

## A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

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# A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

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KELSEY LILLEY, SEP 12 2012

### **A Policy of Violence: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Tactics in the Algerian War of Independence and Algerian Civil War**

“Yacef’s organization, now effectively and deeply rooted...had both Muslims and European populations of Algiers in a grip of terror. Schools had remained closed in October; Europeans took to going out on the streets with automatics concealed on them and when they saw a Muslim walking behind them on the pavement they would slow down to let him pass out of fear of an attack from behind.”<sup>[i]</sup>

The scene was all too familiar for those living in Algeria between 1954 and 1962. Calls for independence quickly escalated into an all-out war against the French that took hundreds of thousands of lives, before France granted Algeria independence. But, even after independence, Algeria’s struggles continued. Disparate groups, united in their hatred for the FLN-led regime, engulfed the nation in years of ceaseless violence, sleepless nights, and uncertain futures. It appeared that Algeria could never have peace, democracy, or either.

In his compelling history of the Algerian War, British historian Alistair Horne provides insight into the terror that Algerians and Europeans alike witnessed daily during the fight for independence. The war occurred in the broader context of global decolonization movements and was a protracted struggle of guerrilla tactics, indiscriminate terror, and violence. In 1962, one might think Algeria’s terror was over; the country was independent, and the revolutionary FLN government presided over the people it liberated. However, this was to the contrary. By the late 1980s, strong dissent to the FLN regime crystallized; insurgent groups reminiscent of the wartime FLN organized in the Algerian hills and cities alike. Like all conflicts, this war had a bloody, inciting incident. And, from there, the country was catapulted back into the daily violence and terror that Algerians were sure had ended with French withdrawal.

The civil war pitted Islamist groups against the government and each other. Each had a different interpretation of Islam and a different political goal. For many of the original dissenters, the goal was fair political representation and elections free from FLN meddling. The groups wanted the ability for Islamists to come to power—and stay there—through the polls. On the other hand, some groups believed that voting for change was a lost cause. To truly install an Islamist regime, they believed they would have to completely overthrow the FLN.

These conflicts provide a comparison of two Algerian cases of protracted violence. Although separated and distinct time-wise, they are similar in many ways. Specifically, both contain actors fighting for a “political” goal, despite those goals differing in scope and feasibility. It is here that it is helpful to recall Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz. Well-known for his classical war doctrine on the subjects of politics and war, Clausewitz argued that the methods of war, for many, are dictated by a political objective.<sup>[ii]</sup> Moreover, war acts as an extension of politics, in that it can either precede or supersede diplomatic efforts.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Clausewitz’s classical doctrine had in mind two nation-states warring with each other, as was the tradition in his time; however, his theories can be extrapolated to a modern context. Each actor in both conflicts had distinctive and—in their minds—*vital* interests. Each, then, attempted to carry out their political goal, and all actors used violence and terrorism, at some point, to force the opposition’s hand. For each actor, moreover, diplomatic attempts failed completely. For the revolutionary FLN, the French ignored and repressed Algerian calls for autonomy and

# A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

independence. For the Islamists, similar repression by the FLN was worsened by an election cancellation, after the regime realized it would lose to an Islamist party. In both cases, the actors needed something more forceful than diplomacy to succeed. Each chose forms of war.

It is, however, important to look past a rhetorical designation to specific strategies and tactics of each group, understanding what actually constitutes “war,” in the theoretical sense. Upon doing so, it is clear that each actor was at “war”, in the Clausewitzian sense, but also at war defined more broadly and evidenced by use of two specific strategies: violence and terrorism.

This paper seeks to detail a historical overview of each conflict, then detail and analyze the strategic and tactical methods for each insurgent group and, to a lesser extent, for the counterinsurgent groups. After an analysis of both violence and terror in the pursuit of policy, it is clear that actors in both case studies saw these strategies as the most effective way to command policy. And, they were right. In the first case, the FLN gained independence against the French; in the civil war, the state successfully suppressed Islamist violence and prevented an Islamic state, albeit at the cost of a bloody decade-long conflict. There is no formula for policy success through violence and terror, and, in each case, external factors influenced the outcome of the respective conflicts as well. Still, this paper will show that on the strategic level, violence and terrorism, in the Algerian context, were effective means of commanding authority in policy.

## Case Study 1: The Algerian Independence War

In 1830, mainland France was in trouble domestically. In an attempt to regain its empire, France invaded and quickly contained much of Algeria, despite initial resistance led by Algerian nationalist Abd-el-Kader.[iv] After nearly 70 years of colonization and despite various uprisings by the Algerian people, the French had “rendered [Algerians] second-class and dispossessed.”[v] This time was a period of land seizure, which was given to French settlers who came to be known as  *pied noirs*, or “black feet.” [vi] Colonial authorities sectioned the country into French-controlled sectors, refused to grant Algerians French citizenship, and implemented unequal voting regulations, all made worse by failed and half-hearted attempts at reform.[vii]

Around the time of WWI, Algerians in France became aware of both the rise of Arab nationalism in the Middle East and the clear lack of “egalitarian” principles in Algeria that were so espoused in France.[viii] In France, intellectuals began writing and speaking about Algerian nationalism and advocating Algeria’s independence from France. The French discourse quickly moved to Algeria, where nationalist movements agitated for independence.

