

**Ben Bella, Kennedy and
Johnson: Cold Warriors at
the Helm, 1962-1965**

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Abstract

This paper examines the formation of United States policy towards Algeria during the presidency of the first Algerian Head of State -Ahmed Ben Bella- in the period 1962-1965. The article analyzes the foreign policy pattern followed by the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations and their interaction with Ben Bella's political style at home and abroad. The focus is put on Algeria's post-independence reconstruction programmes, and its approach to Cold War issues such as Cuba, Vietnam and Sub-Saharan colonial problems. Research shows that Kennedy, like Johnson, hoped to win Algeria to their side in their conflict with the Eastern Bloc. However, Ben Bella's radical character made him a tough Cold Warrior who found American expansionist and interventionist policies incompatible with Algerian socialist orientation.

It fell to President J. F. Kennedy and his Algerian counterpart, Ahmed Ben Bella, to set the foundations of United States-Algerian relations in October 1962. But, the American government then was primarily preoccupied with urgent problems reflecting the sensitive Cold War atmosphere of the day. Three of these in particular bewildered the Kennedy administration, namely: The Cuban Regime, the communist threat in South Vietnam and the Congo Civil War (in present day Zaire). There was also the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, but this ranked

ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث نشأة العلاقات الأمريكية الجزائرية غداة استقلال الجزائر، و يركز على الرئيسان جون ف. كينيدي و ليندون ب. جونسون في تعاملهما مع الرئيس أحمد بن بلا خلال الفترة 1962-1965. انطلقت العلاقات الثنائية بين البلدين في ظل توترات دولية كبرى. أولا، كانت هناك الأزمة الكوبية في أكتوبر 1962. ثانيا، كانت هناك مشكلة الثورات الإفريقية و خاصة أزمات الكونغو [زائير] و أنغولا. ثالثا، كانت هناك مشكلة فيتنام التي تفاقمت بحلول سنة 1965. لعبت الحرب الباردة دورا أساسيا في تباين وجهات نظر رؤساء الولايات المتحدة و الجزائر حيال هذه المسائل وغيرها. لكن الغريب في الأمر ان العلاقات الإقتصادية الثنائية بين البلدين ظلت في تحسن مستمر.

below the other three in terms of importance until the coming of the Six-Day War in June 1967. This paper aims to highlight the making of early United States policy towards Algeria until the fall of Ben Bella's government in June 1965. This event can be considered as a major landmark for that early American-Algerian encounter and for reference and comparison when dealing with the later phases of their relations.

The Kennedy Presidency

American interest in Algeria came shortly after the proclamation of the new republic in September 1962. Beginning in October, there was a number of official visits by State Department diplomats to Algiers in preparation for the scheduled trip of G. Mennen Williams due on 2 February 1963. As Assistant Secretary of State, Williams' visit was indicative of Algeria's importance in United States perception of the rising state. In parallel with these high-level direct American-Algerian contacts, the State Department carried out a comprehensive study of the security situation in Algeria covering the period from December 1962 to December 1964. The value of the study lies in the fact that its findings were endorsed by most defense agencies of the American government particularly the C.I.A, the N.S.A, the security divisions of the State Department and the Pentagon. Only the representatives of the F.B.I. and the Nuclear Energy Board abstained from participation for lacking jurisdiction in the matter.¹

Being the first of its kind, the report is equally valuable for its pioneering character as a referential document for future presidents' action on Algeria. Regarding its substance, the report consisted of six compact paragraphs bearing on important aspects of the Algerian government; notably President Ben Bella's foreign policy. From the outset, the document is defined as being an assessment report of present Algerian conditions and an estimation of probable developments in the following two years or so. The first paragraph asserts the authors' belief that Ben Bella's chances to remain in power were good. First, he enjoyed a solid popular base albeit a narrow one. Secondly, he had some support among the military where his Vice-President –the Defense Minister Colonel Houari Boumediene- was totally faithful to him. Hence, the report draftsmen discarded the probability of Ben Bella being ousted militarily except in extreme circumstances:

The second paragraph conjectures that the Algerian economy will grow weaker for sometime before stabilizing at a lower level than what it would be in 1964. But, the projected economic collapse is not likely to reach the point of causing mass civil disobedience. The draftsmen's view was that the majority of Algerians still accepted hard living conditions for being content with their 'subsistence' agrarian way of life. However, the report notes that the living standard of politicians and important elements of the society like bureaucrats, military personnel and managers of the nationalized plantations and estates was improving far better than what it was under the French colonial system.

