“No Fixed Values”


Christopher Cradock and M. L. R. Smith

“...for our generation there are no fixed values.”¹ So said Major Denoix de Saint-Marc, a Légionnaire, St. Cyrian, wartime resistance veteran, Buchenwald survivor, and veteran of Indochina, Suez, and the Battle of Algiers, at his trial in 1962 for conspiring in the so-called Generals’ Putsch. Few people familiar with the events in Algeria from 1954 to 1962 could deny that “fixed values” were rare during that period. This lacuna is what inspired Saint-Marc and his confrères in the French Army to attempt to codify a new set of operational and strategic “fixed values” by developing the theory of guerre révolutionnaire (revolutionary war, though frequently rendered in English translation as “counterrevolutionary war”),² which reached its most graphic expression in the Battle of Algiers.

The Battle of Algiers was controversial at the time and has remained the subject of often heated debate. The dearth of systematic analysis of guerre révolutionnaire, which formed the strategic backdrop against which the Battle of Algiers was conducted, is therefore surprising. The neglect is evident in French-language sources, though the paucity of analysis of guerre révolutionnaire in English is even starker. A notable gap exists in the historiography between the publication of General Jacques Massu’s two memoirs in 1971 and 1972 and the body of work produced when debate about the Battle of Algiers

² See, for example, John J. McCuen, The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War: The Strategy of Counter-Insurgency (London: Faber, 1966). McCuen’s work was heavily influenced by French writings of the period.
and the use of torture was reignited by the publication of an interview with a former member of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), Louisette Ighilahriz, in *Le Monde* in June 2000.3 The interview implicated Massu and other French officers in the use of torture during the battle and set the scene for the publication in 2001 of General Paul Aussaresses’s memoir, for which he was subsequently prosecuted for publishing an apologia for war crimes.4

Over the years, the focus on torture and other abuses has tended to narrow the scope of research, with the Battle of Algiers being used largely as a morality tale about what happens when a state exceeds permissible limits in its pursuit of a counterterrorist policy. This narrow focus has militated against a broader appreciation of *guerre révolutionnaire*. Massu’s memoirs were written in the aftermath of the release of Gillo Pontecorvo’s film, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), which, though by no means entirely one-sided, was largely pro-FLN and even used the former Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN) commander in Algiers, Saadi Yacef, to reprise his real-life role in the film. That Massu’s memoir was written in response to the film can be seen in his choice of title (the *real or true* battle of Algiers), and Massu spent large sections of the book refuting the accusations of torture and mistreatment. When interest in the war in Algeria revived in 2000, the debate was again restricted to the issue of torture and summary executions. Even Aussaresses gave little space to explaining the context of torture in Algeria or examining how the military and civilian authorities came to believe that such harsh measures were justified. Instead, he wrote less a justification and more a bald account of what took place and why it was effective.

Until 2002, a major obstacle to historians of the war was the lack of access to archival material. This situation changed after the trial of Aussaresses, when French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin agreed to accelerate the opening of state archives. Even so, many of the new works based on this material continue to focus on torture and its human impact and do not provide much attention to the historical and military context or assess the overall contribution of torture to French successes and failures in Algeria.5 This focus was shared by the rash of veterans who took the opportunity to exorcise the demons of their past in print, reflecting an anxious need by many to acknowledge more openly what happened in Algeria. These first-hand accounts represented a

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French obsession with the war—a guerre-franco-française—and consequently the memoirs’ largely anecdotal accounts rarely transcended what Neil MacMaster refers to as “travail de mémoire.”

In the decade following the French withdrawal from Algeria, a number of scholars attempted to understand the French strategy of guerre révolutionnaire in the context of the history of the French Army and to assess the validity of the doctrine in military terms. Of these studies, the most comprehensive were Peter Paret’s French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria and George Armstrong Kelly’s Lost Soldiers, both of which sought to explain guerre révolutionnaire and the actions of the French Army in Algeria, even though the authors were unable to consult either official material that was closely guarded by the French state or the testimonies of men involved who often were in prison, on the run, marginalized, or wary of jeopardizing their current positions in an army whose direction had changed radically from the apparent doctrinaire zealotry of the 1950s. Of those that did offer their views, their insights most likely had not yet acquired that measure of detachment that comes with time. Furthermore, although much was known about French methods during the Battle of Algiers, the full extent of torture and extrajudicial killing, as well as certain other crucial details that have come to light only recently, were unknown to commentators in the early 1960s. As a result, Paret, Kelly, and other authors relied heavily on the theoretical output of guerre révolutionnaire devotees from 1954 to 1961 as a guide to interpreting the army’s actions in Algeria, whereas the actual influences and considerations were, as we show here, somewhat more diffuse.

In assessing the actions and motivations of the French military in Algeria, our article avoids being unduly swayed either by the thinking and radical innovations of an influential minority in the armed services establishment or by the trauma of torture. Undoubtedly, both of these issues have considerable

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8. For example, one of the most remarkable aspects of Aussaresses’s revelations was the exposure of Aussaresses himself, of whom almost no reference can be found in the secondary source literature published before 2001. Only in specialized academic circles was Aussaresses known, although even there only obliquely. He was referred to as “Commandant O” in Yves Courrière’s La guerre d’Algérie (Paris: François Maspero, 1968), and as “the head of a clandestine group of killers” in Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s Les crimes de l’Armée Française (Paris: Fayard, 1975). See Jo McCormack, “Torture during the Algerian War,” Modern and Contemporary France, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2002), pp. 392–395.

relevance to the conduct and understanding of the Battle of Algiers, and it would be perverse to suggest otherwise, but they must be placed in a broader consideration of other factors. Indeed, some scholars who wish to move away from regarding the Algerian war as only a “lived” experience or as a national trauma pertinent solely to France and Algeria have adopted this approach. As Martin Alexander and J. F. V. Keiger put it:

To be sure, other stones need to be turned on the Algerian War as a lived or “experienced” phenomenon, and as an imagined one. Yet to venture too far into the socio-cultural phenomena of the Algerian conflict risks ignoring the paths that direct us to any war’s fundamental characteristics: its strategies, military operations, intelligence and diplomacy (or “the international context”).¹⁰

Mathew Connelly’s work on the importance of the diplomatic strategy of the FLN in Algeria has also given new insights into the FLN’s conduct of the war, the shortcomings of guerre révolutionnaire as the basis for operational strategy, and the significance of the Battle of Algiers.¹¹

Our article incorporates some of these new approaches and the insights of past analysis with the first-hand accounts and writings of the protagonists in order to situate the Battle of Algiers within its broadest strategic design. The article examines the attempted codification of a set of strategic “fixed values” and considers the extent to which it influenced the most controversial of the many dramatic incidents during the Algerian War. The article begins by evaluating guerre révolutionnaire, particularly its views on urban terrorism, and then provides an assessment of the methods employed by the French in the Battle of Algiers and their relationship to the theory of guerre révolutionnaire. Finally, the article examines how far the conduct of the battle can be attributed to the theory or to other factors that influenced the decisions of those involved.¹²


“War in the Crowd”: The Theory of Guerre Révolutionnaire

Whether the tactics and strategy of the French military in Algeria can be described simply as guerre révolutionnaire put into practice is a complex question, especially in the context of urban terrorism and the Battle of Algiers. However, there is little doubt that the development of the theory of guerre révolutionnaire and the debates that accompanied it had a considerable influence on many within the French Army in Algeria and on certain key figures in the French civil administration.

The principles of guerre révolutionnaire were drawn primarily from the experience of the war against Communist insurgents in Indochina, although cursory attention was given to Communist uprisings in Greece, Tunisia, and even Iran. Curiously, neither the British experience in Malaya nor the example of Korea was mentioned in French military texts of the period, leading at least one writer to speculate that much of the appeal of guerre révolutionnaire theory lay in the fact that it was a response to the inferiority felt by the French after their defeat and occupation in World War II, especially vis-à-vis the United States and the United Kingdom.

The war in Indochina lasted from 1946 to 1954 and has rightly been described as a trauma for the French—a violent experience that colored all subsequent thought and response. The French struggled to come to terms with the Viet Minh’s combination of military, political, and psychological pressure that inexorably undermined administrative control in local areas, inflicted significant casualties on the French Army, and finally led to the decisive defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. In Indochina, the French aimed to destroy guerrilla formations, an often frustrating business, and to attempt to draw the enemy into set-piece confrontations.

13. The quotation comes from Colonel Nemo (pseud.), “La guerre dans la foule,” Revue de défense nationale, No. 6 (June 1956), p. 1. The use of the Nemo pseudonym highlights an issue that is worth noting here. The evidence suggests that some of the names of colleagues given by former French soldiers involved in the Battle of Algiers (both in interviews and in memoirs) are probably not their real names. If this is so, the likely reason is the controversial nature of the Battle of Algiers and the operation of semi-official, extralegal entities. Former soldiers like Aussaresses were willing to talk about their own activities but did not want to incriminate their former comrades by name. The situation is further complicated because some of the authors of relevant articles in French military journals were identified only by their surnames, which, like Nemo, may well have been pseudonyms. This is the case, for example, with articles cited below by Colonel Labignette and by Colonel de Rocquigny. No information is available from any source about French military officers with those surnames.

