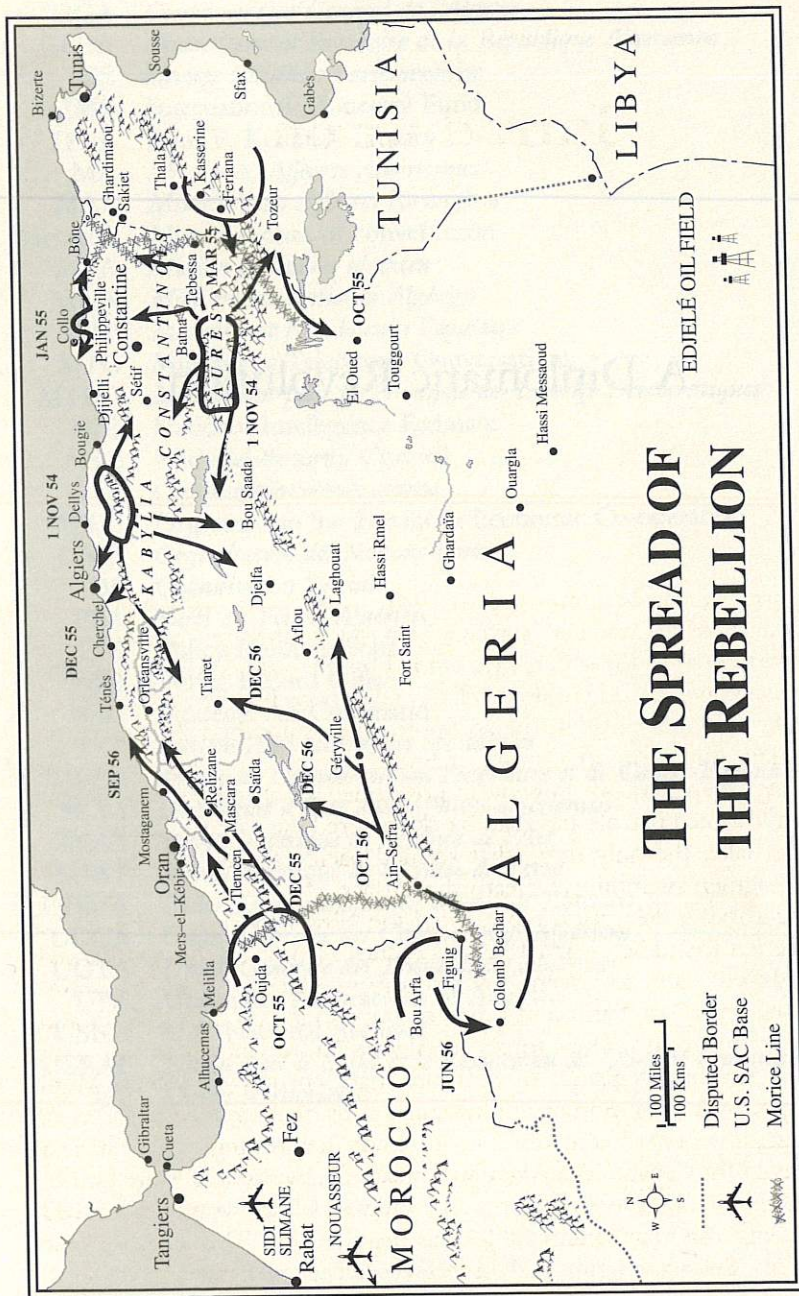




Map by Donald Frazier.

