

War in Algeria: The French Experience

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DISCUSSING THE Algerian War with the objectivity of a historian is difficult. A number of generations of French and Algerian politicians and soldiers have been intimately involved in these events. In both countries, to speak of the Algerian War meant, and still means, to venture into the political realm. In this article, I describe the distinct phases of the war to draw useful conclusions for contemporary counterinsurgency operations.¹

The Algerian War began on 1 November 1954 and ended 8 years later, in 1962, following the independence of Algeria. The conflict was a colonial war between France and the Algerian people, but it was also a civil war between loyalist Algerian Muslims who still believed in a French Algeria and their independence-minded Algerian counterparts. During its final months, the conflict evolved into a civil war between pro-French hardliners in Algeria and supporters of General Charles de Gaulle. The French Army had to wage a war against guerrillas, insurrection, and terrorism, a “revolutionary” war in which the conquest of the population was at stake, exactly as it was in another war that had just ended in Indochina with the defeat at Dien Bien Phu. At the time, the French Army thought it had won in Algeria. On the other hand, France’s political leaders wanted nothing more to do with the former colony.

The war created a deep wound in French society and a deeper one within the Army. The scars healed slowly, and the slightest event can still reopen the wound. Even selecting a date to commemorate the end of the war divides the generation that experienced the war’s effects. In short, the consequences of this war have made relations between France and Algeria and, even now, between the French people and Algerian immigrants, particularly complex. Spite, nostalgia, regret, remorse, guilt, wastefulness, and squandered opportunities abound between the two peoples, as in a love story that ends in a difficult divorce—a story that could have had a happier outcome.

A Plot Out of Clancy or Ludlum?

Making comparisons is always dangerous, but we can imagine the following scenario: A part of the population of one U.S. state declares its independence and begins an armed insurrection that mixes guerrilla activities with urban terrorism. An army of 2 million U.S. soldiers is deployed for 8 years in secessionist territory. Despite a long tradition of obedience to civil authority, the U.S. Armed Forces rebel against the President and Congress, and with support from an important part of the population, demand and obtain the President’s removal, the creation of a new constitution, and the election of a President who acquiesces to military desires regarding the management of the war.

Later, after the new President decides to stop the war by allowing the state to secede, he is almost toppled in a coup d’état orchestrated by prestigious generals with the support of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions, the Army Rangers, and regiments of the U.S. Marine Corps. An antigovernment terrorist movement made up of military renegades tries to assassinate the President. The National Guard fires on flag-waving loyalists singing the national anthem and proclaiming their desire to continue being American. After secession is complete, four million traumatized loyalists flee the newly independent territory, tearfully leaving in droves from the piers of the former American state. Unthinkable? This is exactly what the French would have thought on 1 November 1954, had they been asked the question.

Algeria (1954)

“Algeria is France.” At least that is what the French thought, what they taught their schoolchildren, and what a million French citizens living in Algeria thought in 1954.² Eighteen percent of these French Algerians—an exceptionally high number—had been mobilized from 1942 onward to help the Allies liberate France. “Algeria is France,” the political sector unanimously proclaimed, even

after the initial uprising on 1 November 1954 by nationalists against French rule.

Algeria had been conquered in 1830 and transformed into a French colony administered as if it were metropolitan France. There was, however, a great disparity between Algeria and France. In Algeria, 10 million indigenous Muslims were deprived of all political rights, and 99 percent of the economy was in the hands of French or French Algerian citizens. Although obligated to deal with the grave consequences of World War II (rationing, reconstruction, violent labor strikes, the Cold War, and the War in Indochina), the French government never had the courage to upgrade the native Algerians' status despite a widespread decolonization movement and the role Algerian soldiers had played in the world wars and Indochina.