### *Setting the Stage for Rebellion: Sétif, 1945*

It was “Victory in Europe” day, marking the end of World War II and the Nazi occupation of France.[ix] In the Algerian town of Sétif, May 8 was the perfect time to march, not just in celebration of France’s liberation, but also for the need of Algeria’s liberation. A town of few  *colons* and a majority of Algerian Muslims, tensions in Sétif—and greater Algeria—had been steadily rising amid economic and agricultural devastation, stemming from the war in Europe.[x] As if foreshadowing the bloody conflict ahead, Horne writes of the graffiti that sprung up around Algeria after WWII: “*Français*, you will be massacred by the Muslims!”[xi] But, French displeasure with their Algerian counterparts was mutual, and both parties slung racial slurs at each other. Moreover, the French had plans for Sétif after having gained intelligence that a demonstration might occur. Because there were limited French police, Sétif’s sub-prefect attempted to de-politicize the approaching march, rather than prevent it. Upon seeing the liberation-focused slogans, the sub-prefect ordered his police chief to remove the political banners at all costs. The “cost” turned out to be a riot and subsequent massacre of all Europeans in the area. While it is unclear who initiated the violence, Horne posits that there were armed elements among the marchers, “bent on trouble,” and the situation quickly spiraled out of control.[xii] Intoxicated by violence, the rioters swept through Sétif and into the countryside, eliminated innocent Europeans as “symbols of the  *presence française*,” and continued for five days until French troops could regain the area by force.[xiii]

The Sétif massacre is significant in its foreshadowing of insurgent tactics: of the 103 Europeans murdered, many

## A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

were brutally mutilated as a “message” of the rebels’ intentions.[xiv] France’s equally repressive response to Sétif is a second parallel to the approaching French-FLN conflict: employing the tactic of *ratissage* (“raking over”), the army instilled fear in Sétif and the surrounding villages by conducting mass arrests, summary executions, and aerial and naval bombing campaigns. Extra-judicial bands of Europeans are reported to have targeted even more Muslims for violence, including lynchings and random killings. Reports of the number of Muslims killed in the aftermath of Sétif vary widely—some place the number as low as 1,000, while others claim 6,000, and even 45,000, for the total post-Sétif violence.[xv] As Horne aptly notes, even the most conservative estimate of deaths after Sétif represents a 10:1 French reprisal to the Europeans killed by Algerians in the Sétif massacres.[xvi] Thus, the theme of intoxicating violence and overreaction that is prevalent in both the War of Independence and the 1990s Civil War has its roots in uprisings as early as Sétif.

*“Into the Abyss”[xvii]: The March Toward War*

For Algerian Muslims, Sétif marked a point of no return in their struggle against the French. As French journalist Edward Behr observes,

“Every one of the ‘new wave’ of Algerian nationalists prominent in the National Liberation Front today traces his revolutionary determination back to May 1945.”[xviii]

In the years after Sétif, increasingly harsh economic conditions ensured that fewer Muslims were being employed for agricultural work by  *pied noir* landowners, and income disparities and unemployment rose rapidly: one million Muslims were unemployed, two million “underemployed,” and the average number of work days for an agricultural worker was only 65 each year.[xix] Combined with a skyrocketing population rate, poverty was widespread. As the French proved unwilling to concede demands for political rights to Algerians, Algerian nationalist parties vehemently opposed to French rule proliferated. While these groups ranged from moderate to extreme in their ideologies, it was not until 1948 that a group dedicated to fighting colonialism by armed force, if necessary, existed.[xx] Even then, the FLN did not adopt its official name, *Front de Liberation Nationale* (National Liberation Front), until October 1954. It was then that they set a date for the official armed uprising to begin: November 1, All Saints Day.[xxi]

*All Saints Day, 1954*

For the FLN, lessons from the French resistance and Viet Minh tactics dictated careful preparations for November 1, 1954. They implemented the infamous “triangle” cell operational structure, ensuring that no more than five men would know each other’s identities per rebel cell.[xxii] Each cell would carry out a specific attack on something of French ownership, with strict instructions to avoid civilian casualties. Difficulties in securing weapons and funding forced the FLN to adopt asymmetrical, guerrilla tactics that did not cost much, but would have maximum impact—physically and psychologically. At the uprising’s beginning, rebels in Kabylia caused approximately 200 million francs worth of damage to infrastructure and supply storage; however, overall, the initial attacks were not particularly noteworthy.[xxiii] In France’s mind, the perceived failure of the initial uprising proved that the FLN was an incapable band of rebels. It is now clear, however, that this underestimation bought vital time for the FLN to organize itself.

Amid escalating FLN attacks through the rest of 1954, the French quickly realized that ending the nationalist insurgency would not be as easy as once thought. Thus, they called in the first Parachute Division, known for their skill and experience in conflicts ranging from WWII to Indo-China.[xxiv] These *paras* were immediately successful in the Aurès region, where they made use of Mao Zedong’s maxims of living among the people and utilizing locals in intelligence operations.[xxv] The French subsequently instituted two counterinsurgency operations: *quadrillage* (division of the country into a grid) and *ratissage* (“raking over”). *Quadrillage* responded to the guerrillas’ ability to move freely from rural to urban settings and to use the familiar terrain as an advantage. By dividing Algeria into a grid, the French could more effectively designate areas of operation to military units. *Ratissage* required a thorough comb-through by French *paras* of cities or villages thought to harbor FLN militants. Often, this operation was part of “pacification” and, thus, was meant to—through force—subject the Algerian people to French authority.

