

THE TIGHTROPE: FRENCH COLONIAL COLLAPSE
AND THE SHAPING OF COLD WAR EUROPE

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Military History

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

THE TIGHTROPE: FRENCH COLONIAL COLLAPSE AND THE SHAPING OF COLD WAR EUROPE, by Major Donald J. Thompson, 131 pages.

At the end of World War II, France was much weaker than it had been before the start of the war; however, France still had a role within the U.S.-dominated Western alliance standing against Soviet expansion. Nevertheless, the French leadership chose to engage what remained of their national power in the reestablishment of their overseas colonial empire. France's preoccupation with the reestablishment of its colonial empire was strategically important to the structure of the post-World War II security environment because it amounted to a direct competition to its obligations for the defense of Europe. Paradoxically, the possession of these colonies provided the appearance of greatness that France needed in the wake of its World War II defeat to gain a seat at the table. The energies that France exerted in the course of attempting to reestablish or retain its colonies while it rebuilt its economy and attempted to dominate the military and economic fate of West Germany led to a number of consequences that they did not intend. In particular, France defeated its own initiative to limit the rearmament of Germany, the European Defence Community, while it almost simultaneously lost Indochina. This led to a chain reaction of events that included the admission of West Germany to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the war in Algeria, additional U.S. forces in Europe, the fall of the French Fourth Republic, and the return of Charles de Gaulle.

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This thesis began as little more than a fascination with the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, a prolonged interest that began with Bernard B. Fall's *Hell in a Very Small Place*. After reading several other books about Dien Bien Phu, including those by Jules Roy, Martin Windrow, and Howard Simpson, it began to occur to me that there was far more to the France's post World War II efforts than just the blood and sweat of the Legion.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Sean Kalic, Dr. Jonathan House, and Mr. William Snider for their feedback and guidance. They encouraged me to dig a little deeper at each step in the process.

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ACRONYMS

ALN	<i>Armée de Libération Nationale</i> (National Liberation Army)
C.R.U.A.	<i>Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action</i> (Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action)
CNR	<i>Conseil National de la Resistance</i> (National Council of the Resistance)
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
EDC	European Defence Community
FLN	<i>Front de Liberation Nationale</i> (National Liberation Front)
GPRF	<i>Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française</i> (Provisional Government of the French Republic)
MRP	<i>Christian-Democratic Mouvement Republicain Populaire</i> (Popular Republican Movement)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAS	<i>Organisation de l'armée secrète</i> (Organization of the Secret Army)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

What policy can hope to succeed if the country's arms are brought low?
Of what use is strategical planning if the means of carrying it out are not
forthcoming?

— General Charles de Gaulle, *The Edge of the Sword*,
quoted in P. G. Tsouras, *Warriors' Words*

After World War II, France was much weaker than it had been before the start of the war. However, France still had a major role to play within the American-dominated western alliance standing against Soviet expansion. Nevertheless, the French leadership chose to engage what remained of their national power in the reestablishment of their overseas colonial empire. France's preoccupation with the reestablishment of its colonial empire was strategically important to the structure of the post-World War II security environment because it amounted to a direct competition with its obligations to the defense of Europe.

Paradoxically, the possession of these colonies provided the appearance of greatness that France needed in the wake of its World War II defeat to place them legitimately among the world's great powers. The energies that France exerted in the course of attempting to reestablish or retain its colonies while rebuilding its economy and attempting to dominate the military and economic fate of West Germany, led to a number of consequences. In particular, France defeated its own initiative to limit the rearmament of Germany, the European Defence Community (EDC), an act that in retrospect appears to have been little more than a delay tactic. Nearly simultaneously, France lost Indochina.

This led to a chain reaction of events that included the admission of West Germany to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the war in Algeria, additional U.S. forces in Europe, the fall of the French Fourth Republic, and the return of Charles de Gaulle.

Primary Research Question

Why was France's preoccupation with reestablishing itself as a colonial great power strategically important to the post-World War II security environment in Europe? France's preoccupation with its empire following World War II had to do with the popular perception of the empire. For almost everyone with the exception of a portion of the French communist party, the French believed that their empire represented that part of France that did not fall to the Nazis.¹ Charles de Gaulle embodied this belief and became the standard-bearer for the idea of *prima facie* French greatness that held the Free French together through the defeat of World War II and later propelled France as a whole to advance their interests in the new order represented by the Cold War.

The empire supported France's self-concept as a great nation, especially after the devastating defeat in 1940. Maintaining the idea of France as a great power by retaining its empire was central to the concepts that led to the development of the EDC, the Indochina War, and the Algerian War, all of which left a lasting effect on Cold War Europe.

¹Martin Thomas, "French Imperial Reconstruction and the Development of the Indochina War: 1945-1950," in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 130-131.

Secondary Research Questions

Why was France important to the Western alliance defending Europe after World War II? What was its role as the French government saw it? Essentially, France was the only choice. World War II destroyed Europe and with it, the traditional balances of power. With Germany crushed and half of it occupied by the Soviet Union, there was almost nothing standing in the way of the communists taking all of Europe. Following Germany, France was the next largest military power in Europe, making it the only logical choice in lieu of the United States assuming the role directly. The United States intended for France to be the center of European defense and the French wanted the lead, but the French government could not conceive of doing so without retaining its empire.

What effect did France's colonial reassertion in Vietnam have on its allies?

France was able to set its imperial effort in Indochina within the United States' desire to combat communism worldwide. Because of this, the French were able to enlist the industrial and financial might of the United States to aid them in the fight against the Viet Minh. Additionally, because of the competing military efforts between Indochina and Europe, France placed significant strains on its relationship with its allies. For example, there were times when French colonial actions worked at cross-purposes with U.S. foreign policy. However, the United States could not put too much pressure on the Fourth Republic because of its inherent instability. Should any particular parliamentary-based coalition government in Paris collapse, it endangered important treaties and agreements that often took years to develop and ratify.

What effect did the French loss in Indochina have on their colonial reassertion in Algeria? The French loss in Indochina severely embittered the professional cadre among

the colonial army. These elite troops, who bore the brunt of the fighting, were already psychologically and socially separated from metropolitan France, but after the defeat in Indochina, they started to believe that the Fourth Republic had abandoned them. These troops took the trauma of their crucible experiences in Indochina with them to Algeria and made the situation there worse in the end.

Why was the French counterinsurgency in Algeria important for NATO? French troop commitments to the Algerian War conflicted directly with its troop commitments to NATO. In fact, the imbalance of military effort going to Algeria as opposed to NATO ultimately caused the United States to assume France's role as the primary contributor to European defense.

Significance

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it demonstrates that a country that is economically, militarily, and even socially weak can wield an enormous amount of influence on much stronger nations depending on its national character and the amount of effort that it exerts. Second, this study demonstrates that France balanced its imperial aspirations directly against its commitments to the European defense structure confronting Soviet expansion, in effect shaping both the timing and the method of German rearmament. Moreover, by cloaking their imperial efforts in Indochina with anti-communist themes, the French brought the United States incrementally closer to intervention in Southeast Asia. Finally, because of the direct conflict between France's commitment to NATO and its determination to hold on to Algeria, the United States took up the role of Europe's guardian, the legacy of which remains to this day.

Limitations

The most significant limitation for the research was the reliance on translators for all primary sources providing the French perspective. This is also true for some secondary sources that originally published in French. To mitigate the reliance on one or a few translators, I used a wide variety of sources that include the work of many translators. Given the general congruence of the materials, the author feels comfortable in asserting that the facts and premises offered here represent a sound depiction of events as well as the original authors' intents and meanings.

Literature Review

The Combined Arms Research Library and the Norwich University online research library were both instrumental in obtaining the materials for this thesis. Using these resources, the author was able to access a wealth of secondary scholarly sources including books and academic journals as well as primary sources through various online databases. In addition, I obtained some valuable sources from the personal collection of Dr. Sean Kalic.

Primary Sources

Several very useful primary sources are available and accessible in English. For example, there are the memoirs of Ted Morgan and Paul Aussaresses, which were particularly valuable in analyzing the Algerian War. There are also the memoirs of Charles de Gaulle, which offers interesting insight into the French psyche and national motivations.

Several databases with scanned copies of original documents are available online as well (e.g. the Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room and the Digital National Security Archive). Databases like these offer any researcher the chance to access items that range from ratified treaties to declassified documents that at one time constituted Top Secret information.

Secondary Sources

There are many books and academic journal articles that cover the topics of European security, the Indochina War, and the Algerian War. JSTOR, the online repository of academic journal articles, was a great source for a wide variety of sources that span several decades, providing supplemental details to the narratives presented in the nearly 30 books that I chose to use. The books detailed here under the literature review constitute the most valuable sources as they applied to this particular line of research.

Martin Creswell's *A Question of Balance: How France and the United States Created Cold War Europe* concerns the establishment of the post-World War II Cold War order through the re-arming of West Germany as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. The author's argument is that this arrangement was neither inevitable, nor imposed unilaterally through American power. Instead, the author argues that this arrangement developed through the friction of disagreements between France and the United States concerning the proper place for Germany in the Western world, resulting in an order that France found preferable and the United States found acceptable.

William Hitchcock's *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe* argues that despite crippling weakness in the wake of World War

II, the French Fourth Republic not only guided France's recovery, but also seized the initiative in shaping the Cold War security structure of Europe. The author's argument is that France did not accept the post-World War II security system preferred by the United States. Instead, France resisted that security system, undermined it, and eventually succeeded in altering it to suit its own interests.

In Edward Fursdon's *European Defence Community: A History* the author argues that the efforts behind the planning for the EDC led to the design for the apparatus that eventually came to protect western Europe, in spite of the fact that the EDC itself did not achieve ratification. In fact, Fursdon's narrative supports the thesis that the defeat of the EDC led directly to West Germany's integration into NATO.

Fredrik Logeval's *The Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* is a comprehensive narrative of France's imperial struggles in Indochina following World War II and the genesis of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The arc of Logeval's narrative takes the reader from the end of World War I and the beginning of Ho Chi Minh's independence movement through the fall of Dien Bien Phu to the first glimpse of the U.S. direct intervention. Of particular interest to this project was the detail concerning the critical events of 1945-1946 and the policy changes that developed because of the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the advent of the Truman administration.

In *The Last Valley*, Martin Window's thesis concerns the interplay of events prior to the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu. The author's argument is that French defeat was not inevitable and that the battle could have gone the other way. The evidence to support this includes the horrible losses suffered by the Viet Minh at the hands of the

French at Dien Bien Phu; 25,000 casualties (approximately) among the best of the Viet Minh's assault troops—a deficit that Giap found difficult to make up. The author's argument fits into the thesis topic by demonstrating the tenacity of the French colonial army at Dien Bien Phu, despite its political abandonment by metropolitan France.

Alistair Horne's thesis in *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* concerns the course of events in Algeria from the end of World War II through Algerian independence. The author's argument is that once the combatants injected mutilation and torture into their panoply of violence against each other, there seemed no end to the depths to which the conflict might go, ultimately threatening the very existence of the French Republic. Evidence to support this argument includes the 1961 putsch led by General Maurice Challe, with which he intended to overthrow the Metropole.

In *The Algerian Insurrection, 1954-1962*, Edgar O'Balance presents his thesis concerning the centrality of politics and world opinion to the nature of modern warfare. O'Balance provides a narrative of the major events of the Algerian War, from the uprisings on All Saints' Day in 1954, to the direct intervention of the French army in 1957 and the Battle of Algiers, to the return of Charles de Gaulle and the collapse of the Fourth Republic. Through it all, the author demonstrates that the ability of the Algerian nationalists to garner worldwide political support far outweighed the overwhelming military might applied by the French army.

CHAPTER 2

THE FOURTH REPUBLIC AND THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE COMMUNITY

Introduction

An infallible method for conciliating a tiger is to allow oneself to be devoured.

— Konrad Adenauer, quoted in
J. T. Knoll, *Where the Pavement Ends*

. . . you know as well as we do that right, so far as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.

— Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, quoted in
R. B. Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*

At the end of World War II, France was a defeated country both militarily and economically; however, France demonstrated continued resilience, initiative, and creativity in solving its political and diplomatic problems. From 1945 through 1954, France not only consistently delivered answers to nearly unsolvable domestic impasses concerning economic and political reconstruction, but also kept pace with or outmaneuvered its allies in the course of establishing the security apparatus that shaped Cold War Europe.

This chapter will focus on the enormous political and diplomatic energy that France expended to balance rebuilding economically and politically at home while advancing its international interests in the face of an expanding Soviet threat and collapsing colonial legitimacy. Specifically, this chapter will emphasize the nature of the Fourth Republic and its problems, an explanation for France's continued pursuit of empire, and France's long diplomatic struggle with the United States over rearming

Germany and the defense of Europe, including the Monnet Plan, the Schuman Plan, the Plevin Plan, and the EDC.

Foundations

Nazi Germany brought an end to the Third Republic when it overwhelmed France in 1940.² However, even before this the French recognized the inadequacies of the Third Republic's constitution, which had its origins in the fall of France's Second Empire in 1870³—in turn caused by their defeat at the hands of the nascent German state in the Franco-Prussian War.⁴ Any attempt at forming a government in the aftermath of French liberation and the end of World War II confronted a situation in which there was little to build upon and strong divergent forces to bring together. In addition to the issues between the remnants of the former Third Republic and the participants of the Nazi-collaborating Vichy regime, French politics diverged along two strong currents that sought primacy in France and worked at cross-purposes: the *Conseil National de la Resistance* (CNR) and the *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française* (GPRF).

The CNR included diverse resistance organizations, including the French Communist Party, the *Christian-Democratic Mouvement Republicain Populaire* (MRP),

²Williamson A. Murray, "The World in Conflict," in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 327-328.

³William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 13.

⁴Williamson A. Murray, "The Industrialization of War," in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 247.

and the Socialist Party.⁵ This coalition sought justice, primarily against Vichy collaborators. The GPRF, headed by Charles de Gaulle, sought the reestablishment of order, status for France as a great power, the return of a republic, and, most importantly, national rapprochement.⁶

These two general movements composed of a broad spectrum of political parties and identities had to confront two major problems for post-war France: determining the post-war political order and the national economic model. The political order needed to strike a balance between the pre-war weaknesses of the Third Republic and the outright rejection of any form of republicanism among former Vichy adherents as well as differences between the CNR and GPRF. With a clear majority of 95 percent, the French referendum of October 1945 indicated that the nation would much prefer a completely new government than a return to the unstable parliamentary system of the Third Republic.⁷ Nevertheless, French politicians proceeded along lines that constructed a government much like the model that the public ostensibly did not want.

On 20 January 1946, de Gaulle resigned from his role as the head of the provisional government over controversies concerning his lack of authority in choosing his ministers and the apparent reemergence of a republic guided by the narrow interests of political parties. By April 1946, the National Assembly completed its draft constitution, whose structure advanced a strong parliament and a weak president. Finally,

⁵Jon Cowans, "French Public Opinion and the Founding of the Fourth Republic," *French Historical Studies* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 1991): 69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/286279> (accessed 15 September 2013).

⁶Hitchcock, 12-13.

⁷Cowans, 62.

on 13 October 1946, the French public narrowly passed this draft and the GPRF gave way to the founding of the Fourth Republic.⁸

Unity through Economics: The Monnet Plan

The new republic proved to have the same divisive issues along political and economic lines as its predecessor. Because of the economic damage of World War II, France needed to conduct reforms to the cartels and monopolies that dominated French industry and find a way toward more widely preferable state-managed capitalist methods, but that required a level of cooperation that they had yet to achieve.⁹ Toward that end, in January 1947 Jean Monnet, a civil servant with strong ties to the United States, Britain, and de Gaulle, provided a technique by which France could begin to meet its immediate political and economic problems.¹⁰

In order to minimize divergence across the wide parliamentary spectrum, the Monnet Plan used carefully crafted planning language as a tool to avoid political conflict and promote economic recovery in France and Europe through subtlety and flexibility. Instead of attempting to reform existing structures, the Monnet Plan focused on increasing the economic productivity of France. In Monnet's words, "The influence of

⁸Cowans, 70-71.

⁹Hitchcock, 12-14.

¹⁰Edgar Beigel, "France Moves Toward National Planning," *Political Science Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (September 1947): 381-384, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2144296> (accessed 5 December 2013).

France in the world will depend on the degree to which we are able to raise our production and our national economic activity.”¹¹

By focusing on economics and using apolitical planning language to generate consensus, the newly formed Fourth Republic began to strengthen itself by providing a place for the various political parties to converge in one place along the political spectrum, allowing them to formulate a national economic strategy within the developing European power structure. Realizing the potential of such an approach, the technocrats of Quai d’Orsay, the Ministry of Finance, and the Planning Commissariat intended its “planning consensus” to be “above politics” and hoped that it would have as much success in foreign matters as it had domestically.¹²

Of course, the Monnet Plan was not a panacea. It provided a core of consensus around which the various parties could advance France’s interests and a path to economic recovery through government-managed focus on capital equipment. However, it did not solve the entire array of problems that confronted France after the devastation of World War II. Despite its positive aspects, implementation of the Monnet Plan caused inflation and its focus on capital equipment made it unsuitable for providing consumer goods to the French people.¹³ Thus, even with the new promise of a compromise government in the guise of the Fourth Republic, France still encountered daunting challenges in economic recovery, political settlement, and, by extension, military weakness.

¹¹Hitchcock, 32-39.

¹²Ibid., 39-40.

¹³R. V. Rosa, “The Problem of French Recovery,” *The Economic Journal* 59, no. 234 (June 1949): 155, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2226681> (accessed 8 April 2014).

