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Published version

THORAL, Marie-Cecile (2015). French Colonial Counter-Insurgency: General Bugeaud and the Conquest of Algeria, 1840-47. *British Journal of Military History*, 1 (2), 8-27.

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French Colonial Counter-Insurgency: General Bugeaud and the Conquest of Algeria, 1840-47

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the practice of counter-insurgency carried out by the French under General Bugeaud during the war of conquest of Algeria. By analysing different dimensions of colonial counter-insurgency in Algeria, it will demonstrate that, far from being an incomplete form of counter-insurgency characterised by irregular warfare tactics and racialised brutality of a 'population-centric approach', French counter-insurgency in Algeria under Bugeaud represented the very beginning of a more modern, complete and inclusive form of counter-insurgency that combined force and conciliation.

Introduction

This article will investigate the method of colonial warfare used by the French during the war of conquest of Algeria, with a focus on the method used under General Bugeaud from 1840 until the surrender of Abd el Kader in 1847. It will argue against the consensus view of a sharp contrast between Bugeaud's purely coercive answer to colonial insurgency and Lyautey's more inclusive, progressive and more modern theory and practice of counter-insurgency with its emphasis on the use of economic development to try and win over the local population.

On 14 June 1830, following a plan of invasion of Algeria first conceived by Napoleon in 1808, a French expeditionary force of about 37,000 men landed 20 miles west of Algiers, at Siddi Ferruch and defeated the 43,000 men of the Dey of Algiers' army two days later. After a brief and successful campaign ending with the surrender of the Dey, the ruler of the regency of Algiers which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, the expeditionary force entered Algiers on 5 July. It then proceeded with the military conquest and agricultural colonisation of the northern coastal area of Algeria (the 'Tell'). However, defeating the opposition of the Algerian people proved much less straightforward. This was only the start of a long, protracted, desultory and divisive war of conquest which lasted from 1830 to 1847. The French faced, as early as 1832, a concerted opposition in the west of Algeria, a holy war or *jihad* led by the son of the head of an Islamic brotherhood, 25 years old Emir (Prince) Abd el Kader, who called himself 'the Commander of the Faithful'.

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He quickly gained the support of numerous Arab tribes in western and central Algeria, formed a regular army of 10,000 to 20,000 men and started harassing the French army. After his defeat in one of the only conventional battles of the whole war, the battle of Sikkak on 6 June 1836 causing 1,000 Arab casualties and 50 French casualties, he resorted to exclusive 'guerrilla style' fighting: hit and run tactics, cutting transport supplies, and harassing the rear of the army and stranded soldiers.

The first strategy adopted by the French in the face of this military opposition was one of containment and compromise: on 30 May 1837, the treaty of Tafna recognised Abd el Kader's authority over the western Oran area and ceded him the control of a vast territory south of Algiers, deemed less useful than the coastal areas. However, this policy of limited occupation ultimately failed because it was widely criticised by public opinion in France, who saw it as ineffective (not allowing for large-scale European settlement) and yet extremely expensive (350 million French Francs for the first decade of occupation). After the launching by Abd el Kader, in 1839, of a series of raids on French settlers in the Mitidja plain, killing hundreds of unprotected civilians, the French shifted to 'absolute war' or 'total control' with the appointment of a new governor-general, General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, in December 1840.

A few decades after the French army confronted armed civilians and dispersed guerrilla bands during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (in the Vendée in 1794-5, and then in the south of Italy and in Spain under Napoleon) the war in Algeria was one of the first full-scale experiences of a coherent, organised colonial counter-insurgency supported by foreign aid to the insurgents, in this case provided by the Sultan of Morocco until 1844. It also started a process of theoretical thinking about the nature of colonial warfare and counter-insurgency tactics which informed several 19th century theories of imperial policing and colonial warfare. In one of the most famous and influential 19th century works on colonial warfare, *Small Wars*, Charles Callwell asserted that Bugeaud's tactics should be seen as a model of efficiency in counter-insurgency: 'The French operations in Algeria during many years of war will ever serve to illustrate what is the right way and the what is the wrong way of dealing with an antagonist who adopts the guerrilla mode of war'.¹

In a chapter on French colonial warfare published in 1943, Jean Gottman presented Bugeaud as the founder of the French 'colonial school' of warfare, pointing to his influence on his successors in Algeria, Indochina and Morocco, Galliéni and Lyautey.²

¹ Charles Callwell, *Small wars. A tactical textbook for imperial soldiers*, (1896, repr., London: Greenhill, 1990), p.128.

² Jean Gottmann, 'Bugeaud, Galliéni, Lyautey: the development of French colonial warfare', in Edward Earle ed., *Makers of modern strategy: military thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), pp. 234-259, (p. 247).

More recently, Douglas Porch questioned the existence of such a French 'colonial school' but agreed upon the significance and influence of Bugeaud's theory and practice of colonial warfare.³ In a recent book on Gallieni and Lyautey, Michael Finch qualified this view by suggesting that the only distinctive and influential feature of Bugeaud's theory and practice lay in 'a tendency towards brutal practice'.⁴

The method of colonial counter-insurgency devised in the second half of the 19th century by Gallieni and Lyautey, with its emphasis on political action and economic development (the 'oil spot' tactic), has indeed been presented by most historians as the very beginning of modern counter-insurgency and as a sharp departure from the violent practice of Bugeaud. Douglas Porch qualified this commonly accepted dichotomy between a dark and a bright side of counter-insurgency by emphasising the influence of Bugeaud on his successors and by indicating that Gallieni and Lyautey did not completely rule out the use of force either, but he agreed nonetheless with the widespread presentation of the distinctiveness of Bugeaud's strategy and tactics being rooted in the exclusive use of force and violence.⁵ This was echoed by many other historians such as William Gallois, who reduced the whole strategy and practice of French counter-insurgency in early colonial Algeria to 'a widespread system of violence'. Similarly, Sylvie Thénault, Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, Jacques Frémeaux, Kamel Kateb and Benjamin Brower, while acknowledging that trade between France and Algeria had drawn Algerians into a market-based economy, agreed that: 'There was nothing progressive [about Bugeaud's thinking] resulting in a great deal of violence – death, social and cultural destruction – that typified the experience of French colonialism in Algeria'.⁶ Historians of 20th century Algeria such as Martin Evans have held similar opinions.⁷

A correction to this commonly accepted view was provided first by Barnett Singer and John Langdon, and more recently by Thomas Rid. Barnett Singer and John Langdon, while emphasising the prevalence of violence in Bugeaud's practice of

³ Douglas Porch, 'Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: the development of French colonial warfare', in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of modern strategy: from Machiavelli to the nuclear age*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.377.

