

1969

## Algerian Terrorism

George E. Wales

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Wales, George E. (1969) "Algerian Terrorism," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 22 : No. 8 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol22/iss8/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

# ALGERIAN TERRORISM

A research paper prepared by

Lieutenant Commander George E. Wales, U.S. Navy

School of Naval Command and Staff

*In the past 20 years guerrilla warfare and its concomitants have received considerable attention and study. However, one aspect of the problem—terrorism—has not been adequately investigated and this can partially be attributed to the fact that the concept is alien and odious to most people holding Western values. It is nevertheless an integral part of wars of national liberation.*

*This article examines the use of terrorism as a political weapon in Algeria. In that operation the use of terror by the rebel forces was at first highly successful. The French Army finally resorted to torture to control terrorist activity, but in doing so they alienated the electorate in continental France. Thus the use of counterterror by the French produced a military success but a political defeat.*

## I—SPOKESMEN

Terror is a psychological weapon of unbelievable power. Before the bodies of those whose throats have been cut and the grimacing faces of the mutilated, all capacity for resistance lapses: the spring is broken.<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of M. Jacques Soustelle, Governor General of French Algeria in 1955. He had just returned from viewing the bodies of dozens of massacred European settlers, who had looked to him for the protection of their lives and property. This description of fatalism and despair dramatically portrays, all that those who would apply terror hope to achieve.

The theory and application of terror is not new. It can be found in the history of all cultures. Clausewitz, in his oft quoted book, defined war as an act of violence and further stated that violence is therefore the means to compel an opponent to fulfill our will. He also points out that in war, errors that proceed from a spirit of benevolence are the worst. He felt that to introduce into the philosophy of war a principle of moderation would be an absurdity.<sup>2</sup> He was, of course, speaking of the classical setpiece war as he knew it, not the wars of national liberation and terror tactics as we know them today. His thoughts remain valid in this new context, nonetheless.

Nechayev, a Russian nihilist, wrote in 1869 a startling document entitled

*Revolutionary Catechism* and in it specifically addressed the use of terror in a people's revolution. He felt that whenever a man is murdered, one's only concern should be with the question—In what way has his death profited the revolution? He indicated that one must first destroy those people whose existence is most inimical to the revolutionary organization; then violent and sudden death will put fear into the hearts of the government, break its will, and deprive it of its most energetic and intelligent agents.<sup>3</sup>

Trotsky proposed that the revolution requires the revolutionary class to attain its ends by all the methods at its disposal—if necessary by armed rising and by terrorism. Terror, he felt, could be very effective against a reactionary class enemy and intimidation could be a powerful weapon of policy. A victorious war, he suggested, destroys only an insignificant part of the conquered army, intimidating the remainder and breaking their will. He compares this with revolution which likewise kills individuals and intimidates thousands. Most significant, though, is his complete acceptance of terror. "The State of Terror of a revolutionary class can be condemned morally only by a man who as a principle rejects every form of violence whatsoever."<sup>4</sup> Lenin echoes, "We have never rejected terror in principle nor can we do so."<sup>5</sup>

More specific, however, was the advice given the Algerian rebels by the Tunisian underground weekly *Ez-Zitouna*, in the issue of 26 August 1956.<sup>6</sup> "My brothers, do not kill only . . . but mutilate your adversaries on the public highway . . . Pierce their eyes . . . cut off their arms . . . and hang them. Be certain that they will take to their heels like rats."<sup>7</sup>

For the purpose of this study, terror will be defined as a weapon of war directed at the individual. In this sense it is separate from sabotage, commando and guerrilla raids; words often used

synonomously in the press for terror. It is separate from these acts by the fact that these tactics are directed at economic and military targets, while terror, as defined above, is directed at the unarmed and unprotected individuals within a target population. Terror is a personal thing, a state of mind, and a versatile weapon of unconventional warfare.

## II—THE PARTICIPANTS

A study of the Algerian Revolution and the use of terror and counterterror is revealing—revealing in the sense that this form of warfare was not only widely used in Algeria but in European France as well. It occurred at a time in history when the hard lessons of guerrilla warfare and the use of terror were well known, particularly to the French, who had just completed almost 9 years of fighting in Indochina and who had experienced limited terrorism in Tunisia and Morocco. It also reveals the diverse source from which terror may spring and the varied reactions of segments of the civilian, military, and government communities.

**The Beginning.** The nationalist movement in Algeria had been growing steadily since the end of World War II. The progress of the Allied forces across the northern coast of Africa had nourished the hopes of nationalists throughout the country. Not only did the liberation free them from the harsh control of Vichy France, but it encouraged them to be more active in their quest for self-government.

Overt demonstrations of this desire became apparent in what is generally considered to be the birth of Algerian nationalism during a celebration in Setif in 1945. A mass rally, organized to celebrate the signing of the German surrender, turned into a massacre that proved to be the first step on a long road of strife and, eventually, revolution.

## 28 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

The celebration, reviewed and approved by the Prefect, brought thousands of Moslems to the city. A holiday atmosphere prevailed as the crowds thronged through the streets to listen to speeches and watch the ceremonies. Some of the participants carried the red, white, and green Algerian Tricolor. Across them were written inscriptions such as: "Long Live Independent Algeria" and "Down with colonialism."<sup>1</sup>

The police, always alert to trouble from the Moslems, attempted to remove these banners from the demonstrators. Shots were fired, and a riot ensued; a riot of such magnitude that accurate casualty figures have never been fully established. More sensational reports listed 30,000 casualties. *Stars and Stripes* reported 10,000, and the official French Government report listed approximately 4,000.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the actual figures, the French police and military moved in with unrestrained force. The air force flew more than 300 sorties a day for 10 days, and a French cruiser shelled the medina of Bougie and created tremendous damage and loss of life. This massive suppression of the Moslems bought the French 9 years of time but did not quench the Moslem yearning for independence.