Introduction

At ten o'clock one May morning in 1961, three Swiss Army helicopters skimmed across the waters of Lake Geneva toward the French resort town of Evian. One after the other, each landed by the water's edge, disgorged three passengers, and then lifted off to make room for the next. Stooped under the swooping blades, the assembled men smoothed their suits before making their way to a group of French officials awaiting them. Just out of sight, anti-aircraft guns were positioned along a defensive perimeter, while armed patrols and road blocks covered the countryside beyond. Even the lake, the only thing that seemed pacific about the place, concealed frogmen swimming beneath the surface.¹

The arriving delegation represented the "Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic"—or GPRA, its French acronym—though it could not truthfully claim to govern any territory in Algeria. All of their ministers were exiled in Tunis and Cairo or imprisoned on a fortified island off the Breton coast. Their forces in Algeria had dwindled to less than 15,000 operating in groups of no more than ten or twenty men. With nothing heavier than mortars and machine guns, the *mujahadeen* faced an occupying army of half a million men that was then testing its first nuclear weapons in the Sahara. The Algerians' most effective actions were bombings and assassinations in Algeria and France, which would claim 133 lives during this first round of formal negotiations. The leader of the delegation, Belkacem Krim, had himself twice been sentenced to the guillotine.

Yet those whom French authorities feared most—and the reason for the extraordinary security at Evian—were their own military commanders and settlers in Algeria, who bitterly opposed these negotiations. A month

earlier, a military junta had briefly seized power in Algiers and threatened to land paratroops in Paris, while the Secret Army Organization (OAS)—a terrorist militia made up of the most diehard settlers—had already murdered the mayor of Evian because of his chance association with what would happen there. Renegade army officers and remnants of the OAS would persist in attempts to assassinate President Charles de Gaulle long after the Evian accords sealed the fate of French Algeria almost a year later.

Why, then, was de Gaulle ready to risk his life and the Republic itself to hand over a part of the *patrie* and a million citizens of European descent to men considered criminals under French common law? After all, there had never been an Algerian equivalent of Dien Bien Phu, or even of the Tet Offensive. Instead, the French won the Battle of Algiers in 1957, effectively sealed off the borders in 1958, and had reduced the *mujahadeen* remaining in Algeria to scattered and increasingly desperate bands by 1960. Yet all along they gave ground on the question of Algeria's future status and finally accepted the inevitability of its secession when the insurgency was at its weakest. The inverse relationship between France's preponderant military strength in Algeria and the progressive deterioration of its bargaining position vis-à-vis the nationalists was—as de Gaulle's biographer, Jean Lacouture, put it—"the supreme paradox" of the Algerian War.²

To understand this paradox, one must recognize the tenacity and bravery of the rebels, from the back alleys of Algiers to the border villages of the Constantinois, who fought and organized for more than seven years against atrocious repression. But the principal part of the answer—and of this history—must range far beyond the borders of Algeria. Based on archival research and interviews in Europe, North Africa, and the United States, this book argues that what the Algerians called "the Revolution" was distinctively *diplomatic* in nature, and that its most decisive struggles occurred in the international arena. For weapons the Algerians employed human rights reports, press conferences, and youth congresses, fighting over world opinion and international law more than conventional military objectives. By the end, when they hardly attempted to breach the border fortifications erected around Algeria, the GPRA had rallied majorities against France at the United Nations, won the accolades of international conferences, and gained 21-gun salutes in capitals across the globe. These accomplishments, in turn, inspired the hard-pressed *mujahadeen* to endure in their struggle. Together with the rebel armies and administrators sheltered by Morocco and Tunisia and supported by countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia and Communist China, they outlasted a government that had become obsessed with the war's impact on its reputation abroad. Essentially, the Algerians won by outflanking French forces and border fortifications and surmounting the *invisible* barriers of censorship and sovereignty around Algeria. Once impregnable, these physical and intellectual defenses proved as obsolete as a crusader's castle before the batteries of the international media and the U.N. General Assembly—though the siege took over seven years and as many as 500,000 lives.³

Algeria's fight for independence was also a diplomatic revolution, according to the conventional meaning of the term, in that it helped to reorder international relations. Here, too, is a paradox: France's repeated attempts to contain the conflict only ensured that it would have the most far-reaching repercussions. It was the immediate cause of Paris's concession of independence to the protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia and it accelerated the decolonization of sub-Saharan Africa. A determination to confront the rebels' foreign backers contributed to the Suez crisis and triggered the events leading to the fall of the Fourth Republic and the return of de Gaulle. *Le général* began to withdraw French forces from NATO commands partly to retaliate against America's unwillingness to support the war. And all along Algeria was a rallying point for the non-aligned movement and Arab nationalism. Indeed, this was the first time a subject people who lacked the means to control any of the territory they claimed declared their independence and won the recognition that finally made independence possible. Their example inspired the African National Congress, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and many other such movements.