⁴ Michael Finch, *A progressive occupation? The Gallieni-Lyautey Method and Colonial Pacification in Tonkin and Madagascar, 1885-1900*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.52-53.

⁵ Porch, 'Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey', pp.377-378.

⁶ William Gallois, *A history of violence in the early Algerian colony*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp.2-3; Sylvie Thénault, *Violence ordinaire dans l'Algérie coloniale: Camps, internements, assignations à résidence*, (Paris: Odile Jacob 2012), pp.127-128; Olivier Le Cour **Grandmaison**, *Coloniser, exterminer: sur la guerre et l'état colonial*, (Paris: Fayard, 2005), pp.138-146; Jacques **Frémeaux**, *La France et l'Algérie en guerre: 1830-1870, 1954-1962*, (Paris: Economica, 2002), p.70. Kamel Kateb, *Européens, « indigènes » et juifs en Algérie (1830-1962)*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), pp.40-46; Benjamin Brower, *A desert named Peace: the violence of France's empire in the Algerian Sahara*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp.25-26.

⁷ Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's undeclared war*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.13, p.17.

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counter-insurgency, admitted that he 'was a more complex and significant man than often conceded' and that he also sponsored economic development through the resettlement of Arab tribes, a policy of agricultural development and incentives to enhance trade with the Algerian population and to develop infrastructures.⁸ Thomas Rid hinted at the role of the Arab Bureaux (*Bureaux arabes*) in providing the French with intelligence on the tribes to be rewarded and the tribes to be crushed and in contributing to the economic and cultural development of the country.⁹

While the 'dark side' of French colonial counter-insurgency and the undeniable extreme level of violence on both sides during this conflict have been widely documented in the existing historiography, the policy of cooperation with indigenous Algerians has so far received less attention from historians. This article aims at analysing different dimensions of colonial counter-insurgency in Algeria. First it considers the policy of cooperation and the 'civilizing mission', then the 'war among (or against) the people' and the targeting of civilians, and lastly the adaptation of tactics to this new kind of warfare. By making use of primary sources written by the main actors in the field this article will consider the justification for the methods that were being employed so as to assess the nature of counter-insurgency that was being fought. It will then be possible to more clearly identify whether it was an incomplete form of counter-insurgency characterised by irregular warfare tactics and racialised brutality of a 'population-centric approach' or the beginning of a more complete and inclusive form of counter-insurgency combining force and conciliation.¹⁰

Assimilation and conciliation: trying to rally the population through peaceful means

Bugeaud understood the role of a policy of cooperation, economic development and association in securing the support of the Algerian population and establishing French rule in Algeria. He stated that the key to the French domination of Algeria was in showing the Arabs the economic benefits made by being part of French colonial Algeria,

The native Americans were defeated by alcohol, the Arabs can be subjugated through trade; the use of force can [momentarily] defeat them but it cannot lead to lasting domination. Only trade can attach the Algerian population to

⁸ Barnett Singer and John Langdon, *Cultured force: makers and defenders of the French colonial empire*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), pp.70-72.

⁹ Thomas Rid, 'Razzia. A Turning Point in Modern Strategy', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 21, Iss. 4, (2009), pp.617-635 (p. 632).

¹⁰ Douglas Porch, *Counter-insurgency: exposing the myths of the new way of war*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.26, p.51.

the French (...) Each Arab Algerian who gets rich is, for the French, one ally gained and one enemy less.¹¹

But the benefits of collaboration went beyond the *Bureaux arabes* and trade to include two aspects of the French input less frequently studied: medicine and religion.

As Edward Berenson noted, 'Lyautey's eventual status as a colonial hero suggests (...) that colonialism could command widespread interest in France (...) (if) it seemed to take place in a peaceful, civilized way.'¹² Lyautey's theory of counter-insurgency included humanitarian measures: state building, economic aid, and the use of public health to win over the local population. As Robin Bidwell noted about Lyautey's 'oil spot' tactic in Morocco: 'whenever the French advanced in Morocco they opened an infirmary, often within days of their arrival (...) Lyautey told his officers that in each outpost, he would create an indigenous infirmary aimed at the free medical care of the natives.'¹³

In doing so, he was merely following in the footsteps of his Algerian predecessors. Even in Bugeaud's time, counter-insurgency in Algeria had included a humanitarian and medical dimension. General de Létang actually targeted medical care as one of the key areas for a policy of cooperation or conciliation aiming at winning over the local population.¹⁴

The first attempt at using medicine for peaceful cross-cultural encounters between the French and the Algerian Arabs was undertaken by the chief surgeon of the Zouaves, Giscard, on his arrival in Algeria in 1832. In 1833 he set up an infirmary for the care of Algerian Arabs in Deli Ibrahim. In the first ten months, 973 Arabs received some medical treatment.¹⁵ In a report to the Parliament on the state of Algeria in 1842, Rozey, the president of the Colonial Society of Algiers, suggested that medical care for the native Algerian population was one of the most powerful means of pacification and reported that the infirmary set up by Giscard 'has never been unattended' since 1833 and was used by a large number of Arabs, 'including some Arab women'.¹⁶ Giscard was the first to introduce anti-smallpox vaccination

¹¹ Bugeaud, *L'Algérie : des moyens d'utiliser et de conserver cette conquête*, (Paris: Dentu, 1842), pp.110-111.

¹² Edward Berenson, *Heroes of empire: five charismatic men and the conquest of Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p.229.

¹³ Robin Bidwell, *Morocco under colonial rule: French administration of tribal areas: 1912-1956*, (London: Frank Cass, 1973), p.258.

