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FRANCE AND THE ALGERIAN PROBLEM

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 23 May 1961. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations, and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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FRANCE AND THE ALGERIAN PROBLEM

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the short-term effects on de Gaulle's position in France of the April coup attempt in Algeria and to evaluate the prospect of the negotiations for settlement of the Algerian problem over the next six months.

THE ESTIMATE

Aftermath of the Revolt

1. The collapse of the coup attempt in Algeria has confirmed President de Gaulle's high personal prestige, but the serious weaknesses in the French state laid bare by the revolt still remain. Although the conspiracy was initiated by a few military activists, the belief that the activists enjoyed broad support within the army and the fear that administrative officials and security elements would not act against the insurgents in a showdown caused panic among some government officials early in the crisis. The firm stand by de Gaulle at that time, the demonstration of support by the vast majority of the populace of the metropole, and the failure of the insurgents to gain active support of the army enabled the government to weather the immediate threat. At the same time the crisis pointed up the virtual indispensability of de Gaulle to the survival of the Fifth Republic.

2. The President's retention of his emergency powers to which he had resorted during the crisis, however, has caused widespread misgivings and may result in a decrease in popular support for the government. Although the failure of the insurgency is likely to discourage, at least for the time being, any similar organized efforts to unseat de Gaulle, there remains a constant danger that military activists, well-armed European *colons*, or

rightwing terrorists will continue to commit acts of violence in an effort to disrupt negotiations with the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (PGAR). Such acts might include provocation of clashes between Moslems and Europeans, and there is also a real danger that attempts will be made on the life of de Gaulle or of his prominent associates. Thus, a shaken France approaches the delicate business of negotiating a peace settlement when its army leadership and much of its administrative apparatus are deeply disturbed.

3. An especially serious problem exists within the French military establishment, where it is apparent that many officers, including many of those who for a variety of reasons did not join the mutiny, remain opposed to de Gaulle's Algerian policies. Moreover, the problem of whether or not to obey orders of the civilian government was squarely posed only for the army in Algeria and for some air force units. A few units and officers openly declared themselves for de Gaulle in the early stages of the crisis; most officers, including many who may have been loyal to de Gaulle, waited to see what the outcome would be, if only to avoid bloodshed within the armed forces. The lack of active support from the army apparently caused the insurgents to abandon the revolt. Nevertheless, the attitude of a majority of the army and some of the air force can best be

described as passive or equivocal. The conduct of the navy appears to have been correct throughout, though its loyalty was not put to the specific test of taking military action against the insurgents. The passivity of the army during the coup has posed at a critical moment for France the question of the army's dependability as an instrument of de Gaulle's Algerian policies.

4. De Gaulle's prestige among the Moslem population of Algeria has increased. However, it is likely to decline rapidly unless he gives continuing evidence of his determination to control terrorism by the *colons*, to eliminate *Algérie Française* elements in the army, and to negotiate an Algerian settlement. Indeed, the Moslems of the cities, although generally disposed to lie low while things are going their way, would probably respond violently to provocation by *colon* troublemakers. In these circumstances they would view French military or police action in defense of the *colons* as indicating that de Gaulle was still unable to master French extremists.

Negotiations

5. Successful negotiations depend as much on the attitudes of the PGAR leaders as on de Gaulle's position and on the ability of both parties to control their own extremists. These leaders were alarmed during the insurgency that the best opportunity to achieve their objectives by negotiation would evaporate if the coup succeeded. Nevertheless, the PGAR remains divided concerning the negotiations and the strategies to be employed. The PGAR, especially its moderates, is uncertain whether rebel field commanders, some of whom are convinced that the French will ultimately tire of the struggle, can be counted on to observe a truce arrangement or any compromise settlement.

6. The rebel movement apparently was encouraged by Cairo and Moscow to resist any French offer to negotiate that was not accompanied by a firm French undertaking to recognize the PGAR as the legitimate government of an independent Algeria. While the

PGAR was aware that de Gaulle would not accept this condition, it has feared that, unless secured in advance of negotiations, a dominant position for the PGAR in Algeria might not be attainable. Accordingly, the PGAR is wary of any negotiations, and the extremists, at least, tend to take comfort in the thought that if negotiations break down the PGAR, with the political and military assistance promised by the Bloc, will ultimately wear down French resistance.

The Negotiating Positions

7. After months of painstaking political effort and pressure, de Gaulle had by the time of the April revolt developed a negotiating position that was not only stripped of any mention of an *Algérie Française* solution but was otherwise designed to meet some of the principal Moslem demands, although it still contained many ambiguities. Apparently he does not feel that his bargaining strength has been reduced in any significant degree by the revolt because he has since reiterated the basic outlines of his position. France will offer the Moslems a choice between "association" and a form of independence which de Gaulle describes as "secession." The "association" concept now appears to amount to virtually complete national sovereignty with certain special relationships with France, including the maintenance of limited base rights and retention of French sovereignty in the Sahara. It would also require meaningful guarantees by the Algerian state of the rights of Europeans and pro-French Moslems resident there. If the Algerians reject any form of association and insist upon full independence, the President has threatened to withdraw Europeans and pro-French Moslems to coastal urban centers where their personal interests may be defended, to return all Algerians living in France to their homeland, and to cut off all French assistance. He has also stated that France would retain the Sahara. Publicly, however, the PGAR has steadfastly refused to accept less than full sovereign independence from France over all Algeria, including the Sahara.

8. De Gaulle's position probably contained a sufficient mixture of enticement, threat, and ambiguity to bring the PGAR into discussions. However, there is not yet a cease-fire agreement acceptable to both sides, although the French have announced unilaterally that they will cease offensive operations against the rebel forces. Moreover, substantial areas of disagreement exist on all the major issues, chiefly the disposition of the Saharan regions, the status of the *colons*, the manner and pace of French troop withdrawals, and the role of the PGAR during the interim period between a truce and referendum. Given de Gaulle's determination to solve the Algerian problem, there is a good chance that he will be flexible on at least some of these issues. At the same time, the PGAR, which may feel that rifts exposed in the French Army and State insure the ultimate attainment of its objectives, will almost certainly insist on exacting stiff concessions on these issues from the French.

Prospects

9. Over the short run it is likely that de Gaulle will try vigorously to eliminate all obstacles to successful pursuit of negotiations with the PGAR. He will use his emergency powers to try to root out potential saboteurs of his policy. While he may win the confidence of the PGAR

negotiators by such tactics, it is probable that he will repel some of his current supporters in France and he might drive his enemies to new acts of desperation. For its part the PGAR will be extremely suspicious of French good faith. Moreover, negotiations will be taking place in an atmosphere of extreme tension and explosive possibilities which might at any time produce an incident to interrupt or terminate the talks.

10. We believe that the negotiations will take many months, even if conducted under the best of circumstances. Frequent interruptions and postponements of the formal negotiations are likely and on each such occasion opponents of an independent Algeria will take new hope and exploit any opportunities to assure that the talks are not resumed. The chances of a settlement within the period of this estimate are slight.

11. If the negotiations fail, the PGAR will almost certainly become more extremist and will probably solicit more direct forms of Bloc support. De Gaulle will find himself frustrated by his inability to dispose of the Algerian problem and to get on with the restoration of French power and prestige, which is his primary concern. His failure would seriously undermine public confidence in his regime.