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## LESSON 4

### CASE STUDY: ALGERIA

#### Introduction

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**Purpose** By its examination of terrorist tactics of both the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the Secret Army Organization (OAS) along with their impact on the Algerian Revolution, this lesson allows you to comprehend the importance and primacy of a political strategy in counterinsurgency warfare.

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**Why Study Algeria?** Many of the French techniques used to combat the National Liberation Front (FLN) are now considered the standard for counterinsurgency operations.

In many aspects, the French counterinsurgency effort typified the frustrations faced by modern powers in a classic unconventional conflict.

Like the U.S. in Vietnam, the French in Algeria were unable to transform military successes (of which there were many) into a political victory.

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**Relationship to Other Instruction** This lesson is relevant to the lesson on insurgency and reinforces several recurring themes of unconventional warfare throughout the OOTW phase. It also provides a lead-in to the lessons on U.N. peacekeeping and the case studies on Somalia and Bosnia.

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**Study Time** This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 3 hours of study.

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## Educational Objectives

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**Political Strategy** Discuss the importance and primacy of a political strategy in counterinsurgency warfare. [JPME Area 3(e)]

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**Civilian Population** Evaluate the role of the civilian population as a center of gravity in a counterinsurgency scenario. [JPME Area 3(b)]

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**Counter-Insurgency Strategy** Explain the impact of time, space, casualties, economic expense, and political propaganda on counterinsurgency strategy. [JPME Areas 3(a) and 3(d)]

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**Terrorist Tactics** Discuss the terrorist tactics of both the FLN and the OAS along with their impact on the Algerian Revolution.

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**Unconventional Conflict** State which French counterinsurgency tactics were most/least effective in handling this unconventional conflict.

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**JPME Area/  
Objectives/Hours  
(accounting data)** 3/a/0.5  
3/b/0.5  
3/d/0.5  
3/e/0.5

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## Discussion

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### **Historical Background**

The religious and revolutionary sentiment in contemporary Algeria is a strong reminder of events there four decades ago.

During the 1950s, the Algerian status quo was imperiled by violent revolutionary warfare; terrorism and clandestine political activity were rife not only in Algeria but also in France where harsh government responses engendered revolution rather than ending it.

The French acquired Algeria by force in 1830 and in 1848 incorporated it into France proper, creating districts with voting rights in the National Assembly in Paris. Both countries formed the "French Union."

However, differences in ethnicity, religion, and economics continued to grow, undermining the political union that the French sought to maintain. These factors, combined with Pan-Arabism and post-World War II anti-colonialism, triggered a bloody eight-year (1954-1962) insurgency, the repercussions of which are still felt in France and Algeria today.

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### **French Model of Counter-insurgency**

Many of the French techniques used to combat the National Liberation Front (FLN) are now considered the standard for counterinsurgency operations. These include

- wPopulation relocation
- wMedical assistance
- wPSYOPS
- wCivil affairs
- wIntelligence operations

To overcome rugged terrain, the French employed small, elite units that accentuated speed and secrecy during night operations.

They also incorporated large numbers of indigenous Algerian troops.

However, other measures were unique to this vicious conflict, including illegal kidnapping of suspected guerrilla leaders and extensive use of torture as an intelligence asset.

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## Discussion, Continued

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### **The French Counter-Insurgency Effort**

The French counterinsurgency effort presented all of the frustrations modern powers face in a classic low-intensity conflict. However, a number of cultural, social, and historical factors combined to make the Algerian conflict a particularly brutal and nasty affair, one marked by atrocities committed by both sides.

Added to the nationalistic aspirations of the FLN were deep-seated religious hatreds between Moslems and Christians that had been festering for decades.

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### **Role of the Officer Corps**

On the other hand the French officer corps, fresh from defeat at the hands of Viet Minh guerrillas in Indo-China, was determined not to lose the struggle in Algeria. Indeed, French officers imprisoned by the Viet Minh adopted Marxist torture and brain washing techniques to more effectively fight the Algerian terrorists.

