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FAILURE, SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED: THE LEGACY OF THE ALGERIAN WAR AND ITS INFLUENCE ON COUNTERINSURGENCY DOCTRINE

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FAILURE, SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED: THE LEGACY OF
THE ALGERIAN WAR AND ITS INFLUENCE ON
COUNTERINSURGENCY DOCTRINE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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History

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

The 2003 American invasion of Iraq resulted in a violent insurgency that American forces were initially unable to counter. The United States military was shocked by its failure and was forced to consider what it had done wrong. Once the U.S. military looked into its past it was forced to admit it had wrongly ignored counterinsurgency. To correct this, it assigned many of its officers, along with other military experts, to create a new, updated doctrine that incorporated the lessons of Iraq and other recent, relevant historical precedent.

Perhaps surprisingly to some, the United States military interpreted that the Algerian War was of particularly important value. This example, according to the interpretation of the U.S. military, demonstrated certain aspects of counterinsurgency, called “laws” by some in the military, that could benefit current world powers. The two aspects of counterinsurgency the U.S. determined were especially important from the Algerian War are the primacy of the population—who must be genuinely convinced to participate on the side of the counterinsurgent force—above all else, including the destruction of the insurgent force and the necessity of the counterinsurgent force to only use methods that are consistent with its stated national ideals.

Specifically, the French won the war militarily but still lost politically. This represents an extremely important conclusion for the U.S. military as it has had a history—as in Vietnam—of considering military victory to be the core of its strategy.

The Algerian War, according to the American interpretation, was strong evidence that the old way of thinking was no longer possible. Therefore, the U.S. military studied the Algerian War and this “lesson” has been directly applied to its current counterinsurgency doctrine. Also, the French use of torture represented another lesson that was particular to the Algerian War. The use of torture in France was of particular interest to the Americans because while it appeared to be working during the Algerian War, the U.S. military interpreted that its success was only a facade. The conspicuous use of torture had undermined French prestige both inside Algeria and around the world. Therefore, even though torture yielded positive, short-term results the long-term result was political failure as France discontinued its effort to retain Algeria. Both of these lessons appear in the current counterinsurgency field manual of the U.S. military, which indicate the direct causal link between the Algerian War and current U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine.

DEDICATION

In memory of Dr. Charlie Crouch

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE SETTING: A FOUNDATION FOR REVOLUTION.....	14
3. AMERICAN COUNTERINSURGENCY HISTORY.....	30
4. THE ALGERIAN WAR: A POLITICAL AFFAIR.....	43
5. OLD DOGS AND NEW TRICKS: THE DELICATE NATURE OF COMBAT AND INTELLIGENCE GATHERING.....	70
6. CONCLUSION.....	89
REFERENCES.....	92

CHAPTER 1

ALGERIA: INTRODUCTION TO AN IMPORTANT CASE STUDY

The history of modern counterinsurgency is problematic because it is marked by uneven progress, and its progression is even repeatedly reversed. Some countries, like the United States, have simply ignored their own lessons, not to mention the examples of others. Even the military maxim “generals always seem to fight the last war” criticizes a tendency in conventional warfare that is far less counterproductive than the attitude with which the United States has approached counterinsurgency throughout its history. This relatively uninterested or resistant approach to counterinsurgency has left the United States military unprepared for the 21st Century insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, the initial lack of success in both these recent counterinsurgencies has recently induced American political and military leaders to scramble to improve U.S. proficiency in such operations, as it has in several other wars. While the United States has its own historical examples from which to derive lessons, such lessons are not exhaustive. Even though past American counterinsurgency operations may be the easiest for American strategists to study, the Pentagon has paid close attention to other foreign examples. At the dawn of the 21st Century one example, the Algerian War, dramatically increased in importance to the American military because it has certain elements lacking in virtually all others. Because of these special elements the Algerian War represents a case study of special value to modern counterinsurgency strategists.

The Algerian War provides its scholars with lessons of two types, precedent to be repeated and those to be avoided at all costs. But what is perhaps most telling about the Algerian War, in the context of the lessons it can provide, is that the French succeeded militarily, but lost the war. This fact leaves many orthodox military thinkers scratching their heads. It traditionally has been thought, as this thesis will show, that winning militarily *was* winning the war.

Insurgency is defined by the American army as, "...an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict."¹ So the definition of counterinsurgency follows: "... All political, economic, military, paramilitary, psychological, and civic actions that can be taken by a government to defeat an insurgency."² As this definition suggests, counterinsurgency represents a multifaceted problem for countries and their militaries. History has demonstrated the consequences for those countries that approach counterinsurgency and ignore this essential fact. The lessons from Algeria, as the writings of American military thinkers and official military publications have confirmed, have significantly contributed to the modern understanding of counterinsurgency.

The nature of counterinsurgency, unlike that of conventional warfare, demands political victory as the end, and military operations as the means. In this context, the Algerian War represents a superior historical example as, while the French rendered

1 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*. Headquarters: Department of the Army. April, 2009. pg. 1-1

2 *Ibid.* pg. 1-2

their opposition largely militarily ineffective, they still lost the “war,” that is, they failed to end the insurgency. This thesis will demonstrate both how the Algerian War has received the serious attention of top military thinkers despite the tortuous and, at times, stagnant history of American counterinsurgency doctrine, and the special importance of the French example that demonstrates that military victory alone will not end an insurgency, thereby representing a special link between the Algerian War and the history of American counterinsurgency doctrine.

Over the last quarter of the 20th Century and right up until the 2003 Iraq War, the French war in Algeria has not been a popular topic in the United States. In terms of its military history, the United States has had an abundance of its own examples, like Vietnam and the Philippine Insurrection, which have served as the main sources of discussions involving lessons of the past. Furthermore, only limited intellectual energy has been devoted to a detailed exploration of the application of foreign lessons in counterinsurgency warfare. However, even though the American general public has paid little attention to the Algerian War, its significance to modern U.S. military counterinsurgency doctrine has been surprisingly significant. Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, American policy-makers were faced with an extremely violent insurgency. The sudden demand for the U.S. military to confront this problem sparked an abrupt scramble for ideas to counter the Iraq insurgency. One obvious choice, for reasons this thesis intends to make clear, was the Algerian War. Even within the military, there are extremely few American-authored sources dealing with the Algerian War during the

1970s, 80s or 90s, and even fewer including the topic of counterinsurgency. Therefore, this once relatively obscure politico-military event, during the last quarter of the 20th Century within the United States, has since heavily impacted American foreign policy.³

The Algerian War, as it is commonly called, lasted from 1954 to 1962. When the Algerians revolted, the French initially responded with police and, later, military measures in an attempt to hold on to Algeria at nearly all costs. By the end of the war, 17,456 French soldiers had lost their lives, either killed in action or from “accidents,” and 64,985 had been wounded, while the number of Algerian deaths was likely around 300,000.⁴ However, the Algerian insurgency eventually achieved its primary goal despite its ostensible military defeat by the French army, and France, led by Charles de Gaulle, was compelled to recognize full Algerian independence in 1962. France's eventual failure to retain Algeria despite several well-reasoned and successful practices it employed is the reason the example of the French counterinsurgency holds many lessons for the present and its study has been influential to today's counterinsurgency strategists and policy makers who face similar, if not identical, situations.

The uprising in the former French colony serves as a lasting lesson about what is effective and ineffective as a means to defeat an insurgency and restore the desired political status quo, or to establish a new one. Moreover, the operational lessons learned

³ This is justified by the small number of articles devoted to the Algerian War written in the context of the U.S. “War on Terror.”

⁴ Alistair Horne. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*. United States of America: History Book Club edition by Bookspan, first edition published in 1972, republished in 2002 (cited edition) and again in 2004. p. 538.

from France's experience in Algeria are accompanied by important political lessons and universal ethical questions, regarding in particular, cultural imperialism and the legitimacy of torture. These aspects of the history of the Algerian War reveal lessons that have been applicable ever since. It is not the aim of this thesis to judge the French; however, the task of evaluating the lessons of the Algerian War, and their implications for American counterinsurgency doctrine, necessarily involves a highlighting of French errors over those of the insurgents. The object of this thesis, therefore, is to explore the legacy of the Algerian War, specifically how it has since influenced the theory and application of American counterinsurgency doctrine.

Current world powers, the United States, Great Britain, and Russia, invest a great deal of their resources in counterinsurgency operations, whether these take the form of highly-trained human intelligence, expensive surveillance equipment, or large appropriations.⁵ This is because counterinsurgency is a crucial topic to modern warfare and thus a crucial part of the foreign policy of many of the world's most powerful states. Since World War Two, which is the last example of a large scale, *total* war directly between world powers, the world has experienced a series of "irregular" wars. The term "irregular" war simply refers to any war that does not easily fit the description of a conventional war. Conventional wars feature opposing state actors that fight each other using "regular" armies and naval forces in such a way that reflects an adherence to

⁵ David Ucko. "Innovation or Inertia: The U.S. Military and the Learning of Counterinsurgency" *Orbis*. Spring, 2008 p. 291

regulations and accepted tradition. Therefore, “irregular” warfare denotes any conflict that is not conventional. The Iraq War, the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, and the Vietnam War are the most salient examples of “irregular” wars fought by the United States in recent decades.

The practical need for academic scholarship on counterinsurgency is heightened by the observed lack of success that large nations, especially those which are democracies and therefore rely on public support, have experienced when attempting to stop insurgencies. The primary objective of every counterinsurgency is political in nature, which explains why military superiority, being logically necessary in asymmetrical warfare, does not automatically bring with it “real success” in these conflicts. Real success is only achieved with the establishment of long-term political control of a given area by the counterinsurgency force. Thus, a military victory alone cannot achieve meaningful results. Rather, such victories have been necessary for clearing a path for subsequent political success by removing violent opposition.

Nevertheless, conventional military operations have received the bulk of the attention and implementation, making successful counterinsurgencies significantly more difficult. So, then, counterinsurgency represents a puzzle that conventionally proficient forces have not yet completely solved. The combination of the intrinsic difficulties of counterinsurgency operations and the modern trend of nation-building to establish liberal governments (which often involves such operations) necessitates serious attention and thorough study of specific historical cases. This view is shared by the U.S.

military. Austin Long, writing a report for the Secretary of Defense in 2006, described his work the following way:

This study is premised on the assertion that Iraq and Afghanistan (the two contemporary counterinsurgencies of the day) are consonant with some general characteristics of insurgency and counterinsurgency, and are more similar to than different from many previous insurgencies.⁶

The United States has taken notice over the last decade and has paid careful attention to the historical analysis of this component of its geopolitical grand strategy.

One of the most salient examples of counterinsurgency is the Algerian War of 1954-1962. This violent confrontation between France and Algerian separatists for political control of the massive North African territory left a legacy of considerable value to policy-makers and counterinsurgency strategists the world over. The American military in particular has drawn lessons from the experience of the French. American military strategists have interpreted that analysis of the Algerian War demonstrates the proper and improper methods of conducting counterinsurgency operations, in particular the political and moral perceptions of a target population, as well as the necessity of clear, realistic objectives accompanied by a strict adherence to internationally acceptable methods. The latter is a particularly touchy matter since the insurgents often do not play by the rules of conventional warfare. The participants in this war, especially the English-speaking French officer David Galula, whose works will

⁶ Austin Long. *On "Other War:" Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research*. p. 15

be discussed in much greater detail later, have offered a large volume of anecdotal, doctrinal, and theoretical contributions to the field.

The Pentagon in 2003 showed the film, *The Battle of Algiers*, which is a documentary-style portrayal of the climax of the Algerian War illustrating the operational achievements by the French. As will be evidenced in later chapters, the Pentagon itself eventually realized the striking similarities between the events detailed in of the film and the American shock at the Iraqi insurgency following Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Pentagon's perception of the importance of the legacy of the Algerian War, as this thesis will argue, indicates the Algerian War's influence on American military thinkers. The lessons of the war found in the film were that counterinsurgency is primarily a political endeavor and that the military component must be measured ultimately by its political affects. The subsequent historical application of such lessons, in whatever ways they have been understood and adopted, makes the Algerian War especially important, not just in French or colonial history but for the public policy of states that find themselves in similar circumstances.

While some may contend that the Algerian War is not a viable comparative example because colonial wars are now an extinct endeavor as classic colonial empires have receded or disappeared, many of the elements of colonial war still relate directly to conflicts today that involve counterinsurgency. Even though not altogether appreciated by the French at the time, colonialism during the 1950s and 1960s, was an endangered enterprise. Even though the French government and many of its people failed to detect

it, the international community's tolerance for any state policy reflecting the then-progressively unpopular "White Man's Burden" had significantly declined. The fact that the Algerian War was a colonial war meant that it encroached upon the acceptable assumptions of the international community, which all democracies must contend with when fighting any war. Paris failed to reconcile its differences with the international community, thus putting itself in an awkward position between internal and external demands. While such a conclusion is clearer with hindsight, the failure of policy makers to imagine the results of their country's actions or to heed international opinion once it soured against France exacerbated their international condemnation, serving as a roadblock to political success. The role of international opinion in the Algerian War is evidenced in the nature of its end, as the war damaged France domestically and nearly brought the country to civil war, despite the army's significant operational successes in Algeria. Thus, although colonial wars are outside the realm of current international policy-making, valuable lessons can still be derived from certain elements of them.

In all historical writing, great caution must be exercised in extracting "lessons" from the past, as no two situations are ever exactly the same. Each moment in history is necessarily different from every other. Therefore, when evaluating the worth of historical lessons, it must be remembered that such an undertaking is an inexact science, requiring subjective thinking rooted in knowledge of historical precedent and critical analysis. In other words, while rigid transpositions of historical scenarios are misleading, certain common elements of historical events, whether doctrinal or

theoretical, can be extracted, analyzed and cautiously utilized in the development and execution of strategies and policies. To use the lessons of history effectively, one must walk a tightrope between over-transposition and ignorance. By itself, knowledge of history is not particularly helpful with regard to policy-making. Analysis and deduction from history with regard to its important and causally relevant elements requires great circumspection. Analysis of history for the purpose of practical application of its lessons is, therefore, more of an art than a science.

For students of the Algerian War in particular the process of extracting lessons must be done with caution. As mentioned above, a colonial war is very different from the wars that the United States currently prosecutes. It is not the purpose of this thesis to label the current efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan as “colonial” in nature. Rather, the point is to compare the similar and relevant elements found within each war that are useful in improving policy and provide strategies to move forward. As the 2006 report prepared for the U.S. Secretary of Defense referenced earlier put it, “while many specific details [of Cold-War era counterinsurgencies] do indeed vary greatly, [from post Cold War examples] insurgency and counterinsurgency is [sic] a more general phenomenon that is not a product of... peculiarities.”⁷ While discretion must thus be exercised by those evaluating the lessons of the Algerian War for practical application in counterinsurgency doctrine, this does not make such an endeavor worthless. Also, it is not the central purpose of this thesis to provide an independent evaluation of the

⁷ Long, p. x

Algerian War with respect to potential lessons for subsequent policy-makers. This thesis will look at the Algerian War mostly through the lens of military experts and policy analysts by focusing on the lessons they interpreted and will evaluate their applicability to counterinsurgency doctrine.

