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French paramilitary actions during the Algerian War of Independence, 1956–1958

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ABSTRACT

The archives of the Secretariat General for African and Malagasy Affairs (1958–1974) include a variety of documents on French intelligence in a post-war era marked by decolonisation. Among them is a 6-page long table synthesising information on 38 paramilitary operations conducted or cancelled from January 1956 to March 1958, as well as nine additional operations that were ‘in preparation’ at the time. A detailed analysis of this document adds to our understanding of the French experience with covert action in the context of the Algerian War of Independence, and shows how the fog and friction of ‘secret war’ reinforce the subjective nature of reporting on and assessing covert action’s effectiveness.

Introduction: a window into French ‘action clandestine’

This article analyses a unique document (translated into English and made available in an Annex to the article) presenting 47 paramilitary actions that were planned or conducted by French operators between 1956 and 1958.¹ Analysing this document contributes to our understanding of the French experience with covert action (*action clandestine*)² in the context of the Algerian war of Independence (1954–1962). At a more conceptual level, the argument developed in this article emphasises the subjective nature of reporting on and assessing covert action’s effectiveness.

The context in which this document was produced is one of violence, crisis and transition. Communal and state violence characterised political life in the French territory of Algeria for decades before it escalated into a rebellion on 1 November 1954, when the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) coordinated a series of attacks on French installations and settlers.³ This rebellion turned into an armed conflict, characterised by guerrilla warfare and a brutal and extensive counterinsurgency campaign.⁴ This bloody colonial war pushed the institutions of the French Fourth Republic (1946–1958) to the brink. The conflict progressively blurred the boundaries between military and civilian authorities and spilled over to the metropole. During the ‘political crisis’ of May 1958, elements of the military and supporters of Charles de Gaulle decided to take action against the government, demanding – some would argue forcing – de Gaulle’s return to power.⁵ On 1 June 1958, de Gaulle was sworn in as *Président du Conseil* (Prime Minister). De Gaulle eventually decided to open negotiations with the FLN, which paved the way for the Evian Accords, and Algeria’s self-determination in 1962.

Following his return to power, de Gaulle nominated Jacques Foccart as technical adviser. Foccart would keep this position during the period of transition that led to the adoption of a new constitution in October 1958. He then became Presidential adviser for African and Malagasy Affairs for de Gaulle and remained in this post during George Pompidou’s presidency (1969–1974). Foccart’s papers have now been consolidated as a part of the archives of the General Secretariat for African

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and Malagasy Affairs at the *Archives Nationales* in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, leading to a series of seminal publications by French historians in the last decade.⁶

Several boxes in these archives show that Foccart took a keen interest in the structure and activities of French intelligence. This interest is normal to the extent that senior officials rely on intelligence to inform their policymaking effort. Following his own experience of *résistance* during the Second World War, Foccart maintained a more personal interest in intelligence affairs and clandestine activities throughout his life.⁷ As a result, some of the records available in the *Fonds Foccart* provide a unique – but by no means comprehensive – window into French intelligence activities in the context of decolonisation.⁸

While former senior government officials and researchers have discussed France's use of paramilitary operations in its 'secret war' to neutralise the FLN,⁹ archival records detailing their planning, conduct and outcomes remain extremely rare. A folder on 'intelligence reform', openly available in the *Fonds Foccart*, includes a file with a manuscript note on its cover reading 'SDECE' [*Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage*, France's foreign intelligence agency from 1946 to 1982] and 'Retour Mr Foccart' (Foccart's feedback). This file includes a dozen of documents presenting the targets and means of paramilitary operations.¹⁰ One of these documents stands out because of its broad scope and the operational details it provides.

This document takes the form of a table synthesising information on 38 operations conducted or cancelled from January 1956 to March 1958, as well as nine additional operations that were 'in preparation' at the time (bringing the total to 47 operations).¹¹ Though information on the authorship and date do not feature on this document, its format, content and location suggest this table was produced by the SDECE, or someone who had access to highly sensitive SDECE and military reports,¹² between March and August 1958. The document would have provided Foccart access to basic information on past paramilitary actions (a form of *post facto* oversight). This table provides a unique opportunity to shed light on the scope and the perceived effectiveness of French paramilitary actions in the context of the Algerian war and during the Suez crisis debacle. However, the document provides no information on a number of other aspects, not least the rationales and broader strategy these actions were supposed to serve.¹³

Range and patterns of operations

The table, entitled 'Operations conducted since the 1st of January 1956', is an inventory that offers general information on a series of French paramilitary actions.¹⁴ Two main types of paramilitary actions are presented: sabotage and homicide operations (ARMA and HOMO operations in French intelligence jargon). Several columns in the table describe the target, location, date, means, outcome and result of each operation, but the rationales explaining these operations, the organisation responsible for them, and the sources and methods used to identify targets are not provided. Altogether the table presents 29 sabotage operations (61% of the operations) and 17 homicide operations (36%).