The Algerian Revolution erupted with full force on 1 November 1954. It was heralded by a series of raids and sabotage throughout the country and a proclamation by the newly formed Front de Liberation National, or FLN, declaring its purpose to establish an independent Algeria completely free from French rule.<sup>3</sup>

**The Nationalists.** The primary combatants in the revolution were the FLN, their military arm, the ALN (Armee de Liberation Nationale), and the French Army. The FLN was born of the dissension between the two nationalistic parties existing just prior to the outbreak of hostilities on 1 November 1954. It attracted those who were tired of

factional political hickering and favored direct action. This hard core of professional revolutionaries included former NCO's from Algerian regiments of the French Army of whom Ben Bella and Krim Belhacem are perhaps the best known. It included few recognized intellectuals or politicians and no religious fanatics. Although an important unifying factor, Islam had little to do with their motives. In addition, none of the revolutionaries were well educated or had any kind of experience which would fit them for the task of governing and administering a country of 10 million people. They were essentially fighters, with a limited political outlook. Complete independence was their aim, and they were unwilling to accept any intermediate phases of gradual integration or assimilation. They would not tolerate any form of collaboration with the French or any negotiation that did not start with the acceptance by France of the principles of full independence.<sup>4</sup> They came from the great mass of able-bodied Algerian men whose contact with France had been through military service or through migrant work in French industrial cities. They had seen the benefits and fruits of a modern society, but had been unable to share in these rewards.

While the FLN/ALN was the dominant nationalist party, they did have a serious and troublesome rival in the MNA (Mouvement Nationale Algerien). This group represented the followers of longtime nationalist Messali Hadj, who had actively sought an independent Algeria for many years and felt himself heir apparent to the leadership of any nationalistic movement.<sup>5</sup>

**The Army.** The French Army was, at the time, certainly one of the world's most experienced forces in active counter-guerrilla warfare, having just concluded 9 years of hostilities in Indochina. In November of 1954 there were approximately 40,000 regular troops

stationed in Algeria, most of whom had seen duty in the Far East and had experienced guerrilla warfare firsthand.

The regulars were the backbone of the forces which were to grow to over 400,000 before the end of the crisis. They had been welded through years of hardship and neglect into a "Band of Brothers" whose hanner was the honor of France.<sup>6</sup> They were convinced their heritage of defeat for the past two decades was the work of the French politicians. They believed that the army epitomized all the best national virtues and simultaneously believed that the army represented the French people.<sup>7</sup>

Isolated from Paris and the other forces, they had watched France's colonial empire crumble first in Madagascar, then Tunis, Morocco, and finally in French Indochina. As one colonel was reported to have said, "I'm fed up with hauling down the flag."<sup>8</sup>

Essentially, the army was dedicated to doing what was "best" for France, regardless of what the government might say. It distrusted the politicians and was committed to retaining Algeria as a part of France.

**The Europeans.** Deeply involved in the struggle, as in any war of national revolution, were the civilian population of Europeans and Moslems. The great majority of European settlers in Algeria were city dwellers. These included a substantial middle class of teachers, lawyers, physicians, and civil servants plus a small top-level community of large landowners, businessmen, and senior civil officials. But by far, the majority of the Europeans were comprised of semiskilled workers, shop-owners, taxi drivers, and retail help.<sup>9</sup>

To use the word "European" is somewhat misleading. Only 11 percent of these Europeans had been born in Europe; the remainder had been born in Algeria of families who, while of European stock, had been firmly settled in Algeria for four of five generations.<sup>10</sup>

Algeria was their country, and they were fiercely resentful of any claim of equal treatment by or on behalf of the Moslem population. They had for the last century suppressed every move to provide even a semblance of equal justice to the Moslem community.<sup>11</sup> They were, quite naturally, opposed to any nationalist movement which challenged their privileged position. They were staunchly pro-French Algeria and pro-army, and were violently opposed to the FLN, the MNA, or any change in Paris policy which might be interpreted as a softening toward the insurgents.

**The Moslems.** Ten million Moslems, by sheer numbers, should have played a major role in the revolution, but they were more involved in a struggle for survival than for political independence. They were caught in the middle ground between the opposing forces of the colonials and the active nationalists. As a result, they became the primary target of the terrorist campaigns that were waged to secure their support.

They were predominantly Berbers, a tribe that was unrelated to the Arabs of the countries further to the east. They were descendants of the Numids, who once had ruled all of North Africa. There was an entirely spoken tradition, as their language had no alphabet and no written history. They were a tough, austere, individualistic race that was intensely resentful of imposed authority and had no real concept of nor interest in politics.<sup>12</sup> They shared a long, sad history of conquerors which culminated with the arrival of the French in 1830.

Survival had become the Moslems' most urgent problem. Fertile land was almost nonexistent, having been largely appropriated by the French. The population, on the other hand, was growing at a phenomenal rate, and the per capita income was only one-third that of the European community. In order to survive, great numbers of Moslem men migrated to the industrial cities of

France to seek work or even unemployment compensation which was, in some instances, comparable to wages paid in Algeria. In Paris, Metz, and Lyons they lived in squalor to save enough to send a small sum home every month. It is significant that the mountain area of Algeria which provided most of these migrant workers was also a primary source for the revolutionary movement promoted by the FLN.<sup>13</sup>

There was also a small middle class society made up of Moslems who had adopted French tastes and customs and attended French Schools and who relied on French dominance for their well-being.

The situation in Algeria then was highly volatile, with major segments of the population determined to enforce their will on the remainder. The nationalists were committed to the elimination of French rule. The army and European settlers were just as determined to smash the nationalists without regard to the fluctuating policy of Paris. In the middle stood the vast bulk of the oppressed Moslem population being pressured from both sides to provide support for both movements.