Algeria's progress toward independence did not affect state sovereignty so much as it reflected emerging challenges to this institution, which had for centuries served as the organizing principle of international politics. After all, waves of economic and technological change were already eroding the borders that separate states from one another and from the world community as a whole. To gauge the importance of the international aspect of the war and, conversely, the war's effects abroad, it should therefore be viewed within that wider context. But to describe that scene in more than a superficial fashion, one must also sketch its underlying structures. This will reveal the third great paradox of the Algerian War—and the third dimension of this diplomatic revolution: it shows how "globalization" through integrating markets, migrations, and new means of mass communications exacerbated cultural conflicts and caused increasing political fragmentation. The Algerian War thus serves as a laboratory for observing the velocity of trends that were sweeping the Cold War world and shaped the contemporary era.

This introduction sketches each of these three arguments in turn, beginning with the international struggle, proceeding to its effects on the international system, and concluding with perspectives on how it can help us to understand the ongoing transformation of international politics. The chapters to follow will sustain and substantiate these arguments through a narrative history of the war's origins, course, and consequences.

The Algerian War in the International Arena

After long neglect, the international history of the Algerian War has inspired a new wave of scholarship. The opening of French, American, and British archives has shown that Washington and London were deeply involved and influential in what had long been depicted as a national

drama in French scholarship and popular culture.⁴ But it is only by consulting the Algerians' own archives that one can assess the importance to *both* protagonists of *all* their allies and adversaries and thus write an international history centered on the war itself rather than its effects on the Atlantic Alliance. Even more important, the GPRA records reveal the Algerians as full participants in their own history, which is indispensable if we are to understand how they finally prevailed.⁵

Algerians had learned through long and bitter experience that they could not defeat France through force of arms alone. Years before they formed the *Front de Libération Nationale* in 1954, future FLN leaders began to craft a political strategy aimed at bringing the pressure of international opinion to bear on Paris. When hostilities commenced, French authorities claimed not to care what others thought about what they considered to be a purely internal problem, but they had to dispel the Algerians' hopes if they were ever to bring them to terms. Both sides well remembered from Indochina that outsiders could have a decisive role in colonial conflicts. Indeed, the 1958 crisis that ended with the return of de Gaulle—the pivotal event of the war—began as a reaction against an American attempt to force France to conclude peace. The Algerians, for their part, had to contend with pressure from their allies to accept a compromise settlement—by 1960 the bulk of their effective fighting strength was sheltered in Tunisia and Morocco at the sufferance of their two rulers. More generally, it made sense for both sides to strive for the support of even the smallest states in such a protracted, hard-fought struggle.

Yet the war's international aspect often loomed even larger in people's imaginations—and actions—than the real dimensions of outside aid would appear to have justified. While the rebels immediately announced their intent to “internationalize the Algerian question” and made critical decisions based on the hoped-for effect abroad, outside support often fell short of expectations. In fact, the failure of the nationalists' external leadership to secure more aid for the insurgents was a key issue in the internecine wrangling within the rebel camp.

Nevertheless, the French exaggerated the extent of foreign aid and influence in the rebellion. They therefore timed and tailored their peace proposals to influence world opinion, usually coinciding with the annual debates in the U.N. General Assembly. Even de Gaulle—who denied too often the influence of foreign opinion on his decisions—greatly expanded efforts to influence it. Until the final negotiations, top French officials continued to believe that, if only their allies supported them and their adversaries stayed out, they could conclude the war on their own terms. Even if it were possible to disprove this contention, its demonstrable influence on French decision-making would in no way be diminished.