One operation does not fall in these two categories, and involved selling arms to FLN intermediaries to arrest them in Lyon, France. This is the only action that took place in metropolitan France. Two other operations took place in Algeria, a French territory at the time. One led to the elimination of Mostefa Ben Boulaid (a Second World War veteran and founding member of the FLN) in March 1956, the other successfully started a fire on board of a German cargo that was moored in Algerian waters in January 1958. Together these three operations confirm that the services were conducting actions in France – whether in the metropole or French territories – and against French citizens like Ben Boulaid.¹⁵

The timeline of the operations mentioned in the summary table ranges from January 1956 to March 1958 and coincides with four Prime Ministerships, underlining the political instability that characterised the Fourth Republic.¹⁶ Under these conditions, maintaining comprehensive political

oversight of paramilitary actions must have been challenging. The frequency of the operations shows that they became more prominent in 1957 as the conflict intensified, most notably during the pivotal 'Battle of Algiers' (22 operations, compared to 12 operations in 1956).¹⁷ A majority of operations focused on targets located in North Africa (68% of the operations) with 18 operations in Morocco, six in Tunisia, three in Libya, three in Egypt and two in Algeria. The remaining operations took place in Europe (three in Germany, two in Italy, two in Spain, two in Switzerland, one in Belgium, and one in France) and the Middle East (one in Syria, one in Turkey) as well as the Mediterranean sea. We can infer from these locations that these paramilitary actions were mostly planned or used to destroy and eliminate targets beyond Algeria, in countries where material and political support to the FLN and its armed wing (the *Armée de Libération Nationale* or ALN) originated or transited. In Algeria, the military was overtly seeking to exert its control, beyond Algeria paramilitary actions targeted the FLN's networks in more unacknowledged ways.

The geographic spread of these paramilitary actions can also be linked to the internationalisation of the Algerian war. On the one side, the FLN relied on international partners to secure logistical support and garner political legitimacy.¹⁸ On the other side, French control over Algeria forced some elements of the FLN to retreat and seek support abroad.¹⁹ The French authorities internationalised the conflict when targeting the FLN's network through a series of paramilitary operations that violated the sovereignty of over a dozen countries. All of the countries in which the paramilitary actions were conducted were less powerful than France and some of them were partially dependent on France. One hypothesis is that France's geopolitical superiority over these countries decreased the political and diplomatic risks posed by the actions.²⁰ By contrast, decision-makers seemed to show more caution, cancelling and avoiding operations in or against targets that could be associated with relatively powerful or influential (non-aligned) countries such as Yugoslavia, Egypt and Syria.

The summary table also provides useful information on the type of objectives France considered targeting. Sabotage operations targeted three main types of infrastructure related to the FLN: arms dealer's boats, cargo or tankers and vehicles (15 cases), training camps and supporters' premises (twelve cases) and radio stations (two cases, both cancelled by governmental order).²¹ The first operation presented on the table is a sabotage operation taking the form of three explosions in Tétouan, which was part of a Spanish protectorate at the time. The entry in the table notes that these explosions took place during a visit from French resident-general in Morocco André Dubois to Spanish High Commissioner in Morocco General Garcia Valino on 10 January 1956. However, news media coverage of their meeting between does not mention any explosion.²² Presumably, the explosions targeted FLN infrastructure in Tétouan shortly before, during or after this meeting to strengthen the French position and rally Spanish support.

