

The Algerian fight for independence: a post-war era

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Abstract:

The following article tries to show the diplomatic history of America's involvement in the Algerian war against the French occupation, while there is still much work to be done on American's officials' views and thoughts on the Algerian war; moreover, the article aims at depicting the reality of the Algerian struggle for independence and revealing how Americans reacted to external events and different influences. To put it in a nutshell, there was a kind of triangular relationship between these countries.

Key words: cold war– French occupation– American diplomacy– Algerian independence– new order

The historian is “a witness to what has been found on a voyage of discovery,” as (Novick cited in Erikson, 2008, p.125) once put it. In fact, there is much work to be done on American officials' perceptions of the Algerian War, and the impact of their actions; probably, the United States had great influence on both France and Algeria, a kind of triangulation linking these countries. For instance,

in their attempts to alter U.S. policy on North Africa, French officials hired Madison Avenue public relations firms, took members of Congress and journalists on junkets to Algeria, and at one time considered denouncing unsympathetic foreign service officers to Joe McCarthy.

(Connlley,2002,p.viii)

Connelly's achievement is to involve the Algerian conflict and the struggle of Third World nationalism within the spheres of the Cold War; moreover, he shows the ways in which the successful Algerian struggle predicts somewhat the new era of the new post-Cold War order. He advocates that the Algerian Revolution's military initiative was rather diplomatic, and that the war was won on an international opinion scale rather than in the military field. Algeria became the "epicenter of the North-South conflict" and was the source of tensions that, in the long-run, destroyed the diplomatic steps of the nation-state as it had been known for two hundred years.

Consequently, there emerged a strong desire by both the Algerians and the French to internationalize the war, probably each for their own goals with diverged roads; change happened via the political reactions to these positions, and it debated many hot issues: the French desire to leverage international might in their own interests yet limit interference from the Americans; this includes political actors (Paris, Algiers, London, Washington) military agencies (NATO, the French military, the Algerian FLN party), political alliances and circles (the Bandung nations, the Arab League, Third World countries in the UN) and influential political leaders (Eisenhower, De Gaulle, Macmillan, Dulles, Bourguiba). There was a kind of recognition of the rise of internationalism in international policy making; maybe, there was an organization which tried to establish the post world war order, but changes were deeply rooted in the Franco-Algerian policies.

The Algerian Revolution embodied the Algerian- French-American-UN struggle, presenting more details of each actor's high diplomacy and military initiatives: an analysis of the lingering tensions of post-World War II colonization for both the colonizers and the colonized as well as for the foreign policy problems closely linked to the Cold War era. French colonial policy, *la mission civilisatrice*, was trapped because of its own political ideology. Certainly, it ranked science based on reason as the real source of national development, but it went without saying that only the French people could use science the way they wanted without any constraints or limits. Algerian nationalists did not trust the French thinking and discredited the French mission *civilisatrice*. Algeria accused

and criticized severely the so-called advent of “ modernization”– made in the new forum of the United Nations– which was no more than a French cunning; Americans, strategic and faithful to their own methodologies, became interested in the Algerian critique. Throughout history, a developed nation progress was and has been the gift to the colonized as if the latter are “uncivilized and diminished. This biased viewpoint was teased by images of religious war (jihad), racial segregation, poverty, and bullying.

At that time, the French government depended much on American security and mainly support and waited a word from Washington to show its attitude towards colonialism. As the international public opinion was curious about France's behaviour in Algeria, Washington put some pressures on Paris. French rationales to American queries grew in determining and limiting–as much as possible– the Arab threat as likely to go against their own civilizing orientations and attitudes with a negative Islamic influence. Paris expected that given this threat to progress, Washington would go on supporting its Cold War ally; thus, allowing France to mind its domestic matters. Eventually, for the French, this strategy of relying on American finances and policy had already been experienced in Indochina. The Americans would no longer use this tactic again, and refused to recognize Algeria within the civilizational nations described by the French, instead framing it within their plans of self-determination and nation-building. For the sake of progress, the United States drew a demarcation from French domestic policies in order to find ways to support emerging Third World Nationalism including regional or even religious solidarity.

The French played a double role: in Algeria, positions were carried through the military in and in the United Nations through ideological politics. In the eyes of public opinion, the so-called military triumph against Algerian nationals was closely examined in the imbalance of power between the two camps. Actually, the French relied on airpower backed up by the United States; the extorting the Algerians by means of torture, reprisals against villages and the imprisonment of civilians were forcefully denounced

and severely criticized in the international press. Such a 'filthy' success against the innocent was doubtful and put the very nature of French civilization into question. On the other hand, The Algerian Revolution was scattered around the country and had few military successes to their claim, but could be interpreted in terms of real persistence, martyrdom, brief continued guerrilla warfare and many symbolic—which was not true—victories in foreign according to the French. There was nothing symbolic but a war declared by the Algerian rebels to gain their freedom. Sure, the powers were uneven but the Algerians conquered real territory and did not look for the sympathy of the world; instead they relied on Muslims in the Maghreb world. The French were militarily and cunningly successful in killing many innocent and isolated people but their uncivilized killing methods were held to international criticism.