¹⁴ Georges de Létang, *Des moyens d'assurer la domination française en Algérie*, (Paris: Anselin, 1840), pp.48-49.

¹⁵ Frédéric-Gaétan de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Note sur l'administration d'Alger*, (Paris, Impr. de A. Henry, 1835), pp.47-48.

¹⁶ A. G. Rozey, *Mémoire aux chambres législatives: Esquisse rapide et historique sur l'administration de l'Algérie depuis 1830*, (Paris, 1842), p.162.

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among the Algerian Arabs, first among the Zouaves and then among the tribes pursued by the French flying columns. His example was, after 1837, followed by several other army surgeons: 'at Bone, Bougie, Mostaghanem, Oran, vaccination took root at the same time as civilisation thanks to the dedication of the army surgeons who spread it everywhere [the French troops] waged war.'¹⁷

Giscard and a few other French army surgeons such as Pouzin (who treated some Arab patients at the market of Bouffarik in 1835, then outside the pacified area) not only provided medical care to the Arabs of pacified tribes but also went into enemy territory, sometimes quite far away from the French military bases.¹⁸ In 1833-1834, Giscard, escorted by only two Algerian cavalymen, provided medical care to the Arabs of fifteen villages in enemy territory. Numerous Arabs from the town of Medeha, then unpacified and in enemy territory (30 *lieues* or 145 kilometres from the last French outposts) frequently visited his infirmary at Deli Ibrahim.¹⁹

Emile Bertherand, the former director of the Muslim hospital of Algiers, highlighted the significance of medicine as a means of pacification and cross-cultural encounter, 'The French *toubibs* [Arabic word for surgeon] who practiced their art among Algerian natives have always been rewarded with a very effusive, demonstrative hospitality (...) How much progress could be done in the moral conquest of the Algerian natives if [French authorities] want to reap the benefits of those good dispositions by providing them with adequate medical care (...) Each of the natives [after being] cured [by a French surgeon] will [spread the news to his tribe and] become one of the links of the long chain of sympathy that will gradually link up the winners and the losers.'²⁰

The role of medicine as a tool of pacification was well understood by some army officers serving in Algeria under Bugeaud. For example, General de Létang advocated the replication, 'on a larger scale, of what was done in the province of Algiers by the chief surgeon of the Zouaves units, Giscard, first by dispatching army surgeons to all tribes who submitted to the French, and then by setting up permanent French hospitals for native Algerians next to the French colonised area.'²¹

The very first French hospital entirely dedicated to the free medical care of the Algerian Arabs (not, as Giscard's infirmary, primarily aimed at Zouaves and informally

¹⁷ Emile Bertherand, *Médecine et hygiène des arabes*, (Paris: Bailliere, 1855), p.440.

¹⁸ Emile Bertherand, 'Reconnaissance des Arabes envers les médecins', *Bulletin de l'Algérie*, (1856), p.31.

¹⁹ Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Note*, pp.47-8.

²⁰ Bertherand, 'Reconnaissance', pp. 29-31.

²¹ Létang, *Des moyens d'assurer*, pp.48-51. It would be interesting to know, through Arabic sources, the perception and point of view of the Algerian population on this dimension of a more peaceful policy of cooperation but the lack of such sources unfortunately does not allow for that.

accepting non-Zouave Algerian Arabs) was set up in 1834 by Pouzin in the Metidja plain, 12 *lieues* or 58 kilometres from Algiers, well into enemy territory, beyond the last French outpost. News of its opening spread by word of mouth and soon a large number of Arabs who did not have access to medical care in their tribes visited the hospital. As a French member of Parliament, Frédéric de la Rochefoucauld Liancourt observed one year later, the foundation of that hospital was 'part of a bigger project, that of creating [welfare] institutions preceding the march of the French army in Africa, so that the natives would not be rallied to France only through the force of weapons but also through the benefits of civilisation.'²²

Another dimension of that attempted 'moral conquest' of Algeria lay in a religious policy adapted to a war in which Algerian Muslims made a religious and not primarily nationalist war against Christian invaders.

Some therefore, such as Léon Roches and Engineering Captain Antoine- Eugène Carette, suggested that the key to French success in Algeria consisted in implementing in full the freedom of religion which had been granted to Muslim Algerians in theory in the Treaty of the Tafna (article 5) but was not always strictly implemented (some mosques being desecrated and turned into secular buildings in the 1830s).²³ The yearly pilgrimage to Mecca was officially authorised (forbidden only in years when there was a cholera epidemic in Arabia, as in 1841). Some Frenchmen went even further, suggesting that a way to rally Muslim Algerians to French rule would involve not only authorising but also facilitating the travel of a number of poor and carefully selected Algerians for free transportation to Mecca. This idea was taken up by the French authorities and they dispatched a French ship to Algeria in 1842 and 1843 for the use of Algerian pilgrims.²⁴

Silvain Toussaint Bourlet d'Amboise, a French agricultural reformer and a Muslim convert who was a former '*hodja*' (Muslim religious teacher) in the Ottoman empire, went even further and suggested establishing mosques in the largest French cities, Paris, Marseille and Lyon, in order to attract wealthy Arabs who, instead of going to Mecca or to big fairs in Germany (Leipzig) would go to France and later spread pro-French attitudes in Algeria.²⁵

²² Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Note*, pp.52-53.

²³ Dominique Borne and Benoit Falaize (eds), *Religions et colonisation, XVIe-XXe siècle: Afrique, Amérique, Asie, Océanie*, (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 2009), pp.143-144.

²⁴ Antoine-Eugène Carette, *Recherches sur la géographie et le commerce de l'Algérie méridionale*,(Paris, 1844), pp.175-176.

²⁵ Silvain Bourlet d'Amboise, *Mémoire consultatif présenté au commerce français*, (Paris, Charles Place,1837), p.4.

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This ambitious project was not implemented at the time, but a more discreet and focused suggestion of using Islam and leading Arab Islamic scholars to help in pacifying Algeria was suggested to Bugeaud by one of his close collaborators, Léon Roches the chief staff interpreter.