The targets of homicide operations can broadly be divided into two groups: individuals who were directly involved in or supported FLN operations on the ground, and political figures. Supporters of the FLN who were targeted included arms traffickers Driss Ben Said, Ahmed Kamal, Marcel Léopold [LEOPOLD in the table], Hans Peter Rullmann [RUHLMAN] and Otto Schlüter [SCHLUTTER].²³ These HOMO operations directly supported the French strategy to disrupt FLN supply networks. Two individuals featuring on the list of objectives could not be identified Bou Zidia (who was injured by a homicide operation in August 1957) and Abdel Kafi Jazouli (who is mentioned as the target of an operation in preparation). The difficulty in finding more information about these two targets suggests they were involved in operational support rather than more politically visible activities. The research did identify two other, hitherto unknown 'targets'. In April 1957, a parcel bomb killed pharmacist Rahal Saad in Meknes, Morocco. A newswire published on 22 April 1957 notes that Saad had stopped paying his 'contribution' to FLN agents.²⁴ This dispatch is probably a piece of disinformation authored by French propagandists to maintain plausible deniability and turn the local population against the FLN. This would suggest that French authorities coordinated some of their paramilitary and information operations to reinforce their deniability and maximise their psychological impact. An article published in 2006 in an Algerian magazine mentions Saad as a member of a group of health professionals who offered their services to the FLN and its *Armée de Libération*

Nationale.²⁵ Though the author of this article does not cite his sources, this type of support would explain why Saad was targeted and eliminated.

These assassinations fit a broader pattern according to which French authorities targeted individuals ‘participating to the rebellion’, and sometimes also their family.²⁶ This pattern explains the elimination of Dr. Tonnelot the head physician of a hospital that provided medical care to Algerian rebels.²⁷ The level of involvement of Saad and Tonnelot in FLN activities remains unclear. Did they provide basic health support to the ‘rebels’? If so, their targeting would seem disproportionate. Or did they provide access to materials that enabled violent action? Regardless of their role in the insurgency, the table shows that the operations targeting them hit their families, which raises doubt about their proportionality. From this perspective, these two operations reflect the indiscriminate manner in which French authorities sought to exert control on the FLN, its supporters and the local population. This fits a broader pattern of colonial violence which antagonized locals, feeding a sense of injustice and revolt that was echoed in FLN propaganda and damaged France’s broader counter-insurgency effort.²⁸

Cancellations and restraint

The last two columns of the table provide basic information on the outcome and result of each operation. While 38 operations were planned from January 1956 to March 1958, ‘superior’ and ‘governmental orders’ cancelled eight of them. If this distinction is intentional, political appointees would have given ‘governmental orders’ (cancelling four operations), while commanding officers provided ‘superior orders’ (cancelling four other operations). These cancellations confirm the existence of a chain of command – operators were not going rogue. They submitted at least some of their plans for approval to relevant decision-makers at the military and possibly at the political level.²⁹ Nine operations were still ‘in preparation’ when the table was drafted and presented as ‘waiting for the order to execute’. This language reinforces the sense that superiors authorised these operations.

The operations seeking to eliminate high-level political figures – FLN leader Ahmed Ben Bella (operation planned for July 1956), Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (planned for December 1956 a few months after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and France’s failed intervention in Egypt), and Moroccan politician and nationalist Allal al Fassi (planned for April 1957)³⁰ – were all cancelled by governmental or superior order. The operation targeting former National Assembly representative and Mauritanian politician Horma Ould Babana remained ‘in preparation’ and ‘waiting for the order to execute’ at the time the table was written, but was presumably never authorised or failed since Babana died years later in 1980.³¹ These cancellations suggest that French decision-makers reviewed and ruled out operations that proposed to eliminate well-known political figures supporting Algerian independence, possibly because of the international wave of indignation that would have followed and the escalation eliminating such figures would have caused both in the context of the Algerian war and the Cold War. The international situation would thus be a crucial factor in explaining and limiting recourse to paramilitary actions. The caution displayed in these politically-sensitive cases demonstrates that decisions followed political logics, and contrasts with the more indiscriminate targeting of FLN support networks.

The restraint displayed toward high-level political figures did not extend to those who were more directly involved in operations against the French authorities. Mosteffa Ben Boulaïd [*Ben Moulaid* in the document] was a veteran of the Second World War and a founding member of the Committee of Twenty-Two which called for armed struggle and sought to coordinate the Algerian insurrection from June 1954 onwards. As such he was a political figure, but he was also directly involved in coordinating the fight against French forces in the Aurès province and presented as ‘an important rebel chief’ in the table. Arrested and sentenced to death for his activities, he escaped from prison in November 1955.³² The table confirms that a French operation planted a bomb in a radio that killed Ben Boulaïd a few months later. By contrast, Ahmed Ben Bella was also a member of the

revolutionary committee, but he played a more diplomatic role as an FLN delegate in Cairo. This external role, and the support he was offered by his Egyptian hosts can explain why he was spared.³³ Yet French restraint did not prevent the military, acting without government approval, from hijacking a plane transporting Ben Bella and four other FLN leaders on 22 October 1956.³⁴ This episode contrasts with the sense of control that is conveyed by the 'orders' mentioned in the summary table.