## A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

### *The FLN Fights On: Survival of the First Winter*

Many saw the FLN's survival through the winter of 1954 as a sign that *God* supported the FLN, and a new influx of recruits followed shortly thereafter.[xxvi] Along with these new recruits came an evolution in FLN methods. Soon, attacks were not just against French infrastructure, but also against Muslims associated with France.[xxvii] The brutality with which these murders occurred, moreover, was intended to send a message to others considering the same path— meaning, even Algerians would not be spared FLN wrath. As the FLN resorted more to violence, the French felt forced to respond in kind. This escalation of violence coalesced in the doctrine of “collective responsibility,” originally intended as a means by which the French could force villages and village resources to rebuild FLN-destroyed infrastructure.[xxviii] In reality, however, the French enacted the doctrine to designate “eye for an eye” reprisals for any FLN violence.[xxix]

### *Marighela and “Total War”: The Case of Phillippeville*

The FLN has been deeply influenced by Brazilian leader Carlos Marighela's theories on guerrilla warfare. While unsuccessful as a guerrilla in Brazil himself, Marighela influenced future insurgents with his theories of “militarization,” positing that through terrorism, guerrillas could provoke an overresponse by the state, which would, in turn, alienate the civilian population and bring popular backing for the insurgents.[xxx] By mid-1955, the FLN announced a total war on all French civilians in the vein of Marighela, justifying “collective reprisals” against civilians in an attempt to “militarize” the conflict.[xxxi] To bring to bear the full weight of total war, the FLN mounted an August 20 attack against Phillippeville and its surrounding villages; the day consisted of FLN assaults on 26 different localities containing *piéd noirs*.[xxxii] The violence included grenade attacks on cafés, door-to-door killings of entire families, and “revolting savagery...carefully premeditated planning which clearly lay behind [the massacres].”[xxxiii] Like Sétif for the Algerians, Phillippeville provided the French with a singular event that crystallized hatred against the Muslims of Algeria. The day after the massacre, after French troops were called in to end the killing, French hatred was exemplified in the mass execution of all Algerian prisoners, buried by bulldozer due to the high numbers of casualties.[xxxiv] In similar fashion to Sétif, the administration claimed 123 deaths as a result of the FLN mob, while the French killed 1,273 insurgents—the conservative estimate.[xxxv] The French *were*, in fact, overreacting to the FLN's trap of indiscriminate violence and terror. The 10:1 reprisal killings by the French, though, gave hope to the FLN that Marighela's “militarization” strategy would work.

### *The Rise of Terror*

As the FLN expanded and gained new leadership, its belief in terror as an effective instrument of war, control, and policy grew. In particular, success by an FLN commander in controlling the Soummam region of Kabylia through terror, and others like him, made the case for the FLN to use terror on a wider scale as a strategy for achieving independence from the French. Upon convening the Soummam Conference of spring 1956, FLN leadership consolidated their goals and left in agreement that any cease-fire would be preceded by a grant of independence.[xxxvi] The conference also included a plan for an offensive into Algiers. This strengthening of resolve and clarification of purpose laid the foundation for two major FLN actions in the coming years: the targeting of European civilians as occurred in the Battle of Algiers and, second, the internationalization of the conflict, including bringing terror to mainland France.[xxxvii]

In an extension of General Andre Beaufre's *zones interdites*, or areas cleared of civilians and used as “free fire” militarized zones to tackle the insurgency, the French expanded their resettlement program in 1958. *Regroupement* entailed the forcible relocation of over one million Algerians into barely livable camps, to separate FLN fighters from the support of the population.[xxxviii] For the French, the goal of such camps was to remove Mao's proverbial “water” from the “fish,” with “water” analogizing the people's support, and “fish” the guerrillas.[xxxix] While the camps achieved their objective in relocating enough people to allow counter-guerrilla operations, the wretched living conditions also polarized the last undecided Algerians, as the camps bred anti-French sentiment and Algerian nationalism. Yet again, French reaction to FLN infiltration of the countryside proved to act to France's disadvantage. In relocating hundreds of thousands of people, the French grew closer to a military victory over the FLN, but further from a political one.

# A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

Additionally, the French secured Algeria's borders through electrified and barbed wire, a tactic that was successful in separating entire contingents of FLN fighters from Algeria, locking them into Tunisian territory.[xi] The barrier, known as the Morice Line, contained not only an electrified fence designed to kill, but it was also surrounded by mines, barbed wire, and highly armed mobile patrols that made up the 80,000-man force in the area.[xli] The Morice Line was lethally effective against FLN contingents isolated in Tunisia. By their last major attempt to breach the line, the FLN lost an estimated 6,000 men attempting to return to Algeria.[xlii] In theory, the Morice Line was intended to remove civilians from the "danger zone," seal off the borders, and create a situation in which France could use its dominant firepower to eliminate the FLN in a direct military confrontation—an effort to turn the tables on the asymmetric style of fighting favored by the FLN. In practice, however, the lines of civilian-insurgent distinction often blurred, as when France pushed the FLN into the sovereign territory of Tunisia after a border ambush.[xliii] The French also bombed the Tunisian border town of Sakiet Sidi Youcef, which they suspected as an FLN hideout, killing 80 civilians after mistakenly targeting a school and hospital.[xliv] Sakiet was another instance of over-reaction by the French; while the FLN were using Tunisia and Morocco as refuge, the fall-out from the French bombing campaign into sovereign territory was not equal to the transgression of an FLN sanctuary. The French misstep was also chance for the media to internationalize the Algerian conflict: the Tunisians, furious at the French incursion, transported journalists "to the still smoking scene of the raid" to document the French error. [xlv] Marighela's strategy of overreaction and internationalization, it appeared, was working.

## *The Battle of Algiers*

Seeing Algiers as the "heart" of French colonization, the FLN sought to relay a strategic and symbolic message to the French—the FLN could control Algiers. And, if the FLN could control Algiers, it could control all of Algeria. The FLN intended to instill fear throughout, "to bring the city to its knees" and forcibly elevate the French-Algerian War to an international audience.[xlvi] Soon enough, the same question would come before the UN.

