

The Algerian war of independence

MVZ489 Causes of Political Violence

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Introduction

The war between France and the Algerian people, in the middle of the 20th century, was one of the deadliest and most cruel conflicts of its kind in that century. It is certainly a war of decolonization and even though some of the authors and the public debate frames it as a war between France and Algeria as countries, it is not a true image of the conflict. The country we now know as Algeria was colonized by the French from 1830 and had been an integral part of France (and some say its crown jewel) since the end of the 19th century. This, the way opposition to the French rule formed, the demands made by the insurgents and the way of leading the war are all reasons why I believe that we can study this conflict from the point of view of the internal violence. The main object to study here is obviously the reasons for the population to oppose the French in the first place.

First, I'll briefly establish a theoretical frame of the essay and the tested theory, then I'll explain the history of the French rule over Algeria. I'll use this knowledge to assess whether the chosen theory is suitable to explain the rise of Algerian nationalism. In the end I'll present the results of the analysis.

Theoretical frame

Conflict

We can define conflict behavior as any behavior that helps the party to achieve its goals that are incompatible with that of the opponent or that express hostility towards him. In our studies, we mostly focus on the coercive ways of influencing the other actor, from threat of coercion to violent coercion. The possibility for conflict arises when two parties have incompatible goals. The conflict can have different levels of complexity, which depends on tangible issues (such as recognition of the state, security, money) is more significant than intangible issues (values, ideologies etc.). Heidelberg Institute of International conflict research defines conflict in the international relations as "clashing interests on national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties that are determined to pursue their interests and win their case". Peter Wallensteen says that to understand and provide conflict analysis we have to take into account and study 3 major factors, which are actors, process and incompatibilities.

Ethnic Security Dilemma

We shall study chosen conflict via a prism of a certain theory of international (or intranational) relations. I choose the Ethnic Security Dilemma theory, which is an interesting concept that brings international relations concept to domestic politics. The first one to apply this concept internally was Barry Posen. The ethnic security dilemma stems from an idea that the government of any state is the greatest potential threat to any (namely minority) groups inside. That's because it usually takes a state's resources to commit genocide and the fear of group extinction is an important element of ethnic identity and group conflict. „The ethnic security dilemma, then, essentially occurs when the efforts of one group to control the government cause all to be worse off. “¹ There is a lot of similar but different definitions of the security dilemma and the ethnic security dilemma as such. For this essay I chose the definition by Shipping Tang, which is building on the original exposition by Butterfield, Herz and Jervis, that's why Tang calls it „the BHJ formulation“. It has eight major aspects: „(1) The ultimate source of the security dilemma is the anarchic nature of international politics. (2) Under anarchy, states cannot be certain about each other's present and future intentions, partly because intentions can change. As a result, states tend to fear each other (...). (3) The security dilemma is unintentional in origin: only between two states that merely want security without intending to threaten the other – that is, both are benign or defensive realist states – can a genuine security dilemma exist. (4) Due to the uncertainty about each other's intentions and fear, states resort to the accumulation of power or capabilities as a means of defense, and these capabilities inevitably contain some offensive capabilities; (5) the dynamics of the security dilemma is self-reinforcing and often leads to (unintended and bad) spiral-like situations, such as the worsening of relationships, arms race, and war; (6) the dynamics of the security dilemma tends to make some measures for increasing security such as accumulating unnecessary offensive capabilities self-defeating: more power but less security;(7) the vicious cycle derived from the security dilemma can lead to tragic results, such as unnecessary or avoidable wars and, (8) the severity of the security dilemma can be regulated by both physical factors (for example, geography, asymmetric distribution of power) and social psychological factors (for example, ethnocentrism, nationalism, worst-case mentality).“²

There are three essential aspects – anarchy, lack of malign intention of both sides and some accumulation of power. “Other aspects are either consequences or regulators of the security

¹ Saideman, S., Lanoue, D., Campenni, M., Stanton, S. (2002): —Democratization, Political institutions, and Ethnic Conflict. A pooled-Time Series Analysis, 1985-1998 , Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 35, No 1., pp: 103-129.

