

# External Assistance: Enabler of Insurgent Success

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Victorious insurgencies are exceptional because the strong usually beat the weak.<sup>1</sup> But all power is relative, and if an insurgency has access to external assistance, such assistance can alter the insurgent-government power ratio even to the point where the insurgency becomes the stronger side. This is what happened during the American War of Independence. This is what did *not* happen during the American Civil War. External assistance made Yorktown possible; its absence condemned the Confederacy to Appomattox. To be sure, external assistance is no guarantee of insurgent success, but there are few if any examples of unassisted insurgent victories against determined and resourceful governments.

Much of the key theoretical literature on the phenomenon of weak victories over the strong discounts or altogether ignores the importance of external assistance. Andrew Mack argues that the best explanation of insurgent success is possession of superior political will and therefore greater readiness to sacrifice; the insurgents win because they wage a total war against an enemy that fights but a limited war.<sup>2</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft contends that superior strategy—e.g., protracted irregular warfare against a conventional foe—best explains insurgent victories.<sup>3</sup> Gil Merom believes that chances of insurgent success hinge greatly on government regime type; insurgencies fare much better against democracies than against dictatorships because the former lack the stomach for brutal repression.<sup>4</sup>

These explanations share a common assumption: the key to offsetting the stronger side's material superiority lies in the weaker side's possession of superiority in such intangibles as political will and strategy. The United States

was defeated in Indochina because the Vietnamese Communists displayed a far greater willingness to fight and die<sup>5</sup> and pursued a strategy that simultaneously limited their exposure to US military strengths (firepower, air mobility) and exploited American political vulnerabilities (the electorate's aversion to indecisive, protracted wars for limited objectives).

However, even the most committed and cunning insurgency cannot hope to win without material resources. A rebellion must have arms. The Vietnamese Communists, among the most tenacious and skilled enemies the United States has ever fought, could hardly have prevailed unarmed, which is how they would have had to fight absent the massive Soviet and Chinese assistance they in fact received. North Vietnam, the political and military engine of the Communist war in Indochina, had no arms industry; it had to import even small arms and small-arms ammunition from the Soviet Union, China, and other Communist Bloc countries. The Soviets and the Chinese also supplied trucks, radios, medicines, medical equipment, artillery, tanks, fighter aircraft, naval vessels, an integrated state-of-the-art national air defense system, thousands of technical advisors, and over 300,000 (Chinese) logistics troops who manned and maintained North Vietnam's railroad system against US air assault.<sup>6</sup> Had the Vietnamese Communists been isolated from external assistance, as were their fellow Communist insurgents in Malaya and the Philippines in the latter 1940s and early 1950s, they almost certainly would have suffered the same fate: defeat. But the United States was never in a position to seal off North Vietnam from the Communist Bloc, much less South Vietnam from North Vietnam. It was the combination of stronger political will, superior strategy, *and* foreign help that decided the Vietnam War.

The same is true of the American War of Independence. As in Vietnam, the rebels in America fought a total war while the metropolitan power fought a limited war. The rebels gambled their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor on victory, whereas, for British commanders, defeat meant reassignment elsewhere or a return to the pleasures of London society. For the British, North America was a distant theater of operations; for the Americans, it was home. Indeed, after France intervened on the rebel side, North America became, for the British, not a secondary, but rather a tertiary theater of operations (after Europe, where Britain faced the possibility of invasion, and the Caribbean,

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where Britain sought to defend its fabulously lucrative Jamaica and other sugar and spice islands).

The Americans also had a superior strategy: (1) protracted irregular warfare conducted by local militias, guerrilla bands, and an elusive Continental Army aimed at wearing down Britain's political will, coupled with (2) a search for foreign intervention that could neutralize British material superiority. Though George Washington initially sought a conventional military decision in and around what is now the greater New York City area, he soon came to recognize the perils of positional warfare against a materially superior professional army (especially one supported by the guns of the Royal Navy). He reverted to a strategy of hit-and-run attacks against exposed British and Hessian detachments based on the implicit assumption that the Continental Army could win, or at least not lose, simply by surviving. As Donald Snow and Dennis Drew observe:

Washington knew he had no reasonable hope of victory against the British . . . in open battle. At best he could wage defensive battles, judiciously withdraw after inflicting casualties, and wait to fight another day. With some good fortune (and poor British tactics) Washington might be able to fall upon isolated portions of the British force and inflict small defeats. Washington's objective had to be to buy time, raise the cost of the war to the British, and hope that they would tire of the whole affair. The other American hope was for foreign help from France, Britain's traditional enemy and colonial rival.<sup>7</sup>

The British, for their part, seemed to have no strategy other than seizing cities like New York and Philadelphia in the hope that Washington would come out and fight. British forces in the Thirteen Colonies, whose peak strength was 35,000,<sup>8</sup> were woefully insufficient to seize control of colonial America; they could do little more than hold selected ports and make occasional forays into the hostile American interior, where they faced constant attrition by American irregulars. An entire army under Sir John Burgoyne was entrapped in upstate New York by the all too often formidable combination of the regular Continental Army screened and supported by militias. Indeed, the British were unprepared to cope with the mix of regular and irregular warfare, and in the end, according to one assessment, it was "unconventional victories [in the countryside] that enabled Washington's conventional army to survive and ultimately to triumph. The British lost the war in the countryside."<sup>9</sup>

Nor did it help that the colonial insurgency had no center of gravity. Piers Mackesy sympathizes with the British commanders:

Where was the center of gravity of the American rebellion? This loose confederation had no centralized administration to be overthrown by the occupation of a capital city, no common economic interest whose destruction would bring

down the edifice. Was the center of gravity to be found in the Continental Army? It was unassailable [because] Washington's aim was to avoid or postpone decision, and he could do so by withdrawing into inaccessible country and impregnable positions.<sup>10</sup>

The British were further plagued by distance and lack of reliable logistical access to the colonial countryside. The difficulties of projecting and sustaining military power across 3,000 miles of often turbulent ocean in the pre-Industrial Age were formidable enough, but for the British in North America they were greatly exacerbated by rebel control of the countryside, which made it impossible for British forces to sustain themselves on indigenous fuel (wood and coal), forage (for horses and oxen), and foodstuffs, most of which had to be transported from Great Britain across waters swarming with American privateers.

Notwithstanding the formidable operational and logistical challenges confronting the British, however, the American insurgency lacked the power to move the war from stalemate to decisive victory. The transformative event was France's formal entry into the war following Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga in October 1777. Even before Saratoga the French government, working in concert with Congress's agent in France, Silas Deane, was covertly shipping large quantities of arms, gunpowder, and equipment to the Americans through a dummy trading company. The military cargoes, which included 30,000 muskets, artillery, tents, 300,000 pounds of gunpowder, and 25,000 uniforms, proved "indispensable to American forces fighting in the campaigns of 1777, especially troops charged with stopping Burgoyne."<sup>11</sup> More—much more—was to come.

The establishment of a formal alliance with France in 1778, which was followed in 1779 and 1780, respectively, by Spanish and Dutch declarations of war against Britain (though not as allies of the American rebels), opened the floodgates to massive French financial credits, gunpowder shipments (90 percent of the gunpowder consumed by American forces during the war<sup>12</sup>), and direct French military and naval intervention in North America, including an army under the command of General le Comte de Rochambeau and a fleet commanded by Admiral le Comte de Grasse. It was these forces, especially de Grasse's seizure of control of the Chesapeake Bay (severing Lord Cornwallis's sole supply line), that delivered the clinching victory at Yorktown in 1781. The decisiveness of French intervention was reflected in the opposing orders of battle at Yorktown: against a British force of 8,500 troops and no supporting warships, and alongside a Continental Army of 9,000 American troops and no supporting warships, the French contributed 38 ships-of-the-line and 22,800 troops, including 15,000 marines and armed sailors.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, by

the time Franco-American forces began investing Yorktown, it is probable that Britain was no longer the stronger side in North America. The fact that an insurgency starts out as the weaker side does not preclude its eventual transformation, via foreign intervention, into the stronger side.