The third paragraph focuses on the Algerian military. It reveals that the army numbered 60.000 men and was being equipped with Soviet weaponry beginning in 1963. The report also asserts that the army was capable of ensuring home security reflecting improved professionalism compared with its 'rival' competitor in the region; namely: the Royal Moroccan Army. On the other hand, the report minimizes the probability of renewed border clashes between the two sides in spite of the prevailing tension in Algerian-Moroccan relations. Here, it should be indicated that the border conflict happened in October 1963; which means that the report was regularly updated to include new developments.

The fourth paragraph deals with Franco-Algerian relations. In that respect, the draftsmen estimated that Algeria would gradually and timely disengage from those overwhelming bilateral ties. But, this move implies the risk of causing France to reduce the amount of economic aid to Algeria especially when the understanding covering the use of nuclear sites by France expires in 1965. Yet, French need for Algerian oil combined with Algerian dependence on French financial help would prevent complete separation between the two countries.

Seen otherwise, the existing multifaceted interdependence between the two countries will persist anyway. In consequence, the report argues that Franco-Algerian 'interdependence and association' links would keep them together at least in General de Gaulle's lifetime. But, the more important conclusion was that France was indirectly checking Sino-Russian influence on Ben Bella's government. Thus, it

was stated: "... At least as long as French assistance and presence remain strong, the USSR and China will be content to play a background role although continuing to provide economic aid. [However], a major breach between France and Algeria could open the way for greatly increased Soviet influence".

The fifth paragraph carries on with the topic of foreign policy. It asserts that on account of the revolutionary ideals held by Algerian leaders, the government will maintain its support to any movement claiming to be anti-colonial. For example, in Africa, "Ben Bella will provide moral support, as well as arms and training, to revolutionary movements, often in concert with Soviet and Chinese actions". These actions, it was stressed, would clash with United States policy in sub-Saharan Africa. Algeria's Africa policy might even represent a real danger if as a consequence thereof a given rebel movement acquired the capacity to carry out a sustained guerilla war. At this stage, it was clear that American-Algerian relations were set for future misunderstandings over the colonial problem in Africa and the impact of Cold War on the issue.

In the final paragraph, the report states that Soviets and Chinese were confident that Ben Bella's foreign policy was working in their favour in upholding revolutionary movements. Therefore, they would take the backseat while the job was done for them. Next, the report warns that Soviet influence would be predominant in case France was to dissociate with Algeria. This hypothetical eventuality would benefit Soviet interests in Algeria though it would be very taxing for the U.S.S.R. too. They would have to provide an important budget to support Algeria which is something very unusual for the Soviet economy.²

On scrutiny, the study reflects a sentiment of growing suspicion and worry affecting American officials concerning Algerian home and foreign affairs. Inside the country, the post-colonial economy was in shambles unable to get started as indicated by the declining standard of living of the masses. What was worse, the prospect for further deterioration did not seem avoidable in the short term. All this meant that Algeria was facing the danger of political instability and even external threat.

In foreign affairs, American disenchantment with Algeria stemmed from Ben Bella's leftist positions. They objected to the government's active meddling with African issues and material support for

revolutionary movements irrespective of their ideological nature. Algerian policies were seen Sino-Soviet oriented and so detrimental to American interests, but more particularly conflicting with United States policy in Black Africa in the Cold War context of the early 1960's. But, was Ben Bella a communist in American eyes for that matter?