Known for its tight and winding streets, the Casbah, or Muslim section of the city, presented perfect territory for asymmetrical urban warfare amid its population of 80,000 Algerians.[xlvii] Moreover, the overwhelmingly unemployed youth that lived in the Casbah found the FLN's cause alluring and FLN leaders like the infamous Saadi Yacef successfully recruited said youth.[xlviii] In its first major bombing, the FLN used well-to-do Algerian women who could pass through Algiers checkpoints, disguised by their "European" looks and undisturbed by French soldiers.[xlix] These women planted bombs in three locations frequented by Europeans, and two detonated effectively. By now, French overresponse to FLN violence was expected; a French mob gathered post-bombing and executed a *rattonade* ("rat-hunt," Arab-killing spree) through the city against any Muslims they found.[l] This overreaction was so familiar to FLN leaders like Yacef that he routinely ordered his operatives off the streets after an offensive, leaving regular citizens to feel the wrath of the French and be swayed to the FLN's cause.

On January 7, 1957, General Jacques Massu of the Paratroopers was called to Algiers to end the FLN's grip on Algiers. His methods, while tactically effective, became a growing cancer on French society, internationalizing the conflict more than the FLN could have hoped. In particular, the widespread use of torture and other questionable interrogation and police methods solicited outcry in mainland France. No sooner had the French entered Algiers to begin pacifying operations, however, than the FLN called for one of their strongest resistance measures yet: a week-long strike. The strike was intended to be a strong statement to the international community—and specifically, the UN—that Algerians uniformly supported the FLN and were willing to oppose the French by all means. While provoking the French was perhaps not the primary goal of the strike, FLN leaders were certainly aware that the French response to a peaceful measure might also work in their favor; the UN and the world, after all, had all eyes on Algeria at that time. On the morning of the strike's start, the French dropped leaflets and sounded loudspeakers demanding that Algerians go to work.[li] When propaganda failed, the French began breaking into shops, tearing off the shutters, and allowing looting until shop owners "emerge[d] in order to protect their unguarded goods, and were then ordered to remain open under threat of imprisonment." [lii] The brutal strike-breaking tactics continued throughout the week, and French troops even rounded up workers and drove them to work, a so-called "collection service." [liii] While the strike was a tactical failure for the FLN, the French violent and repressive strikebreaking actions ultimately provided more political ammunition for the FLN's cause.

## A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

### *The FLN's Success: Internationalizing the Conflict*

For the FLN, “diplomacy” and “terrorism” were inextricably linked; violence and repression by the French proved invaluable tools—not for prompting a mass Algerian uprising, but in the world arena. As an FLN representative remarked at the UN, “[E]very time a bomb explodes in Algiers we are taken more seriously here.”<sup>[liv]</sup> Violent and horrific in their own right, the FLN’s terror tactics proved that they were willing to do whatever it took, for however long, to gain independence. While the war was still years away from its end, it was through this strategy of internationalizing the conflict through violence and terrorism that the FLN eventually garnered independence. Despite losing the military battle, the FLN won the political “war,” gaining the international support and opinion necessary for a grant of independence.

### *Bringing the Fight to France: The FLN and the OAS*

In August and September 1958, the FLN opened a new front in their terror war: France. Orchestrating bombings and attacks on police stations, the FLN also attacked strategic supply reserves that were being sent to French troops in Algeria.<sup>[lv]</sup> Between the rise of terrorism in France and the newly elected French President Charles de Gaulle’s failure to propose an acceptable ceasefire, something had to give. Notably, in the previous years, the issue of Algerian independence was so decisive that it toppled the Fourth Republic and brought Charles de Gaulle to power in 1958.<sup>[lvi]</sup> In the years after his rise to President, de Gaulle aptly noted that the French were rapidly losing credibility in its fight against the FLN; accordingly, de Gaulle began to speak of “reconciliation”,<sup>[lvii]</sup> and then called for a ceasefire.<sup>[lviii]</sup> He made the correct observation that France was going to lose Algeria; de Gaulle simply attempted to shape the end game. In 1959, de Gaulle replaced the Algerian Commander-in-Chief with General Maurice Challe, with whom he charged the duty of swiftly ending the military conflict. Under Challe, the French bolstered their recruitment of *harkis* (Algerian citizens fighting for the French) as counterweights to FLN resistance, and reenacted the controversial *regroupement* policy. Active since 1958 and before, the relocation policy peaked in 1959 to relocate over one million Muslims.<sup>[lix]</sup> At their worst in this period, the camps resembled overcrowded refugee camps that lacked basic sanitation and proper health provisions:

“[I]nmates were found eating grass in the field, and in the overcrowded, tented encampments for nomads of the south infants were often found dead of cold in the mornings.”<sup>[lx]</sup>

In response to de Gaulle’s comments favorable to Algerian independence, a group of European right-wing dissidents based in Algeria began their own insurrection against the French government.<sup>[lxi]</sup> Known as the *ultras* for their extreme right-wing views, this group coalesced to form the *Organisation de l’armée secrète* (Organization of the Secret Army, OAS). Formed in January 1961, the OAS became an FLN-like guerrilla element in the fight against de Gaulle and the French government, using all means necessary—including terrorism—to keep Algeria French. The OAS targeted anyone inside Algeria devoted to an “Algerian Algeria,” setting off a series of strong explosions and targeted assassinations in Algiers to terrify the Muslim and European communities.<sup>[lxii]</sup> Within months, the OAS had significant representation in both Algiers and Oran, where it acted with “apparent impunity,” as it carried out assassinations amid ineffective and inactive police oversight.<sup>[lxiii]</sup> The police faced similar challenges in countering the OAS as the FLN; the OAS clung to a bastion of support from the poor, white neighborhoods of Algiers and Oran, where its knowledge of the people and landscape afforded the same privileges as the FLN had in the mountains.<sup>[lxiv]</sup> But, the OAS couldn’t stop Algeria’s momentum toward independence, and France and the FLN signed the Evian Accords in 1962, officially ending hostilities. Then, on July 1, Algerians voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Evian Accords’ grant of independence; on July 3, de Gaulle officially recognized independence.<sup>[lxv]</sup>