But France's greatest contribution was strategic: by declaring war on Britain, France transformed what, for Britain, had been a colonial insurgency into a world war. By the end of 1780, ally-less Britain was fighting France, Spain, and the Netherlands, whose combined ships-of-the-line totaled 180 to Britain's 120,<sup>14</sup> in North America, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean. Together with several hundred American privateers, the French, Spanish, and Dutch navies threatened not only Britain's trans-Atlantic lines of communication and its sugar-rich empire in the Caribbean but also the security of Britain itself. For the first time in over a century, control over the maritime approaches to the British Isles was seriously threatened by a naval coalition whose chief member—France—also fielded the best army in Europe. For Britain, the war in North America had suddenly become a strategic liability. Anthony James Joes does not overstate the case that “there is probably no more clear-cut example of the importance of outside help to the success of an insurgency than the American War of Independence.” Especially critical was the French navy, “which carried French troops to America as well as gold, clothing, and cannons to Washington's army [and] kept that specter of an invasion luridly before British eyes [and] interrupted the already quite tenuous system whereby the British supplied their forces in America.”<sup>15</sup>

If the first great American insurgency demonstrated the decisive importance of external assistance, the second great American insurgency demonstrated the decisive importance of its absence. The Confederacy, an insurgency initiated by the Southern states against continued membership in the United States, chose to make war against a Union that was much stronger in the material indices of power that counted in the mid-19th century. The North had an 8:1 advantage in draftable (i.e., white) manpower, a 6:1 advantage in financial resources and industrial production, a 4:1 advantage in railroad track mileage, and an overwhelming superiority in commercial maritime and naval power, including a latent capacity to gain control of the waterways that bounded and crisscrossed the Confederacy.<sup>16</sup> Nor was the North burdened by a large and potentially rebellious slave population; indeed, whereas Confederate ideology precluded military service for blacks, at least until the very end of the war, a total of 190,000 blacks—nine percent of all those who wore the federal uniform—performed service in the Union army or navy.<sup>17</sup> In Abraham Lincoln the Union also had an even greater superiority in political leadership; and in Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman the Union—albeit belatedly—had military lead-

ership that, like Lincoln, appreciated the war at the strategic level (in contrast to Robert E. Lee, whose vision of the war was confined to his own theater of operations) and understood the operational and strategic opportunities afforded by the North's manpower and industrial superiority. Above all, they understood the strategic opportunities that flowed from the waters that surrounded and ran through the Confederacy.

Under these circumstances, the operational virtuosity of Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia, though greatly assisted until 1864 by an Army of the Potomac commanded by generals varyingly timid (McClellan), mediocre (Pope, Hooker, Meade), or incompetent (Burnside), could only retard the Confederacy's inevitable strategic defeat. Retrospectively, it can be argued that the Confederate leadership's great mistake, aside from starting the Civil War, was to wage a conventional war against a conventionally superior foe. By fighting the Union on its own terms, the Confederacy pitted its weakness against Union strength. (A little more than a century later, in the Tet Offensive of 1968 and the Easter Offensive of 1972, North Vietnam's Communist forces suffered terrible military defeats when they attempted positional warfare against US forces.) Arreguin-Toft rightly argues against the weaker side selecting the same strategy as the stronger side. "If strong and weak actors use a strategy representing the same strategic approach—direct against direct, indirect against indirect—strong actors should win." On the other hand, if "strong and weak actors employ strategies representing opposite strategic approaches—direct against indirect or indirect against direct—weak actors are much more likely to win."<sup>18</sup> The weaker South chose a direct strategy against the stronger North, which pursued a direct strategy against the South.

If this analysis is correct, then the South had only two hopes for victory: to reduce the unfavorable material odds via foreign intervention or, failing that, to adopt an indirect strategy of guerrilla warfare, a strategy for which there was ample precedent in the Spanish *guerrilla* of 1808-1814 against the French occupation of Spain. Unfortunately, prospects for foreign help in the form of British and French diplomatic recognition (and subsequent access to British and French war materiel) were problematic from the beginning. By late summer of 1862, French Emperor Napoleon III favored recognition, but only if Britain would follow suit. In Britain, however, public opinion was divided: upper-class conservatives favored recognition, whereas the middle and working classes opposed it. The government itself also was divided: Lord Russell, the foreign secretary, wanted to recognize the Confederacy, whereas Lord Palmerston, the prime minister, was most reluctant because he believed recognition would lead to war with the United States. In the end, it all boiled down to whether the South could convincingly demonstrate that it could defend its declared independence. In this regard, Lee's defeat at Antietam in