The Algerian nationalists shook the French colonists and brought colonization to an international trial case. The so-called French Enlightenment thought was exposed to hot public debate, in the United Nations and in the media. Civilization, modernization, and development were the main elements to debate. Ideologies have always concealed the nature of the emerging contest between North and South, and have left the debate open to many interpretations of the post-colonialism in terms of the irrelevant and bullying ideologies.

The main problem within the context of De Gaulle's domestication of the Algerian question was raised. Were France and Algeria obliged to face the identity issue or even the identity crisis? More specifically, was it difficult to define who an Algerian is and who a French is? We think that at that time there were Muslim scholars like Ibn Badis, Ibrahimi, Mili and many others who fought vices and the immorality of the colonial system. The answer was easy: either a Muslim or non-Muslim whatever language one used as Algerian Muslims had no such identity problems.

The colonial French authority was determined to fight and 'kill' the Arabic language and Islam from Algeria. Islam became a banned subject and a taboo to the French and teaching Arabic language was not easy; special permission from the military ruler was required and too often not granted. Qur'anic teaching was

fought and banned in the mosques, some of which converted to the spread of Christianity. churches. Such satanic actions from the French colonizers done on purpose put the Algerian society in pressure and forced it into illiteracy by the year 1930. In 1830, the majority of the Algerian people had been a little literate, maybe, at the start of the French colonization. There were more than one hundred schools in the capital city. Likewise, the Algerian economy was 'strong enough' right at the beginning of the French occupation. The military rulers became landlords and took by force hectares and hectares of fertile land after killing or torturing their legitimate owners.

The French colonial system in Algerian was cruel. It did not respect even the slightest symbolic gestures of the Algerian identity.

By the same token, the Algerian people had never rolled over and died. In 1889, the Algerian nation witnessed the birth of a great scholar Sheikh Abdelhamid Ibn Badis from a noble family in the city of Constantine in the east of Algeria. After he had finished his Islamic studies in Ézzitouna University in Tunisia, he came back to Algeria and came up with, along with his friend Shaikh Bachir ÉL-Ibrahimi, a clear plan to rescue Algeria from the French occupation.

Race, culture, and identities, concepts that upset Europe during the early portion of the century, reappeared in the struggle for Algeria. The French considered Algeria as theirs and a rich country shaped by the French occupation with big colonizing activities and expansions. It was the French mission—in fact occupation— that had given the Algerians ideas, identity, science, enlightenment and culture!!! Accordingly, the French settlers must have been highly ranked with a special status. This is how any colonizer uses nice words while greediness eats it to the bone; The French were greedy and wanted to eradicate the Algerian people from the globe since the latter were Muslim and would never ever run after wrong ideas advocated by their false preachers on the wrong track. The Algerians knew well that they already had a deeply rooted Islamic culture well shown in the Arabic manuscripts, a very rich history, a prophetic language that would never die, and they were not willing to accept the French settlers to integrate themselves to this state.

Identity remained a tug of war between the East–West rivalry. It both confirmed old assumptions and opaque shifts within the structure and nature of the Western alliance. Some of the most obvious changes included the undermining of the idea of national sovereignty, a loosening of the French connection to the alliance, a shift towards Eastern Europe through Germany, and a greater separation between the Anglo powers and the Europeans. A structural change occurred in the role of media and the growth of international public discourse. This change involved a lessening of the central power of the state, and a growth in the peripheral power of interest groups and public opinion, both informed and popular. What was created under the umbrella of the Cold War was a new transnational order. It is less clear what ideology animated that order. Progress, as defined by Third World Nationalism is tarnished, market ideology is remarkably devoid of humanism, and many of the values depicted by enlightenment philosophers are rejected by conservative politicians who promote religion, western culture and nationalism as the glue for future generations.

A Diplomatic Revolution offers a fascinating argument based on a variety of multi-lingual and multi-archival sources that reflect the national discourse of the nations involved. The addition of oral interviews from personages in North Africa adds to the context and texture of the story. The movement away from a national perspective creates new insights as to how the overall puzzle fits together. This is, however, a big-picture view of the world and subject to some of its problems. As Connelly (2002) himself notes, one must do the detail work as well as the "big picture" and that requires a great deal of smaller studies to support this larger view. There is the risk that what is apparent from the global view, and is indeed occurring on the local level, is not seen by the leaders of the large nations. Although we are not clear that a diplomatic revolution actually occurred in the political capitals, the evidence for an ideological shift in the public discourse is clear and strong. How quickly, thoroughly or easily that shift reaches the leaders of the people is the test for democracy in the post–Cold War era.

From the French point of view, considerations of this kind should have sufficed to guarantee wholehearted American support. The United States preferred to hedge its bets, initially by maintaining surreptitious contact with

FLN representatives, and whispering private words of caution and concern into the French ear, and later by adopting an increasingly neutral public posture, and threatening to withhold military and financial assistance from France if it did not make the kinds of concessions that Washington considered necessary to reach a settlement. The evolution of American policy from that of stalwart ally to that of "honest broker" was halting. In the beginning the Americans needed the French badly, and French hints that, if pressed too hard on Algeria, they might have to reconsider their commitment to NATO, always went reliably home. But French influence in Washington inevitably declined as conditions in Europe stabilized. The rearmament of Germany, the advent of intercontinental ballistic missiles, the SinoSoviet split—these and all the countless other adjustments of the global strategic balance in the 1950s were also steps toward Algeria's independence.

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