In a later memorandum by Mc George Bundy –Johnson's Assistant for National Security Affairs- dated January 5, 1965; we find that the American administration did not consider Ben Bella himself Communist. He only expressed his revolutionary views with some temperamental excitement .³ Some writers have even blamed Ben Bella's leftist tendencies on his collaborators who were trying to avoid losing the socialist elements of the government to the rivaling camps vying with Ben Bella for leadership .⁴

After Kennedy's assassination, and on the basis of the NIE 62-64 report, President Johnson, who followed Ben Bella's case previously, decided to find means to reason him for his unrelenting criticisms of American foreign policy. Subsequent to varied consultations with White House staff and multiple correspondences with different agencies and analysts, Johnson's advisors reached the conclusion that there must be use of the aid programme and similar technical or trade agreements destined for Algeria to pressurize President Ben Bella into considering moderating his unfriendly attitudes regarding the United States .⁵

The said aid policy consisted of a symbolic multi-aspect help package consisting of technical, service, commodity or convertible dollar credit. It usually came as a kind of bonus gift from the American government to help Algeria complete trade transactions and deals payable in cash and agreed to on favourable terms. Algerian imports were mostly American wheat grains covering 40 to 50% of the country's yearly needs. As a rule, the rather lengthy procedure amounted to the following. The Algerian purchase order was first lodged through the ambassadorial services with the State Department. Then, consultations and opinions about the transaction were obtained from advisory services and officials before State Department action. Finally, the President took his decision in full awareness of the recommendations made by the hierarchy. Last, the President's decision was transmitted to the concerned agencies for implementation.

In the case of Algeria, after 1963, the commodity-based aid policy was gradually turned into a strategic lever to redress Ben Bella's foreign policy. Historically, the aid policy developed in the context of an old programme called (Public Law) PL 480 with varied versions labelled as Title I, Title IIetc, according to each Title's respective financial worth. Algerian war refugees had benefited from the programme since the late 1950's .⁶ Then, at the close of 1962, the PL 480 was revived by President Kennedy out of friendship for Algeria within the general framework of United States foreign aid policy. However, early in 1965, in reaction to Ben Bella's pro-Soviet statements, Mc George Bundy advised Johnson to suspend current Algerian aid deliveries until Ben Bella would come to 'his senses' .⁷ It implied withholding scheduled quotas and freezing approved wheat grain transactions for Algeria at short notice.

The reason behind the move is that the projected sanctions arose initially from recommendations made to that effect by William Porter; the U.S. Ambassador to Algiers. The latter had pointed out in a number of memoranda the necessity of considering the options and effective means to put Ben Bella under pressure by means of the PL 480, yet without actually driving him into the hands of the Soviets. But Porter emphasized that unlike President Nasser of Egypt, Ben Bella did not create problems for the United States at least on Algerian soil until then .⁸ To conclude his views to Johnson, Mc George Bundy voiced his admiration for Porter whom he found aptly competent in conveying the point –of U.S. disappointment in him- so frankly to Ben Bella , and yet managing to keep the lines of communication open between them.

Hence, American aid to Algeria was severely reduced along the Bundy-Porter proposed lines. For example, the first sanctions were applied to the quotas of January-February 1965 when portions of the consignments were secretly diverted to Morocco⁹. As a consequence, the value of the PL 480 shrank from \$53 million in 1964 to \$24 million in 1965. The nature of the aid package for that year consisted of commodities like flour, cooking oil, milk powder to go towards paying land rehabilitation workers, and some medical equipment for a hospital at Algiers as part of the MEDICO-CARE project .¹⁰

