

The French Experience in Algeria

The Character of the Fighting and the Political Consequences

1954-1962

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Abstract

The intent of the paper is to provide a brief overview of the Algerian War and the collapse of the French position. This paper looks from a military and a social viewpoint, and argues that the French colonization of Algeria was based on the notion that Algeria was more than merely a colony and instead was culturally integral to France. The Second World War faced the French with such atrocity that the continental citizens became more mindful of individual liberties and atrocities committed during war, while the French military's loss of Indochina in 1954 conveyed the lesson that increased brutality was needed to win a counterinsurgency campaign. The French military applied the lessons of Indochina to Algeria and the clash of values almost caused a civil war. De Gaulle took over the Parisian government and over the next few years he suppressed the military and abandoned Algeria, and in the process forced the French to redefine themselves as intolerant of torture and culturally separate from Algeria.

Key Words: France, Algeria, Terrorism, Radical Islam, Insurgency, Counterinsurgency

Resumo

A intenção do trabalho é oferecer uma breve abordagem da Guerra da Argélia e do colapso da posição francesa. O artigo parte de um ponto de vista militar e social, e argumenta que a colonização francesa da Argélia baseou-se na noção de que a Argélia era mais do que uma mera colônia sendo, ao invés disso, culturalmente integrada à França. A Segunda Guerra Mundial impôs aos franceses atrocidades tais que os cidadãos continentais se tornaram mais conscientes das liberdades individuais e das atrocidades cometidas durante uma guerra, enquanto a perda militar francesa da Indochina em 1954 trouxe a lição de que uma brutalidade crescente era necessária para vencer uma campanha de contra-insurreição. Os militares franceses aplicaram as lições da Indochina na Argélia e o conflito de valores quase causou uma guerra civil. De Gaulle tomou o governo parisiense e pelos próximos anos suprimiu o exército e abandonou a Argélia, e no processo forçou os franceses a se auto-redefinirem como intolerantes à tortura e culturalmente separados da Argélia.

Palavras-chave: França, Argélia, Terrorismo, Radicalismo Islâmico, Contra-insurgência.

The French obsession with Algeria from the time of its conquest to the Évian Accords created a political climate that could not change without fundamentally redefining the French identity. The Algerian's struggle for independence was through and through a political struggle, with (epitomizing Clausewitzian ideals) the actual violence serving as an expression of their political agenda. The challenge faced by the FLN was to unite the Arab population against the French and create an Algerian government with the FLN leaders as the only legitimate powers and this was accomplished by the terrorist campaigns between 1954 and 1962. The failures of the French can be summarized as a consistent misreading of the arising situations, from the mass arrests that radicalized much of the population in the initial phase of the struggle to the assumption that Algerian independence was part of a larger communist expansion than a nationalist movement. These misconceptions combined with the almost fanatical attachment to Algeria tore France apart by forcing her to compromise her liberal values with her attachment to North Africa.¹ It appears now that there is little that the French could have done to retain their original (pre-1954) hold on their colony, but the evacuation of Algeria mandated that France move away from certain values of the Fourth Republic. The violence in Algeria and the political struggle in Paris forced the Fifth Republic to establish new values and allow for a France without colonies.

The French colonization of Algeria originated from Charles X's desire to avenge an insult from the Dey of Algeria against the French Consul.² The fact that it took three years for the French to retaliate combined with the constant investment indicated that Charles was probably interested in using, to paraphrase Alistair Horne, '*gloire*' as a distraction from the torrid abuses and shortcomings of his regime. After the fall of Algiers, the struggle carried on, irrespective of the collapse of Charles X's regime. The steady flow of colonists and the continued military operations in the war started by a reviled monarch indicates that colonization was politically convenient, with the newly formed second republic declaring it an "integral part of France."¹ Questions over what exactly was "Algerian" caused problems for all potential revolutionaries. The non-*Pied Noir* population was not ethnically unified, and the problem of bringing them together beyond the fact that they were not French was handled uniquely by the revolutionaries in

¹ This came both from the powerful *Pied Noir* lobby and members of the military who felt that making concessions in Algeria would dishonor the fallen.

² Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, "Liberty, Equality and Colony", accessed on 7.30.2008 from <http://mondediplo.com/2001/06/11torture2>

the 1950s and will be addressed later in this paper. Ferhat Abbas gained fame for saying before the revolution, “I will not die for the Algerian nation as it does not exist.”³ The offspring of the colonists strongly identified with French ideals and French history without ever knowing mainland France. This resulting population, while proudly self-identifying as French, only knew Algeria as their home.

With this in mind, it is no surprise that the strongest lobby for *la Algérie Française*⁴ came from the African-born Europeans. This population, the *Pied Noir*, in addition to their increasing size, enjoyed a considerable sway over the French government. Unfortunately, this left the Muslim population, the “Algerians”, to be marginalized. Horne notes that the major reform efforts proposed by Paris for the Algerians were, in fact, torpedoed by the *Pied Noir*. Horne specifically cites both a measure to provide increased liberties to Algerians who had served in the First World War and the Blum-Viollette Bill, which offered citizenship to an unprecedented (albeit still far from being in any way representative) number of Algerians. Both of these bills were “stillborn” (to use Horne’s term) because of the *Pied Noir* lobby.⁵ The French perception of the Algerians was mired in racism. French author Pierre Nora satirically describes a courtroom where a man is testifying, stating that five witnesses were present to a crime, “Two men and three Arabs.”⁶ This revealing comment represented an attitude not only possessed by the *Pied Noir*, but also by the continental French, and, ultimately, served as an unspoken foundation for the military’s understanding of the conflict.

The Sétif rising in 1945 served only to further divide the Arab resistance, but the opening of the Algerian war on All Saints’ Day (November 1st), 1954. Ben Bella and the rest of the CRUA (Comité Revolutionnaire d’Unité Algérienne) were empowered by the French humiliation at Dien Bien Phu, that same year. The fact that a major colonial power had been undeniably defeated in a pitched battle by the colonized people served both to empower the subjugated and to insult the French in such a way that their pride would blind their strategic judgment. The character of the struggle that emerged in Algeria was a significant break from both the positional warfare of the early half of the century and of previous guerilla strikes. While the attack on All

³ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace* (New York: 2006) Pg. 404-It is important to note that Abbas did eventually throw his allegiance in with the FLN.

⁴ The author wishes to note that this term was used heavily in Horne’s *A Savage War of Peace* and will be used in this paper to refer to the concept of a French-controlled Algeria.

⁵ Horne, p.36-37.

⁶ Horne, p.55.

Saints' Day in 1954 hit police and military barracks, it achieved little tactical success and failed to cause significant disruption.⁷ The FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) realized true success not by striking at the French military, but instead at civilian targets, including both *Pied Noir* and Muslims who they saw as aiding the French. The French failures in this situation were their attribution of the struggle to foreign agitation. The notion of foreign agitation would be recurrent throughout the Algerian war. It was widely believed by the French that Egypt was the nexus of the resistance and this was buttressed by the seizure of the ship *Athos* that was carrying guns from Egypt to Algeria in 1956. The appeal to the Communist nations later sowed the fear that the FLN was a communist front.⁸ A serious error in judgment on the part of the French was the principle of "collective responsibility" and the mass reprisals that it entailed. Horne claims this was forced upon then-Governor General Jacques Soustelle by the military (the first step in a long series of instances where the military tail would wag the dog). The effect of collective responsibility is that in launching mass arrests and failing to limit the violence of the French soldiers, the Algerian community was driven further away from the French and, in Horne's words, "...the army would regard almost every Muslim as a potential killer."⁹

The strength of the FLN came from its ability to survive and from the polarizing effect that it had on the populations. As previously noted, they increased their membership by drawing the French into overreacting and further alienating the already divided population, the FLN increased its offensive by using terror to enact social and cultural change. For example, the FLN sought to boycott the *Pied Noir* tobacco and spirits industry, so they banned Muslims from consuming any of these products under the penalty of mutilation or death. Additionally, they established their own media outlet, including the illicit radio station "Voix de Algérie" which allowed the FLN to spread their message to a much wider audience (allowing them, in Horne's words, to become a "mass movement")¹⁰. In addition to spreading their message, the FLN struck at what they saw as representative of French culture. The French education system became a target, with schools burned and teachers terrorized. To replace these, the FLN created its own schools (and hospitals and other social services). Inside these new institutions, FLN supporters reinterpreted history so as to portray the French as ignorant and violent and the Algerians as

⁷ Horne, p.104.