Competing factions—most notably the FLN, but also the *paras* and the OAS—were willing to do *anything* necessary to achieve their political goals and found violence the most effective tactic. The FLN eventually attained their political goal of independence; however, FLN success must also be viewed in context of its ability to internationalize a political issue *through* violent methods. In contrast, the OAS failed militarily and politically. While its violent campaigns were far bloodier in its shorter lifespan, terrorism for the OAS was not paired with political maneuvering, allowing a military defeat by the French army to effectively end the OAS as an opposition force.

# A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

## Case Study 2: The Algerian Civil War, 1990-1998

“A man is stopped by a roadblock. The hooded men ask him if he supports the government or the GIA. He replies ‘the government’ so they cut his right ear off. Shortly after, he is stopped by another roadblock of hooded men. They ask him the same question. When he replies ‘the GIA’ they cut his left ear off. The following day he goes to the doctor, who asks him which part of his face he wants sewn up first. ‘My mouth, so I cannot speak,’ he replies.”[lxvi]

“If you did not study during Boumediène’s time then you will never study.  
If you did not make money during Chadli’s time then you will never make money.  
If you did not die during Zeroual’s time then you will never die.”[lxvii]

-Algerian jokes from the 1990s Civil War

Upon independence from France, FLN leader Ben Bella raced to Algiers to claim his spot as head of the FLN and Algeria’s first President. Quickly, however, Houari Boumédiène, Ben Bella’s Defense Minister, organized a bloodless coup to install himself as the new President.[lxviii] Ruling with an iron fist and learning from the inability of his predecessor to quickly consolidate power, Boumédiène used the army to maintain power inside the FLN. After Boumédiène’s 1978 death, a powerful military faction (the HCE, High State Committee) of the FLN brought Chadli Benjedid to power as President.[lxix] Chadli’s presidency was characterized by a more open political system and shift toward a free-market economy, though economic malaise, unemployment, and rapidly shifting government positions were quickly trying the people’s patience.[lxx]

### *The 1988 Black October Riots*

In a backlash against unemployment, skyrocketing debt, and state mismanagement, tensions broke out into riots in Algiers and its suburbs in October 1988. The riots were not overtly religious or political, but were still seen as a threat to order by the army, who eventually intervened in a violent repression that killed an estimated 500 protestors[lxxi] in the “worst day of violence” since Algeria’s independence.[lxxii] Described as the Algerian *intifada*, Black October was the Sétif of the Civil War, an inciting incident in the rapidly approaching violent spiral. [lxxiii]

### *The FIS’ Formation*

Created in 1989, the FIS (*Front Islamique de Salut*, Islamic Salvation Front) was a crystallization of discontent with the FLN after Black October. It advocated a state based on Islam and focused political outreach efforts through its social welfare programs.[lxxiv] In 1990, many hailed Algeria’s move to multi-party, municipal elections as a step closer to democracy; the FIS won easily in a process that included over 50 political parties. While the motivations for voting for the FIS were numerous, varied, and even contradictory, the 54% vote for the FIS versus a 28% for the FLN was a clear vote of no confidence in the FLN government.[lxxv]

In December 1991, the FLN government panicked when the FIS won first-round parliamentary elections with a 188-seat majority.[lxxvi] Terrified that an openly Islamist group could win enough seats in the second round to run the country, the army seized power and cancelled elections. The army then brought to the Presidency of the HCE a formerly exiled FLN founder, Mohammed Boudiaf.[lxxvii] This was not a last-minute emergency decision, though. The military had prepared for the coup by alerting Tunisian border forces and readying a justification for Algerians on why the coup was necessary.[lxxviii] The military, thus, made a calculated decision to insure the election results would keep an FLN ruler in power—at all costs. In February 1992, the FLN declared a state of emergency, suspending constitutional provisions in the name of security and stability.[lxxix] By March, the FLN dissolved the FIS and arrested its two top leaders, Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj.[lxxx]

In the time between FIS local election wins and the 1991 election cancellation, however, the FIS had time to make an impact on the population. The FIS used the time to “Arabize” and “Islamicize” the populations they governed. Others supported the FIS not for their Islamist platform, but for the prospect of change from the status quo of the FLN.[lxxxi] Particularly for frustrated and unemployed—but well-educated—youths, the FIS appeared as the party of

## A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

“opportunity,” which would break Algerians away from the FLN’s high un- and under-employment rates.[lxxxii]

### *The Rise of Armed Groups*

After the government cancelled the 1992 elections and banned the FIS, a number of anti-regime groups, previously existent but dormant in wait for the election results, announced their intentions confront the FLN militarily.[lxxxiii] Major points of contention between the FIS and other anti-regime groups had been that the FIS believed in the establishment of an Islamic state through elections;[lxxxiv] violence and armed rebellion, for the FIS, were only intended to force the regime to reinstate the FIS as a legitimate, competitive political party. In contrast, groups that would coalesce to form the GIA (*Groupe Islamique d’Armé*, Armed Islamic Group) felt that violence was the only way to forcefully eliminate the FLN and bring to power an Islamic state. There was no reason, they argued, to bother reinstating the old political system. When the FIS was banned from political life, then, the more militant anti-regime groups no longer had any obstacles to pursuing violent struggle. Each group consequently moved forward its own political endgame. For the FIS, like the independence-era FLN, diplomacy and change by way of elections were met with outright state stonewalling; eventually, the FIS felt forced to intervene militarily as a method of achieving its political goals. For the GIA, the original political goal was to overthrow the FLN and establish an Islamic regime. Where the GIA differs from the Clausewitzian doctrine on war as policy, though, is that the GIA had no intention of attempting diplomacy, seeing it as a waste of time. Rather, the group jumped to violence and terror to force change.