In 1841, Roches argued that most Arab tribes perceived the economic benefits of rallying to the French but were prevented from doing so because Abd el Kader had proclaimed that all Muslims who accepted life under Christian rule without resistance would suffer eternally. According to Roches those same verses from the Koran used by Abd el Kader could be used to show the limitations of holy war. After Muslim people exhausted the possibilities of resisting Christian aggression as long and as fiercely as they could, when resistance is no longer tenable and possible, they must cease the fighting and recognise the conqueror's rule, provided the latter granted them freedom of religion.

Knowing that several religious leaders feared the long-lasting consequences of the war in Algeria and wanted to reach an agreement with the French, Roche set off in July 1841 on a mission to gather the most influential and famous Islamic *ulama* (Islamic scholars) in a meeting in Mecca (far from Abd el Kader's influence) to issue a *fatwa* (an Islamic legal pronouncement issued by one or several Islamic scholars), authorising the Algerian Muslims to live under French rule.²⁶ He succeeded in having a *fatwa* drafted along those lines in January 1842 by the *ulamas* of Kairouan and of Cairo, with the support of the emir of Mecca. The *fatwa* was later approved and signed by the *ulamas* of Baghdad, Medina, Damas, and Mecca, giving it a pan-Islamic seal of legitimacy.²⁷ The influence of this *fatwa* on Algerian people is hard to assess as, by the time it was issued, Abd el Kader had lost many of his fortifications and many tribes had submitted to the French. French policy was more complex than mere *razzias*, even though the conquest did also include some degree of violence against Algerian civilians.

Targeting civilians

The "guerrilla" dimension of the war, the support provided by many tribes to Abd el Kader in the early stages of the war, the near absence of real battles and the elusiveness of the enemy showed the limitations of a strictly military type of war focused on the enemy combatants. Because Abd el Kader had the support of a large part of the population, the French army brought war to the civilian population, waging war among and against the people.

²⁶ Léon Roches, *Trente-deux ans à travers l'Islam*, vol. 1, (Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1884), pp.440-441.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp.130-131.

In many, if not all cases of irregular warfare, civilians are at the forefront, both as actors and as targets. Bugeaud's justification for the targeting of civilians actually rested on the assertion that, for the Algerians, war was total and that the insurgents received the active support of civilians among the tribes working with Abd el Kader.

Even though some milder means were simultaneously employed to try and win over the population, some army officers argued that counter-insurgency in Algeria would be unsuccessful if only conciliatory, non-military measures were employed. Force was seen as the only way to impose respect and obedience among the proud and warlike peoples like the Arabs. General de Létang (commander of the province of Oran in 1836-7) thus devoted a full chapter (chapter 4) of his book on the means of controlling Algeria to 'the use of force as a means of pacification'. This chapter starts with this telling assertion: 'Conciliatory measures will not be sufficient to rally the Arabs to France. Force will have to be used for this purpose.'²⁸ The consensus opinion among French army officers was that the focus on conciliation would be seen (and exploited) as a sign of weakness by the Arabs. The tribes who refused the French offer of peace should therefore be ruthlessly hit so as to impress the other tribes and threaten them into submission.

Bugeaud thus launched a scorched earth policy aimed primarily at threatening and demoralising Arab and Kabyle opponents, and, secondarily, at securing supplies for the army (living off the land). Flying columns were instructed to launch raids on rebellious tribes, borrowing from the pre-Arabic tradition of desert or nomadic warfare: the *gzhias* or *razzias* (used by Bedouins against enemy tribes). Those *razzias*, or raids, consisted in seizing livestock, goods and food supplies, sometimes burning down *douars* (villages of tents or huts), destroying fruit trees and harvests, and taking prisoners and cattle back to the nearest French camp. The *razzias* were in part punitive, used in retaliation for the violence used by Abd el Kader's army on French prisoners and on unarmed French settlers and to avenge French losses (settlers or prisoners beheaded). However, their main aim was strategic and they were therefore conceived as a particular tactic of war: to attack with overwhelming force unprepared and ill defended herdsmen or settlers and, by hitting at the tribes' main sources of revenue, to force them into submission.

The difference between European warfare and colonial warfare, and the focus on pillage and raids in colonial warfare, was seen as the direct result of the different stages of economic development and organisation between different civilisations. General Bugeaud thus justified the use of *razzias* in Algeria along those lines in a speech on 15 January 1840, 'In Europe, we don't just make war against armies, we make war against interests. If we won against adversarial enemies, we penetrate the

²⁸ Létang, *Des moyens d'assurer*, p.61.

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country's interior and seize the centres of population, of trade, of industry, the borders, the archives of government and soon the interests are forced to capitulate. But there are no equivalent interests to seize in Algeria, or at least there's only one, the agricultural interest and even that is much more difficult to seize (...) because there are neither villages nor farms but nevertheless one sows grains, brings in the harvest and there are pastures ... I couldn't discover any other seizable interest.'²⁹

However, despite Bugeaud's and many other army officers' justifications of the use of *razzias* in Algeria, the practice was widely criticised in metropolitan France, by liberal journalists and by some members of parliament who saw it as immoral, barbaric, and negating the moral justification of the imperialist venture as a whole (the so-called 'civilising' mission). There were predictable, important and well-known differences between the military and the metropole over practices in colonial campaigning, and metropolitan concern for the level of violence characterising the war in Algeria. This did not mean that the military focused exclusively on violent means of counter-insurgency and failed to lay the foundations of an effective civil policy. They did, as was demonstrated earlier in this article. However, the focus of metropolitan public attention was on the violence and brutalities committed on civilians.