⁸ Horne, p.158, 463.

⁹ Horne, p.102, 112-115, 136.

¹⁰ Horne, p.112, 133.

advanced and unified. The results were that young Muslims were taught a visceral hatred for the French colonists, further isolating the two communities.¹¹

In Paris, the idea that Algeria could be separated from France had not entered anyone's mind; however the demographics were such that if everyone in Algeria were enfranchised, the Muslim Algerians would soon dominate the elections. After a series of successes at the ballot for the Algerian Muslims in the municipal elections of 1947, The French began to manipulate the election outcomes in 1948 and by 1951 (in Larkin's words), the elections to the Algerian Assembly and the French National Assembly were "effectively stage-managed."¹² By the year 1954, however, the Laniel administration collapsed in a vote of no confidence following the defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Pierre Mendés France was elected with the expectation that he would bring an end to the struggle in Vietnam (which he did successfully, allowing the USA to replace the French). Unfortunately, the downfall of Mendés France came from his treatment of Algeria, specifically in the policies of the comparatively liberal governor-general Soustelle.¹³

Soustelle's objective in French Algeria was to import the liberal values that had taken hold on the continent and extend them to the native Algerians. To assist with this task, he employed Germaine Tillion and Vincent Monteil, two famous reformers who were to assist with studying the Algerian condition.¹⁴ Under Soustelle, successful inquiries into the Algerian plight were accomplished, and Soustelle advocated the idea of "integration"—the first major push for reform since the Blum-Viollette bill. Under this vision, all of the occupants of Algeria would be afforded equal rights.¹⁵ As previously noted, the FLN saw itself as the only legitimate power in Algeria and to allow this kind of inclusion into French society could only rob them of their support. The *Pied Noir*, seeing themselves as part of Algeria (and in no way inclined to threaten what they had, much less even think about leaving) were especially sensitive to the fears mentioned by Larkin, as the expanding Algerian population, if permitted to vote, would be in a perfect position to retaliate for all the historical injustices. With the combined sentiments of the *Pied Noir* and those leading the FLN, it is no surprise that Soustelle came under fire from every direction. The mounting pressure to deal with terrorism led Soustelle to implement shortsighted

¹¹ Horne, p.403.

¹² Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front* (Oxford: 1988) p.226-228.

¹³ Larkin, p.237-241, 245-246.

¹⁴ Horne, p.109-110.

¹⁵ Horne, p.107-109.

maneuvers in haste, such as the “collective reprisals” mentioned earlier. Soustelle’s reign of ineffective liberalization and short-sighted offensives happened to contain two major victories for the FLN: first the issue of the uprisings being discussed, which Soustelle described as being more helpful than “a convoy of arms.” The second victory for the FLN was the Phillipville massacre (August 20th, 1955), which killed 37 men women and children and left thirteen injured and provoked reprisals by *Pied Noir* vigilantes (arguably paving the way for increasingly radical organizations that would come to threaten the stability of the French government).¹⁶ Under Soustelle, the divisions between the *Pied Noir* and the Muslim community became greater, and the strife only grew worse. The additional failings of peace overtures served as the nails in the coffin and Soustelle left Algeria in the beginning of February 1956.¹⁷

The rise of Guy Mollet after the fall of Eduard Fare (who succeeded Mendés France) saw a further radicalization of the *Pied Noir*, with the emergence of the “ultras” and the emergence of vigilante organizations, often times led by World War II veterans who felt that they were entitled to some sort of recognition for their service, and that they were being betrayed by liberals in Paris and by Soustelle. A notable characteristic of these groups was that they felt that they had little faith in the French government and had little objection to use violence to express their outrage, notably illustrated by the firing of a bazooka into the offices of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, General Salan. The quote of a *Pied Noir* demonstrator illuminates the mindset of the hardline and its decision to resort to violence:

The FLN has taught us that violence is profitable for Muslims. We are going to organize violence by Europeans and prove that it too is profitable.¹⁸

The FLN strategy fell into place like clockwork in a watch. The terror inflicted on the Muslim community had destroyed European-Muslim relations that bred paranoia and mutual suspicion. The increasingly visible bombings and massacres underscored European vulnerability, which then generated impatience with each successive administration (Laniel, Mendés France, and Faure had fallen; Mollet would fall because of the Battle of Algiers). In addition to the aforementioned “ultras” and vigilante groups, the army began to show increased autonomy,

¹⁶ Horne, p.118-124.

¹⁷ Horne, p.127, 181-182.

¹⁸ Horne, p.148-151.

especially in its decision-making, which led to the major gaffe that was the abduction of Ben Bella. He was flying from Morocco to Tunis when the pilot received orders purporting to be from the French Ministry of Defense to land in Algiers. As soon as the aircraft touched down, the *gendarmes* stormed the aircraft and arrested Ben Bella. This operation was clearly executed without the consent of the civilian government of France, and it nearly sparked an international incident. This placed Mollet and then governor-general Lacoste in an intractable position; the international community was disgusted by this act and the Muslim Algerians were outraged, however the *Pied Noir* saw this as a gallant move and were so enthused that Mollet stated, “I could not liberate [them]...My government would have fallen overnight.”¹⁹ Before the beginning of the Battle of Algiers, the Muslim community had (apart from the *Harkis*—Muslim auxiliaries in the French Army, and other French supporters) been forced together by the European reprisals. A liberal *Pied Noir* was quoted as saying at the end of 1957 that there were no more moderate Muslims, that:

...Within a few months it's finished. No one any longer. As a result of bullying them, arresting them, interning them, and occasionally killing them—you've won; but everybody who represents anything of importance in this country has gone over to the FLN. There are no more intermediaries.²⁰

This author is loathe to indulge in comparing the French experience in Algeria with the American experience in Vietnam, but several important parallels can be drawn between the Battle of Algiers and the offensive launched during the Tet holiday eleven years later. Tet shook the faith of the American people; it overwhelmed the nation with a sense that they had been lied to, it greatly strengthened the anti-war movement, it put the Viet Cong at their weakest and it set off a chain of events that led the military to feel that it was abandoned by the citizens it served. If Tet was a cinder block on America's chest, Algiers was an anvil to France. Most importantly, the Battle of Algiers paved the way for *Résurrection*, the collapse of the Fourth Republic, and the rise of De Gaulle.

¹⁹ Horne, p.159-161.

²⁰ Horne, p.220.

The Battle of Algiers opened as a reprisal against the French executions of Algerian prisoners. It was intended to be the largest offensive to date and the aim was to break the French will to fight by causing a disproportionate number of civilian casualties:

Announcing that for every guillotined member of the FLN a hundred French would be killed indiscriminantly...Saadi Yacef (who...had taken over the Algiers network) was told to 'kill any European between the ages of eighteen and fifty four...

The immediate impact of this “open season” tactic was the shooting of 49 Europeans over a three day span (June 21-24, 1956), which was met with a powerful bomb that killed 70 Muslims, placed by the precursor organizations to the OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète) which would eventually become one of the biggest threats to French security towards the end of the war.²¹ The end of the year saw increased murders and terror bombings by the FLN. The bombings themselves now were often carried out by women as part of a change in strategy where people would be targeted in the bombings instead of property. Violent mob reprisals against innocent Muslims increased in addition to the selective targeting by vigilante groups One of the more famous reprisals occurred after the assassination of the Mayor of Algeria and subsequent bombing of the cemetery during his funeral. The mob attacked men and women indiscriminately and left 4 dead and 50 injured.²²

The month of January 1957 saw General Jacques Massu arrive in Algeria, to accompany the new chief of staff of the paratroopers, Colonel Yves Godard. With the arrival of these generals, the greatest tactical offensive against the Algerians would be opened (with the notable exception of the response to the January 28th strike, which resulted in the pillage of Muslim shops and businesses all across the country, which itself only increased participation in the general strike).²³

The frequency and the intensity were rapidly increasing, and Godard faced enormous pressure to halt the bombings. Godard determined that the only way to stop the bombing would be to by capturing the leaders and destroying the network inside Algiers. To this end, he stated, “Intelligence is Capitol.” Given this, then, Godard and Massu made a Faustian bargain in their

²¹ Horne, p.183-184.