September 1862 and Lincoln's subsequent issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, which committed the Union to the abolition of slavery (a very popular cause in Britain), fatally weakened Confederate prospects for foreign intervention.<sup>19</sup> As for the option of guerrilla warfare, it was beyond the imagination of the leading Confederate generals, who saw themselves as soldiers in the European tradition of regular combat, and who were in any event hardly disposed to embracing a strategy whose very example could inspire slave insurrections—the nightmare of the White South.<sup>20</sup>

Antietam, not Gettysburg, was the strategically decisive battle of the war because it ended any real prospect of foreign intervention and because it permitted Lincoln to transform the war from an arcane dispute over the relationship between the individual states to the Union into a moral crusade against slavery. Absent external intervention, the South was probably doomed to defeat as long as Lincoln's genius, assisted by timely Union victories, could sustain sufficient northern support for his war policies.

The American War of Independence and Civil War are hardly conclusive proof of the vitality of external assistance to insurgent success. Fighting power is a mélange of measurables (e.g., troop strength, weapons counts, sortie rates) and intangibles (e.g., generalship, organizational quality, morale). It seems reasonable to conclude that no amount of outside help could redeem the fortunes of a politically and strategically incompetent insurgency; thus the Tito-assisted Greek Communist insurgency was defeated in 1949 because it had no popular political program and because it pursued conventional military operations against a conventionally superior foe. Conversely, it seems no less reasonable that highly motivated and skilled insurgents—the Boers in South Africa, for example—can be defeated if denied access to external assistance.

But the correlation between external assistance and insurgent victory, and a lack of foreign intervention and insurgent defeat, is striking. The insurgents in the American War of Independence (1775-1783), the Spanish *guerrilla* against the French (1808-1814), the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), the French-Indochinese War (1946-1954), the Vietnam War (1965-1973), and the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) were all assisted, and all won. In contrast, the insurgents in countless peasant rebellions in the pre-Napoleonic era and in such post-Napoleonic insurgencies as the Indian Mutiny (1857-1858), American Civil War (1861-1865), the Boer War (1899-1902),<sup>21</sup> the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960),<sup>22</sup> and the Philippine Communist insurgency of the late 1940s and early 1950s were all unassisted, and all lost. Only against the most enfeebled government (e.g., the French regime of Louis XVI in 1789, the Czarist government in 1917, the Batista regime in Cuba in 1959) is an unassisted rebellion likely to triumph. In such cases the government, not the insurgents, is the weaker side.

Some have argued that the Chinese Communist defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Government, the Kuomintang (KMT), is an example of an unassisted insurgent victory. This judgment, however, requires qualification. Though it is highly probable, given the KMT's utterly corrupted leadership and strategic incompetence, that the superbly led Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its highly skilled, disciplined, and motivated military arm, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), would have won without direct foreign assistance, they were nonetheless beneficiaries of significant support from the Soviet Union. The PLA was, to be sure, an exclusively internal Chinese creation, and it emerged from World War II as a large and very impressive military and political force. Starting in 1946, however, it began receiving, from departing Soviet forces in Manchuria, large quantities of Japanese weapons—sufficient to equip 600,000 to 700,000 troops—which the Soviets had taken from the surrendered Kwangtung Army.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the Soviet occupation of Manchuria from August 1945 to May 1946 established external Communist control over a strategically vital area where the CCP was politically and militarily weak (Manchuria had been under complete Japanese control from 1931 to 1945). Soviet authorities in Manchuria blocked the entry of KMT forces while permitting hundreds of thousands of CCP political cadre and PLA troops to enter Manchuria where, by the time the Soviets departed, they had established control of the countryside.<sup>24</sup>