### III—ORGANIZATION

Terror played a major role in each of these camps. Each group employed terror tactics in different ways to achieve its objectives.

Terrorist organizations are not known for their complete files and orderly records, but in Algeria captured documents and firsthand reports reveal the structure of the FLN terrorist organization in Algiers. They allow a greater appreciation of the size and complexity of a fully developed terrorist group.

The FLN's Council for the Zone of Algiers had complete authority within the party for all activities in Algiers. It consisted of a political-military leader who had a political assistant, military assistant, and an assistant for external

liaison and intelligence. The bomb-throwing network was responsible directly to the zonal council. This group was carefully kept apart from other elements of the political-military structure. It was subdivided into a number of distinct and compartmented three-man cells. They communicated to superiors and subordinates through an intricate network of message drops. In the city of Algiers in 1956 this group alone comprised approximately 4,500 unarmed persons and 1,200 armed agents.<sup>1</sup> This number excludes a special police force of the ALN designed to carry out the specific executions required by the judiciary of the FLN.<sup>2</sup>

This highly organized group was fully operational 18 months after the commencement of open warfare. It was self-sustaining in that it provided its own explosive manufacturing facilities and recruitment. In the early phases of the war, recruits were found readily among politically active Moslems. Later, an active program was established which intimidated the uncommitted into making financial contributions and eventually taking part in direct terrorist activities.<sup>3</sup> Once a recruit became directly involved in a terrorist murder or mutilation, he had little choice but to cooperate.

**The Terrorist.** Contrary to what is generally assumed, the terrorist does not look upon his actions as criminal. Rather he considers himself a soldier and therefore not morally responsible for his actions. He looks upon his assignments as a duty to be performed and carries out his responsibilities without personal involvement within the framework of his organization.<sup>4</sup>

One member of the ALN, when asked by a correspondent what he did before becoming active in the field forces of the ALN, replied frankly, "I was a bombthrower." When the correspondent challenged that grenades had killed and maimed hundreds of innocent

people, the soldier replied, "I threw grenades under orders, and always in places where there were soldiers and men who had hurt our people."<sup>5</sup>

Yassif Saadi, the FLN's chief of the Algerian sector, commented after his capture on the bombings that had occurred under his direction. He said, "I had bombs planted in the cities because I didn't have planes to transport them. They caused fewer victims than the artillery and air bombardments of our mountain villages. I'm in a war, you cannot blame me."<sup>6</sup>

#### IV—METHODS OF OPERATION

The goal of the Algerian terrorists of the FLN was the eventual control of the government, and they employed a variety of tools in their efforts to achieve this goal. Rebellion is an expensive undertaking, and the most obvious immediate FLN need was funds to purchase arms and other supplies. They were able to gain these monies by taxing the inhabitants of areas under their control. The tribes in the hills and the Moslems of the cities were forced to contribute through the use of threats and occasional acts of reprisal.<sup>1</sup> The FLN's organization extended to continental France, where Algerian immigrants were similarly taxed. One French estimate placed the contribution of Algerian immigrants in France at 500 million francs a month during 1957.<sup>2</sup>

Extortion was also widely used by the FLN, and in the later stages of the war the Secret Army Organization also obtained funds in both Algeria and France by this method.<sup>3</sup> A good illustration of its use is to be found in a note received by a Jewish shopkeeper in Algiers.

Sir:

If on Wednesday you do not hand us the sum of two million francs, which will be deposited in the hall of the building situated at

1, Rue D'Isly, before 1745 hours near the staircase at the end near the cupboard, your daughter will be abducted and serve as a mistress for the Army of Liberation.<sup>4</sup>

One of the major objectives of the FLN was destroying the confidence of the people in police protection. Only when the populace felt that they had no effective protection would they either flee or accede to the demands of the FLN. Such an atmosphere would also lead to the flight of business capital from the country and the undermining of the Algerian economy.<sup>5</sup> This was partly accomplished by a large number of murders and public bombings, neither of which the police were able to prevent.

The FLN also attempted briefly to cripple the Algerian economy by eliminating the consumption of tobacco. An individual regional leader decreed that any person caught smoking would have his nose cut off by the terrorists of the FLN, but the policy proved to be unworkable and damaging to the FLN cause.<sup>6</sup>

The FLN also used terror as a political weapon. They attacked the rival nationalist leaders of the MNA who still took part in the colonial administration. The victims were first warned by letters bearing the FLN letterhead and crest and ordered to cease all political activity not in conformity with FLN objectives. Those who persisted were assassinated, and the execution order with an FLN letterhead and crest was left on the victim.<sup>7</sup> In Algeria the FLN was successful in its battle with the MNA and all but eliminated it, but in France the struggle continued. It was estimated that from October 1956 until October 1957 over 550 Algerian Moslems were killed and over 2,200 wounded by the rival terrorist organizations. On the average, two Algerians a day were killed in Paris alone. Moslem racketeers and

## 32 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

gangsters stepped into the conflict, practicing extortion under the guise of nationalism.<sup>8</sup>

The struggle for control of the nationalist movement reached a climax when over 300 villagers of the small village of Kabylia, accused of supporting the MNA, were herded together in the village of Kasha Mehta and knifed or shot to death by the FLN.<sup>9</sup> Similar incidents occurred on other occasions, and it has been claimed that, while not successful in its battle with the FLN, for several months the MNA caused more casualties to the FLN than did the French Army.<sup>10</sup>

A good example of the FLN's use of political terror occurred prior to an election scheduled in 1956. Several weeks preceding the election the FLN published the following proclamation:

ELECTION FOR THE RENEWAL  
OF THE  
FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
Algerian People!