For several reasons, nationalist sentiment was, at least initially, less virulent in Algeria than it was in Morocco or in Tunisia, which had just obtained their independence. In 1830, the Algerian population had changed from a feudal society to a colonial one, French rule replacing that of the Bey of Algiers and various tribal chiefs. While it did not increase or diminish the Algerians' civil rights or improve their living conditions dramatically, French rule did provide security, economic development, disease eradication, and literacy initiatives. Then too, with one million French colonists and the symbols of French sovereignty part of the landscape, so to speak, Algerians looked at the situation with a sense of fatalism and concluded, as Muslims often do, "Inch' Allah"—(it [French rule] is the will of God).

French domination also derived support from notorious Muslim tribal chiefs and elitist judges, clerics, and civil servants whose interests were served by the French presence. These people had sided with France at the time of conquest and continued to offer their loyal support over the years. Veterans, too, predominantly favored the French. More than 150,000 Algerians had fought alongside the French in Tunisia, Italy, France, and Indochina. Elite troops, they had covered themselves in glory, notably in Italy for breaching the Gustav Line, and had suffered staggering losses. As recompense, France had merely given them medals, war pensions, and government jobs. Many who had hoped to obtain French citizenship or at least equal rights with French Algerians were dismayed by this ingratitude. However, they could not forget the bonds they had forged with their French brothers on the field of battle. In 1954, Algerians who considered taking up arms against their former comrades were rare.

Culture and tradition also worked to assuage native Algerians. Literacy efforts among children, especially in cities and towns, spread the French language and culture, and the Muslim elite assimilated this second culture without forsaking their own. Long-established friendships between Muslim and French Algerian neighbors contributed to maintaining the status quo. Although unwilling to grant their Muslim countrymen equal rights, French Algerians were paternalistic and friendly in everyday life. On the farms and in small businesses, certain families had known each other for generations; they got along. Above all else, awareness of French power and the memory of blood spilled in earlier revolts deterred political unrest.

However, in 1945, nationalist demonstrations degenerated into riots. The ensuing unrest resulted in ethnic French families being massacred. The following government crackdown caused thousands of deaths and civil unrest temporarily paused. Fear of government violence was not the only check: Many moderate nationalists believed that a democratic, peaceful transition was possible. They demanded only equal rights, not independence. For these reasons, the nationalist opposition had difficulty recruiting and organizing militants.

An 8-Year War

The Algerian War of Independence, 8 years in duration, had 3 distinct phases: the birth of the Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action (soon to be known as the National Liberation Front [NLF]) and its rise to power; a period of NLF military defeat but political victory; and a final period of political tumult and a bloody independence.

The NLF's birth and rise to power (1954-1957). Six exceptional men, isolated and penniless, chose the path of armed struggle to gain independence. Mustafa Ben Boulaid, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Didouche Mourad, Rabah Bitah, Krim Belkacem, and Mohamed Boudiaf created the Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action. To these individuals, Algeria owes its independence.

During the first few months of its existence, the militant NLF created resistance groups and urban cells, recruited new members, and fought to survive. However, the general population maintained a wait-and-see attitude and often refused to pay "revolutionary taxes."

Realizing they had failed to convince the Muslim population to join them, NLF leaders decided to raise the level of violence, so as to stimulate hatred, bloodshed, and fear between the French and Muslim communities. On 20 August 1955, they stoked fanaticism in a few villages whose

residents rose up to massacre and mutilate French civilians. The Army intervened by distributing weapons to the French civilians, and the resulting repression led to hundreds of Muslim deaths, a dire development that would help the rebels achieve their goal.

Provoked by the NLF, fanatical violence spread widely, causing the Army to clamp down on the Muslim population through inspections, arrests, interrogations, detentions, and repression, which caused even more Muslims to side with the NLF. By 1956, the NLF had imposed its authority on Algeria's Muslims, and although the French Army swelled to 500,000 soldiers, it still had to remain in a defensive posture.

The NLF understood victory would be political, not military, and wanted to discuss the war in the international news media and at the UN. In 1957 the rebels began a campaign of urban terrorism by detonating bombs on the streets of Algiers and killing scores of civilians. The world did, in fact, begin to pay attention.