Much of what has been written about the Algerian War is monographic and focused chronologically on the events that took place. Since this thesis is concerned with the overall lessons of the war and their application, such works are useful to cite details for the purpose of comparison. Several works written during the last years of the war will serve as sources as they provide a valuable perspective into the contemporary perceptions of the war. The vast majority of historical literature written on the “memory” of the Algerian War deals with cultural or political phenomena, not the military aspects of the war. A prime example of this is Todd Shepard’s *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*, which deals with the lasting effects of France’s defeat in Algeria, and the cultural and philosophical impact the war has had on the traditional notion of French universalism. Also, works like *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory*, co-authored by Jim House and Neil Macmaster, examine the French government’s reaction to domestic unrest and active dissent on behalf of the Algerian revolutionaries and the sometimes brutal repercussions that reaction had on French citizens and Algerians. In terms of diplomatic history, Matthew Connelly’s work, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins*

of the Post-Cold War Era, focuses on the diplomatic repercussions of the Algerian War, and, in particular on the relationship of France and the United States.

While most of the historical scholarship on the after-effects of the Algerian War deals with culture and diplomacy, there are several reports written by and for the military, whose objective is to derive useful strategic and tactical lessons from the Algerian War. David Galula, a French military officer who actually participated in the French counterinsurgency operation in Algeria as a commander of a company sized pacification unit, has written a number of articles, books, and reports on the subject. His works are crucial to this thesis, as he is essentially the face of the military side of the Algerian War's legacy for the American military men and women who have studied the war. Several reports, written by military officers for their respective war colleges, discuss Galula's experience and doctrines and thus serve to causally bind the Algerian War and U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine. Several political scientists and military personnel have written reports for the same purpose.

Even though there exists a plethora of books, articles, reports and speeches dedicated to Algeria, counterinsurgency, and the marriage of both, there is a dearth of works which consider the lessons learned about counterinsurgency from the Algerian War. Therefore, this thesis is advancing into relatively uncharted territory. In order to effectively outline the effect the Algerian War has had on counterinsurgency doctrine this thesis will begin with a survey of basic elements of Algerian history relevant to the eventual uprising. Part of Chapter 4 will deal specifically with Gillo Pontecorvo's film,

Battle of Algiers (1964). This film is extremely useful as it highlights many of the most important aspects of the war, and is the source that subsequent generations, including military officials, have used to understand the war. For many it is their total knowledge of the Algerian conflict. However, lessons from the film represent only a small part of the range of lessons derived from the Algerian War. The political and military lessons derived from the conflict will be given separate attention, each with its own chapter, because of the importance of understanding the different nature of each. Finally, crucial to the outcome of the war and its effect on counterinsurgency doctrine since, is a discussion of the issues of torture and the “acceptable” means of warfare. These issues make the Algerian War a classic example of the importance of rules of engagement for a democratic nation in the modern era. Bringing these things all together should bring about a clear understanding of the relevance of the French experience in Algeria in fighting counterinsurgencies today.

CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING: A FOUNDATION FOR REVOLUTION

...generally blazing down without pity or moderation, but capable of unpredictable, fierce change. Immense, beautiful, sudden, savage and harsh; one gropes inadequately for the right adjectives to describe the country⁸

Understanding the starting point of the Algerian Revolution is requisite to comprehending the nature of the subsequent counterinsurgency. The United States military has decided that during any counterinsurgency, the primary goal must be to win over the native population, which is something the French government failed to do in Algeria. The root of the problem for many Muslims in Algeria was a lack of representation in local and national governments as Algerians were promised citizenship, which they never really received. This problem was exacerbated by the hostile treatment at the hands of the European colonists who appropriated much of the best land and disproportionately dominated Algerian local politics, which resulted in biased laws meant to keep the Europeans in nearly complete control. While many in the French government identified this as a problem, their efforts to enact reform failed repeatedly for a number of reasons that will be discussed in this chapter. The French failure to overcome the practical difficulties in instituting reform characterized politics in French Algeria for its duration. The failure to solve these problems resulted in an insurrection, known as the Algerian War.

⁸ Horne. p. 44

The French counterinsurgency effort was made unusually difficult by the *pieds noirs*. European *pieds noirs*, also referred to as *colons* by many Muslim Algerians, were adventurous people of various European descents and had conspicuously different interests than the mainland French. The *pieds noirs* enjoyed a substantial advantage in terms of living conditions and government representation. Dominating French Algerian politics, these settlers feared that an increase in representation for Muslims would threaten the way of life they had worked so hard to establish. Therefore, *pied noirs* logic held that oppression of Muslim Algerians equated to protection of their own interests. Moreover, this oppressive attitude, a problem in itself over time, was coupled with racism and vitriol. As a famous *pied noirs* poet, Jules Roy, admitted, "One thing I knew because it was told to me so often, was that the Arabs belonged to a different race, one inferior to my own."⁹ In this environment, some members of the French government, who will be identified later, claimed prematurely, though their reform efforts never yielded anything substantial, that Muslim Algerians were really French citizens and that they were being assimilated. This rhetoric was obviously not true because it never translated into tangible reform, which enhanced dissent among Algerian Muslims. Even if the French government realized the dislocation between its rhetoric and reality, it failed to evaluate adequately the potential dissent it would create, or to overcome the significant roadblocks that certain elements of French domestic politics provided.

⁹ Ibid. Pp. 54,55

This would explain why assimilationist rhetoric, explained later, essentially fell on deaf ears and undermined the support for the French of Arab moderates. Time and time again, *pieds noirs* interference was responsible for blocking political reforms intended to improve the political and social predicament of Muslim Algerians which might have precluded insurrection. The extent of the difficulties faced by the French did not mean they were insurmountable. After all, at the start of the insurgency in 1954, the FLN likely did not have the support of a majority of the Muslim population, or even for that matter of the Algerian Nationalists, who were fractured into several rival groups. The French claim, made throughout the insurrection, that the FLN insurgent group did not represent Muslim Algerians as a whole was justifiable for much of the Algerian War. However, French political failures, due to several complex factors, contributed to the FLN's ability to win enough support of the Muslim population to supplant French authority. David Galula, a counterinsurgency specialist who experienced more success than most as the commander of a French unit that was tasked with pacifying multiple regions in Algeria from 1956 to 1958, concluded that:

There was no doubt in my mind that support from the population was the key to the whole problem for us as well as for the rebels. By "support" I mean not merely the sympathy or idle approval but active participation in the struggle.¹⁰

If the population was the key, then the political failures of the past had to be confronted if their support was to ever materialize. Thus, the mentalities of various French

¹⁰ David Galula. *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958*. RAND Corporation (1963) p. 69

government officials, the French military, *pieds noirs* and Algerian Muslims at the outbreak of the conflict are crucial to understanding the entire conflict.

As stated earlier, over the course of the French presence in Algeria, the universalist French notion of sovereignty, which dated from the French Revolution, was repeatedly contradicted by the actual French involvement with Algerians on Algerian soil. In 1955, the French Governor-General of Algeria, Jacques Soustelle, appointed by Prime Minister Pierre Mendes-France, opined:

France is at home here... or rather, Algeria and all her inhabitants form an integral part of France, one and indivisible. All must know, here and elsewhere, that France will not leave Algeria any more than she will leave Provence and Brittany. Whatever happens the destiny of Algeria is French.¹¹

Even though it can be said that Soustelle's words were likely genuine and there was serious consideration among reform-minded French politicians like Mendes France and Soustelle for minor liberal reform in Algeria, from the perspective of an Algerian, these sentiments were undercut by the memory of poor treatment at the hands of French *colons*. After Algeria had been effectively "pacified," following the 1830 invasion, the French took a large majority of the best land for themselves. Even so, there were multiple efforts at reform to "assimilate" the Muslims of Algeria, as Todd Shepard has written the French government "expected all male inhabitants of Algeria to become French citizens eventually."¹² However, even considering these good intentions, reality

11 Horne p. 108

12 Todd Shepard. *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006. pg. 22

took a very different course. Progress towards actual equality for Muslim Algerians was repeatedly stalled. The “native code,” promulgated in 1881, indicates that French promises reform were not really powerful enough to make Muslim Algerians equal to European *pieds noirs*. According to Shepard, the code “instituted exorbitant penalties” for “infractions” that could only be committed by “natives,” which obviously referred to Muslims. “This inscription,” Shepard explains, “signaled the close of an active French policy of legal assimilation.”¹³ “The National Assembly’s repeated re-authorization of the supposedly temporary native code offered constant reaffirmation of the presumed inferiority of ‘Muslims.’”¹⁴ Shepard argues that an “embrace of pragmatism over principle” by the French incubated the failure to reform from 1881 until well into the 20th century.¹⁵ By the 1950s, he adds, “The architects of integration admitted that official failure to grapple with the reality of the mass exclusion of ‘Muslim’ Algerians from citizenship had institutionalized discrimination.”¹⁶ In short, Algerian society and culture were replaced with that of the French for the duration of Algeria’s colonization.

If a lack of meaningful political reform was at the heart of the mounting Muslim Algerian dissent to French rule, it cannot be said that such reform had not been attempted repeatedly. However, due to the realities of French politics, characterized by a general lack of any sustained, cohesive political front that could actually push reform

13 Ibid. p. 31

14 Ibid. p. 35

15 Ibid. p. 23

16 Ibid. pg. 47

through the intricate law-making process as well as bitter resistance from *pieds noirs* who were desperate to protect the way of life they had worked so hard to create, reform was constantly adulterated, delayed or defeated. Alistair Horne discussed a process that repeated itself throughout his narrative of the French in Algeria: “By and large, [attempts at reform] had followed a dismally stereotyped pattern, initiated by metropolitan France, frustrated by *pieds noir* pressure-groups.”¹⁷ Furthermore, France, following World War II was preoccupied with its own economic problems following the extreme destruction of French cities and industry during the war. Charles de Gaulle once said that it would take “a whole generation of furious work” just to bring France back to what it had been in the 1930's.¹⁸

Thus, although there were a number of efforts by the French government to effect political change in Algeria after 1830, the failure to implement significant reforms represented the root of the problem for France’s effort to retain Algeria. There were in fact a significant number of Muslim Algerians who wanted to be a part of France, and a majority probably who would have accepted some form of French presence. After all, France did provide many observable benefits to Algeria, things like education, agriculture technology, improved public sanitation for cities and villages, and many other benefits. However, the failure to implement meaningful political reform damaged the ability of French politicians to point to these benefits as reasons why Algeria should

17 Horne. p. 36

18 Ibid. p. 65

remain French. Failing to satisfy even the more modest political demands of Algerian moderates undermined the government's efforts to win Muslim support and precipitated the uprising.

Between the French invasion and the days leading up to the revolution, although occasional half-measures—the number of political reforms intended to increase representation for Muslim Algerians—had been attempted by French officials, the cold reality was that the pride of many Muslims had been assaulted by the *colons* for over a century. In 1847, Alexis de Tocqueville, then a deputy in the French National Assembly, told his government that “We have rendered Muslim society much more miserable and much more barbaric than it was before it became acquainted with us.”¹⁹ One hundred and twenty years later, William Polk, a political scientist and advisor on American foreign policy in the Middle East sent to Algeria in the 1960s, similarly noted that he “found that Algerians were so totally excluded from the *colon* economy that even ‘mom and pop’ laundries and bakeries were European monopolies.”²⁰ Therefore, failed reform efforts did not do enough to secure and sustain the loyalty of Muslim Algerians. The French plea that Algerians were actually French, meant to stem the tide of dissent, did not improve the economic and social realities on the ground and was constantly belied by daily experience.

19 William Polk. *Violent Politics. A History of Insurgency, Terrorism and Guerrilla War from the American Revolution to Iraq*. New York: HarperCollins Books, 2007 p. 131.

20 Ibid. Pp. 131

Furthermore, the promulgation of biased and racist laws, like the native code, created a rift between the French and the Algerians. This rift was ripe for exploitation by nationalist Algerians. Though much of the immediate culpability for the treatment of Muslim Algerians belongs to the *pieds noirs*, the French government was responsible for making good on its self-proclaimed duty to help Muslim Algerians attain political, social and economic equality. Furthermore, the French Government remained dangerously inactive regarding the building tension. Finally, the French effort to impose their culture upon Muslims in Algeria characterized the thoroughly unproductive effort to “assimilate” Algerians into France. Assimilation appeared to many Muslims as mere talk, and real progress for Algerians came too little, too late.

As a preview of things to come, during the late spring of 1945, Muslim separatists viciously unleashed their pent-up fury on the relatively unsuspecting *pieds noirs* in and around the Algerian town of Setif. The implications of the Setif massacre for the 1954 revolution are significant, as the brutal and atrocious acts committed by Algerian terrorists burned themselves into French collective memory. Alistair Horne wrote of the uprising:

The accumulated casualty reports made grisly reading: 103 Europeans murdered, plus another hundred wounded; a number of women brutally raped, including one aged eighty-four. Many of the corpses were appallingly mutilated: women with their breasts slashed off, men with their sexual organs stuffed into their mouths.²¹

21 Horne. p. 26

For a society that historically thought of their Algerian neighbors as inferior, such brutal actions could only fuel that perception. Reinforced by the *Setif* massacre, this perception would lead to the justification of later controversial methods utilized by the French against the insurgency, such as of collective punishment and torture. The *Setif* massacre thus further dehumanized Muslim Algerians in the minds of *pieds noirs* and mainland French alike. As will be evidenced in later chapters, American military scholars later concluded that such dehumanization influenced the nature of the counterinsurgency.

Between the *Setif* massacre in 1945 and the outbreak of revolution nine years later, the French government failed to appreciate the signs of mounting unrest among Muslim Algerians. They continued to fail to enact any meaningful political reforms in Algeria that might have avoided, or at least have postponed, a violent revolution. *Pieds noirs* opportunists used the emotions that the *Setif* massacre stirred up in France to justify their expansion of political control over Algeria. Therefore, the outrage initiated by the massacre altered the political environment in a way that facilitated harsh reprisals by the army and the *colons*. Further exacerbating the situation was a significant growth in the Muslim population (the Muslim population jumped from 5.6 million in 1931 to 8.5 million in 1954)²² that coincided with economic troubles stemming from an influx of agricultural technology that made the labor of several thousands of Muslim agriculture workers obsolete.²³ All of these problems—the resistance of *pieds noirs* to reform,

22 Ruedy. p. 94

23 Ibid. pp. 120-121

Muslim restlessness, and widespread unemployment--made Algeria a difficult nut for Paris to crack.