² TANG, SHIPING. The security dilemma and ethnic conflict: toward a dynamic and integrative theory of ethnic conflict. Review of International Studies [online]. 2011, vol. 37, no. 2, s. 511-536. ISSN 02602105., p. 514

dilemma, and they are neither sufficient nor necessary for the rise and continuation of the security dilemma.”³

Even though this definition talks about states as units, I believe we can (and as was established by Posen any many researchers after him) apply the general security dilemma theory to intrastate conflicts, here the Franco Algerian conflict.

One crucial point that we have to test as well is whether the groups in the conflict were formed and (self)defined along ethnic lines (for example common customs, homeland, religion, ancestors, language). Otherwise it obviously cannot be ethnic conflict.

History of the conflict

To understand the French-Algerian war, we need understand the history of the mutual relationship of these countries and nations. Even though some say that „no overview could adequately explain the complexity of this conflict that had three faces: war of decolonization between France and Algeria, war in Algeria itself (between the FLN and Messalists) and war in France itself,”⁴ I’ll try to present the crucial facts that lead to the insurrection and violence in the middle of 20th century.

The actual conquest of Algeria began in 1830, few years after what was cited as its cause – the unfortunate humiliation of the French consul in Algeria⁵- and lasted until 1947. „De Bourmont’s contingent was able to conquer Algiers in three weeks with small losses. To take control over Algeria took many years and was accompanied by a number of bloody battles.”⁶ The French occupation has had a profound implications on the society. „The main reason that made these drastic changes possible was threefold. First, it was the new system of administration, put in place by the French, second, it was a dismantlement and total change of the system of agricultural property, and in both of these reasons an important factor was the arrival of the European settlers – colons.”⁷ After World War I there was about 791 thousand colons in Algeria. That represented about a seventh of the population. The system of

³ IbidemT

⁴ BACHOLLE-BOŠKOVIĆ, Michèle. La Guerre d'Algérie expliquée à nos enfants. The French Review [online]. 2003, 76(5), 968-982 [cit. 2016-06-13]. ISSN 0016111X., p. 969

⁵ The dey of Alger wanted France to repay its loans made during the Napoleonic wars, but France didn’t feel the need to. The dey then tapped him with a ceremonial flywhisk, calling him a "wicked, faithless, idol-worshipping rascal"

⁶ BERÁNEK, Zdeněk. Alžírsko. Praha: Libri, 2007. Stručná historie států. ISBN 978-80-7277-335-0., p 42

⁷Ibidem, p. 44

ownership has been dismantled, social security broken down and the system of schools nearly annihilated. Apart from the changes in the economic structure, there were big changes in the societal and cultural sphere as well. „Even though there were some time-limited and minority ideas saying that the French should treat Muslims as equal co-citizens, as said for example the emperor Napoleon III., the reality was very much different. (...) At the end of 19th century the situation in Algeria was very similar to that in the south of United States.“⁸ The discrimination could also be seen in the realm of the language. „The only official language during the whole time of the colonization of Algeria was French and a law from 1938 even stated Arabic as a foreign language.“⁹

As colonial power, France had many colonies and protectorates, but Algeria was a special one, it was an integral part of France, another department on another continent. "Having declared Algeria in the 1880s officially an integral part of France on par with Normandy or Burgundy, they created the lasting legacy of an infrastructure of roads and railways, while building schools and hospitals and setting up a modern public administration.“¹⁰ Algerians were very far from being recognized as French citizens.

It was however few educated Muslim Algerians who started to opposition movement. The first movement opposing the French rule (not in itself, but the discriminatory parts of it) was the „Young Algerians“. „The Young Algerians wanted, for their duty to serve and die in French uniform, revision of the discriminating law about autochthones and bigger political rights for the regional elites.“¹¹ These were the ideas of the young (and mostly educated men), but the war and the problems that came with it made the hostility to France in the rest of the population even stronger.