NLF military defeat, political victory (1957-1960). In a decision of grave import, the French government granted absolute power to the Army and ordered it to reestablish order using all means at its disposal. Individual liberties were suspended in Algeria; the 10th Parachute Division occupied Algiers; and in a matter of weeks, the NLF's cells had been dismantled and its principal leaders arrested, killed, or driven into hiding or exile. Seizing the initiative, the Army began to control the terrain, the borders, and the population. NLF losses mounted.

The government then timidly sought to negotiate an end to hostilities, a move that provoked the ire of French Algerians and the disbelief of the Army. On 13 May 1958, French Algerians rebelled against the peace process and formed a "Committee for Public Safety" that rejected the government's authority. What ensued were some truly revolutionary events.

The government ordered the Army, which retained full civil and military powers, to oppose this new insurgency. Instead, and despite its tradition of absolute submission to civilian authority, the Army joined the Committee for Public Safety. Army leaders demanded the abdication of the government, a new constitution, adoption of a pro-French Algerian policy, and the designation of De Gaulle as head of state. They went so far as to prepare an airborne operation against Paris. Unpopular, lacking in authority, and incapable of proposing an alternate solution, the government and Chamber of Deputies gave in. To quickly return to at least the appearance of legality, De Gaulle demanded and

received investiture by the National Assembly. He immediately organized elections, which he won resoundingly.

Concurrently, the Army took advantage of its position of power within the Committee for Public Safety to impose the very changes the French had refused since 1945: social reforms and equality of civil rights for Muslims. Because it tightly controlled Arab districts after the Battle of Algiers (1957), a year-long offensive in the capital by the 10th Parachute Division, the Army convinced the Muslim population to obey the Committee for Public Safety, demonstrate in European neighborhoods, defend their rights, support Army reforms, and call for De Gaulle's rise to power. The generals took a big risk in doing this because of the recent terrorist attacks and the rift of hatred and blood that separated the French and Muslim communities.

The demonstrations that followed had an enormous effect: Under the influence of crowd psychology and revolutionary rhetoric, the two communities came together. Suddenly, it appeared that nothing was beyond their reach, including peace, reconciliation, and a new French Algeria of brotherly love, biculturalism, and harmony. The Army tried to persuade NLF leaders, and even those terrorists who had planted explosive devices, to join the reconciliation movement. A victory tour by De Gaulle succeeded in persuading the Army and the population that victory and peace were near.

In the following months, the NLF's leaders in Tunisia failed to remotivate members of the resistance, and the organization lost much of its will to fight. More people began to side with the French Army and De Gaulle. At the same time, a new commander in chief, General Maurice Challe, implemented a plan to systematically destroy the NLF. Three years later, the rebels had no more than 5,000 members, no means to conduct offensive operations, and no objective beyond survival. Some 300,000 Muslims (a large percentage of men old enough to fight) had registered for service with the Army. A French military victory did indeed seem imminent.

French Algeria's agony (1961-1962). This near victory was, however, fruitless. Unlike his military chiefs, De Gaulle had a global geopolitical vision; he understood that the international community firmly supported the decolonization movement. In late 1960, having decided that France's place was in Europe, not North Africa, De Gaulle openly committed to "an Algerian Algeria" and made peace overtures to the NLF's leaders in Tunisia.

The generals felt they were about to be robbed of their victory and, worse, their honor. Wanting to fulfill the promises they had made to French Algerians and their Muslim sympathizers that

Algeria would remain French, some of them hatched a plot.

In April 1961, four well-known generals, including two former commanders in chief in Algeria, rallied a dozen regiments and took control of Algiers. They demanded that De Gaulle re-adopt the policy of “French Algeria” and break off all negotiations with the NLF. Unlike in May 1958, however, the rest of the Army remained loyal to the government. A nation weary of war supported De Gaulle, and he crushed the putsch.

On 16 March 1962, in Evian, France, the government and the NLF signed peace accords mandating a cease-fire, setting up a 1 July referendum on Algerian self-determination, and addressing such topics as security for all Algerians, including the French in Algeria and the harkis (Muslim soldiers) in the French Army.