Five ARMA operations were 'cancelled by superior order'. Two of these proposed to destroy *Radio Le Caire* (in August 1956) and *Radio Damas* (September 1956), which played a central role in the dissemination of anti-colonial messages to local populations throughout the region.³⁵ A 'governmental order' also cancelled a commando operations against an FLN training camp located in Libya in August 1956, while a 'superior order' cancelled the remote destruction of Tunisian barracks that were going to be occupied by the FLN in April 1957. Another 'superior order' cancelled an operation targeting a Yugoslav cargo in December 1957. Though the specific circumstances of these cancellations remain unclear, they highlight discrepancies between the plans developed by operators and the limits imposed by their superiors. One hypothesis is that some of these cancellations reflect political limits on the conduct of paramilitary operations and concern with the ability to plausibly conceal, deny or – should deniability become impossible – explain French responsibility to foreign governments and the public.³⁶ Destroying facilities in pro-Western Libya and military barracks in newly-independent Tunisia risked aggravating the conflict. Sinking a Yugoslav cargo and bombing objectives located in countries that displayed anti-Western tendencies (Syria) or received support from the Soviet Union (Egypt) would have posed a significant risk of escalation in the broader context of the Cold War.³⁷ However sinking an Egyptian cargo and a tanker moored in Turkish and Belgian waters was deemed less problematic. These variations suggest decision-makers followed a certain logic that ruled out paramilitary actions they deemed too politically risky.

Outcomes, results and interpretations of 'success'

Reporting on the results of these paramilitary actions raises conceptual questions about how to interpret their effectiveness. The table of operations presents basic information about the outcomes and results of each operation, which makes it possible to assess their success rate in a positivist manner. Out of the 30 operations that were conducted, twelve are presented as a 'complete success' (40%) and seven as a 'partial success' (23%). Overall, the rate of 'complete success' is higher for sabotage operations (42%) than for homicide operations (33%, three out of the nine HOMO operations that were not cancelled by superior order). Taking into account partial successes, homicide operations become more successful (66%) than sabotage operations (52%). There is no noticeable trend in the success rate of different types of sabotage operations. Those targeting vehicles such as cargoes and tankers (four complete successes and one partial success) were as 'successful' as those targeting premises (four complete successes and one partial success).

The determination of 'success' reveals the subjective nature of evaluating the results paramilitary actions.³⁸ The document does not provide definitions for each type of result but information in the last two columns are sufficient to draw inferences. The yardstick used to measure success is strictly operational. Operations that are deemed to be a 'complete success' destroyed or eliminated their target. The way in which the author of the table determined 'partial success' is more debatable. In two homicide operations deemed to be 'partial' successes, the operators killed the mother of the target (Otto Schlüter) and hit the family of Dr. Tonnelot, who had provided support to FLN sympathizers. Two other partial successes involve homicide operations that injured but did not eliminate their target. Why were these actions presented as 'partial successes' if their target was not eliminated? One hypothesis is that these operations successfully disrupted some of the FLN support networks and publicly signalled that FLN supporters risked their lives (a form of dissuasion). In another case, a sabotage operation supposed to 'attack all vehicles heading for Tunisia' is presented as a 'partial success' but its outcome reads 'complete success on the technical plan but no vehicle [was] encountered on the road'. The author displays a form of bias when presenting paramilitary

actions that did not achieve their stated objective as qualified successes. These 'partial' successes focus on the ability to operate more than the effects of each operation.

The assessment of results is equally problematic at the other end of the spectrum, where a number of operations failed or were cancelled due to some sort of failure. The table only identifies four cases of 'failure' (two targeting individuals, one targeting FLN premises and one targeting a cargo). However a number of operations marked as 'cancelled', especially those 'cancelled following security concern' (three operations) and 'due to the absence of an objective' (six operations) can be considered respectively as operational and intelligence failures. The majority of these 'cancellations' (seven of them) concerned ARMA operations on moving targets such as boats, cargos, tankers and vehicles. Two other cancellations targeted Ahmed Kamal who had left his hotel in Madrid before the operators arrived, and was too closely surrounded by other persons when an operator was supposed to shoot him a few months later.