On 1 November, 1954, All Saints Day, groups of armed separatists attacked military and government targets all over Algeria. At the same time, the FLN broadcast a communiqué explaining the ideological impetus for the violence. The communiqué read, "Goal: National independence through... [the] ...restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam."²⁴ The FLN and its allies wanted nothing less than full autonomy. Almost two weeks later the Mendes-France administration responded that "one does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and the integrity of the Republic."²⁵ This rebuttal was a clear indication that France was again defining Algeria as a part of the Republic, and perceived the issue to be a domestic matter. The two opposing premises regarding the sovereignty of Algeria were mutually exclusive, so no common ground could be found. This essentially left the French with two options: withdraw and lose Algeria or destroy the FLN and secure permanent political stability. France's Prime Minister, Pierre Mendes-France, the same man who had negotiated France's withdrawal from Indochina, set the tone for the next five years: France was going to fight.

24 Horne. p. 95

25 Ibid. p. 98

The All Saints Day attack was aimed at the centers of French power in Algeria as army installations, police stations and *pieds noir* civilians were attacked throughout the country. The selection of the targets was telling, as the insurgent forces had declared war on any “occupying” European foreigner. Mendes-France quickly sent military reinforcements to find those responsible for the attacks and to prevent any future attacks. Since the French had decided that the uprising was a domestic affair, many of the reinforcements were policemen.²⁶ French forces immediately set to work hunting down the attackers. There were mass arrests in which guilty and innocent alike were rounded up and sent to prisons or holding areas. *Pieds noirs* were enraged by the attacks and pressured Paris for a tougher response. Several known Algerian nationalist groups were outlawed, and the French grip on day-to day life in Algeria tightened.²⁷

One tactic common among French forces in the early days of the Algerian War was the *ratissage*, literally meaning “raking over,” which was similar to a search and destroy mission.²⁸ Early in the uprising, these missions were usually ill-defined and involved wide sweeps of areas based on incomplete intelligence. These early examples, which often involved collective punishment and acts of violence, did more to hurt innocent Muslims who were “on the fence” than it did to injure the FLN. It is noteworthy that Mendes-France and Jacques Soustelle both issued orders against such policies, but the convoluted political environment of the Algerian War, including

26 John Talbott. *The War Without a Name*. Pg 38

27 Horne. pp. 96, 97

28 Talbott p. 39

disobedience from the French military and significant political pressure from *pied noirs* interest groups, meant that collective punishment continued.²⁹ Much like torture, these often clumsy, nebulously targeted *ratissages*, especially those involving the harsh treatment of innocents, actually served to radicalize Algerians who might otherwise have remained neutral.³⁰

As the French military and police worked to stem the attacks on European settlers, the FLN expanded its attacks against Muslims. Muslims were much more vulnerable to the FLN's attacks than *pieds noirs*, since France put a higher emphasis on protecting Europeans. The FLN attacks on Muslim civilians were intended to drive a wedge between the Muslim population and the French government. If Muslims could be coerced into disassociating from the French "assimilation" would be impossible, thus making the permanent occupation of Algerian soil untenable. The French political leadership recognized the threat this posed and became convinced that political and social reform were critically necessary. However, the *pieds noirs*, who believed that their entire way of life rested on their ability to rule over the Muslims of Algeria, bitterly resisted political and social reforms. As one scholar has put it, "The failure of this policy [that is to institute meaningful reform] in all its guises, or its abandonment, meant

29 Horne. pp. 106-118

30 Constantin Melnik. *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency In Algeria*. RAND Corporation (1964) pp 170-203

the end of French Algeria."³¹ France was forced to either make difficult, politically unpopular decisions or wage a losing war as best it could.

Early in the war, the FLN lacked a developed organization and adequate funding. The organization was therefore forced to be frugal when planning its operations.³² But although it was poorly supplied, the FLN was able to establish a grassroots movement across many parts of Algeria, indeed, decentralized, local violence spread even as the FLN's leaders were being apprehended. In spite of key gains made by the French in apprehending FLN leaders, the insurgent organization survived and was able to establish the beginnings of a "state within a state" in Algeria. This "state within a state" concept is essential for the success of any insurgency, as it serves to legitimize the insurgency as an heir-apparent government and helps to convince the populace of its permanence.

In 1954 it was very difficult to determine which side held the advantage. On the one hand, nearly all of the revolutionary leadership had been captured or arrested by French forces and several regional networks were completely bankrupt or dispersed.³³ However, the methods by which the French forces accomplished these successes coupled with the political environment of French Algeria did more in the long run to fuel a popular uprising than prevent it. Though shaky and rudimentary by nature, the

31 Talbott. p. 40

32 Ibid. p. 115

33 Talbott. p. 39

FLN did succeed in establishing a “state within a state” and, perhaps more importantly, simply survived.

In 1955 the FLN staged a bloody massacre in Phillipville, an action that may have been the turning point in the entire war. The FLN decided to use terrorism, in the form of gruesome attacks on civilians, in an attempt to provoke a heavy-handed response from the French forces. As the FLN leadership had already concluded, the French doctrine of “collective responsibility” served as, according to one FLN official, “our best recruiting agent.”³⁴ In essence, the FLN trap worked, as the French responded with brutality. While militarily French forces benefited in the short term from severe military retaliation, in the long term the insurgency benefited more.

During the months leading up to the Battle of Algiers, which occurred in the densely populated Algerian capital, the FLN followed a strategy of terrorism against “soft targets” (usually non-military, lightly guarded civilian targets, which were much easier to attack and more likely to induce reprisals) in order to keep pressure on the French forces and expand their own support. The insurgent strategy had worked in rural areas, and the FLN decided that the time had come to expand the insurgency to an urban setting like Algiers. The battle that ensued, timed to maximize international attention on the conflict as the United Nations was scheduled to debate the “Algerian Question,” was meant to prove that the insurgency was urban as well as rural. The French, maintaining their military-focused tactics over time effectively destroyed the

34 Horne. p. 110

operational capabilities of the FLN in and around Algiers. Following the military victory in Algiers, French forces continued their aggressive pursuit of the remaining FLN apparatus. Using their refined counterinsurgency techniques, they succeeded in improving security in Algeria as the FLN was eventually pushed into bordering Tunisia and Morocco. The French also set up an effective series of fortifications, known as the Morice Line, in order to close the borders to prevent re-infiltration by those FLN members that had been forced out of the country.³⁵

As the sources will demonstrate, valuable lessons have been learned from the effective military operations conducted and perfected by the French during the Battle of Algiers and their subsequent rout of remaining FLN forces. However, these military lessons have been qualified, as successful counterinsurgencies are not typically accomplished by military force alone. The more successful the French were in destroying the FLN, the clearer it was to French politicians that without a political solution, military success would be wasted. However, the growing perception of French politicians, who reasoned that military victory could serve only as leverage for a more advantageous agreement with insurgent forces, was not shared by the military leadership or the *pieds noirs*.

When De Gaulle moved towards a settlement with the FLN that would recognize a dramatically reduced role in Algeria for France, French military and *pied noirs* leaders felt betrayed, and a domestic crisis exploded in France. As a result, all the different

³⁵ Ibid. pg. 230

political entities mentioned earlier, motivated by their own various interests, were unprepared for the disorganized conclusion of the Algerian War. The lack of continuity among these political entities was central to the French national failure. As this thesis will demonstrate, the lack of a coherent, clear and internationally acceptable strategy by the French doomed their efforts in Algeria from the start. Political progress failed to materialize and military success, according to the U.S. military interpretation, was thus wasted. The narrative of French involvement in Algeria involves both effective and ineffective policies, both of which are valuable for later generations of military and political thinkers. The remaining chapters of this thesis trace the lessons learned by subsequent military and political leaders and analysts from both French successes and failures during the Algerian War.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICAN COUNTERINSURGENCY HISTORY

...Algerian insurgents did not achieve much military success of any kind; instead they garnered decisive popular support through superior organizational skills and propaganda that exploited French mistakes. These and other factors, including the loss of will in France, compelled the French to surrender-U.S. Army/ Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (2006)

Learning lessons from history is not something the United States military lacks the ability to do. In nearly every conflict in which the U.S. has participated, its military has proved adept at learning from its mistakes and adjusting its tactics, which Mark Moyar attributes to competent leadership. As Mark Moyar has observed, “Conventional forces adapted very well when they had adaptive commanders, even when they had not been exposed to counterinsurgency doctrine.”³⁶ However, although the U.S. military has adapted well during each individual war to the particular circumstances it encountered, it has consciously resisted the permanent institutionalization of counterinsurgency doctrine, so lessons have had to be repeatedly relearned at great cost. In particular, counterinsurgency represents a concept that, as one expert puts it, “the U.S. military has typically paid little attention to.”³⁷ The history of American counterinsurgency must be understood in this light. Whatever lessons about counterinsurgency were learned, and whatever doctrinal progress was made, was usually subordinated to the view that the military should focus on the “destruction of

36 Moyar. p. 260

37 David Ucko. “Innovation or Inertia: The U.S. Military and the Learning of Counterinsurgency” *Orbis*. Spring, 2008 p. 290

military targets,” therefore relegating stability operations and pacification to civilian, non-military entities.³⁸

The resistance of the U.S. military to the permanent implementation of counterinsurgency lessons has a long history. This repeated, historical pattern in American military history has been called “counterinsurgency syndrome.”³⁹ Indeed, when tracing the history of American counterinsurgency doctrine, one does not encounter a sustained progression of building on real-life experiences. Rather, one finds a history of learning and then forgetting.

The forward to the current *U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* states,

This manual is designed to fill a doctrinal gap... With our Soldiers and Marines fighting insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is essential that we give them a manual that provides principles and guidelines for counterinsurgency operations. Such guidance must be grounded in historical studies.⁴⁰

An example of such a “doctrinal gap” can be found during one of the United States’ first major counterinsurgencies: the American Civil War. During the mid-19th century, the concept of irregular war was undercut by the assumption that only conventional war was “honorable.” Nonetheless, units were given extremely vague orders and urged to use whatever means deemed appropriate. The Union initially treated the existence of Confederate insurgents as primarily a political issue, intending to win them over.

38 Ibid. p. 291

39 Ucko. *The New Counterinsurgency Era*. p. 25

40 David Petraeus and James Amos. *U.S. Army/ U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. iii

However, that changed over the course of the war as it became apparent that the political demands of the two sides were mutually exclusive, forcing the Union to adopt a more aggressive strategy.⁴¹ But even though this led to operations designed specifically to root-out irregular guerrillas, the army had no interest in developing a permanent mechanism to institutionalize counterinsurgency.

The United States' next rendezvous with an insurgency followed its brief war with Spain in 1898-1899. American forces captured the Philippines in order to use them as a bargaining chip in the negotiations to end the war. For reasons that remain in debate, the United States decided to occupy the archipelago after a successful conventional campaign.⁴² Upon meeting armed resistance from the local population, American forces responded extemporaneously, for there was no coherent, overall strategy in place at the outbreak of the insurgency. As in the counterinsurgency operations of the American Civil War, U.S. forces initially treated the uprising as a political matter and attempted to solve it by political means. President William McKinley said that “it should be the earnest and paramount aim of the military administration to win the confidence, respect, and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines.”⁴³ This attitude prevailed until, frustrated by a lack of observable progress against the insurgents and stoked by criticism in the press, U.S. policy shifted to focus on the destruction of the opposing force. “Swift

41 Moyer. p. 17

42 Ibid. pp 63-68

43 Ibid. p. 66

methods of destruction," as suggested by one general, replaced benevolence.⁴⁴ The United States ultimately emerged victorious in its political goal in the Philippines of retaining political control.

The lessons from the Philippine Insurrection, even if largely discarded, may have done more to hurt American efforts against future insurgencies than help. American forces triumphed after they changed their methods from political benevolence to violent suppression and intimidation. This invariably led those few military men who gave any thought to future counterinsurgencies to conclude that pacification was more likely to succeed with opposing force-destruction and intimidation than it would by appealing to the population by other means. One general remarked, "A short and severe war creates in the aggregate less loss and suffering than a benevolent war indefinitely prolonged."⁴⁵ The lure of such logic for the military establishment was strong, especially since it seemed to be confirmed by experience. However, as democratic nations found their societies less tolerant of such violence and communications technology became more advanced—bringing with it the advancement of many forms of liberal ideals—dirty wars of considerable brutality and mass human suffering, even if only short-lived, resulted in by-products—like international pressure and the alienation of the target populace—that became more and more severe. Therefore, according to its current doctrine, the U.S. military has decided that the only way it could fight

44 Ibid. pg. 75

45 Ibid. pg. 85

counterinsurgencies in this “new counterinsurgency era” was to focus on winning over the population instead of relying on military force, like they did in to win the Philippine Insurrection.

Over the next few decades, during both world wars, American forces did not participate in significant counterinsurgency operations, but their experience both in Europe and the Pacific helped to cement conventional warfare as the primary strategic focus. After the world wars the United States did not encounter major insurgencies in dealing with former enemies, as most of the defeated powers already had experience with market capitalism, and were not resistant to liberal democracy.

The United States military defines stability operations as,

...various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside of the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential government services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.⁴⁶

Even the experience with stability operations in Japan and in Western Europe, which contain some of the essential elements of counterinsurgency, did not survive long in military practice. “Despite its successful state-building enterprises in Germany and Japan following World War II,” David Ucko writes, “[the U.S. military] did not institutionalize or prepare for any similar contingencies.”⁴⁷ This helps explain the “doctrinal gap,” experienced yet again when American forces committed themselves to supporting the fledgling government in South Vietnam.

46 *The U.S. Army Stability Operations Field Manual* The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2009. p. viii

47 David Ucko. *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars*. pg 26

As a large portion of the United States military deployed for war in Vietnam in 1965 it thought of counterinsurgency as, at best, a secondary issue. Instead the United States was thoroughly committed to fighting conventional wars. However, North Vietnamese forces were experts at participating only in battles they determined to be favorable. John Nagl, a lieutenant colonel and expert on counterinsurgency warfare wrote, "The United States Army entered the Vietnam War with a doctrine well suited for conventional war in Europe, but worse than worthless for the counterinsurgency it was about to [undertake.]"⁴⁸

The central objective of the United States was to stop the spread of communism in South Vietnam, primarily by building up and protecting the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The strategy of destroying communist military forces through attrition overlooked the salient concern for the U.S.: the political stability and viability of its ally, the Republic of Vietnam. South Vietnamese forces made themselves very unpopular throughout the countryside, and the failure of American forces seriously to confront this issue resulted eventually in its failure to meet its original objective: the establishment of a strong, popular non-communist South Vietnam.⁴⁹ Nagl summed up the Vietnam War as a conflict that

demonstrates the triumph of the institutional culture of an organization over attempts at doctrinal innovation and the diminution of the effectiveness of the organization at accomplishing national interests. The United States Army had become reliant on firepower and technological

48 Lt. Col. John Nagl. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 p. 115

49 Millen. pp. 8-24

superiority in its history of annihilating enemy forces; although political considerations may have governed the strategic conduct of the war, they had little connection with the tactical-level management of violence.⁵⁰

Ingrained habits that had become institutionalized, he added, posed an insurmountable obstacle to military innovation, which came from the bottom-up based on smaller units' combat experience.