The end of the war in Algeria was tragic. Radical hardliners in the military and among the French living in Algeria founded a terrorist organization—the Secret Army Organization (SAO)—that intended to assassinate De Gaulle; unleash a civil war against the government, the police, and the French Army; and ignite an ethnic war against the Muslims. The SAO assassinated hundreds of Muslims, and many Algiers neighborhoods revolted and attacked police and military units. The Air Force responded by bombing the SAO-controlled neighborhoods. When French Algerians carrying French flags and singing the *Marseillaise* mounted a protest, the Army opened fire on them. After 19 March 1962, in accordance with the peace accords, the French Army enforced the ceasefire with the NLF, although combat continued to flare between the NLF and the SAO. Hundreds of French Algerians were kidnapped and assassinated. French Algerians then understood they no longer had a place in Algeria.

In a matter of weeks, a million forlorn refugees (2 percent of the French population in 1962) arrived in southern France. Among them were thousands of pro-French Muslims, though most of the latter group (mayors, tribal chiefs, harkis), believing they were protected by the peace treaty, chose to stay in Algeria. The NLF immediately massacred perhaps 150,000 of these.

The war’s overall death toll was immense. According to the French Ministry of Defense, 22,755 French soldiers were killed, 7,917 died in accidents, and 56,962 were wounded. Thirty-five hundred Muslims were killed in combat while serving in the French Army. An additional 66,000 Muslim civilians (along with the 150,000 massacred post-cease-fire) and 2,788 French civilians were killed by the NLF, while another 875 French went missing. On

the NLF side, over 141,000 rebels died in combat, thousands more disappeared during the Battle of Algiers, and about 12,000 members of the NLF fell victim to internal purges. Sixteen thousand Algerian civilians died as a result of combat or during revolts or ethnic confrontations. Overall, the head of the NLF estimated that 300,000 Muslims were killed. With great pain, France and Algeria had turned the page to decolonization.

Lessons Learned from the War

Without spelling them out, there are some obvious and perhaps enlightening similarities between the French experience in Algeria and the Coalition Force experience in Iraq.

NLF tactics. From the humble origin of a handful of unknown and unarmed militants, the NLF became a well-armed, well-organized guerrilla force that challenged 500,000 French soldiers for more than 5 years. It proved itself adept at using publicity to recruit new soldiers, organizing those recruits, inciting ethnic conflict, conducting urban terrorism, and controlling the population.

The NLF explained its actions and recruited its soldiers in outlying towns and in Muslim neighborhoods in larger cities, and it created representative entities outside Algeria, principally in Tunisia and Egypt, to spread word of NLF actions to an international audience. Its beginnings, however, were fraught with difficulty. Notoriously violent pro-French elements deterred many Algerians from joining the NLF, while other Algerians demurred out of loyalty to France, adopted a wait-and-see attitude, or resigned themselves to fatalism.

The initially noncommittal attitude of the population incited certain NLF leaders to instigate ethnic conflict. Assaults, assassinations, and massacres were carried out against the French in Algeria. Later, the NLF called for jihad, but the Muslim population, especially the religiously moderate Berbers, was less than receptive to the call.³ Nevertheless, fissures between the French and Muslim communities widened and more provocations, followed by more repression, inexorably pushed the population toward the guerrillas.

Vast, mountainous, woody, and lightly populated, Algeria offered terrain favorable to guerrilla warfare. Capable resistance groups operating from densely forested areas harassed French Army posts, patrols, and convoys in a war of ambushes in which the attackers always had the advantage of terrain and surprise. When the French Army conducted cordon and search operations, the resistance (operating in 150-man units called *katibas*) avoided contact and blended into the surrounding forest. Occasionally, several *katibas* joined to conduct

common operations of short duration. For command and control, the NLF divided Algeria into six regions, or wilayas, each administered by a colonel assisted by a political advisor. Each colonel also headed an elite commando unit, one of which, the Ali Khoja Commando, held some of the best French regiments in check. As in most conflicts of this type, the local leaders could be charismatic commanders or authentic heroes, bloody tyrants or common thieves.

