

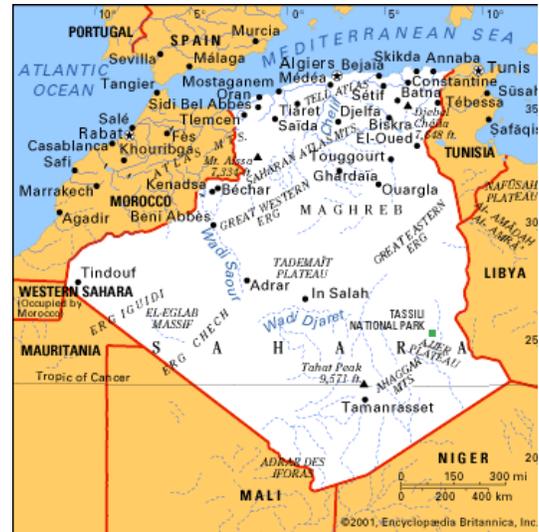
# The Battle for Algerian Independence

by Catherine de Bruin-Graf and Jeffrey Fowler

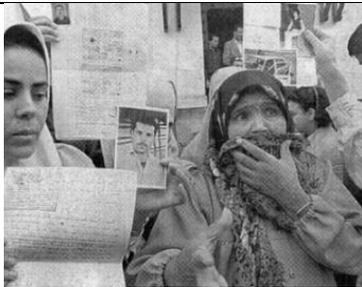
In 1834, France conquered the area of North Africa known as Algeria and established a colony. French settlers controlled the arable land and Algerians were kept at the bottom of society, unable to vote, hold good jobs or have any say in the running of their country. At the end of World War II, Muslims, who were 90% of the population of Algeria, organized a National Liberation Front (FLN) to demand independence. In the 1950s, they started guerilla warfare. By 1957, over half a million French troops were stationed in Algeria in an effort to suppress the rebellion.

In 1958, when Charles de Gaulle was installed as the President of France, the country was on the brink of civil war over the Algerian question. De Gaulle initially proposed retaining Algeria as part of metropolitan France while granting Muslims more rights as citizens. However, he soon accepted the idea of “self-determination” for Algeria. Despite this shift, French colonists in Algeria resisted and the war for Algerian independence continued until 1962. After Algerian independence, one million Europeans left the country.

The struggle for Algerian independence was a major front in the post-World War II fight to end colonialism and imperialism. The Algerian freedom fighters were supported by the Soviet Union, so this conflict also played a role in the Cold War. The battles between Algerians and French colonists often blurred distinctions between civilians and military personnel and raised the question of what constituted legitimate action and what was terrorism. These battles illustrate many of the issues in the current conflict between United States and Islamic forces in Iraq, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and between Israelis and Palestinians. An examination of the Algerian Independence Movement can help students address the question, “When, if ever, is revolutionary violence justified?” An excellent resource that graphically explores this question is the movie, *The Battle for Algiers* (1966: French with English subtitles).



[http://www.merriam-webster.com/maps/images/maps/algeria\\_map](http://www.merriam-webster.com/maps/images/maps/algeria_map)

<p><b>Timeline of the Algerian Independence Movement</b></p> <p>1954. FLN(National Liberation Front) forms and fighting begins with French</p> <p>1956. Tunisia and Morocco gain independence</p> <p>1957. France sends more than 400,000 troops to Algeria</p> <p>1958. Charles DeGaulle begins Fifth Republic in France</p> <p>1959. DeGaulle mentions “self-determination” for Algeria and French <i>colons</i> revolt.</p> <p>1962. Algeria achieves independence</p>	<p><b>Facts about Contemporary Algeria</b></p> <p><b>Population: 32, 129,324 (99% Arab-Berber and Islamic)</b></p> <p><b>Capital: Algiers (El Djazair) Literacy: 70%</b></p> <p><b>Geography: A narrow fertile plain along the Mediterranean Sea in the north. Mountains in the central region and the Sahara Desert to the south.</b></p> <p><b>Principal Resource: Oil.</b></p>
 <p>(left) Algerian women read a revolutionary proclamation.</p> <p>Source:<a href="http://alfatihoun.edaama.org/Fichiers/Algeria/History/web/Algeria%20History.htm">http://alfatihoun.edaama.org/Fichiers/Algeria/History/web/Algeria%20History.htm</a></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.algeria-us.org">http://www.algeria-us.org</a></p>	<p>The Algerian flag has a green and white background. The crescent and star are red.</p> 

