemen, and 123 wounded. 42 Once again, events in Algeria captivated the world. Frenchmen had been gunned down by Frenchmen. The specter of civil war again loomed. But, significantly, there were very few statements in support of the FNF from senior Army officers, who remained silent and awaited De Gaulle's response. That was not long in coming. In a televised speech that some consider his most eloquent, De Gaulle, in uniform, condemned the insurgents, spoke of the "harsh test" facing France, and told listeners that as having "supreme responsibility, I must therefore be obeyed."43 It galvanized the majority of the Army, and reduced any thoughts of a coup. However, it also galvanized the extremists in Algeria, and radical solutions became the topic of discussions not only in the FNF, but also among the more

moderate *pieds noir* population, and, more ominously, among the Army officers in Algeria that remained committed to French Algeria.

On 14 June, De Gaulle broadcast a public appeal to the F.L.N. leadership, now operating as the Provisional Government of Algeria, or G.P.R.A., in Tunisia, to begin negotiations toward a cease fire and peaceful solution to the conflict. On June 25, a delegation arrived in Melun, outside Paris, and talks began. The Muslim position was that nothing short of complete self-determination was acceptable, and after four days the Algerians departed without any progress toward reconciliation. From a political perspective, it was a victory for the Algerians, who could continue the struggle and wait for France to become even more divided. Algerian independence no longer seemed a dream; it was now more a question of time. But as that time approached the French hard-liners made frantic efforts to find a military solution that would preserve the status quo. Their efforts resulted in the formation of the organization that would forever in the future be synonymous with French radical extremism and terrorism in Algeria, the O.A.S., or Organization Armee Secrete. Comprised of Army deserters and civilians, the O.A.S. replaced the FNF and several smaller splinter groups. Although clearly the desperate attempt by a small group to deny the inevitable, the O.A.S. was responsible for a reign of terror in Algeria and in France that, in the end, as moderates of all opinions grew appalled and disgusted by the excesses, merely hastened the end.

#### THE GENERALS' REVOLT

The hope of the *Algerie Francaise pieds noir* was for a prestigious former general officer who could counter De Gaulle's personal impact, with or without overt ties to the O.A.S. There were candidates available. General Salan had retired, and was in Algeria for a period of time before being summoned back to France for public inflammatory comments regarding the situation. Retired Air Force General Edmond Jouhard, born in Oran and the only *pieds noir* general, was living in Algiers. Salan eventually moved to Madrid, and continued his contact with Jouhard and other extremists. In the spring of 1961, apart from the increasingly violent attacks of the O.A.S., planning was well under way for a coup, a deadly serious attempt to seize the reins of government. General Salan in Madrid, the relatively unknown General Andre Zeller (former Chief of Staff of the French Ground Forces), General Jouhard in Algiers and, lastly, the now retired General Challe in France, were convinced by an articulate group of colonels and lieutenant colonels, some retired and some fugitives, and many with ties to the O.A.S., of the

chances for success. All but Salan surreptitiously entered Algeria, and the coup planning accelerated. Challe was the leader, and the figure the radicals counted on to lead the coup by force of personality. The coup was timed to be executed as soon as he arrived. The belief was that upon hearing an appeal from their former commander, the elite units that had comprised the Commandos de Chasse (about 21,000 men) would immediately obey his call, and sway the rest of the 500,000 man force in Algeria to follow 44. It would then be just a matter of time before the French Army in Germany and even at home would follow, and the coup succeed. Challe was ignominiously slipped into Algeria in a small airplane on 21 April. The coup was executed on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Legionnaires and paras of the Commandos de Chasse did in fact participate, but in retrospect it is clear that only select leaders understood what was happening. The1st Parachute Regiment of the Foreign Legion occupied Algiers, but in the rest of the country there was little activity. Of immediate concern to Challe and his fellow conspirators was the fact that neither the Air Force nor Navy recognized the coup, and several key Army generals, upon being informed of the situation, immediately refused to cooperate. General Salan arrived on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, but had little impact on the situation. The four generals found their expected force dwindling by the hour. In the evening, DeGaulle appeared on television, and gave a performance that was considered "one of the most momentous in his career..." <sup>45</sup> By appealing to every French man and woman to help him restore order, and by demonstrating an iron resolve, De Gaulle shifted millions of civilians, and thousands of undecided officers, from ambivalence to support for the government, and the coup was doomed to fail. Four days after proclaiming their authority, the four generals left Algiers in civilian clothes, facing an uncertain fate before courts martial.