Vietnam, Nagl argues, clearly demonstrated the need for an institutionalized counterinsurgency doctrine, rather than the old habit of relearning and re-adapting, which has proven so costly. After all, it would seem only logical that a war involving multiple counterinsurgency operations and resulting in tens of thousands of Americans killed in action and costing billions of dollars would actually have a lasting institutional impact regarding the military's approach to such operations. General Westmoreland, who was in charge of the war from 1964 to 1968, concluded, "This new and traumatic experience by our nation should provide lessons for our people, our leadership, the news media, and our soldiers."⁵¹ But while "lessons" were learned, these lessons ironically reflected a belief that counterinsurgency should be avoided. Even though it would seem logical that the U.S. military would have focused more on counterinsurgency following Vietnam, it interpreted the war as proof that such operations only distracted the military from its true purpose (conventional force destruction) and thus were to be avoided.

50 Nagl. p. 115

51 Gen. David Westmoreland. "Westmoreland Reflects on a War of Attrition." *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War*. ed. McMahon, Robert. p. 217

The next significant war in which the American military found itself, the First Gulf War, did not in fact involve counterinsurgency at all. After the United States easily defeated Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army in a short series of conventional battles, American President George H.W. Bush decided, with the ghosts of Vietnam undoubtedly in the back of his mind, not to expand military operations far into Iraq and not to attempt a regime change there. The war also displayed the U.S. military's preference for conventional war, as Saddam Hussein's regime was spared despite its hostility to U.S. interests.

However, once President Bush decided to assist the humanitarian efforts in Somalia in 1993 by sending troops, American troops faced a different situation and counterinsurgency warfare reared its ugly head again. The lessons of Somalia were different. Mark Bowden characterized the way the U.S. military explained the situation in Mogadishu to its soldiers, as recounted in his bestselling account of the Battle of Mogadishu, *Black Hawk Down*,

Warlords had so ravaged the nation battling among themselves that their people were starving to death. When the world sent food, the evil warlords hoarded it and killed those who tried to stop them. So the civilized world had decided to [respond by deploying special forces]... to clean things up."⁵²

Such a task could not be accomplished by conventional warfare. Using tactics that reflected a poor understanding of urban combat among a dense population the American force there had two helicopters shot down, and in the attempt to rescue the

52 Mark Bowden. *Black Hawk Down*. p. 10

fallen crew, 19 soldiers were killed in action.⁵³ The reaction of the American public to the events in Mogadishu— which involved a demand for troops to be withdrawn without the achievement of the central objective—indicated a lack of support for such missions. Even though a much larger war, The Gulf War, involved more troops and more casualties remained popular in the United States, the much smaller engagement in Somalia, with a fraction of the casualties resulted in more domestic unrest. While there were tactical lessons regarding the execution of urban combat, derived from the battle, counterinsurgency itself remained on the back burner.

In the context of the history of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, the 2003 invasion of Iraq represents the 21st Century Vietnam. Because the war is still ongoing, its complete history cannot yet be written. However, it has already secured a place in the history of counterinsurgency. George W. Bush had decided before the war that, unlike his father during the previous Gulf War, he must end Saddam Hussein's regime after the conventional invasion of Iraq. This meant that a new state, one fashioned along the lines of liberal, representative governments existing in the West, was to be “built” and protected. Therefore, political stability became the end and occupation was merely the means. However, the occupation proved difficult, as an insurgency began to materialize. This was a problem of particular significance for American forces as, in David Ucko's words, “the U.S. military's attitude toward stability operations [right

53 R.D. Hooker. “Hard Day’s Night: A Retrospective on the American Intervention in Somalia.” *Joint Forces Quarterly*. Issue 54, 3rd Qtr, 2009.

before the war] can be understood as a combination of disinterest and aversion.”⁵⁴

Therefore, as in many other situations in their history, American forces found themselves unprepared for what they encountered. This has been highlighted in a military research study done by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy of the “seven essential intelligence mistakes” made by American planners. One of these “mistakes,” according to the report, was that “the planning focused strongly on the traditional military tasks, to the exclusion of post-combat requirements. In particular, the military intelligence estimates did not correctly predict the rapid development of a significant anti-coalition group.”⁵⁵ Thus, counterinsurgency abruptly returned to significance.

The current counterinsurgency in Afghanistan is similar. Although less precipitous than in Iraq, the insurgency in Afghanistan has gained momentum after the conventional war had apparently ended, and continues to threaten the American objective of establishing a democratic, pro-coalition government. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military has had to relearn the lessons it should have already learned from previous history. Will the United States military finally institutionalize the “lessons” from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? As one expert put it, “It is imperative

54 Ucko. *The New Counterinsurgency Era*. p. 47

55 Gregory Hooker. *Shaping the Plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Role of Military Intelligence Assessments*. pp. 40,41.

that the U.S. military engage with rather than seek to forget the many lessons from Iraq.”⁵⁶

The interpretation following the Vietnam War that counterinsurgency should be avoided instead of perfected, was not overturned until after Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. As Moyer has written, “Vietnam had taught [the U.S. military] to steer clear of counterinsurgencies.”⁵⁷ However, the unexpected momentum and severity of the Iraq insurgency forced the Pentagon to scramble for ways to “adapt” as it has had to do often throughout history. Currently, there are many experts who suggest these lessons should be permanently institutionalized by the U.S. military. This is due to the popularly-held view, one that has been gaining momentum since the initial difficulties surrounding the occupation of Iraq beginning in 2003, that counterinsurgency operations will be necessary for years to come. According to the current doctrine of American counterinsurgency, re-learning lessons during a time of war, as evidenced by the ongoing counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, has been an extremely costly endeavor, one that the United States in the future would be wise to avoid. It is for exactly this reason, that the United States military has developed a strong interest in the Algerian War. However, one expert noted, “The fundamental problem with the U.S. military's aversion to counterinsurgency and stability operations is that it has confused

56 Ucko. *The New Counterinsurgency Era*. p. 179

57 Mark Moyer. *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency From the Civil War to Iraq*. London: Yale University Press, 2009 p. 1

the undesirability of these missions with an actual ability to avoid them.”⁵⁸ Even though the U.S. military wanted to avoid counterinsurgency, partially based on its experience in Vietnam, world events and strategic interests since have made it unavoidable.

In a recent analysis of the history of leadership in counterinsurgency operations, Mark Moyar has listed “ten attributes of effective counterinsurgency leaders.” Three of these attributes, “Empathy,” “Charisma,” and “Sociability,” involve social and cultural relationships between the counterinsurgency force and the host nation's populace.⁵⁹ “Empathy,” he writes, “enables leaders to appreciate the thoughts and feeling of others...This asset is of obvious value in influencing the civilian populace in an insurgent conflict.” Charisma, he adds, is useful for commanders to make “people more willing to follow their lead... not only on subordinates but also on every other friendly or neutral person, [and] charismatic leaders,” he says, “wield influence in all cultures.” Sociability comes into play as “counterinsurgency commanders must talk with leaders of other organizations and other nationalities to obtain their cooperation.”⁶⁰ All three are critical for the leaders of counterinsurgency forces in accurately determining and assessing the perceptions of the host nation's population.

These attributes are indirectly important to the Algerian War in a strategy research project written in 2008 by Kenneth Detreux, an officer at the U.S. Army War College. Detreux argues forcefully that:

58 Ucko. “Innovation or Inertia” p. 291

59 Moyar. p. 10

60 Ibid. pg. 10

Counterinsurgency forces must understand that criticality of the center of gravity in a counterinsurgency environment: the populace.... The French had a far greater history in Algeria and quelled previous insurgencies over the time of their colonial rule. Throughout, the French failed to fully understand the importance of focusing their efforts on the dominant Muslim community and lift some of the repressive laws and rules governing Algeria.⁶¹

Detreux implies the importance of relationships between soldiers and civilians, and Moyer's three attributes are critical in this regard. Such arguments, when applied to the particular circumstances of the Algerian War, make it clear how important understanding and dealing with the Algerian populace was to the overall success of the counterinsurgency.

⁶¹ Kenneth Detreux. Contemporary Counterinsurgency (COIN) Insights From the French Algerian War (1954-1962) Thesis: U.S. Army War College. p. 10

CHAPTER 4

THE ALGERIAN WAR: A POLITICAL AFFAIR

*Experience shows that in this sort of war the political factors are just as important as the military ones, if not more so. This was particularly true in Algeria, where especially after 1956, there was practically no military contest in the conventional sense owing to the superiority of the French armed forces...⁶² - David Galula in *Pacification in Algeria* (1964)*

Counterinsurgency, at its heart, is a political endeavor. While military force is a necessary and significant part, such force is but a means to an end, it is not the end itself. Specifically, counterinsurgency, as interpreted by the U.S. military, is political because in order to achieve victory the “host” population must be convinced that whatever political outcome the counterinsurgent entity is attempting to bring about and sustain is desirable. The active participation of the host-nation populace is necessary in this endeavor. Algeria, particularly, reinforces this logic as most of its people eventually accepted the FLN even though it had been militarily defeated.

The salient causal connection between the Algerian War and the development of current U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine is represented by the *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Already referenced several times, this military publication is the corporate result of years of research, experience, interpretation and synthesis by several authors within the United States military. The work is not an academic research project, therefore its assertions are not directly cited, making it difficult to locate exactly which historical precedent led to exactly which doctrinal

⁶² David Galula. *Pacification in Algeria: 1956-1958*. pg. 5

development. Furthermore, determining how much of an influence the Algerian War had on the various authors, who are anonymous, is impossible to tell. However, this should not deter analysis of the causal foundation of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine as valuable research is possible despite this inherent difficulty.

By piecing together various reports written by America's military leaders, and the prevalence of French counterinsurgency experiences in American military publications and journals—which are authored by the very same “COIN [Counterinsurgency] community,” as a leading expert on the topic refers to it, that engineer official doctrine—the argument that the Algerian War has an exceptional role in the development of current American counterinsurgency doctrine can be defended.⁶³ Serving as perhaps the “smoking gun” regarding a direct causal connection between the Algerian War and the development of current U.S. counterinsurgency strategy is the aforementioned counterinsurgency field manual, also known as FM 3-24. This publication includes in its index multiple entries for Algeria, and dedicates an entire section to the “laws” of David Galula. Furthermore, it lists the work of multiple “classics,” including works by French military officers who served in the Algerian War, including Galula, and Alistair Horne's, *A Savage War of Peace*. The forward to the bibliography reads:

This bibliography is a tool for the Army and Marine Corps leaders to help them increase their knowledge of insurgency and counter-insurgency. Reading what others have written provides a foundation

63 Ucko. *The New Counterinsurgency Era*. p. 78

that leaders can use to access counterinsurgency situations and make appropriate decisions. The books and articles that follow... are... some of the more useful for Soldiers and Marines.⁶⁴

Therefore, the French experience in Algeria and the development of counterinsurgency doctrine, according to the *U.S. Army/ U.S. Marine Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, are directly connected.

Gillo Pontecorvo's masterpiece, *The Battle of Algiers*, produced less than three years after the Algerian War, represents more than a classic film, for it also occupies a surprisingly significant place within the history of the development of counterinsurgency theory and strategy. Whether or not the film itself is a useful tool to strategists and policy-makers is debatable, it is apparent that several journalists, army leaders and government officials have taken great interest in it with that in mind. As a September, 2003 *New York Times* article reported,

The Pentagon recently held a screening of 'The Battle of Algiers,'... The Pentagon's showing drew a[n]... audience of 40 officers and civilian experts who were urged to consider and discuss the implicit issues at the core of the film- the problematic but alluring efficacy of brutal and repressive means in fighting clandestine terrorists in places like Algeria and Iraq more specifically, the advantages and costs of resorting to torture and intimidation seeking vital human intelligence about enemy plans.⁶⁵

Although there exists a dearth of Army sources that elaborate on the decision to show the film, this excerpt clearly demonstrates the value the Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict assigned to the film, and also indicates their

64 Ibid. p. Bib-1

65 Michael Kaufman. "What Does the Pentagon See in the 'Battle of Algiers'" *New York Times*, September 7, 2003, p. WK3.

perception of the importance of the Algerian War itself. Due to the film's attention to detail and the director's apparent commitment to accuracy, *The Battle of Algiers*, while not a documentary, serves as a useful chronicle of the battle and, more importantly, an examination of the causal nexus inherent in reprisal-based counterinsurgency. Because of the success the film has enjoyed with mass audiences, it is particularly effective in bringing before the public the otherwise complex and confusing topic of counterinsurgency.

Deriving historical significance or applicable lessons from fictional accounts, especially those from the silver screen can of course be problematic, as the demands of having to entertain an audience coupled with the personal bias inherent in the film-making process can result in a film that is more important for its message than its historical accuracy. Generally, it is therefore advisable to view films of this kind with some skepticism, and often even as propagandist and sensationalist presentations. This is especially true of works of any kind relating to the Algerian War.⁶⁶

Yet this does not exterminate the historical value of *The Battle of Algiers*. The film is unique among dramatizations of the Algerian War as it largely overcomes many of the aforementioned drawbacks. Even considering the close proximity between the events themselves and the production of the film, which might seem to preclude sufficient

⁶⁶ Interview with Gillo Pontecorvo in booklet accompanying the Criterion edition DVD.

reflection and result in sensationalist or propagandist tones, Gillo Pontecorvo's film would seem to be the exception and not the rule.⁶⁷ As one historian says,

Not only does it depict both sides of the war with objectivity and detachment, and both its Algerian and French victims with equal sympathy, it also refuses to moralize about the methods used by the French in suppressing the terrorism of the FLN.⁶⁸

Similarly, a *Washington Post* editorial said about the film,

The French, nominally the 'villains' in this story, would have no monopoly on evil... The revolutionaries, nominally the 'good guys,' would have no monopoly on virtue: They would be murderers, thugs, cutthroats, given entirely to a war of terror and bringing death to the innocent...⁶⁹

Because of its efforts at balance and its relative lack of pronounced bias or political agenda, the film has generally been treated as a quasi-historical study of the war. The film's structure and narrative are quite persuasive in this regard. For Pontecorvo shows, in an apparently logical and dispassionate manner, the unfolding of events, the escalatory nature of urban terrorism and the counterinsurgency it prompts. This point is made by one of Pontecorvo's colleagues, PierNico Solinas, a fellow intellectual, filmmaker and writer, who offers his own characterization of the universal, practical use of the film, which turns out to be consistent with the attitude certain Pentagon officials have shown towards Pontecorvo's film. Solinas's prose serves as a useful summary of

67 Hugh Roberts. "The Image of the French Army in the Cinematic Representation of the Algerian War: the Revolutionary Politics of the *Battle of Algiers*". *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-62*. ed. Martin Alexander, Martin Evans and J Keigler. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. pp. 151-161

68 Ibid. p. 152

69 Steven Hunter. "The Pentagon's Lessons from Reel Life" *Washington Post*. September 4, 2003. p. C01

the logic that justifies the film's relevance to the determination of public and military policy.