The role—obviously unintentional—of the Japanese army in Manchuria and China proper from 1931 to 1945 in paving the way for the CCP's victory also must be considered. Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931 deprived the KMT of China's industrial heartland,<sup>25</sup> and Japan's seizure and occupation, from 1937 to 1945, of all of coastal and much of inland China opened the door for CCP infiltration of areas now vacant of a KMT presence. (Japanese forces were concentrated in the cities and along the strategic lines of communication.) Japanese aggression also excited Chinese nationalism, on which the CCP was much better able to capitalize than the KMT. Walter Laqueur believes that the "two main causes of the Communist victory [in China] were the general disruption caused by the Japanese invasion and occupation and the superiority of Sino-Communism as a force rallying the masses. . . . The [N]ationalists had been weak even before 1937; subsequent military defeats accelerated and deepened the process of decomposition." Bard O'Neill agrees:

The Japanese occupation was fortuitous for Mao because it provided a nationalist appeal around which support could be rallied and also because it diverted the attention of the Kuomintang away from the Chinese Communist insurgents. Moreover, as the war dragged on, Mao's stature as a heroic nationalist was enhanced, while the dislocation and costs of the fighting further weakened Chiang Kai-shek's position. Indeed, there is reason to question whether Mao's

strategy would have been successful against the Kuomintang if the Japanese had not invaded China.<sup>26</sup>

The Communist victory in China had profound strategic consequences for the Communist insurgency in French-Indochina—yet another case of enabling external assistance. In the French-Indochina War, the insurgent Viet Minh were initially (1946-1949) isolated from outside assistance; they were short on military experience, poorly armed, and incapable of mounting the kind of major military operations that finally collapsed French political will in 1954. What turned the tide was the PLA victory in China and subsequent conversion of the Sino-Vietnamese border into a conduit of major Chinese military assistance in the form of professional advisors and training teams, large quantities of small arms and military gear, and, most important, modern artillery captured from Chiang Kai-shek's armies.<sup>27</sup> It was Chinese-supplied artillery that enabled the Viet Minh to crush the large French garrison at Dien Bien Phu, and it was the fall of Dien Bien Phu that produced the French political concessions at the 1954 Geneva Conference that ended French rule in Indochina and established Communist rule in what became North Vietnam.

In April 1950 the CCP's Central Military Commission ordered the establishment of a training school in China for Vietnamese officers and the creation of a Chinese Military Advisory Group that supplied Chinese military advisors to the Viet Minh army headquarters and downward to divisional and regimental levels. Over the next five months China also supplied the Viet Minh with thousands of rifles and machine guns, 300 bazookas, 150 mortars, 60 artillery pieces, and large quantities of munitions, medicines, communications gear, clothes, and food.<sup>28</sup> This assistance enabled the Viet Minh to clear French forces and outposts from Vietnam's border area with China, eliminating any obstacles to passage of further assistance from China. Chinese provinces bordering Vietnam were converted into training and logistical sanctuaries for the Viet Minh. During 1951 and 1952 China accelerated arms deliveries, and from 1952 to 1954 Chinese war material tonnage delivered monthly to the Viet Minh rose from 250 to 4,000 tons.<sup>29</sup> The Chinese effectively transformed the Viet Minh from elusive bands of guerrillas into a formidable conventional army. (The battle of Dien Bien Phu was a miniature Asian Verdun—a thoroughly conventional fight involving frontal assaults on fortified defensive positions.)

The massive aid in training and supplies [following the arrival of the PLA on the Vietnamese border] provided by the Chinese to the Viet Minh allowed the latter to entirely refit their army into a powerful force capable for the first time of engaging the French Expeditionary Corps in battle. With the onset of the rains in June 1950, the Viet Minh sent its battalions to Chinese training camps in the region of Wenshan, Long Tcheou, and Chingshi. The troops, without

arms, crossed the border on foot and once in China were transported by truck. Clothed in new uniforms, they followed an intensive training course for three months under Chinese instructors. The Viet Minh used these troops to form an entirely new military organization. From 2,000 men, the Viet Minh regiment rose to 3,578 men. At all echelons, these regiments were henceforth supported by heavy equipment, signals, and headquarters units. Some 20,000 men rotated through this training in 1950 alone.<sup>30</sup>