The Monnet Plan could not undo the damage done to France's economy during the war years. As one might expect, the division of France into a Nazi-occupied area and Vichy France deeply divided the organic national structures involved in producing industrial, agricultural, and consumer products. However, Germany's most indelible mark was the persistent financial chaos that the Nazis caused in France by forcing the French to pay for their own occupation with francs, which the Germans then put back into the system in payment for goods and services. The result was rampant inflation.¹⁴ As an example of the enduring legacy of the war on the French economy, in order to buy a new coat in 1945 France, it required nearly 18 times the amount of money (in 1938 currency) that it would have in 1938, and the new coat would almost certainly be inferior because of the degradation of French industry.¹⁵

France, Germany, and Indochina

In terms of a political settlement for the economic recovery and defense of Europe, the French were not only at odds with themselves, but also their allies; chiefly the United States. In an atmosphere of increasing Soviet aggressiveness throughout Eastern Europe in post-World War II 1945, the United States viewed the strategic

¹⁴Filippo Occhino, Kim Oosterlink, and Eugene N. White, "How Occupied France Financed its own Exploitation in World War II," *The American Economic Review* 97, no. 2 (May 2007): 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30034464> (accessed 25 May 2014).

¹⁵Eleanor L. Michel, Edward A. Jones, and Edmund A. Méras, "Impressions of France 1946," *The French Review* 20, no. 3 (January 1947): 218, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/381675> (accessed 15 September 2013).

situation with concern. With the destruction of a united Germany, the traditional balance against the power of the Soviet Union was gone.¹⁶

Accordingly, in order to create a credible conventional deterrent against Soviet expansion without having to assume the role of Europe's permanent "night watchman," the United States sought to restore the military capabilities of Germany, specifically West Germany.¹⁷ Of course, the French had extreme misgivings about this course of action. The idea of rearming the nation responsible for having invaded France three times in the course of 70 years was unconscionable and the French were convinced that the Allies should keep all military power away from Germany, even if that meant stripping it of its industrial might to do so.¹⁸

In terms of military prowess, France faced a long road toward recovery. To make matters worse, France came to complicate its position by making competing troop commitments. During World War II, Winston Churchill insisted upon a French occupation zone in Germany.¹⁹ As part of the Potsdam agreement formed by the Four Powers in 1945, the French accepted a long-term troop commitment along with the

¹⁶J. M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 970-971.

¹⁷Martin Creswell, *A Question of Balance: How France and the United States Created Cold War Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), viii.

¹⁸Jacques W. Wach, "A Survey of the Problems of Reconstruction Facing the Fourth Republic," *The Journal of Business of the University of Chicago* 20, no. 2 (April 1947): 68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2350315> (accessed 15 September 2013).

¹⁹Jonathan M. House, *A Military History of the Cold War: 1944-1962* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 45.

United States and Britain.²⁰ Nearly simultaneously, the French planned for the reoccupation of their colony in Indochina.²¹ By the fall of 1946, the French had 75,000 troops in Indochina, including the Foreign Legion, Algerians, and other colonial troops,²² an effort which would also come to prove a long-term commitment.

Given the litany of problems facing the Fourth Republic in Europe, it is curious that the French would expend their limited energy in an attempt to reestablish their authority in Indochina. It appears that this seemingly strange disposition for empire stemmed from French self-perception about how France could leverage colonial holdings to its advantage. As Gaston Monnerville proclaimed at the French Consultative Assembly in May 1945 following the German surrender, “Without her empire, France would today be just another liberated country. Thanks to her empire, France is a victorious country.”²³

This was the sentiment of many French citizens at the end of World War II, and it would continue to resonate with the French throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Indeed, before the war France’s overseas colonial empire was second in size only to that of the British. France oversaw (in theory) colonies that included over 71 million people

²⁰Edward Fursdon, *The European Defence Community: A History* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980), 42.

²¹Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), 137.

²²House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, 273.

²³Edward P. Fitzgerald, “Did France's Colonial Empire Make Economic Sense? A Perspective from the Postwar Decade, 1946-1956,” *The Journal of Economic History* 48, no. 2 (June 1988): 373, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2121178> (accessed 15 September 2013).

on three continents over a combined area many times that of France itself.²⁴ With such an empire intact, diminished post-war France could still make a play for great-power politics. However, even though the appearance of empire was important to post-war France in terms of prestige and international bargaining power, the actual economic benefit of retaining colonies was weak or nonexistent.²⁵

A study conducted by the *Ministere de l'Economie et des Finances* made the case that they were reserving the colonial markets for exclusive French trade. However, policies including the extension of social programs and transfer-payment schemes to the colonies outweighed this, tipping the balance toward liability.²⁶ Unfortunately for the French, their colonies also eventually proved politically burdensome. Nonetheless, at the end of World War II the standard French opinion concerning empire was that retaining it was not just a matter of pride and honor, but also a matter of economic and political strategy.

In 1946 and 1947, the most troublesome colonial reoccupation for France was Indochina. Recognizing the difficulties of colonial reoccupation, some parties sought to avoid the inevitable war associated with executing such a policy. For example, the French Communist Party did its best to prevent the Indochina War, using propaganda, opposition to funding, and strikes to delay the shipment of materiel and troops. Political differences still deeply divided the Fourth Republic on many subjects and it struggled to cope with

²⁴J. F. Bell, "Problems of Economic Reconstruction in France," *Economic Geography* 22, no. 1 (January 1946): 58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/141763> (accessed 9 April 2014).

²⁵Fitzgerald, 373.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 375-378.

rebuilding the French economy and defenses at home in the wake of World War II. Not surprisingly, the government in Paris viewed a war in Indochina as much less important.²⁷

Nevertheless, France's Western allies did not have any particular objection to France's reassertion in its colonies and this at least in part opened the possibility. With the enthusiasm for empire still high within the British government, the United Kingdom tacitly supported France's idea of empire, even as its own imperial power ebbed.²⁸ They also openly aided the French militarily at the start of the open war between France and the Viet Minh.²⁹ In fact, the British under General Douglas D. Gracey struck the first blow of what would later become the First Indochina War with a coup that helped to place the French back in power in Saigon on the night of 22 September 1945.³⁰

As for the United States, the Truman administration formally recognized France's claim on Indochina in 1945, fully clearing the way for France to reassert itself.³¹ Conversely, by February 1947 U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall observed a troubling dichotomy. According to Marshall, the French exhibited a "dangerously outmoded colonial outlook" for an environment in which nineteenth century empires

²⁷House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, 273.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 33.

²⁹David G. Marr, "Creating Defense Capacity in Vietnam: 1945-1947," in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 76-77.

³⁰House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, 23.

³¹Karnow, 137.

were declining.³² On the other hand, Marshall also made note of the fact that Ho Chi Minh had “direct Communist connections.”³³ Caught between an archaic model and a radical model of government, Marshall could not offer a workable policy toward Indochina.³⁴ Nonetheless, with the advent of the Truman Doctrine on 12 March 1947, anti-communism became overriding. From that point on, the United States intervened on the behalf of “democratic” governments throughout the world in order to “assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.”³⁵

After the fall of China to communist forces in 1949, from the point of view of the United States, France’s move back into Indochina provided a convenient and willing front against communist expansion in Asia as part of its burgeoning plan to stem the tide of communism worldwide. Indeed, the United States would come to underwrite the French war effort in Indochina and in some respects temper its expectations of French military strength in Europe lest it tamper with the effort in Asia.³⁶ As such, the French effort in the First Indochina War intimately tied itself with the issues surrounding the

³²Mark Philip Bradley, “Making Sense of the French War: The Postcolonial Moment and the First Vietnam War, 1945-1954,” in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 16.

³³Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death* (New York: Random House, 2010), 98.

³⁴Bradley, 16.

³⁵Harry S. Truman, “The Truman Doctrine: Speech before a Joint Session of Congress,” American Rhetoric, 12 March 1947, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/harrystrumantrumandocctrine.html> (accessed 30 April 2014).

³⁶Creswell, 4.

defense of Western Europe against an increasingly expanding Soviet Union and German rearmament.

The French were still committed to their interests abroad, but their resources available to affect outcomes were inadequate to the tasks of both European defense and colonial resurgence, creating a serious dilemma. To disengage from international involvement would send a signal that confirmed French weakness in the eyes of its adversaries, but to overreach meant courting defeat by both enemy and ally alike.³⁷ It was in this environment that France confronted the primary question at the center of any post-war settlement, political, military, or economic: What to do with a defeated Germany?³⁸ The United States and United Kingdom sought to rehabilitate the German economy by returning the Ruhr and Saar regions to German control; however, the French took great exception to this as part of their near paranoia when it came to German arms industries, which had traditionally centered in these areas.³⁹

Confronting pressure from their Western allies to reintegrate Germany within the framework of a Western alliance as a bulwark against Soviet Communism, the French initially sought to make themselves a third power. France wanted to align itself as a dominant power in Europe independent of the United States and the Soviet Union. France saw its recovery in terms of the domination of the future economic and political structure of Germany, placing the French at odds with the United States, which sought to avoid the

³⁷Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron, "Introduction," in *France Defeats EDC*, ed. Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), ix.

³⁸Fursdon, 47.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 42-43.

economic conflicts that helped foment World War II in the first place.⁴⁰ Moreover, the French had even been willing to court Stalin to support their plans for the prevention of a Europe dominated by the United States and Britain, but the Soviet Union did not comprehend these advances. Faced with the prospect of isolation between the two great power blocs, France realized that the Americans were their only reasonable alternative.⁴¹

By 1948, France had a growing awareness of its own political weakness, both from its inability to maintain a hardline stance on Germany and the growing threat of the Soviet Union.⁴² French officials began to understand that France could only exercise what remained of its limited power within the context of an alliance with the United States, Britain, and, increasingly, West Germany.⁴³ Nevertheless, even in the environment of a polarized world governed by treaties that laid down the lines between east and west, including the United Nations Charter (1945), The Dunkirk Treaty (1947), The Brussels Treaty (1948), and the North Atlantic Treaty (1949), France continued to advance its own interests independently.⁴⁴ It was within this context that the French resisted the U.S. method and timing for rearming Germany.

As early as 1948, the Americans sought to rearm the Germans. While serving as a U.S. military representative to the United Nations, General Matthew Ridgeway

⁴⁰Hitchcock, 41-42.

⁴¹Michael Howard, "Introduction," in *Western Security: The Formative Years 1947-1953*, ed. Olav Riste (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 15.

⁴²Hitchcock, 73.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁴Fursdon, 28-35.

approached his French colleague General Pierre Billote with this suggestion, arguing that it would be impossible to defend Europe against a Soviet assault without “the best infantry in Europe.”⁴⁵ With NATO in place as of 1949, pressure from the United States to rearm Germany increased dramatically.⁴⁶

From then on, France could not just obstruct German growth and reintegration, it had to advance an alternate plan through “active and constructive” policies that could pre-empt more aggressive United States-United Kingdom plans that Monnet and his colleagues perceived as detrimental to French interests.⁴⁷ Toward that end, the French government advanced the Schuman Plan and the closely related Pleven Plan.

The Schuman and Pleven Plans

The year 1950 proved to be a turning point in international relations that generated greater activity from the Western allies to convince France to reconcile itself to the new order, as well as energizing the corresponding French ripostes. Economic developments concerning coal and steel, the question of German rearmament, and the outbreak of the Korean War forced Europeans to face their problems of security vis á vis Communist aggression and placed greater emphasis on the necessity for a united European defense.

⁴⁵Creswell, 14.

⁴⁶National Security Council, Presidential Directives, Item PD00213, “United States Position Regarding Strengthening the Defense of Europe and the Nature of Germany’s Contribution Thereto,” 11 September 1950, Digital National Security Archive, http://gateway.proquest.com.library.norwich.edu/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:dnsa&rft_dat=xri:dnsa:article:CPD00213 (accessed 30 April 2014).

⁴⁷Hitchcock, 100.

From an economic standpoint, post-World War II steel production in France had reached a level in 1949 where overproduction was imminent and was about to have considerable negative effects on the process of European integration via economic recovery.⁴⁸ This overproduction meant that there would be no return on the investment of \$2 billion of Marshall Plan aid for any projected future. Politically and socially, European leaders including Jean Monnet and Tony Rollman, who headed the Steel Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, reasoned that effectively wasting money from Marshall Plan aid would be disastrous, providing the Soviet Union an exploitable diplomatic lever to undermine any concept of a new Europe.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Fursdon, 50-54.

⁴⁹Ibid., 56.



Figure 1. Cold War Europe, 1949-1955

Source: United Kingdom, “Map to show political alignment 1949-1955,” The National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/focuson/film/activities/cold-war/2-behind-the-smiles-pc.htm> (accessed 16 April 2014).

Accordingly, the French reacted quickly by launching the “Schuman Plan” in May of 1950, later known as the European Coal and Steel Community.⁵⁰ The Schuman Plan advanced the notion of pooling the coal and steel production between France and Germany in a manner that would produce a coordinated management of resources to

⁵⁰A. W. Lovett, “The United States and the Schuman Plan. A Study in French Diplomacy 1950-1952,” *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 2 (June 1996): 425, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2640188> (accessed 9 April 2014).

avoid production overruns and other inefficiencies affecting the European economy. Cleverly, the plan also entailed a strong security feature in it that allayed some of the French fear of a resurgent German military.⁵¹

The agreement pooled the resources of coal and steel production of several European countries, including France and Germany, under a single authority. Robert Schuman, the plan's primary author, logically connected war and war making potential with coal and steel. Arguably, since pooling the production of these two crucial war making resources entailed France and Germany working together, the chances of armed conflict between the two nation states diminished considerably.⁵²

While the Schuman Plan made the French feel safer, the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950 convinced the members of the North Atlantic alliance that credible conventional deterrent and containment forces were increasingly necessary. The Korean War proved that the mere possession of atomic weapons on the part of the United States was not a sufficient deterrent for a conventional invasion. While the use of such a weapon might be reasonable to prevent a massive invasion of one's homeland or in retaliation for the use of a similar weapon, to use such weapons against a localized enemy in a limited war was completely out of proportion.⁵³ Accordingly, NATO sought a substantial

⁵¹French Fourth Republic, "Schuman Declaration," 9 May 1950, European Union, <http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration> (accessed 9 April 2014).

⁵²Fursdon, 58-59.

⁵³Antulio Echevarria, "Nuclear War and Limited War," Seminar 3, Lecture 8, Norwich University, Northfield, VT, 27 January 2013, 1.

increase in its conventional deterrent capability in Western Europe out of fear of a similar Soviet attack.⁵⁴

The need for this deterrent, especially at a time when France, Great Britain, and the Dutch were fighting insurgencies in their colonies and therefore stretched thin militarily, placed extreme pressure on the NATO alliance to rearm West Germany.⁵⁵ Moreover, once the French asked the United States to commit itself to the defense of Western Europe in 1950, the rearmament of Germany was an absolute requirement if France wanted any chance of defending itself against the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ At this point, the French accepted the inevitability of German rearmament, but they preferred to see it proceed at a time, place, and manner of their choosing.⁵⁷

Subsequently, René Pleven, the Prime Minister of France at the time, introduced the “Pleven Plan” in October of 1950.⁵⁸ The Pleven Plan was a tentative concept for a European army, which eventually led to the development of the EDC proposal. At its root, this proposal encompassed the Western European powers (initially including the

⁵⁴Lawrence Friedman, “The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 741.

⁵⁵House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, xiii.

⁵⁶André Philip, “The Interplay of Interests and Passions,” in *France Defeats the EDC*, ed. Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 37.

⁵⁷Creswell, 40.

⁵⁸Jaques Fauvet, “The Birth and Death of a Treaty: From Pléven Plan to vote of August 30, 1954,” in *France Defeats EDC*, ed. Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 128.

United Kingdom) that would form a European army that purposely limited German participation.

The final ratification for this plan depended on approval of the Schuman Plan, a condition self-imposed by France and meant as a condition for the invitation of the Allies to “study” the matter in Paris.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the advent of the Korean War upset the delicate balance of pooling coal and steel resources under a supranational authority. The Schuman Plan, purposely aimed at delaying the rearmament of Germany, could not hold in an environment in which the threat of communist attack appeared heightened.⁶⁰ Under these conditions, the U.S. Joint Chiefs in August 1950 had gone so far as to advocate the formation of a full 20-division West German army, a course of action that would have mortified the French.⁶¹

The Pleven Plan also proved troublesome for French military efforts due to the unclear disposition of non-integrated forces overseas and the intended level of integration. Because of the uncertainty regarding non-integrated forces, which included the French colonial army, adoption of the plan would imperil France’s efforts at reestablishing their authority in Indochina.⁶² In addition, Pleven’s plan for a European

⁵⁹C.G.D. Onslow, “West German Rearmament,” *World Politics* 3, no. 4 (July 1951): 468, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2008892> (accessed 8 April 2014).

⁶⁰Pierre Melandri, “France and the Atlantic Alliance 1950-1953: Between Great Power Policy and European Integration,” in *Western Security: The Formative Years 1947-1953*, ed. Olav Riste (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 270-271.

⁶¹Geoffrey Warner, “The British Labour Government and the Atlantic Alliance, 1949-1951,” in *Western Security: The Formative Years 1947-1953*, ed. Olav Riste (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 252.

⁶²Fursdon, 90.

army limited German participation to battalion and below and had the potential for solving France's problem with regard to limiting German rearmament, but probably would not have accomplished anything else. In fact, none of the 12 NATO chiefs, including the French generals, thought that a plan integrating mixed regiments of different nationalities could possibly work on the battlefield. As a result, many of France's allies believed that Pleven scheme was little more than a delay tactic meant to forestall German rearmament.⁶³

Whether through accident or design, the plan served to hold the allies at bay with regard to wholesale German rearmament. The flaws in the plan that set overseas troop commitments against European troop commitments tied to limiting German participation generated legitimate internal debates, but France may have purposely contrived the flaws. Conveniently enough for the French government, this created time to shape the situation to their liking and in concert with their desire to act independently of American hegemony.

The EDC

The idea for the EDC had its genesis at the Petersberg Conference on 9 January 1951.⁶⁴ Designed as a way for France to limit German military participation and unite

⁶³Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "The First Cold War Buildup: Europe in United States Strategy and Policy, 1950-1953," in *Western Security: The Formative Years 1947-1953*, ed. Olav Riste (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 187.