In exploring its most significant implications, [Pontecorvo] seeks to draw from history a critical conclusion that can exist independently of the Algerian struggle. That very struggle becomes a proving ground which elevates to the level of an archetypal situation from which a theory can be deduced. By illustrating the teachings and methods of revolutionary struggle, *The Battle of Algiers* offers a blueprint for other struggles and other revolutions.... Thus the movie resists being dated or limited to a specific historical setting.... The action takes place in Algiers but it very well could happen anywhere else.⁷⁰

For 21st century audiences, the use of the phrase “anywhere else” evokes American - occupied Iraq, as the Pentagon likely concluded. Specifically, in the film, FLN attacks were shown to cause the French to implement tighter security measures. These were countered with new FLN attacks to which the French respond by pressing harder and harder. The way in which the movie portrays the cycle of escalation, leading to more death and destruction, is extremely accurate as a depiction of events, but it also serves as a useful summarization of historical precedent that can be related to later, similar situations. It is hardly surprising, then, that one reviewer notes that the film was used by the Pentagon as a “source document,” for the events it portrays represent a realistic representation of the reality of counterinsurgency.⁷¹

This point has been made by others as well. A 2003 article written for the *New Yorker*, by Phillip Gourevitch, suggests a very clear connection between the contents of

70 PierNico Solinas, Introduction to the published screenplay of Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1973), pp. ix-x.

71 Carlo Celli, “Gillo Pontecorvo's Return to Algiers by Gillo Pontecorvo”. *Film Quarterly*, vol. 58, No. 2 (Winter, 2004-2005), p. 49

Pontecorvo's film and the events in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Gourevitch writes:

For all the differences between France's fight to keep Algeria... and America's current dispensation in Iraq, the parallels between the drama of insurgency and counter-insurgency in *The Battle of Algiers* and our present Iraqi predicament are as clear as day and as depressing as the Pentagon film programmers promised.⁷²

Using the lens of the film, Gourevitch immediately senses the parallels between the events of the Algerian War and those of Iraq. He goes on to juxtapose the rhetorical question asked by Mathieu, the composite character commanding the French paratroops in the film, "Is France to remain in Algeria? If your answer is still yes, you must accept all the necessary consequences" with George W. Bush's assertion that America intended to "stay the course" in Iraq.⁷³ The connections made in this article are direct and specific, indicating that Pontecorvo's film has a place not only in film history but in the history of counterinsurgency as well.

Indeed, in an age of heightened awareness of terrorism and the methods of counterinsurgency, journalists, government officials, and military officers have revisited the Algerian War via *The Battle of Algiers*. Carlo Celli, in his 2004-2005 review in *Film Quarterly* entitled "Gillo Pontecorvo's Return to Algiers by Gillo Pontecorvo" confirms this. "Since the attacks of 9/11," he notes, "there has been increased interest in the film..."

⁷² Phillip Gourevitch, "Winning and Losing". *The New Yorker*. December 22, 2003.

⁷³ Ibid.

The Battle of Algiers received a limited re-release in major cities in late 2003.⁷⁴ “Late 2003” obviously coincides with the early American occupation of Iraq, which almost certainly prompted this renewed interest in Gillo Pontecorvo's film. Another journalist, writing for the *New York Times*, in an article titled “Film; Lessons of the Pentagon's Favorite Training Film” assumes the film's importance with regards to policy, though he also warns that “its lessons ought to be applied to other situations cautiously, precisely because of the film's principal strength: its deep roots in a specific time and place.”⁷⁵ Various other articles--the film became available on DVD once again in 2004--confirm the renewed interest in the film because of its relevance to American foreign policy and military strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Simply put, as former national-security adviser Zbigniew Brezezinski put it, “If you want to understand what's happening in Iraq, I recommend *The Battle of Algiers*.”⁷⁶

The film accurately depicts the decentralized structure of the FLN, a structure typical of most historical insurgent groups. Similarly, there are scenes of military officers marking on chalk boards, filling out recent information obtained through interrogation which are largely accepted as accurate by the U.S. military. Detreux, in his military research report, points to these scenes in discussing the importance of “French forces,” he notes, “were able to systematically break down the organization. This cellular

74 Celli. p. 49

75 Ibid. p. 226.

76 Peter Rainer, “Prescient Tense: Re-creating the carnage of fifties Algeria—bombings, assassination, police torture-- The Battle of Algiers is as relevant today as it was in 1965.” *New York* (magazine) (January 12, 2004) (web accessed) < http://nymag.com/nymetro/movies/reviews/n_9697/>

structure of the FLN/ALN was depicted in Gino Pontecorvo's [sic] movie, *The Battle of Algiers*, where the paratrooper commander, working on a blackboard, was systematically filling in the wire diagram of those insurgents identified, captured or killed."⁷⁷ This particular quote is significant because it represents a direct link between military analysis of historical precedent in counterinsurgency and the Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*. The fact that Detreux, himself a military officer, referenced the film as an example of a representation of counterinsurgent intelligence analysis proves *The Battle of Algiers'* significance to the U.S. military.

However, as valuable as watching Pontecorvo's film was likely to have been to Pentagon officials and military officers, as indicated by the counterinsurgency field manual, *The Battle of Algiers* includes only a snapshot of the Algerian War, as the events it depicts are limited to the actual urban battle. Study of the larger Algerian War from historical documents, monographs and government reports have had a much larger impact on counterinsurgency thinking than Pontecorvo's film.

A leading voice on counterinsurgency, John Nagl, has written:

The ultimate determinant of the success or failure of counterinsurgency theory and practice is the attainment of national objectives; neglecting the explicit consideration of this characteristic would only relegate it to the realm of unstated but inescapable facts. It is better to confront it directly.⁷⁸

Nagl's "national objectives" are political ones, and he argues that to ignore this "characteristic" of counterinsurgency operations would be detrimental. While there

⁷⁷ Detreux. p. 6

⁷⁸ Nagl p. 29

have been other successful methods of counterinsurgency in the past, like the American focus on military solutions and coercion during the Philippine Insurrection, the current U.S. military has decided that such methods cannot work in today's liberal, inter-connected global society. The eminent British counterinsurgency expert, Sir Robert Thompson, also lists as his first and foremost "principle of counterinsurgency" that "the government must have a clear political aim: to establish and maintain a free, independent and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable."⁷⁹ The Algerian War, more than other wars, strongly suggests this. The FLN had been completely militarily defeated by the French, yet it was the political environment surrounding the war that precluded a French victory. This chapter deals with the particular lessons derived by military thinkers from the Algerian War, which are more political than military in nature.

Lt. Colonel David Galula, the French military officer and one of the most internationally influential counterinsurgency thinkers, has been the subject of many United States Army and Marine Corps studies. Several American War College and Strategic Studies Institute theses and research papers have been dedicated to the study and evaluation of Galula's theories and his experience in the Algerian War. The *Military Review's* massive, two-hundred page "special edition" titled, "Counterinsurgency Reader," for example, begins and ends with quotes from him.⁸⁰ Also, the U.S.

79 Robert Thompson. *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam*. p. 50

80 *Military Review* "Special Edition: Counterinsurgency Reader" Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth,

Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual quotes him several times. Galula's experience with counterinsurgency came largely from his direct involvement in the Algerian War. He contributed to the establishment of the view that counterinsurgency was "a political war" with his *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, published in 1964.⁸¹ Serving in Algeria from 1956 to 1958, Galula observed first-hand the nature of counterinsurgency warfare. Galula's experience and the importance of his testimony have been widely noted; in the introduction to a 2006 article in the *RAND Review*, the anonymous author observed that

The recollections of RAND consultant Lt. Col. David Galula... have a remarkable, almost timeless resonance nearly half a century later, with striking parallels to America's recent experiences in Iraq.... He died in 1967...depriving America of his guidance at a time when the United States was becoming more deeply involved in Vietnam.⁸²

Similarly, a United States Army Colonel went so far as to say,

While [Galula's] strategy should be purely applied in hot revolutionary insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, I contend that his strategy is also broad enough to apply against non-state actors, or an insurgency without state borders, such as al-Qaeda and its ilk.⁸³

Such quotations make it clear that Galula's contributions, chiefly derived from the Algerian War, had a great influence on the development of American counterinsurgency strategy.

Kansas October 2006

81 Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (1964) p. 8

82 Anonymous Introduction. "From Algeria to Iraq: All but Forgotten Lessons from Nearly 50 Years Ago." *RAND Review*, Summer, 2006. p 22

83 Col. Chad Rotzien. *Fighting a Global Insurgency Utilizing Galula's Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory*. p. 13

If Galula's writings indicate the Algerian War's impact on American counterinsurgency strategy, it is his "essential laws of counterinsurgency" that are his greatest contributions. The first law, "the objective is the population," which has already been discussed, has become the cornerstone of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy. The *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* field manual (2009), which is less focused on the strategic aspects of counterinsurgency and more focused on the tactical methods American soldiers should use, states, "At its heart, a counterinsurgency is an armed struggle for the support of the population. This support can be achieved through information engagement, strong representative government, access to goods and services, fear, or violence,"⁸⁴ and in support of this strategy cites David Galula's laws of counterinsurgency.⁸⁵ While it may now seem obvious that the population is the key to counterinsurgency, this was not the attitude of past military generations. This is exactly why Galula, writing in 1964, referred to counterinsurgency as a "new mission" and asserted that military minds had to be "adapted... to the special demands of counterinsurgency warfare."⁸⁶ But even up until the 2003 Iraq War, American military leadership still regarded the destruction of opposing forces as paramount. Nagl writes,

[The U.S. Army during the Vietnam War] saw its *raison d'être* as winning wars through the application of firepower and maneuver to annihilate enemy forces simply could not conceive of another kind of war in which its weapons, technology, and organization not only could not destroy the enemy, but usually could not even find or identify him.⁸⁷

84 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*. Headquarters: Department of the Army. April, 2009. p. ix

85 Ibid. p. 3-9

86 Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (1964) pp. 94,95

87 Nagl. p. 198

Thus, when the United States finally took counterinsurgency doctrine seriously, it was seen as a new concept. Likewise, to focus on winning over the population was not an established concept even by the late twentieth century.

Galula's second law of counterinsurgency states that "support [of the counterinsurgent force by the target populace] is gained through an active minority." Essentially, Galula relies here on the tested assumption that "in any situation, whatever the case, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause."⁸⁸ Such was the case in Algeria, as the FLN represented a minority that wanted to gain majority support. Commenting on this situation, a major in the United States Army who wrote his master of military art and science thesis on David Galula's doctrine and its implications for American counterinsurgency efforts asserted that the creation of a political party in a host nation was essential to building support from those elements of the population that were formerly pro-insurgent or passive-neutral.⁸⁹ The *U.S. Counterinsurgency Field Manual* dedicated a whole section to the importance of both "active" and "passive" supporters. Known as FM 3-24, this part of the field manual recognizes that, just as Galula said in the 1960's, that "active internal support is usually the most important to an insurgent group."⁹⁰ Galula observed during his command in Algeria that most of the native populace remained neutral observers,

88 Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (1964) p. 75

89 Maj. Steven Vrooman. *A Counterinsurgency Campaign Plan Concept: The Galula Compass*. p. 26

90 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p 3-16

which in fact was the case in virtually every historical example of counterinsurgency before Algeria or since.⁹¹ While evidence of this went virtually unheeded before, Galula emphasized this aspect of revolutionary warfare. The costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led American military strategists to show renewed interest in ideas of counterinsurgency.

Galula in his writings has also stressed the importance of institutionalizing a doctrine to serve as a template for combating insurgencies throughout the world. However, he has suggested that the application of such a doctrine should not be rigid because successful counterinsurgencies require dynamic, flexible leadership in order to deal with multifaceted problems. He emphasized that

There is clearly a need for a compass [regarding counterinsurgency], and this work [his book] has as its only purpose to construct such an instrument, however imperfect and rudimentary it may be. What we propose to is to define the laws of counterrevolutionary warfare, to deduce from them its principles, and to outline the corresponding strategy and tactics.⁹²

This is what led one later American military official to refer to Galula as “a comprehensive theorist.”⁹³ The Department of the Army's *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* field manual, has drawn the same conclusion as Galula, indicating that “this manual

91 Anthony Joes. *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency*. (The consistency of several examples throughout the book, among others cited elsewhere, contributed to this particular cited conclusion)

92 Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare*. pp. xii, xiii

93 Vrooman. p. 26

gives the U.S. Army a common language, concept, and purpose to fight and achieve success in a counterinsurgency.”⁹⁴

Perhaps Galula's most important contribution to the history of American counterinsurgency has been his views about what the central emphasis of such operations ought to be. Thus, while the destruction of the enemy force is necessary and important, Galula emphasizes that it is not of primary importance relative to political endeavors. He writes:

The destruction of the guerrilla forces in the selected area is, obviously, highly desirable, and this is what the counterinsurgent must strive for. One thing should be clear, however: This operation is not an end in itself, for guerrillas, like the heads of the legendary hydra, have the special ability to grow again if not all destroyed at the same time. The real purpose of the first operation, then, is to prepare the stage for the further development of the counterinsurgent action.⁹⁵

With the Algerian War, and specifically Galula's observations in mind, the United States armed forces have reached the same conclusions. Table 1-1 of the *U.S. Army/ U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* lists an array of what it refers to as “Unsuccessful practice[s].” The first entry is: “Overemphasize killing and capturing the enemy rather than securing and engaging the populace.”⁹⁶ A leading thinker on the topic of counterinsurgency stated, “What renders the U.S. military's experience with counterinsurgency so cyclical is its seeming inability to learn either from its lack of preparation...[and tendency] to revert instead to a singular focus on high-intensity

94 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*. p. ix

95 Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare*. p. 107

96 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. 1-31

warfare.”⁹⁷ These conclusions were inspired at least partially from David Galula's writings on the subject, as is confirmed by the field manual's “selected bibliography.”⁹⁸ The juxtaposition of these quotes clearly indicates a strong link between the Algerian War, as interpreted by Galula, and the American military's recently adopted counterinsurgency doctrine. The United States is convinced, largely due to the prevailing interpretation of historical precedent and the circumstances of its recent counterinsurgency experiences, that the population is the key to success.