²² Horne, p.185-187.

²³ Horne, p.188-192.

decision to permit torture in their interrogation centers. The issue of torture opened a deep wound in the French conscience, recalling the injustices perpetrated by the Nazis. The ethical considerations came back to hurt France, by seriously damaging its image as a liberal and humanitarian state and by the profound psychological damage that it had on its own soldiers. The strategic considerations also became relevant, for the news of torture being used on prisoners in cold blood both angered the Muslim community and the international community for its violation of the Geneva convention. It is true that by the fall of 1957, the bombings and attacks had stopped and the FLN could no longer fight within the cities, but the cost was irreparable damage to the French image and its soldier's humanity.²⁴

The last few months of 1957 saw the leaders of the Algiers network dead or imprisoned and the FLN abandoning Algeria with its tail between its legs. The extensive penetration of the terror networks by French informants, the information extracted by Godard's interrogation centers and the disruption of Muslim communities by the forced relocation of entire villages²⁵ made it impossible for the FLN to wage terror campaigns the way it had before inside of Algeria, so the remaining leadership (now plagued with internal divisions) sought refuge in neighboring Tunisia, with the city of Tunis serving as its base of operations.²⁶ Tactically, times had never been better for the French military, but the abuses by Godard's paras came to the international light, bringing the FLN attention from the UN and then-senator John F. Kennedy. The outcry against the French abuses also enabled the FLN to expand its operations into France where it extorted money from Algerians living in France. The emergence of a new anti-war movement also led some extreme left-wing extremists to provide clandestine support for the FLN, the most famous of these being Francis Jeanson who helped the FLN smuggle its funds out of France and into Swiss banks where it could be laundered. Amidst the negative popular opinion, the Mollet government collapsed, leaving France without government for twenty-two days.²⁷

Having driven the FLN across the Tunisian border, the French erected a highly secure border fence (electrically charged, supported by troops, mines and helicopter support, extending from the sea to deep into the Sahara) to contain the FLN. This fence was subject to almost

²⁴ Horne, p.198-199, 204-206, 219.

²⁵ This forced relocation, much like the torture, would eventually prove itself a strategic cost.

²⁶ Horne, p.212, 217-221, 223- The French never understood how serious the divisions were, but the FLN found it necessary to assassinate Ramdane Abane, one of their top leaders, to preserve unity. Horne, p.228-229.

²⁷ Horne, p.234, 237-238, 243-246.

perpetual attack from the FLN soldiers, however it proved to be an effective killing field, forcing the FLN to waste essential manpower in staging pitched battles against the French border forces, which were acquiring aircraft from the US and using new tactics to detect and kill the rebels. A noticeable example came at the position of Souk-Arhas, where 820 men launched an all out scramble to cross the line and reinforce FLN forces already inside Algeria. While significant numbers breached the line, at least 620 rebels were captured or killed by the French, who large transport helicopters to rapidly move soldiers to points of conflict. The Morice line by itself was serving its purpose effectively, however the army was growing increasingly comfortable with its autonomy and, in February of 1958, launched a raid into Sakiet, a village on the Tunisian side of the border without seeking permission of the civilian government.²⁸

This cross-border incident was the next step in a quick succession of events that ruined the army's confidence in the Fourth Republic. The army saw a large number of FLN casualties and had seized a great number of weapons and saw concerns over the border violation as a sign of an ineffective government. In Paris, the incident caused pressure to mount from England and Britain and the Galliard government (which replaced Mollet) fell in a vote of confidence backed by both the center and the Communist Party. The final straw that broke the army's tolerance of the Parisian government was when the FLN decided in May to execute three French soldiers it had captured a year previously.²⁹ These executions were not particularly well received by the European population, and the rumor of an upcoming mass riot encouraged governor-general Lacoste to flee Algeria. The absence of leadership both in Paris and in Algeria created a vacuum, and in the midst of a demonstration that turned into the ransacking of the vacant governor-general's office, the army opted to create a Committee of Public Safety that would hold Algeria together until some semblance of order could be restored.³⁰