These failures and cancellations reveal the fog of secret war, the uncertain and complex nature of paramilitary actions. In several instances, the author of the table adopts a narrow definition of failure that minimises the operators' responsibility. Four failures reflect the role of friction, specifically the ways in which the means of action and their environment can hamper the conduct of paramilitary operations. In one case, an operator supposed to plant a timed explosive charge in FLN premises located in Tunis was arrested and interrogated, but he maintained his cover and was eventually released. In another case, an operator failed to eliminate arms dealer Marcel Léopold when his weapon misfired. A repeat operation assassinated Léopold one month later.³⁹ Another operation aiming to eliminate Omar Ouamrane – an FLN leader in charge of weapons procurement and supplies⁴⁰ – failed when the explosive charge detonated prematurely, killing the operators. In March 1958, a SDECE frogman successfully placed an explosive charge on an Egyptian cargo in Antwerp harbour. But the 'charge was probably lost following a storm' and never damaged the cargo. The extent to which paramilitary operations rely on accurate and timely intelligence is apparent in the six cases in which the absence of a target (mostly boats and in one case an FLN supporter) led to cancellation. Finally, three operations were cancelled following a 'security concern'. In two of these three operations, the security breach could be imputed to the operators' inability to maintain their cover. When preparing to place an underwater charge on an arms dealer's ship, a team of operators was identified by the traffickers and the mission had to be cancelled. In another case, an operator who was supposed to place an explosive on an FLN vehicle was arrested by the police in Tunis. While some of these failures can be linked to bad luck, the majority of them can also be associated with insufficient or inadequate intelligence, and poor planning and tradecraft. Some of these failures were relatively minor, leading to loss of time and resources. Others were more significant because they revealed the hand of the operators – though not necessarily that of the French services – to their target.

Conclusion

The document analysed in this article provides a window into France's use and the limits of paramilitary actions in the context of the Algerian war. The use of sabotage and assassination operations fits a broader pattern of colonial violence and reinforces the reputation of ruthlessness sometimes associated with French intelligence.⁴¹

Though the table of operations does not offer specific information on the rationales behind each operation, some inferences can be drawn from its analysis. The level of operational involvement of the target seems to have influenced the approval of paramilitary actions. Presumably, there was a degree of opportunism too, the services proposed operations when targets could be identified and located in advance. Senior officials reviewed and cancelled those that were too politically sensitive and risked internationalising the conflict further, such as the assassination of President Nasser. But they approved dozen of operations targeting weapons traffickers, rebel chiefs and FLN supply networks in various sovereign, and sometimes friendly, countries. So long

as the services limited their ambitions and targets to arms dealers, FLN operatives and infrastructure – whose elimination had mostly tactical implications – decision-makers did not cancel their actions.

The analysis also highlighted how the fog and friction of secret war create room for different interpretations of ‘success’ and ‘failure’. This subjectivity is visible at the operational level displayed in the table, and more generally when the assessment moves from short-term tactical objectives to long-term strategic aims. While several paramilitary actions analysed in this article succeeded in disrupting FLN support infrastructure and networks they also contributed to France’s ruthless reputation. What looked like paramilitary successes to French decision-makers would systematically be interpreted as a form of colonial violence by its adversaries, thus raising questions about the strategic utility of paramilitary operations.