The international aspect of the war was therefore significant in part because so many people believed it was important and acted on the assumption that the fighting in Algeria had begun and would one day end because of events elsewhere. Moreover, many in France reached this con-

clusion in the first days of the war, when the identity of the rebels—much less their strategy—was still obscure. This suggests that preexisting attitudes helped produce and sustain the extraordinary interest in the role of outsiders. One must therefore analyze French images and ideas about others and themselves that led them to believe that the fighting in Algeria had external causes and global consequences.

Much of the French diplomatic effort to win over foreign governments and their publics was organized around the idea that “Algeria is France”—that the Algerian *départements*, constitutionally a part of France since 1848, were a French creation. For the FLN, on the other hand, the war was an attempt to *restore* Algeria's existence as an independent nation. With the formation of the GPRA in 1958, the FLN began to demand recognition as its legitimate government. For this purpose, nongovernmental organizations could also make a contribution. Although the attendance of GPRA delegates at an international labor conference or their accession to the Geneva Conventions might not seem like matters of great import, they appeared to give substance to the Algerians' claims and so became tests of strength between the two antagonists.

In the fight for world opinion, both sides employed propagandists and cultivated foreign news media and intellectuals. Since they were waging what was sometimes the only shooting war in the world, they were assured of an attentive audience, especially as the issues involved—Arab nationalism, African decolonization, and strains in the Atlantic Alliance—were all at the top of the international agenda. From the beginning Paris recognized that the media could keep Algeria on that agenda even if the army drove the FLN underground. Battle was joined in radio and television studios, the corridors of the United Nations, and campus debates, and the echoes could be heard in the councils of decision makers. If unmoved by the occasional rally or the innumerable petitions of Paris intellectuals, policymakers' approach to the Algerian problem was shaped by a climate of opinion that insisted on racial equality, secularism, and cooperative “development.” Both sides had an interest in adapting to that climate, and the peace they made at Evian reflected the expectations of the age, even if it did not fulfill them.

Reversals of Fortune

Just as the outside world acted on Algeria's history, the war provoked an equal if not opposite reaction abroad—what Elie Kedourie called “prodigious peripeties,” borrowing the French word for reversals of fortune.⁶ One of the most important was the Algerians' challenge to the principle that had protected states from foreign scrutiny of their domestic affairs. The crux of the problem for French officials could be seen in the contradictions of their arguments: in insisting that Algeria was their own affair, they claimed that the war would have been quickly won were it not for external interference—either actual, as in aid by Egypt and Tunisia, or

potential, as in their belief that the rebels would hold out as long as it appeared that international pressure might force Paris to sue for peace. But to counteract this effect, the French had to act outside Algeria, whether by asking for material aid and full diplomatic backing from their allies—which forced them to consider their preferences in formulating policy—or by direct action against the FLN's allies, which belied the idea that Algeria was a domestic difficulty concerning France alone. Indeed, nothing "internationalized" the war so much as France's increasingly desperate attempts to isolate it.

France's first major effort to isolate Algeria was the concession of "independence within interdependence" to the two protectorates on its eastern and western flanks. French officials calculated that they could use residual economic leverage and military bases to prevent Tunisia and Morocco from aiding the rebels and perhaps enlist their support in negotiations to end the war. Such a strategy would have required considerable discipline and some flexibility about the future of Algeria, but the French were too divided to make it effective. Instead, military commanders seized arms shipments off the coasts of Morocco and captured the rebels' external leadership in midflight to Tunisia, thus expanding the conflict to international waters and airspace. While they succeeded in stopping peace negotiations, they made adversaries of Algeria's two neighbors and provided ammunition for FLN arguments that France's conduct could no longer be considered its own affair.

The November 1956 assault on Egypt proved to be an even more grievous self-inflicted wound, because it not only destroyed Paris' remaining prestige in the Arab world but transformed its relations with Washington. Until the Suez crisis, the Americans had followed a "middle of the road" policy between the French and the North African nationalists, hoping to avoid either a split in the Atlantic Alliance or criticism from Arab allies. But they would not allow the French (or the British) to escalate their fight with Arab nationalism and perhaps engulf all of North Africa in conflict. France's humiliation at American hands had other causes and consequences that will be discussed in due course, especially in terms of Franco-Israeli relations and their respective nuclear programs. But the most important consequence for Algeria was to exacerbate the financial deficits that made France vulnerable to U.S. coercion.