Chinese-supplied weapons and logistical support were crucial to the Communists' politically decisive victory at Dien Bien Phu. The French committed major errors in underestimating the Viet Minh's fighting power and in choosing to fight at a place so distant from the center of their military strength in northern Vietnam (the Red River Delta). But Dien Bien Phu, a remote place in the middle of mountainous jungles, was as much of a logistical challenge for the Viet Minh as it was for the French, and it was the logistical battle that determined the outcome of the siege. The PLA supplied Viet Minh forces surrounding Dien Bien Phu from Chinese supply bases 600 miles away, moving supplies via 600 Soviet 2.5-ton trucks and thousands of specifically configured bicycles, capable of carrying 400 pounds, pushed on foot by porters; together, these conveyances moved a total of almost 8,300 tons of weapons, ammunition, food, and other supplies to the Viet Minh during the siege.<sup>31</sup>

It was Chinese-supplied artillery, including 48 superb US-made 105-millimeter howitzers (captured from KMT forces in the late 1940s or from US forces in Korea),<sup>32</sup> that set up the French garrison for successful Viet Minh infantry assault and that defeated attempts to save the garrison through aerial resupply. Viet Minh artillery not only dominated French artillery and inflicted heavy losses on French infantry; it also incapacitated the Dien Bien Phu airstrip and exacted a heavy toll on the French air force supporting the garrison. Especially effective were the four battalions' worth of Soviet 37-millimeter anti-aircraft guns. Over time, those guns, together with other artillery, shot down or destroyed on the ground 62 French aircraft and damaged another 167—extremely heavy losses for an air force that at any given time never had more than 75 combat aircraft and 100 supply and reconnaissance aircraft to support Dien Bien Phu.<sup>33</sup>

**T**he Algerian War (1954-1962), the subject of much recent professional military interest, offers additional, if more complicated, evidence of the vitality of external assistance. At great cost, the insurgent *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN) won politically but lost militarily, and it lost militarily because of ruthless French counterinsurgency methods and French success in shutting off external material assistance. The French army had learned much from its defeat in Indochina, where it was never in a position to isolate the

Viet Minh from Chinese Communist assistance, and in Algeria it faced a smaller and much less politically formidable enemy than the Viet Minh. The peak strength of the FLN's military arm, the *Armee de Liberation Nationale* (ALN), never exceeded 40,000, including regulars, auxiliaries, and irregulars, and it is testimony to the FLN's limited political appeal within Algeria that five times that number of Algerians fought on the French side.<sup>34</sup> The FLN, which was governed by a fractious collective leadership, lacked not only a charismatic, Ho Chi Minh-like, single authoritative leader, but also any political program for the impoverished rural masses of the country. Unlike the Vietnamese Communists, who promised land as well as national liberation to the peasantry, the FLN promised national but no social liberation.

Even had the FLN enjoyed a larger popular support, which its heavy reliance on urban terrorism worked against, it confronted a massive French military presence and a skilled and barbarously effective counterinsurgent strategy. French forces in Algeria peaked in 1960 at 500,000, by which time there were only a few thousand ALN fighters still operating in the country (the bulk of the ALN was ensconced on the other side of the Tunisian border).<sup>35</sup> French forces always maintained at least a 10:1 numerical advantage over insurgents inside Algeria. Moreover, they made widespread use of torture, collective punishments, and forcible population relocations to extract intelligence, terrorize potential FLN supporters, and isolate vulnerable communities from FLN penetration. In 1957, in the face of an FLN terrorist campaign launched in Algiers, the French government transferred civil authority in Algiers to the military, which proceeded to crush the FLN in Algiers. In what became known as the Battle of Algiers, elite parachute units under the command of General Jacques Massu brutally broke an FLN-sponsored general strike (by threatening to destroy shops on the spot unless shop owners opened them) and then savagely rooted out the FLN infrastructure through mass arrests and torture.<sup>36</sup>

But what really killed any chance of an FLN military win was the French success in physically isolating the insurgency from external material assistance. During the first two years of the insurgency, the FLN suffered an acute shortage of weapons; it armed itself largely with what weapons it could capture from government security and police forces. This situation changed dramatically when France granted independence to neighboring Morocco and Tunisia in March 1956. From then on, those two countries became conduits of external Arab military assistance. Tunisia also became a sanctuary for ALN forces; indeed, as the war got worse for the FLN inside Algeria, Tunisia became the FLN's main operating base. It encamped on the Tunisian side of the Algerian border, armed and trained its forces there, and then launched raids into Algeria.

