


# A Case Study of Information Operations: Algeria 1956-1962

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# Agenda

- Motivation: Why study Algerian case?
  - Composition & Categorization of Info Ops
    - Sequence
    - Hierarchy & Composition
    - Measurability
  - Examination of Algerian case
    - The general F.L.N. Information Campaign
    - Some F.L.N. Information Operations
    - French counter Information Operations
    - Short-Term and Long-Term Effects
  - Implications for Afghanistan
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# Why Study the Algerian Case?

- Aid construction of general theory of Info Ops
  - Composition of Info Ops
  - Higher purpose of Info Ops – *What is goal of overall operation?*
  - Interdependencies of Info Ops components – *How does each part of an IO contribute to the effect?*
  - Measurability of Info Ops effects – *Can all IO effects be measured? If not, why not? If so, how?*
  - Categorize types of IO – *How many types of Info Ops?*
- Provides historic backdrop to current DoD concerns:
  - Info Ops & mitigating Terrorism
  - Info Ops & Counter-Insurgency
  - Balancing Military Effort with Diplomatic & Informational Effort

# Sequence: How Does Each Part Affect the Others?

- Sequence Independent – first IO has no necessary effect on succeeding IOs
  - Ex. “Battle of the Beams” in WWII (Britain); first success at foiling radio guidance of Luftwaffe bombers did not increase or decrease chances for success of later efforts
- Sequence Dependent – first IO reduces chance for success of later IOs
  - Ex. first terrorist bombings in Algiers made French less trusting of Algerians and prompted French retaliatory terrorist bombings
  - Result – subsequent F.L.N. bombings harder to carry out and less effective

# Hierarchy: Can Smaller Parts be disaggregated from Large Parts?

- Decomposable— Info Actions work independently of other Info Actions
  - Ex. in WWII Britain, radio signals worked against Luftwaffe independently of other actions (e.g. blacking out streetlights)
- Not Decomposable - Info Action works only within context of larger campaign
  - Ex. in Algiers, without claims of responsibility population cannot distinguish between assassinations and ordinary murders

# Example: Non-Decomposable Info Ops

## Hierarchy of Components:

### Info Campaign

Wide-Reaching Effort to Shape Target Audience's Opinion on Range of Issues

### Info Operation

Series of Actions Focused on Shaping Opinion on Specific Issue

### Info Action

Single Action with Single Message to Target Audience

## Algerian Examples:

*The Battle of Algiers*

Bombings & Assassinations in French Quarter & F.L.N. Claim of Responsibility [1]  
(1956 & 1957)

*A Single Bombing*  
*F.L.N. Call for General Strike*  
*Responsibility Claim for an Assassination*

## Info Operation Sequence:

InfoAction<sub>1</sub>, InfoAction<sub>2</sub>, ... InfoAction<sub>n</sub> → Effect of Info Operation

[1] Home, Alistair (1977) *A Savage War of Peace*. Harmondsworth, Eng.; New York: Penguin Books.

# Measurement

## ➤ Quantifiable

- Ex. in Battle of the Beams the strength, frequency, & duration of interfering radio signal correlated with measurements of pilot's deviation from course

## ➤ Qualitative

- Ex. in Battle of Algiers, impact of a particular bombing on French resolve to suppress F.L.N. hard to quantify

# Two Categories of Info Ops

## ➤ Cybernetic

- Sequence independent, decomposable, quantifiable
- Consists of **Signals** that carry **Information**

Emitter → Information Channel → Receptor

Disrupter = Channel Noise

Example: Battle of the Beams (1940), Electronic Warfare

## ➤ Semiotic

- Affected by sequence, not decomposable, difficult to measure
- Consists of **Signs** (words, etc.) that form a **Message**

Sender → Communication System (code) → Receiver

Disrupter = speaker's coughs, stammers

Example: Phases in Battle of Algiers, Strategic Communications

***For Semiotic case, there are no “partial successes” i.e. either entire Info Campaign success or fails based on general message plausibility, regardless of individual Info Op successes***

# Evaluating Semiotic Info Ops

- Are guiding propositions or arguments **plausible** for target audiences?
- Are target populations **mobilized**, to act in support of propositions?
- Can **adversary respond** with Counter Info Op? Why?

# Components of F.L.N. Semiotic Info Campaign


## ➤ Abstract Propositions or Arguments

- Muslims of Algiers belong to Algerian Arab nation
- Algeria is not part of France

## ➤ Targeted Audiences

- Arabic-speaking Muslims of Algiers
- Bilingual Jews of Algiers
- Christian and Muslim Arabs of Tunisia & Egypt
- French colonists in Algeria
- Metropolitan France
- UN

# F.L.N. Information Operations

- Reprisals for French Execution of Rebels by Assassinations of French Civilians, Jun '56
  - Bombings of French cafés in Algiers, Sep '56
  - Successful Call for a General Strike, Jan '57
  - Defeated by French Info Operations and Military Operations, F.L.N. leaves Algiers, Oct '57
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# Short-Term Effects of F.L.N. Info Ops

- Gratified small number of Algerians seeking revenge for French injustices
- Terrified larger number of Algerians who feared to cooperate with French
- Put Algerian moderates in difficult political position
  - Could not easily justify French COIN
  - Called “collaborators”

# French Info Ops (Response)

- “Turned” captured F.L.N. militants via torture, threats to family members, forcing them to
  - Work as informants
  - Spread disinformation among F.L.N. ranks (1957)
- Divided Algiers into blocs supervised by “loyal” Algerians who reported suspicious activity
- Arrested 30%-40% of male population in Arab quarter of Algiers
  - Hundreds tortured

# Effects of French Info Operations

## Short-Term Effects: *Appeared Successful!*

- Informers caused confusion and mistrust among F.L.N. members
  - F.L.N. forced to purge the urban membership
  - Thousands of cadres killed by leaders for Op Sec
- French arrests, interrogations, & torture extracted useful information
- Short-term defeat of F.L.N. in Algiers
- **Turned most urban Algerians against French**
  - Difficult to measure externally and difficult to anticipate
  - This drove long-term effects

## Long-Term Effects: **Failure!**

- Not coordinated to form coherent Information Campaign with plausible message
- Conflicting messages
  - mixing of anti-F.L.N. messages and anti-Algerian message via arrests, interrogations, ...
- Metropolitan French population not convinced French could defeat F.L.N.
- Failed to mobilize international support for French positions

# Implications for Afghanistan

- What are guiding propositions of U.S. Info Campaign?
- What messages should U.S. or pro-Afghani gov't organization transmit?
  - ex. "Afghanistan is an independent country allied w. U.S."
  - ex. "Anti-gov't insurgents are foreign intruders."
- What populations are we targeting?
- What is **plausibility** of message to these populations?
- What are Taliban's messages?
- How effectively do our messages counter theirs?

# The Taliban's Information Campaign

## Strengths

- Builds on past performance
  - Heroes of war against Soviet occupation
- Fluent in national language (Pashtu)
- Exploits grievances against Karzai government corruption
- Communication methods designed for audience
  - DVDs, cassettes (semi-literate population)
  - Traditional poems (“night letters”)

## Weakness

- Not wholly representative
  - Narrow appeal to Pashtuns, Other ethnicities not well-targeted
  - Ignores many religious strands (Sufism, Shi'ism)
- Cuts against pre-conflict (pre-Soviet invasion) power structures
- Inconsistencies in message & actions [2]
  - Primary focus is on local & national interests
  - Rhetoric touts global jihad

[2]: Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words? International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 158, 24 July 2008;

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5589&l=1>