However, Secretary of State Dean Rusk wanted more pressure on Algeria. He was willing to bring the PL 480 down to the level of \$20 million for the year 1966 .¹¹ By then, there developed a tripartite

conviction between Mc George Bundy, Porter and Rusk that Algerian aid should be trimmed even further in the absence of signs of gratefulness from the Algerian administration. In essence, they objected to Ben Bella's leftist pronouncements about crises such as Cuba, Vietnam, Congo and the Dominican Republic ...etc. Still, they agreed that Algeria was one of the most six important countries of Africa that should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, by then, the United States had increased its stake in the Algerian desert by investing \$100 million in varied oil projects .¹² Financially, that was not a major interest yet, but it ended up as such over a decade later when the figure skyrocketed to a colossal \$3 billion by 1980 .¹³ In this context of growing American assets in Algeria, one is tempted to understand that the United States maintaining of its uneasy ties with the Algerian government against all odds was driven mostly by the strategic consideration of American long term oil needs.

Nevertheless, it is to be appreciated that American governments of the 1960's were trying to be different from Truman's (1945-1952) and Eisenhower's (1953-1960) in dealing with newly-independent states. Whereas non-alignment and neutralism was not acceptable so far especially in John Foster Dulles's time, those principles became somewhat tolerated during Kennedy's mandate. Secretary Rusk confirmed that approach when he wrote: "We were not worried by those countries which chose not to take a position in the Cold War.....But we faced a problem with some third world leaders who were rascals, and others who had expansionist designs in their regions" .¹⁴

Anyway, American pressure was maintained on Algeria. Thus, only five days before Ben Bella's fall, Johnson allowed stopping aid to the country. On 14th June 1965, Rusk conveyed to Algerian Ambassador to Washington –Mr. Cherif Guellal- that the running programmes were coming to an end unless the Algerian government submitted a request for their continuation. There would be prolongation of funding only for two activities relating to hospitals and land rehabilitation until expiration of their budgets .¹⁵ It is not difficult to understand that the requirement of renewing Algerian application for American aid aimed to humble Ben Bella's revolutionary fervour. He had to admit openly -in public- his country's need for foreign help which would be a kind of moral undertaking not to be ungrateful to the United States in the future.

Thereafter, the component elements of the aid programme began to stop one by one because of budgeting delays, as in the case of the Soil Conservation Service, the Four Areas and the Care-Medico projects .¹⁶

In other words, the Johnson administration was laying the blame on Ben Bella for its Algerian sanctions. But Bella too blamed his country's internal difficulties squarely on the legacy of French imperialism and Western neo-colonial policies towards rising independent states and Third World countries in general. That is why he particularly took to task United States aggressive foreign policy for its negative hegemonic control over world events. Hence, his policy style was laden with populist revolutionary rhetoric and anti-American attitudes regarding most Cold War issues. In consequence, he sided with revolutionary movements in Africa struggling against western colonialism and sympathized with nationalist rebel groups fighting against corrupt or West-oriented conservative regimes. Seen otherwise he sought a growing role for Algeria to oppose western imperialism. However, it was believed that those goals were beyond Algeria's means unless Ben Bella set aside the country's immediate priorities of national development .¹⁷

But, what were Ben Bella's political thoughts and his appreciation of United States foreign policy, notably regarding his country. The Algerian internal situation prevailing between 1962 and 1965 was a critical one pregnant with events likely to materialize in the short term. One can summarily outline the main aspects of that congested situation without delving into the details with a view to highlighting Ben Bella's immediate predicament and so explain facets of his character and political behaviour.

Essentially, he confronted two major challenging tasks encompassing political and economic domains in his attempt to build the new Algerian state. On the political side, there were three phases of development characterized by an overflow of issues from pre-independence days which persisted through the period 1963-1964. The first phase; August-September 1962; was used to lay the foundations of the new government such as electing the Constituent Assembly, enlarging the Political Bureau and launching the Algerian Republic.