Despite this approach, the French achieved some operational innovations during the Indochina campaign that foretold subsequent actions in Algeria. These innovations, pioneered mainly by commanders in the field to counter the unorthodox guerrilla techniques of the Viet Minh, included the employment of units such as the 11ème bn. Parachutistes de Choc (11e. Choc), a joint enterprise between the paratroops and the Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Épionnage (SDECE—the French foreign intelligence service), which specialized in sabotage and counterguerrilla missions. In addition, the larger Groupes de Commandos Mixte Aéroportés (GCMA), formed in 1951, played a leading role in organizing indigenous Catholic and Montagnard formations behind enemy lines. These gave the army its first experiences in countering the psychological techniques and parallel hierarchies of the Viet Minh that were based on Mao’s doctrines developed in the Chinese civil war. Several prominent figures in the Battle of Algiers held positions of command in these units, such as Aussaresses and Colonel Yves Godard in the 11e. Choc, and Colonels Roger Trinquier and Marcel Bigeard in the GCMA.\footnote{See Aussaresses, \textit{Battle of the Casbah}, p. 6; Kelly, \textit{Lost Soldiers}, p. 91, and Roger Trinquier, \textit{Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency} (London: Pall Mall, 1964), pp. viii–ix. See also Peter Drake Jackson, “French Ground Force Organizational Development for Counterrevolutionary Warfare between 1945 and 1962,” M.A. Thesis, Army War College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2005, pp. 38–118, available on-line at http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/cgsc_jackson.pdf.}

More important than tactical innovations was the psychological impact on the army. Soldiers who returned from Indochina brought back not only the bitterness caused by defeat and the death of comrades at the hands of a relentless enemy, whose tactics they had barely begun to understand until it was too late, but also an acute sense of betrayal by the political class and the nation. The governments of the Fourth Republic had ordered French troops to abandon the Vietnamese who had fought with them, compounding the bitterness many times over. Other French soldiers, before they returned to France, had endured captivity in Viet Minh camps where they received further insights into Communist ideology and psychological methods.

The return of the colonial army gave those who had fought in Indochina and had disagreed with the type of war waged by the French High Command the opportunity to air their views. For a time, their output was prolific, dominating the content of military journals and enjoying “a virtual stranglehold on the army’s semi-official organs of information.”\footnote{Kelly, \textit{Lost Soldiers}, p. 127.} The proponents of \textit{guerre révolutionnaire} drew on their personal experiences in Indochina and on other sources and immersed themselves in the revolutionary theories of Vladimir

\textit{Guerre Révolutionnaire} and the Battle of Algiers
Lenin and Mao Zedong. They also consulted a range of material on crowd psychology, most notably *The Rape of the Masses* by Serge Chakotin, whose theories on the manipulation of popular opinion became the basis for much of the psychological warfare operations undertaken in Algeria.\(^\text{17}\) Although some officers disagreed with the calls for radical changes in the army’s doctrine, this was the period of greatest influence for those who advocated *guerre révolutionnaire*.

The impetus for these ideas came mainly from the intelligence staff and veteran officers in the field in Indochina, who invariably enjoyed the support of their political superiors such as Minister of Defense Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury. These ideas were discussed and propagated through the staff colleges, lectures, and veterans associations such as the *Anciens d’Inchôchine*. Space does not permit an examination of the theory of *guerre révolutionnaire* in its entirety. Much of it was written as a guide for fighting Communist rural insurgency rather than urban terrorism, reflecting the experience of Indochina. Nonetheless, the basic principles were intended to be relevant to all aspects of subversive war and purported to redefine the character of war and its primary objectives.

The central tenet of *guerre révolutionnaire* was that the nature of contemporary war had changed radically. Officers who had been involved in the struggle against the Viet Minh wanted the rest of the army to share what Raoul Girardet and Jean-Pierre Thomas describe as “the spectacular revelation of another intellectual and moral universe.”\(^\text{18}\) These officers rejected the view that the East-West standoff was primarily about the rivalry between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact. “Le troisième guerre mondiale est commencé” (the third world war has begun) summed up how influential sections of the French military assessed the importance of regional conflicts like those in Indochina and Algeria.\(^\text{19}\) *Guerre révolutionnaire* doctrine stipulated that war would not involve large-scale conventional forces, let alone nuclear weapons, which the French regarded as something of an Anglo-Saxon obsession. Colonel Charles Lacheroy imagined a conversation between the Soviet officials Nikita Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin in which they acknowledge the impossibility of a nuclear war and instead decide to use revolutionary war to undermine the West by attacking colonial possessions.


and other weak points around the periphery. Officers in the French High Command were not afraid to lecture their allies on their misplaced focus. General Jacques Allard, for example, addressing an audience of NATO commanders in 1957, stated:

The Soviet Union has concealed from many the fact that the direction of its main effort is not the East-West axis, but a vast enveloping curve passing through China, the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Egypt, and North Africa in order to encircle Europe.20

The conspiratorial outlook of the doctrine envisaged only the Communist and the Civilized, “le bon” and “le mal.” There could be no compromise or complacency.21 Commandant Jacques Hogard described the situation thus: “It is the war of revolution for the conquest of the world. This war has become permanent, universal, and truly global.”22 Convinced that the FLN were or would become Communist regardless of their nationalist rhetoric, this conceptual view of the conflict affected the conduct of the war by instilling the belief that almost any means of combat were permissible in such a critical struggle.23

The adherents of guerre révolutionnaire thus depicted the conflicts in Indochina and Algeria as part of a global Communist strategy to win the Cold War without using vast conventional forces. This would be a new type of war in which accepted norms of conventional military strategy, organization, and tactics were obsolete. As Colonel Trinquier observed of the French efforts in Indochina: “Our military machine reminds me of a pile driver attempting to crush a fly.”24 Although the theorists of guerre révolutionnaire realized that the French Army could not simply emulate the approach of Mao, Võ Nguyên Giáp, and other guerrilla commanders, they believed that the basic objective

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21. In addition to fearing a Communist conspiracy, French military officials presumably were motivated also by the idea that Algeria was an integral part of metropolitan France (rather than a colony, like Tunisia or Morocco) and therefore should not be granted independence.


23. In the fevered atmosphere of the 1950s, France was not alone in imagining a global Communist conspiracy. Many who studied Lenin’s writings took the following quotation from 1920 to heart: “In 50 years time armies will not make much sense. We shall have so well eaten away at our enemies before the conflict breaks out that their military operations will fail in the hour of need.” Quoted in Kelly, Lost Soldiers, p. 156. The pattern of successful Communist insurgency in the post-1945 era seemed to bear out this prediction, as insurgents refrained from trying to destroy the enemy in open combat. Not until victory was assured did they move to open combat. This was the lesson of Dien Bien Phu, and guerre révolutionnaire theorists merely extrapolated the strategy and potential outcome to a global scale.

of revolutionary warfare would be the same for counterrevolutionary forces; namely, control of the population. Wars of maneuver and decisive engagements were irrelevant when confronted by an enemy that would fight not so much to gain control of territory as to win the support—voluntary or otherwise—of the civilian population. As Trinquier put it: “We know that the *sine qua non* of modern warfare is the unconditional support of the population.”

The French military theorists noted that the writings of Lenin and Mao placed great emphasis on the importance of secure base areas to sustain the revolution, something that had been manifestly vindicated in both China and Indochina. However, although a base area is often conceived of as a physically defined area, its essential element as viewed by French theorists was actually the moral support of the population. Hence, they believed a base area should be seen as a socio-psychological element rather than a physical expression. Fundamentally, a secure base constituted an area in which an insurgent could move and act with relative freedom. This did not necessarily mean that the insurgents needed to be in ostensible control of the area, desirable though that might be. This point was stressed by one of the French military theorists: “The word ‘base’ does not have the same meaning for Marxist-Leninist theoreticians as for us.” The guerrillas believed that the population was to be won over secretly and controlled by a clandestine network of parallel hierarchies to create a “microstate.” Although the official government apparatus might ostensibly continue to function, real control would pass to the insurgents.

Base areas are critical in any kind of war, but whereas in so-called conventional war they are important as actual locations for staging, resupply, and reserves, in insurgent/revolutionary warfare the same functions are defined in terms of popular support rather than tangible areas. Insurgents are able to move among the civil population, plan in safety, and rely on people to provide food, shelter, intelligence, and new recruits. The theory of *guerre révolutionnaire* sought to ensure the same benefits for the forces of order and deny them to the enemy.

Theorists of *guerre révolutionnaire* believed that Communist revolutionaries had two main advantages over conventional military forces: organization and ideology. The French had been much impressed by the power that Viet Minh cadres exercised over local areas through parallel hierarchies. The revo-

25. Ibid., p. 8; emphasis in original.
volutionary hierarchies ran parallel not only to the official administration but also to one another, with the organization split into different competencies, such as military, political, and logistics. Theorists argued that “the individual is imprisoned in several networks of independent hierarchies” and is thereby controlled from several different directions. 28 Everybody is classified and placed in the revolutionary hierarchy’s “network of networks,” whether farmers, newspaper sellers, even young children, who were often used as couriers. In this environment, informing becomes obligatory, even down to one’s own family. 29

Those who fought in Indochina and Algeria also emphasized the effectiveness of terror in garnering popular support. But they did not consider terror the most important means of controlling the population. Impressive though the Viet Minh’s organization was, the decisive factor was the ardor with which the cadres adhered to Communism. The complex network of hierarchies could not have functioned without a shared commitment to the cause. The French were impressed by the way the Viet Minh had fought on the battlefield and observed similar fervor among the FLN in Algeria. Many French observers assumed that this fervor came from the same source, Communism, which could be reduced to a series of relatively simple ideas that were appealing and understandable to the masses, particularly when given a nationalist veneer. The theorists of guerre révolutionnaire believed that ideology was crucial in controlling the masses and inherent in the potency of Communist and nationalist dogmas, and they perceived an urgent need to formulate a similarly attractive and accessible ideology to help combat the insurgents.