⁶⁴Fursdon, 105.

Europe, France signed the EDC treaty and associated protocols on 27 May 1952.⁶⁵

Curiously, by the time of its 1954 defeat in French parliament it had served to do little more than delay German rearmament, serving no greater purpose than the Plevin Plan at its foundation.

During this time, two approaches to European defense advanced: the French method via the EDC and a European army and the Spofford Proposal under which West Germany would contribute national forces to NATO. At the Petersburg Conference in Bonn, Germany, the Allied Occupation Powers intended to discuss a way in which they could bring Germany into the framework of NATO.⁶⁶ This “Spofford Plan,” named for Charles Spofford, the U.S. Representative to NATO, offered U.S. support to France’s European army concept in return for immediate German rearmament.⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, the French opened a conference in Paris that focused on the development of a European army based upon the original Plevin Plan.⁶⁸

Within France, a tedious and tendentious debate arose from the attempt at EDC ratification. Votes on the issue centered on matters of the most esoteric nature, as if the French National Assembly collectively intended to bog down the legislative process in

⁶⁵Nathan Leites and Christian de la Malene, “Paris from EDC to WEU,” *World Politics* 9, no. 2 (January 1957): 193, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2008879> (accessed 9 April 2014).

⁶⁶Martin Dedman, *The Origins and Development of the European Union: A History of European Integration* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 66.

⁶⁷Ted Galen Carpenter, “United States’ NATO Policy at the Crossroads: The ‘Great Debate’ of 1950-1951,” *The International History Review* 8, no. 3 (August 1986): 398, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40105629> (accessed 6 April 2014).

⁶⁸Dedman, 66.

minutiae. Indeed, it proved far more difficult to get the National Assembly to ratify the EDC (it never happened) than it had been for the government to sign the treaty.⁶⁹ One of the key points of contention among the French opponents of the EDC was that any attempt at achieving parity with Germany within the framework of the EDC while defending Indochina against the Viet Minh would push France's resources beyond the breaking point. Additionally, contributions to the EDC determined voting rights and the French could not concede German dominance, economic or otherwise; therefore, they could not simultaneously accept the EDC and continue the fight in Indochina.⁷⁰

Shifting combinations of coalitions within the National Assembly clashed with each other politically over the issues of the EDC, making it that much more difficult to ratify the treaty.⁷¹ In keeping with the pronouncements of Phillip Williams, the author of *Crisis and Compromise: Politics in the Fourth Republic*, in French politics, "there were never fewer than three" strong political attitudes and "associates on one issue were bitter opponents on another."⁷² Andre Philip, a contemporary professor of economics at the University of the Saar, argued that this behavior stemmed from the French pursuit of fixed moral principles in the absence of Christian faith where the political took the place of the spiritual. As such, the French were not necessarily interested in concrete results, but rather faithfulness to their individual abstract values.⁷³

⁶⁹Leites and de la Malene, 194.

⁷⁰Fursdon, 200.

⁷¹Philip, 24.

⁷²Cowans, 63.

⁷³Philip, 38.

The French press was also less than helpful. In fact, the French press attempted to promulgate different points of view among the public based upon the political and social orientation of the various organs of the press.⁷⁴ Despite the complete destruction and partition of Germany, opponents of the EDC still harbored fears of German hegemony. According to *Le Monde*, if the French ratified the EDC, there would be “Either a war for Leipzig or Koenigsberg, or a German Europe.”⁷⁵ Another major newspaper of the day, *Combat*, printed such anti-EDC statements as, “The European army is nothing more or less than the *Wehrmacht* . . . Hitler’s Europe without Hitler.”⁷⁶

Thus, the ratification of the EDC was problematic for France, even though it was the most viable plan that the French government had been able to advance.⁷⁷ Moreover, regardless of the fact that France had agreed in principle to the Spofford Plan of November 1950, the German Chancellor’s insistence upon equality and political independence within its framework made it unacceptable to France.⁷⁸

On the other hand, proponents of the EDC believed that they needed to bring Germany into a “carefully crafted political and economic system” in order to ensure

⁷⁴Jean Jose Marchand, “A Tableau of the French Press,” in *France Defeats the EDC*, ed. Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 102.

⁷⁵E. J. B. Rose, “The Press and International Tensions,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 38, no. 1 (January 1962): 53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2611380> (accessed 9 April 2014).

⁷⁶Marchand, 106.

⁷⁷Carpenter, 398.

⁷⁸Dedman, 66.

stability at a time when the East-West conflict was at its most dangerous.⁷⁹ Indeed, both Konrad Adenauer, the German Chancellor, and Armand Bérard, the French envoy to the United Nations, argued that a combined European army incorporating the Germans would be less provocative to the Soviets.⁸⁰ From the EDC proponents' view, this advanced France's effort to limit German power while bringing them into the Western alliance on French terms.⁸¹ Problematically, Robert Schuman, French Foreign Minister, and Rene Mayer, French Prime Minister, saw the ratification of the Schuman Plan as a prerequisite to EDC ratification,⁸² which meant that it appeared to some as a relatively transparent attempt to delay rearmament until the institutions designed to keep Germany in check were mature.⁸³ In effect, this was true. These conditions would delay further debates on ratification until the summer of 1954.⁸⁴

France's effort in the Indochina War also seriously hampered the progress toward the EDC's ratification. In the spring of 1954, events in Indochina posed the most serious threat to the EDC. Opposition to debating the EDC included concerns over the absence of

⁷⁹Hitchcock, 133.

⁸⁰Creswell, 36.

⁸¹Hitchcock, 169.

⁸²Alfred Grosser, "Germany and France: A Confrontation," in *France Defeats EDC*, ed. Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 58.

⁸³Hitchcock, 144.

⁸⁴Grosser, 58.

the most elite French army officers as they fought, and often died, with the colonial army in Indochina.⁸⁵

Since 1914, France had what amounted to two armies. There was the metropolitan army, which France intended for use in Europe against other European powers, and there was the French colonial army, intended for small wars and imperial policing. The former consisted primarily of conscripts from the French mainland. The latter consisted of volunteers and locally recruited native peoples, but also tended to have the elite among its cadre.⁸⁶ How could they debate a matter affecting the defense of the homeland with so many of its top officers so far away? The fighting at Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954 heightened this concern.

Other issues regarding this included the entanglement of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as they related to Indochina. Was it reasonable for France to advance the EDC and subscribe to rearming Germany as a counterweight to the Soviets when the Soviets had it in their power to reinforce the Viet Minh through their Chinese allies? Under such conditions, according to Raymond Aron, the French expeditionary forces at Dien Bien Phu “were, in a way, merely hostages.”⁸⁷ As a corollary, if the Soviet Union saw the EDC as a threat, they had no reason to end the Indochinese War without a

⁸⁵Raymond Aron, “Historical Sketch of the Great Debate,” in *France Defeats EDC*, ed. Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 16.

⁸⁶Peter Drake Jackson, “French Ground Force Organizational Development for Counterrevolutionary Warfare Between 1945 and 1962” (Master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2005), 13.

⁸⁷Aron, 16.

counterbalancing position. Thus, it is apparent that the Soviets hoped to trade a brokered armistice in Indochina for France's rejection of the EDC.⁸⁸

By the beginning of the Geneva Conference on Indochinese and Korean political settlements on 26 April 1954, the fortress at Dien Bien Phu was already doomed.⁸⁹ Negotiations for U.S. intervention, proposed at the last minute and without unanimity within France, also failed.⁹⁰ The Soviets further weakened France's already poor position with a vitriolic speech by the Soviet diplomat Vyacheslav Molotov, which created the impression that the Soviet and Chinese-backed Viet Minh would request terms that no French government could accept.⁹¹ On 7 May, Dien Bien Phu fell.⁹² By 12 June, the Laniel government collapsed under its Indochina policy.⁹³ The French reformed their government under Pierre Mendès-France, signing an armistice on 20 July 1954.

Under Prime Minister Mendès-France in 1954, the government position was one of emphasized priority to Indochina and indifference to EDC.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, in an attempt to appease opponents and advocates of the EDC within the National Assembly, the Mendès-France government attempted to make modifications to the treaty. In turn,

⁸⁸Aron, 17.

⁸⁹John Prados, *The Sky Would Fall* (New York: Dial Press, 1983), 42-43.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 168-169.

⁹¹Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 511-512.

⁹²Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002), 412.

⁹³R. E. M. Irving, *The First Indochina War* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 127.

⁹⁴Fursdon, 266.

these caused some outrage among their European partners who had gone to great lengths to accommodate it.⁹⁵

In the end, the National Assembly never actually debated or voted on the EDC in the course of its defeat. Anti-EDC elements of the assembly defeated the EDC through a vote that offered a choice between postponing the debate and rejecting the treaty outright. This parliamentary motion, peculiar to the National Assembly, did not allow recourse for bringing it to the floor for proper deliberation. General Adolphe Aumeran brought the motion to reject to the floor, effectively killing the EDC.⁹⁶ Interestingly, General Aumeran was a *Pied Noir*, which offered some foreshadowing of the conflict that would stem from the friction between European defense and colonial rule in Algeria.⁹⁷ Ultimately, the frictions between the parties in the National Assembly led to the defeat of the EDC through a mundane parliamentary technicality, which produced a decisive vote affecting much of the Cold War security apparatus as it related to France.⁹⁸

The irony in the failure of the EDC was that it brought about the very condition that the French designed it to prevent. Primarily, the French brought the EDC treaty into existence to prevent Germany from joining NATO; once the French themselves defeated the EDC, they left no existing or feasible alternative to the question of European security or German rearmament other than the NATO solution. However, through their

⁹⁵Aron, 19.

⁹⁶Fursdon, 295.

⁹⁷French National Assembly, “Biographies of the Members of the Fourth Republic,” <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/biographies/IVRepublique/aumeran-adolphe-leon-gustave-01111887.asp> (accessed 5 December 2013).

⁹⁸Aron, 19.

combination of outward maneuver and inward conflict, the French chose the timing. They placed over four years between the genesis of the EDC in Bonn and its defeat in Paris. In effect, this gave the French time to prosecute its colonial war in Indochina without having to overstress their system in an EDC contribution competition with West Germany and without subsuming their army within a larger European army. West Germany joined NATO on 9 May 1955 as its fifteenth member. In retaliation, the Soviets signed the Warsaw Pact with their seven satellite states on 14 May.⁹⁹

Within France, the collapse of the EDC ultimately dissolved the two opposing blocs that determined its fate. The Mendès-France government caused the dissolution of these two blocs with its replacement solution to the EDC.¹⁰⁰ In place of the EDC, the Mendès-France government proposed utilizing the protocols of the Western European Union, which introduced relaxed connections between France and Germany, and included the United Kingdom. This effectively undermined the alliances of those blocs within the National Assembly seeking either guarantees or supranational arrangements by removing their justifications. Mendès-France did so by offering EDC supporters a strong connection between Germany and the West through technical as opposed to military, economic, and political means, promised a non-military, gradual unification of Europe, and asserted that the future lay with the possibility of *détente* with the East by reducing tensions through arms control.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Fursdon, 337.

¹⁰⁰Stanley Hoffman, "The Postmortems," in *France Defeats EDC*, ed. Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 166.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 172-173.

By 1954, post-war France had reformed its government, substantially rebuilt its economy, and managed to maneuver politically between the two superpowers to gain significant leverage from a point of extreme weakness. Through its own constant diplomatic and political activity, France managed to shape the nature of German rearmament, gain a measure of security in Europe without losing military sovereignty, avoid competition with West Germany, and marshal its forces for an attempt to retain its colonies. The only significant downside was the effort expended in Indochina.

CHAPTER 3

COMPETING INTERESTS IN INDOCHINA

Introduction

The key to the problem of Indochina is to be found in the domestic political situation in France.

— Ho Chi Minh, quoted in R.E. M. Irving,
The First Indochina War

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test of the kind of war on which they are embarking . . .

— Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

Ho Chi Minh placed his sun helmet upside down on bamboo table. He put his hands into its bottom and said, “That’s where the French are.” Then he ran his fingers around the edge of the helmet. “That’s where we are. They will never get out.”¹⁰² By 7 May 1954, the most significant battle of the Indochina War was over.¹⁰³ The French had killed Viet Minh soldiers by the thousands, but lost Dien Bien Phu. Along with it, they lost Indochina, ending the eight-year war that France fought parallel to its struggle to rebuild its economy and political system in the wake of World War II. This chapter examines the effects of the Indochina War on the economic and political efforts that shaped simultaneous efforts to rebuild France and secure Western Europe.

Although the Indochina War troubled France’s post-war domestic policies for years, the genesis of the Indochina War preceded the founding of the Fourth Republic. At

¹⁰²Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 257.

¹⁰³Fall, 389.

the end of World War II, the exile government under Charles de Gaulle signed the Brazzaville Declaration, a policy that would retain the various parts of the French Empire within a perpetual federal “French Union.”¹⁰⁴ Under this concept, various national groups within the union would have local autonomy, but defer to Paris for issues of defense and foreign policy. As the most heavily populated and wealthiest of France’s colonial holdings, Indochina proved to be the test case for this policy. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese wanted more autonomy than France wanted to provide and French colonial officials dismissed any policy that moved Indochina toward independence.¹⁰⁵

Foundations

What led to this precarious balance in Indochina at the end of World War II included more than just the agendas of Vietnamese revolutionaries and French colonial officials. During the time leading up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, French Indochina had acquiesced to pressure and allowed the Japanese to create staging areas for their invasion of Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁶ U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew this, understood it, and remembered it in 1945.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Irving, 2-4.

¹⁰⁵House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, 270.

¹⁰⁶Gary R. Hess, “Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina,” *The Journal of American History* 59, no. 2 (September 1972): 354, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1890195> (accessed 16 April 2014).

¹⁰⁷Stein Tonnenson, “Franklin Roosevelt, Trusteeship, and Indochina: A Reassessment,” in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 73.

President Roosevelt was staunchly anti-colonial.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, as the United States gained the upper hand in the Pacific in 1945, President Roosevelt wanted to invade Indochina not only to fight the Japanese, but also to liberate the Vietnamese from France.¹⁰⁹ However, the sensitivity of newly liberated mainland France and the strategic priorities of defeating Imperial Japan made President Roosevelt's desired invasion of Indochina impossible. Nevertheless, he apparently intended to give the impression that it was forthcoming.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the U.S. Navy sent a carrier force under the command of Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey to raid the coast of Indochina in mid-January 1945, which seemed to confirm Japan's impression that an allied invasion was imminent.¹¹¹

Intercepted Japanese radio messages that followed on 11 February indicated that the Japanese considered creating a reason for a coup against the Vichy French colonial officials. The Japanese had left the French in power to administer the colony, but considered them untrustworthy in the event of an invasion by the United States. By 22 February, the local Japanese Imperial military officials in Indochina considered the U.S. threat to have subsided. Regardless, in keeping with the Japanese Supreme War Council's 1 February decision to "take military control of Indochina," the local Imperial military

¹⁰⁸Ronald Spector, "Allied Intelligence and Indochina," *Pacific Historical Review* 51, no. 1 (February 1982): 32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3639819> (accessed 16 April 2014).

¹⁰⁹Tonnenson, "Franklin Roosevelt, Trusteeship, and Indochina: A Reassessment," 62.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹¹Stein Tonnenson, "The South China Sea in the Age of European Decline," *Modern Asian Studies* 40, no. 1 (February 2006): 18-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3876599> (accessed 16 April 2014).

decided to proceed on schedule.¹¹² On 9 March, the Japanese in Indochina conducted a coup, removing the Vichy French colonial officials from power and defeating the colonial troops stationed there.¹¹³

France had been on its heels since Paris fell to the Germans in 1940, but this coup demonstrated the weakness of the French directly to the Vietnamese.¹¹⁴ Coupled with the Japanese slogan of “Asia for Asians,” it also offered a strong stimulus for Vietnamese nationalism.¹¹⁵ As a result, for the next several months, emboldened communist guerillas known as the Viet Minh conducted harassment attacks against the local Japanese Imperial authorities, with some limited help from an intelligence unit from the United States.¹¹⁶

A week after the United States conducted its 6 August 1945, atomic attack on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, the Viet Minh declared their intention of disarming their Imperial occupiers. Four days later the Viet Minh declared a provisional government.¹¹⁷ With France’s colonial administration in Indochina removed and the Japanese Imperial occupiers neutralized, the Indochinese Communist Party under Ho Chi Minh inherited a

¹¹²Tonnenson, “Franklin Roosevelt, Trusteeship, and Indochina: A Reassessment,” 65-66.

¹¹³Spector, 32.

¹¹⁴Hess, 366.

¹¹⁵Irving, 10.

¹¹⁶Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2004), 82.

¹¹⁷Irving, 16.

power vacuum and proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) from Hanoi on 29 August.¹¹⁸

On 2 September, while Japan signed its formal surrender to the United States, Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of Vietnam. However, Ho realized perhaps more than anyone the fragile nature of his emerging state. Allied armies converged on Vietnam. The Allies had estimated correctly at the Potsdam Conference that the French would not have sufficient troops available to send to Indochina for the administration of a Japanese surrender.¹¹⁹ They agreed, in the absence of French officials whom the Allies did not invite, to occupy Indochina temporarily with the Nationalist Chinese north of the sixteenth parallel and the British to the south.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, "Introduction," in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

¹¹⁹Irving, 11.

¹²⁰Windrow, 84.



Figure 2. French Indochina

Source: National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, “French Indochina,” <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/shared/media/photodb/photos/110224-F-XN622-010.jpg> (accessed 16 April 2014).