The FLN, assuming once again the responsibilities before God, before men, and before history, has decreed:

1. Active abstention . . .
2. The execution of all candidates, to whatever party they may belong.
3. The abduction and the slitting of the throats of all electoral agents.
4. The resignation of all representatives in office. These, from deputy to simple djemma member, are required to resign before January 1, 1956. All representatives without any exception who refuse to resign will be considered traitors to the fatherland and killed without judgment. . . . The

FLN requests all its militants and sympathizers to procure a weapon and to proceed with direct action. Each patriot will consider it his duty to kill a traitor.<sup>11</sup>

On 8 December, the day following the proclamation, the Algerian Assembly voted to postpone the election, and the FLN saluted the "cascade of resignations."<sup>12</sup>

The FLN also used terror to provide vital support for their insurgent units. The populace was forced to provide recruits, intelligence, and sanctuary to the FLN and to deny these to the French. Occasionally the insurgents would relieve the pressure on one of their field units by a terror campaign designed to draw enemy forces away from the area of operations.

To unnerve the European colonials, the FLN used in conjunction with terror a very effective psychological device—a simple slogan written on a piece of paper was inserted in the morning newspaper or slipped under a door. The slogan said, "The suitcase of the coffin," and it brought home to the colonial that he had not escaped the notice of the rebels.<sup>13</sup>

Indiscriminate bombings were also used by the FLN to drive uncommitted Moslems into active participation on the side of the FLN. These bombings were carried out against the colonials and provoked reprisals upon the Moslem population. These reprisals alienated the French from the Moslems and created public support for the FLN.<sup>14</sup>

The FLN also used bold and daring assassinations as a tool of propaganda. It conducted a widely reported raid on a beach 50 miles west of Algiers in 1960, machinegunning some 50 bathers, killing 14. The generally accepted motive was to counter the army propaganda being issued at the time that the FLN was no longer an effective force.<sup>15</sup>

In conducting their terror campaign and in employing the tools described



above, the FLN was careful to apply terror with selectivity. Although the Moslem population was one of the objects of terrorist activity, it was never harassed to the point where its hatred of the insurgents overcame its primal instinct of self-preservation. The FLN was not so discriminating against the French, but its campaign nevertheless had dramatic emotional implications in Paris, where the ultimate decisions would be made concerning the outcome of the war. "... once the primal instinct of self-preservation has been aroused, the psychological battle was won by the rebels. The French had another occasion to measure the inefficiency of their promises to reform, justice and greater well being."<sup>16</sup>

The settlers in Algeria were thoroughly unnerved by the terrorist offensive of 1956-1957, but they were never on the point of surrendering. In itself, the dramatic nature of the terrorist challenge insured dramatic response to the call for counteraction.

## V—RESPONSE

Faced with an insurrection and a well-organized and determined terror campaign, how did France respond?

The immediate reaction of French politicians was varied and somewhat confused. There was an initial attempt to minimize the seriousness of the events by referring to the rebels as outlaws or criminals acting on their own. When reports stated that the rebels were receiving local support from the population, this was blamed on intimidation.

High-level attention was shortly brought to bear on the Algerian problem. Paris commissioned a new Governor General, M. Jacques Soustelle, to handle Algerian affairs. He arrived a month after the commencement of hostilities, bearing an increased appropriation for economic development.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after the Soustelle takeover,

in January 1955, a State of Emergency bill was enacted in the Assembly which permitted stringent controls to be enforced on the population. The bill included provisions for government control of the movement of all persons within designated areas. Also, protection and security zones could be created in which special regulations could be imposed on the inhabitants. Authorities were given the right to expel troublemakers from the area. Forced residence and authorized night searches became part of the final version of the law.<sup>2</sup>

In May, at a plenary session of the Algerian Federation of Mayors, a resolution was voted that called for "an unequivocal reassertion" of French authority plus a measure asking the "supreme penalty" for all persons convicted of terrorist activities.<sup>3</sup> Before adjourning for the summer, the National Assembly extended the State of Emergency Act until mid-1956. Ultimately, the Governor General gave complete power to the army for the suppression of terror and the reassertion of law and order in Algiers.<sup>4</sup>

The military forces garrisoned in Algeria were also caught off guard by the sudden onset of widespread attacks and violence. Initial feeling was that they were faced with another tribal uprising that could have serious implications if allowed to proceed unchecked. To counter these activities, immediate steps were taken to augment the 40,000 regulars already in Algeria with an additional three battalions of paratroopers from France. Regular operations were mounted in the Aures and Kabylia Mountains, the focal points of the initial disturbances. These were generally standard movements and followed the political guidance of "firm sanctions but no reprisals."<sup>5</sup> They paralleled the police efforts of arresting known political agitators and extremists. The bulk of the forces was deployed in the field engaging the guerrilla forces of the ALN.

In the fall of 1955 terrorist and

## 34 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

guerrilla activity had increased despite efforts to suppress it, and the military became increasingly frustrated. This made it painfully obvious that the uprising had grown to revolutionary proportions, and a call was placed for more troops until eventually 400,000 were involved.

The year 1956 saw a hardening of political guidance which resulted in increased and less restrained military actions. It had become increasingly apparent that pure military efforts were not enough, and the Army responded with the introduction of a civic action program. This effort located officers in remote villages in an attempt to improve their image and personify the government's concern for the people's well-being. Such officers on occasion had sole responsibility for up to 10,000 people, and some had to resort to their own personal funds to finance projects for their districts.

Supplementing these individual officers were special civic action teams of various skills and talents ranging from farmers to physicians. These groups traveled through the countryside, instructing and assisting the local inhabitants.

Psychological warfare was also introduced by the Army. Convinced at a result of their experiences in Indochina that a strong program of this nature was essential, they formed the 5th Bureau which instituted "brainwashing" and other techniques and did enjoy some success in reorienting captured insurgents to the government's side.