In the Algerian war this search was ultimately fruitless insofar as the cause of Algérie Française did not appeal greatly to those who were most vital to reach, the Muslim Algerians. Formulations comprising liberal humanism, Catholicism, and straight anti-Marxism lacked popular resonance. The search for a counter-ideology thus took on increasingly anti-democratic undertones as it became clear that democracy as an ideology lacked the certainty and clarity of nationalism and Communism, reflecting perhaps the fact that few in the army believed that the Fourth Republic was itself a model of positive democracy. 30 By 1958, Hogard would state that “it is time to realize that demo-

30. Paret discusses an anonymous essay that was distributed in 1957 to thousands of officers in Algeria, Contre-révolutionnaire, stratégie et tactique, which justified insurrection against the Fourth Republic and analyzed the methods to be used: “The army must transform itself. From a purely military organization it must change into a politico-military force that participates in the counter-revolution.” Paret, French Revolutionary Warfare, p. 116.
cratic ideology has become powerless in the world.”\textsuperscript{31} These tendencies eventually led to an attempt by some military officers to overthrow the Fifth Republic and to the formation of the OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète).\textsuperscript{32}

**Guerre Révolutionnaire and Urban Operations**

The attention given to the Battle of Algiers and the subsequent upheavals that centered on the capital of Algeria have tended to obscure the fact that until 1957 the French military had almost no experience of urban guerrilla violence. Despite the quantity of writing from 1954 to 1957, *guerre révolutionnaire* had devoted far less attention to it than to rural insurgency. This is not to say that terrorism in a wider sense was ignored, but France’s experience in Indochina had brought the French Army into contact with forms of violence that were essentially rural and selective rather than the indiscriminate attacks that characterized urban terrorism in the Battle of Algiers. However, urban terrorism did occur in Indochina as well as in other theaters such as Palestine and Cyprus.

*Guerre révolutionnaire* theorists regarded urban terrorism as a means of establishing control over the population, undermining the official administration, and establishing a clear ideological gulf between the forces of order and the revolution. *Guerre révolutionnaire* writers agreed that terrorism is a crucial part of the first stages of revolutionary warfare. As one of the theorists put it: “Urban terrorism is the arm for conquering the minds of the people in the transitional phase between the cold and hot war.”\textsuperscript{33} Others saw terrorist attacks as part of the “publicizing phase.” Apparently random and indiscriminate bombings and assassinations, accompanied by revolutionary slogans, strikes, and demonstrations, would announce the revolutionary movement to the general populace and to the outside world. The core of the organization’s network would also be established at this point.\textsuperscript{34}

A central idea was that terrorist attacks were not intended to persuade

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\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{32} The connection between *guerre révolutionnaire* and the OAS is outside the scope of this study. But it would be wrong to imply that the OAS was an inevitable outgrowth of *guerre révolutionnaire* thinking. Many OAS members, as well as those who participated in the Generals’ Putsch of 1961, did so for a variety of reasons, such as a misplaced sense of honor and the dream of *Algérie Française*. That said, the theory did have some influence on some key individuals and tactics of the OAS. As Paret states: “At the very least it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire* contains a high potential for political explosiveness.” Ibid., p. 120.

\textsuperscript{33} Colonel de Rocquigny, “Urban Terrorism,” *Military Review*, No. 38 (February 1959), p. 1. (De Rocquigny may be a pseudonym.)

\textsuperscript{34} Kelly, *Lost Soldiers*, pp. 116–117.
supporters of the status quo, who were often the primary targets. Instead, the theorists viewed attacks as psychological statements aimed at the indigenous population, whose allegiance the revolutionary organization was trying to secure. In the words of one officer writing under the nom de plume Ximenés:

In the conduct of systematic terrorism, it is not merely necessary to cause the disappearance, by threats or assassination, of a certain person who is hostile to the cause or is feared because of his great influence. The goal is no longer merely the elimination of an obstacle, but a general psychological effect.35

The aim was to cause the disintegration of established authority by undermining its worth and effectiveness in the eyes of the population and to make clear the existence of a ruthless alternative. This “ideological conquest” had two phases. First, the population becomes indifferent to the government but remains essentially passive, assisting neither the authorities nor the revolutionaries. Second, under sustained psychological assault from terrorism and ideological indoctrination, the population begins to give active assistance to the insurgents.36

Those who wrote about terrorism realized that another aim was to provoke a reaction by the forces of order that would further alienate the population from the established administration. If, on the other hand, the forces of order responded weakly, that would leave the population feeling vulnerable to insurgents who seemingly could strike anywhere at any time. Lacking adequate protection and firm leadership, the population would be compelled to accept the legitimacy of insurgents.37 Thus, the revolutionary organization establishes a base from which it can operate and further strengthen its control of the population through indoctrination and more selective terror, such as executions and punishments for minor infringements, focusing on the most recalcitrant.

In all aspects of guerre révolutionnaire theory, the correct response was divided into “la parade” and “la riposte,” the parry and the thrust, based on an assessment of the enemy’s techniques,38 which were divided into “destructive” and “constructive.” Terror, intimidation, and elimination of rivals were classed as destructive, whereas selection, recruitment, infiltration, and so on were “constructive.”39 “La riposte” had to be balanced, according to the theory, by an effective “parade.” According to General Allard, “these two terms

37. Ibid., p. 4.
are inseparable. To destroy without building up would mean useless labor; to build without first destroying would be a delusion.”

However, in counter-terrorism practice, the destruction of “la riposte” predominated. The terrorist network was weakest at the start, and therefore a robust and immediate response was required by the government. “Terrorism,” as one officer put it, “can be described as a germ infecting a healthy organism,” a germ that is vulnerable if the healthy blood cells counterattack immediately. Otherwise, if the body is weak, the germ thrives and gains strength. The key to victory was to destroy not an army but “an armed clandestine organization,” and this would also be the key to victory in the wider war. “Constructive” actions might be useful, “but victory will not be obtained without the critical act (l’acte essentiel): The destruction, as comprehensively as possible, of the rebel political organization.”

Theorists of guerre révolutionnaire had little to say about the means to achieve these objectives in conditions of urban guerrilla warfare. Generally, they agreed that an extensive and efficient intelligence organization was necessary, having noted the importance of intelligence and its relationship to the Viet Minh’s control of the population. The theory emphasized the destruction of the insurgent organization as a general principle but with no specific thought to operations in an urban environment. Despite Trinquier’s thorough exposition of urban counterterrorism and guerre révolutionnaire, his thinking was largely a post-hoc reaction to his experiences in Algeria and indeed first appeared in 1961 with the publication of his La Guerre Moderne. In 1956 the French Army had almost no experience with urban terrorism or the policing tasks they would soon undertake. Guerre révolutionnaire gave the army a set of principles that might influence such operations, but did not give a detailed plan that could be put into effect.

**The FLN/ALN in Algiers**

Much Algerian nationalist military strategy was based on the study of previous conflicts. Hocine Aït Ahmet, the head of the Mouvement pour le
Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques, a rival nationalist organization to the FLN, analyzed the insurgencies in Ireland from 1916 to the 1920s, as well as Mao’s efforts in China and the struggle of the Viet Minh in Indochina. He reported that Algeria was geographically and socially unsuited to a guerrilla campaign, and he suggested the coordination of finances, propaganda, and morale to influence external opinion in order to “integrate the people’s war into the international context.”46 Undoubtedly such thinking also affected the approach of the FLN, which appeared equally anxious to cater to anti-colonial opinion. Most notably, FLN attacks across Algeria increased around the time of the Bandung Conference in 1955, and the general pattern of FLN activity through 1961 sought to link Algeria with the global tide of decolonization. As Phillipe Tripié, a French intelligence officer, noted, there was “a natural interaction between the Algerian event and its global context.”47

The decision to fight in Algiers was the FLN’s initiative and should be seen in the framework of the organization’s overall strategy. The urban campaign of 1956–1957 in Algiers was intended to influence world opinion, highlighting the anti-colonial nature of the struggle, undermining the French position, and persuading sympathetic states that the FLN was strong enough to deserve aid and recognition. In the fall of 1956, one FLN leader, Ramdane Abane, asked, “Is it preferable for our cause to kill ten enemies in some riverbed in Telergma, which no one will talk about, or to kill one person in Algiers, which the American press will report the next day? Although we are taking some risks, we must make our struggle known.”48

Such attacks, often indiscriminately targeting pied noirs civilians, as in the notorious bombings of a milk bar and a restaurant on 30 September 1956, characterized the FLN’s conduct in the Battle of Algiers. Continuous random shootings and bombings directed at European civilians and officials ensued. From October 1956 to January 1957 the FLN established its “base area” in the Casbah district of Algiers through a mixture of coercion and voluntary recruitment. The FLN developed an organizational structure that, in a manner not dissimilar to the Viet Minh, attempted to displace French administrative authority. This structure included committees of information, justice, finance, health, and trade unions, as well as a liaison committee to maintain contact with other wilayas (military districts). The Casbah was to become the


46. Connelly, “Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonisation,” p. 223.
47. Ibid., p. 224.
ZAA (Zone Autonome d’Alger), in which the FLN was the effective authority and in which its leadership, the Comité de Coordination et d’Exécution (CEE), would be based.

The ZAA was headed by a council of four: a political-military leader, a political assistant, a military assistant, and an external liaison and intelligence assistant representing the two elements of the FLN and the ALN.49 The rest of the FLN network was divided into three sectors and subdivided into districts and groups. From that level downward, the organization comprised cells, minimizing the damage from the possible loss of one or more members or cells. The lowest constituent was the demi-cell of three people. Two demicells and a leader made up a single cell, and two cells and a leader made up a demi-group, and so on.50 The FLN side of the network concentrated on recruitment, indoctrination, and, in particular, the collection of funds. Trinquier estimated FLN membership in Algiers by December 1956 at around 4,500.51 The ALN network in the city generally operated separately except at the highest level and was smaller, with approximately 1,400 members.52 Finally, the bomb-planting network operated autonomously and kept in contact with the ALN chief only through letter drop.