Through 1957, the French tried to resist American pressure for a compromise peace while pursuing more direct means of isolating Algeria, such as constructing a line of electrified barbed wire, mine fields, and radar-directed artillery along its borders with Tunisia and Morocco. Refugees streamed out of Algeria, while the rebels began to strike back across the frontiers. Consequently, the French military claimed the right of hot pursuit and in 1958 bombed a Tunisian border village in retaliation for local FLN attacks. Once again the Americans used economic diplomacy to protect an FLN ally and increased pressure on Paris to accept a political settlement with the Algerians. But a defiant National Assembly repudiated

Republic. The interregnum ended with a settler uprising in Algiers, which returned de Gaulle to power.

While de Gaulle's original intentions in Algeria remain obscure, he demanded unreserved support for the war as a condition for cooperation in the Atlantic Alliance. When Washington refused, de Gaulle began the process that would end in 1966 with the withdrawal of all French forces from integrated commands. At the same time the Algerian War helped to divide France and the United States it also exemplified one of the main policy differences between the two Communist powers, with Beijing pushing for full support of this and other national liberation movements and Moscow remaining more interested in profiting from the U.S.-French conflict.

At that time, the nonaligned movement posed the most direct challenge to the East-West structure of international politics, and here, too, the Algerians were at the forefront. For those who had recently won their independence, or still aspired to it, the Algerian struggle was a rallying point and an inspiration. People across the Arab world followed events in the press, listened to reports on Egypt's *Voice of the Arabs*, and watched FLN propaganda films. In addition to Nasser, a heroic figure for many, charismatic leaders like Sukarno, Kwame Nkrumah, and Fidel Castro all embraced the cause. The Algerians were "present at the creation" of the movement at the Bandung conference and helped it to become an effective force by coordinating bloc voting at the United Nations and collective lobbying of the superpowers. Thus, if the idea of a free Algeria eventually triumphed over *Algérie française* partly because of the power of the non-aligned movement, the war itself was both a cause and a consequence of that movement's emergence.

In his recent book, Robert Malley described how this history gave Algerians a privileged place in the "pantheon" of Third World powers. But he cautions that they and their French counterparts too often credited their every action with world-shaking significance. Immersed in the papers they left behind, scholars can forget the difference between words and deeds and exaggerate the war's importance as an agent for change. One could argue that Algeria's was just one of many anticolonial movements that resulted from broader, deeper economic, social, and cultural developments interacting with political events far more momentous than anything isolated to North Africa—like World War II and the ensuing Soviet-American rivalry. From this perspective, Algeria is prominent due to its position at the crest of a wave of anticolonialism that began to swell in South and East Asia in the 1930s and finally rolled into the southernmost parts of Africa forty years later. Indeed, Algeria's formal status as French *départements* and the bitterness with which Paris fought to keep it made it something of an anomaly—or at least a problematic candidate for a case study.

This account anticipates that argument by taking it further still: Algeria was extreme in almost every way. It was extreme in the intensity of its colonial experience and in the destructiveness of its decolonization. It

was extreme even in what made it typical: rapid population growth, over-exploitation of lands, a rural exodus, emigration, and cultural conflicts between secular nationalist and religious reform influences—the main engines of revolutionary change throughout the colonial world. Moreover, from the Moroccan crises before World War I until Algerian independence, North Africa was continually buffeted by great power conflicts.

In all of these ways, Algeria was an extreme example of a common problem: the simultaneous fragmentation and integration of the world community. The socioeconomic fault line dividing North from South was deepest and narrowest here, running right through Algeria's cities and countryside. On the other hand, nowhere was the pressure for economic, political, and cultural integration—and the clash that resulted—so powerful, sending tremors around the Cold War world. By focusing on this epicenter of nascent North-South conflict, we can see how and why the ground began to shift beneath the surface of the superpower competition.