The public outcry was even bigger when news came out of the massacre or *enfumade* (smoke) of the Ouled Riah tribe ordered by General Pélissier in late 1842. Some 800 members of that tribe had retreated before the advance of the French army and the *razzias* committed on neighbouring tribes and had sought shelter in a complex of caves or caverns in the nearby Dahra mountains. The French pursued them and, after unsuccessfully ordering them to surrender and get out of those caves, piled wood at the entrances of the caves and set it ablaze, asphyxiating the Algerians who were trapped inside. This was the deadliest and most widely publicised case of *enfumade* but it was not the only one and there were a few other cases in subsequent years. This atrocity committed by the French army against rebellious tribes could not be kept secret or censored, despite the efforts of the War Minister Marshal Soult to cover it up, and, when leaked to the press, was strongly condemned by the French public.³⁰

As with the *razzias*, the *enfumades* were seen and presented by the army as a form of adaptation to irregular warfare. Rather than a tool of terror and intimidation, some French military insisted that they were only used as a last resort to force Algerian enemies out of the caves where they sought shelter after refusing to surrender.

²⁹ T.R. Bugeaud, P. Azan, and P.J.L. Azan, *Par l'épée et par la charrue: écrits et discours* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), pp.67–68.

³⁰ Jennifer Sessions, ' "Unfortunate necessities": violence and civilisation in the conquest of Algeria', in Patricia Lorcin, Daniel Brewer (eds.), *France and its spaces of war. Experience, memory, image*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), pp.29-44, (pp. 35-36).

Army officer Jean-Baptiste Montaudon stated that the reality was more complex than the picture presented by Liberal metropolitan newspapers. Far from being all disarmed non-combatants, some tribal members skilfully used their knowledge of the local environment and particularly of the complexes of caverns in the mountains for their hit and run type of warfare, to hide there when they were pursued by the French army and, from there, to emerge suddenly to hit at the rear of French units.

According to him, the smoking of those caves was therefore a legitimate military response:

As soon as we entered that area, we fell under the fire of our enemies (...) and soon our enemies became invisible, they hit at us from the depths of the caves and, after our rear-guard has joined up with us, they come up out of the earth like ghosts and assault our soldiers. It is a type of attack which is very new to us and against which we can hardly defend ourselves because our troops have to march on top of those caverns and, to enter them, which are true underground citadels where they shelter their warriors, their families and their riches, we would have to descend by rope, one after the other, and we would in all likelihood be killed before having even set foot on the ground. The Arabs are used to getting in and out of those caves (...) and can easily and quickly jump out of them to attack our rear before getting back to their refuge in case of a counteroffensive (...) as we can't reach [the Arabs] directly, we pile up wood at each entrance of those caves and we set it ablaze.

The moral outcry of the press and of public opinion in France therefore seemed to him, as to several other army officers, to be caused by a misunderstanding of the nature of the war they waged in Algeria. In this respect, the French military felt misunderstood by the metropole:

The opposition press of the time, as fiery as it is unpatriotic, threw insults at [the French army]. Those journalists (...) find it natural that, when faced with an enemy combatant, the French had to accept stoically to be attacked but not that when, after several summons, after some French negotiating envoys were murdered by the Algerians, a French General ordered to bombard the citadel, that is to say smoke the caves.³¹

The opposition to the widespread practice of *razzias* and the much more limited practice of *enfumades* drove a wedge between French metropolitan, civilian opinion and the majority of the French military in the field who felt misunderstood and

³¹ Jean-Baptiste Alexandre Montaudon, *Souvenirs Militaires: Afrique - Crimée - Italie*, (1913; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2013), pp. 131-132.

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unsupported by their fellow countrymen. Army officer Pierre de Castellane thus criticised the hypocrisy and the lack of hindsight of many journalists. According to him, those raids were a mere adaptation to the economic context, to the agricultural and pre-modern nature of Algeria, not so different from the siege of big cities or the attack of a few key industrial centres in European warfare:

The African *razzia*, so severely deprecated – ce '*vol organisé*' [organised theft] as it is called in the declamatory style in use among the great orators and the leading newspapers of the opposition, is simply what is customary in Europe in another form. What is war? Hitting at [the enemy's] interests.³²

The army's chief staff interpreter, Léon Roches, also complained on 20 January 1844 to his cousin, a battalion general garrisoned in metropolitan France, about what he saw as the prejudiced bias of the metropolitan press against the French army in Algeria:

You seem inclined to follow the opinion expressed by some journalists, that the Army of Africa and her leaders commit acts which go beyond the rules of humanity (...) If the Arabs had regular armies, we would fight them; if they had towns, we would besiege them, but they flee before us, and keep on murdering stranded soldiers. How to win this war if not by hitting this invisible enemy in their family and in their herds? (...) Our soldiers only kill the Arabs who make use of their weapons, they relocate peacefully the non-aggressive men, women, children and livestock (...) to the French military camp' and there they ensure that they are fed and put in separate tents.³³

If the *razzia* was not aimed at killing civilians the rules were not always strictly adhered to and there were Algerian civilian casualties, especially in the case of punitive, retaliatory raids. General Gentil's *razzia* on the Beni Zeroual tribe in March 1843 resulted in 150 native Algerians being killed, and 712 prisoners being taken, along with 400 cattle and 3,000 sheep being seized, at the cost of 11 French soldiers killed and 18 injured.³⁴

Moreover, even though the overall casualties were generally rather low, important booty (livestock, horses, grain) and civilian prisoners (mostly women and children) were taken and used to build up pressure on the rebellious tribes and push them into submission.³⁵

³² Pierre de Castellane, *Souvenirs de la vie militaire en Afrique*, (Paris: Hachette, 1856), pp.201-202.

³³ Roches, *Trente-deux ans*, vol. 2, pp.343-344

³⁴ Gallois, *A history of violence*, p.120.

³⁵ Rid, 'Razzia', p.620.

However, not all French officers approved the use of physical violence against civilians, both on moral and on practical grounds. For General de Létang, for example, devastating the countryside, burning down *douars* or villages, destroying trees and harvests would only be detrimental to the long term agricultural colonisation of the country. He argued that force should be directed more at the enemy's persons than at their properties. He did not suggest any form of execution or extermination (condemned as barbaric), but rather advocated the use of psychological or religious terror: enemy prisoners should be deported to mainland France, which, as a western, Christian country could be seen as a dangerous environment on cultural, social and religious grounds.³⁶

However, the war of conquest was not only waged among and against the Algerian civilian population but also, and primarily, against the forces gathered by Abd el Kader. Faced with no concentrated forces, the French army in Algeria was, as Bugeaud recalled, 'like a bull being attacked by a multitude of wasps.'³⁷ The type of warfare waged by the French in Algeria was indeed radically new to them, requiring new tactics and adaptation not only to the enemy's way of war but also to the environment.

