

Lesson 5: The Battle of Algiers (1956–1957)

The Text

The Battle of Algiers was one of the most intense and decisive episodes of the Algerian War of Independence. It took place mainly between 1956 and 1957 in the capital city, Algiers. The conflict centered on the struggle between the FLN (National Liberation Front) and the French colonial authorities, who sought to suppress the growing independence movement.

During this period, the FLN organized a series of urban operations in Algiers. These included bombings, secret communications, and targeted attacks against French military and police forces. The goal was to make the capital a symbol of resistance and to show that the Algerian Revolution was not limited to rural areas.

In response, the French army launched a massive security campaign known as the “pacification” operations. General Jacques Massu and the paratroopers were given full control in Algiers. Their methods included raids, curfews, checkpoints, arrests, and widespread use of torture to gather information. These measures created fear but also increased resentment among Algerians.

The battle reached its peak in 1957 when the French dismantled the FLN’s urban network in Algiers. Although the FLN suffered heavy losses, the Battle of Algiers had a lasting impact. It exposed the brutal nature of French repression, attracted international attention, and strengthened global support for Algerian independence.

The battle demonstrated that the Algerian Revolution had strong roots in both the countryside and the cities. Even though the FLN lost militarily in Algiers, they won politically, as the world increasingly recognized the legitimacy of the Algerian cause.

Vocabulary Matching

| Word | Definition (Mixed) |
|--------------|--|
| Pacification | A military operation to control a population and reduce resistance |
| Curfew | Forcing people to remain indoors at specific hours |
| Network | A group of connected people working secretly toward a goal |
| Casbah | A historic district of |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| | Algiers with narrow streets and alleyways |
| Targeted attack | Elite soldiers trained to jump from aircraft into combat |
| Bombing | Using pain to force someone to give information |
| Paratroopers | Causing an explosion to destroy or damage a target |
| Torture | A specific assault aimed at a particular location or person |

Comprehension Questions

1. What was the main goal of the FLN's urban operations in Algiers?
2. How did the use of paratroopers influence the French military strategy?
3. Why did the Battle of Algiers attract international attention?
4. How did fear and resentment among Algerians affect the progress of the conflict?
5. What does the text suggest about the relationship between rural and urban resistance in Algeria?

True or False

1. The FLN relied exclusively on rural operations during the Battle of Algiers.
2. General Jacques Massu led the French paratroopers in the city.
3. Curfews were one of the measures imposed by the French army.
4. The French successfully eliminated all FLN influence permanently in Algiers.
5. The Battle of Algiers had no impact on global support for Algerian independence.
6. The FLN lost militarily but achieved political success.
7. Torture was used as a method to gather information.
8. The Battle of Algiers shows that resistance existed only in the countryside.

Vocabulary Fill-in-the-Blanks

Use these words: pacification, network, paratroopers, bombing, targeted attack, curfew, Casbah, torture

1. The French army conducted a _____ operation to suppress the rebellion.
2. The FLN maintained a secret _____ to organize its fighters.

3. _____ were used by the French army to enter the city quickly.
4. The FLN carried out a _____ in a French-controlled area.
5. Civilians faced a strict _____ during the conflict.
6. Many operations took place in the narrow streets of the _____.
7. _____ was employed to extract information from captured FLN members.
8. A _____ focused on a single location to weaken enemy control.

Discussion Questions

1. How can international awareness affect the outcome of a local conflict?
2. What lessons can modern movements learn from the Battle of Algiers about organization and strategy?
3. How might the experiences of the Battle of Algiers shape Algerian national identity today?