Galula's mark on American counterinsurgency policy is therefore unmistakable and he can be said to represent one of the “founding fathers” of modern doctrine, along with other leading thinkers on the topic such as Sir Robert Thompson. This shows how the authors of the counterinsurgency doctrine from which American strategists have recently drawn their own ideas are not Americans, since, as previously discussed, American lessons from the Vietnam War were interpreted in such a way that led to the belief that counterinsurgency should be completely avoided. In contrast, French and British thinkers retained much of their experience and attempted to make the lessons of places like Malaya and Algeria permanent.

The French counterinsurgent force failed, then, as American doctrine based in part on the writings of Galula has since stated, to “focus on the population, its needs and its security,” and because of this failure of the French they lost the war, despite their

97 Ucko. *The New Counterinsurgency Era* pg 44

98 Ibid. p. Bib-1

military victory.⁹⁹ As previously stated, though French politicians considered Algeria to be a legitimate part of France instead of a colony, Algerians perceived the opposite because they were repeatedly denied equal treatment under French law. This represented a key difference in perceptions between the French government and native Algerians, and led to ineffective political maneuvering by the French, as Algerians simply did not trust French promises of reform after so many failed attempts. Moreover, for their part, because many Frenchmen claimed they were extending the possibility of equality to Algerians, when the latter failed to be persuaded that they were in fact equal to Europeans, many French politicians were convinced that Muslim Algerians were an unreasonable opposition.

Eventually, American policy-makers took note of this and applied the lessons of the French blunder in arriving at their own doctrine. An American military officer, writing a few years after the Second Gulf War, seemed to praise French tactics:

Political and economic change allowed French forces to regain the initiative against the FLN/ALN by 1956. Many aspects of the French efforts were successful: dramatic increases in manpower, *quadrillage* and re-settlement removed portions of the population from the influence of the insurgents; the SAS deprived the insurgents of mobility and provided actionable intelligence for the French to exploit. These efforts showed the sustained attempts by the French to counter the problems of civil administration through other than military means.¹⁰⁰

The Major went on to note, however, that

despite recognizing the importance of other than military efforts and the attendant paradox of COIN operations, the French Army could not gain

⁹⁹ U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. p. 1-31

¹⁰⁰ Maj. Jason Norton. *The French-Algerian War and FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency: A Comparison*. p. 58

the confidence of enough Algerians to counter the political actions of the FLN/ALN.¹⁰¹

The implications of this assessment for counterinsurgency theory are tremendous. It suggests that an implementation of a seemingly effective strategy—one that obeys Galula's “laws” and is employed by a nation possessing extensive resources—can prove worthless in a counterinsurgency if it does not recognize as its central objective the active participation of the population. Therefore, the truly important battle is fought in the realm of ideas, culture and perception where convincing is more important than killing. This maxim, often contested by military commanders throughout the history of counterinsurgency, lies at the heart of the tension between military tradition and military innovation.

One of the most important lessons of the Algerian War has been the importance of the cultural intelligence and awareness of the soldiers and commanders of the counterinsurgent force. Specifically, cultural intelligence refers to an understanding of the values, political habits, perceptions, and social tendencies of a particular population group. The needs, concerns and desires of a particular culture are usually at the root of its political issues. Since counterinsurgency is itself a political endeavor, such an appreciation is crucial. This lesson has not been lost on military planners. The

Counterinsurgency Field Manual states:

Cultural awareness has become an increasingly important concept...[military officers] study major world cultures and put a

101 Ibid. p. 58

priority on learning the details of the new operational environment when deployed. Different solutions are required in different cultural contexts.... Like all other competencies, cultural awareness requires self-awareness, self-directed learning, and adaptability.¹⁰²

In Algeria, many French, especially the *pieds noirs*, openly displayed their contempt for Muslim society or culture. This is another lesson that American doctrine has incorporated from this conflict. In a 2005 report written for the U.S. Army War College, Karl Goetzke, in a section entitled *A review of the Algerian War of National Liberation Using the U.S. Army's Current Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, observes:

While limited concessions were made [by the French government to the Muslim Algerians], they were insufficient to assuage pent-up demands of the indigenous people of Algeria. An extremely violent French response to a terrorist incident that occurred on VE day further fanned the flames of discord. By 1954 the simmering conflict came to a boil. The indigenous people of Algeria lost confidence in their ability to achieve self-determination through political dialogue with France. Instead, military action, coupled with diplomatic outreach efforts to the international community, was embraced as a solution to their predicament.¹⁰³

As this quote suggests, the lack of cultural awareness by French soldiers and officers limited their ability to readily identify the “population's grievances,” a topic which is listed as imperative by the counterinsurgency field manual.¹⁰⁴

Ken Booth, in his prescient work *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*, ironically published in 1979 during the Iranian Revolt, has similarly argued the strategic importance of taking into consideration the understanding of an opposing culture.

102 U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. pp. 7-3,7-4

103 Karl Goetzke. *A Review of Algerian War of National Liberation Using the U.S. Army's Current Counterinsurgency Doctrine*. p. 2

104 U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. p. 3-13

Booth argues that such considerations are central to the success or failure of political stability operations. "When ethnocentrism interferes with knowing the enemy," he writes, "various unfortunate political and/or military consequences may follow," and he lists these as "misplaced confidence," "misplaced suspicion," "surprise," "inflexibility," "rigidity in crisis," and "self-fulfilling prophecies."¹⁰⁵ Such theories seem especially fitting not only to the French experience in Algeria but to nearly every counterinsurgency since. This was already the case of 19th Century Algeria when French ethnocentrism led to the abrupt forced dissolution of traditional power bases in Algerian culture. Thus, the governor-general of Algeria in 1894, as Alistair Horne has pointed out, complained of the "consequences" of the "French policy of breaking up the great traditional families of Algeria..." Horne quoted Jules Cambon,

[this policy was undertaken] because we found them to be forces of resistance. We did not realise [sic] that in suppressing the forces of resistance in this fashion, we were also suppressing our means of action. The result is that we are today confronted by a sort of human dust on which we have no influence and in which movements take place which are to us unknown.¹⁰⁶

Failure to craft policy that reflected an appreciation of the importance of traditional social and political structures had enormous implications for the revolution and the counterrevolution in Algeria, and this logic still applies today. Examples of counterinsurgent forces dissolving the existing power structures in host nations has consistently led to negative results. An analysis of these examples prompted the inclusion of section 5-71 of the counterinsurgency field manual: "Population control

105 Keith Booth. *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*. 1979 pp.104-107

106 Horne. p. 37

includes determining who lives in an area and what they do. This task requires determining societal relationships-- family, clan, tribe, interpersonal, and professional."¹⁰⁷ Undoubtedly, the Algerian example was important in the development of this conclusion.

David Galula makes this point when he recalled a conversation he had with a soldier under his command in Algeria. Galula was attempting to explain the need to focus on the population as the objective, which meant listening to them and treating them well. This proved to be a difficult task, he recalled, as the soldier responded, "Sir, these Kabyle people (ethnic group in Algeria), they are all bastards, they are all hypocrites, they all support the rebels."¹⁰⁸ This type of attitude is common with many young soldiers who have a limited perspective due to a lack of familiarity with other cultures. Galula responded to the soldier:

Our job is precisely to stop this support. If we lump together all rebels-- and this is what the FLN want us to do--we are sure to keep the population supporting them. If we distinguish between people and rebels, then we have a chance.... My rules are: outwardly you must treat every civilian as a friend; inwardly you must consider him a rebel ally until you have positive proof on the contrary.¹⁰⁹

Many American military leaders have slowly incorporated the same logic and especially the importance of cultural intelligence. In a 2003 report for the Joint Forces Staff College, written during the early stages of what was to become a paroxysm of insurgent violence and general lawlessness in Iraq, its authors criticized the

107 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. 5-20

108 Galula. *Pacification in Algeria: 1956-1958*. p. 72

109 *Ibid.* p. 72

shortcomings of the then-prevailing concept of “winning over the hearts and minds” as the catchall key to victory. However, they admitted its essential importance.

Many roadblocks exist to winning the hearts and minds in post-war Iraq: the most important is American ethnocentrism. U.S. soldiers and statesmen generally lack understanding of the Arab worldview.... Part of America's inability to persuade the Iraqis derives from their very foreignness and America's inability to fully understand their psychology. Only Arabs fully understand their own paradigm, but cultural training could help American occupiers to be more attuned to Arab sensibilities.¹¹⁰

A 2008 study on “Successful Revolutionary Movements” by Raymond Millen for the American Strategic Studies Institute represents yet another link between the Algerian War and the current view of the U.S. military regarding soldiers’ and planners’ cultural awareness and the importance of perceptions. In a section with the heading, “State sponsorship or protection of unpopular economic and social arrangements or cultural institutions,” Millen noted of the Algerian War that the stage was set before the revolution ever started for a widening gap in perceptions because of the failure the French to translate their good intentions into good legislation. Specifically, he pointed out the inefficiency of relying heavily on unpopular “intermediaries” — pro-French Muslims and *Harkis*--within Muslim society. This coupled with “the paltry number of French administrators,” who were “over-worked and understaffed” and had “little contact with the populace,” put the French in a dangerous political situation.¹¹¹ This can largely be attributed, he noted, to a lack of cultural intelligence, and the failure of the

110 Maj. Justin Gage, Maj. William Martin, Maj. Tim Mitchell, Maj. Pat Wingate. *Winning the Peace in Iraq: Confronting America's Informational and Doctrinal Handicaps*. pp. 1,2

111 Millen. p. 25

French to appreciate the importance of understanding and then utilizing the host nation's former, internal political power structures. The United States has since attempted to learn from this example. Millen quoted in this regard Alistair Horne's observation that "the tragedy of the Algerian Insurgency might have been averted had the French shown 'a little more magnanimity, [and] a little more trust, moderation and compassion.'"¹¹²

The role that international and French domestic politics played in the context of the Algerian War was also crucially important. In fact, much of the tangled confusion of French domestic politics during the Algerian War undercut the effectiveness of French military policy. While the problem of the *pieds noirs* may be unique to the French predicament in Algeria, as the colonists, who were full French citizens, held such a commanding position in Algeria, the obstacle they represented for the French during the counterinsurgency does provide lessons for others. For instance, French political disunity, and a general lack of a cohesive national will, prompted at least in part by the actions of the *pieds noirs*, illustrates the obstacles that politically powerful third parties can pose for liberal governments in attempting to deal with protracted, costly wars of insurrection. David Galula explained the importance of the political situation in France this way:

Instability and paralysis of the government had been the dominant feature of political life in France, at least since the end of World War II. Parliament had become the real source of power. There, a cluster of small democratic

112 Ibid. p. 25

parties, united against the Communists on the far left and against the Gaullists on the right, sometimes combined but more often competed for the privilege of running the government. A parliamentary majority could always be found for any problem, but when the problem changed, the majority changed with it, so that long-term, coherent policy was impossible to formulate—much less to implement. Short-lived cabinets built on precarious coalitions succeeded each other, often after a long crisis, and fell apart after the first serious hurdle.¹¹³

This explains perfectly the situation in France that made it difficult for the various governments of the Fourth Republic to deal with effectively with the *pieds noirs* or the situation in Algeria. Writing nearly half of a century later for the Strategic Studies Institute, Raymond Millen observed “moreover, the frequent shuffling of government officials undercut a coherent and consistent policy towards Algeria,” which suggests a strong link between the French situation in the 1950s and American counterinsurgency doctrine in the 21st century.¹¹⁴ Such a shuffling of governments reflects a lack of political will, which made it difficult to prosecute a war. This is true for modern democracies as well, especially with irregular wars in which progress is slow and objectives are usually inherently nebulous. By the 21st century, many military experts more thoroughly embraced the principle that military operations be planned with political objectives and popular support in mind. As the U.S. Army/ Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual explains the “political” element in military operations:

At the strategic level, gaining and maintaining U.S. public support for a protracted deployment is critical. Only the most senior military officers are involved in this process at all. It is properly a political activity. However, military leaders typically take care to ensure that their actions and statements

113 Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (1964) p. 7

114 Millen. p. 35

are forthright. They also ensure that the conduct of operations neither makes it harder for elected leaders to maintain public support nor undermine public confidence.¹¹⁵

Such a comment's inclusion in official U.S. military doctrine is surprising given the military's long-standing position of keeping politics and military operations separate. The experience of wars involving insurgency has brought about a change in military thinking, one in which so far as conflict situations are concerned, has seen as impossible to separate the fighting of a modern war from political concerns.

Just as domestic support is crucial, international politics has also come to play an important role in counterinsurgency strategy after the Algerian War. As Millen notes, "The French did not appreciate the power of the media, particularly film footage and photos, in defending its policies, and lost an important front in the war."¹¹⁶ International opinion in fact became progressively more critical of the French actions in Algeria, at the very time the FLN was committing terrible atrocities of its own; the critical focus of the world, however, was squarely on France. This point has become even more important in the early 21st century in an age of unprecedented global interconnectedness. "The advent of global media has only compounded the problem," a recent RAND research document has noted, "enemy propagandists have a field day when COIN forces kill or injure innocent people."¹¹⁷ Much as David Galula argued, when a powerful democracy kills innocent people, the world pays extremely close attention, which can easily lead to

115 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. 1-26

116 Millen. p. 40

117 *Underkill: Scalable Capabilities for Military Operations Amid Populations*. RAND research document. p. xv

pressure and even condemnation. The U.S. military has accepted this assessment. Millen, in summarizing the U.S. interpretation of the issue, writes: "Algeria had made France one of the most reviled members in the U.N., prompting de Gaulle to seek an end to the war, even if under less than ideal conditions."¹¹⁸ The Algerian War is a perfect example of the effect international opinion can have on the ability of a nation to successfully defeat insurgencies. This is true not only in the conduct of war but of organizing coalitions, which has become an increasingly important element in recent wars. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 demonstrates this, but as one multinational research study done on coalition warfare indicated, coalitions "have played an increasingly prominent role in international security policy since the end of the Cold War."¹¹⁹ A hostile international attitude, as the French interpreted during their war in Algeria, posed serious problems in such protracted hostilities, much as others since have similarly experienced.