After dismantling the party and arresting FIS leaders, the FLN used intimidation against what was left of FIS sympathizers to discourage them from revitalizing the FIS.[lxxxv] As a result of the policy, however, the regime polarized moderate FIS sympathizers to become more radical followers of violent anti-regime groups, or even into insurgents themselves.[lxxxvi] This is a striking parallel to the methods that brought the FLN to power against the French. Overreaction and repression of moderate FIS sympathizers only served to polarize Algerians, and they often chose the anti-FLN side.

Alternative anti-FLN groups had existed for years. The most powerful, initially, and a frontrunner in the original campaign against the FLN, was the MIA (*Mouvement Islamique Armé*, Armed Islamic Movement). The MIA was well organized, well armed, and operated out of the *maquis* (mountainous guerrilla strongholds), where insurgent knowledge of the terrain was advantageous to waging guerrilla campaigns. Moreover, the MIA was composed of many *Moudjahidin* fighters, who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan.[lxxxvii] These fighters were welcomed back to Algeria and celebrated for having first-hand knowledge of fighting a *holy war*; soon enough, they applied the same tactics to the civil war in Algeria.

By September 1992, the politically disbanded FIS officially entered into conflict against the FLN to regain its political rights by force, forming its armed wing, the AIS (*Armée Islamique du Salut*, Islamic Salvation Army).[lxxxviii] However, by the time the FIS declared its military resistance to the regime, groups like the GIA and MIA had already been mobilizing anti-regime supporters dedicated to change through violence alone. While the GIA did not officially form until October 1992—at which time it was still a loose conglomeration of anti-regime groups—the FIS’s initial slow response cost it its legitimacy in the eyes of the people and allowed the GIA to gain support for its own platform of power through violence. Because the FIS had officially been disbanded, it was militant Islamist groups who became the first, true initiators of civil war, and they began with terrorist acts designed to garner Algerian attention and sentiment. Thought to number approximately 2,000-3,000 fighters in 1993, the GIA’s spectacular bombings and assassinations created an air of “invincibility” and lent legitimacy to their claim of fighting a holy war.[lxxxix] The GIA’s strength was in their effective and terrifying targeting: a scorched earth policy destroyed trains, schools, and, in summer 1993, the assassination of up to ten police officers each night.[xc] The GIA initially targeted symbols of the “colonialist” leanings of the FLN regime: French intellectuals, nationals, and foreign journalists were singled out for assassination. By October 1993, the GIA had added all foreigners and non-Muslims to the list of vulnerable targets.[xci]

### *The State Response*



## A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

It was against the mounting power of the GIA that the regime attempted to pacify Algiers and its surrounding rebel strongholds; backed by a 15,000-strong force, the army pushed Islamist fighters out of the cities.[xcii] Because so many of the rebel groups operated in the remote *maquis* where intelligence-gathering was difficult, the Algerian security forces often placed double agents inside armed groups. As many Algerians suspected for years, the security forces purposely used infiltrators, particularly in the GIA, to push the group toward a more extreme, radical ideology.[xciii] The regime hoped to scare the population into *needing* security from the state, lending legitimacy to the government's repressive counterinsurgency methods.[xciv]

As part of its counterterrorism strategy, the FLN state used a version of Marighela's "militarization" model. Rather than provoking "overresponse," the regime instead fomented the insurgency from the ground up, through its GIA infiltrations, in hopes that extreme violence would justify a *carte blanche* from the Algerian people to suppress the insurgency. Like the insurgents, the regime perpetuated its strategy in pursuit of a political goal: power consolidation in the face of insurrection. In the FLN's case, the strategy was relatively effective. While violence against the state continued well into the 2000s, including horrific massacres through 1997 and 1998, the state eventually won out over the insurgents, and today the Algerian security apparatus has a no tolerance policy for Islamic insurgents.[xcv]

*"Tension was everywhere": [xcvi] The Descent into Violence*

In 1992, Algerian guerrilla forces were estimated at 2,000.[xcvii] By 1993, the number multiplied to 22,000, peaking at 40,000 in 1994.[xcviii] By 1993, the state was experiencing guerrilla warfare throughout Greater Algiers, including attacks by both the FIS and the GIA. To counter the growing militant influence, the government trained its soldiers in anti-guerrilla operations, 15,000 of who were parts of the Algiers pacification force. The occupation of Algiers was particularly effective in paralyzing the insurgency because it stressed the population, which was necessary to provide for the soldiers' needs, keeping them in a state of constant terror, as any association with the military could be construed to the insurgents as spying—a potentially deadly allegation.

Until 1994, the non-Islamist aligned population was spared from the urban-based terror orchestrated by armed insurgents. By 1994, the hope for a decisive victory—one way or another—was gone, and the opposing parties moved toward "total war," the wide-reaching implications of which forced the population to choose sides:

Algerians grew accustomed to unexplained explosions and bursts of gunfire at night; to news of yet another colleague or relative being knifed to death or gunned down while on the way to work or out shopping; to constantly coming across security force roadblocks and checkpoints that could always turn out to be a dreaded *faux barrage*, a 'false checkpoint.' [xcix]

This forced polarization of citizens through violence and terror was effective in that it provided a clear answer—either support or opposition—from the populace. Marighela's militarized strategy, then, moved the Islamic groups closer to their political goals.