Operations conducted since the 1st of January 1956⁴²

Target	Location	Date	Means	Outcome	Result (see key)
Trigger explosions during visit from Mr. DUBOIS at Gal VALINO	Tetouan	Jan. 56	Placement explosives	Three explosions	R 1
Target an important rebel chief	Algeria	March 56	Booby-trapped radio set	Destruction of Ben Moulaid Mostaffa	R 1
BEN BELLA	Cairo	Jul. 56	Attack with a suppressed firearm in the street	Operation cancelled at the last moment by governmental order	A 1
Arms dealer boat	Trieste	August 56	Underwater charge placed by a frogman. Insertion from land	Objective not encountered	A 3
Arms dealer boat	Tanger	August 56	Underwater charge placed by a frogman. Insertion from boat	The boat was identified by the traffickers on its way out, mission cancelled	A 2
FLN training camp	Libya	August 56	Transport of a commando by submarine	Operation cancelled at the last moment by governmental order	A 1
Radio LE CAIRE	Cairo	August 56	Placement of an explosive by an operator	Operation cancelled by governmental order	A 1
Radio DAMAS	Damas	Sep. 56			A 1
Attack the premises of Otto SCHLUTTER	Hamburg	Sep. 56		The premises are significantly damaged. Schlutter is harmed, one of his friends is killed.	R 1
KAMAL	Madrid	Nov. 56	Attack the objective with a suppressed firearm in his hotel room	The target had left the hotel for an unknown destination	A 3
Arms dealer boat	Trieste	Dec. 56	Underwater charge set up by a frogman. Insertion from land	No objective encountered	A 3
NASSER	Port Said	Dec. 56	Remotely controlled explosion at the arrival of the objective	Operation cancelled by superior order	A 1
F.L.N. vehicles	Tunis	Feb. 57	Placement of an explosive on the vehicle	The operator is arrested by the police	A 2
Egyptian oil tanker	Istanbul	Feb. 57	Charge placed by a frogman	Objective has left despite operators placing explosive within 24 h of receiving intelligence	A 3
F.L.N. premises	Tunis	March 57	Placement of a timed explosive charge	One of the operators was arrested and interrogated at length by the police, but having maintained his foreign cover, was released	E

(Continued)

Target	Location	Date	Means	Outcome	Result (see key)
F.L.N. premises	Tunis	March 57		Premise is destroyed – 3 FLN killed	R 1
Ahmed KAMAL	Madrid	March 57	Attacking the objective in his villa (suppressed firearm)	Presence of 3 persons close to the objective at the time of the attack prevented the operator from shooting	A 2
Danish cargo	Tunis	March 57	Underwater charge placed by a frogman.	The objective has not [moored] for a night in Tunis	A 3
ALLAL EL FASSI	Tanger	April 57	Triggering remotely controlled charge at the moment the objective is passing	Operation cancelled by superior order	A 1
Rahal Saad	Meknes	April 57	Sending a parcel bomb	Destruction of the objective and of his family	R 1
Destruction of Tunisian barracks when they will be occupied by FLN	Tunisia	April 57	Preparing barracks occupied by French troops for remote destruction months later at a large distance	Operation cancelled by superior order	A 1
Arms sale to FLN to arrest buyers	Lyon	April 57	Establishing contact with intermediaries and delivering weapons	Arrest of interested parties. Recovery of the arms and money resulting from sale	R 1
Arms dealers boat	Tanger	May 57	Placement of an underwater charge by frogmen transported by boat	Destruction of Barra and Bruja Roja	R 1
Otto SCHLUTER	Hamburg	June 57	Placement of a charge under his car	The mother of the objective is killed	R 2
TONNELOT	Oujda	June 57	Placement of a charge on the terrace of the objective	His family is hit	R 2
LEOPOLD	Geneva	August 57	Attacking the objective in the staircase of his apartment block	The weapon fails to fire at time of use	E
Attack all vehicles heading for Tunisia	Lybia	August 57	Bling parachuting of a team preparing approach lights. Landing of a plane bringing a commando with autochthons – Take off after mission	Complete success on the technical plan but no vehicle encountered on the road	R 2
BOU ZIDIA	Rabat	August 57	Attack in the street at night, suppressed firearm	Objective severely injured	R 2
Arms dealers boat	Tripoli	Sept. 57	Placement of an underwater charge by frogmen transported by boat	Vittoria S. sunk in Sfax by the charge placed in Tripoli	R 1
LEOPOLD	Geneva	Sept. 57	Attack of the objective in the staircase of his apartment block	Objective killed	R.1
OUAMRANE	Tunis	Sept. 57	Attack using a remotely controlled charge	<i>The operators are killed by a premature detonation of the charge</i> [manuscript note]	E
Finnish cargo	Atlantic	Oct. 57	Placement of a charge by frogman	Objective sank in high seas	R 1
FLN explosives depot	Nador	Dec. 57	Placement of a timed device by a commando transported by a fishing vessel	Objective entirely destroyed	R 1
Yugoslav cargo	Morocco	Dec. 57	Placement of a charge by frogman	Operation cancelled by superior order	A 1
Yugoslav cargo	Morocco	Jan. 58	Placement of a charge by frogman	Cargo inspected by French Navy	A 3
German cargo	Algeria	Jan. 58	Placement in the hold of an incendiary to create a minor incident that can serve as a warning	Incident signalled to the Llyod	R 1