A 2007 thesis for the Command and General Staff College, comparing the French practices in the Algerian War and the U.S. doctrine as described in the counterinsurgency field manual, stresses the awareness of international opinion in counterinsurgency operations that American operations must incorporate:

French political and military leaders repeatedly argued against any outside involvement in what they believed to be an internal issue... The continued reporting by the FLN and other groups of the atrocities, brutality, and repression of rights of Algerians were put forth in highly

118 Millen. p. 41

119 *Coalition Military Operations: The Way Ahead Through Cooperability*. Report of a French-German-UK-U.S. Working Group. 2000 (updated in 2010) p. ix

public forums like the UN, and continued to tarnish France's claim to their legitimate role of maintaining Algeria as a part of the republic. French dialogue with other nations on Algeria did not exist, and they never publicly addressed the issues of repression colonialism. These actions caused French operations to lose legitimacy. Strife in France increased over the course of the direction of the conflict, and world opinion turned against the perceived colonial policies of France.¹²⁰

While this passage lacks depth and a thorough historical perspective, it does indicate what some American military officers believed they had learned from the Algerian War: that modern military operations must pay close attention to international perceptions of military operations. As the counterinsurgency manual states:

The omnipresence and global reach of today's news media affects the conduct of military operations more than ever before... Insurgents use terrorist tactics to produce graphics that they hope will influence public opinion—both locally and globally.¹²¹

In this way, the United States became committed to avoiding the international backlash that the French suffered during their counterinsurgency in Algeria.

The United States military, as indicated by its current counterinsurgency field manual, (among various other relevant publications discussed in this chapter) developed its counterinsurgency doctrine with several historical precedents in mind. The Algerian War, in particular, offered the United States exceptionally important lessons regarding the prerequisite necessity for a viable political solution during any counterinsurgency. The French failure, despite military success, provides an exceptional lesson which has been incorporated directly into American doctrine.

120 Norton. p. 85

121 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. A-6

CHAPTER 5

OLD DOGS AND NEW TRICKS: THE DELICATE NATURE OF COMBAT AND INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

The United States cannot afford to take the attitude that civilian casualties are unfortunate but unavoidable. Expressions of regret cannot repair the political damage caused by harming people whom U.S. troops are supposed to protect. When the U.S. military is entrusted with responsibility for security in another country, that country's inhabitants should be accorded the same protection from death and injury that Americans enjoy at home. A lower standard is indefensible on strategic, political, and logical grounds.¹²²

The tactics of military operations involved in counterinsurgencies are, as previously stated, profoundly different from the tactics of conventional warfare. When conducting counterinsurgencies, militaries must account for their own weaknesses and the strengths of the enemy, and devise strategies consistent with whatever conclusions they reach. In many ways, the French destruction of the FLN during the Algerian War was a textbook case in how to neutralize a guerrilla enemy, though with a few important caveats, as this chapter will elucidate. This chapter will focus on three key areas, based on the works of American military officers and experts, which illustrate the way the Algerian War directly affected the U.S. military approaches to counterinsurgency operations. These particular aspects focus on how careful modern counterinsurgency forces must be in carrying out their military operations. While there are several military lessons from the Algerian War that deal specifically with how best to destroy the enemy force, this chapter will focus on the modern necessity of conducting

¹²² *Underkill* p. xv

counterinsurgency operations that cause minimum harm to the target population. This is important so that the cooperation of the population—the central objective in American counterinsurgency doctrine—can be achieved. The overarching theme in this chapter focuses on the way the American military has adjusted its fundamental approach to military operations in support of counterinsurgencies, making them population-centric, rather than myopically focused on the destruction of the enemy. U.S. naval officer Robert Riggs, writing for the Naval War College, organized his four lessons as: the importance of “Psychological Operations,” “Human Intelligence,” “Employment of Forces,” and a “Measured Response,” which will be explained later.¹²³ This chapter will adopt a similar organization and examine three essential lessons learned by the American armed forces: the primacy of intelligence, the importance of engaging in an appropriate use of force, and the emphasis on psychological warfare.

Counterinsurgency, as has been mentioned, is primarily a political endeavor, but military operations are a necessary and significant part, as physical security is required for those entities tasked with the establishment of political stability. As the counterinsurgency field manual makes clear, it is imperative to “establish and expand secure areas.”¹²⁴ Political measures alone will not initially secure anything or anyone, even if such measures represent the ultimate basis of permanent, lasting security. Once elements of an insurgency establish their control over a certain area, the

123 LCDR Robert Riggs. *Counter-Insurgency Lessons from the French-Algerian War*. p. 12

124 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. 1-31

counterinsurgents must use force in order to take control back. Naturally, this force must occur within close proximity to the very populace the counterinsurgents hope to win over. Whether purposefully or accidentally, killing members of the target population undermines any effort to persuade them to cooperate with the government. Therefore, great effort must go into keeping the non-insurgent population safe from violence. Historically, this has been an extremely difficult task and virtually impossible to do perfectly, as collateral damage eventually occurs. The extreme difficulty of avoiding this, coupled with the U.S. military's objective to win over the population, explains why this matter is so important to the United States military. As this chapter will demonstrate, the experience of the Algerian War has heavily influenced the current U.S. military's perception of the importance of what is termed "appropriate use of force."

Fighting a war is necessarily a violent, brutal endeavor. Regardless of technological advances, the essence of war is the killing of other human beings. Such brutality has become more and more loathsome to the populations of liberal democracies. While war is certainly not an extinct endeavor, the ability of liberal states to maintain public support for protracted, costly wars diminished during the 20th century. While clear, rational objectives and demonstrated success can alleviate such inherent difficulties, the particular nature of counterinsurgency warfare brings with it a different set of obstacles. Therefore, it is extremely important for modern states to maximize their military efficiency by killing more of the enemy and fewer innocent

civilians. Additionally, it is crucial for states to practice internationally acceptable methods and follow international rules of warfare even if the United States military believes that “the contest of [this type of] war is not 'fair;' [and] many of the 'rules' favor insurgents.”¹²⁵

One aspect of counterinsurgency that is crucial is intelligence. An article entitled, “Intelligent Design: COIN Operations and Intelligence Collection and Analysis” concludes that

In COIN, the environment is as important as the enemy, because the neutral majority, the center of gravity, resides there. COIN requires an appreciation of cultures, religions, tribes, classes, ethnicities, and languages, so that the people will view U.S. forces and their own government positively and work against an insurgency. Consequently most intelligence is collected by human intelligence.¹²⁶

Even before the Algerian War France recognized that intelligence was vital to combating an insurgency. One of the “forgotten successes” of the French in Southeast Asia is the very accurate intelligence they gathered despite unfavorable conditions. Dien Bien Phu, the famous military defeat of the French by the Vietminh, Alexander Zervoudakis has noted, came about more as a result of political meddling than a failure of military intelligence.¹²⁷ Continuing their habit of putting a high priority on good intelligence into the Algerian War, French forces during the Battle of Algiers were quite successful in piecing together an accurate picture of the FLN network, and eventually bringing the

125 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. 1-2

126 Dan Zeytoonian et al., “Intelligent Design: COIN Operations and Intelligence Collection and Analysis.” *Military Review* September-October 2006, p. 30

127 Alexander Zervoudakis. “From Indochina to Algeria” *The Algerian War and the French Army*. p.47

group to its knees. French intelligence even went as far as to follow closely several key FLN members in New York City.¹²⁸ One especially memorable element of French intelligence is the way in which it was willing to use torture to derive information. However, regardless of the methods the French used to gather information, which are discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, the priority they gave to intelligence, and its tremendous impact on the destruction of the FLN, demonstrates how essential such a priority is in counterinsurgency warfare.

As David Galula pointed out in Algeria, borrowing from Mao Tse-tung, “[the Algerians were] Moslems, and we were not. The rebel fish could swim better in Moslem water than the counterinsurgent land mammal.”¹²⁹ Therefore, it was imperative for the counterinsurgent forces to obtain as clear and realistic a picture of the “Muslim sea” as possible. The French realized their innate disadvantages were thus aggressive in their efforts to obtain knowledge of the FLN’s tactics, its patterns, its composition, its operational strength, and the relationship it had with the population. Methods of obtaining useful information about an enemy that are more significant in conventional wars are signals intelligence (interception of electronic communication between different enemy elements) and airborne intelligence (using airpower to catch a glimpse of the physical presence and movements of the enemy). While the French put these methods to use and achieved some observable results, in Algeria, the more useful form of

128 Irwin Wall. *France, the United States and the Algerian War*. p. 167

129 Galula. *Pacification in Algeria*. p. 69

intelligence was “human intelligence.” Human intelligence refers to information that is obtained from individuals who are involved with the conflict that may be useful to the counterinsurgent force. Sir Robert Thompson explains the purpose and objectives of this kind of intelligence in wars involving insurgencies:

Whatever the circumstances of the insurgency, there will nearly always be some people who are prepared to surrender for one reason or another and join the government side. Well-treated and carefully interrogated, sometimes over a long period, they reveal a tremendous amount of information. A situation gradually develops whereby any later individual who is captured or surrenders can be interrogated on the basis of a mass of information already available to the intelligence organization. This shocks the truth out of him far more effectively than torture.¹³⁰

More recently, an American military research report, drawing upon the French experience, explained:

The key to an effective HUMINT [human intelligence] capability is to foster trust and build relationships with the local population. As these relationships grow and the local population recognizes that the insurgents are a greater threat than the military, and that the military is capable and willing to protect them, they will come forward and deliver intelligence. The French found this to be true as their HUNINT network strengthened in proportion to their ability to understand and work with the local population.¹³¹

Even though American military thinkers concluded that torture was counterproductive to overall counterinsurgency efforts they still saw the French as an example to follow in other aspects of their human intelligence gathering.

Because they lack the resources of conventional armies, insurgent groups generally adopt different methods, which conventional military forces like the French in

130 Thompson. p. 87

131 Riggs. p. 10

Algeria are not trained sufficiently to deal with. Most of the time, these methods involve the pre-planned killing of civilians and other brutal atrocities, such as the *setif* massacres. When, in response, developed states partake in similar methods and tactics they likely suffer from international backlash, like official condemnation which may damage that nation's image; at least this was the fear of de Gaulle's administration during the Algerian War which why international opinion contributed to the cessation of the French effort to retain Algeria. This helps explain why France's military success did not translate into final victory as de Gaulle ordered France out of Algeria with international opinion in mind. The French example in Algeria taught that regardless of the methods that insurgents were willing to use, the counterinsurgent force was held responsible for its actions and must live up to the national standards they profess. As Sir Robert Thompson explains:

There is a very strong temptation in dealing both with terrorism and with guerrilla actions for government forces to act outside the law, the excuses being that the processes of law are too cumbersome, that the normal safeguards in the law for the individual are not designed for an insurgency and that a terrorist deserves to be treated as an outlaw anyway. Not only is this morally wrong, but, over a period, it will create more practical difficulties for a government than it solves. A government which does not act in accordance with the law forfeits the right to be called a government and cannot then expect its people to obey the law.¹³²

While Thompson's observation was not derived specifically from the Algerian War, its logic fits the lessons the Americans have derived from both Thompson and the French experience in Algeria.

132 Thompson, Robert. *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam*. p. 52

The advantage in this respect was with the insurgents, for as Galula puts it, “The insurgent, having no responsibility, is free to use every trick; if necessary, he can lie, cheat, exaggerate.”¹³³ Even if Galula's claims are somewhat disingenuous, the FLN could murder its own civilians, as it did, with few or no real international repercussions, while French prestige would take a serious blow from revelations of torture. This meant that the FLN simply had to “wait it out” as the populations of larger democracies—in the court of international opinion—grew critical and the French themselves grew weary of war and became more divided on the use of torture. Such was the case in the Algerian War: the FLN hoped its terrorism would induce French reprisals, which would bring forth international condemnation of the French, and thus obviate its significant military and economic advantages. One such atrocity occurred in May of 1956, when French special forces responded to the death of two of their own by killing nearly 80 Muslims in a Turkish bath. None of the French troops were held responsible for the massacre. Such actions, the American naval officer Robert Riggs, has pointed out, only fueled the fire of the insurgency and improved the FLN's position in the international arena.”¹³⁴

One of the salient memories of the Algerian War that shapes its legacy and has affected the debate on counterinsurgencies today is the French army's recourse to torture as a means of gathering information. Torture was justified by French commanders, and it seems to have greatly enhanced the ability of French authorities to gain valuable

133 Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare*. p. 14

134 Riggs. p. 14

intelligence on the FLN.¹³⁵ During the Battle of Algiers, several methods of torture were extensively employed which have since been condemned. The adoption of torture has, and remains, a subject of much discussion and disagreement. Torture is also, of course, a matter of definition. What is acceptable? What makes one method unacceptable but another acceptable? Wullaume, a French senior civil servant, endorsed certain forms of torture, contending that they were effective and “no more brutal than deprivation of food, drink, and tobacco, which is always been accepted.” Among the methods he accepted included “water and electricity methods provided they are carefully used.” He reasoned that they would “produce a shock which is more psychological than physical and therefore do not constitute excessive cruelty.” There was also the method of “suspending two men completely naked by their feet, their hands bound behind their backs and plunging their heads for a long time into a bucket of water to make them talk.”¹³⁶ Several individuals within the American military, as will be evidenced later in this chapter, argued that such methods, while justified by many French soldiers and leaders, greatly contributed to the erosion of public support for the war.

General Massu, the commander of French *paras*—the elite paratrooper unit deployed to exterminate the FLN—during the Battle of Algiers—as even that film reveals, was not the monster some suggested, or a commander who relished torturing

135 William Polk . Violent Politics. p. 141

136 Horne. p. 197

prisoners. Rita Maran's work *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French Algerian War*, cogently lays bare the predicament Massu found himself in.

Mutilations carried out by the FLN and its supporters were atrocities that qualified as private acts of torture. Massu was responsible, as military commander in Algiers, for the protection of its inhabitants and was especially concerned with stopping these particular acts of terrorism.... [Among the evidence of atrocities committed by the FLN were] Children wounded by gunshot because they continued to attend school...men whose nose and lips were sliced off because they did not honor the FLN interdiction against smoking...families whose dead bodies were lumped together in horrible resemblance to...concentration camp atrocities. Against such atrocities Massu acted in accordance with what he considered the responsibilities of his post. The great mass of Muslim Algerians whom he respected and wished to protect were, he said, his major consideration as governor of Algiers. As for the small segment among them who were terrorists and rebels, he was not constrained from taking reciprocal action against them."¹³⁷

Such logic is attractive to those "on the ground" in Algeria, like Massu, who had the responsibility of defeating the insurgency. However, as history generally and the Algerian War specifically taught the American military, in the long run torture does more harm than good. Albert Camus, the brilliant novelist and eminent French intellectual who sympathized with the plight of Muslim Algerians, said that, "torture has perhaps saved some at the expense of honour, by uncovering thirty bombs, but at the same time it created fifty new terrorists, who operating in some other way and in another place, would cause the death of even more innocent people."¹³⁸ An American officer has similarly noted in 2007 that the French suffered from their "misuse of force when they used torture" because "inappropriate tactics and disproportionate use of force could backfire, turn the population against the counterinsurgent and create an

¹³⁷ Rita Maran. *Torture: The role of ideology in the French Algerian War*. New York: Praeger, 1989. pp. 100,101
¹³⁸ Horne. p.205

environment ripe for recruitment by the insurgents.”¹³⁹ Even if it were provable that torture leads to short-term intelligence breakthroughs, given the objective of counterinsurgency warfare of winning over the civilian populace, torture is now considered by many counterproductive.