Accordingly, the Chinese marched on Hanoi and Haiphong from the north and the British came in through Saigon from the south. The French sent word from metropolitan Paris that they would soon send troops as well. Finally, although officially defeated, the

Japanese still had 70,000 troops in Indochina. In early September 1945, it was not at all clear how the disposition of the DRV would work out.¹²¹

The Return of France

What followed was fortunate for the DRV, in a manner of degree. Although they were overwhelmed with the combined might of the armies approaching from the north and the south, the DRV only confronted an enemy in the south. The Chinese Nationalists at the northern frontier had no problem with the DRV as long as the Vietnamese provided their troops rice and continued to administer public order. However, at the southern end of the country the British refused to deal with DRV representatives, rearmed 1,400 French colonial soldiers, and declared martial law from Saigon. Compelling the remaining Japanese troops to join British-Indian regiments in suppressing resistance, the British commander forced all elements of the DRV, armed or otherwise, to retreat into the countryside.¹²²

With the 31 October arrival of Admiral Georges Thierry D'Argenlieu and General Philippe Leclerc, the French began consolidating their position in Cochinchina and Annam south of the sixteenth parallel. Leclerc's armored columns ran throughout southern Indochina for the next two months with only marginal resistance. By 5 February 1946, Leclerc declared, "Cochinchina and southern Vietnam have been completely pacified."¹²³ Nevertheless, by this time Leclerc had observed the ongoing nationalist

¹²¹Marr, 76-77.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Irving, 15.

movement in Vietnam and was certain that France could not possibly reestablish itself via military force.¹²⁴ From Leclerc's perspective, despite concurrent Viet Minh weakness, France needed to reach a negotiated settlement with Ho Chi Minh.¹²⁵

Ho reached the same conclusion as Leclerc. The DRV found itself between the ostensibly neutral, but powerful Chinese occupiers in the north and the resurgent French in the south. Moreover, the DRV was in no shape to fight. Ho had to negotiate. Unfortunately, Admiral D'Argenlieu, in his colonial administrative role as the High Commissioner, was not amenable to compromise. In contrast to Leclerc, D'Argenlieu was autocratic and dedicated to the reestablishment of France's grandeur, which nested well with the philosophy of Charles de Gaulle whom D'Argenlieu knew personally as well as professionally.¹²⁶

Given the relatively direct relationship between France's provisional government under Charles de Gaulle and the colonial administration of D'Argenlieu, it seemed that policies might relax after de Gaulle resigned on 20 January 1946. Ho certainly thought as much.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, the effect of de Gaulle's departure was exactly the opposite. The absence of strong leadership in the Metropole led D'Argenlieu to believe that he could do as he saw fit and sought only a military solution. In the meantime, metropolitan France

¹²⁴Irving, 17.

¹²⁵Fredrik Logevall, *The Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012), 130-131.

¹²⁶Alain-Gerard Marsot, "The Crucial Year: Indochina 1946," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, no. 2 (April 1984): 344, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260599> (accessed 14 April 2014).

¹²⁷Logevall, 130.

focused far too inwardly in its struggle to develop a compromise government in de Gaulle's absence, and did not concern itself with reform to colonial administration.¹²⁸

Under these conditions, D'Argenlieu increased military pressure on northern Vietnam, conducting a demonstration of naval force at Haiphong on 6 March 1946, which led to favorable terms for France with the complicity of the Nationalist Chinese. Chiang Kai-shek, who was much more concerned about fighting his war with Mao Tse-tung's Peoples' Liberation Army in China, was not particularly interested in providing occupation forces for northern Vietnam. As such, the Chinese Nationalists were more than willing to hand over their role as an occupation force to the French.¹²⁹

On the same day as the naval demonstration, which oddly included confused fighting between some French and Chinese forces in Haiphong harbor, France and the Viet Minh came to an agreement under intense Chinese pressure.¹³⁰ Threatened with the possibility of having to fight the Chinese Nationalist Army in addition to each other, France and the Viet Minh compromised, signing the "Preliminary Convention" recognizing the "Republic of Vietnam."¹³¹ The conditions of this agreement meant that Vietnam was now ostensibly a "free state" within the Indochinese Federation and the

¹²⁸Marsot, 340.

¹²⁹Logevall, 132-133.

¹³⁰Office of the Secretary of Defense, Pentagon Papers Part I, "United States – Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967," NND 63316, A25-A26, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, <http://media.nara.gov/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-I.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2014). The Preliminary Convention stipulated three things: first, that France recognized the DRV, but within the framework of the French Union; second, the DRV would welcome French troops as they took the place of the Nationalist Chinese; and finally, the parties agreed to a future conference on Vietnamese foreign relations, law, and French economic and cultural interests.

¹³¹Logevall, 133.

French Union, though this included the Vietnamese acceptance of 25,000 French occupation troops to replace the departing Chinese.¹³²

France continued to clamp down on the Viet Minh over the summer of 1946, while parliamentary elections in France that summer shifted the government to the right. With the MRP receiving 28 percent of the votes, Georges Bidault became the President of the Provisional Government of France. Significantly, this 28 percent plurality was the highest figure that the MRP had ever received, signaling to Bidault that his conservative government could pursue a policy of no compromise when it came to the reestablishment of France's authority in Indochina. Thus, Bidault did not intend to compromise with the DRV, even though Ho Chi Minh would have settled for remaining in the French Union at the time if Vietnam could have joined the United Nations.¹³³

Essentially, the Provisional Government of France under Bidault and the Fourth Republic that followed it inherited their foreign policy philosophy directly from de Gaulle. After all, Bidault had been de Gaulle's Foreign Minister. De Gaulle's policy followed directly from his perspective on the value of France's overseas empire in relation to France's defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1940. From de Gaulle's perspective, it was the French overseas empire that had proven to be the central element that allowed France to survive during World War II.¹³⁴ Indeed, this was the founding sentiment of French resistance that de Gaulle projected from London during the fall of

¹³²Logevall, 133.

¹³³Irving, 26-27.

¹³⁴Jaques Frémeaux and André Martel, "French Defense Policy: 1947-1949," in *Western Security: The Formative Years – European and Atlantic Defense: 1947-1953*, ed. Olav Riste (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 92-93.

France on 18 June 1940. “France is not alone. She is not alone. She is not alone. She has a vast Empire behind her . . . and is continuing the fight.”¹³⁵ Accordingly, France was determined to keep its empire.

Two factors aided the general trend underlying the electoral victory that shaped this policy toward Indochina. First, France’s colonial service had been actively involved setting the policies regarding all colonial possessions as far back as the Brazzaville Conference in January-February 1944.¹³⁶ During the conference, representatives of the Ministry of Overseas France advocated reform, but carefully crafted the language of the agreements along conservative lines that essentially left the position of primacy to metropolitan France. In 1946, the Ministry of Overseas France emerged as a leading organization in the Provisional Government against any serious departure from traditional colonial policy. Finally, with the installment of Paul Ramadier’s cabinet in 1947, they resurrected the traditional colonial lobby. With these efforts, the debates on local autonomy and democratization came to an end.¹³⁷

The second factor was the post-war imperial enthusiasm among the French people. The political rebuilding and reforming in metropolitan France and the redesign of the French Empire as a French Union gave people the misleading impression that a modernized version of colonialism was possible in the post-war era. Colonial possessions, cloaked in terms of a federated French Union, became the understood

¹³⁵Logevall, 23-24.

¹³⁶Irving, 2.

¹³⁷James I. Lewis, “The French Colonial Service and the Issues of Reform, 1944-8,” *Contemporary European History* 4, no. 2 (July 1995): 154, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20068659> (accessed 2 February 2014).

metrics of resurgent French power and national greatness. Moreover, advocates of empire, such as the Colonial Service, conducted their machinations to shape this popularity without concern over public scrutiny because of the general ignorance of the public when it came to colonial matters.¹³⁸

Save for a segment of the Communist Party in France, no one in 1946 France was interested in relinquishing colonial possessions. The Provisional Government, the Fourth Republic, the Colonial Service, and the public at large sought to retain French colonies for matters of prestige and the perceived value in keeping France strong.¹³⁹ Crucially, France also saw its overseas empire as the only potential method of counterbalancing the emerging superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁰ Giving up any portion of it was unthinkable.

This impasse was not lost on Ho Chi Minh, who was in France through the later summer and early fall 1946. Without having to be much of a sage, he predicted the coming conflict. “It will be a war between an elephant and a tiger. If the tiger ever stands still, the elephant will crush him with his mighty tusks. But the tiger will not stand still . . . He will leap upon the back of the elephant, tearing huge chunks from his side . . . slowly the elephant will bleed to death.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸Thomas, “French Imperial Reconstruction and the Development of the Indochina War: 1945-1950,” 130-131.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴⁰Frémeaux and Martel, 93.

¹⁴¹Irving, *The First Indochina War*, 29.

Concurrent to the electoral developments in France, events in Indochina began confirming Ho's predictions. In September and October 1946, colonial officials in Saigon began reporting an increased number of skirmishes with the Viet Minh. Although reports invariably showed that these rebels were on the losing side of these confrontations, the Viet Minh position in Cochinchina was improving.¹⁴²

In order to reverse this progress, the French commander in Cochinchina, General Etienne Valluy, sought to hit the Viet Minh at the source of their power. D'Argenlieu agreed with Valluy and they decided to crack down on Haiphong.¹⁴³ French forces already controlled part of the city, but the Viet Minh controlled others. By gaining control of the city and the harbor, the French thought they might be able to strangle the Viet Minh economically. After all, this was the conduit through which the Viet Minh smuggled in oil and weapons from the Chinese.¹⁴⁴ On 20 November 1946, the Indochina War began in earnest when the French attempted to seize a vessel suspected of transporting contraband weapons. The Viet Minh resisted. Fighting escalated and poured into the streets until the French ended it with a combination of naval gunfire, artillery, and close air support. By 28 November, France was in control of Haiphong.¹⁴⁵

The Viet Minh could not hope to confront France directly at that time. Although France used a hodge-podge of Allied surplus and salvage equipment, its colonial troops still had heavy weapons, an air force, and a navy. The Viet Minh did not. Thus, the Viet

¹⁴²Logevall, 153-154.

¹⁴³Ibid., 154-155.

¹⁴⁴Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 81.

¹⁴⁵Windrow, 90.

Minh avoided direct combat. Sabotage, bombings, and assassination became the preferred Viet Minh techniques in 1947.¹⁴⁶ The 30,000 to 50,000 Viet Minh spread throughout the country moved easily among the population. France controlled a handful of cities and towns in Vietnam that depended on troop presence, but the Viet Minh controlled the countryside.

Symptomatic of the problems that continued to confront French military operations in Indochina, General Valluy did not have enough troops at his disposal to execute effective operations while simultaneously consolidating his gains.¹⁴⁷ Because Indochina was a colony and not French territory, the government could not use conscripts there.¹⁴⁸ In 1948, the situation only grew worse. Many of Valluy's troops had enlisted in the last months of World War II. With their enlistments expired, they returned home. Valluy conducted no large-scale offensives that year.¹⁴⁹

Colonialism or Anti-Communism?

In the meantime, the violence in Indochina began to make the idea of France's colonial resurgence less politically viable.¹⁵⁰ On 18 March 1947, during one of the debates on Indochina policy, François Billoux, the Minister of Defense and a Communist, refused to stand when the members of the National Assembly paid their respects "to the

¹⁴⁶Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 95.

¹⁴⁷Windrow, 95.

¹⁴⁸Jackson, 65.

¹⁴⁹Windrow, 98.

¹⁵⁰Thomas, "French Imperial Reconstruction and the Development of the Indochina War: 1945-1950," 131.

brave [French] soldiers in Indochina.”¹⁵¹ Given that President Truman had just announced his anti-communist doctrine “Truman Doctrine” on 12 March as a counterweight to Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, Ramadier’s government began to perceive Billoux and the rest of his party in alignment with the Soviets. Indeed, Ramadier relieved Billoux and four other Communists of their posts in his cabinet on 4 May.¹⁵²

A French economic slump in the latter part of 1947 coupled with the February 1948 Soviet takeover in Prague forced France to reevaluate its priorities. France needed economic aid and the French began to see that the Soviet Union might be more of an immediate threat than Germany.¹⁵³ Given these developments, Ramadier’s expulsion of the communists within his cabinet appeared appropriate. After all, because of the Truman Doctrine, it was not at all clear if the United States would provide Marshall Aid to a government that shared power with communists. France desperately needed money and was resorting to a bread ration at home that was less than that of World War II in order to support the Indochina War.¹⁵⁴

The Indochina War initiated a controversy in Paris under a set of circumstances that drove France to align itself more closely with the United States, which in turn made it financially possible to continue the Indochina War. Consequently, France aligned itself firmly within the U.S. sphere of influence. In return, the United States acquiesced to

¹⁵¹Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 97.

¹⁵²Ibid., 98.

¹⁵³Hitchcock, 73.

¹⁵⁴Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 99.

France's desire to fight the Viet Minh for Indochina under the guise of anti-Communism despite the duplicity of the obvious colonial goal.¹⁵⁵

In early 1949, the entangling relationship between the United States, France, and the Indochina War only deepened. The priority was still Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty was close to signing, but the centrist government in Paris at the time could not afford discredit in Indochina. The United States could not pressure France to grant independence to Vietnam because her other colonies would surely pursue independence as well, destabilizing France. The French public would not accept a rapid decolonization and the centrist government would fall if the United States forced the issue, jeopardizing the U.S. interests in the North Atlantic Treaty and progress in French policies on German sovereignty and European security.¹⁵⁶

Proxy War: Chinese and U.S. Aid

In October 1949, the situation changed dramatically. With the defeat of Nationalist Forces in the Chinese Civil War, Mao Tse-tung's Peoples' Liberation Army began to deliver modern arms and military advice to the Viet Minh. Moreover, Communist China officially recognized Ho Chi Minh's government as the rightful representative body for the Vietnamese people on 18 January 1950. The Soviet Union recognized them on 30 January.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 97.

¹⁵⁶Logevall, 220.

¹⁵⁷Windrow, 108.

Following this official recognition, China offered “every military assistance needed by Vietnam in its struggle against France.”¹⁵⁸ From 1950-1954, China delivered 116,000 small arms and 4,630 cannons to the Viet Minh, outfitting five infantry divisions, one engineer division, one artillery division, one antiaircraft regiment, and one guard regiment.¹⁵⁹ With time, the Viet Minh became increasingly powerful and bold.

In response, France hurriedly approved a competing government on 2 February 1950 in Saigon under the hapless Bao Dai.¹⁶⁰ France resorted to Bao Dai because he was the only man that they thought could rally the Vietnamese to a nationalist cause and remain pliantly under French control.¹⁶¹ Unfortunately, Bao Dai’s excellent credentials as the scion of Vietnam’s imperial line did not negate the fact that he was blatantly corrupt and ineffectual.¹⁶² A week later London and Washington recognized the Saigon government.¹⁶³ More importantly, the direct aid to France for the prosecution of the Indochina War that U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson pushed in late 1949 became a

¹⁵⁸Chen Jian, “China and the First Indo-China War, 1950-54,” *The China Quarterly* no. 133 (March 1993): 89, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/654240> (accessed 17 June 2012).

¹⁵⁹Qiang Zhai, “Transplanting the Chinese Model: Chinese Military Advisors and the First Vietnam War, 1950-1954,” *The Journal of Military History* 57, no. 4 (October 1993): 715, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2944099> (accessed 17 June 2012).

¹⁶⁰Hitchcock, 117.

¹⁶¹Irving, 56.

¹⁶²Karnow, 172-173.

¹⁶³Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 18.

more serious consideration. In the wake of the Korean War that broke out on 25 June 1950, Truman signed military aid legislation to help fund France's war in Indochina.¹⁶⁴

Even with the aid of the United States, France's effort in Indochina continued to compete directly with European defense. In September 1950, the North Atlantic Council declared that German rearmament was a top priority.¹⁶⁵ A month later, after the defeat of the French at Cao Bang, Mendès-France warned his countrymen that they must choose between Indochina and Europe. Strategic overreach was becoming a serious danger to both efforts.¹⁶⁶

By 1953, France's war effort in Indochina was going poorly. The French application of the western way of war came with a heavy dependence on materiel and the French had neither the financial nor the industrial capacity to meet the demand. It was expensive, costing the French government between one and two billion Francs a day; with that came deterioration of support from home.¹⁶⁷ The Indochina War was devouring a third of the entire defense budget in 1953 and it was increasing.¹⁶⁸ In its attempt to rearm in Europe and prosecute the war in Indochina, France needed massive amounts of

¹⁶⁴Karnow, 177.

¹⁶⁵North Atlantic Council, Ministerial Communiques, "Final Communiqué: Sep 16-18, 1950," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c500918a.htm> (accessed 15 April 2014).

¹⁶⁶Laurent Cesari, "The Declining Value of Indochina: France and the Economics of Empire, 1950-1955," in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 181.

¹⁶⁷Jules Roy, *The Battle of Dien Bien Phu*, 2nd ed. (New York: Carrol and Graf Publishers, 1963), 4-5.

¹⁶⁸Hitchcock, 179.

U.S. military and financial aid.¹⁶⁹ Inconveniently for France, the United States predicated continued delivery of this aid upon the approval of the EDC treaty.¹⁷⁰

On 7 May 1953, France appointed General Henri Navarre as commander in Indochina, but the mission that Prime Minister Rene Mayer gave him was neither to destroy the Viet Minh nor to win the war.¹⁷¹ Navarre's mission was to create a favorable negotiating position for France to withdraw: to create an "honorable way out."¹⁷² By this time, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower did not consider a French victory in the Indochina War militarily feasible.¹⁷³ Navarre understood this as well and promoted the ongoing stalemate as part of his plan, which stipulated the postponement of major offensives until October 1954 to provide time to build up his forces.¹⁷⁴

The ceasefire between United Nations forces in Korea and Red China complicated matters in the autumn 1953. It allowed the Chinese to divert aid bound for Korea to Vietnam.¹⁷⁵ In addition, the French had just negotiated a treaty with Laos that placed an implied responsibility upon the French for the defense of Laotian territory without defining the limits of that responsibility.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, France had declared the

¹⁶⁹Cesari, 178.

¹⁷⁰Hitchcock, 179.

¹⁷¹Roy, 6.

¹⁷²Windrow, 205.