By early 1957 the situation had deteriorated badly and was beyond the ability of even the military-assisted civic authorities to control. In Algeria alone, over 13,000 civilians had lost their lives to terrorist activities since the outbreak of hostilities in late 1954. This caused the Governor General, M. Robert Lacoste, to give the army full administrative and political control of Algiers by administrative decree.<sup>6</sup>

The army committed itself totally to the elimination of terrorist activities in Algiers. Four regiments of paratroopers were recalled from normal operations and placed under the command of General Massu, a favorite of the colonials. He began his no-holds-barred campaign to clean up Algiers in March and finished it in November 1957 with the arrest of the last sectional leader.<sup>7</sup>

Normal police methods had obviously been inadequate. General Massu adopted a combination of military and police methods and applied them in massive quantities. All citizens were registered and issued work, food, and travel permits. An intelligence network was established. It included an informer in every house, on every block, and in every place of employment. With this information base, the army could put its hands on anyone it wanted within a matter of minutes. Roadblocks, checkpoints, and curfews limited all but essential intercourse between sectors of the city.

The "paras" could and did arrest anyone on unamed offenses and imprison them for unlimited periods of time.<sup>8</sup> It was widely reported, and there is little doubt, that they used third degree and torture to extract intelligence from uncooperative suspects.<sup>9</sup>

Quick response squads were on duty continuously to immediately prosecute any leads or intelligence gained by the brutal interrogation methods. Instances were recorded where couriers, having been caught on their way to a rendezvous, revealed their information and were replaced by disguised police to complete the meeting and arrest and interrogate another link in the organization.

Support of the population and the intelligence they provided, speed, surprise, and sudden concentration of forces were the weapons General Massu used to smash the terrorists of Algiers.

In the remainder of Algeria, intermittent terror and guerrilla warfare were

carried out by the A.L.N and opposed by the army, but most observers agree that the military situation was well in the hands of the French by May 1958.<sup>10</sup>

In the civilian community, hatred and distrust between the Moslems and Europeans increased. As terror tactics expanded, more and more persons began to carry sidearms.

In April of 1955 a group of European farmers in the Redj, a district near Mila, banded together and formed a small group of crop watchers for their mutual self-protection. M. Soustelle, the Governor General, lashed out at this assumption of state power with the statement, "Under no circumstances will illegal or semi-legal groups destined, in the view of their sponsors, to fight terrorism be tolerated. Terrorism cannot be eliminated by methods tending to supplant the public powers . . ." <sup>11</sup> He feared, that should some turn of events transform this group of undisciplined civilians into a mob, they could cause more problems than already existed. In spite of his warnings, by the summer of 1956 several clashes of Europeans and Moslems had occurred, and the recruitment of a local militia was authorized, a force known as the Groupes Militaire de Protection Rurale.

Many European civilians packed up their belongings and left Algeria to start life elsewhere. The ultimatum, "The suitcase or the coffin," left little alternative for the average colonial citizen. If he could, he left.<sup>12</sup>

The extremists in the European community formed a small clandestine self-defense force romantically called the Red Hand. This group, according to one author, operated with the collusion of the French Secret Service.<sup>13</sup> It was originally a loose association of desperate colonists with a common purpose; to preserve French rule in the territories of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. It was active as early as 1952.

Its area of operations extended into two continents, both Africa and

Europe. Its gunmen stalked and eliminated North African rebels and Europeans who sympathized with the nationalists. They had a degree of success, applying terror directly to European arms suppliers who were providing arms for the rebel forces of the nationalists. They were able to convince some that business with the nationalists was not in their long-range best interests. The French Government was also conducting work in a parallel vein, so the exact effect of the Red Hand cannot be accurately assessed.

Toward the latter part of the war in the early 1960's, the Red Hand directed its efforts toward the overthrow of De Gaulle's Fifth Republic which had, by then, committed itself to the establishment of an independent Algeria and in doing so "betrayed the colonists." In this latter endeavor it joined hands with the newly formed terrorist group, the Secret Army Organization, or the famed OAS.

The goal of the OAS was to impose the will of the colonists on Paris and to leave the army free to finish its war with the FLN.<sup>14</sup> They portrayed themselves as loyal Frenchmen, working to preserve Algeria for France even though the Fifth Republic refused to do so. They sought to give the nationalist movement the complexion of a Communist conspiracy and thus profit from the emotional response this would produce. This, they hoped, would force De Gaulle to change his policy, suppress the nationalists, and preclude any agreement with the FLN.

OAS tactics were solidly based on terror. OAS strategy was founded on psychological and subversive warfare principles hammered out by a group of ex-military men, several of whom had considerable experience in the field in Indochina and Algeria. The OAS leaders believed that a revolutionary movement, given enough popular support, could dislocate established authority and gain its overthrow by terrorism, sabotage,

## 36 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

and mass demonstrations. Accordingly, the OAS formed its own terrorist, psychological, and political sections modeled largely on the FLN pattern.<sup>15</sup> Its method was to make normal government impossible for De Gaulle's Governor General in Algeria.