The French could have responded by invading western Tunisia, but chose instead to erect a barrier over 200 miles long from the Mediterranean southward to the empty Sahara, where border crossings could be easily detected. The barrier consisted of an eight-foot electric fence charged with 5,000 volts and flanked on both sides by 50-yard belts of ground seeded with anti-personnel mines and backed up by thick, World War I-style barbed wire entanglements. (A similar barrier was constructed along the Moroccan-Algerian border.) Completed in 1957 and known as the Morice Line (after French Defense Minister Andre Morice), the barrier was defended by 80,000 troops who constantly patrolled the line and had immediate on-call artillery to shell any attempted insurgent infiltration.<sup>37</sup> The border area was also cleared, through regroupment, of populations potentially sympathetic to the insurgency.

By the end of April 1958, an estimated 6,000 insurgents and 4,300 weapons had been snared in attempts to cross the line into Algeria, and the ALN made no more significant attempts to breach it.<sup>38</sup> From then on, ALN strength inside Algeria declined even as it expanded in Tunisia. Together with naval control of the Algerian coastline, the French had achieved in Algeria what they had failed to achieve—as would later the Americans—in Indochina: isolation of the insurgents from foreign military help. The effects of this isolation, coupled with stepped-up French counterinsurgency operations inside Algeria, were militarily decisive:

The French strategy had a devastating impact on the Algerian insurgents. Whole FLN and ALN formations were hunted down in their previous sanctuaries—the night and the mountains. The units of the nationalist movement became younger, less experienced, badly supplied, and often short-lived. Their morale, critical for a prolonged campaign, was deeply shattered. Local FLN commanders inside Algeria began to realize the magnitude of the damage inflicted by the French force, even before 1959. Algerian communities rejected the FLN's authority more vigorously than before, its forces' efforts to extract money failed more frequently, and the organization's overall revenues diminished accordingly. The exiled nationalist leadership was confronted by the hard-pressed leaders of the forces inside Algeria who bluntly questioned its motives and objectives as well as prospects of success in the struggle.<sup>39</sup>

But if France had won the military war, it lost the political war. By 1958 the war's mounting blood and treasure costs, and France's brutal tactics,<sup>40</sup> had alienated most of the French electorate and had propelled the decrepit French Fourth Republic into an ultimately fatal political crisis from which emerged a new republic and a Charles de Gaulle determined to rid France of its Algerian albatross. Algeria received its independence in 1962.

The strong correlation between external assistance and insurgent success does not diminish the insurgent requirement for superiority in such intangibles as will, strategy, organization, morale, and discipline. External assistance can favorably, even decisively, alter the material power ratio between an insurgency and an enemy government or foreign occupier. For either the insurgent side or the counterinsurgent side, material strength unguided by sound strategy and unsupported by sufficient willingness to fight and die is a recipe for almost certain defeat. But most insurgencies seek foreign help for good reason.

#### NOTES

1. Insurgency is here defined as rebellion against an indigenous government or foreign occupier.
2. Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics*, 27 (January 1975), 175-200.
3. Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).
4. Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).
5. The Vietnamese Communists suffered a higher percentage of military dead proportional to the general population than any other major belligerent in modern history. During their war with the United States, they incurred a total of 1.1 million military dead, representing 5.5 percent of a population of 20 million (16 million in North Vietnam and four million in Communist-controlled areas of South Vietnam). In contrast, the 58,000 American dead represented 0.02 percent of the US population (in 1965) of 194 million. The Communists' proportional losses tower over those of France in World War I (3.4 percent) and those of both sides combined in the American Civil War (1.9 percent). These percentages are based on numbers appearing in Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), p. 64; Jeffrey Record, *The Long War: Why We Lost in Vietnam* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998), pp. 36-37; John E. Mueller, "The Search for the 'Breaking Point' in Vietnam: The Statistics of a Deadly Quarrel," *International Studies Quarterly*, 24 (December 1980), pp. 507-11; and Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005), pp. 508-11.
6. See Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969," *China Quarterly*, No. 142 (June 1995), pp. 356-87; and Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), pp. 57-72.
7. Donald M. Snow and Dennis M. Drew, *From Lexington to Desert Storm and Beyond: War and Politics in the American Experience* (2d ed.; New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), p. 39.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
9. John D. Waghelstein, "Regulars, Irregulars, and Militia: The American Revolution," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 6 (Autumn 1995), 136.
10. Piers Mackesy, "What the British Learned," in *Arms and Independence: The Military Character of the American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1984), p. 184.
11. Neil Longley York, *Turning the World Upside Down: The War of Independence and the Problem of Empire* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), p. 118.
12. Larry H. Addington, *The Patterns of War Since the 18th Century* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), p. 15.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.
15. Anthony James Joes, *America and Guerrilla Warfare* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2000), p. 47.
16. Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (rev. ed.; New York: Free Press, 1994), pp. 163-68.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
18. Arreguin-Toft, p. 24.
19. See Norman Graebner, "Northern Diplomacy and European Neutrality," in *Why the North Won the Civil War*, ed. David Donald (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 55-78; and Howard M. Hensel, *The Sword of*