The North-South Frontier

The term fault line conveys a sense of the wider implications of what was happening in Algeria, the slow buildup of countervailing forces, and their sudden eruption. Yet the different sides were not so well delineated. Rather than facing each other across a chasm, leaders ranged along a continuum: from the first president of the GPRA, Ferhat Abbas, who spoke little Arabic and once wrote that there was no such thing as an Algerian nation, to those settlers—often of Spanish and Italian origin—who called themselves Algerians and threatened secession from Paris when it suited them. In a sense, the war was about redrawing the borders between the different territories and communities that overlapped in Algeria, at the intersection of the Atlantic, European, Arab, and African worlds. While this study will continue to emphasize the salience of the North-South division, the word frontier best describes Algeria's intermediate—and indeterminate—position between them.

Algeria's more populated northern areas are just 100 miles south of Spain and 400 miles from France, which began to extend control over them in 1830. In 1848—when Haute-Savoie and Nice were not yet French—they were designated *départements*, in theory no different from the French *départements* of continental Europe, which were called the *metropole*. A century later, French Algeria was explicitly included in the North Atlantic Treaty and then the Treaty of Rome and thus became part of the new European strategic and economic community. The discovery in 1956 of immense oil and natural gas reserves made the Algerian *départements* seem all the more integral to the industrial economies. France accounted for more than three-quarters of their exports and even more of their imports. Algeria had almost no industry of its own. Instead, one in seven Muslim men worked in the metropole, where they already numbered 300,000 on the eve of war.

French people of the metropole called Muslim immigrants stoking coal on cargo-boats *pieds noirs* because of their black feet. The term became a way to insult settlers, but by the 1950s Algeria's nearly one million citizens of European descent had made this epithet their own. Though they studied in French-language schools, fought in French wars, and elected deputies to the National Assembly, the *pieds noirs* cultivated a hybrid Mediterranean culture. Visitors to Algiers could easily imagine themselves in Marseilles, while Oran seemed to many a Spanish city. Their broad avenues were lined with cafes, their parks were populated with old men playing *pétanque*, their beaches were filled with young people in shorts and swimsuits. From where they stood, Algeria seemed like a reflection of the opposite shore.

But if one turned south and traveled inland to the rural villages where 70 percent of Muslims lived, the scene would have been quite different, the prospects more ominous. From here Algeria appeared more a reflection of the Middle East and Africa beyond the Sahara. For every pied noir sipping pastis in Algiers and Oran, there were nine Muslims, more than half under 20, typically subsisting on whatever could be scratched out of small plots of marginal land without irrigation or farm machinery. Deforestation and soil erosion contributed to stagnant or declining agricultural production. Paradoxically, this situation resulted from one of the few genuine contributions by colonial authorities to the lives of ordinary Muslims: public health measures that had dramatically reduced mortality rates. Since birthrates remained high, the Muslim population had more than doubled in less than fifty years and was growing at one of the fastest rates in the world.

For most French observers, the only solution was to accelerate and complete the process of "development," making Muslims economically, culturally, and, above all, demographically "modern."⁷ But from Indonesia to Indochina to North Africa, colonial authorities were finding that efforts to increase production of foodstuffs for local consumption and export upset the patron-client relationships through which they maintained control. The expansion of large-scale, mechanized agriculture caused them to lose contact with the local population while increasing migration to the cities and emigration to Europe. Like black African and Asian immigrants, Algerian Muslims maintained contact with their families and often returned to their communities, sometimes with unsettling results. Indeed, the first Algerian nationalist movement of the twentieth century emerged among these emigrants in France.