In their anti-guerrilla campaigns, the 1990s Algerian state response has many parallels to that of French actions during the independence struggle. Special anti-guerrilla forces, *ninjas*, regularly used waterboarding-like water torture, sexual abuse and beatings, and electrocution as interrogation techniques against suspected insurgents.[c] In an attempt to act under legal cover, Algeria passed anti-terrorism laws to allow trials of FIS sympathizers, despite their illegality under international law.[ci] To increase the "culture of fear," many units—both government and insurgent—fought under cover of darkness: "The daytime *hittiste* [urban poor] could well be a night-time fighter, and the keen sportsman at a sports centre could belong to the special units." [cii] This uncertainty was so pervasive that residents feared travelling too far out of their home; if stopped at a government-run checkpoint, residents knew that even the smallest mistake could mean arrest. Even in smaller communities, the presence of government informers—or even, rumor of their presence—was enough to keep the community in fear:

"People knew that even the most innocuous activity could have fatal consequences. Survival might depend on how you greeted people. Was it in French, Arabic, or Berber? Did it include any religious references?" [ciii]

## **A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria**

Written by Kelsey Lilley

Algeria as a whole was transformed by 1994 into a country on edge; violence and death were “normal.”

Despite having the military upper hand by 1994, the FLN regime understood that, amid ceaseless violence, the regime still lacked legitimacy among Algerians.[civ] Thus, it convened a reconciliation conference (though it made no progress) and, in September, released FIS leaders Madani and Belhadj from prison.[cv] With renewed training and bolstered forces, the government organized and carried out 1995 Presidential elections, resulting in the election of General Liamine Zéroual.[cvi] While the government hoped that the successful election would restore its legitimacy by reinstating the political process, the Islamist groups had not given up; historian Hugh Roberts observes of the 1995 election: “[T]he voters did not really elect the President; they either expressed their ideological allegiances, or ratified the army’s choice of President.”[cvii]

After Zéroual’s first 1995 elections, deemed the “elections of hope,” the state continued to gain ground on the insurgents despite protracted violence by both the FIS/AIS and the GIA.[cviii] By Zéroual’s second election, the GIA had significantly declined in terms of its leadership and ability to legitimately threaten the regime. However, rather than fading into the fray, the GIA engaged in a last-ditch attempt at power, by “unleash[ing] mass murder on civilians.”[cix] The dying GIA, thus, orchestrated a series of gruesome massacres. At this point, the GIA, while lethal, lost all legitimacy when it diverged from a realistic political goal to seek a “policy” of senseless violence. There was no longer a strategy behind the terror; violence continued only as part of its cycle.

### *The Cracks Widen: AIS vs. GIA*

In contrast to the GIA, the FIS/AIS attempted to distinguish itself by condemning attacks on foreigners and vowing only to attack symbols of the regime.[cx] This clear break from the GIA led to factional rivalries and, eventually, all-out war among the Islamist groups for the population’s support. Tactically, strategically, and ideologically, the GIA and FIS opposed each other. Additionally, the FIS never diverged from its goal of reinstating political parties and elections, to which violence and terror were merely the means to an end. The GIA, however, wanted nothing to do with the political process, instead opting for sheer terror against Algeria, claiming of elections and a political process that “God alone legislates.”[cxi]

Upon his 1999 election, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika attempted to eliminate what was left of Algeria’s insurgent groups.[cxii] Algeria passed a controversial amnesty law for militants who turned themselves in. But, what was more effective than amnesty was the FIS/AIS ceasefire, which has been dutifully upheld since 1997.[cxiii] By 1998, the GIA was irrelevant as a major antagonist to the regime; Zéroual’s focus on both reconciliation and military dominance successfully undermined much of the GIA structure.[cxiv] Ultimately, the threat of the Islamist groups faded.

Bouteflika’s achievements brought a permanent truce between the FIS/AIS and the government in 1999. These negotiations set the foundation for the “civil concord” that eventually allowed general militant amnesty.[cxv] Problematic groups remaining include the fragmented GIA splinter group, the GSPC (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*, Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), considered presently to have lost legitimate political goals, acting simply as a terrorist organization. The GSPC has recently morphed into a regional branch of al Qaeda. Algerian security forces continue to mount operations against the Islamic insurgents, and, particularly after September 11, 2001, Algeria has benefitted from security assistance from Western countries.

In the five years at the height of the civil war (1992-1997), an estimated 120,000 people were killed.[cxvi] At some points during the war, there were 500 deaths per week. [cxvii] While wholly opposed to the other’s political goals, both the Islamists and the FLN are to blame for the number of casualties and the amount of destruction from the Civil War. Terrorism and violence were successful for the FLN in keeping the Islamist threat at bay; for the Islamists, violent tactics were not enough to force the FLN to change its policies. While the violence and terror is officially over, the legacies of the Algerian civil war will not soon be forgotten.

### **Conceptual: Analyzing the Role of Violence and Terrorism in Politics**

It is clear from both case studies that insurgents used violence and terrorism as a means through which they could

# A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

attempt political objectives. For the FLN, violence and terror provoked French overreaction, which polarized Algerians and garnered international support for Algerian independence. In the 1990s, the FIS used armed insurrection against the FLN to force FIS re-integration into the political sphere. For the GIA and other disparate groups, violence and terror were perpetuated to overthrow the FLN altogether and establish an Islamic state. For Clausewitz, this partnership is natural:

“[W]ar is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse... The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.”[cxviii]

Although violence and terror are considered merely aspects of war, both case studies illustrate an adherence to the idea of using such tactics to perpetuate policy.