The ensuing confusion left people appealing for a great unifying power, and the first choice was Charles De Gaulle, the man who had rebuilt France after the end of World War II. De Gaulle was a safe choice as he was a national hero who could appeal both to the citizenry of France and the increasingly agitated military. And in a sort of "Father-knows-best" manner, De Gaulle accepted the personal invitation to take the reigns of the turbulent nation, on the condition

²⁸Horne, p.263-267.

²⁹Horne, p.267-270.

³⁰Horne, p.283, 285-287.

he be given an absolute free hand in the running of the country for the next six months. During these machinations, the Army had taken over Corsica, and the paratroops were making plans to land in France and seize Paris, with the promise of support from the Second Armored Task Force. The objectives of this putsch, codenamed *Résurrection* was to completely shut down the government and paralyze the assembly while the army installed De Gaulle. Fortunately, the assembly capitulated and formally permitted De Gaulle to establish a new government.³¹

Undoubtedly the most painful position De Gaulle found himself in was that he came to be seen as the one who would provide a magic cure-all solution to the woes in Algeria. He was everyone's hero and as such he was expected by the many different factions with opposing interests to fight for their own specific objective. With the expectation that he would please everyone, it was a miracle that he was able to please anyone. Most importantly, De Gaulle realized that the status quo in Algeria was not sustainable, and that peace would come at a price to France. This upset the army for two reasons: first, the operations in Algiers had been successful and the FLN had been driven across the Morice line. Why would they back down now? Secondly, because of *Résurrection*, the Army felt that "De Gaulle was "their man," and believed that it was the threat of *Réssurrection* that put him into power.³²

It was, in fact, precisely because of the unprecedented level of autonomy displayed by the army in the taking of Corsica and threatening Paris that De Gaulle had to reform the army. To prevent another *Réssurrection*, over 1,500 officers in Algeria had either been reassigned to bases within France or Germany or forcibly retired, and the Committee of Public Safety was disbanded by October of 1958. It was at this same time when De Gaulle extended an olive branch to the FLN, the "Paix au Braves," which was met with a new wave of bombings (some of which would now happen in mainland France) and a categorical rejection of all peace overtures except total French withdrawal. Additionally, the National Assembly feared that this would signal to the continental population that the French were on the run, while the *Pied Noir* "ultras" saw this as De Gaulle stabbing them in the back while the army saw this as a military setback.³³

De Gaulle had placed General Maurice Challe in charge of the offensive, under whom tactical success was achieved, including improved use of helicopters for rapid response situations

³¹ Horne, p.293-298.

³² Horne, p.546.

³³ Horne, p.306-309, 317.

and increased participation of Muslims in the *harkis*. The cost of this was worsening conditions for villagers outside the cities who found themselves in ever-worsening displacement camps. The greatest frustration to the French army, according to Horne, is the simple fact that no matter what the French did, they could never completely break the FLN. By the sheer fact of its survival it defied Challe's efforts and laughed at the peace offerings extended by De Gaulle, taking these to be a sign of a weakening of the French will to fight.³⁴

The position of the Algerian Muslims having been solidified, the toll of the violence committed against the *Pied Noir* soon served to harden and radicalize the European population. The continued offensives and peace overtures (bringing terms like "self-determination" and others vaguely reminiscent of long deceased reform measures) portrayed the French to the FLN as floundering and pursuing an easy way out of the conflict. De Gaulle's peace overtures were often searching for a certain moderate element to end the war favorably for the French. This was not to be, for any moderate movement existing in Algeria was either killed or cowed into submission by the FLN or driven to the extreme by the draconian reprisals and moral transgressions performed by the French forces. The proven strength of the FLN had been its survivability, and even after Challe's offensive, defeating the French had become a waiting game. To the *Pied Noir* "ultras," the French overtures for peace became another cog in a vast mechanism unintentionally built by the threefold combination of the FLN attacks, the Army's inability to crush the FLN, and De Gaulle's apparent desire to sell out the European population of Algeria to the Muslims.