'Small war' tactics

Bugeaud believed that his theory of war had been vindicated by 6 January 1844. Writing later to one of his friends, *chief battalion* Comte d'Esclaibes, he stressed how effective his campaigns had been. Apart from four or five small tribes on the border with Morocco, most of Abd el Kader's empire had been subsumed (the remaining ones being subsumed between 1844 and 1847).³⁸ However the submission of the majority of those tribes resulted as much from a state of general exhaustion and famine after several French raids or *razzias* on their villages and harvests as in particularly effective military tactics employed against enemy combatants. The main difference between warfare in Algeria before and after Bugeaud's era lay in a shift from a fairly static, defensive strategy revolving around the dispatch of a few expeditionary columns from a large number of fortified positions, to a war of movement, pursuing Arab combatants and terrorising the civilian members of recalcitrant tribes.

Rather than a brand new set of innovative tactics, Bugeaud's method of counter-insurgency tied together tested and proven tactics used in some previous counter-insurgency operations such as the Vendée and Spain. Like these operations the focus was on continuous training to harden up the troops and prepare them for the reality

³⁶ Létang, *Des moyens d'assurer*, pp.61-67.

³⁷ Thomas Robert Bugeaud, *L'Algérie : des moyens d'utiliser et de conserver cette conquête*, (Paris: Dentu, 1842), p.25.

³⁸ Thomas Robert Bugeaud, *Lettres inédites du maréchal Bugeaud*, (Paris: Deslis, 1923), p.100.

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of mountain or desert warfare, a borrowing from some of the guerrilla tactics used by their opponents, and common sense advice given to subordinate officers and soldiers. For Bugeaud, the key to the domination of Algeria was mobility, speed and 'shock' surprise attacks, which were the pre-requisites of any form of guerrilla warfare. This strategic shift led to organisational and logistic changes. The focus on light infantry made a great number of the forts then used by the French army redundant.

Central to Bugeaud's planning was the appropriate deployment of his forces. Trying to hold the country by setting up an extensive network of outposts meant that each garrison was bound to be too small to defend the camp and provide expeditionary columns patrolling the surroundings. The capacity of action of each garrison being limited to the range of their guns, this inevitably led to the paralysis of the forces garrisoned in those forts, and to the partial paralysis of the army as a whole in Algeria (as other units regularly had to be diverted to resupply those remote garrisons). Bugeaud was acutely aware of the need for concentration due to the pressure of those forts on the scarce human resources available in Algeria. One of his very first measures as governor general was to dispatch 5,000 men to resupply the 500 soldiers and officers stranded at the fort of Tlemcen.³⁹ He also drew lessons from foreign colonial counter-insurgency in Muslim lands. The Russians (like the French in Algeria in the 1830s) resorted to a rather defensive policy based on a very large number of forts or outposts in the Caucasus and yet were not very successful in their war against Shamil which had resumed in 1839. Using this to back up his argument on the necessity to evacuate a large number of small or non-strategic outposts in Algeria, he observed:

You have under your very eyes eighteen years of unsuccessful attempts by the Russians to establish their rule over Circassia (...) Were their hundreds of outposts of any use? Did they enable them to subjugate the country?⁴⁰

Under Bugeaud, the focus thus shifted from the previous system of tying up French units at numerous points. This strategy resulted from the fear that the evacuation from one could be interpreted by the enemy as evidence of weakness. Instead Bugeaud emphasised the relentless mobility of French forces and their concentration on a small number of carefully selected, strategic strongholds, located on two parallel lines of occupation: seven on the coast (Oran, Mostaganem, Tenes, Cherchell, Algiers, Philippeville, Bône) and seven further afield (Tlemcen, Mascara, Milianah,

³⁹ Chambre des Députés, *Procès Verbaux de la Chambre des Députés*, 9 June 1838, pp.202-203.

⁴⁰ Letter from Bugeaud to the War Minister, 20 January 1847, quoted in Marcel Emerit, 'L'influence russe et croate sur la colonisation militaire à l'époque de Bugeaud', *Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-mer*, Vol. 46, No. 163-165, (1959), pp.85-96 (pp. 92-93).

Medeah, Setif, Constantine, Guelma). The other forts were promptly evacuated.⁴¹ In the eastern province of Constantine, for example, two thirds of the existing French forts were evacuated in the spring of 1841.⁴² Accordingly, the remaining forts in that province (Setif, Constantine, Guelma and Bône) could be strengthened.⁴³

With the reduction in the number of fortified positions and the adoption of guerrilla tactics, heavy artillery was no longer seen as paramount. According to the Prussian army officer and theorist of small war Karl von Decker, whose main work was translated into French in 1837, 'artillery, in order to be successful in small war, must be extremely mobile, tenacious, and light.'⁴⁴

This was very well understood by Bugeaud who, unlike his predecessor Marshal Count Valée, and against the general opinion of the army at that time, was firmly opposed to the use of heavy artillery in Algerian campaigns. In Bugeaud's opinion heavy artillery would only slow down convoys, force the French army to travel on the main roads, roads that were exposed to constant harassment by Algerian Arabs or Kabyles, and add to the general state of exhaustion of the army.

Bugeaud, drawing upon his experience of counter-insurgency during the Napoleonic Peninsular war also introduced flying columns, first advocated by General Kleber and used by General Hoche in the Vendée in 1794, and later used in Egypt, Italy and Spain during the Napoleonic wars. Made up of 4,000 infantrymen, 2,000 French cavalrymen, and 1,000 native cavalrymen (*Spahis*), and equipped with light artillery (2 mountain batteries and another battery), they were designed to pursue the enemy after an ambush or to roam the countryside and attack the enemy wherever they assembled.⁴⁵ Such operations were aimed at demonstrating French strength and presence throughout the country, to try and deter some other tribes which might have attempted to rebel had they witnessed evidence of weakness from the French forces.