## Debating the Future of Algeria, 1956-1962

**Assignment:** Examine the French, Algerian and World opinions on the conflict in Algeria. Prepare a speech to the United Nation’s General Assembly expressing your views on the conflict and a possible solution.

### A. French Opinion

#### Algeria Is France’s Anguish , *The New York Times*, April 21, 1957

“ This criticism, made notably by former Premier Pierre Mendes-France, is that France cannot afford the financial and economic cost of the present policy of pacification. In a time of financial crisis and inflation, she spends at the rate of one billion dollars a year to support the army in Algeria, which means taking 400,000 men out of industry and diverting to war uses goods that might help to redress her trade balance. It is also argued, that France cannot afford politically to pursue her present policy, since it increases Moslem hostility and handicaps her relations with the Arab world and non-Arab Africa. . . . Algeria is mainly a problem of emotions. On the one side is the deeply rooted conviction that Algeria is an integral part of France, as the constitutional fiction proclaims. Frenchmen settled it more than a century ago, developed it and governed it; hence the nearly 1,000,000 Europeans living there have vested rights that are deemed incompatible with any form of independence based upon majority rule, since the great majority are Moslems. . . . The Algerian problem has split France. . . . The idea of giving Algeria independence as if it were merely an African country, and especially the idea that the more backward countries represented in the United Nations should advise France on this subject, provoked in France a wave of bitter resentment that did not help toward a victory of logic over emotion.”

**All French Policies Set Back By Algeria, *The New York Times*, June 2, 1957**

“The reported massacre by rebels of several hundred Moslem men in an Algerian village called Melouza this week brought new evidence of the inability of even a large army to put down terrorism throughout that country. . . The Mollet formula was “pacification,” a cease-fire, then free elections, then a negotiation with those elected to represent Algeria either in the French Parliament or in some other body never specified. . . The French public became more and more disturbed because of the apparently futile mobilization of masses of youth who otherwise would have been doing productive labor, because of the financial costs, because above all of the sense of frustration that the Algerian war, now in its third year, has brought. . . But the term independence, used by the rebels to define their goal, has been carefully avoided, although independence has been granted to Algeria’s two neighbors, Morocco and Tunisia, whose leaders now seek it for Algeria.”

**Lacoste Rejects Algeria Criticism, *The New York Times*, July 8, 1957**

“Robert Lacoste, Minister for Algeria, declared today that French efforts to crush the Algerian rebellion would continue despite international criticism. . . M. Lacoste also suggested that the United States ought to solve its “Negro problem” before telling France how to get along with the Moslems. . . He rejected the idea of a North African federation. He said Premier Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia was ‘just dreaming’ in advocating a French North African community. Mr. Bourguiba’s real goal is Algerian Independence, the French official said.”

**B. Algerian Opinion**

**Editorial from the first issue of “El Moudjahid” (1956)**

“It is about time that an organ of resistance fighters comes to be, to fill a certain void in order to make known to the Algerian people in struggle, and to a world polarized by the war in Algeria, the voice of our fighters. “El Moud-jahid” will be the official voice of the FLN, and the mirror of the Armée de Liberation Nationale. The immense political importance of the current war, the prestigious exploits of the Moudjahidines, the untold suffering which the Algerian people suffers with a rare spirit of sacrifice at the hands of imperialist soldiery, need to be known.”