Simultaneously and subsequently, the second phase; 1962-1963; was a period of serious misunderstanding and violent political fighting involving varied forces and leading figures over the orientation of the

country's institutions. In fact, the crisis came to an end only thanks to the intervention of the army in the many troubled regions of the country. The third phase; 1962-1964; saw the rise of the F.L.N. (Front de Liberation National) as the only legitimate national party of post-independence Algeria and the exclusion of all other political organizations. Hence, many opposition leaders and rival parties chose to go underground for survival with the leading ones being the P.R.S, (*Parti de la Révolution Socialiste* of Mohammed Boudiaf), the F.F.S (*Front des Forces Socialistes* of Hocine Ait Ahmed) and few other such outlawed groups. This third phase was concluded with the election of Ben Bella as the country's first Head of State in September 1963 and the adoption of Socialism as the country's system of government.¹⁸

In the economic field, Algerian independence meant the reconstruction of a war-torn country. The long colonial decades of land expropriation and resource exploitation had left Algeria bankrupt. Then, the departing one million strong French *colons* in the summer of 1962 completed the drama of Algeria's destruction. Hence, at the last G.P.R.A meeting in Tripoli in June 1962, it was agreed that postwar reconstruction would follow a socialist model so as to involve all the active forces of the Algerian Revolution such as the peasantry, the army and the intelligentsia in the nation-building process. Such communal effort would in effect be a continuation of the war effort as experienced during the revolutionary period 1954-1962. In other words, the projected socialist society would be logically progressive and naturally anti-imperialistic.¹⁹

Therefore, the early economic and social national development strategies were nominally conceived in the context of the Tripoli Charter. For example, the year 1963 saw the adoption of legislation aimed at preventing the rise of an aristocratic or upper class in Algeria. This took the form of general nationalization policies of large estates and property inherited with independence in 1962, the institution of self-management systems for the state-owned farms or agricultural lands, and the creation of national agencies for the rehabilitation of the land. Additionally, a state agency for commerce was set up with exclusive prerogatives over internal and external trade. Similarly, labour agreements were entered into for the transfer of Algerian idle manpower to France. However, the Algerian leadership still imbued with traumatic colonial memories was

reluctant to see French control continue in the new Algeria. Thus, beginning in 1963, the economy was opened for partnership to other countries notably the United States. Consequently, by 1970, American companies were importing 10% of Algerian oil products.²⁰ Maybe, that was one more reason which boosted United States-Algerian relations in the volatile years of the 1960's in addition to the projected mid-term American investment plans in Algerian oilfields in the Sahara.

The Cuban Crisis

In spite of improving economic cooperation between the two countries, American foreign policy was hardly appreciated by President Ben Bella particularly concerning imperialism-marked issues or Cold War questions. Here, it should be pointed out that Ben Bella allows much consideration to the human as opposed to the professional factor in sizing up his partners. With respect to Kennedy, Ben Bella makes a distinction between the man as an old friend of the Algerian cause since the 1950's and the elected President 'who is captive of the American system'.²¹ Ben Bella is respectful of Kennedy's humane nature, but he rejects his political personification of American institutions bent on expansionism and intimidation in dealing with rising states or nationalist leaders such as Cuba, Egypt, Ghana and Vietnam.

In any case, Cuba was Kennedy's most serious challenge during his whole presidency; 1961-1963, for trying him severely on two occasions, and also for opposing him to Ben Bella. He had to face the first test in the famously known episode of 'the Bay of Pigs' Crisis. As a matter of fact, the test came down to him as a legacy from President Eisenhower who saw the crisis develop during his mandate and was determined to deal with it eventually when the time was fit. On leaving the White House in January 1961, Eisenhower broke off American relations with Cuba presenting thereby Kennedy with a fait accompli of an anti-Castro policy. What is more, the C.I.A was simultaneously engaged in the preparation of an anti-Castro coup that came in the form of a military invasion of the Bay of Pigs on 15 April 1961. As the operation failed, the aggression turned into humiliation for the Kennedy administration which accepted responsibility for it.²² No doubt that Kennedy's image of peaceful man was severely

tarnished for condoning what amounted to an imperialist policy in the eyes of his admirers inside and outside the country.