(Continued)

Target	Location	Date	Means	Outcome	Result (see key)
FLN training camp	Oriental Morocco	Feb. 58	Low-altitude bombing by night by an unidentifiable plane, even by French military authorities	Objective partially hit	R 2
Egyptian cargo	Antwerp	March 58	Placement of a charge by frogman	Placement is successful but the explosion did not take place because of an unknown cause, charge probably lost following a storm	E
Destruction of a print shop serving the FLN	Fedala		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
Burning down a garage used by the FLN	Fez		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
Destruction of a FLN grenade factory	Nador		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
Destruction of a FLN radio training centre	Nador		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
JAZOULI Abdel Kafi	Meknes		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
ORMA OULD BABANA	Rabat		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
RUHLMAN	HAMBURG		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
DRISS BEN SAID	Rabat		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P
Arms dealers boat	Mediterranean		In preparation	Waiting for the order to execute	P

SUMMARY of the MISSIONS

30 operations attempted:

- 17 cancelled
- 8 by superior order
- 3 following security concern
- 6 by absence of the objective
- 17 accomplished
- 12 complete success
- 5 partial success
- 4 failures
- 3 following technical incident
- 1 by arrest of the operator, but left no proof of the origin of the action

9 operations in preparation

KEY

R 1 = Complete success

R 2 = Partial success

A 1 = Cancelled by superior order

A 2 = Cancelled following security concern

A 3 = Cancelled due to absence of the objective

E = Failure

P = In preparation

Notes

1. Archives Nationales (AN), Pierrefitte-Sur-Seine, AG/5(F)/318: Opérations réalisées depuis le 1^{er} janvier 1956. A copy of the original document has been made available through the Wilson Centre Digital Archives, at <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/240232>>.
2. In a more contemporary context, French practitioners do not use a literal translation of 'covert action' (*action sous couverture*), but talk about *action clandestine*. See Olivier Chopin and Benjamin Oudet, *Renseignement et Sécurité* (Paris: Armand Colin 2019), 137–40; Alain de Marolles, 'La Tradition Française de l'Action Invisible', in Pierre Lacoste (ed.), *Le Renseignement à la française* (Paris: Economica 1999), 337–8.
3. On the Algerian war of Independence see: Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War*; Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*.
4. On violence, see: Branche, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie*; Thomas, *Fight or Flight*, 289–92. On the French doctrine of revolutionary war see Roger Trinquier (translated by Daniel Lee), *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London: Pall Mall Press 1964); John Shy and Thomas W. Collier, 'Revolutionary War' in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1986); Cradock and Smith, "No Fixed Values".
5. Anderson, *La guerre civile en France*; Thomas, Le Béguec and Lachaise, *Mai 1958*.
6. Bat, 'Les "archives Foccart" aux Archives nationales', 189–201; Bat, *Le Syndrome Foccart*, 49–51. A guide is available online, see: Archives Nationales [thereafter AN], Archives du secrétariat général des Affaires africaines et malgaches et de la Communauté (1958-1974), at <https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/consultationIR.action?ird=FRAN_IR_053799> (accessed 20 May 2021). For key research based on these archives see: Bat, *La fabrique des barbouzes*; Bat, Forcade and Mary, *Jacques Foccart: archives ouvertes*; Bat, *Les réseaux Foccart*.
7. Turpin, *Jacques Foccart*.
8. A significant portion of 'Foccart's papers' remains classified, and the role of intelligence in French decolonisation cannot and should not be reduced to Foccart's papers and perspective.
9. Gaillard, *Foccart Parle*, tome I; Melnik, *La mort était leur mission*; von Bülow, *West Germany*; von Bülow, 'Myth or reality?'
10. Most of them are dated between late July and September 1958. AN, AG/5(F)/318: 'Note à l'attention de M. Foccart. Les Services Secrets (Renseignements – Contre-espionnage – Action clandestine)', 3 July 1958; 'Fiche relative à l'exécution d'une mission', 28 July 1958.
11. AN, AG/5(F)/318: Opérations réalisées depuis le 1^{er} janvier 1956.
12. The 6-page document bears no security marking and is freely accessible at the *Archives Nationales* and can therefore be reproduced without authorisation as long as there is no commercial purpose.
13. For more on this strategy see von Bülow, *West Germany*, 53; Shy and Collier, 'Revolutionary War'; Cradock and Smith, "No Fixed Values".
14. The list of operations mentioned in the table might not be exhaustive. See for example discussion of the sabotage of the cargoes *Emma* and *Typhoon*, and the assassination of Georges Geiser in Faligot, Guisnel and Kauffer, *Histoire politique des services secrets français*, 220; Krop, *Les secrets de l'espionnage français*, 479–88.
15. The 'Lamine Guèye' law recognized the French citizenship of individuals from French Overseas Territories. National Assembly, loi tendant à proclamer citoyens tous les ressortissants des territoires d'outre-mer, law n° 46-940, 7 May 1946.
16. Those of Edgar Faure (1955-56), Guy Mollet (1956-57), Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury (1957), and Félix Gaillard (1957-58). For some context on the failure of the Fourth Republic see Knapp and Wright, *The government and politics of France*, 50-1.
17. On this intensification, see: Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War*, 148-225; Cradock and Smith, "No Fixed Values", 80–83; Tenenbaum, *Partisans et Centurions*, 240–43.
18. Evans, *Algeria*, 116.
19. Cradock and Smith, "No Fixed Values", 96.
20. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 8; von Bülow, *West Germany*, 30–5.
21. One target remains unclear and could not be categorised.
22. 'La rencontre Dubois-Valino', *Le Monde*, 12 January 1956; Marchat, 'La France et l'Espagne au Maroc pendant la période du Protectorat (1912-1956)', 104–5.
23. On Kamal and Schlüter see von Bülow, *West Germany*, 135, 139. A SDECE document in the *Fonds Foccart* identifies Hans Peter Rullmann and Driss Ben Said as 'traffickers'. See: AN, AG/5(F)/318: 'Fiche concernant les objectifs "HOMO"', 5 August 1958, 1.
24. Agence France Presse, 'Un pharmacien algérien (qui ne payait plus le F.L.N.) tué par une bombe', *Le Monde*, 22 April 1957.
25. Djamel Belbey, 'L'apport de la famille de la santé à la révolution. Les blouses blanches au cœur du combat', *Mémoria*, 6 October 2012, 72. The author does not cite his sources.
26. AN, AG/5(F)/318: 'Fiche: rôle du S.D.E.C.E. en ALGERIE', 1.
27. Essemli, 'Le Maroc entre la France et l'Algérie (1956-1962)', 88 (note 53).