*the Union: Federal Objectives and Strategies During the American Civil War* (Montgomery, Ala.: USAF Air Command and Staff College, 1989), pp. 91-105.

20. Joes argues that the Confederate failure to turn to guerrilla warfare after Appomattox was attributable to: (1) extreme war exhaustion; (2) widespread misgivings within the South over secession; (3) popular resentment of conscription and forced requisitions; (4) bitter factionalism within the Confederacy's political leadership; (5) moral disquiet over the institution of slavery; and (6) Lincoln's "malice toward none" approach to the defeated South. See Anthony James Joes, "After Appomattox: The Guerrilla War That Never Was," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 8 (Spring 1997), 52-70.

21. The Boers were fighting in the South African interior and a hemisphere away from Germany, where sympathy existed for the Boers but not for intervention. Though the Boers had purchased excellent German rifles and some German and French field guns before the outbreak of hostilities, the British, by virtue of their command of the sea, quickly shut down access to further Boer arms purchases from abroad. The British eventually committed a total of 450,000 troops against the Boers, whose own numbers peaked at 87,000 (see Thomas Packenham, *The Boer War* [New York: Random House, 1980], p. 607). Against such odds, and subjected to ruthless British destruction of their farms, livestock, foodstuffs, and forage, the completely horse-mounted Boers capitulated.

22. At no time during the Malayan Emergency (as the British officially termed it) of 1948-1960 did the Malayan Races Liberation Army, the military arm of the insurgent Malayan Communist Party, have access to external military assistance. In his comparison of the Malayan Emergency to the Vietnam War, Sir Robert Thompson, who served as secretary of defense in Malaya from 1957 to 1961 and later headed the British Advisory Mission to South Vietnam, concluded that among the many counterinsurgent differences separating the two wars, "perhaps the greatest advantage of all was that Malaya was completely isolated from outside communist support" by virtue of "having only a 150-mile frontier with friendly Thailand in the north (with whom there was a border agreement under which Malayan police forces could operate across the border) and a 1,000-mile sea coast which could easily be patrolled." See Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 19.

23. Michael M. Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997), p. 110; and Sergei Gonchorov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), p. 14.

24. Sheng, pp. 110-11. For an extensive assessment of Soviet assistance to the CCP in Manchuria, see Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1987).

25. Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 259.

26. Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Dulles, Va.: Brassey's, 1990), p. 35.

27. Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 47-49.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

29. Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (London: Cassell, 2005), pp. 152, 154.

30. Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001), p. 200.

31. Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 451-52.

32. Windrow, p. 151; and Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1961), pp. 32, 322.

33. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, pp. 454-55; and Zhai, pp. 47-49.

34. Merom, p. 87; Alf Andrew Heggoy, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Algeria* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1972), p. 179; and John Ambler, *The French Army in Politics 1945-1962* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1966), p. 156.

35. Laqueur, p. 295; and Merom, pp. 100-01.

36. Alistaire Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), pp. 183-207.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 263-65.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

39. Merom, pp. 85-86; also see John Talbott, *The War Without a Name: France in Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), pp. 191-96.

40. Lou DiMarco, "Losing the Moral Compass: Torture and *Guerre Revolutionnaire* in the Algerian War," *Parameters*, 36 (Summer 2006), 63-76.