From Tunisia, a guerrilla army of tens of thousands of troops harassed French units arrayed along the border. The guerrillas would foray into Algeria, then flee back into Tunisia. This army infiltrated Algeria, escorting numerous mule trains packed with arms for the resistance.

The NLF understood from the outset that while a military victory was beyond its reach, the movement only had to survive the war, not win its battles, to obtain a political victory. Aided by international publicity, this strategy worked perfectly. The NLF increased the level of violence, and the war was duly debated in the UN, the Arab League, and other international bodies. Astute NLF leaders stressed that an ambush conducted in an isolated valley had only a slight psychological effect and attracted limited media coverage, whereas a bomb detonated in an Algiers theater or stadium quickly caught the eye of the French and international news services. Urban terrorism thus became the NLF's choice course of action in the war for independence.

NLF leaders might not have read Mao Tse-tung, but they instinctively rediscovered one of his principal tenets: Guerrillas must be immersed in the population like fish in water. The population constituted the principal stake of the war because rural and even urban NLF cells could not survive without daily support from a large part of the population.

To enlist the population's sympathy, two simultaneous actions were required: destroy the French administration (and the power of French culture over the population) and control the population through an efficient parallel administration. The NLF systematically assassinated Muslim and French functionaries, mayors, and professors; attacked French schools and prohibited Muslim children from attending them; forced respect for Islam by prohibiting the use of alcohol and tobacco; and applied a code of merciless sanctions—after the first warning, cutting off noses, then slitting throats if these warnings were not heeded.

Voluntarily or by force, the population was required to obey the NLF and provide intelligence, money, food, and new recruits. A bona fide, highly

structured political administrative organization (PAO), which included tax collectors, informants, liaison and propaganda agents, judges, and mayors (the embryo of Algeria's future administration) closely observed and monitored the population.

French Army tactics. After 2 years, the French found they had lost control of entire regions, primarily because they had isolated themselves in camps and posts. The Army then turned to a full-spectrum strategy that would neutralize the guerrilla movement. Officers with experience in counter guerrilla operations in Indochina and those from colonial units with extensive knowledge of Algerian culture and the administration of populations devised a two-part doctrine of pacification: Get the support of the population because the population was the primary stake of the war, and control the borders. To accomplish the first it was necessary to provide considerable material and humanitarian support, which the NLF evidently could not provide; to protect those who sided with the Army; and to send a political message at least as strong and full of hope as that of the NLF—to the magic word “independence” (expected to bring with it happiness in addition to liberty), the French Army decided to oppose the word “integration,” which meant total equality with French Algerians and French citizens. To control the borders, the Army had to stop the guerrillas and cut off all their external sources of support, thus completing the asphyxiation begun by the loss of popular internal support.

This doctrine would be applied progressively, and successfully, as evidenced by the massive commitment of the harkis and the decision of thousands of rebels and villages in 1959 and 1960 to support the French Army against the NLF.

Once embarked on the path to pacification, the French Army crossed a line to an area off-limits to armies in democratic countries: It made a deliberate political commitment. Because the entire political class of the day unanimously accepted a “French” Algeria, the Army saw nothing wrong in assuming the government's prerogative. It quickly swung into action once the government legally conferred civilian power on it.

Pacification's ultimate goals were to destroy the NLF's PAO, restore French administration, and reestablish a secure environment for reunification without exposing the people to excessive risk. Intelligence gathered by human agents (HUMINT) was vital to attaining the first goal. Classic police and counterinsurgency work, facilitated by the highly structured and standardized NLF network, helped crush the rebels' PAO.⁴ To achieve the second and third goals, the Army replaced a civilian

administration unable to act in unsecured areas. It took over the management of schools, clinics, road maintenance, the water supply, and so on. To help administer these functions, the Army divided Algeria into a “grid” of regions, sectors, and sub-sectors. At the lowest level, an infantry company controlled a few villages and a couple thousand inhabitants. The same soldiers who used shovels, first-aid kits, and schoolbooks reinforced security, administered the population, and fought the kabitas and local PAOs. Sustained contact created a strong personal bond between the people and “their” company. Once trust had been established, the company formed village self-defense units, called harkas, which worked with the French to seek out and destroy rebels.