OAS terrorism was directed mainly against government supporters and members of the police and armed forces. Starting with an average of 14 terrorist acts a day, this figure rose to about 41 daily by the end of 1961. In the month of May 1961, for instance, in Algeria and France there were 222 plastic bomb attacks, while in June there were 229.<sup>16</sup>

The continuing aim of the OAS was to provoke communal riots on such a scale that the French Army would have to intervene on the side of the Europeans. This they thought, would make the proposed cease-fire impossible.<sup>17</sup> The FLN—not so much from humanitarian reasons, as in its own best interests—saw through this effort and kept a firm grip on the Moslem community, avoiding massive retaliation. This campaign by the OAS brought about a change of attitude in the army which was now prepared to shoot Frenchmen, if necessary.<sup>18</sup>

Frustrated in its efforts, the OAS adopted even more extreme measures, a policy of scorched earth, so that when the Moslems took over they would have little of value left. Many schools and buildings, sorely needed in an emerging country, were burned in this campaign.<sup>19</sup>

The French Government was not unresponsive to these violent challenges to its authority. One of the reported responses had a sinister character beyond that normally found in a democratic government's reaction to a threat. This took the form of a group of assassins called the Barhouzes, the bearded ones. They were, according to one author, "a special force loyal to the person of Charles de Gaulle."<sup>20</sup> Their

origin, he feels, dated back to the days of 1940. This group reportedly was augmented in Algeria by a large number of Vietnamese, among them killers from the Bande Noire, specialists in torturing Vietnamese prisoners. Their mission in Algeria was to eliminate the OAS.<sup>21</sup>

At the trial of General Salan, a figurehead of the OAS, the subject of the Barhouzes was addressed. The Governor General, M. Morin, denied their existence, and no one in authority ever confirmed it. Yet, to quote Roland Gaucher, author of *Les Terroristes*, "Today, the role of the Barhouzes is no longer contested by anyone."<sup>22</sup>

Their entry into the Algerian scene was a major psychological error; the mere existence of such an organization, sponsored by a head of state, produced a severe shock for those who held an image of France as the birthplace of Western virtues. As a result, they were hunted by the civilian population as well as the OAS and received no sanctuary. Their contingent of Bande Noire Vietnamese caused them to be easily identified, and they were relentlessly pursued. They eventually withdrew after suffering many serious losses.<sup>23</sup>

A democratic society, regardless of its motives or provocations, must be able to face the scrutiny of its people concerning the methods it adopts to achieve its goals. When the antiterrorist methods used by the army in the battle of Algeria began to seep into France in 1957, rumors and allegations flew, charging the army with indulging in torture and deliberate brutality to intimidate prisoners.<sup>24</sup>

Two major opinion-making groups were formed in France. They placed increasing attention on the excesses allegedly used by the army and, by implication, the government. These groups were the intellectuals and the clergy, both of whom launched an eloquent and united attack on the army's ideology, sense of mission, and the moral justification for its actions in

Algeria. The intellectuals denounced the army's explanation for its actions in Algeria in a manifesto entitled "Declaration of the Rights of Refusing to Serve in the Algerian War."<sup>25</sup> This declaration was signed by 121 writers, artists, and teachers. It was widely circulated and gave the army reason to be concerned of the intellectuals' influence, and it put increasing pressure on De Gaulle to end the war.

The clergy, acting on a letter sent by Catholic priests serving in Algeria, protested the torture of Moslem suspects by young, susceptible conscripts, warning that the war was corrupting the souls of young French recruits. The College of Bishops, Archbishops, and Cardinals then condemned these practices and actively encouraged disobedience on the part of those ordered to perform such inhuman outrages. A Congress of Protestant Clergymen announced support of conscientious objectors.<sup>26</sup>

The government suppressed a book written by several Moslems who had been subjected to torture and by its suppression stirred the world press. The *Manchester Guardian* said, "The confiscation of the book can only confirm the allegations it contains. The French Government has only itself to blame if these allegations are believed abroad. It is acting as though it were true and more discreditable still, as though it wished to hush them up."<sup>27</sup> The *London Observer* said, "Only a few days ago M. Debre, the French Prime Minister, was appealing to his Western Allies to understand and support French Policy in Algeria. If he is asking us to support a policy which requires the use of torture to enforce it, can he really be surprised when we refuse?"<sup>28</sup>

Mme. Simone De Beauvoir, the noted author, took up the torch and rushed into print the vivid story of a young and attractive Moslem girl of 22 who had been captured and tortured by the "paras." It explained in detail the

excruciating and degenerate tortures she had endured.<sup>29</sup>

This combined effort did much to cause the Fifth Republic to decide that the sooner the war was ended the better. What was accomplished by all this terror? Was it worth the effort and the terrible cost in human life and property? A few brief figures may give an indication of the suffering over the 7½ years of the war. Its magnitude can often be overlooked, with the small daily totals in the newspapers and periodicals. There were 42,090 acts of terrorism recorded during the course of the war. As a result, there were 10,704 Europeans and 43,248 Moslems either killed or wounded. It was also estimated that approximately 4,300 Algerian Moslems were killed in France and an additional 9,000 wounded.<sup>30</sup>

Most observers agree that the use of terror did serve the purposes of the insurgents and provided them the support of the people upon whom the success of their cause depended. On the other hand, counterterror used by the forces of authority did not, and in the long run it was actually counterproductive. Algiers best illustrates this point. Although the terrorist activity was virtually eliminated there, the methods employed drew such heavy condemnation from the world that they caused serious damage to the government and alienation of the neutral population in Algeria.

## VI—SUMMARY

An attempt has been made to investigate the terror campaign in Algeria and to review the response of France to this facet of unconventional warfare.

The initial decision to employ terrorism is the deliberate choice of the insurgent's political and military leadership. It can be commenced or discontinued on command. The FLN's choice of terrorism was dictated by the advantages such a campaign would and did yield.

## 38 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

From the FLN standpoint, terror was most certainly efficient. With a small number of dedicated personnel, the FLN succeeded in intimidating an entire population and disrupting the political scene to the point where normal government was impossible.

Terror also suited the FLN's purposes by its versatility. The application of terror swelled its own ranks, then protected and provided them with intelligence. It filled their coffers and eliminated their opposition, all the while creating a psychological climate conducive to their operations. Brian Crozier, author of *The Rebels*, put it most succinctly when he said, "Terror is the natural weapon of determined men with small resources, fighting against a superior force."<sup>1</sup>

The French response was one of initial bewilderment and refusal to face reality. The politicians made statements and resolutions and eventually enacted a bill authorizing special measures to be taken in areas designated as being in a state of emergency. When it became obvious that this bill was unenforceable with the small number of police available, they eventually turned over full control of the government to the army. The army responded by pursuing an elusive and fleeing enemy in the mountains, leaving the population without protection.