Even though the infantry formed the bulk of the French forces in Algeria, Bugeaud highlighted the importance of the cavalry to pursue the enemy, launch quick offensives and envelop the enemy forces. Because the strength of Arab warriors lay mostly in their cavalry, Bugeaud stressed that 'the [French] cavalry should be constituted of elite men and horses because, as it is small compared to that of the

⁴¹ Bugeaud, *L'Algérie*, pp.15-16.

⁴² C. Rousset, 'La conquête de l'Algérie. Le gouvernement du général Bugeaud', *Revue des deux mondes*, Vol. 84, (1887), pp.763-792.

⁴³ Ministère de la Guerre, *Tableau de la situation des établissements français dans l'Algérie en 1841*, (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1842), p.2.

⁴⁴ Karl von Decker, *De la petite guerre selon l'esprit de la stratégie moderne*, (Paris: Levrault, 1827), p.129.

⁴⁵ A. G. Rozey, *Cris de conscience de l'Algérie*, (Paris: Gratiot, 1840), p.97.

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Arabs, it needs to be excellent.⁴⁶ To measure up to Abd El Kader's cavalry the French army had to adapt to the peculiarities of the terrain. Part of the French cavalry in Algeria was therefore provided by native units, the *Spahis* (light cavalry regiments), raised by the French as early as 1831.

The use of native troops, which started before the appointment of Bugeaud and was continued under his direction, was not limited to the cavalry. The French army also recruited some Kabyles from the Zwawa tribe to form an infantry battalion in 1831. Their success in battle then led to the creation of a second battalion. Considered as elite troops, they participated in the second battle of Constantine in 1837. In many cases, the rulers of the tribes who had made their submission to the French could be required to mobilise their warriors and hand them over to the French, as was done before with the *goum* when Algeria was part of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷ The French also made use of native warriors from the *Makhzen* (mounted martial tribes in Ottoman Algeria). The two most powerful and militarily competent of them, the Douairs and the Smela (in the province of Oran) were even granted, through the treaty of 16 June 1835 confirmed by a decree on 16 September 1843, complete fiscal exemption in return from military service for the French.⁴⁸

However, Bugeaud was adamant that those native units should always be seen as supplementing a strong French infantry and cavalry. A powerful French presence ensured the continuing loyalty of the Arabs and Kabyles, whom he saw as loyal only as long as they thought they were on the winning side and were supported by a strong and sizeable French army. According to Bugeaud, native units 'can add to the strength [of the French army] but they should not constitute its core elements.'⁴⁹

Bugeaud also called for a significant change in the composition of the officer corps, asking for younger officers, especially young generals, whom he saw as more suitable for a physically demanding war of attrition in a mountainous environment. He also preferred army officers who had built their career in Algeria, who knew the topography, the terrain, the mores and habits of the Arabs, and who might even speak Arabic. To retain these elite army officers in Algeria, Bugeaud suggested a financial incentive.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Bugeaud, *L'Algérie*, p.29.

⁴⁷ Jacques Frémeaux, 'Les premières troupes supplétives en Algérie', *Revue historique des armées*, Vol. 255, (2009), pp.61-67.

⁴⁸ Ministère de la Guerre, 'Arrêté portant organisation de la cavalerie indigène auxiliaire soldée en Algérie sous la dénomination de Makhzen' *Recueil des actes du Gouvernement de l'Algérie, 1830-1854*, (Alger: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1856), pp.251-252 (p. 251).

⁴⁹ Bugeaud, *L'Algérie*, p.31.

⁵⁰ Bugeaud, *L'Algérie*, pp.29-30.

Another challenge of campaigning in Algeria for the French was to adapt to the difficult environment in which they were fighting, all the more so because their enemy made good use of their local knowledge. This was particularly true of mountain warfare. The French were often at a disadvantage since they marched through open valleys and were overlooked by local Arabs or Kabyles who could attack from higher ground or throw rocks at them when the French started climbing the mountain sides.⁵¹ As army officer Pierre de Castellane observed of one incident, 'It looked like a scene directly drawn from medieval times, like the assault of some ancient fortress built on the edge of the cliff.'⁵²

Bugeaud adapted tactics to the Algerian mode of warfare and to the environment in an effort to reduce the number of potential casualties. Much of this adaptation was simply common sense practice. For example, when marching in mountainous zones additional protection for the rearguard was provided by two parallel columns flanking the main column. Soldiers were instructed to take shelter behind rocks or earth mounds when attacked by partisans rather than continue to march under the enemy's fire only to strike back once they would have reached higher ground as they used to do before. Moreover, noticing that the French army used up a large quantity of ammunition and that the sound of the shooting actually seemed to increase the excitement and fighting spirit of the Arabs, Bugeaud ordered the army to use their firearms more sparingly, only against the Arabs who were close enough to be a possible target, dropping altogether the practice of panic random shooting which was, at best, ineffective and, at worst, counterproductive.⁵³

Special attention was also paid to the protection of isolated camps at night which were arranged in square formations, protected by outposts manned with watchmen and sometimes by mobile patrols. The French also set up an 'ambush service' aimed at small groups of Algerian combatants.⁵⁴ In addition, they made good use of night patrols attacking Algerian camps which had been previously identified by French scouts, borrowing from a practice widely used by their enemies (night raids on camps).

Bugeaud also insisted on enrolling well trained civilian settlers in the war as they were directly interested in the security of the new colony. The French metropolitan system of National Guards had been extended to Algeria just after the beginning of the war, through the creation of the first militias of armed settlers (such as that of Oran in 1833) mostly dedicated to local policing and defence against Arab raids.

⁵¹ Pierre de Castellane, 'Une campagne dans la province d'Alger', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, (October 1849), p.104.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.104.

⁵³ Roches, *Trente-deux ans*, vol. 2, p.350.

⁵⁴ Ministère de la Guerre, *Tableau de la situation*, p.4.