Experience and knowledge contributed to success. On average, conscripted units stayed in Algeria for 28 months after their initial training; thus, the men became seasoned soldiers who understood rebel tactics. Each battalion also benefited from a hunter unit, often composed of harkis and former rebels, which tracked the local katibas and practiced guerrilla tactics against them.

The grid method was also applied to urban areas. Algiers, for example, was divided into sectors, with a neighborhood chief keeping watch on all buildings and city blocks in his sector. He was expected to identify all inhabitants and know why any were absent. If he did not, he was promptly accused of complicity with the NLF.

Simultaneously, the Army moved to stop the flow of external support to the rebels. It constructed a barrier that extended along the borders with Tunisia and Morocco, from the sea to the desert. With its electrified barbed-wire, minefields, radars, patrol routes for armored elements, and interdiction units stationed in posts offset from the border by a few kilometers, the barrier was intended not to sweep the area of insurgents, but to locate them quickly. The barrier acted like a fishnet that interdiction units could use for several hours at a time to intercept katiba arms convoys. It was so efficient that infiltration became suicidal, causing NLF guerrillas in Tunisia to deliberately abandon their comrades in Algeria.

Having denied the rebels safety and support, the Army, under Challe, further refined its infantry tactics. Intervention units were assigned to each region to conduct search and cordon operations with units that inhabited the grid. Except for some parachute units made up almost entirely of conscripts, these intervention units were generally professional regiments (Foreign Legion, Parachute, or Marines). In 1959, Challe grouped these regiments into a strategic reserve, which he

successively committed in mass operations across Algeria, beginning in the relatively quiet Oranie region and ending in the rebel strongholds of Kabylie and the Aures Mountains.

Intervention operations always began as routine cordon and search missions, but they were coordinated regionally and went on for weeks, even months at a time, thus preventing NLF guerrillas from waiting out the Army by hiding in caves or other safe places. Those who did hide fell prey to ambushes when they emerged to look for food and water. Within 2 years of the Challe Plan’s implementation, the guerrillas had lost all offensive capabilities and were effectively routed.

The Army also attacked from the inside. Special forces and secret services action units infiltrated guerrilla networks to misinform and mislead NLF leaders. In the most damaging of these operations, the Army fabricated a terrorist network that asked the NLF for support (weapons, ammunition, explosives, and money) from neighboring networks. The bogus group’s inactivity eventually aroused the suspicions of local chiefs, but when it did the imaginary group put out the word that it had been infiltrated by the French; it also claimed to have proof that the guerrillas in surrounding areas had been likewise infiltrated. The NLF chiefs in these surrounding areas promptly picked up some of their own people who, under torture, named accomplices. Rumors of a plot reached even the ears of Colonel Amirouche, the feared commander of the Kabylie Wilaya, who quickly found evidence of a yet deeper plot. He convinced other Wilaya commanders to proceed with bloody purges in their regions. Over the next several months, the NLF executed thousands of its own members. Recently recruited high school and university students bore the brunt of the violence; as urban intellectuals, they were already suspected by the NLF’s mostly rural, peasant base. The killings, of course, discouraged many sympathizers from joining the insurgency.

Legal Problems. In the first months of the war, the French applied peacetime law. In fact, there being no foreign aggression, the word “war” was never used. Any person arrested for any aggressive act or singled out as an insurgent was subject to a police investigation and potential judgment by a nonmilitary tribunal. This system failed. When the suspects were freed for lack of evidence and triumphantly returned to their towns, they immediately executed their accusers. Civil authorities were so incapable of performing their missions that they turned over their powers to the Army.