The second Cuban Crisis broke out coincidentally during Ben Bella's visit to the United States in October 1962. The trip was meant to celebrate the accession of Algeria to United Nations membership as the 108th member state. But, soon the occasion turned into a severe test of American-Algerian relations as Ben Bella was faced with two critical problems; one relating to Cuba, the other to the Arab-Israeli Conflict.

Regarding Cuba, Ben Bella was embarrassed to receive an invitation from Kennedy to visit the White House shortly after receiving another one to visit Castro in Havana. So, when the White House was informed of Ben Bella's plan to honour the Cuban invitation, it expressed its disinclination to receive Ben Bella. Nevertheless, after the U.N. membership party, Ben Bella was received by Kennedy in the White House on 16th October for another congratulatory party. Yet, Ben Bella fell in another embarrassing situation when he found he had to meet the presidents of South Korea and South Vietnam which the Algerian government was not ready to recognize yet. The two regimes were created by the American government in the 1950's and as such were considered puppet regimes by Algerian revolutionaries. It is not clear whether the White House sought to trick Ben Bella into striking a personal friendship with the two Asian leaders in the hope it would lead to future diplomatic relations between their respective countries or if Ben Bella was simply oversensitive to the event blowing it out of proportion as reported in his memoirs. It should be noted though that the two Asian regimes needed by then to get out of their isolation for closely identifying with American post-war expansionist strategy in Southeast Asia.

Ben Bella's memoirs also reveal that things went from bad to worse during that first contact with Kennedy. In one such face-to face meeting between them, the discussion became so tense and terribly undiplomatic for its excessively crude quality. The conversation focused on the American-Cuban misunderstanding rather than Algerian-American bilateral interests. Thus, Ben Bella squeezed Kennedy over his intimidating moves towards Cuba. In reaction, Kennedy explained that he would tolerate a version of Yugoslavian or Polish Communism in Cuba, but would never accept an expansionist

Communism bent on spreading the revolution in all Latin America. One assumes this to be a direct allusion to Che Guevara's role in exporting the Cuban Revolution to South America and Africa in the early 1960's.

Next, in the context of the developing Missile Crisis, which did not become public until 22 October, Kennedy told Ben Bella that he would not accept the presence of missile bases on the island. At this point, Ben Bella interjected to remind Kennedy that the United States was in control of a base at Guantanamo implying that logically that the United States was not in a position to deny to others what it was accepting for itself. Furthermore, Ben Bella went to the extent of reminding Kennedy that his administration was supporting corrupt regimes in the world while it was attacking nationalist leaders such as Castro and Nasser. Anyway, he remained unconvinced by Kennedy's argument.²³

It is clear that Ben Bella sought to settle old scores over "imperialism" as exemplified by the Cuban case once for all. If that was his aim, he certainly succeeded in stating Algeria's position on the question straight to Kennedy, although not knowing that there would never be any future meeting between the two men for ever. Strangely enough, Ben Bella let all his criticisms out so unreservedly in that single 'Summit Meeting'. He went as far as to blame Kennedy saying: "why do you victimize Castro? And why this entire embargo you impose on Cuba? You are warned that if you deal with us in the same way...as you did with him, you will get another Cuba in Africa". Ben Bella recognizes that the exchange was "harsh and equally frank on both sides".²⁴ It is not to be found anywhere in the annals of diplomacy that a summit meeting has reached this level of exquisite unorthodoxy. Curiously, this extraordinary event has not been related in its fullest proportions by officials on the American side.

At this point, Ben Bella was well aware that little chance if any was left for improving American-Algerian relations after the heated debate. He wrote: "...I left Kennedy with no illusion about future American aid policy for Algeria, notably regarding the financial help we had been promised ...which quickly went into oblivion".²⁵ So, the reduction of Algerian aid began early under President Kennedy in retaliation to Ben Bella's anti-imperialistic attitudes. To add insult to injury, Ben Bella flew to Havana on a Cuban plane that came to collect him right at New York. Being aware of the seriousness of the

situation, Ben Bella revealed his apprehension about the possibility of falling victim to some vengeful act at the hands of the C.I.A. Yet, he concluded his statement praising Kennedy as a courageously honest man. He had personal appreciation for him for being a symbol of moderation amid forces of aggression and war that made up the American elite.²⁶ Because of that special consideration for Kennedy's personality, he named a public square after him in Algiers on learning about his assassination on 22 November 1963.