In January 1957 the number of attacks increased dramatically in the run-up to the opening session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. In that one month, more than 100 separate terrorist incidents occurred in Algiers, with more than 4,000 operations undertaken by the ALN in Algeria as a whole.53 The FLN also called a weeklong general strike on 28 January for the period leading up to the opening session of the UN General Assembly. Further attacks took place in February, including at public sports venues, but the efficiency of the anti-terrorist tactics of the paratroopers meant that by the end of March the FLN/ALN networks lay in tatters and that no attacks occurred in March. In April, the members of the CEE escaped from Algiers to continue directing the rebellion from Tunisia, although this did not include Larbi Ben M’Hidi who had been captured and killed in prison under the direct supervision of Aussaresses in March.

The lull came to an end in June when a new campaign began under Saadi Yacef, the head of the ALN, who decided to return to the offensive. FLN fighters planted bombs in lampposts and, most notoriously, under the stage of an orchestra at a dance hall. The new wave of terrorism was distinct from the

49. Trinquier, Modern Warfare, p. 10.
50. Ibid., p. 11.
51. Ibid., p. 13.
campaign that preceded it. Yacef was alone as the main leader in the city by now and had little choice, having refused to flee.54 He sought to reinvigorate the FLN’s momentum and to avenge the executions of captured FLN militants by the French. But this was the last, desperate, riposte of a network that had been defeated and was being hunted to extinction by the paratroop units, which had been recalled once more from the bled (rural areas). From the end of July 1957, terrorist activity in Algiers declined to almost nothing. The Battle of Algiers formally ended in September 1957 with the capture of Saadi Yacef and the death of the ALN’s chief assassin, Ali la Pointe (Ali Ammar).

“Un Travail de Flic”: Guerre Révolutionnaire in Practice

The defeat of the FLN in Algiers has generally been regarded as a tactical victory directly attributable to guerre révolutionnaire. One of the most comprehensive studies of the French Army’s performance states that “the victory of Algiers was an undisputed success of guerre révolutionnaire.”55 Martha Crenshaw Hutchinson agreed, noting that guerre révolutionnaire “underlay the army’s response to FLN terrorism.”56 But how far was the conduct of the French military in the Battle of Algiers truly influenced by this doctrine?

The FLN’s campaign reached a peak in the final weeks of 1956. Bombings were frequent, but most disconcertingly for the pied noir population were the random assassinations, which stirred widespread fear and distrust and gave rise to ethnic violence in December 1956 with the murder of the mayor of Boufarik and president of the Federation of Mayors of Algeria, Amédée Froger. Yacef and Ben M’Hidi had decided to kill a prominent pied noir leader in order to widen the gulf between the two communities.57 The killing of Froger by Ali la Pointe sparked a mass turnout by the pied noir population at his funeral. An FLN bomb at the cemetery, which mistimed and therefore did not inflict the intended mass casualties, further enraged an already emotional crowd, leading to vicious attacks on Muslim individuals and property, a so-called ratonnade, which left several dead and many injured. The prospect of further uncontrolled mob violence was at least as important as the inability of

54. In an interview Zohra Drif claimed that she took over direction of the organization in Algiers from Yacef when he was arrested, and had been working with him before that. See Amrane-Minne, Des femmes dans la guerre d’Algérie (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1994), pp. 137–138.
the police to halt the terror attacks in prompting Resident Minister Robert Lacoste’s decision to call in the army. That the police had proved unable to make an impact on the FLN in the Casbah was obvious from the increasing terrorist attacks, but, considering that only 1,500 police had been deployed there to confront some 4,500 active nationalist fighters, this was perhaps unsurprising.

“Massu, I entrust you with the order of this department. You have all its powers. With your division, you are going to restore all of it.” With these words, Lacoste gave the military full responsibility for operations in Algiers. Some French legislators had called for a political solution of the kind that Charles de Gaulle tried to arrange with the FLN, but the weakness of the Fourth Republic combined with resistance from the civil administration in Algiers meant that the policies of the center, which were often unpopular with the pied noir population, made the government largely ineffective. One of the most important aspects of French action in the Battle of Algiers was the emphasis on a purely military solution that offered no compromise, no negotiations, and no quarter given.

General Massu believed that the situation essentially required a police action, a prospect not welcomed by the troops of the 10éme Division Parachutistes (10e. DP) he commanded. Massu himself called it a “job for dustmen,” and Colonel Marcel Bigeard, commander of 3éme Régiment de Parachutistes Coloniaux (RPC), condescendingly described it as “un travail de flic” (cops’ work). Aussaresses recalls a conversation with Massu that summed up the prevailing mood of the 10e. DP:

Today, Aussaresses, we are going to knock them off very quickly and by every possible means. These are the government’s orders. Because you weren’t volunteering for the job, you’re well aware that this is not an assignment for the choir-boys.69

At the outset of the Battle of Algiers, the French Army had little expectation of finally being able to put into practice guerre révolutionnaire theories, nor did the army have any enthusiasm for a task that most soldiers felt was not what they were trained to do.

**Administration**

Massu’s guiding principle was the necessity of destroying the FLN organization rather than the capture of individuals or equipment. “The destruction of

the rebel political and administrative structure is the number one mission for the army,” he said.60 In this regard, the 10e. DP’s approach was conditioned by the need to obtain intelligence and act on it swiftly. Godard, Massu’s chief of staff, stressed that “intelligence is capital.”61 To underpin the intelligence-gathering actions of the 10e. DP, Massu set up elements of a parallel administration across Algiers. The city was divided into four zones, each controlled by a parachute regiment; 1er Régiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes (RCP) (Colonel Georges Mayer), 2ème RPC (Colonel Albert Fossey-François), 3ème RPC (Colonel Bigeard), and the 1er Régiment Étranger Parachutiste (REP) (Colonel Albert Brothier, and later Colonel Pierre Jeanpierre), with support from the 9ème Zouaves. This system was merely an extension of the standard pacification approach in the rest of Algeria, and its advantage was that troops gained better knowledge and a sense of familiarity with the area and its inhabitants. What Massu referred to as “the surface method” of anti-terrorism was the quadrillage (squaring) system that involved the establishment of manned posts at 200 sensitive points across the city and 180 daily patrols of six men each. This formed the basis of the 10e. DP’s intelligence operation and population control strategy, allowing intelligence to be acquired and used more rapidly.62 The intelligence officer of each regiment had a key role in disseminating intelligence and ensuring cooperation with the police, who themselves had one liaison officer attached to each regiment.63 The Casbah was assigned to Col. Bigeard’s 3e. RPC, and the entire area was cordoned off with checkpoints controlling all access into and out of the district.

**Organization**

The organization of the 10e. DP in Algiers, like the division of the city, mirrored the FLN’s administration. The usual chain of command was augmented by several parallel units, made up of both military and civilian personnel who had specific but overlapping functions. Aussaresses’s memoirs reveal that Massu actually had a parallel staff operating alongside the official staff of the 10e. DP. According to Aussaresses, this arrangement stemmed from the concern among senior officers of the 10e. DP, in particular Col. Godard, that the mission in Algiers was full of potential pitfalls that could damage the reputation and prestige of the division. The main staff continued to be based outside Algiers at Hydra, headed by Godard, implying that the paratroops’ role lay in

operations against rural guerrillas not against urban terrorists. Aussaresses was under no illusions about being ordered to command this “parallel staff,” which he understood as a code word for “secret,” and he complained to Colonel Mayer: “Not so bad? You must be joking? You know what they’ll ask me to do? They’ll have me do the dirty work of all of it!”

Aussaresses and Trinquier were to be in charge of this “secret staff”: Trinquier with responsibility for intelligence-gathering and Aussaresses for what he refers to as “action implementation.” They were responsible for overseeing and coordinating the intelligence effort with the regimental commanders and intelligence officers and also with the police. In practice, this meant that the most important suspects were brought to Aussaresses and his men, who conducted many of the brutal interrogations and summary executions, or “disappearances,” that marked the Battle of Algiers: “Even though it wasn’t spelled out in so many words,” Aussaresses wrote, “the more observant people understood that my job was to unburden the regiments of the most unpalatable tasks to cover those they had to undertake on their own.” Only Aussaresses has talked about the role of this unit. Not even Trinquier discussed it in his treatise on guerre révolutionnaire, and we know little about why Massu or Godard decided on such a structure apart from what Aussaresses asserts.

Figure 1 represents an attempt to piece together the overt and covert sides of the 10e. DP’s organization in Algiers from the available evidence. The existence of a clandestine bureaucracy running parallel with the overt structure was presumably intended to give protection to Massu, Godard, and other commanders in the 10e. DP if events turned against them. In this context it is interesting to note that nowhere in Massu’s memoirs is Aussaresses or his activities mentioned, even though according to Aussaresses his relationship with Massu was a close one. Aussaresses, for his part, bears no sign of feeling slighted at being overlooked or ignored by his commanding officer. In fact he freely admits that, with his intelligence background and experience of counterterrorism in Philippeville earlier in the war, he was the ideal candidate to run the covert apparatus and that such an assignment in effect ended his career.

Even so, Aussaresses also took precautions. He began to run his own net-

64. Aussaresses, Battle of the Casbah, pp. 69–70. Aussaresses attributes this predicament to the personal rancor between Godard and himself. They had clashed earlier, in particular, over Godard’s apparent usurpation of Aussaresses’s command of the 11e. Choc unit in Indochina, which Aussaresses had created in 1946 (p. 117).

65. Ibid., p. 117.

66. Figure 1 is based on Aussaresses, Battle of the Casbah; Massu, La vraie Bataille d’Alger; Trinquier, Modern Warfare; Horne, A Savage War of Peace; Kelly, Lost Soldiers; and Paret, French Revolutionary Warfare.
Fig. 1. Organization of the 10th Parachutists’ Division (Algiers, 1956–1957) Overt and Covert Structure

*replaced Col. Pierre Jeanpierre
work of agents who, he claims, penetrated the FLN leadership and were responsible for the capture of Saadi Yacef and Ali la Pointe after Aussaresses had left. To run this network he formed a separate team of men, mainly *pied noir* and native Algerians who had been with him in Philippeville. The team was kept secret from the rest of his unit, which itself was a secret. “It was,” he states, “a safety net if someone in authority sought to find out what we were doing on our strange nightly runs.”