The effectiveness of torture as a method of intelligence gathering is presently a matter of heated debate and differing opinions.¹⁴⁰ In a recent study of the Algerian War, by a “consultant to the Social Science Department” of the RAND Corporation the author asserts for example that torture, despite its alleged moral problems, actually has produced observable results. “Whatever the moral judgment of such methods may be,” the report indicates, “the extreme effectiveness of those offensive operations which resort to them is undeniable.” The report concludes that intelligence directly resulting from torture contributed more than anything else to the destruction of the FLN. However the reports also warns that “the difficulties and inconveniences of such operations must not be overlooked.... such methods cannot be used without shocking the population itself... one may ask if, in the long run, the negative feelings thus repressed are not reasserted to the benefit of the rebellion.”¹⁴¹ So while there exists a legitimate debate regarding the efficacy of such methods, torture has been largely rejected as an acceptable action by the United States military.

139 Rotzien. p. 6

140 Charles Krauthammer. “The Torture Debate, Continued.” *The Washington Post*. Friday, May 15, 2009. (web accessed)

141 Melnik. p. 197,198

Comparing the current U.S. attitude towards the use of torture to that of the French in Algeria, an American major has written:

Much of the French failures can be attributed to the tactical methods employed that, despite success, resulted in strategic failure. FM 3-24 [the counterinsurgency field manual] devotes a chapter to addressing the legal considerations and ethical actions required in a counterinsurgency. U.S. doctrine clearly articulates the importance of adherence to strict guidelines of international law, U.S. policy and regulation, and legal precedence. The French did not address such considerations. In many cases, they attempted to justify their actions by citing the nature of the enemy and enemy terror tactics. The French suspended the rights of the individual in their single-minded pursuit of the FLN/ALN.¹⁴²

While there is still considerable debate on the subject, there has thus recently emerged an acknowledgment of the long-term, negative effects that torture can have on counterinsurgency operations, which has been reinforced and enhanced by the French experience in the Algerian War. The U.S. counterinsurgency field manual dedicates an entire section on the French decision to use torture during the Algerian War. There it notes,

This official condoning of torture on the part of the French Army leadership had several negative consequences. It empowered the moral legitimacy of the opposition, undermined the French moral legitimacy, and caused internal fragmentations among serving officers that led to an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1962. In the end, failure to comply with moral and legal restrictions against torture severely undermined French efforts and contributed to their loss despite several significant military victories. Illegal and immoral activities made the counterinsurgents extremely vulnerable to enemy propaganda inside Algeria among the Muslim population, as well as in the United Nations and the French Media. These actions also degraded the ethical climate throughout the French Army. France eventually recognized Algerian independence in July 1963.¹⁴³

142 Norton. p. 110

143 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. 7-10

The United States military's current official stance on torture in support of counterinsurgencies is as follows:

Abuse of detained persons is immoral, illegal, and unprofessional. Those who engage in cruel or inhuman treatment of prisoners betray the standards of the profession of arms and U.S. laws. They are subject to punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The Geneva Conventions, as well as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, agree on unacceptable interrogating techniques. Torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment is never a morally permissible option, even if the lives depend on gaining information. No exceptional circumstances permit the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.¹⁴⁴

This conclusion by the U.S. military is the result of a progression, even since 2001, that is characterized by shying progressively away from such methods. It is likely that the “lessons” of Algeria regarding torture have been retroactively embraced after the United States' own encounters with related controversy. The lesson here seems clear, that while the justification that French political and military leaders used for the torture of FLN suspects may have seemed reasonable and justifiable at the time, the American view is that it led to bad policy, and contributed to national failure.

Psychological war is a crucial aspect of military operations in support of counterinsurgency. Psychological operations revolve around the conviction that the primary objective is the cooperation of the population. As this thesis has argued, counterinsurgency is in its core objective a political endeavor. This means that all military actions in support of this political mission must be designed to affect change that is productive to that end. Therefore, force that may destroy the enemy is necessary,

144 Ibid. pp. 7-9

but only if such actions do not send many of the neutral population into the waiting arms of the insurgency. A RAND report written shortly after the Algerian War proposed a useful hypothetical scenario.

With the population entirely and profoundly on the side of the established power, one could consider the problem of insurgency solved. Under such conditions the counterinsurgent forces benefit from the information required to localize armed rebel bands and identify the members of their political organizations. Terrorism and secrecy remain the only tactical weapons of the insurgents, who have no opportunity to carry out their political strategy.¹⁴⁵

Therefore, a proverbial tight-rope must be walked between not using enough force, which would fail to provide the security necessary for political gains, and too much force which would drive the “prize” of the battle, the population, away from the kind of active participation Galula deemed essential to success.

The Algerian War is perhaps the best demonstration of this concept in 20th-century history, even though for many and complex reasons, it was not successful. The 1964 RAND report on the Algerian War, cited above, argues that “it is indispensable for the counterinsurgents to act psychologically on the population... revolutionary warfare must be considered with certain reservations.” The report continues, “...some French theoreticians go so far as to claim that psychological action on the population is alone important, that the destruction of the rebel para-military forces is only secondary since it is influenced by the effectiveness of the measures taken to conquer the masses... and that the only effective methods are those used by the rebellion itself.” However, the author

145 Melnik. p. 212

concludes that such thinking is “more theoretical than practical,” as the counterinsurgent military “engaged in hard daily combat... cannot wait for the problematic effects of psychological action on the population.”¹⁴⁶ While this report and current American doctrine do not disagree with the assessment that psychological warfare is of crucial importance, neither sees it as a replacement for military action altogether. United States doctrine itself is clear on this.

Executing a COIN operation is complex, demanding, and tedious. There are no simple, quick solutions. Success often seems elusive. However, contributing to the complexity of the problem is the manner in which counterinsurgents view the environment and how they define success. The specific design of the COIN operation and the manner in which it is executed must be based on a holistic treatment of the environment and remain focused on the commander's intent and end state. Success requires unity of effort across all LLOs (logical line of operations) to achieve objectives that contribute to the desired end state—establishing legitimacy and gaining popular support for the host nation government. Operational design and execution cannot really be separated. They are both part of the same whole.¹⁴⁷

But although military actions are necessary, they must conform to a set of rules that precludes them from detracting from the psychological effort. Therefore, operations that may appear to be purely military, such as search-and-destroy missions, are both inherently political and psychological in this context. This means that combat must achieve a positive psychological impact. For instance, an operation that kills twelve insurgents and contributes to the security of a certain Algerian village without killing civilians or destroying much property is considered ideal. Conversely, an operation that

146 Ibid. p. 218

147 U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. pp. 5-31, 5-32

kills or captures one hundred insurgents, but destroys a town full of neutral citizens ends up causing more harm than good. While all of this may seem to make counterinsurgency an exercise in futility, the RAND report cited above on the counterinsurgency lessons of the Algerian War, offers a way to avoid these problems, which represents how American military strategists approach the “mistakes” made by the French.

By rendering participation in the rebellion optional through protection of the population, by proving to the masses through spectacular military victories that armed struggle is impossible, by demonstrating through success and an unshakable will that the rebellion is not and never will be rewarding, and by eliminating the negative feelings and satisfying the positive aspirations of the inhabitants in order to make them understand that rebellion is useless, the counterinsurgents can put into practice numerous methods of psychological action on the population and thwart those which are being used by the rebellion.¹⁴⁸

Thus, in a war that is more about convincing than killing, military actions must be conceived and carried out in such a way that takes into consideration their psychological implications on host nation population it impacts.

Another aspect of the Algerian War that has served as a lesson for American military thinkers is the practice of collective punishment, which is the practice of targeting large groups of likely innocent people with the assumption that there will likely be a few insurgents among them. Such a practice ignores one of the central rules of counterinsurgency: the necessity of gaining the population's support. There are few better ways to lose support than to round up or kill large numbers of people, many of

148 Ibid. p. 240

whom may be innocent. As Alistair Horne has written of the tactics employed by the French units,

On the ground, the physical reaction—or over-reaction—was predictable. It was predictable, not specifically because of the *pieds noir* mentality, but because this is the way an administration caught with its pants down habitually reacts under such circumstances... First comes the mass indiscriminate round-up of suspects, most of them innocent but converted into ardent militants by the fact of their imprisonment; then the setting of faces against liberal reforms designed to tackle the root of the trouble; followed, finally, when too late, by a new, progressive policy of liberalization.¹⁴⁹

The reforms nearly always came too late and in too feeble form to pacify people so indiscriminately dealt with. Horne makes the same point when he notes:

[T]he French *Conseil-General* for the department of Algiers... voted unanimously: that order be firmly and rapidly restored...that the guilty, whoever they are, be exemplarily punished... that, henceforth, no weakness be tolerated... and that French Policy... be founded upon the healthy elements of the population.¹⁵⁰

Such actions, according to Horne worked against the efforts of those in the French government sympathetic to the Muslim Algerians' plight who pushed for political reform that might have created support for the French and the maintenance of their rule in Algeria.

In terms of the American military's interpretation of the French use of collective punishment, one American officer has written, "Rationalizing the extreme circumstances warranted extreme countermeasures... General Jacques Massau, [sic] authorized wholesale round-ups of entire neighborhoods in addition to extrajudicial preemptive

149 Horne. p. 96

150 Ibid. p. 97

detentions of FLN suspects.” These actions, “lacked the foresight of the second and third order effects and consequences as a result of their military actions.”¹⁵¹ The lessons from the French practice of collective punishment are firmly entrenched in American doctrine, as is seen in the sensitivity American planners have emphasized in planning military operations and their effect on the target population. Being too harsh can turn neutral members of the population away, while being too soft can cause the population to doubt the resolve of the counterinsurgent force. Successful military endeavors must balance the two. A juxtapositioning of the two current methods “cordoning and entering” and “cordoning and knocking” offer interesting insight into the appreciation the United States has for the importance of winning over the population. Both of the above concepts are subsets of “cordon and search” operations, which are “conducted to seal off an area in order to search it for persons or things such as items, intelligence data, or answers to priority intelligence requirements.”¹⁵² Cordoning and entering involves a certain risk level for soldiers, and is authorized when intelligence demands extra security. “Cordon and knock... is less intrusive than cordon and search. It is used when the populace is seen as friendly or neutral, when no resistance is expected, and when the goal is to disrupt and inconvenience the occupants as little as possible.”¹⁵³

This policy represents a tremendous departure from the attitude of “collective responsibility” that the French followed during certain, sometimes critical points in the

151 Detruex. p. 9

152 *U.S. Army/U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. p. 5-8

153 *Ibid.* p. 5-8

Algerian War. While this practice was not commonplace throughout the war's duration, its occurrences were frequent enough to warrant analysis and adjustments on application when American planners evolved their counterinsurgency doctrine. The Algerian War offered a unique lesson for others. Because the military is the designated entity to conduct counterinsurgencies, and its tradition and history are characterized by a strong preference for conventional warfare, coupled with a tradition of conservatism and resistance to anything that may threaten that tendency, counterinsurgency has been a problematic endeavor. All of which makes historical examples like the Algerian War particularly important for military situations that involve counterinsurgency. This has been especially true for the American military and explains the attention the Algerian War has received from recent American military planners.

CONCLUSION

The nature of modern counterinsurgencies, as previously discussed, has changed over time. So while the U.S. military has an established doctrine, meant to be utilized in any counterinsurgency, it also recognizes the importance of adaptability and imagination in its officers. As of 2010, the United States is fighting in two violent counterinsurgencies concurrently. While there is reason to believe that counterinsurgencies, those following externally forced regime change, will not likely occur in the next dozen or so years, the concepts involved in counterinsurgency, especially those pertaining to stability operations, will have permanent importance as long as weak or unstable states are believed to be a continuing threat to global security.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates predicted,

Repeating an Afghanistan or an Iraq--forced regime change followed by nation-building under fire--probably is unlikely in the foreseeable future. What is likely though, even a certainty, is the need to work with and through local governments to avoid the next insurgency, to rescue the next failing state, or to head off the next humanitarian disaster. Correspondingly, the overall posture and thinking of the United States armed forces has shifted away from solely focusing on direct American military action, and towards new capabilities to shape the security environment in ways that obviate the need for military intervention in the future.¹⁵⁴

Therefore the political lessons of the Algerian War will be of continued importance even after the conclusion of the violent counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan and even if extremely similar examples to not replicate themselves for years to come. Specifically, the observed importance of cultural awareness, the role and importance of mass

154 Quote from U.S. Secretary Robert Gates in *The U.S. Army Stability Field Operations Field Manual*. pg. 2-1

perception of the host-nation's populace, and the methods by which counterinsurgent forces can obtain active cooperation from host-nation civilians are of heightened importance.

The context of the Algerian War, itself a lesson for American strategists, demonstrates the importance of cultural awareness and perception to counterinsurgent forces. The failure of the French to meet the aspirations of the moderate Algerian precluded the primary objective from being achieved. This example is highlighted by the concurrent French military victory. The primacy of politics in counterinsurgency was unearthed by the military success of the French. Furthermore, using the logic that counterinsurgency is primarily a political endeavor, the nature of military operations and intelligence gathering methods of the Algerian War also became extremely important to the United States military. During the Algerian War, torture, which was heavily debated at the time, led to observable results which have since been interpreted by the American military as counterproductive, though there is still debate on the question.

In the context of a political war, in which convincing is just as important as coercing, methods that can alienate the very population that the counterinsurgent forces strive to win over are counterproductive to that end. This logic leads to the conclusion that all military operations must be analyzed for their psychological effect on the population. As this thesis has argued, such examples were conspicuously played out

during the Algerian War and American military literature reflects that they incorporated these lessons.

This exceptional example in counterinsurgency history, therefore, commanded the attention of American military leaders who have since been scrambling for better ways to combat contemporary insurgencies since the Iraq insurgency in 2003. The *U.S. Army/ U.S. Marine Corp Counterinsurgency Field Manual* confirms this link as it includes several direct citations from the Algerian War and its perhaps most significant participant, David Galula. While U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine obviously has many foundational sources it cannot be denied that the Algerian War offers its own unique lessons, and is instrumental in the current United States counterinsurgency doctrine.

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