„The legitimacy of the demands was acknowledged by politicians in Paris, who in the last months of the war began to work on the draft reforms that would broaden the range of political and civil rights for a group of Algerian Muslims. These proposals encountered fierce resistance most of the colons.“¹² This stubbornness of the French colons will destroy every

8 BERÁNEK, Zdeněk. Alžírsko. Praha: Libri, 2007. Stručná historie států. ISBN 978-80-7277-335-0., p. 46

9 HOLEŠ, Jan a Jaromír KADLEC. Jazyková politika frankofonních zemí. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2012. Odborná kniha. ISBN 978-80-244-3257-1., p 24

10 HARRISS, Joseph A. When France lost its crown jewel: fifty years on, it's still struggling to get over the horror and shame of the Algerian war. The American Spectator [online]. 2012, 45(7), 46-48 [cit. 2016-06-13]. ISSN 01488414., p. 47

¹¹ BERÁNEK, Zdeněk. Alžírsko. Praha: Libri, 2007. Stručná historie států. ISBN 978-80-7277-335-0., p. 51
¹²ibidem, p. 53

effort to make the situation of the Algerian population more bearable until the beginning of the war and even beyond.

If before the World War I the only viable opposition were the Young Algerians and the participation of the population was limited, the momentum of the different opposition groups started to grow between the wars and „after World War II there were masses of Algerian people organizing themselves in different organizations and political parties, including those in the French diaspora“¹³.

There was a big difference between the political views. The Young Algerians, until the WWII, refused the viability of the Algerian nation as itself, and believed that Algeria can thrive only under France. Another organization, the Association of the ulamas of Algeria tried to promote the education of salafia and achieve political, but most of all religious independence of the country. There was also a political organization called the Nordalgerian star (Etoile nord-africaine), which was the first party to want the Algerian independence from the beginning. Its symbol later became the official flag of Algeria.

The radicalization of the opposition had increased at the end of the peaceful period. „The global conflict, that left the imperial standing of France deeply shaken, brought about a convergence of opinions of the different parts of the Algerian opposition.“¹⁴ The situation didn't improve with the regime of Vichy at all, with the governor Weygand unable draft and pass laws to appease the population. More fuel in the fire was the Manifesto of the Algerian people, published by Ferhart Abbas, that cited the quasi-new Atlantic Charter that guarantees the right of all people to choose the government. „The awakening of the Algerian nationalism was also facilitated by the 14 point program of US president Wilson, a and most of all its fifth statement regarding the „colonial question“, in which he states that the colonial problems should be resolved impartially and with regard to the minds of the autochthones.“¹⁵

The first spark was lit on May 8th 1945, when most of the world celebrated the end of the war. During a celebration in majoritairly Muslim city of Sétif. There's no certainty as to what has happened, but we know that the events left some of the Muslim protesters dead and provoked a revenge of Algerians, and a brutal response from France

¹³ Ibidem, p. 56

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 65

¹⁵ LUTZ, Andreas. Špinavá válka: Alžírsko 1954-1962. Praha: CeskyCestovatel.cz, 2016. ISBN 978-80-87657-06-5., p 22

„For many of the Algerian Muslims the 8th May meant a definitive rupture with the idea of futile cohabitation with Europeans in the borders of an French Algeria.“¹⁶

After these events, even with some effort on the side of the French government, it was impossible to appease the population and its nationalist feelings. The first organized attack came on November 1st and then came a war of independence with no clear front lines, sabotage acts, spreading of terror, killing of civilians. The war „lasted for 8 years, until 1962. About 300 000 Muslims and 30 000 Europeans were killed and it was one of the deadliest conflict of its kind in the 20th century.“¹⁷

Assessment

In the theoretical framework, we explained the (ethnic) security dilemma theory. In this part of the essay, we will try to see whether this conflict fulfills the requirements of the defined security dilemma and ethnic conflict.

Ethnic

As we saw in the short account of the common Franco Algerian history, Algeria was an integral part of France. „At the end of 19th century, there were different laws and different political rights¹⁸ for each of the two communities.“¹⁹ There was a theoretical possibility for Algerian to get a French citizenship, but this required them to become Christian. That’s why the application for the citizenship were few. Moreover, the administration rejected most of these applications. Given the fact that even a conversion to Christianity wasn’t in most cases enough to get them a citizenship, the discrimination in fact had ethnic grounds, so it was segregation. There was no explicit segregation law, but there were more of implicit rules of behavior that made equality and integration of the two communities virtually impossible.