Trinquier’s role involved the creation of an additional unit that was openly acknowledged, even though it grew out of the “parallel staff.” Trinquier had been asked by Massu to draft a countersubversion plan that included a “population control mechanism.”

To this end, Trinquier set up the Dispositif de Protection Urbaine (DPU) consisting of police, gendarmes, and soldiers who organized the population by numbering each house (according to a method Trinquier had picked up from his study of Napoleon), counting the inhabitants, and identifying one man who was to have responsibility for ensuring that no FLN cells existed in a building or immediate district. Trinquier later described the principle:

> Control of the masses through a tight organization, often through several parallel organizations, is the master weapon of modern warfare. This is what permits the enemy to uncover quickly any hostile element within a subjugated population. Only when we have created a similar organization will we be able to discover, and immediately eliminate, those individuals the enemy tries to introduce among us. . . . This organization will permit the command to enlist the participation of the populace in its own protection. To a certain extent, it will be able to participate in the tasks of the forces of order and carry out simple police missions. Detection, surveillance, and occasionally the arrest of dangerous individuals will be managed without difficulty.

The DPU provided essential intelligence through its network of informers and direct daily links with the population, allowing the DPU to determine which people were missing from their residences or were strangers and therefore suspect in the eyes of the authorities.

Alongside this clandestine, “parallel” staff, Massu’s official staff under Godard’s direction apparently functioned as usual. Massu received intelligence and progress reports from Godard and the 2ème Bureau (French military intelligence) every day. He also received nightly written reports from Aussaresses (General Raoul Salan, commander-in-chief in Algeria, and Robert Lacoste also received copies), and Trinquier and Aussaresses met with Massu

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67. Aussaresses, *Battle of the Casbah*, pp. 90–91. Aussaresses never states whether the “authority” he sought to evade was military or civil.

68. Ibid., p. 70.

every day at Massu’s home, not at 10e. DP HQ. Godard, however, ran not just Massu’s official staff but also an organization that mirrored Aussaresses’s and that overlapped with Trinquier’s activities as well. The web of units operating during the Battle of Algiers with similar and overlapping tasks, acknowledged and unacknowledged, amounted either to organized chaos or, as Kelly believes, to “confirmation of the theory of parallel hierarchies,” indicating that such mechanisms perform a useful role in executing highly sensitive missions and obscuring political responsibility.

Several authors have referred to the Centre de Coordination Interarmées (CCI), which was overseen by Godard and commanded by Colonel Léon Simoneau. This unit, according to Kelly, “enjoyed an autonomous and privileged relationship with the military command.” The CCI seems to have been a coordinating body that had organizational connections with the police, regular intelligence sources, interrogation and holding centers, and resettlement operations, although the actual mechanisms are unclear. The shadowy nature of the organization reached its zenith when it helped to coordinate the Generals’ Putsch of 1961 and the beginning of the OAS. Under the aegis of the CCI was another unit with a sinister reputation, the Détachement Opérationnel de Protection (DOP), which was under the command of Captain Ruat. The DOP, whose activities have been widely acknowledged by those involved in the Battle of Algiers, acted as expert interrogators. If a prisoner did not divulge information when initially interrogated by his captors, he was handed over to DOP officials who were, according to Massu, “specialists in the interrogation of suspects who wanted to say nothing,” a task that often involved torture. This function was very similar to the role of Aussaresses’s unit. Although the chain of command is somewhat murky, Massu’s unit apparently was attached, if only loosely, to the CCI and Godard’s side of the hierarchy.

One additional unit was the Groupe de Renseignement et d’Exploitation (GRE), an intelligence network of agents run by Captain Christian

70. Aussaresses, Battle of the Casbah, pp. 121–122.
71. Kelly, Lost Soldiers, p. 201.
72. Peter Harclerode, Fighting Dirty: The Inside Story of Covert Operations from Ho Chi Minh to Osama Bin Laden (London: Cassell, 2001), p. 242. Harclerode’s source for naming this officer is unclear, and Simoneau is not mentioned in Lost Soldiers by Kelly, who is the only other author to mention the CCI. Confirmation of Simoneau’s role is thus difficult.
73. Kelly, Lost Soldiers, p. 203.
74. Godard was deeply implicated in both of these notorious affairs.
75. Rotman, L’ennemi intime, p. 186.
77. Harclerode, Fighting Dirty, p. 242, says that DOP was part of the DPU, but Kelly claims that its connection with the High Command was “uncertain.” Kelly, Lost Soldiers, p. 201. Horne, in A Savage War of Peace, does not describe the place of the DOP in the 10e. DP’s organization.
Léger, a Moroccan-born Zouave who reported to Godard. The GRE was apparently also linked to Trinquier’s DPU and was responsible for interrogating suspects under greater or lesser degrees of pressure, as well as infiltrating the FLN/ALN ranks to a high level. Alistair Horne reports that one of these agents was instrumental in the capture of Saadi Yacef and Ali la Pointe, but Aussaresses also claims this distinction for one of his agents—an indication of the duplication and confusion surrounding the activities of the 10e. DP in the Battle of Algiers. Yet despite these shortcomings and the personal tensions between certain senior officers, the dissemination of intelligence and the coordination of action were key strengths of the 10e. DP organizational structure.

**Operations**

Massu himself later claimed that he used two methods in the fight against terrorism in Algiers, “surface” actions, which had only superficial effects, and “profond” actions, which were less obvious but had a deeper, underlying utility. The operations of the 10e. DP in the Battle of Algiers were extremely methodical and based on intelligence. The analysis of operations during the Battle of Algiers can therefore be divided into intelligence targeting, methods for obtaining intelligence, and action based on intelligence.

Faced with the clandestine cell structure of the FLN/ALN in Algiers in which members knew only their comrades in the cell and their immediate superior, the French commanders believed that destroying the whole organization would require the capture of the leaders. As Godard stated, “the man who places the bomb is but an arm that tomorrow will be replaced by another arm.” The systematic use of intelligence was required to establish a trail to the head of the ZAA. Godard relied on an *organigramme*, a diagram-pyramid of the FLN/ALN organization displayed on a blackboard at Massu’s headquarters. Intelligence from various sources allowed names to be added until the enemy organization was gradually recreated on the board. In this way, Saadi Yacef was identified relatively early through cross-referenced snippets of intelligence. Ben M’Hidi’s role in the organization, however, was not identified until his actual capture.

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81. This is according to Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, and his source was presumably Godard himself. Courrière attributes this success to Léger’s and Bigeard’s cooperation. Aussaresses, though, claims he had known the identity of Ben M’Hidi a week before his capture by the 3e. RPC (the night 15–16 February 1957) but that this information had been kept secret within Aussaresses’ unit. Aussaresses, *Battle of the Casbah*, p. 133.
The army’s assault on the top of the insurgent organization in Algiers was therefore to be from the bottom up. Massu concentrated much of his efforts not just on the military wing, the ALN, but on the FLN, which was attempting to undermine and replace the French administration. The lower levels of the FLN were, in Massu’s view, a weak point of the organization because many fighters tended to be unaware of the basic requirements of belonging to a clandestine movement, and their security was often poor.\(^8\) The 10e. DP’s operations against the lower levels of the FLN began with the results gleaned from thorough study of police files at the start of the campaign and were greatly expedited by the system organized by Trinquier’s DPU. Because all residents of the Casbah were catalogued and had been given a number and identity papers, anyone who was not part of this system was immediately suspect and arrested.

Furthermore, the DPU’s system of block-warden informers provided a steady stream of intelligence concerning anyone who was not known in that particular house, block, or street. The FLN’s fund collectors were especially vulnerable. Massu stressed the importance of money to the FLN, calling it “the nervous system of war (le nerf de la guerre),” and he estimated that the collectors in Algiers brought in 20 million French Francs from all levels of society. The collectors tended to be noticeable to the general population and thus were vulnerable to informers. Their capture was particularly disruptive to the network and also valuable in terms of further information insofar as they knew the identities of political commissars and FLN district commanders.\(^9\) Certain professions within the Casbah were also useful low-level sources of intelligence that could hold out the possibility of information leading to the higher echelons. Lawyers were one such profession (although few Muslims were lawyers in the Casbah), and Aussaresses also gives the example of bricklayers. Colonel Bigeard had created a list of registered bricklayers using professional registers from the Prefecture. Bricklayers frequently built weapons stores and hideouts for the FLN/ALN leadership. Aussaresses states that whenever they found a bricklayer, they checked his records to see whether he had been working. If he was listed as not working but his hands showed that in fact he had been, he was immediately arrested. This approach paid off not just in the capture of bomb-making material and arms but also in the detention of high-ranking FLN personnel.\(^8\)

Despite the specific targeting sometimes suggested in Massu’s, Aussaresses’s, and Trinquier’s accounts, one of the strengths of the paratroopers’ in-

\(^9\) Ibid., p. 129.
\(^8\) Aussaresses, *Battle of the Casbah*, p. 149.
intelligence effort was its sheer scope. French troops did not need much to suspect a Muslim Algerian and were able to arrest and interrogate immediately without any legal oversight. At the start, Massu set out five rules for the conduct of the Battle of Algiers:

i. Anyone who is a member of or helps a terrorist organization is guilty on pain of death.
ii. Anyone who is captured will be interrogated immediately by the forces that captured him.
iii. Anyone can be arrested and interrogated who is suspected of involvement.
iv. Sentences for terrorists will be carried out within 48 hours.
v. Authority for these methods comes from the government. 85

As these principles suggest, the 10e. DP had almost unlimited powers of arrest and exploited them to the full. The initial stage of the operation was marked by a great sweep in which the 3e. RPC, acting on information gleaned from police files, made mass arrests on the night of 14 January. Colonel Godard awoke the next morning expecting around 250 suspects, but found that the 3e. RPC and Aussaresses’s unit had brought in more than 1,500. 86 From the beginning of January to the end of September 1957, 30–40 percent of the male population of the Casbah was arrested and questioned. From January to 31 March alone, some 24,000 were arrested, more than four times the estimated strength of the FLN and ALN networks. 87 Arrests were carried out at night, shortly after the curfew that had been imposed on the cordoned-off Casbah. The French forces hoped to gain intelligence and act on it before the curfew was lifted the following morning. Any individuals seen on the streets after the start of the curfew were shot on sight and the bodies left until morning pour encouragers les autres.