28. On the long history and multiple forms of French colonial violence in Algeria see: Ageron, *Genèse de l'Algérie algérienne*, 577–88; Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*, 5–10; Gallois, *A History of Violence in the Early Algerian Colony*.
29. Raymond Muelle describes both a bottom-up and a top-down a similar logic of actions executed at the request of the authorities, in a chapter covering the period 1958–1960. See: Muelle, 'Le 11e choc pendant la guerre d'Algérie', 154–55. Journalists Roger Faligot, Jean Guisnel and Rémi Kauffer claim that Guy Mollet, who served as Prime Minister from February 1956 to June 1957, authorized sabotage and homicide operations from September 1956 onwards, but they do not cite their source. See Faligot, Guisnel, and Kauffer, *Histoire politique des services secrets français*, 220.
30. 'Allal el-Fassoï, 82, Dead; Top Moroccan Nationalist', *New York Times*, 14 May 1974, 40.
31. Presumably not because of a SDECE operation. See Assemblée Nationale, 'Babana Horma', at <http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/%28num_dept%29/3860>.
32. Evans, *Algeria*, 119, 126; Morizot, "Ben Boulaïd, Mosteffa".
33. von Bülow, *West Germany*, 36–39.
34. Evans, *Algeria*, 186–87.
35. Ageron, *Genèse de l'Algérie algérienne*, 577–88; Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 28.
36. These concerns would reflect a 'state model' of plausible deniability discussed in Poznansky, "Revisiting plausible deniability", 3–5.
37. For a similar point see Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 370.
38. This argument is further developed in: Cormac, Walton and Van Puyvelde, 'What constitutes successful covert action?'
39. The documentary evidence corroborates suggestions made in von Bülow, *West Germany*, 308; Faligot, Guisnel, and Kauffer, *Histoire politique des services secrets français*, 220.
40. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 183.
41. Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 370.
42. AN, AG/5(F)/318: Opérations réalisées depuis le 1^{er} janvier 1956. Translation by the author. The translation follows a literal approach, using the same spelling, wording and grammar than in the original document whenever possible.

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