The first terrifying demonstration of this rage came in the form of the uprising during called the "Barricades Week," instigated by Jo Ortiz, the leader of the newly-established FNF ("Front National Français"). The continued presence of FLN attacks had driven *Pied Noir* civilians to align themselves with Ortiz's faction, as had the French colonels who believed that 1960 would see France separate itself from Algeria.³⁵ With the new Fifth Republic, De Gaulle was in a ripe position to modernize France, however Algeria and those who fought to keep the French mired in it. Bernard Tricot recalls De Gaulle as an innovator and a military man at heart, and describes Algeria as an "archaic war" and wrote that

³⁴ Horne, p.333-335, 338, 348.

³⁵ Horne, p.349-353.

...It [Algeria] was all very distasteful to him. What he really desired to do was to modernize the French army and bring it into the atomic era, and this was always impeded by Algeria.³⁶

If one treats the army as a metaphor for France as a social and political actor, then the conservative factions led by Ortiz and the colonels were the beginning of a series of death thrashes of the old France. While Ortiz and the FNF did seize national attention with the general strike that they incited, their support from the military failed to materialize (quite arguably due to De Gaulle's personal appeal that all soldiers retain their allegiance).³⁷ Tragically, the French military would not show the same restraint in the future.

The summer of 1960 saw another attempt at peace with the negotiations at Melun. These were both brief and heartbreaking for De Gaulle, for the FLN representatives spent their time arguing that the imprisoned Ben Bella should be present and that more high-ranking officials should be present for the discussions. After reiterating the firmness of the FLN's position and categorically rejecting any sort of compromise, De Gaulle disbanded the talks on June 29th, 1960.³⁸ The failure of the peace further polarized the French electorate, with the continental left (although none were actually members of the Communist Party) producing the "Manifesto of the 121," which incited French conscripts to desert, while General Salan (now retired) declared "total war" against De Gaulle and named himself leader of the *Algérie Française* movement. So completely disgusted by De Gaulle's rule, he returned covertly to Algeria with retired General Edmond Jouhaud. Increased discussions of the possibility of an Algerian Republic caused Marshall Juin, one of De Gaulle's closest friends, publicly accused De Gaulle of abandoning the *Pied Noir*, brought the resignation of Governor-General Delouvier's Secretary-General André Jacomet, and caused the Governor-General himself to be attacked by demonstrators on Armistice Day. Eventually, there arose a plot to incite a revolution (to take place in December, 1960, upon De Gaulle's arrival), loosely coordinated between elements of the military and the "ultra" *Pied Noir*, with the separate objectives of hardening the French policy towards the Algerians and killing De Gaulle held respectively.³⁹

³⁶ Horne, p.381.

³⁷ Horne, p.369-371.

³⁸ Horne, p.394-395.

³⁹ Horne, p.418-423, 427.

The uprising failed completely. The “ultras” were rebuffed and the civil leadership in Algeria was purged. The sting of this humiliation only angered the generals further and encouraged them to attempt again with greater planning. Within the *Pied Noir*, a new organization that would persist beyond the General’s Putsch and well into the Évian Accords—The Organization Armée Secrète (OAS).⁴⁰ Having both been split off from the Muslim community long ago, and further isolated from the continent since *Résurrection* and the rising in December, it can be argued that a split was emerging between the army and the *Pied Noir*. Challe declared upon the Generals seizing power:

I am in Algiers, together with Generals Zeller and Jouhad, in order to keep our solemn promise, the promise of the Army to hold Algeria, so that our dead will not have died for nothing.⁴¹