¹⁷³Prados, 10.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁷⁵Fall, ix.

¹⁷⁶Windrow, 211-212.

independence of the three Associated States making up Indochina (i.e. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) in July, an effort that complicated France's relations with all three, but did not address any root causes of the ongoing conflict. Finally, both France and the United States feared direct Chinese intervention in Vietnam.¹⁷⁷ From France's perspective, a Chinese air intervention into Vietnam in particular was the worst-case scenario.¹⁷⁸

Navarre had a tremendous amount of pressure on him to show results quickly. The war was in its eighth year. The instability of the Fourth Republic and the competition with European defense directly affected support for his mission. Navarre had almost no public support.¹⁷⁹ The popular writers of the day, including Jean-Paul Sartre, were not only bitterly against the war in Indochina, but also against the Expeditionary Corps itself, which further undermined public support for the colonial army.¹⁸⁰ Navarre was also under pressure from the United States. In blunt terms, the United States wanted him to show some results for the aid going toward the Indochina War.¹⁸¹ President Eisenhower

¹⁷⁷The Vietnam Center and Archive, "The Threat of Direct Chinese Communist Intervention in Indochina: Address by the Secretary of State," 11 June 1954, Folder 11, Box 1, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 1 - Assessment and Strategy, Texas Tech University, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120111001> (accessed 20 June 2012), 1-2.

¹⁷⁸Prados, 3.

¹⁷⁹Windrow, 206.

¹⁸⁰Chester W. Obuchowski, "French Writers Look at 'The Dirty War'," *The French Review* 40, no. 6 (May 1967): 745, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/385049> (accessed 17 June 2012).

¹⁸¹Howard R. Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1994), 8.

and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, actually required the French to “fight the war more aggressively” in order to justify continued military aid.¹⁸²

The Tipping Point in Indochina: Dien Bien Phu

General Navarre’s solution to fighting the Viet Minh more aggressively with limited means lay in the concept of the air-land base, or *base aero-terrestre* in French military parlance. Navarre saw the success of the defense of the Na San perimeter in December 1952 as his model. During that battle, the French crushed Viet Minh human waves with a combination of artillery, tanks, and fighter-bombers.¹⁸³ Basically, the French had moved their forces by air into Viet Minh territory, built up a defensive position, and used its strength to destroy Viet Minh forces when they attacked, employing aircraft for resupply and paratroopers for reinforcement when necessary.¹⁸⁴ Navarre’s air-land base concept seemed to be the formula for success. It was both lure and trap for the Viet Minh.¹⁸⁵ Following the war, Navarre admitted, “We were absolutely convinced of our superiority in defensive fortified positions.”¹⁸⁶

Against the backdrop of the Laotian treaty, the mission given by the French government, and the belief that he had the preponderance of force on his side, General

¹⁸²George C. Herring and Richard H. Immerman, “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: ‘The Day We Didn’t Go to War’ Revisited,” *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 2 (September 1984): 344, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1901759> (accessed 26 July 2012).

¹⁸³Simpson, 6-7.

¹⁸⁴Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 155-156.

¹⁸⁵Fall, 24.

¹⁸⁶Windrow, 222.

Navarre broke with his initial plan of postponing battle with the Viet Minh. He chose the valley at Dien Bien Phu for his next *base aero-terrestre*. However, this would not be like Na San. The Viet Minh had learned from their mistakes. Vo Nguyen Giap now knew that he had to destroy the lifeline of an air-land base by bringing the airstrip under heavy artillery fire.¹⁸⁷ Fortuitously, the Viet Minh would also gain a tremendous advantage in updated equipment and advisors from China because of the armistice in Korea in the fall of 1953.¹⁸⁸

Navarre had three reasons for placing his air-land base at Dien Bien Phu. First, he sought to interdict Viet Minh troops headed toward Laos. Second, he wanted to draw Viet Minh troops away from the Red River Delta where they appeared to be preparing for an offensive. Finally, he sought to draw the Viet Minh into attacking a fortified position on the Na San model in order to destroy the main body of the Viet Minh army.¹⁸⁹ Unfortunately, Navarre's timing was poor. The battle joined very close to the Geneva conference in April on Asian problems and Indochina. As such, Dien Bien Phu assumed a level of political and psychological importance in France that was completely out of proportion to its military significance.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷Simpson, 7.

¹⁸⁸Windrow, 63.

¹⁸⁹Morgan, *Valley of Death*, xii.

¹⁹⁰Sherman Kent, Estimate for the Director of General Intelligence, "The Probable Outcome at Dien Bien Phu and its Implications," 24 March 1954, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/> (accessed 5 July 2012).

From the Viet Minh's perspective, Vo Nguyen Giap's strategy rested on three factors. First, Giap knew that he could establish local superiority in force because of the distance between Dien Bien Phu and any major French bases, which made reinforcement and resupply possible only by air.¹⁹¹ With the flood of Chinese aid following the end of the Korean War, for the first time Giap could also have superiority in artillery firepower.¹⁹² In fact, the Viet Minh painstakingly emplaced heavy weapons, including 105mm artillery, within forward-slope casemates dug into the hills surrounding Dien Bien Phu.¹⁹³ Second, with the increasing international pressure on France to come to a negotiated settlement regarding Indochina, the timing of the battle against the Geneva conference gave the Viet Minh the favorable international environment they needed. Finally, Giap believed that he could tactically mold the battlefield situation to his favor by taking advantage of French miscalculations.¹⁹⁴

The French command under General Navarre made several strategic mistakes. First, Navarre did not listen to his Air Force commanders concerning the limitations of airlift.¹⁹⁵ Second, he completely ignored, or showed contempt for, the Viet Minh's supply system comprised of tens of thousands of laborers moving through the jungle

¹⁹¹Fall, 14.

¹⁹²Windrow, 253.

¹⁹³Simpson, 54-55.

¹⁹⁴Chalmers Johnson, "The Third Generation of Guerrilla Warfare," *Asian Survey* 8, no. 6 (June 1968): 443, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2642158> (accessed 17 June 2012).

¹⁹⁵Roy, 32.

undetected.¹⁹⁶ Finally, Navarre completely underestimated the enemy by discounting Viet Minh artillery capability through his own false assumptions.¹⁹⁷ By 13 March 1954, the Viet Minh had surrounded the strong points at Dien Bien Phu with an estimated combatant strength of 49,500 soldiers—five divisions, including a heavy division with anti-aircraft guns and Katusha rockets.¹⁹⁸ The French force consisted of 13,200 soldiers.¹⁹⁹ Perhaps worse, Navarre launched the simultaneous Operation Atlante with which he further divided his already meager resources and obviating any chance of sending a relief force.²⁰⁰ Dien Bien Phu was doomed.

Operation Vulture

There was a plan to save the doomed fortress at Dien Bien Phu that merits some explanation and demonstrates the intense pressure of the situation: Operation Vulture. On the afternoon of 26 March 1954, the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur William Radford, met with General Paul Ely, the French Chief of Staff. Their conversation led to the development of a conceptual plan for direct U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu using strategic air power. Although not planned out in its particulars and mechanisms, the result was a tacit understanding between the two men that if France

¹⁹⁶Roy, 110.

¹⁹⁷Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 261.

¹⁹⁸Windrow, 709.

¹⁹⁹Fall, 137.

²⁰⁰Prados, 108.

formally requested support, the United States would consider intervening directly with a massive air strike.²⁰¹

President Eisenhower initially showed some enthusiasm about the intervention, but eventually backed down.²⁰² With the exception of Radford, none of the Joint Chiefs supported the concept. General Matthew Ridgeway, the ground forces commander during the Korean War, was vehemently against it.²⁰³ Ominously, an essential assumption of some reports on the concept was that the strike was to include nuclear weapons.²⁰⁴

Eventually, Eisenhower's enthusiasm cooled. The risks of generating a general conflagration were too high. The Chinese had 150,000 troops on the border with Vietnam.²⁰⁵ Moreover, the China had an alliance with the Soviet Union.²⁰⁶ Congressional approval was necessary for an intervention of this level and Congress refused to intervene unilaterally under such conditions.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, even if the United States had moved to save Dien Bien Phu, it would not have guaranteed French victory in Indochina or even favorable negotiating terms.

²⁰¹Geoffrey Warner, "Escalation in Vietnam: The Precedents of 1954," *International Affairs* 41, no. 2 (April 1965): 269, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2610620> (accessed 17 June 2012).

²⁰²Herring and Immerman, 349.

²⁰³Fall, 93.

²⁰⁴Windrow, 568-569.

²⁰⁵Prados, 126.

²⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 158.

²⁰⁷Warner, "Escalation in Vietnam: The Precedents of 1954," 276.

For France, winning at Dien Bien Phu still meant losing Indochina. The French in Indochina confronted the classic counterinsurgency concentration and dispersal paradox. To consolidate their power, they had to hold positions throughout the country by dispersing. However, in order for these troops to protect themselves and effectively engage the enemy, they had to concentrate. The only methods known for solving this paradox are to either commit vast resources to satisfy the conditions of dispersion and concentration simultaneously or to build indigenous forces over many years.²⁰⁸ France could afford neither in 1954.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, even if they could have afforded such a force ratio, the resurgence of empire under the guise of the French Union was a weak counter narrative to the independence promised by the Viet Minh.

Legacy

Several issues lay in the wake of France's defeat in Indochina. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Laniel government collapsed.²¹⁰ In addition, the removal of French troops from Indochina meant, *ceteris paribus*, that passing the EDC treaty was not as urgent because those troops and their funding would be available to satisfy European defense.²¹¹ Nevertheless, given the level of effort expended, one of the most shocking results of the defeat was the sense of relief, or abject collapse of national morale, on the part of the

²⁰⁸Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1975): 187, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2009880> (accessed 17 June 2012).

²⁰⁹Prados, 134.

²¹⁰Fursdon, 266.

²¹¹Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 625.

French public.²¹² This last element, coupled with the inability of the Fourth Republic to address the problems of decolonization and especially its ineptness, which included leaking information to the Viet Minh, led the professional soldiers who fought there to feel betrayed. As one soldier put it, “Now we know that wherever the French Army fights, it will always be stabbed in the back.”²¹³ Moreover, France did not just reject their efforts, it also forced these professionals to abandon the local people who had supported French rule and depended upon the French colonial army for protection.²¹⁴ Tellingly, many of these soldiers would go on to fight against another insurgency in Algeria.

²¹²Windrow, 630.

²¹³Irving, 155.

²¹⁴Roger Trinquier, *A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), viii-ix.

CHAPTER 4
THE ALGERIAN PROBLEM

Introduction

Make haste to reassure me, I beg you, and tell me that our fellow-citizens understand us, support us and protect us as we ourselves are protecting the glory of the Empire. If it should be otherwise, if we should have to leave our bleached bones on these desert sands in vain, then beware of the anger of the Legions!

— Jean Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, quoted in
A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*

Damn it . . . we tried to tell them they would repeat Indochina all over again in North Africa. And they said ‘Oh no! Algeria’s part of metropolitan France!’ – and all that damn nonsense.

— President Dwight D. Eisenhower, quoted in
in M. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*

As noted in Chapter 2, in 1947, the United States noted the “continued existence of an outmoded colonial outlook” on the part of France.²¹⁵ Nonetheless, with the expansion of communism, both real and apparent, the Truman administration was willing to support France in its war against the Viet Minh in Indochina. Beginning in 1950, the United States provided massive amounts of military aid through its NATO channels that the French used in Indochina, which by 1953-1954 constituted the almost complete underwriting of French military activity in that region.²¹⁶ However, when it came to the issues of North Africa, the connection between Soviet expansion and French military actions in their former colonies was not so clear from the perspective of the United

²¹⁵Bradley, 16.

²¹⁶Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 9.

States. Though the French cloaked their efforts at colonial resurgence in North Africa in terms of anti-communism, their main benefactor—the United States—did not buy it. On the other hand, the United States still needed France in NATO.

For the French, their relationship with Algeria was far different from the one they had with Indochina. The French government considered Algeria to be French territory and the over one million European colonists living there were French citizens. Unlike Indochina, where only professional soldiers and the Foreign Legion could serve, France used tens of thousands of conscripts from the mainland in Algeria. Most of the French public was prepared to divest the nation of Indochina by the time the French occupied Dien Bien Phu.²¹⁷ However, they were much less sanguine about doing so with Algeria. In addition, many veterans in the French army carried their crucible experiences from Indochina into the fight for Algeria. For reasons that went beyond national honor and far more to those of personal honor, the veterans of Indochina brought a disturbing level of fierceness to bear against the insurgents of Algeria.

The humiliating defeat in Indochina served as a warning and a watchword for the European colonial population of Algeria and the French army alike, making their reactionary efforts against Algerian independence even more exaggerated. This chapter will demonstrate that in spite of the lessons of Indochina, the French government, the European colonists, and especially the army ratcheted up their response to Algerian independence until the Fourth Republic fell, Charles de Gaulle returned, and Algeria achieved independence in spite of their efforts. In turn, each effort complicated and

²¹⁷Windrow, 206.

shaped the structure of NATO, the policies of the United States toward Europe, and the nature of the Cold War apparatus facing the Soviet Union.

Foundations

The conflict between France and Algeria began as a diversion. During the highly unpopular reign of King Charles X, there arose a minor conflict between the Dey of Algiers and the Consul representing France over a sum of money owed to some Jewish Algerian traders dating back to the days of the French Revolution.²¹⁸ This minor event, which happened in April 1827, gave the French Government just enough provocation to launch a military expedition in the hope that a stunning victory would improve the popularity of the regime. Developing in a desultory fashion, the disagreement took three years to create the conditions necessary for a *casus belli* and the French did not invade until 14 June 1830.

Ironically, Charles X fell from power less than a month and a half later, leaving the French army to fight against fierce opposition with little guidance from the French government. The initial plan was to annex only a part of the coastal zone. However, in 1834 the new king, Louis-Phillipe, decided to occupy the entire coastline as well as Algiers because he believed that the French public wanted it.²¹⁹ Eventually, the combined

²¹⁸Edgar O'Balance, *The Algerian Insurrection: 1954-1962* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967), 21.

²¹⁹Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa: 1830-1914* (London: University College of London Press, 1998), 59.

might of the 100,000-man French army and the internal divisions among the indigenous tribes worked to pacify Algeria. In 1847, this was substantially complete.²²⁰

Following this period of conflict, the Algerian peoples' struggle for independence from France subsided until shortly after the end of World War I.²²¹ Up to that point, the French government kept the Arab and Berber populations in a state of docile servitude through a network of specifically selected and accommodating Muslim *grande*s that the French colonial authorities referred to as the *beni oui-oui*, or "yes men."²²²

By 1912, the growing European colonial population of the early twentieth century became large and organized enough to assert its own political interests in Algeria.²²³ This large and active minority of European colonists called *colons* or *pied noirs* ("black feet") was not uniformly French in ethnicity.²²⁴ In fact, by 1917 only about a fifth of all *pied noirs* were French with the remainder being mostly Spanish, Italian, or Maltese.²²⁵ Regardless, this melting pot of southern and western Europeans dominated Algerian

²²⁰Ibid., 63.

²²¹Daniele Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 13.

²²²Rabah Aissaouri, *Immigration and National Identity: North African Political Movements in Colonial and Postcolonial France* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009), 13.

²²³O'Balance, 27.

²²⁴House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, 288.

²²⁵Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Book Review, 2006), 51.

politics and ensured that Algeria operated for and by Europeans in concert with Metropolitan France and often at the expense of the indigenous population.²²⁶

As an example of the societal imbalance that developed, over 100,000 Algerian Muslims fought for France during World War I.²²⁷ Nevertheless, the French, and especially the *pied noirs*, continued to look down on the Algerians following the war, regardless of their service to France. In reaction, the Algerians formed a small nationalist movement under the auspices of their own Communist party, the “*Parti Communiste Algérien*.”²²⁸ Other organizations followed, including the *Fédération des Elus Musulmans d’Algérie*, a group of French-educated Algerian intellectuals and the *Etoile Norde Africaine*, a group composed mostly of Algerian workers. Most of these movements sought overlapping versions of the same thing: equal rights to liberty, property, and representation.²²⁹

Although these various elements continued to lobby for the advancement of Algerians throughout the 1930s, they were generally divided along the lines of a plan of assimilation with France and a plan of independence from France. Only with the fall of France in 1940 did the Algerians break toward the latter. In keeping with the argument posed by Alistair Horne, the Muslim mind, at least in Algeria, was very susceptible to the ideas of prestige and *baraka*, or a “special grace or good fortune accorded from on

²²⁶Dorothy Pickles, *Algeria and France: From Colonialism to Cooperation* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 23.

²²⁷O’Balance, 27.

²²⁸Aissaouri, 26.

²²⁹O’Balance, 27-29.

high.”²³⁰ Interestingly, this concept was similar to the Vietnamese concept of the “mandate of heaven,” a right to rule conferred from heaven above and the only legitimate source of authority.²³¹ As such, the humiliation of France at the hands of the Germans made a deep impression.²³² Moreover, the totalitarian nature of the Vichy regime that remained in control of Algeria drove the moderate voices of Algerian independence toward the extremists.²³³

Regardless of the apparent divide between indigenous Algerians and European colonists, following the Allied landings in North Africa that broke the Vichy hold over Algeria, many Algerians again fought for France. Algerian *Spahis* and *Tirailleurs* participated valiantly in the Italian campaign of World War II, enjoying camaraderie with French, British, and American soldiers alike and more importantly receiving military training as well as an infusion of the ideal of freedom from the Allies.²³⁴ Accordingly, the *présence française*, France’s colonial hold on Algeria, began to appear weak in comparison to Allies’ massive power.

The French no longer possessed the *baraka* or the military might to overawe indigenous Algerians. Algerians returning from the frontlines of World War II expected

²³⁰Horne, 41.

²³¹Brian Michael Jenkins, “Why the North Vietnamese Will Keep Fighting” (Research Paper P-4395, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, March 1972), 2.