Concerning the Arab cause, Ben Bella was in for another surprise. He found that segments of the American press had distorted his image depicting him as an anti-Semite. This, he interpreted as a plot engineered against him by imperialist circles connected to Jewish Zionism. In that respect, he stated: "...That Israel is a bridgehead for imperialism in the Middle East..... is doubtless fact to me". As to accusing him of anti-Semitism, that is because he unveiled the criminal role played by Israel in the Arab world.²⁷ The American press was even more critical of him after discovering his plan to meet Castro. He wrote about it: "...From that point, the press went through a hysterical condition, and instantly I became a personification of the devil in all American media centers".²⁸

It is not devoid of meaning that no interviews or reports can be found in the American press on Ben Bella's first and last visit to the United States. The controversial contact that he had with Kennedy seems to have made snowball in the media. Surely, it must be an extremely odd case for the numerous American media groups with their incredible political diversity to show no interest in the Algerian experience because of Ben Bella's outspoken anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. However, to Ben Bella, the situation was indicative of an American deficit in sociability and human touch. As he put it: "...What seems to be lacking in America is contact between men. That is why its megacities looked packed with people, but remained socially awfully empty at the same time".²⁹ Obviously, Ben Bella meant the literal sense of the term, but the reader can also guess the implied deep-lying criticism of American straight-jacketed civilization.

The American side of the story is mostly available in Arthur Schlesinger's brief account which is a little different in substance. Schlesinger –Kennedy's personal assistant- emphasizes that Ben Bella refers all the goodness he saw in America to Kennedy personally. He

usually sent him his greetings through Ambassador William Porter whenever the latter returned to Washington. However, to Kennedy's astonishment and disappointment, he went from there directly on a visit to Castro for whom he had the same feeling as Kennedy. There, they issued a joint communiqué calling for American evacuation of Guantanamo" .³⁰ Here, we can perceive Schlesinger's subtle irony to the effect that Ben Bella was naïve and somewhat unsophisticated in handling Kennedy and Castro sentimentally even-handedly.

According to Schlesinger, Kennedy too found Ben Bella sociable and honest. But, he considered his trip to Havana most puzzling, for it was either a case of genuine naivety or a premeditated affront to the United States. Anyway, Ben Bella kept sending his greetings to Kennedy on the one hand while praising the Cubans and the Viet Minh (Communist guerillas fighting in South Vietnam) and denouncing United States imperialism on the other hand ³¹.

American-Algerian relations were tested once more in the second crisis; namely: The Missile Crisis of October 1962. On discovering the presence of Soviet missile launch pads in Cuba, the American government went into round-the-clock high level consultations and meetings. Military and political leaders sought to work out strategic plans to retaliate against the missile threat. Thus, on 22 October, a quarantine zone was declared around Cuba to prevent the entry of new equipment to the island. Also, warnings were issued to the Soviet Union that its transportation ships would be checked to get into the area or be fired on eventually in case of resistance. Simultaneously, it was asked of N.A.T.O. to lend assistance in case confrontation broke out with Russia. Next, the United States endeavoured to secure the support of the United Nations and the Non-Aligned countries. Indeed, the Third World War seemed imminent with both superpowers getting ready for a nuclear stand-off. It was a close call, had it not been for the marathon negotiations and compromises achieved during the critical period, 15-28 October, leading to a face-saving bilateral superpower understanding. Thus, it was agreed that the Soviet Union would remove its missiles from Cuba against the withdrawal of American (Jupiter) missiles from Turkey. Additionally, the United States undertook not to carry out any invasion operations of Cuba in the future .³²