The military, however, also had problems administering the law. In 1957, a controversy erupted

in France over the Army's torture and summary execution of suspects, particularly during the Battle of Algiers. One general and several officers resigned to protest methods they considered contrary to military ethics, disgraceful to the Army's image, and, worst of all, counterproductive because they drove Muslims to the NLF. Recently, two generals who participated in the Battle of Algiers admitted to having resorted to these practices—the only method available they said—to combat the daily scourge of urban terrorism. Many other soldiers emphatically maintained they had fought within legal boundaries and with military honor. To this day, the controversy continues.

Consequences of the Algerian War

On disembarking in France, French Algerian émigrés realized they loved their country of birth and its Arab citizens more than the mother country, which few of them knew. Nonetheless, this valiant, proactive people had great success integrating into French society while still preserving group cohesion.

In Algeria, after 130 years of French colonial domination and 8 years of war, independence did not provide the happiness the people had yearned for. Leaders who had enjoyed the support of the NLF army in Tunisia stripped surviving insurgent chiefs and resistance forces of power. During the ensuing struggle for political control, the Algerian people endured a socialist dictatorship, a military dictatorship, border wars with Morocco, chronic rebellions by the Kabylie Berbers, economic crises, political assassinations, terrorism, and another civil war. According to UN data, in 1954, Algeria ranked 14th in the world in gross domestic product; in 2001, despite the oil boom in the Sahara, Algeria ranked 74th. Relations between France and its former colony have also been slow to normalize.

For the French Army, the end of the Algerian War was a terrible ordeal. After the 1961 coup in Algiers failed, a dozen prestigious regiments were disbanded and numerous highly decorated officers—many of them heroes of World War II and Indochina—were tried and sentenced to prison; others were forced to flee their homeland or to retire from active service. A number of military SAO members, including one colonel, were executed by firing squad. When chosen to preside over a court martial, one general loyal to De Gaulle took his own life to avoid standing in judgment of his peers.

For some time, the Army remained bitterly divided between the old French Algeria hardliners and those in the De Gaulle camp. Trust between the military and its civilian leaders was another casualty. The military has long harbored mistrust of the political class for changing its policies in the midst of war and for going back on its word and abandoning those Algerians who had united with the Army. Conversely, until recently a significant part of the public believed the Army capable of intervening in the democratic workings of political institutions, or even of organizing another military coup.

The Algerian War did have at least one benefit: Young officers now read the stories of their predecessors, and most daydream of being, at least once in their careers, commanding officers of hunter units or of isolated outposts, fighting with total initiative in *their* zone, against *their* enemy while competing for the hearts and minds of *their* people. This mindset enables them to adapt rapidly and effectively to stability or peacekeeping operations. Even so, the darker lessons learned from the Algerian War have been etched into their collective memory: Do not promise anything you yourself cannot provide; do not interfere in politics; and be prepared to withdraw with a clear conscience. **MR**

NOTES

1. The historical data in this article are drawn from the books of Yves Courrière. This article uses the term French Algerian to refer to French citizens who were born, raised, and lived in Algeria.

2. Among these were strong minorities of Italian, Spanish, Armenian, Jewish, and Greek immigrants. Nicknamed the "Pieds Noirs" (Black Feet), the French Algerians retained the pioneer spirit of the first colonists. Several thousand native-born Muslims, essentially Army veterans, also had French nationality. They made up a small number of the Algerian Muslim soldiers who had enlisted in the French Army during World War II and the War in Indochina.

3. The Berbers, the indigenous inhabitants of Maghreb, were present before the Arab conquest of the region. They make up the second largest ethnic group

in North Africa, have their own language and culture, and have always demanded administrative autonomy and respect for their rights.

4. Due to the centralized, pyramidal, symmetrical organization of the political administrative organization, it was not difficult to crack a local network. Each family knew the tax collector who came to request money every month, the tax collector had a contact in the logistic cell who knew his own chief, and this chief had a contact with a combat bombing cell and propaganda cell. If you broke one link, you could break the whole chain. The key factor was speed: Identify the network from the first piece of intelligence (often using physical pressure or torture) and then roll up the members before they could find out they had been betrayed.

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