The product to be extracted from the huge crowd of “suspects” was information, and the methods used by the French authorities to obtain it were free from normal legal restrictions. Although the use of torture was a hallmark of the Battle of Algiers, other methods were also used. In numerous cases cited by those involved, operational and intelligence successes were based not on ruthless torture but on the combination of separate pieces of intelligence obtained by different methods, including the 10e. DP’s extensive use of police

85. Massu, La vraie Bataille d’Alger, p. 49.
86. Courière, La guerre d’Algérie, p. 800.
87. Connolly, A Diplomatic Revolution, p. 131.
files. Precisely how the army came into possession of the files is unclear, but the information gleaned from them was vital in controlling the population, in cross-referencing bits of intelligence, and in tracking the population’s movements. Related to this type of intelligence work, Massu recalls that the large amount of paper used by the FLN in its communications was a key weakness. Because of the FLN’s cell structure, communication was usually written, much of it in French. Massu refers to a “fonctionalisation” within the FLN that inevitably produced a great deal of material, the sheer volume of which inevitably meant that some of it would fall into the hands of the French and was useful in filling in the names on Godard’s organigramme.

The French also gained intelligence by encouraging members of the Muslim community to provide it voluntarily. This effort focused on two main sources: the system of local informers organized under the DPU, and the undercover sources who infiltrated the FLN/ALN and acted as agents for the French. The contribution from DPU informers to the intelligence effort has already been noted. Their feel for local information was invaluable for commanders who were operating in the alien environment of the Casbah, with its maze of streets and veiled figures and the unfamiliar native language of its residents. The activities of the agents recruited by Captain Léger’s GRE were perhaps even more damaging to the FLN and ALN. They helped to identify the hiding places of several senior terrorists, including Kamel Mourad (the chief manufacturer of bombs for the ALN), Si Mourad (Yacef’s military adjutant), Djamila Bouhired (whose European looks helped her to place bombs in pied noir areas), and, above all, Yacef and Ali la Pointe.

These successes came in July–September 1957, and the GRE was more prominent in this last part of the Battle of Algiers. The GRE also was responsible for spreading disinformation within the FLN to exacerbate rivalries and suspicions. The French intelligence services used this tactic throughout the Algerian war with considerable success. The FLN and ALN were rife with feuds that resulted in much bloodshed and disruption. The situation in the ZAA was no different, and the organization turned inward on itself as it buckled under the fierce pressure of the French. The agents of the GRE had a further role, which was to “turn the population back to favor the French,” look-

88. Horne suggests that Godard sent the files to a major in the 11e. Choc, accompanied by an armed guard. Couriére broadly agrees but claims that the files were seized on Aussaresses’s orders. Aussaresses states that they were given up voluntarily, reflecting the successful cooperation between the army and police. See Horne, A Savage War of Peace, p. 190; Couriére, La guerre d’Algérie, pp. 797–798; and Aussaresses, Battle of the Casbah, pp. 92–100.
89. Massu, La vraie Bataille d’Alger, pp. 135–137.
90. Couriére, La guerre d’Algérie, pp. 880–893.
ing for individuals with whom they could speak in order to establish a degree of goodwill. Their primary task, however, remained intelligence-gathering and the disruption of enemy networks.

Although these methods often made valuable contributions to the intelligence effort of the 10e. DP, the information extracted by interrogation is what consistently provided the bulk of actionable information for the French forces. The interrogation and processing of such large numbers of suspects required the use of several holding centers and prisons. In all, roughly twenty different centers were used, including the infamous Villa Sésani, the headquarters of the 1e. REP; the villa de Tourelles, where Aussaresses and his men were based; and the largest camp at Beni-Massous, run by the police. Army posts, headquarters, police stations, and other buildings of various sizes were requisitioned to hold and interrogate the vast numbers of suspects.

The principal factor for the French authorities in dealing with those arrested was speed. The imposition of a curfew gave the French forces a window of action in which information from suspects was likely to remain of use for a while. Suspects normally were rounded up at the start of the curfew and then, according to Massu’s rules, interrogated immediately by the units that captured them, typically the paratroopers of the 3e. RPC and police attached to the regiment. If the captives did not provide information that could be acted on immediately, or if they refused to talk or had information that related to another regiment’s sector, they were handed over to the DOP, to Aussaresses’s unit, or sometimes to the police, who were always eager to get their hands on senior FLN fighters and members of the Partie Communiste Algérien (PCA). These “specialists,” as described by Trinquier and Massu, took on the interrogation and torture of those who initially refused to talk or who were of high value.

However, the quantity of suspects was so large that these units became overwhelmed, and interrogation teams attached to each regiment were ordered to extract information using the most brutal methods. Torture thus became institutionalized in the 10e. DP. For men like Aussaresses, torture was not the initial method used, but they understood and accepted that it would be used at the next stage if a suspect refused to talk or attempted to deny what the French believed was the truth. The means of torture included beatings, burning, holding the suspect’s head in a bath of dirty water, and placing a wet

91. Ibid., p. 875.
cloth over the face. Electric shocks were also used; electrodes were attached to the ears or the genitals of the victim, and a high-voltage electrical current passed through. This last method, which was performed using a field telephone generator known as the gégene, became synonymous with the darkest moments of the French Army in Algeria. Aussaresses claims that torture rarely went on for much more than an hour because most suspects by then would have confessed. But Henri Alleg, a PCA member who was captured and tortured, asserts in his memoirs that torture in some cases continued for much longer. The effectiveness of the torture in producing information is not in doubt. The ruthless use of brutal interrogation techniques shattered the cohesion of the FLN/ALN networks and generated a wealth of intelligence in a very short time. As Trinquier noted later: “In time, we climbed little by little to the summit of the pyramid.”

Yet, there was a further stage of brutality that marked the activities of the 10e. DP. Aussaresses describes the outcome of torture in these terms: “They would talk either quickly or never.” He does not mince words about the fate awaiting anyone taken to the villa des Tourelles: “The mere fact that they were at the villa des Tourelles meant that they were considered so dangerous that they were not to get out of there alive.” Officers in the 10e. DP believed it would be pointless to turn these people over to the civil judicial system, which was not set up to deal with such a large volume of cases. Aussaresses and his colleagues were convinced that they were dealing with men who had committed indiscriminate murder and mutilation, the successors to those responsible for the horrific massacre at El-Halia and elsewhere in 1956, men who were patently guilty, who would have been sentenced to death in normal circumstances, and who, in any case, would be killed by the FLN if they were released. The extrajudicial executions were designed to prevent the momentum of the operation from being slowed by legal procedures and were, Aussaresses claims, “an inseparable part of the tasks associated with keeping law and order.”

After interrogation, the captives were generally shot or strangled and buried in anonymous graves outside Algiers. Aussaresses describes his personal involvement in many executions, including his personal responsibility for the hanging of Ben M’Hidi on a remote farm. Other units, according to Courtier,

98. Ibid., p. 120.
99. Ibid., p. 127.
100. Ibid., pp. 124–127, 132–141.
ére, dropped the bodies from helicopters into the sea.101 This course of action became so prevalent that it spawned a new euphemism among the paratroopers, who called such acts “work in the woods.”102 The dead were then listed either as killed while trying to escape, as having committed suicide, or as just missing. The numbers are impossible to assess, but Paul Teitgen, the General Secretary of the Prefecture who resigned over the conduct of the Battle of Algiers, estimated that 3,024 extrajudicial killings occurred—a figure he derived by subtracting the number of released prisoners from the number arrested. Courière puts the number higher, at around 4,000. If these totals are broadly accurate, they equate to approximately 80 percent of the membership of the FLN and ALN. The effect of these actions alone on the ability of the FLN/ALN to run a coordinated clandestine organization was clearly devastating. Even so, the ALN was able to launch a second terror campaign in the summer of 1957—indicating that enough of the network survived the onslaught earlier in the year. Thus, despite Aussaresses’s confidence that he never killed anyone who was not guilty, the likelihood is that those put to death included a significant proportion of innocent people. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the FLN decided to pull its leadership out of Algiers to reside in safety in Tunisia, particularly after the death in custody of Larbi Ben M’Hidi.