**Résistance Algérienne No. 4, March 28, 1957**

“The French Government has now decided to create urban militias in Algeria. . . . [French Minister] Lacoste decrees that henceforward every European will be armed and should open fire on any person who seems to him suspect. . . . [O]n the plane of human rights, what is facism if not colonialism rooted in a traditionally colonialist country? . . . [I]s not colonial status simply the organized reduction to slavery of a whole people? . . . The Algerian revolution speaks to the occupying nation and says: ‘Take your fangs out of the bleeding flesh of Algeria!’”

**A First-Hand Account of Torture by Algerian Fighter Omar Hamadi, December 5, 1960**

“We arrived June 20, 1959 and as is usual at Berrouaghia, as soon as we arrived the beatings began, and without reason. As soon as we arrived we were made to strip naked and all exposed to blows delivered by those who are used to doing this. . . I can cite another case that happened to me whose story I’ll cite. It was for a jar of water that I’d given a brother (another Muslim), who didn’t have water. We went to point this out, we six prisoners, and for this half-liter of water we were punished with 20 days in a cell.”

**Declaration of Principles in the War for Algerian Independence, The Manifesto of the 121, 1960**

“For the Algerians the struggle, carried out either by military or diplomatic means, is not in the least ambiguous. It is a war of national independence. But what is its nature for the French? It’s not a foreign war. The territory of France has never been threatened. But there’s even more; it is carried out against men who do not consider themselves French, and who fight to cease being so. It isn’t enough to say that this is a war of conquest, an imperialist war, accompanied by an added amount of racism. There is something of this in every war, and the ambiguous nature of it remains. . . We must be reminded that fifteen years after the destruction of the Hitlerite order, French militarism has managed to bring back torture and restore it as an institution in Europe.”

**Appeal to the French distributed to French Public by FLN, October 22, 1961**

“In order to express their resolution Algerian men, along with their wives and children, decided on October 17, 1961 not to return home at 8:00pm, which the colonial power attempted to impose on them. If it were up to the Algerians, this demonstration would have peacefully unfolded. Only the hateful aggressiveness of the forces of repression, some of whose members have itchy trigger fingers, was the cause of the scenes of violence, of the shootings and of the shedding of Algerian blood. . . . For seven years the dirty war in Algeria has corrupted all the values of freedom and humanism that your country once proposed to the world. Look what Paris has become, which was once the capitol of the right to asylum. Fight colonialist repression and ensure that Paris not become the capitol of racism. . . Make common cause with the Algerian militants who oppose the barbaric and racist repression. Prevent men from being rounded up and deported because they have enlisted in a fight in defense of ideals for which people all over the world have fought.”

**C. World Opinion**

**Russian Leaders Ask Free Algeria, *The New York Times*, July 8, 1956**

“Soviet leaders finally came out openly for Algerian independence today and expressed sympathy for the fighting Algerian nationalists. . . Though formally the Arabs of Algeria are French citizens, in actual fact they are subjected to colonial oppression. . . The Arabs, who compromise the indigenous population of Algeria and are the lawful masters of their land, no longer wish to tolerate their unequal position. . . This struggle meets with the sympathy and solidarity of all freedom-loving peoples, including broad sections of the French people who condemn colonialism.”

**Britain Cautions UN on Algeria, *The New York Times*, Dec 14, 1960**

“Britain up held the Algerian policy of President de Gaulle today as ‘consistent and courageous’ and cautioned the United Nations against interference. . . The speech was the first solid defense of France’s position in the Algerian debate. That debate has been dominated until now by Asian and African demands that the United Nations organize a referendum to decide Algeria’s future and by sweeping attacks by the Soviet bloc on colonialist powers in general and the United States in particular.”

**Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist from Martinique, working in Algerian hospitals (1963)**

“**Terror, counter-terror, violence, counter-violence: That is what observers bitterly record when they describe the circle of hate, which is so tenacious and so evident in Algeria. . . The**

**fact is that soon we shall have had seven years of crimes in Algeria and there has not yet been a single Frenchman indicted before a French court of justice for the murder of an Algerian.”**