While these men led the uprising, they could not totally control their armies. The disenchanted lower ranking soldiers began to express their outrage towards their officers, and fuel was added to this fire in what Horne describes as another “victory of the transistors” where De Gaulle broadcasted via radio orders that the soldiers had a duty to halt the rebellion at all costs. In doing so, De Gaulle found a line that Challe would have to cross if he wished to insure that the “dead will not have died for nothing.” The prospect of having to order his soldiers to fire on their comrades-in-arms sickened him, and it was Challe who persuaded the Generals to stand down, and it was Challe who personally accepted total responsibility for the actions of The Generals. In this decision, the military could no longer oppose De Gaulle’s peace overtures.⁴²

Where the OAS broke from the military was that it was an inherently predacious organization. The OAS’s primary tactic was terror and chaos, and it took on a form somewhat like a film negative of the FLN. Horne writes:

By and large, the *Pied Noirs* were led to believe and trust in the OAS as an organization protecting their interests, just as the FLN had fought so successfully for Muslim interests...⁴³

⁴⁰ Horne, p.432-434, 440.

⁴¹ Horne, p.450 -Salan had been in Spain in exile since the previous uprising, but he would soon join the other three generals.

⁴² Horne, p.457-459.

⁴³ Horne, p.488.

Unlike the four generals, the OAS had no objection to targeting other French or even *Pied Noir* who they saw as too liberal. Their tactics involved mass bombings, professional assassins known as “killers.”⁴⁴ Their attacks mirrored in many ways the policies of the FLN in the opening of the war, as they sought to antagonize the Muslims into launching a blind counterattack, which would force a French response and destroy the ongoing peace talks at Évian.⁴⁵ A practical consideration of their strategy reveals gaping flaws and illuminates the failure of the OAS. As noted earlier, the FLN gained its strength by its ability to survive. The struggle fought by the FLN had a certain inevitability about it, where it appears that so long as their movement survived, they would win. The OAS on the other hand was attempting to reverse French policy being enacted during the height of their activity. They were fighting against time. Another major flaw in their strategy was declaring their strategy would be to implement total chaos and prevent the French government from being able to enact their own policies. The killings and bombings of before had served to attract everyone’s ire, however the targeting of government workers put them into direct conflict with the army, which had initially been slightly sympathetic to the conservative movement. The final sick and tragic irony was that the environment of terror created by the OAS had surpassed the level of angering the *Pied Noir* at those providing their security, and instead prompted the beginnings a mass exodus that would end with 1.38 million Europeans departing for France and tens of thousands leaving for other countries.⁴⁶

Decolonization is our interest and, therefore, our policy. Why should we remain caught up in colonization’s that are costly, bloody and without end, when our own country needs to be renewed from the bottom up?⁴⁷

In a four-year span, France came undone. The violence, the struggle and the moral compromises made left the continental French enraged and the Algerian French without faith in their leaders. In a sort of soul-searching manner, France, under De Gaulle, had to determine what it would fight for. By the close of the Battle of Algiers, the French army had demonstrated that it

⁴⁴ Horne, p.486-488.

⁴⁵ Horne, p.508.

⁴⁶ Horne, p.516, 528-529, 533.

⁴⁷ Horne, p.444.

could, on a tactical level, fight against the FLN, however this fighting had created a permanent rift between the Muslim and European communities, and as such, had the fighting continued, France would have to devote all of its attention to a permanently alienated and disenfranchised community dwelling within its borders, as well as live with a backslide off the moral high ground. De Gaulle's decision to disentangle himself from Algeria was a concession to the values of the continent; that France could not be defined by its colonies and that it could not remain odious in the eyes of the international community or its own citizens. The conscious, albeit protracted, effort to seek peace with the Algerian resistance at any cost was an immense sacrifice to those who had never known the continent and to those whose comrades had sacrificed their lives to continue holding north Africa. Additionally, it was a defeat, in the sense that the FLN achieved quite handily its political agenda through the use of violence and by surviving French suppression. The task of accepting this defeat required both the acceptance by the military that the fallen would not be dignified through the perpetuation of struggle. Unfortunately, the "ultras" of the *Pied Noir* had so hardened their side, that the almost *Deus ex Machina* solution of the mass exodus was the only solution to the problem of the French Algerians. After another four years, France was well again.

"It was a victory march. That may seem curious, but it was really symbolic, because in these last days it represented a great victory over ourselves..." – Christian Fouchet.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ Horne, p.534.