²³²Horne, 41.

²³³O’Balance, 31.

²³⁴Horne, 42.

political reform in return for their shared sacrifices on the battlefield.²³⁵ The Free French under de Gaulle mitigated some of the inequalities in 1944, but the revocation of the *code d'indigénat*, which barred Muslim men from citizenship and voting rights, was not enough to satisfy the desires of the independence movement.²³⁶ Moreover, Algerian nationalists knew that French power depended upon the Allies, chiefly the United States, and they were well aware of the overtly anti-colonial positions of the Roosevelt Administration.²³⁷ Accordingly, Algerian nationalists perceived both the relative weakness of France in the absence of Allied power and France's relative political isolation from the United States when it came to colonialism. This explains in part the events surrounding the first salvo of the Algerian War.

Sétif

On 8 May 1945, during part of the Victory in Europe celebrations, Algerian nationalists made a procession in the town of Sétif, clashing with the local police.²³⁸ No one is certain who fired the first shots, but the disenfranchised Muslims rioted against French rule, overwhelmed the local police force, and targeted the local settler community, killing around 100 *colons*.²³⁹ In reprisal, the French called in a naval cruiser

²³⁵Aissaouri, 127.

²³⁶Connelly, 23.

²³⁷Horne, 42-43.

²³⁸Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86.

²³⁹Heather Lehr Wagner, *The Algerian War* (New York: Chelsea House, 2012), 13.

and subjected Muslim towns in the surrounding Aures Mountains to bombardment from the air to teach the Algerians “a lesson.”²⁴⁰ By the end of the reprisals, the French had killed approximately 20,000 to 30,000 Algerians.²⁴¹ In what would ultimately prove ironic, Charles de Gaulle oversaw the reprisal, stating that he was resolved not to let Algeria “slip through our fingers.”²⁴²

With these actions, any chance of French-Algerian assimilation was probably impossible. Metropolitan France and Algerian colonial government rejected virtually every concession that the Algerians nationalists sought. A system of two classes in Algeria remained in spite of the fact that the constitution of the French Fourth Republic did away with the distinction between a “citizen” and a “subject.”²⁴³ In fact, the French National Assembly passed the Statute for Algeria in September 1947, a set of “reforms” intended to solidify the perpetual dominance of the European colonists.²⁴⁴

The U.S. policy toward these actions was somewhat mixed. On one hand, the official policy was to support French hegemony in North Africa as the best way to ensure the security of the region.²⁴⁵ On the other hand, the U.S. government continuously

²⁴⁰Wall, 11.

²⁴¹Aissaouri, 129.

²⁴²Wall, 11.

²⁴³Pickles, 26.

²⁴⁴Martin Thomas, “The Colonial Policies of the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, 1944-1954: From Reform to Reaction,” *The English Historical Review* 118, no. 476 (April 2003): 404, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3490126> (accessed 26 April 2014).

²⁴⁵Lorna H. Hahn, “French North Africa: An American Problem,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (June 1955): 193, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/442237> (accessed 28 April 2014).

pushed France to make concessions that extended the political franchise to the indigenous population. Regarding the latter, the pressure was enough for the Governor-General's office in Algiers to blame the Sétif riots on American policy.²⁴⁶

Further complicating the relationship, in 1949 France demanded that the North Atlantic treaty include Algeria as part of the area covered for western defense as part of the price for French participation.²⁴⁷ The United States acceded to this demand and included Algeria.²⁴⁸ However, in this concession only applied to external attack, meaning that France could not rely on NATO to fight an insurgency from within Algeria.²⁴⁹ Accordingly, the combination of French heavy-handedness, Algerian disenfranchisement, and the political isolation of France with regard to its so-called internal issues eventually festered into conditions ripe for rebellion.

All Saints' Day

From 1947 until 1954, the Algerian nationalists produced no significant concerted effort or effect on their French and *pied noir* overlords. However, in 1954 the *Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action* (C.R.U.A.), founded the *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN), a political organization that rapidly gathered the support of the

²⁴⁶Wall, 12.

²⁴⁷Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 83.

²⁴⁸North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The North Atlantic Treaty," 4 April 1949, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm (accessed 1 May 2014).

²⁴⁹Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War*, 83.

Algerian population for liberation from the French.²⁵⁰ In addition to the FLN, the political wing of the independence movement, there was also the *Armée de Libération nationale* (ALN), the military wing.²⁵¹

The rise of this movement under the FLN coincided with timing that made it more virulent to its nationalist Algerians and extraordinarily inconvenient to France. For example, from the Algerian perspective the timing of the start of the revolution under FLN coincided with the French government under Méndes-France granting autonomy to Tunisia, a sure sign that autonomy, or even independence, was possible. Conversely, from the perspective of the Metropolitan government the timing could not have been worse. Unlike Tunisia, Mendés-France could not offer autonomy to Algeria even if he was predisposed to do so. The presence of Algerian representatives, who were *pied noirs* by default, in the French National Assembly was crucial to achieving the votes necessary for rearming West Germany.²⁵²

The first meeting of the C.R.U.A. occurred in May 1954, nearly simultaneous to the French defeat Dien Bien Phu.²⁵³ The effect among the Algerian nationals present, many of whom had relatives who had fought and died alongside the French in Indochina, was energizing.²⁵⁴ Rumors of the complete collapse of the French army spread like

²⁵⁰Joly, 17.

²⁵¹Trinquier, 10.

²⁵²Wall, 13.

²⁵³Ted Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2005), 19.

²⁵⁴Pamela A. Pears, "Kateb Yacine's Journey beyond Algeria and Back," *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 100, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3821252> (accessed 28 April 2014).

wildfire and the leaders of the newly formed FLN set forth their policy in unanimity that theirs was not to be a revolution carried out in a single stroke to achieve political concessions. The FLN was determined to carry out an unlimited war of liberation aimed at nothing less than the independence of Algeria.²⁵⁵

On All Saints' Day, 1 November 1954, the revolution began with attacks against a wide variety of targets across Algeria. In Algiers, FLN operatives exploded bombs in the radio station, a petrol depot, and the gasworks.²⁵⁶ The loosely coordinated attackers also detonated bombs in the resort town of Biskra, assassinated Colonel Lucien Blanche, attacked a gendarme barracks and a police barracks, and set several fires.²⁵⁷ The initial toll of damage against the representatives of the French regime in Algeria totaled 200 million francs.²⁵⁸

The effect of this damage did not rally the Muslim population to a general uprising the way the FLN thought it might. However, the reaction, or overreaction, on the part of the *pied noirs* and the French government drove an increasing number of average Algerians toward the FLN.²⁵⁹ Mendès-France sent 10 battalions of infantry and riot police on day two of the revolt and even diverted entire regiments to Algeria as they returned from Indochina.²⁶⁰ As argued by Alistair Horne, the government's reaction was

²⁵⁵Horne, 78-79.

²⁵⁶Evans, 113.

²⁵⁷Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers*, 19-20.

²⁵⁸Evans, 114.

²⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 138.

²⁶⁰Connelly, 76.

typical. In attempts to root out those responsible, they rounded up the masses, most of whom were innocent. However, through the ordeal of the innocents' imprisonment they converted into "ardent militants."²⁶¹

The Philippeville Massacre

Despite the relative increase in militants resulting from the initial government reactions to the All Saints' Day attacks, the first year of the FLN's activity confronted severe setbacks. The forces under Colonel Paul Ducournau refused to accord any FLN soldier the rights of a combatant and ruthlessly hounded them in brutal *ratissages* ("rat hunts").²⁶² In an atmosphere of desperation, the FLN leadership ordered a war on all French civilians, "no pity, no quarter!"²⁶³

On 20 August 1955, the FLN carried out an attack against the European civilian population living around the port of Philippeville, killing and mutilating 123 European men, women, and children.²⁶⁴ The attackers accentuated their operation with compliance terrorism, the selective assassination of Muslim collaborators, mutilating the bodies in order to shame them and sometimes posing or placing them in macabre display, a practice that sent a dire warning to other would-be collaborators.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹Horne, 96.

²⁶²"Disc Three: Remembering History," *The Battle of Algiers*, directed by Gillo Pontecarvo, interview with Alistair Horne (1966; New York: The Criterion Collection, 2004), DVD.

²⁶³Horne, 119.

²⁶⁴Evans, 140-141.

²⁶⁵Wall, 13.

The French used heavy-handed military attacks in reprisal. In some cases, the French exterminated the populations of entire Muslim villages.²⁶⁶ In the immediate aftermath, the Governor-General Jacques Soustelle, whom Mendès-France had installed to carry out liberal reforms, reacted with revulsion and instead carried out reprisals.²⁶⁷ By the official French account, French soldiers killed 1,273 Muslims, a figure roughly 10 times the number of Europeans. However, Soustelle's representative in Paris, Guy Calvet, claimed that the figure was much higher. According to Calvet, the soldiers and the *piéd noirs* continued in a sort of rampaging fury for a month, killing nearly 20,000.²⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the FLN survived and this imparted a measure of *baraka* that was effective in bringing in new recruits.²⁶⁹

Much to the dismay of France, the United States reacted with sympathy toward the Algerian nationalists.²⁷⁰ Still, the United States still needed France in NATO. The contemporary policy of the United States regarding the defense of Europe called for France to provide the bulk of the troops necessary for NATO's shield. The United States also needed France's consent to move forward with the tediously negotiated German rearmament, made more difficult by France's ironic failure to ratify the EDC in 1954. The United States had an anti-colonial tradition and thus held some sympathy with the

²⁶⁶Aissaouri, 141.

²⁶⁷Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010), 1068.

²⁶⁸Connelly, 86.

²⁶⁹Porch, 1068.

²⁷⁰Wall, 14.

Algerian nationalists. Nonetheless, the chief concern with France and its Algerian problem was that the politicians in Paris might not ratify the agreements for integrating West Germany into NATO if the United States pulled its support for France in North Africa.²⁷¹

The Suez Crisis

Algeria was not the only nascent Arab states of the mid-1950s. Many Arab countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia that were formerly imperial outposts dominated by old European colonial powers, began asserting their own particular brands of nationalism. Pan-Arabism was closely associated to these individual movements and various members of the Arab League competed with each other for the lead role. Of these, Egypt was especially active under Gamal Abdel Nasser. Under his leadership, Egypt set in motion a set of circumstances that led to humbling realizations for the British Empire, a paradigm shift for certain French army professionals, and serious complications for the NATO alliance. The linchpin that brought this all together was Algeria.

The year 1956 was especially active for Pan-Arab nationalism. During the early part of the year, the British accepted a negotiated withdrawal from Egypt.²⁷² In March, France granted independence to both Morocco and Tunisia.²⁷³ The United States, eager to

²⁷¹Wall, 17.

²⁷²Patrick L. Nemy, "Operation MUSKETEER: The End of Empire. A Study of Organizational Failure in Combined Operations" (Case Study, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2013), 1.

²⁷³O'Balance, 67.

increase its influence through the region, extended an aid package to Nasser to pay for the agriculturally important Aswan Dam project. However, the Eisenhower administration did not appreciate the way Nasser positioned himself between the United States and the Soviet Union in an attempt to get better terms on a loan. Moreover, there was significant pressure coming from Congress to deny any loan to Egypt, based on both economic and ideological reasons, especially after Egypt acceptance of Soviet military aid.

Accordingly, John Foster Dulles, the U.S. Secretary of State, publicly rejected Nasser.²⁷⁴ In response, Nasser advanced Egypt's independence and on 26 July 1956 nationalized the Suez Canal to pay for the dam himself.²⁷⁵

For the British, this was too much. The Suez Canal was their strategic route to India, which had heretofore been their largest and most lucrative colony. In 1956, it was still a primary commerce route and, more importantly, the primary access point for oil shipments. Accordingly, the British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, sought to seize the canal and retake control of it.²⁷⁶ For France, the situation looked like a good way to reassert its power in the region as well and quickly drummed up the idea of a joint British-French-Israeli expedition to punish Egypt.²⁷⁷ Both hoped to overthrow Nasser.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, 340-341.

²⁷⁵Evans, 183.

²⁷⁶Neky, 1.

²⁷⁷Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem: the United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944-1958* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 184-185.

²⁷⁸Neky, 2.

Unfortunately, including the Israelis in the operation was a problem. Because of the ongoing cross border actions between Israel and Egypt, France saw Israel as a promising potential partner. However, there was still a lingering hostility and distrust between Israel and Britain dating back to the difficulties of the Palestinian Mandate and the treaties between Britain and Arab countries that were avowed enemies of Israel.²⁷⁹ The answer to this impasse and British reluctance to include the Israelis was a convenient, if not rather transparent, cover story for a joint British-French operation meant to seize the canal by force.

The three governments decided on a plan in which the Israelis would attack the Egyptians first. Once the Israeli force advanced sufficiently across the Sinai toward the Suez to ensure that the canal appeared threatened, the British and the French would “rescue” the canal from the Israelis.²⁸⁰ By doing so, the combined British-French-Israeli team intended to get rid of Nasser and place the canal back under British control, which would have accomplished the ends of the British and the Israelis.²⁸¹

As for the French, they were convinced that Nasser supported the insurgency in Algeria—a perception that Nasser appeared to cultivate with a non-stop stream of Pan-Arab propaganda from Radio Cairo, in French, for the benefit of Algerian nationalists.²⁸²

²⁷⁹Geoffrey Warner, “‘Collusion’ and the Suez Crisis of 1956,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 55, no. 2 (April 1979): 229, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2616319> (accessed 29 April 2014).

²⁸⁰House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, 346.

²⁸¹Warner, “‘Collusion’ and the Suez Crisis of 1956,” 239.

²⁸²Jonathan M. House, “Strategic Background to the Suez Crisis, 1956” (Case study, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2013), 1.

The perceived connection between Nasser and the insurgency in Algeria allowed the French government under Guy Mollet's cabinet to convince themselves that removing Nasser would cause the nationalist movement in Algeria to collapse.²⁸³ This impression was strong enough for the Algerian Governor General Robert Lacoste to believe that "one division in Egypt [was] worth four in Algeria."²⁸⁴

Unhappily for France, the operation was a debacle. The British and the French intended to execute their operation with enough deliberate speed to outrun the accumulation of political pressure expected from the United States and the Soviet Union.²⁸⁵ Accordingly, they purposefully kept the United States out of the loop.²⁸⁶

Along the way, the British and the French made some critical errors in aligning their ends, ways, and means. Chief among these was that in gathering the resources they thought necessary to conduct the operation, they lost the element of speed, which was crucial for outrunning political pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union. Further problems included the paucity of equipment resulting from post-World War II military budget cuts on the part of the British and France's existing commitment of 400,000 troops to Algeria.²⁸⁷ Simply put, the old imperial nations, exhausted by war, tied down by insurgency, and overshadowed by the power of the United States and the Soviet

²⁸³Home, 162-163.

²⁸⁴Evans, 183.

²⁸⁵Neky, 2.

²⁸⁶Connelly, 120.

²⁸⁷Neky, 4-6.

Union, did not have the wherewithal to coerce nations of the Third World the way they once had.

In a little less than two days, the Suez operation was over. The operation, which began on 5 November 1956 with an airborne drop near Port Said, had the misfortune of overlapping with the crushing Soviet reprisals against Hungary.²⁸⁸ In response to Hungary's desire to depart from the Warsaw Pact, the Soviets put the Red Army in the streets of Budapest.²⁸⁹ With an ongoing demonstration of the Soviet Union's resolve, Premier Nikolai Bulganin issued a credible nuclear ultimatum to France and Britain.²⁹⁰

Nearly simultaneously, the United States withheld financial and materiel aid from Britain and France.²⁹¹ The British effort collapsed under this pressure first and by 6 November 1956, the French received word of the British acceptance of a ceasefire. Although casualties were low for the British and the French, the monetary cost was somewhere between 100 million and 328 million British pounds, a staggering figure compared with the five million pounds budgeted by the British Chancellery.²⁹² Worse, the combined operation did not achieve its stated objective. The Suez Canal remained under the control of Egypt.²⁹³

²⁸⁸Horne, 163.

²⁸⁹Evans, 184.

²⁹⁰Ralph Dietl, "Suez 1956: A European Intervention?" *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (April 2008): 273, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036506> (accessed 29 April 2014).

²⁹¹Connelly, 120.

²⁹²Horne, 163.

²⁹³Neky, 2.

For the British, the realization of their weakness was stunning. Marking a sea change in their national paradigm, they purposely shifted their foreign policy toward one that aligned more closely with that of the United States.²⁹⁴ As early as 10 November 1956, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave its reasoned assessment of the Suez operation, stating that France and Britain were “no longer able to influence seriously world affairs.”²⁹⁵ Recognizing this, the British did away with the European agenda born of their relationship with France and opted to support the United States in the polarized global order.²⁹⁶

However, for the French, who marked both the U.S. condemnation of the British-French operation and the British break toward the United States, the reaction was bitter. It signaled the end of the primacy of the *Entente Cordiale* between Britain and France and the deepening of French resentment of the “special relationship” between the United States and Britain.²⁹⁷ Further, it marked the beginning of an anti-Americanism that pushed France away from NATO.²⁹⁸

For the French colonial army in particular, the failure of Suez was especially bitter. They sensed that their own government had betrayed them yet again. According to one of the regular soldiers, “Even in Indochina . . . where you were betrayed daily by

²⁹⁴Wall, 33.

²⁹⁵Brogi, 185.

²⁹⁶Dietl, 276.

²⁹⁷Horne, 163.

²⁹⁸Brogi, 186.

everyone, they wouldn't have dared do anything like that.”²⁹⁹ The army professionals, the “Indo-China Hands,”³⁰⁰ those left in the lurch at Suez, began to despise the government that it served, but felt they had to win in Algeria to protect the integrity of the army.