In addition, many French officers used the *guerre revolutionaries* doctrine which categorized the conflict as a quasi-religious defense of western civilization against international Communism.

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### **Factors Working Against Compromise**

Moreover, the French colonial population (*pieds noirs*), after living in Algeria for over a century, considered it their home and were adamant against any political compromise, even with moderate Algerian nationalists.

It was from these European "ultra" factions and dissident Para and Foreign Legion units that the fanatical Secret Army Organization (OAS) was formed.

Thus, the French government had to deal not only with FLN extremists, but also with OAS terrorists led by General Raoul Salan. This conflict within the French Army, which at times was at war with its own soul, almost led to civil war in France.

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## Discussion, Continued

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### French Advantages

At first it seemed the French had many advantages.

Logistically, Algeria was directly across the Mediterranean from the French mainland.

Pro-government colonial forces contained thousands of loyal Algerian troops, and the French colonial infrastructure had governed Algeria for over a century, buttressed by educated European and Algerian citizens.

Militarily, right up until the end of the struggle, National Liberation Arm (ALN) guerrillas (the military wing of the FLN) were no match for French regulars.

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### French Military Successes

In fact, it could be argued that France won the war militarily.

The Morice Line across the Tunisian border isolated ALN troops outside Algerian combat zones.

Crack French intelligence and counterinsurgency units destroyed the FLN terrorist infrastructure block by block during "the Battle of Algiers."

The Challe Offensive in the rural *bled* decimated ALN guerrilla ranks while seizing the initiative from insurgents.

French commandos successfully captured the top FLN cadre.

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### French Political Defeats

But no matter how well the French did militarily, the war dragged on.

Without a political solution and the support of the majority Moslem population, French forces remained isolated in a hostile sea.

The French in Algeria, like the U.S. in Vietnam, were unable to transform military successes (of which there were many) into a political victory.

As you consider the readings, try to apply the lessons learned by the French to some of the low-intensity scenarios today.

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## Required Readings

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***Operations Other  
Than War  
(OOTW)  
Readings***

wPimlot, John. "The Algerian Revolution." *War in Peace*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1981, Volume I, pp. 311 to 327. Find this reading in the *Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings*, Annex D, pp. D- to D-. Pimlot explains the response by the French government to the rebellion of Algerian nationalists in Algeria. With Algeria officially a part of France itself, the French government faced a considerable challenge in attempting to accommodate both the Algerian nationalists and the descendants of the French colonialists who resided in Algeria.

wPrice, James R. "Algeria 1954-1962." *Challenge and Response: Internal Conflict*. Washington, DC: American University Press, 1968, Volume I, pp. 328 to 355. Find this reading in the *Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings*, Annex D, pp. D- to D-. The nationalist revolution in Algeria had underlying political causes that a French military victory and diplomacy were unable to counteract. An independent Algeria was inevitable.

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## For Further Study

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### Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

wPorch, Douglas. *The French Foreign Legion*. New York: Harper Books, 1991.

wBraestrup, Peter, "Partisan Tactics-Algeria Style." *Modern Guerrilla Warfare*. Edited by Franklin Mark Osanka. New York: The Free Press, 1962, pp. 376-393.

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## Issues for Consideration

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**Strategy** According to John Pimlot, what strategy did the FLN leaders consistently follow during the insurgency? Why was it successful?

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**Ramifications** According to the readings, what were the political and diplomatic ramifications of the revolution outside Algeria?

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**Tactics** Based on the readings "The Algerian Revolution," and "Algeria 1954-1962," explain the tactics used by French Counterinsurgency forces including the Challe Offensive, Morice Line, Quadrillage, SAS, and Hot System.

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**Lessons Learned** What lessons, if any, can U.S. military forces learn from the French counterinsurgency experience in Algeria?

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