To combat terror, France resorted to counterterror and allowed the army to make its own decisions in Algeria. While this method is the natural one and was without question most effective in the short-run battle of Algiers, it was self-defeating. Once the army's methods became known, an outraged public demanded such methods cease. France was no longer able to point to Nazi atrocities with impunity. It was negative public opinion that contributed in the long run to the political decision to end the conflict on the insurgents' terms.

The leaders of public opinion against the counterterror program were the

intellectuals. They very effectively challenged the right of the French Government to violate human freedoms even in a struggle for its own existence. This dialogue made sensational press material as has been demonstrated in the United States brutalities allegedly committed by U.S. or Allied forces usually receive expanded and outraged coverage where as the same methods by insurgents receive minor notice. Geoffrey Boeca, author of *The Secret Army*, put this problem very well when he stated, "When violence answers violence in a growing frenzy that makes the simple language of reason impossible, the role of the intellectuals cannot be, as we read every day, to excuse from a distance one of the violences and condemn the other."<sup>2</sup> The responsible press is not immune from this criticism and must exercise similar judgment.

Terror was also the weapon chosen by a limited number of the civilian and military communities when they formed the Red Hand and the OAS. Whatever they contributed to the maintenance of a French Algeria was offset by the countereffects on the Moslem community. The Moslems, witnessing their methods, were repelled and joined the nationalists to fight against such repression.

It might appear that terror is profitable if used only by the insurgents and self-defeating if used by the forces of order. What then can a democratic society do to preserve its principles and still engage in a battle for its very existence?

## VII—CONCLUSIONS

In a democracy such as France, the government derives its authority from the people. Its whole purpose is to serve the people under the guidelines of its constitution. To violate the constitution and its guarantees of individual freedom, if only for one person, is to violate the freedom of all men living under that

government and invalidates the right of that body to govern.

Therefore, a democratic government cannot authorize, nor even tacitly permit, the use of torture, unlawful arrest or imprisonment to combat terror as Colonel Trinquier proposes in his book. Colonel Trinquier was a leader in the army's struggle to suppress terrorism during the battle of Algiers. In his book relating this experience, he states that following the capture of a terrorist he must be interrogated immediately with ". . . no lawyer present for such an interrogation. If the prisoner gives the information requested, the examination is quickly terminated; if not, specialists must force his secret from him. Then, as a soldier he must face the suffering, and perhaps the death, he has heretofore managed to avoid."<sup>1</sup>

It is hopelessly optimistic to consider a movement so dedicated to their cause that they will resort to armed force and yet prohibit terrorism as a method of achieving their objectives, particularly after seeing the success terrorism has achieved in other wars of national liberation. Therefore, a democracy must be prepared to combat terrorism rationally and effectively.

The events in Algeria dramatically displayed the power of a well-organized terror campaign. It also illustrated the extensive measures necessary to combat and suppress terrorism, once it has gained a foothold. The cornerstone of terrorism is intimidation and will work equally well for the schoolyard bully or a nation building a war machine in the balance of power race.

Terrorism is a natural, efficient, and versatile weapon in the hands of insurgents. Its efficiency lies in the fact that it requires no buildup of weapons, material, and manpower as do more conventional methods of waging war. It can start with one determined man equipped with a razor and end with the intimidation of hundreds. Algeria illustrated this clearly. A relatively small

organization eventually intimidated an entire population and made the orderly business of government impossible. Terror's versatility is grounded in its power over people; people who control all facets of the revolutionaries' objectives.

Unlike conventional warfare, which pits armed forces openly against one another in the field, terrorism operates totally submerged within its target population. It brings the war directly to an individual's doorstep where he must fight his own battle for survival against an unseen, omnipresent enemy. The victim has only two choices; he can refuse to cooperate and face the dire consequences virtually alone or surrender and no longer oppose the objectives of the terrorists. The fact that Algiers was indeed a battleground was not recognized by the French authorities until the terrorists had unquestionably gained the upper hand.

As effective as it is, the insurgent cannot use terror recklessly. It is not an all-powerful, unbeatable weapon, as the FLN found out. A most critical aspect of successful terrorism appears to be tight, rational control. It was the sharp rise of terrorist acts in Algiers that caused the government to declare martial law and for the first time directly confront the terrorist with adequate force on his own grounds.

For the insurgent, this avoidance of excess must carry over in the size of his organization. Large size, of necessity, complicates command and control, increases the financial and material needs for its operations, and thus makes it increasingly vulnerable to excesses, infiltration, and compromise. A small, properly structured terrorist organization, opposed by established police methods, can achieve its objectives by a tightly controlled, centrally directed campaign against influential and strategically located individuals within the established government, business, and military elites. Maintained at this level,

## 40 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

the insurgent can exercise his control for an unlimited amount of time.

Massive executions and bombings of public places often dilute the advantageous effects of special group intimidation and create a strong demand for massive countermeasures from the peripheral citizens who had previously been relatively unthreatened as mere observers of selected terrorism. Such a response works counter to the terrorists objectives and is damaging in the long run to the insurgents' cause if it provokes an increased application of force as was the case in Algiers.

When permitted, the army waged an effective and, with one exception, sound and defensible campaign against the terrorists. They recognized Algiers for what it was, a battleground. They then methodically applied all the accepted principles of warfare to the unusual environment, and they won. This placed a heavy burden on the population but resulted in no major outcry except against the use of torture.