Even Ben M’Hidi had realized that the methods employed by the 10e.DP would crush the FLN in Algiers if unrestrained. According to Trinquier, a file captured by the French in 1957 recorded Ben M’Hidi’s pleas with the FLN’s supporters outside the Casbah: “We are no longer protected by legality. We ask all our friends to do the impossible, to have legality reestablished; otherwise we are lost.”103 The French also recognized the importance of suspending the normal legal and judicial procedures. Trinquier later wrote that terrorists should be given a legal status of their own, different from that accorded to prisoners of war or criminal murderers. Massu went to Paul Reliquet, the attorney general in Algeria, to ask for a new law that would enable his soldiers to “carry out efficaciously, but on legal foundations, the task assigned to them.”104 Even a report from the army’s Catholic chaplains office called for the “establishment at the earliest possible moment of a judicial system conforming to the needs of the Algerian situation.”105

103. Quoted in Trinquier, Modern Warfare, p. 47.
105. Quoted in Paret, French Revolutionary Warfare, p. 68.
Others on the ground saw less need for a new legal structure and instead just wanted to suspend the existing legal structure for a time, which is essentially what happened. Aussaresses felt that “by asking the military to reestablish law and order inside the city of Algiers, the civilian authorities had implicitly approved of summary executions.” He cites numerous instances in which the civil authorities, with whom he seems to have had the smoothest of relations, deliberately turned a blind eye to the methods employed. The civilian administration played a crucial role in suspending normal legal restraints in Algiers, enabling the 10e. DP to continue the operation using whatever methods they chose. In operational terms, this was the key to their ultimate success. As Captain Jacques Allaire, the intelligence officer for the 3e. RPC, declared: “One was, it must be clearly stated, outside the law. There were few lawyers, there was not much justice; there was the 10e. DP, which reestablished order in Algiers.”

“Very Special Combat”

That the troops of the 10e. DP did reestablish order during the time they were present is undeniable. The leaders of the FLN retreated to the sanctuary of Tunisia, and the ZAA project was thoroughly defeated, giving a great lift to French forces across Algeria. Until terrorism and disorder returned in 1960, Algiers was quiescent. But what might have been the outcome if Massu and his troops had not been successful? Algiers probably would have been in constant upheaval, as terrorist incidents provoked harsh counterterrorist measures by the pied noir ultras. Such measures, as became evident three years later, would have weakened the moral validity of the cause of Algérie Française and undermined the position of the French government much sooner—a potentially ominous development in light of the weakness of the Fourth Republic. Most likely, only de Gaulle had the stature to fend off the severe pressure against withdrawal from Algeria.

Was, then, the Battle of Algiers “an undisputed triumph of guerre révolutionnaire”? Several points are worth noting.

107. Quoted in Rotman, L’ennemi intime, p. 124.
108. Both Massu and Aussaresses contend that their methods were justified to head off the counterterrorist threat from the pied noir community. A bomb had already exploded in the rue de Thèbes in September 1956, and Massu foiled a plot to empty fuel trucks into the Casbah and then set the fuel alight, the consequences of which would have been catastrophic. See Aussaresses, Battle of the Casbah, p. 77; and Massu, La vraie Bataille d’Alger, p. 148.
First, the way the 10e. DP organized itself was certainly reminiscent of guerre révolutionnaire theory in that it sought to establish parallel hierarchies that could gain control of the population. The number of overlapping and interconnected units as well as the cooperation between military, police, and civil authorities allowed the French forces to exert pressure on the population from numerous angles. As Trinquier wrote six years later: “Modern warfare requires the unconditional support of the populace.”110 The French Army’s approach in the battle, particularly the use of the DPU in organizing and cataloging the residents of the Casbah and the use of the GRE’s agents to manipulate opinion, was clearly aimed at control of the population. The troops of the 5e Bureau, the newly formed army unit set up to wage psychological warfare, were unstinting in their efforts, using loudspeakers mounted on trucks and leaflet drops to reach the Muslim population. It is impossible to gauge how successful the psychological warfare was because almost no contemporaneous evidence is available. Trinquier, Aussaresses, and Massu ignore or barely mention the psychological warfare. But the technique itself was pure guerre révolutionnaire.

Second, the refusal to waver regarding the enemy’s organization as the essential target is largely in line with guerre révolutionnaire theory. “Our only aim,” said Massu, “was to reconstruct the terrorists’ organization and then destroy it.”111 The numbers of arrests, the thoroughness of research and interrogation, the brutality of the torture, and the speed with which the paratroopers acted were all designed to smash an organization completely and deprive it of any opportunity to regenerate itself.

Third, the preeminent role of the military in dealing with insurgency was also part of guerre révolutionnaire theory, indeed an extremely dangerous part. The architects of the French antiterrorist campaign in Algiers and guerre révolutionnaire writers evidently believed that the civil state was ill equipped to fight a war against opponents who used terror tactics. Hogard wrote, “It is now evident that we must consent not only to make sacrifices, but also to transform our mentality and politico-military structure,”112 and Colonel Charles Lacheroy stated in one of his lectures at the Center for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerrilla Warfare at Arzew that “one does not wage revolutionary war with the Code Napoléon.”113 The defeat of clandestine insurgents, he argued, required the abandonment of certain civic principles:

“Because the enemy played incessantly on the ambiguity of Western pluralism, manipulating the contradictions of the richer civilization, some of this richness would have to be curtailed in the interests of solidarity and survival.”

Where this mode of thinking led certain of those in the 10e. DP and others after the Battle of Algiers is beyond the scope of the discussion here. Suffice it to say that Massu and his officers were fully ready to suspend the normal rights and legal procedures that existed in France in 1957. In fact, they considered it a necessity. Their views coincided with the attitude of many civilian officials in Algiers and in the French government. No clearer statement of guerre révolutionnaire could challenge Robert Lacoste’s ideological assessment of the Battle of Algiers: “We wage a very special combat. It is modern revolutionary war, above all psychological, with the adherence of the population at stake.”

The civil authorities, in this sense, played a role subordinate to the military—an approach conforming to the precepts of guerre révolutionnaire.

The extent to which other aspects of the Battle of Algiers were inspired by guerre révolutionnaire theory is open to debate. Several authors have insisted that the most infamous activities—torture and summary executions—were direct outgrowths of the theory. Martha Crenshaw, for example, states that “most of the guerre révolutionnaire theorists considered torture the only valid response to insurgent terrorism.” But the references she cites are Trinquier and the 10e. DP chaplain, Père Delarue, both of whom were reflecting on their experiences long after the event. Trinquier declared in his book Modern Warfare, published in 1964, that “the use of terrorism as a weapon of war inevitably provokes the utilization of its antidote, torture.” This statement says less about the original guerre révolutionnaire theory than about Trinquier’s post-hoc view that those who practiced terrorism could logically expect torture as a morally equivalent response.

In truth there is no evidence that either torture or extrajudicial executions were ever advocated or even implied in guerre révolutionnaire essays before 1957. However, some scholars, such as Paret, are convinced that even if atrocities were not part of the theory of guerre révolutionnaire, “they belonged to its reality.” To be sure, the emphasis of guerre révolutionnaire on the primacy of the military over the civil authorities, the theory’s insistence that the struggle

114. Ximenés, quoted in Kelly, Lost Soldiers, p. 124.
115. Quoted in ibid., p. 169.
117. Trinquier, Modern Warfare, p. 70.
118. Paret, French Revolutionary Warfare, p. 66.
was a stark choice between right and wrong, and the writers’ openness to the need for new operational techniques did encourage certain elements who were convinced by guerre révolutionnaire to adopt distinctly anti-democratic and ruthless positions.

This does not mean, however, that the atrocities in Algiers were directly inspired by guerre révolutionnaire theory. Several of those involved have pointed out that torture was being used in Algeria before the Battle of Algiers and was practiced in particular by the police and security services in Algiers. Aussaresses describes how the police in Philippeville first introduced him to torture in 1956. He says he had not employed this technique in Indochina, although he had heard that brutal methods were used there in “extreme” cases.119 Articles in the French press had exposed the use of torture as early as 1955—an indication that it was employed from the very beginning of the war in Algeria and was, to some extent, public knowledge.120 Massu described how the French Army absorbed these tactics from the Algerian police, a process similar to that mentioned by Aussaresses: “Torture already existed. It was practiced before by the regiments that were united under my command. It was practiced in the countryside.”121 Most of the French officers justified the use of torture not by invoking guerre révolutionnaire but by stressing the need to save innocent lives and prevent the cruel atrocities of the FLN, many of which they had seen firsthand. Torture and executions were deemed essential to get the job done. According to Claude Ranfaing: “It was necessary to use it, without hate, without perversity. It was not just a game, nor was there any pleasure; it was simply to obtain a result that enabled people’s lives to be saved. That’s all!”122 The testimony of many other soldiers who admitted using torture also highlights the jarring impact of the sight of the murder and mutilation of civilians that accompanied ALN operations. Most believed that what they were doing was necessary to protect innocent lives. As Massu stated: “The innocent deserve more protection than the guilty.”123

Another interesting and rarely investigated possibility in explaining the use of torture and extrajudicial killings in terms other than those found in guerre révolutionnaire thinking is the experience several years earlier in Indochina. The terror campaign by the ALN in Algiers was unprecedented in its scale and ferocity—a campaign with which the French had no real experience—but terrorism itself had been used before against the French. In

120. Rotman, L’ennemi intime, p. 21.
121. Quoted in ibid., p. 126.
122. Quoted in ibid., p. 199.
123. Quoted in Kelly, Lost Soldiers, p. 201.
Saigon in 1950 the Viet Minh had conducted a little-noted urban terrorism campaign. The tactics of the terrorist network and the response of the French-backed forces were extremely similar to what occurred in the Battle of Algiers.

In 1950 a locally recruited Vietnamese sûreté under the notional Vietnamese government of Bao Dai had replaced the French sûreté. The new Vietnamese police chief, Nguyen Phan Long, believed that the Communists could be reconciled to the Bao Dai government if the hand of reconciliation was extended. As a result, Saigon’s prisons were emptied of suspects, and the police no longer carried weapons. The head of the Viet Minh in Cochin China, Nguyen Binh, responded by building a Communist network in the city in such a way that the French expeditionary force would not interfere before the network was fully established. It was a “silent takeover” that replaced the existing administration with parallel hierarchies so that the Viet Minh effectively controlled much of Saigon. 124 In April, with the Communist network firmly entrenched in the city, the Viet Minh launched a terrorist campaign of bombings and assassinations of government officials, carried out by a battalion of 950 trained killers. The situation rapidly deteriorated, and the Viet Minh gained such a hold on the population through fear and indoctrination that they were able to call general strikes and large demonstrations almost at will. The middle classes of Saigon increasingly feared to venture out onto the streets inasmuch as the Viet Minh seemed in control of the city. Even schools joined the strikes, and teachers were systematically intimidated. The Vietnamese police were powerless, and the French authorities could not intervene under the terms of the agreement signed with Bao Dai’s nationalists.