## *Violence*

In the Algerian cases, it is helpful to analyze the elements of both violence and terrorism as means to achieving the political end that Clausewitz discusses. For decolonization proponent and philosopher Frantz Fanon, violence in a revolutionary context has the ability to “free” the people:

“[V]iolence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self respect.”[cxix]

For Fanon, violence *must* be an integral part of any revolutionary movement. Particularly, in the decolonization era through which Fanon lived, as well as the “neo-colonialist” administration of the FLN in the eyes of 1990s insurgents, Fanon’s observations of violence as a freeing force are plausible. In particular, insurgents fighting against years of misrule and oppression offer motive for the “liberation violence” theory.

Opposite Fanon is the perspective that violence corrupts. Particularly in the debate over torture, General Aussaresses’ memoir of his time in the French army during the Battle of Algiers provides a stark contrast to the perspective of Fanon. Aussaresses’ memoirs contain, in gruesome detail, accounts of the systematic violence and torture used against FLN suspects. While Aussaresses is not repentant, his introduction is a caution to readers about the power of violence:

“What I did in Algeria was undertaken for my country in good faith, even though I didn’t enjoy it... I pass no judgment on others and certainly not on my former enemies... May the readers of this book remember that it is easier to judge in haste than to understand, and simpler to ask for forgiveness than to state the facts.”[cxx]

## *Terrorism*

While there is no single accepted definition of terrorism, academics agree on various elements of its makeup. For Hutchinson, terrorism includes “deliberate,” “destructive,” “anonymous,” and “unpredictable” violent acts against mostly civilian targets—chosen for their symbolic value—with the aim of instilling fear for a political purpose.[cxxi] To narrow her definition to the revolutionary situation inherent in both Algerian cases, she notes that terrorism is a strategic element of insurgents’ search for political power and regime change, particularly for groups who begin with few resources.[cxxii] The last element of terrorism on which Hutchinson focuses is with regards to the intended psychological effects; in the Algerian cases, each actor used terrorism to force an effect on the civilian population, “whose loyalties and support may determine the outcome of the revolution.”[cxxiii]

Insurgents fighting to overthrow a state apparatus have major hurdles to overcome. Often, they are fighting a better-armed, better-trained, and better-funded counterinsurgency force, so they must choose their tactics wisely and frugally. It is, thus, the asymmetric nature of terror that is appealing for insurgents. While it does not “cost” the group much to carry out initial events, the “benefit” is reaped in the level of anxiety, isolation, and insecurity rendered by

# A Policy of Violence: The Case of Algeria

Written by Kelsey Lilley

each attack. For the insurgents, violence is, to a degree, assumed necessary for reaching political goals; the state, however, submits to a much higher burden of responsibility: "The counterinsurgency forces...must appear to be angels while fighting a dirty war." [cxxiv] An entrenched government, whether the French in 1954 or the FLN in the 1990s, must appease its constituents, provide services, and uphold law and order. As Galula observes,

"[D]isorder—the normal state of nature—is cheap to create and very costly to prevent. The insurgent blows up a bridge, so every bridge has to be guarded; he throws a grenade in a movie theater, so every person entering a public place has to be searched." [cxxv]

It is these costs that are effective in forcing a polity to move toward the insurgent's goals. While Clausewitz was not witness to the Algiers bombings in 1957 and 1958 or the GIA massacres in the late 1990s, he would recognize the utilization of war tactics—however brutal—in relentless pursuit of political gain.

## *Conclusions and Further Research*

From this analysis of the Algerian case studies, it is clear that both violence and terror were central to all actors' goals. Each actor, in its own way, used violence and terrorism to further political aims, with varying degrees of success. For the FLN of 1954 to 1962 and the Islamists of the 1990s, violence was a unifying force that resulted in the population's support and cooperation. With an end political goal of independence, the FLN capitalized on French overreaction to polarize Algerians and international observers alike. For the Islamists, neither violence nor terror was enough to achieve a "democratic" result or an Islamic state. For the French, violence and terror were considered means to an end, being rendered as necessary for keeping Algeria French. In its desire to keep Algeria by all means, however, France overstepped the acceptable threshold of violence and, eventually, lost the political battle on the international stage. The FLN regime in the 1990s, on the other hand, successfully mitigated the Islamist threat through a calculated counterinsurgency campaign of violence and repression, consistently using said tactics for their political goal of regime consolidation.

These concepts and case studies provide a foundation for the analysis of similar insurgent movements. While each is distinct in its political aims, strategies, and tactics, the framework of violence and terror as a means of "war" to achieving those goals is a commonality across contexts.

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[iv] Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 30.

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[vii] Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 33-35.

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[xii] *Ibid*, 25.

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Written by Kelsey Lilley

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[xxvi] *Ibid*, 129.

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Written by Kelsey Lilley

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[lv] Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 318.

[lvi] *Ibid*, 572.

[lvii] *Ibid*, 301.

[lviii] *Ibid*, 342.

[lix] *Ibid*, 338.

[lx] *Ibid*.

[lxi] *Ibid*, 479.

[lxii] *Ibid*, 486.

[lxiii] *Ibid*, 488-489.

[lxiv] *Ibid*, 490.

[lxv] *Ibid*, 531.

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Written by Kelsey Lilley

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[lxxvi] *Ibid*, 191.

[lxxvii] *Ibid*, 191.

[lxxviii] *Ibid*, 256.

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[lxxxix] Evans and Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*, 186.

[xc] *Ibid*, 187.

[xci] *Ibid*, 295.

[xcii] Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War*, 72.

[xciii] Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, 188.

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Written by Kelsey Lilley

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[cii] Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War*, 76.

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Written by Kelsey Lilley

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