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Bugeaud wanted to use them as part of the French offensive apparatus by increasing their number and their size, by asking for a more active service from them, and by providing them, on Sundays and holidays, with regular military training sessions by the army officers of the nearest military *cercles* (military territorial units), sessions in which the focus would be on skirmishing manoeuvres and tactics.⁵⁵ He issued a decree on 18 March 1841 which placed Algerian militias under the direct command of the army. Most militias became quasi-permanent with their members being asked to be on duty almost one day out of five. They were provided with weapons by the army and collaborated with the army in night patrols and ambushes.⁵⁶

Bugeaud's method of colonial warfare was far more complex than a simple system of violence and brutality. On his arrival in Algeria he had to shape a force and devise tactics adapted to a new mode of warfare and to a difficult environment. He therefore designed an original and effective method of counter-insurgency based on his previous experiences and on the observation of the tactics used by the enemy.

Conclusion

Writing in 1857, when the whole of Algeria (including Kabylie, conquered in 1856-1857) had been forced into submission, Emile Carrey observed:

This deep pacification is a subject of glory for our civilization because this conquest was accomplished as much through our benevolent government as through the strength of our weapons (...) The benevolence of our modern civilization lessens day after day the double hatred, both religious and nationalist, that the Algerian people felt towards the French. Because appeasement reached through a benevolent rule is much more powerful than through the use of force.⁵⁷

The extreme level of violence which characterised the French military operations in Algeria in the 19th century was downplayed in this presentation of the French conquest. The use of summary executions, the widespread resort to *razzias* and the few cases of *enfumades* revealed the true nature of those colonial 'small wars'. But, even though the military authorities tried to justify the use of violence on the grounds of a civilisational divide between Europe and North Africa (the Algerians being presented as barbaric enemies, unlike European combatants), the atrocities committed by the French army in Algeria were strongly condemned by many French members of Parliament and journalists.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Bugeaud, pp.32-34.

⁵⁶ Ministère de la Guerre, *Tableau de la situation*, pp. 83-85.

⁵⁷ Emile Carrey, *Récits de Kabylie, campagne de 1857*, (Paris: Lévy, 1858), p.321.

⁵⁸ See for example 'Du caractère actuel de la guerre d'Afrique', *La Presse*, no. 3379, 29 July 1845, p.1.

The French army lost nearly 100,000 men in Algeria between 1831 and 1851: 92,329 dying in hospital and 3,336 in combat.⁵⁹ However, the consequences of the war on Algeria and its native population were much more dramatic. The Algerian native population, estimated to be 3 million strong in 1830⁶⁰, had dropped to 2.5 million in 1851⁶¹. Many of the deaths were due to the direct or indirect consequences of the war: food shortages and general famine in the 1840s (due to Bugeaud's scorched earth policy and to the amount of supplies redirected to the French army); epidemic diseases (cholera and malaria); civilian deaths during *razzias*; voluntary exile of some Algerian Moors and Arabs (in Tunisia, Morocco, Syria); and a few cases of forced deportations (of Algerian opponents to New Caledonia and Guyana). The death toll in the war of conquest was so high that in 1880 some French physicians or statisticians even feared that the native Algerian population would become extinct.⁶² The fear lessened after the substantial demographic increase in the native Algerian population in the 1880s and 1890s.

Overall the French were militarily successful in the war of conquest of Algeria. The shift from a limited occupation of the coastal belt in northern Algeria to the conquest of all of Algeria was bound to be complicated, expensive and demanding, as was acknowledged by Bugeaud himself when taking up his position as Governor General.⁶³ However, the effective conquest and pacification of all of Algeria by 1857 (except the very southern Saharan territories conquered in the last two decades of the 19th century) proved the effectiveness of the counter-insurgency method implemented by Bugeaud.

The influence of Bugeaud's military tactics on the theory and practice counter-insurgency is undeniable. The French army in Algeria was faced with a type of warfare which was new to them. Operations in themselves were demanding. Adapting to the enemy's guerrilla tactics, he succeeded in defeating a widespread political-religious war which initially mobilised a large part of the Algerian population and was all the more difficult to contain because of Abd el Kader's elusive tactics.

However, counter-insurgency is not only about military action and in Algeria as in other theatres of French colonial warfare, economic, political, religious and medical or humanitarian means also had to be introduced in order to detach the civilian population from the influence of Abd el Kader. Bugeaud considered that winning the support of Algerian tribes, through trade, by bribing their chiefs, or by providing

⁵⁹ Jean-Christian-Marc Boudin, *Histoire statistique de la colonisation en Algérie*, (Paris: Bailliers, 1853), p.53.

⁶⁰ René Ricoux, *La démographie figurée de l'Algérie*, (Paris: Masson, 1880), p. 260.

⁶¹ Ministère de la Guerre, *Tableau de la situation des établissements français dans l'Algérie en 1850-1852* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1853), p. 117.

⁶² Ricoux, *La démographie figurée*, p. 261.

⁶³ Bugeaud, *L'Algérie*, pp.26-27.

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work to some members of the tribes, was key to the French domination of Algeria.⁶⁴ The counter-insurgency strategy employed by the French in Algeria under Bugeaud effectively combined irregular warfare tactics, psychological warfare, material warfare against civilians and a policy of conciliation and cooperation aimed at winning the support of the local population. The effectiveness and the modernity of Bugeaud's strategy is undeniable. The system used by Bugeaud in Algeria was far more complex than the mere use of violence and brutality and, as such, he played an important part in the development of a French theory and practice of colonial counter-insurgency. Some historians, such as Douglas Porch, have emphasised how Bugeaud's coercive tactics have influenced French colonial warfare.⁶⁵ While this point had to be made, the legacy of Bugeaud goes beyond this. Far from resorting exclusively to the use of force, his Algerian tactics were more nuanced in that they combined coercion and development. At the same time Bugeaud recognised the importance of trying to win over metropolitan public opinion through the (unsuccessful) defence of the use of violence by the French army in Algeria. In this respect, Bugeaud's legacy extends beyond the scope of military tactics and the use of violence and coercion. It also includes an essential dimension of modern counter-insurgency, a population-centric approach aiming at winning over the local population through conciliation and development.

⁶⁴ Bugeaud, *L'Algérie*, pp.110-111.

⁶⁵ Porch, 'Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey', pp. 378-381.