Development theorists anticipated that a period of instability would accompany the transition from tradition to modernity in areas like Algeria, so the beginning of the insurgency in 1954 made modernization appear even more urgent. But closer inspection revealed that the events here and around the Third World represented a significant departure from the development model. Rather than creating consumer societies in the colonies, new means of mass communications were mobilizing Third

World peoples against the West. Instead of fostering industry and a disciplined workforce, integration in global markets was allowing migrant laborers to sustain subsistence economies. Contrary to expectations that urbanization would reduce birthrates, population growth in Algeria and a host of other countries was continuing to accelerate. And rather than being mere objects of Westernization, North Africans were themselves reshaping the cities and the metropole. In 1947, a study of Algerian demography was already warning of "a real invasion and a berberisation of whole neighborhoods in Marseilles and Paris."⁸

The war came because French Algeria reflected North and South—their attraction and polarization. Here as elsewhere, the main ingredients of integration—new communications technologies, global markets, migration flows—also exacerbated communal conflicts. Contacts between the French and the Algerians, whether in the form of temporary residence or exposure to cultural influences, were as likely to elicit armed resistance as mutual identification. Indeed, the FLN itself embraced both Western and Islamic influences and rejected the bipolarities that were supposed to exist between them. As the FLN's official newspaper, *El Moudjahid*, declared:

The Algerian people are at the same time the most nationalist and the most cosmopolitan, the most loyal to Islam and the most receptive to non-Islamic values. Among Muslim peoples it is perhaps one of the most attached to the Muslim faith and the most penetrated by the spirit of the modern West.⁹

In time the spirit of Algerian independence penetrated France itself, as youths and intellectuals idealized the cause and aligned with immigrants against the state, which resulted in pitched battles in the streets of Paris with hundreds of casualties. Thus, instead of denoting the extent of the imperial sway, the old colonial slogan of a France extending "from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset"—one of the southernmost towns of the Sahara—came to delineate a zone of insecurity, both physical and mental, as France's deepening engagement with Algeria and Algerians became as disturbing as it was dangerous. Rather than a struggle to bring Algeria into the "modern world," the war became a fight over the very meaning and purpose of modernity.

Under these circumstances, some turned to an older view of the future of North and South, one that portrayed international relations as race relations. Rather than assuming the inevitability of progress, it depicted the Algerian revolt as a harbinger of a "clash of civilizations." In this way, Algeria's fight for independence also reflected both past and future—seeming to recall older conflicts between Islam and Christendom while foreshadowing "culture wars" and racial and religious violence, including racist attacks on immigrants and Islamist assaults on westerners.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the simultaneous integration and fragmentation of the world community have inspired a vast literature investigating their various aspects: from the consolidation of global markets

to the increasing pluralism of international politics, from the proliferation of cross-cultural interactions to the growing inequality within and between societies. This book will instead examine how some of those trends characteristic of the post-Cold War era operated in an earlier time—indeed, at the very height of the superpower confrontation. In this way, we will see how, for instance, population growth, environmental scarcities, international institutions, new media, and, not least, the conscious agency of colonized peoples were already combining to cause radical change—of a recognizably new kind—when some might assume the international system was frozen into an ideological contest between East and West, one in which the South only provided stakes in the game or a place for proxy wars. We will also witness how, even then, people realized that these processes of integration and fragmentation were transforming their world. Thus, Algeria not only affords a privileged perspective on the wider process of decolonization, it also provides a preview of how the postcolonial world would grapple with what may be "the supreme paradox" of our age.¹⁰

When the last of the Swiss Army helicopters lifted off and the French and the Algerians were left alone across a table in the Hôtel du Parc, they started debating a question that remains unanswered to this day: How could diverse but interconnected cultures coexist without clashing within each country and across the Mediterranean? These negotiations will be described at the close of this narrative. But it will be suggested that they did not end, perhaps cannot end as long as the global processes of integration and fragmentation continue to transform Algerian, French, and international society. Even when the different sides prefer fighting to talking—when, as François Mitterrand declared, "the only negotiation is war"—their conflicts as much as their conversations determine how these historical forces will be expressed in diverse societies through their different languages. As Pierre Bourdieu once observed, "[W]ar remains a dialogue when all is said and done."¹¹