In de Gaulle's memoirs, he underscored the attitude of the army as it continued its work, “haunted by fear of another Indo-China, another military reverse inflicted on its colors, the army, more than any other body, felt a growing resentment against a political system which was the embodiment of irresolution.”³⁰¹ If nothing else, the series of reverses forged unity within the professional army, but it did so at the expense of its connection to the French nation.³⁰² Under this new paradigm, the feckless Fourth Republic was undeserving of the army and did not have the wisdom or fortitude to guide it. In Algeria, the army was on its own. “The time of the leopards had come.”³⁰³

The Battle of Algiers

During the summer of 1956, Saadi Yacef, the head of the FLN in Algiers, ordered the death of 49 civilians. FLN operatives shot them indiscriminately, working to fulfill the promise that for every FLN member guillotined, one hundred Europeans would

²⁹⁹Horne, 164.

³⁰⁰Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers*, 113.

³⁰¹Chales de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope:Renewal and Endeavor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 15.

³⁰²Horne, 177.

³⁰³According to Ted Morgan in *My Battle of Algiers* (127), the term “leopards” was used as a monicker for French paratroopers.

die.³⁰⁴ In the wake of these killings, a series of reprisals and counter reprisals continued throughout the rest of the year. *Pied noir* vigilantes planted and detonated a bomb in a house on Rue de Thèbes in the Casbah on 10 August, killing at least 50 people. In September, the FLN detonated bombs at a milk bar and the Cafeteria, two of Algiers' most popular cafes.³⁰⁵

In October, Europeans walked the streets of Algiers nervously, often toting concealed automatic weapons as they went.³⁰⁶ By November, the streets of Algiers were full of terror. The FLN detonated bombs at several more locations including a bus station, a department store, and on a downtown street.³⁰⁷ The atmosphere was ripe for a general confrontation between the European and indigenous Algerian communities and the FLN took advantage of it. FLN operatives recruited a young triggerman named Ali la Pointe, giving him the mission to assassinate a high-level *colon*.³⁰⁸ He did so on the morning of 28 December 1956, killing the popular mayor of Boufarik, Amédée Froger. During the funeral the next day, FLN operatives placed another bomb that went off in the cemetery, fortunately injuring no one because of its poorly timed arrival. Regardless, that was the

³⁰⁴Horne, 183.

³⁰⁵Donald Reid, "Re-Viewing the Battle of Algiers with Germaine Tillion," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 60 (Autumn 2005): 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472817> (accessed 30 April 2014).

³⁰⁶Horne, 186.

³⁰⁷Paul Aussaresses, *The Battle of the Casbah: Counter-Terrorism and Torture* (New York: Enigma Books, 2006), 66-67.

³⁰⁸Horne, 187.

last straw. The *pied noir* population went wild, randomly attacking any Muslim they could lay hands on, killing four and wounding at least 50.³⁰⁹

In response, Governor-General Robert Lacoste called in General Jacques Massu, the commander of the elite 10th Parachute Division, fresh from the Suez debacle.³¹⁰ By 8 January 1957, elements of the 10th were in the Casbah, a maze-like area of old Algiers where nearly 100,000 Muslims lived. The paras quickly corralled almost 1,000 suspects and began a program of systematic torture to attain information on additional suspects.³¹¹

The paras' counterinsurgency program was heavy-handed, but it was also systematic. First, the paras used the *quadrillage* or "gridding" system that eventually became associated with Roger Trinquier to divide the city of Algiers into zones of manageable size and to conduct a census.³¹² Following this, Massu authorized a program of mass arrests, sometimes rounding up entire neighborhoods in the process.³¹³ Coupled with torture, the paras' program of arrests was effective immediately, at least in the short-term.³¹⁴ Disturbingly, this defied conventional wisdom when it comes to torture. The

³⁰⁹William E. Watson, *Tricolor and Crescent: France in the Islamic World* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 120.

³¹⁰Aussaresses, 68.

³¹¹Connelly, 126.

³¹²Trinquier, 72-75.

³¹³Angel Rabasa, Lesley Anne Warner, Peter Chalk, Ivan Khilko, and Paraag Shukla, "Money in the Bank: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations" (Occasional Papers, Rand, National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, CA, 2007), 19.

³¹⁴Kenneth M. Detreux, "Contemporary Counterinsurgency (COIN) Insights from the French-Algerian War (1954-1962)" (Thesis, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA 2008), 9.

assumption that the torture victim will merely say what the interrogator wants to hear did not hold in Algeria. By the end of February, paratroopers under Massu's command had dismantled the bomb network within the Casbah and captured most of the insurgent leaders.³¹⁵

During early 1957, torture seemed to be oddly acceptable among the combatants, even according to the most unlikely sources. The man leading the roundup in the Casbah sector of Algiers was Colonel Marcel Bigeard, an Indo-China Hand who had fought at Dien Bien Phu. When the jungle fortress collapsed, Bigeard fell into the hands of the Viet Minh and learned torture the hard way.³¹⁶ Even though he had suffered from torture himself, Bigeard saw it as just another tool. It was effective, therefore he authorized it. According to his obituary in *The Telegraph*, Bigeard saw torture as merely a "necessary evil."³¹⁷

Even more surprisingly, the 10th Parachute Division Chaplain, Father Louis DeLarue, released a letter, published by the *Students' Review* in Algiers, defending the use of torture against the FLN. According to him, if faced with a dilemma over two evils, the torture of the guilty to save the innocent versus the death of the innocent, "there can be no hesitation in choosing the lesser of the two evils."³¹⁸ Strangest of all, the captured

³¹⁵Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers*, 151.

³¹⁶Watson, *Tricolor and Crescent*, 121.

³¹⁷"General Marcel Bigeard," *The Telegraph*, 20 June 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/military-obituaries/army-obituaries/7841910/General-Marcel-Bigeard.html> (accessed 30 April 2014).

³¹⁸Yuval Ginbar, *Why not Torture Terrorists?: Moral, Practical, and Legal Aspects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

FLN leader Ben M'Hidi approved of the use of torture. During a conversation with Bigeard, in which they both coldly yet deferentially discussed the strategy of their respective situations, M'Hidi stated these interrogation techniques were "the only valid methods."³¹⁹

By August of 1957, the French sent 24,000 Muslims to internment camps, where the inmates were systematically tortured.³²⁰ This accounted for a figure more than four times the population of the FLN and nearly 10 percent of the entire Muslim population of Algeria. Moreover, by the end of the year nearly 4,000 Muslims had disappeared completely.³²¹ In retaliation, during 1957 there was an average of over 2,000 attacks, big and small, on various targets throughout Algeria. Nevertheless, the French army held the upper hand with the FLN suffering almost 2,600 dead from direct action alone.³²²

On the other hand, the methods by which the French army was winning in a military sense began to erode public support for the war. In February 1958, the tell-all book *La Question* went to publication in Paris. It sold 66,000 copies before the censors banned it.³²³ Afterward, it sold another 90,000 copies through the black market and was second in popularity only to the *Diary of Anne Frank* at French bookstores. Several translations quickly followed, with an introduction in the English translation by Jean Paul

³¹⁹Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers*, 160.

³²⁰Connelly, 131.

³²¹Ibid.

³²²O'Balance, 100.

³²³Chester W. Obuchowski, "Algeria: The Tortured Conscience," *The French Review* 42, no. 1 (October 1968): 101, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/386217> (accessed 30 April 2014).

Sartre, France's most influential intellectual. Censorship was not effective and the word of France's atrocities spread worldwide, providing the worst possible impression of French authority for world opinion.³²⁴

Militarily, there was no question of the short-term benefits of *quadrillage*, internment, and torture. However, contrary to Trinquier's argument that torture was "the only way to win the war," it most assuredly was not.³²⁵ Though the network of Casbah bomb makers was temporarily defeated, the paratroopers alienated the entire Muslim population.³²⁶ According to Yacef, the use of torture increased popular support of the FLN from 50 percent of the population to 95 percent of the population from 1956 to 1957.³²⁷ Moreover, France managed to alienate some members of the U.S. government, including outspoken and popular Senator John F. Kennedy.³²⁸ The paras' victory in Algiers was thus Pyrrhic, losing in the court of world opinion for the sake of a temporary military advance.

³²⁴Evans, 224.

³²⁵Tzvetan Todorov and Arthur Denner, "Torture in the Algerian War," *South Central Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40039956> (accessed 30 April 2014).

³²⁶Evans, 225.

³²⁷"Disc Three: Remembering History," *The Battle of Algiers*, directed by Gillo Pontecarvo, interview with Saadi Yacef (1966; New York: The Criterion Collection, 2004), DVD.

³²⁸Detreux, 10.

The Return of de Gaulle and the End of the Fourth Republic

If the bad press from *La Question*³²⁹ was not enough to bring down the already unpopular French government under Félix Gaillard, then this coupled with the ratification of a framework law or *loi cadre* was surely enough. Under *loi cadre*, Algeria was to remain an integral part of France; however, it would be broken into federated territories that would essentially run their own affairs.³³⁰ Along with these considerations, France had a situation brewing along the border between Algeria and Tunisia. ALN fighters sought refuge in the borderlands of Tunisia, but were also using those areas as staging grounds to draw the French into a wider conflict: a classic insurgent tactic.³³¹ When the French finally bombarded the Tunisian border village of Sakiet Sidi Youssef on 8 February 1958 in an attempt to get at ALN fighters, they created a crisis in the French government that required a larger than life figure to solve.³³² For the French, this was de Gaulle.

The Gaillard government was under enormous pressure from the United States and Britain to enter into negotiations over the Sakiet incident with Tunisia.³³³ Ever resentful of outside interference, the political center of France lost confidence in Gaillard

³²⁹The term “La Question” (The Question) itself refers to torture with the terminology of Voltaire according to Mohammed Hardi, one of the leading historians on the Algerian War. See the interview with Hardi on “Disc Three: Remembering History,” *The Battle of Algiers*.

³³⁰O’Balance, 101.

³³¹Detreux, 8.

³³²Wall, 99-100.

³³³Evans, 232.

and he fell from office on 15 April 1958. In the wake of this collapse, Pierre Pflimlin agreed to form a new government a little over a month later. However, many Europeans in Algiers suspected Pflimlin of favoring a negotiated settlement with the FLN.³³⁴

In Algiers, there were already several overlapping plots for installing a strong, nationalist government. The most important of these was that of Léon Delbecq, a Gaullist deputy who sought a “French national resurrection” through the establishment of a government under General Charles de Gaulle.³³⁵ With the National Assembly electing Pflimlin by a comfortable margin on 14 May 1958 and given his suspected predilections, the loyalty of the army was in question. The next day, de Gaulle announced he was “ready to assume the powers of the Republic.”³³⁶

By 24 May 1958, paratroopers from Algeria seized Corsica to use as a staging ground for the invasion of France. Pflimlin resigned four days later under threat of a coup and on 1 June, Charles de Gaulle stood before the National Assembly, which voted him into office as Prime Minister by a 329 to 224 margin.³³⁷ With the army having achieved its goal without actually launching its coup d’état, the paratroopers and other volunteers from Algeria stood down. For six months, de Gaulle ruled by decree.³³⁸ The Fourth Republic was officially dead.

³³⁴O’Balance, 102.

³³⁵Ibid., 102-103.

³³⁶Philip Williams, “How the Fourth Republic Died: Sources for the Revolution of May 1958,” *French Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 17-21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/285892> (accessed 30 April 2014).

³³⁷Morgan, 266-267.

³³⁸Horne, 298.

Gaullist Reforms and the Challe Plan

As de Gaulle began to assert his power as the head of what would soon be the French Fifth Republic, he immediately resolved to correct the unhealthy balance between the army and the government. De Gaulle transferred praetorian-like officers responsible for abuses of power and political intrigues from Algeria to metropolitan France. He even transferred Massu.³³⁹

De Gaulle also reached out to the FLN. He offered the FLN the “peace of the brave”—a negotiated settlement; however, the FLN rejected this notion.³⁴⁰ Like any insurgent group, the FLN understood that in order to win, all it needed to do was survive. The French could control the borders, break up large rebel groups, and defeat the insurgents in open combat any day of the week, but they could not root out the insurgency. Militarily, the French could dominate the Algerian nationalists in almost every conceivable way, but a French victory necessitated success in the court of public opinion.

Public opinion was just as much a problem for de Gaulle as it had been for the Fourth Republic. Like the Fourth Republic, de Gaulle found himself squeezed between the necessities of courting world opinion and French opinion on Algeria. In the short term, the latter seems to have had the greater effect. Only three days after his election as Prime Minister, he gave a speech on the balcony of the Governor-General of Algeria in

³³⁹Bernard E. Brown, “The Army and Politics in France,” *The Journal of Politics* 23, no. 2 (May 1961): 270-274, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2126705> (accessed 30 April 2014).

³⁴⁰Connelly, 197.

which he encouragingly yet ambiguously stated, “I understand you.”³⁴¹ Moreover, just a few days after that at another speech in Mostaganem, Algeria, de Gaulle electrified the crowds with the pronouncement, “*Vive l’Algérie française!*”—a statement that convinced even the most unrepentant remnants of the Vichy regime that de Gaulle would preserve French Algeria.³⁴²



Figure 3. French Algeria

Source: Merriam-Webster, “Algeria,” Merriam-Webster, Inc., <http://www.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/nytmaps.pl?algeria> (accessed 1 May 2014).

³⁴¹Wall, 159.

³⁴²Horne, 301.

Indeed, it looked as if that was exactly what de Gaulle intended to do. With General Maurice Challe assuming the role of commander in Algeria in 1959, the French army began using a new set of tactics against their nationalist foes. Previously, the French army sought to counter any attack wherever it might occur. Under the Challe Plan, the French army concentrated its combat power in one area at a time. Using massive power in smaller areas allowed Challe to trap insurgents and kill them in ever-greater numbers. In doing so, the French army decisively pacified increasingly larger areas of Algeria. Unfortunately, the tactics used also included the widespread removal of populations to ever-larger *regroupment* camps to separate the public from the FLN. By October 1959, the French army had 1,242 such camps holding over two million Muslims.³⁴³

Though effective from a strictly military point of view, these camps generated additional political costs. Uprooting the population and placing them into these internment camps was inordinately disruptive for the traditional peasants of Algeria, both in terms of pattern of their daily lives and the rural economy that supported them.³⁴⁴ Moreover, conditions in the camps ranged from poor to deadly. Resembling barbed-wire concentration camps, they were overcrowded and according to Jules Roy went “without water, without sewage or sanitation of any kind, without land to cultivate.”³⁴⁵ It was not

³⁴³Evans, 250.

³⁴⁴Keith Sutton, “Army Administration Tensions over Algeria's Centres de Regroupement, 1954-1962,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (November 1999): 269, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/195925> (accessed 1 May 2014).

³⁴⁵Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), xxxiv.

unusual for Muslims to die from exposure or hunger and disease ran rampant.³⁴⁶

Although the French did attempt to prevent these conditions through a quasi-civil-military inspector general team, military expediency triumphed over any civilian considerations, which drove the population even further from the French.³⁴⁷

Paralleling the political fortunes of the French in Algeria, the military successes of the Challe Plan were equally bankrupt in their ability to deliver a settlement, let alone a victory. During a tour of facilities in August 1959, de Gaulle stated to those present “What I have heard and seen here in the course of this inspection gives me full satisfaction. I have to say that to you. But the problem is not solved.”³⁴⁸ Everything was in order for France in Algeria from a military perspective. On the other hand, because of the massive number of French troops in Algeria, France could not adequately contribute to NATO. In their place, six divisions of the U.S. Army stood watch in Western Europe.³⁴⁹

The Europeans’ Revolt and the Generals’ Putsch

On 16 September 1959, de Gaulle announced in his “self-determination speech” that the French government would offer the FLN three options: independence,

³⁴⁶Wall, 160-161.

³⁴⁷Sutton, 243.

³⁴⁸Horne, 343.

³⁴⁹Wall, 190.

integration, or federation.³⁵⁰ Concerned with statements like these and the sense that de Gaulle intended to abandon them, the right-wing European population in Algeria, referred to as the “ultras” became bitterly and vocally discontented.³⁵¹ On 24 January 1960, the ultras clashed with *gendarmes* in Algiers, a fight that killed several on both sides.³⁵² However, by 30 January the street fighting and rioting was over. General Maurice Challe, Commander in Chief of the French forces in Algeria, defused the situation by sealing off the ultras in their barricades close to the university buildings, starving them out, and rounding up the ringleaders.³⁵³ The ultra’s revolt was short-lived, but the palpable frustration remained and festered within the higher ranks of the army used to contain them.

The last straw came with the 16 November 1960 decision to hold a referendum on independence the following January. The purpose of it was to indicate to any would-be insurgent (i.e. on the order of the “ultras”) that to revolt against a decision for an *Algerie algerrienne* was to revolt against not only the President, but also the nation as indicated by the referendum.³⁵⁴ Prophetically, in December, retired General Raoul Salan, another Indo-China Hand, who had commanded in both that region and in Algeria, declared, “if

³⁵⁰Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, “Kennedy’s Algerian Dilemma: Containment, Alliance Politics and the ‘Rebel Dialogue’,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 2 (April 1999): 65-66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284004> (accessed 1 May 2014).

³⁵¹Horne, 349.

³⁵²Connelly, 222.

³⁵³O’Balance, 146.

³⁵⁴Pickles, 80-81.

the people [i.e. *pied noirs*] in their desperation fight to remain French, I shall be at their side.”³⁵⁵

Despite the fact that de Gaulle won two-thirds of the vote, clearly demonstrating the trend toward Algerian independence through the electoral process, four retired generals who had spent their lives serving France revolted in April 1961. These four included, Raoul Salan, André Zeller, Edmond Jouhoud, and perhaps most surprisingly, Maurice Challe.³⁵⁶ Challe, who had masterminded the 1959 effort against the FLN, attempted to use the willing 1st Parachute Regiment of the Foreign Legion to seize government buildings. The putsch lasted a mere three days. French authorities loyal to de Gaulle arrested Challe on 25 April and drove the remaining ultras and ultra-sympathizers underground.³⁵⁷

Decolonization Complete

With the collapse of the General’s Putsch in the wake of the success of the referendum, there was little doubt about who represented the legitimate government in France. Thus, de Gaulle moved forward with independence for Algeria. For the remainder of this final phase, the French army mounted no major operations against the FLN.³⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the final process of negotiating the precise terms of Algerian

³⁵⁵Pickles, 82.