Although such brutal methods were used by the army on a small scale, they soon created a worldwide negative reaction, resulting in international condemnation of French methods. The proponents of torture argue that if such methods remain limited and clandestine they will be of unlimited value. It is also argued that the structure of the FLN would not have been so readily detected and destroyed without such action and that the time gained saved many hundreds of innocent lives. The use of torture, nonetheless, cannot be authorized. This will undoubtedly slow but not stop the apprehension and destruction of the terrorist network, but it is a price that must be paid.

Once a terrorist campaign has commenced, it tends to spawn terrorist opposition groups such as the Red Hand and the OAS. These fringe group activists will feel perfectly justified in using

terror as a weapon, using the "eye for an eye" philosophy. Their methods will be similar, if not identical, to those of the original terrorists and their motive sometimes difficult to distinguish from those of prior terrorist activities. Bombings are a case in point. The FLN had utilized public bombings to destroy business confidence and discourage communications between the Moslems and Europeans. The OAS, on the other hand, used the same method to incite reprisals between the same groups and hopefully commit the army on the side of the colonials. The forces of authority will have to be particularly alert to detect these subtle changes and identify the entry of another terrorist organization into the battle.

The events of Algeria demonstrated that terrorism is a virulent virus able, in the appropriate environment, to infect any host, friend or foe. The virus cannot be totally eliminated, as it lies dormant in all men, but it can be countered and suppressed, once active. Algeria has shown us that.

---

### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Lt. Comdr. George E. Wales holds a bachelor's degree in geophysics from the Colorado School of Mining and a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School at Monterey, California. As an attack aviator he has served as a test pilot and engineer at the Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River and in Vietnam where, in two separate tours, he served as Operations Officer in Attack Squadron 113 and subsequently in the same position in Air Wing 19. Lieutenant Commander Wales is a 1969 graduate of the Naval War College, School of Naval Command and Staff, and is currently assigned to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C.

---



## FOOTNOTES

### I—SPOKESMEN

1. Brian Crozier, *The Rebels* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 258.
2. Karl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1953), p. 3-4.
3. Segi Nechayev, quoted in Robert Payne, *Iero, the Story of Terrorism* (New York: Day), p. 11.
4. Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 58
5. U.S. Dept of State, *Soviet World Outlook* (Washington: 1954), p. 279.
6. Crozier, p. 169.
7. *Ibid.*

### II—THE PARTICIPANTS

1. Richard Brace and Joan Brace, *Ordeal in Algeria* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1960), p. 54.
2. *Stars and Stripes* reported in *The New York Times*, 1 June 1954, p. 17; Germaine Tillion, *France and Algeria, Complementary Enemies* (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 47.
3. American University Special Operations Research Office, *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Algeria 1954-1962* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963), p. 37.
4. Gerard Mansell, *Tragedy in Algeria* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 59-60; Jacques R. Goutor, *Algeria and France: 1830-1963* (Muncie, Ind.: Ball State University, 1965), p. 34-35.
5. Crozier, p. 240.
6. Edgar S. Furniss, Jr., *De Gaulle and the French Army* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1964), p. 23.
7. Ronald J. Stupak, "Military's Ideological Challenge to Civilian Authority in Post World War II France," *Orbis*, Summer 1968, p. 582-604.
8. Quoted in Joseph Kraft, *The Struggle for Algeria* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 98.
9. Mansell, p. 49.
10. Tillion, p. 63.
11. *Ibid.*, v.p.
12. *Ibid.*, v.p.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 119-120.

### III—ORGANIZATION

1. Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare, a French View of Counter-Insurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 10-13.
2. American University Special Operations Research Office, *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963), p. 275-276.
3. Brace, p. 199.
4. Trinquier, p. 18.
5. Joseph Kraft, "I saw the Algerian Rebels in Action," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 11 and 18 January 1958, p. 29-31 and p. 42-45.
6. Trinquier, p. 20.

### IV—METHODS OF OPERATION

1. *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare*, p. 276.
2. Michael K. Clark, *Algeria in Turmoil* (New York: Praeger, 1959), p. 360-361.
3. *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare*, p. 286.
4. Crozier, p. 172.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
6. Clark, p. 219.
7. *Case Studies in Insurgency*, p. 98-99.
8. Edgar O'Ballance, *The Algerian Insurrection* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1967), p. 93.
9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*
11. Clark, p. 240.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
14. *Case Studies in Insurgency*, p. 99.
15. O'Ballance, p. 166.
16. Clark, p. 101.

## V—RESPONSE

1. Goutor, p. 43.
2. Bracc, p. 124.
3. Clark, p. 155.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
5. Serge Bromberger quoted in Crozier, p. 203.
6. David C. Gordon, *The Passing of French Algeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 62.
7. O'Ballance, p. 96.
8. Serge Bromberger, quoted in Crozier, p. 203.
9. "Algerian Terror on the Rise." *The New York Times*, 6 August 1964, p. 6:4.; also Carey Williams, "Algerian Terrorism." *The Nation*, 12 November 1960, p. 4-5.
10. Goutor, p. 52.
11. Clark, p. 153.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
13. Joachim Joesten, *The Red Hand*, (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1962), p. 17.
14. Geoffrey Boeca, *The Secret Army* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 118.
15. O'Ballance, p. 187.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Boeca, p. 153.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Roland Gaucher, *Les Terroristes* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1965), p. 296.
23. Boeca, p. 157.
24. O'Ballance, p. 98.
25. Stupak, p. 582-604.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Manchester Guardian*, 24 June 1958 quoted in Ronald N. Murdock, "The Hitler Heritage of Paris," *The Nation*, 18 July 1959, p. 23-27.
28. *London Observer*, 28 July 1958, quoted in Murdock.
29. Boeca, p. 38-39.
30. O'Ballance, p. 200.

## VI—SUMMARY

1. Crozier, p. 127.
2. Boeca, p. 141.

## VII—CONCLUSIONS

1. Trinquier, p. 21.