The Algerian, who are in a majority Arab people, have obviously very different ancestry from the French. Moreover, there is the definition of Algerian nation by Ibn Badis: „Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language and Algeria is my motherland“²⁰. Also, “it was a war

¹⁶ BERÁNEK, Zdeněk. Alžírsko. Praha: Libri, 2007. Stručná historie států. ISBN 978-80-7277-335-0., p. 68

¹⁷ BERÁNEK, Zdeněk. Alžírsko. Praha: Libri, 2007. Stručná historie států. ISBN 978-80-7277-335-0., p. 72

¹⁸ In 1881 the law known as Code d’indigénat was signed into action. It was a series of crimes that applied only to the „Muslim French“. Among others it cited unauthorized trespassing between the regions of Algeria, travel abroad, unauthorized assembly and more. The punishments could be collective and the jurisdiction was under the local courts, but the judges were appointed by France.

¹⁹ BERÁNEK, Zdeněk. Alžírsko. Praha: Libri, 2007. Stručná historie států. ISBN 978-80-7277-335-0., p. 47

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 56

inspired by religion. Even though "the declaration from Soumman" that was adopted at a congress of FLN in 1956 called for a separation of the religion and the states; and although there were some leader inspired by socialism. But these positions cannot make us forget that from 1954 to 1962, FLN expanded its hold on the population and prohibited the consummation of tobacco and alcohol, under the penalty of mutilation, in the name of Islam.“
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We can then say that the conflict was truly an ethnic one.

Anarchy

One of the main aspect in our chosen definition of the security dilemma is the fact that there is (to a certain point) anarchy. In France's Algeria, there wasn't anarchy comparable to the one of the international system, however, in some areas the control of the government became more and more limited. A big factor here was the realities of the two World wars and namely the effects of the Second World War on the capability of France to sustain the stability of its non-European territories, and on the other hand the many problems the population faced because of the restraints of the war. „For the Muslims it (*the defeat by Rommel*) was an important experience that has shaken their faith in the real strength of the French power.“²²
In this sense, I'd say that there wasn't anarchy yet, but all of the parties involved thought it's coming.

Lack of malign intention

In my opinion, it is true that there were no explicit malign intentions on the both sides to substantially hurt the other party. On the part of the colons, there was a clear objective not to give up their privileges and not to let the Algerians achieve full political rights and citizenship. That being said, they didn't want to hurt the Algerians anymore they needed to keep them in their subordinate position. The Algerians didn't necessarily want to hurt the French citizens either. Their goals was to gain full rights and citizenship. It wasn't until after they understood this won't never happen by peaceful means that they started to oppose the government violently. „The growing hostility towards French colonizing power was caused also by bad economic situation (...) There was a long term increase of dissatisfaction over the

²¹ STORA, Benjamin. Algérie: les retours de la mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance. Modern [online]. 2002, 10(4), 461-473 [cit. 2016-06-13]. DOI: 10.1080/0963948022000029547. ISSN 09639489., p. 466

²² Ibidem, p. 66

limitation of the political rights and openly racist behavior of a major part of the French people.²³

Accumulation of power

The aspect of the accumulation of power, that is the number of supporters, financial sources, allies and also weapons that could be used in a violent encounter, is also an aspect we can deem true in this case. The French accumulation of (mainly hard) power in this case is clear. In the wake of the conflict, the Algerians were able to accumulate some soft power (that grew stronger with the continuation of the conflict), the uprising was supported by a great number of the population, and they were able to gather weaponry as well by raiding French policy offices and deposits of weapons. It wasn't very much, but given their strategies of asymmetrical fighting in the *maquis*, it was more than enough.

Conclusion

To conclude, I believe we can say the Franco-Algerian conflict can be partly explained by the ethnic security dilemma theory, as the parties of the conflict were formed along and defined by ethnic lines, there was a threat of an oncoming anarchic environment, there were no explicit malign tendencies and we can see the accumulation of power on both sides (mostly on the Algerian side) on the wake of the conflict. In this essay there is not enough space for examining other aspects of the definition or to problematize the interpretation. Other theories we could examine in this conflicts could be the mainly the grievances and the democratization theories.

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