³⁵⁶Horne, pictures 29-32.

³⁵⁷Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers*, 268.

³⁵⁸O’Balance, 186.

independence took over a year.³⁵⁹ De Gaulle had to contend with ongoing violence between the FLN and the *Organisation de l'armée secrete* or “Organization of the Secret Army” (OAS).³⁶⁰

The OAS was a terrorist organization founded in February 1961 by “ultras” that continued to oppress and attack the indigenous population of Algeria.³⁶¹ Essentially taking over where the putsch failed, the OAS worked to do what the paras had failed to do: defeat the FLN and save French Algeria. In fact, many of the soldiers that had served under Challe went over to the ultras, as did General Raoul Salan, who became the de facto leader of the OAS.³⁶²

Throughout 1961, the OAS conducted a campaign of terror using techniques from the French Resistance, the Viet Minh, and the Israeli Haganah.³⁶³ Like the police before the arrival of the paras, the ALN and the *gendarmes* were not able to reduce or destroy the OAS. Finally, after the OAS gunned down seven young army conscripts on 23 March 1962, the army stepped in. Twenty-thousand French troops surrounded and destroyed the OAS stronghold in Algiers, one city block at a time.³⁶⁴ Unlike the FLN that could melt away into the greater population, the OAS crumbled. The ceasefire agreement, conducted

³⁵⁹Morgan, *My Battle of Algiers*, 269.

³⁶⁰Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 243.

³⁶¹Aissaoui, 146.

³⁶²Horne, 480.

³⁶³Evans, 305.

³⁶⁴Connelly, 268.

at Évian, France, on 18 March was already complete, making the last big OAS effort appear even more futile.³⁶⁵

On 14 July 1962, Algeria became an independent nation. According to author Dorothy Pickles, the agreements reached at Évian, France concerning Algerian independence provided three mitigating factors that made them worthwhile for most French people. First, they were a device by which the *pied noirs* and the French army might be able to digest the unpleasant nature of Algerian independence with the least loss of face. Second, the agreements freed France from having to defend an indefensible policy in Algeria in front of the United Nations and NATO. Finally, it substantially completed the process of France's decolonization.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵Wagner, 91.

³⁶⁶Pickles, 119.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Introduction

Therefore, we must study not only the laws of war in general, but the specific laws of revolutionary war, and the even more specific laws of revolutionary war in China.

The war situation as a whole may cover the entire world, may cover an entire country, or may cover an independent guerilla zone or an independent major operational front.

— Mao Tse Tung, *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War*

In the wake of World War II, France confronted monumental problems.

Metropolitan France was in ruins. Naturally, so was its economy. Indochina, France's most lucrative colony, was on the brink of independence and breaking toward communism. Algeria, legally part of metropolitan France, but operated as a colony, was also beginning to press for independence. French military forces were in disarray, scattered, undermanned, and underequipped. Perhaps worst, political divisions in France made it almost impossible to develop a central government strong enough to deal with these problems in an environment in which the United States and the Soviet Union dominated global politics. To solve their problems, the French needed a way to rebuild their economy at home, satisfy the Allied commitment to the defense of Western Europe, and hold on to their Empire.

Crucially, they had to satisfy the dilemma of what to do with their empire. On one hand, they wished to retain it for multiple reasons. From a psychological standpoint, it satisfied the French desire for grandeur in the wake of having fallen to such a lowly state

after having been a world power for so long. From a realist standpoint, it offered the appearance of an active and vibrant enterprise much larger than metropolitan France, critical to regaining the position of France as a world power. On the other hand, France could barely afford to rebuild itself at home, let alone advance a resurgent colonial program. Moreover, any advance in its most important colonies, Indochina and Algeria, required a significant military effort. Any such effort conflicted directly with the Allied effort to build a conventional deterrent force against Soviet expansion in Europe without resorting to simply rearming Germany.

European Defense

The central problem of European defense from France's perspective was to find a way to satisfy the demands of the Allies for a credible conventional deterrent to Soviet expansion. The United States expected France to provide the bulk of the troops necessary for any such effort. Implicit in this arrangement was that the United States would in turn provide much needed financial and materiel support to the French effort. Choosing to view France's Indochina effort as another front against communism as opposed to the advancement of colonialism, the United States also underwrote much France's expense in the Indochina War.

In Europe, France embarked upon a series of diplomatic and political programs that served multiple purposes. At the forefront of almost all of these policies was the desire to fulfill France's role within the structure of the Allied defense of Europe without resorting to German rearmament. The Monnet Plan, the Schuman Plan, the Pleven Plan, and the EDC had the potential to solve a number of problems for France. The Monnet Plan placed France on the road to economic recovery and provided a structure around

which the various divergent parties could rally. The Schuman Plan aimed at correcting issues of production overruns instigated by the Monnet Plan and combining the industrial capacities of France and Germany in a way that made it exceptionally difficult for the two countries to renew hostilities, satisfying France's desire to lock West Germany into a subordinate role.

After North Korea's invasion of South Korea in 1950, the Allies perceived an elevated urgency for a credible conventional deterrent in Europe to mitigate the threat of a conventional invasion by the Soviet Union. Accordingly, France introduced the Pleven Plan. With the Pleven Plan, France advanced the idea of an integrated European army. On its face, it appeared as a completely legitimate effort on the part of France to work toward an achievable defensive system for Western Europe. However, at its heart the Pleven Plan seemed to have been purposefully unworkable, "a refusal hidden within an impossible project."³⁶⁷

The integration requirements for the proposed European army were militarily unsound. The plan required the use of mixed nationalities at every level above battalion, a caveat that would have made it virtually impossible to conduct operations because of the communication difficulties alone. Moreover, the plan had a self-damaging poison pill in it for the French empire. Curiously, if France had followed the Pleven Plan, it might have had to integrate the elite cadre of its colonial army along with the metropolitan army within a greater European army.³⁶⁸ In such a case, not only would the metropolitan army

³⁶⁷Aron, 4.

³⁶⁸Fursdon, 90.

cease to exist, the colonial army would do likewise, making any colonial military effort impossible.

Finally, France made the adoption of its very own Pleven Plan more difficult by self-imposing Schuman Plan approval as a pre-condition to passing the Pleven Plan.³⁶⁹ Given that the Korean War upset the balance of coal and steel pooling at which the Schuman Plan aimed, there was virtually no way to get this pre-condition met, let alone approve the Pleven Plan. Accordingly, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion other than the notion that both of these plans demonstrated strong ulterior motives on the part of France. The Schuman Plan might have been a good tool for managing coal and steel production and the Pleven Plan might have been a legitimate political answer to heightened Allied concerns over a conventional invasion. However, the only real purpose that either served was to delay the rearmament of West Germany and no party wanted to do this more than France.

On the heels of the slow demise of the Pleven Plan in the face of escalating concerns over communist expansion, the Allies held the Petersberg Conference in Bonn, Germany to discuss different ways in which the Allies might incorporate West Germany into NATO. Two competing plans emerged. The Spofford Plan advanced the notion of an outright national West German army integrated into the NATO defense plan at the national level. True to form, France again advanced the notion of a European army with a kind of modified Pleven Plan called the EDC, which aimed at limiting West German participation and uniting Europe.

³⁶⁹Onslow, 468.

However, much like the Pleven Plan, the EDC also had a self-inflicted poison pill for France. As with any plan for French participation in the Allied defense of Western Europe, the EDC's requirements conflicted with France's military effort in Indochina. Specifically, the EDC sought to limit the militarization of West Germany by placing a cap on Bonn's level of participation in western defense equal to that of a predetermined level of participation by France. Considering that voting rights in the EDC framework depended upon the level of participation, it was unthinkable for France to make a commitment at a level lower than West Germany.

Unfortunately, with the better part of France's defense budget devoted to Indochina, France could not live up to its end of the bargain. In other words, there was no way for France to fight the Indochina War and simultaneously contribute forces to the EDC at a level greater than or equal to that of West Germany. Simply put, the EDC was a bust. It was no better than the Pleven Plan and did not amount to much more than another delay tactic on the part of the French government. Indeed, the EDC proposal did not collapse until after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. By then, the competing military effort in the Indochina War was over and the Algerian War had not yet begun. Accordingly, it is difficult to argue that the EDC, or any other plan for that matter, was much more than a purposeful delay in West German rearmament at the expense of the Allies, engineered to allow France time to concentrate on Indochina.

Indochina: The Crown Jewel

Charles de Gaulle and the majority of the French government and public placed an enormous value on the French Empire in making France more than "just another

liberated country” in the wake of World War II.³⁷⁰ However, the French focus on working out a solution for their metropolitan government during the last half of 1945 and the first half of 1946 distracted them from any reasonable solution to the chaos in Indochina, the crown jewel of their empire. During the uneasy time between de Gaulle’s resignation from the provisional government in January 1946 and the establishment of the Fourth Republic the following October, there was a chance to reach a negotiated settlement with Ho Chi Minh. Unfortunately, the man in charge of colonial administration was the incredibly inflexible and imperialistic Admiral Georges Thierry D’Argenlieu, a martinet who would accept nothing less than the return of France’s pre-World War II grandeur.

By the time that the French established the Fourth Republic, fighting was already escalating in Vietnam and continued to do so into 1947. After the United States announced the anti-communist Truman Doctrine in March 1947, a negotiated settlement was highly improbable. At that point, France had to defeat the Viet Minh in order to retain Indochina and, from their perspective, it needed Indochina because it was the most vital part of the overseas empire. Conveniently, the Viet Minh was not only a nationalist organization; it was also undoubtedly a communist organization. Therefore, it was easy for France to couch its fight against the Viet Minh in anti-communist terms and garner the support of the United States.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the United States, it would have been much more convenient for France to reach some sort of compromise with the Viet Minh, if the French colonial army could not defeat them quickly. The main concern of the

³⁷⁰Fitzgerald, 373.

United States was the defense of Western Europe against the expansionist Soviet Union, a concern that only deepened with the invasion of South Korea in 1950. The United States wanted and to some extent expected France, as the largest of the continental European allies, to be the primary contributor of troops for European defense. Again, this was something France could not afford simultaneously to the Indochina War. Moreover, the United States could not put pressure on France to reach a negotiated settlement with the Viet Minh because it risked destabilizing the Fourth Republic, thus jeopardizing the North Atlantic Treaty meant to protect Europe. Accordingly, the United States chose to back the French in Indochina, underwriting nearly three quarters of the cost by 1953.³⁷¹

Of course, the United States could not do this indefinitely. There were limits to the patience of the Eisenhower administration. In fact, by 1954 the Eisenhower administration predicated continued aid to France for the Indochina War on two conditions. First, in direct terms, the Eisenhower administration expected the French colonial army to demonstrate results for the millions of dollars of U.S. aid. As mentioned earlier, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles actually told the French point blank to “fight the war more aggressively” if they expected additional aid.³⁷²

Second, the Eisenhower administration tied the EDC directly to Indochina. The United States, determined to create a credible conventional deterrent in Europe by incorporating West Germany into the defensive scheme one way or the other, purposely required France to ratify the EDC treaty in order to receive additional military and

³⁷¹Windrow, 664-665, n21.

³⁷²Herring and Immerman, 344.

financial aid for the Indochina War.³⁷³ Given that the EDC was a French plan that armed West Germany on France's terms, the demand was not wholly unreasonable.

In the end, of course, France lost Indochina, making the balance between military contributions to the Indochina War and the EDC a moot point. In the summer of 1954, following Dien Bien Phu, the French National Assembly officially eliminated the EDC through parliamentary procedure, clearing the way for the Allies to bring West Germany into NATO.

France lost both its most valuable colonial asset and, eventually, the diplomatic fight against West German rearmament. Was all the effort for nothing? Perhaps not. Through a series of international integration plans and parliamentary gamesmanship, France had managed to delay the timing and shape the method of West German rearmament for almost nine years. If nothing else, retaining Indochina and thus the French Empire intact during this time provided some underpinning for that "certain idea of France"³⁷⁴ that both the Fourth Republic and the French people needed to advance French interests in an era dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the meantime, there was one segment of French society that bore an unevenly heavy burden throughout the Fourth Republic's delicate balancing act: the elite cadre among the colonial army in Indochina. By 1954, most of the soldiers and leaders in the colonial army had suffered through the deaths of their comrades and the defeat of their

³⁷³Hitchcock, 179.

³⁷⁴The "certain idea of France" is most closely associated with Charles de Gaulle. Lawrence D. Kritzman, "A Certain Idea of de Gaulle," *Yale French Studies*, no. 111 (2007): 158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20479377> (accessed 8 May 2014). Kritzman refers to the notion that France should be great because it is France.

army at the hands of the Viet Minh. Certain key figures among them had also suffered capture and torture by Viet Minh communists. For the soldiers in Indochina, the political balancing act between commitments to Europe and Indochina meant little and looked much more like a betrayal of their sacrifice.

Algeria: Metropolitan France?

Unlike Indochina, Algeria was legally part of metropolitan France. As such, France was of course very interested in defending it and keeping within its sphere of influence. In addition, the French had over one million European colonists/citizens residing in Algeria, the overwhelming majority of whom had families that had been there for generations. In fact, as part of the condition for ratifying the North Atlantic Treaty, the French demanded the inclusion of Algeria, a condition to which the United States accepted with the caveat that it would only apply to matters of external attack.³⁷⁵

Generally, with the advent of the Cold War, the United States supported French hegemony in North Africa as the best way to ensure the defense of the region against Soviet-sponsored communist expansion.³⁷⁶ On the other hand, unlike the Indochina situation, the United States was not convinced of any widespread communist infiltration within Algeria. Indeed, it rather looked as if the independence movements throughout North Africa were nationalist as opposed to communist. Regardless, the Fourth Republic was in no position to grant independence to Algeria in the same manner as they were with Tunisia and Morocco. The Algerian *pied noirs* had representation in the National

³⁷⁵Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War*, 83.

³⁷⁶Hahn, 193.

Assembly and their votes were critical to the ratification of West German rearmament following the demise of the EDC.³⁷⁷ Likewise, the United States was concerned that pulling support for France endangered West German integration into NATO.³⁷⁸ Because of the primacy that the United States placed on European defense, the *pied noirs* held the Allies hostage for the sake of a French Algeria.

Due to the excesses of the *pied noir* population and the heavy-handed French responses to Algerian nationalist uprisings, a negotiated settlement with the FLN would have been very difficult, especially following the reprisals for the Philippeville Massacre.³⁷⁹ Sending in General Jacques Massu's paratroopers to put down the FLN revolt made any sort of peaceful solution virtually impossible. The paras, having been humiliated in Indochina and in some cases tortured by the Viet Minh, were fresh from the Suez Crisis, a failed operation they considered just another betrayal on the part of the Fourth Republic.³⁸⁰ For these men, there was no compromise. Someone would pay. In this case, it was not only the FLN, but also the entire Muslim population in Algeria. With all indigenous Muslims as potential suspects, the paras dived into their version of counterinsurgency with a cold ferocity that is now legendary for its cruelty.

Backing up this group of hardened veterans, the French deployed hundreds of thousands of troops from the French metropolitan army and reserves, an act that was completely legitimate under French law because Algeria was legally part of metropolitan

³⁷⁷Wall, 13.

³⁷⁸Ibid., 17.

³⁷⁹Connelly, 86-87.

³⁸⁰Horne, 164.

France.³⁸¹ This massive troop buildup eventually allowed France to secure a kind of victory, at least on purely military terms. Unfortunately for the French, the combination of internment and systematized torture garnered the FLN an unending stream of new recruits. For every FLN fighter rooted out in such a manner, 10 rose to take his place.³⁸² Moreover, because of the French troop commitment in Algeria, the United States took the place of France as the guardian of Europe, eventually placing six combat divisions in West Germany.³⁸³

In the end, the Algerian War served virtually no purpose for France. The French military effort in Algeria was directly at odds with France's NATO commitment to the defense of Western Europe. In this case, France succeeded in neither endeavor. The only mitigating factor for the French was that in 1962, after 22 years of war, they had managed to rebuild their economy, achieve a respectable level of authority independent of the United States, and, finally, find peace.

Conclusion

At the end of World War II, France was a defeated nation. Economically, industrially, socially, and psychologically, the French appeared to have little to offer. However, with hardly more than a "certain idea of France,"³⁸⁴ the French plunged immediately into great power politics, using their leverage with the United States at every

³⁸¹Neky, 4-6.

³⁸²Todorov and Denner, 20.

³⁸³Wall, 190.

³⁸⁴Kritzman, 158. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Kritzman refers to the notion that France should be great simply because it is France.

opportunity to advance the French agenda as if it was an ordinary extension of France's power.

In Europe, the French used the balance between military commitments to Europe and Indochina to delay West German rearmament while the United States paid the bill on both ends. In Indochina, the French held onto their most important colony just long enough to give themselves credibility to generate the delay by couching their colonial reassertion in anti-communist terms. In Algeria, the French used the United States as a kind of strategic replacement. The corollary to France employing hundreds of thousands of its conscripts from the metropolitan army in Algeria, troops meant for NATO, was that the United States deployed its divisions in their place, effectively obviating French responsibility. Remarkably, this last development still shows its legacy in Germany even today, 25 years after the end of the Cold War.

Naturally, some of the consequences of French actions between 1945 and 1962 were unintended and some of the actions that the Fourth Republic took were a direct result of its inherent instability. For example, the French did not intend to lose Indochina, even less so Algeria. However, the remainder of French efforts, completed with the conglomeration of Fourth Republic cabinets and Charles de Gaulle himself, possessed a remarkable continuity when it came to keeping West Germany in a subordinate role and advancing France's interests independent of, and sometimes at great expense to, the United States.

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