Algeria did not share an uncertain fate. Although it would be 1962 before the final transfer of authority to the G.P.R.A., and the renegades of the O.A.S. would continue to wage a campaign of terror, the die was cast. There was no question that Algeria would become independent, and the last territory of the great French Empire lost to the Grand Republic. A great exodus began, one of the "greatest mass migrations of the twentieth century." More than half a million *pieds noir*, most of them destitute, would depart, 350,000 in June of 1962 alone. The French character of Algeria was, almost overnight, eliminated. It would be 1975 before the Algerians would receive an official French visit, and the tricolor fly again.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Accepting that the original intent of the French government was to maintain *Algerie francaise*, and that most of the citizens of France agreed with that objective, what happened over the course of the eight year struggle to produce the opposite result? Quite simply, the national policy and concomitant national strategy changed, but the military element of that policy/strategy did not. It is ironic that it was the socialist Prime Minister Mollet who, in 1956, decided to pursue a purely military solution to the "problem" before addressing reforms in Algeria. His decision separated the military element of national power from the economic element (particularly critical in Algeria), as well as from the diplomatic and informational elements. Never again was there any apparent attempt to synchronize the tools of national strategy and, as the national objectives changed, the military remained focused on the original goal.

The separation was irrevocably set by actions in Algiers. When the Army was given absolute authority, the concepts of due process and civilian control were roughly pushed aside. The military success in Algiers, and later across the entire country, validated the supremacy of the military, and convinced many officers that 'the Army knows best." "Civilians lost Indochina to the communists, but we will not let that happen in Algeria," was a popular sentiment. A weak and fragmented civilian government failed to apply the elements in concert, and the Army leaders essentially acted as they saw fit, regardless of the consequences. The radical right wing in Algeria was able to co-opt military leaders in Algeria, and the Army's institutional inability to see the "big picture" played into their hands. There were more than enough mistakes and failures to taint almost everyone involved, but to summarize what should be in the minds of individuals and institutions involved in crafting any nation's national strategy:

Any attempt to execute a national strategy that does not fully consider all the elements of national power, and that does not synchronize those elements, however disparate their relative impacts may be, is doomed to probable failure. If the strategy does not fail, it most certainly will be accomplished at a great cost to the nation.

WORD COUNT = 6,685.

# **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Tony. <u>The French Stake in Algeria, 1945-1962</u> (Cornell University Press. Ithaca), 19. <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 21. <sup>3</sup> Horne, Alistair. A Savage War of Peace (Viking Press, New York), 26. <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 14. <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 29. <sup>6</sup> Talbott, John, The War without a Name (Alfred A. Knopf, New York), 14. <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 24. <sup>8</sup> Horne, 79. <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 98. <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 99. <sup>11</sup> O'Ballance, Edgar. The Algerian Insurrection 1954-1962. (Hamden, CT: Archon Books), 50. <sup>12</sup> Horne, 128. <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 118. <sup>14</sup> O'Ballance, 53. <sup>15</sup> Smith, 134. <sup>16</sup> Horne, 154. <sup>17</sup> O'Ballance, 78. <sup>18</sup> Talbott, 80. <sup>19</sup> Horne, 186. <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 187. <sup>21</sup> O'Ballance, 80. <sup>22</sup> Horne, 188. <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 188.

- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 168.
- <sup>25</sup> Menard, p. 44.
- <sup>26</sup> Horne, 191.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 198.
- <sup>28</sup> Menard, 45.
- <sup>29</sup> Horne, 207.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 267.
- 31 Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 245.
- <sup>33</sup> Talbott, 112.
- <sup>34</sup> Horne, 269.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 282
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 280.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 281
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 303.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 337.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 357.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 363.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 369.
- <sup>44</sup> Henissart, Paul. Wolves in the City (Simon and Schuster, New York), 73.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 106.
- <sup>46</sup> Horne, 531.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Bocca, Geoffery. The Secret Army. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Clark, Michael. Algeria in Turmoil. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1959.

Fanon, Frantz. A Dying Colonialism. New York: Grove Press, 1965.

Furniss, Edgar. De Gaulle and the French Army. New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1964.

Gordon, David C. The Passing of French Algeria. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Heggory, Alf A. <u>Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Algeria</u>. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972.

Henissart, Paul. Wolves in the City. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.

Horne, Alistair. A Savage War of Peace. New York: Viking Press, 1978.

Jureidini, Paul. <u>Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare</u>. Washington: The American University, 1963.

Menard, Orville. <u>The Army and the Fifth Republic</u>. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1967

O'Ballance, Edgar. The Algerian Insurrection 1954-1962. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967.

Pickles, Dorothy. Algeria and France. New York: Frederick H. Praeger, 1963.

Schalk, David. War and the Ivory Tower. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Shrader, Charles. The First Helicopter War. Westport, CT: Prager, 1999.

Smith, Tony. The French Stake in Algeria. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Talbott, John. The War without a Name. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

Wall, Irwin. <u>France, the United States and the Algerian War</u>. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.