What finally led to a change in the situation was a grenade and mortar attack launched by the Viet Minh against a U.S. delegation called the Griffin Mission, who were then assaulted by a rioting mob. Bao Dai responded by replacing Phan Long with Nguyen Van Tam, who was committed to taking on the Viet Minh with no holds barred. Nguyen, as head of the sûreté, transformed the situation in three months through what he described as “applying the hot iron at once.” 125 He rebuilt the sûreté from the bottom up to ensure its security, and, as part of this effort, he put to death his secretary, who had been furtively working for the Viet Minh. Nguyen’s men started executing Viet Minh informers and cadres at night, leaving the bodies on the street as a warning to the population. Informers began to work for the sûreté again, and sûreté personnel routinely tortured suspects for intelligence and then acted on it as rapidly as possible. Military courts executed dozens of suspected terrorists


125. Ibid., p. 180. Interestingly, three months was the same amount of time it took the 10e. DP to restore order in the first phase of the Battle of Algiers (January–March 1957).
by firing squad. Within three months, the Viet Minh organization was shattered, and the head of the Viet Minh in Saigon, Le Van Linh, was captured along with documents detailing the entire network.\footnote{Yves Gras, \textit{Histoire de la guerre d’Indochine} (Paris: Denoël, 1992), p. 293.} Eventually the Viet Minh acknowledged defeat and withdrew, ending the violence. From then on, as Yves Gras observed, “Saigon became a town as peaceful as Paris or Marseille.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 24.} This dramatic turnaround had a spillover effect into other Vietnamese cities. As a result, despite the Viet Minh’s success in the countryside, urban areas in Vietnam remained calm for the rest of the war.

Although there is no direct evidence that the events in Saigon influenced the tactics in the Battle of Algiers, the connection seems plausible. Massu, in acknowledging the French Army’s lack of experience in confronting urban terrorism campaigns, mentions the plastic bomb attacks by the Viet Minh in Saigon as the only other example of which he knew.\footnote{Massu, \textit{La vraie Bataille d’Alger}, p. 47.} Most likely, other Indochina veterans who held command posts during the Battle of Algiers were also aware of the 1950 campaign. In any case, the similarities between the enemy’s attack and the authorities’ riposte are clear. This template was the only one the French had available for a situation that was otherwise unprecedented.

This earlier episode may help explain the lack of what \textit{guerre révolutionnaire} theory considered indispensable to success in the new type of warfare. On both sides, the Battle of Algiers was almost totally a matter of “la riposte” with little or no “la parade.” Curfews, arbitrary arrests, street cordons, torture, and disappearances were never balanced in any meaningful way by the more positive measures advocated by the \textit{guerre révolutionnaire} theorists to win and maintain popular support, the ultimate objective in subversive war. The Casbah was gripped by terror, which undoubtedly played a role in controlling the population, but any positive measures to increase support for the French-backed regime was largely a case of the GRE using their agents in a secondary role and Massu and certain other officers adopting Algerian children. If the Battle of Algiers was truly a victory for \textit{guerre révolutionnaire} it would have necessarily involved more effort to redefine, in a positive way, the relationship of the Muslim population to the prevailing order.

The testimony of many of those involved in the Battle of Algiers is remarkably devoid of references to \textit{guerre révolutionnaire} theory, although undoubtedly some officers such as Trinquier and Godard found its ideas congenial. Massu mentions \textit{guerre révolutionnaire} only to note his unfamiliarity.
with its principles. Aussaresses never refers to it and gives no indication that he was influenced by it in any way. Although *guerre révolutionnaire* probably had its strongest influence among the paratroopers and Foreign Legion, many officers in these units—and all the more so in other units of the army—mistrusted the “psychologues” who believed the doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire*. When men such as Godard and Lacheroy—and others like Colonel Antoine Argoud, the formidable French commander of the district south of Algiers (and later Massu’s chief of staff), who had tried throughout the conflict to change the army’s doctrine using the principles of *guerre révolutionnaire*—took the drastic step of trying to overthrow the government in 1961, they were not supported by the majority of paratroopers or Foreign Legion units or by the bulk of the army. Massu, Bigeard, Trinquier, Aussaresses, Mayer, Fossey-François, and the majority of officers involved in the Battle of Algiers remained loyal to de Gaulle.

If the influence of *guerre révolutionnaire* theory is insufficient to explain the actions of the 10e. DP in the Battle of Algiers, what other possible factors should be considered? In addition to the influence of the Algerian police and possibly the “Battle of Saigon,” the emotional state of the French Army unquestionably had much to do with the ferocity and determination that characterized the operations of the elite units of the French Army in Algeria; namely, the paratroop and Foreign Legion regiments. These forces, because of their colonial roots, had been at the heart of the struggle in Indochina. The French Army as a whole had been through the profound trauma of catastrophic defeat by the Germans in 1940, the difficulties brought about by the split between Vichy and Free French forces, and then the defeat in Indochina. This was compounded for the units of the 10e. DP on the eve of the Battle of Algiers by the humiliation of the withdrawal from Suez even as victory was in sight. The desire to restore the reputation of the French Army was particularly strong among the many veterans of Indochina who were in the 10e. DP. As Aussaresses declared: “I had lost too many comrades at Dien Bien Phu and didn’t want to see that happen again.” The war in Indochina had been a cruel one, *la sale guerre* (dirty war), in which the

130. This was Bodard’s phrase, writing in 1967, and presumably was intended as a deliberate reference to the Battle of Algiers. See Bodard, *The Quicksand War*, p. 168.
133. Although the term *dirty war* referred originally to the Indochina case, it is now almost always as-
French had been exposed to an enemy whose ruthlessness and willingness to commit atrocities had brutalized many who fought there. When the ALN used similarly abhorrent tactics such as the massacres at El-Halia and elsewhere, many officers were determined to take revenge against such adversaries. As Jacques Servan-Schreiber, who served in the paratroops in Algeria and Indochina, observed: “Defeat, and the consequences of defeat, can degrade a nation more disastrously than anything else.”

Another factor worth emphasizing here is the deeply troubled relationship of the army with the state. After World War I, the French Army had come under suspicion from leftists of being the potential source of a coup d’état and had been infiltrated by the far right in order to launch a coup if the Communists gained any more power under the Third Republic. The debates about modernizing the army and how to defend against Nazi Germany were guided as much by concerns about the potential of the army to act internally as by its effectiveness against foreign enemies. The mistrust widened during the war with the split between those who remained loyal to Vichy and those who rallied to de Gaulle, often mirroring political views forged in the 1930s.

Later on, army commanders believed that they had been given too great a burden in Indochina and then had been betrayed by venal politicians of the Fourth Republic. Confidence in the institutions of the Fourth Republic was very low within the army by the time the Battle of Algiers began. Many officers were convinced that the French state was incapable of winning the war against the FLN and would simply display the same lack of will it had shown in Indochina. Guerre révolutionnaire theorists agreed with this, but many of the officers who believed that the Fourth Republic was too weak to sustain the effort in Algeria had come to this conclusion without ever reading or speaking to the proponents of the theory. The weakness and degradation of the French political system in the 1950s were evident for most to see. Furthermore, the officers in Indochina and Algeria had been assigned a role that increasingly overlapped with the civil administration, in no small measure because the civil institutions were so weak. The French Army has often been accused of having sought primarily military solutions to political problems in

Indochina and Algeria, but this pattern was attributable, at least in part, to the lack of any civil bodies that could have credibly explored a political solution. As Captain Joseph Estoup explained when on trial for his role in the Generals’ Putsch:

My only political action has been in obedience to my orders: colonialist up to 1956, paternalist in 1957–8, “fraternalist” in 1958–9, opportunist ever since. They never taught me in St Cyr to arrange for a town’s food supply, follow up a police investigation, do the job of Prefect of Police, organize a polling station, or suspect my fellow officers.\(^{136}\)

Many officers took on the functions of the civilian institutions in Algeria simply because those institutions, and the system that supported them, were so weak, not because the theory of *guerre révolutionnaire* told them they should. This should not be forgotten when assessing the conduct of the Battle of Algiers.

The role of *guerre révolutionnaire* theory in French counterterrorism has yet to be fully explored. Nonetheless, this article has sought to challenge the notion that the operational success of the 10e. DP can be described as an undisputed triumph of the theory or that the battle was fought explicitly with this doctrinal construct in mind. To be sure, the theory did have some influence, and certain individuals, notably Trinquier and Godard, evidently sought to put into practice aspects of *guerre révolutionnaire* thinking. Nonetheless, many prominent French officers, including key figures such as General Massu, showed little regard for *guerre révolutionnaire* either during or after the Battle of Algiers.

Many of the paratroopers were inclined to act as ruthlessly as they did because of their recent experiences in Indochina and Suez, as well as more distant memories that affected the army and the French nation as a whole. Furthermore, the army commanders, when confronted by an onslaught of urban terrorism, may have been influenced at least as much by the practical examples of the “Battle of Saigon” and the prior experience of the Algerian police as by the principles laid out in *guerre révolutionnaire* essays. The conclusion we might draw, therefore, is that the contingent historical experience of the French Army, rather than the abstractions of *guerre révolutionnaire*, is what most directly accounts for French actions during the Battle of Algiers.

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