There is no official Algerian position on the issue, although the above-mentioned Castro-Ben Bella Communiqué suggests that

Algeria was all out for Cuba. Ben Bella's memoirs barely touch on the point avoiding a clear cut position. However, Schlesinger asserts that contact was made over the issue with Ben Bella who promised to withhold fuel supply to Soviet aircraft at Algiers if things went to the worse.³³ This seems a bit strange knowing Algeria's close ties to the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, one might assume that Ben Bella knew the Soviets would not need Algerian help with so many neighbouring Arab countries offering their services. As for Kennedy, he apparently held no grudge against Ben Bella's concerning the Cuban row. According to Schlesinger, because Kennedy felt personally related to the Algerian Revolution, he remained interested in the country's post independence national development. He always enquired from Porter about Ben Bella's well being to the point of requiring a facial description of Ben Bella in conjunction with any message that may have been destined to him through Porter. Ben Bella in turn preserved his feelings of friendship for Kennedy to the point of mourning him on his death.³⁴

L. B. Johnson's "Jingoism"

American priorities changed in the first year of Johnson's presidency; November 1963-January 1965. According to Rusk, Johnson's main worries narrowed down to the Vietnam problem and the Great Society.³⁵ So, though Vietnam was gaining primacy, the President wanted to improve the social conditions of American citizens notably the lower classes which began to agitate in that turbulent period of the early 1960's. Indeed, much of that decade was stained with social conflict, violent racial confrontation and civil rights activism. It culminated in the assassination of great figures such as Malcolm X in 1965, Robert Kennedy in 1967, Martin Luther King in 1968 and Fred Hampton in 1969. It also led to the formation of rebel movements such as the pacifist Hippies or the radical Black Panthers. Understandably, it was pressing for Johnson to work out social miracles especially as domestic life began to react to foreign policy.

Vietnam is the one leading topic that consumed American interest for the whole following decade and affected much of world opinion and international relations. Hence, a brief review of this question and the stages of its transformation into a time-bomb is in order to assess its impact on American-Algerian ties. Firstly, the Vietnam story began

with its independence from France in 1954 which also was the year when the Algerian Revolution kicked off. The Vietnam problem was not solved at the Geneva Conference in the summer of 1954 as the issue of administering the country in the form of two separate regions remained hanging. Under the influence of the two superpowers, by 1956, there emerged a Communist government in North Vietnam and a liberal capitalist system in South Vietnam.

The second most important development was the formation of the South East Treaty Organization (S.E.A.T.O) in September 1954 under the leadership of the United States with the aim of checking the communist expansion in East Asia. Under a special protocol, the treaty was extended to cover South Vietnam making American-South Vietnamese cooperation in security and defense matters a forgone conclusion for Eisenhower and all the following Presidents .³⁶ From then on, North Vietnam became in the eyes of American leaders a potential threat to South Vietnam's existence notably for claiming the right to reunify both sections as in the old days preceding French colonial rule. Thus, gradually a guerilla communist movement known as the Viet Minh developed in the South bent on toppling the pro-American regime in Saigon. Obviously, the Viet Minh organization was coached by the North Vietnamese forces called the Viet Cong, and its survival almost guaranteed by their unconditional support in the face of mounting repression of the successive Saigon military dictators.

By the time of Johnson's access to the presidency, tension was running high in South Vietnam owing to the increasing confrontation between the Viet Minh and the South Vietnamese forces. Hence, the American administration began to intensify its support for the Saigon government on the basis of the SEATO understanding. That was the situation until in August 1964 when it was announced that two United States warships were subject to communist aggression in the Tonkin Gulf. On the express order of Johnson, the Congress voted the Tonkin Gulf Resolution authorizing retaliation on North Vietnamese targets leaving all discretion to the President. Thereafter, the Resolution was used as a declaration of war on North Vietnam with the American army determining the conditions of its implementation. That is how the civil strife that had been inter-Vietnamese for years gradually turned into an American-Vietnamese conflict.

When Johnson secured a new presidential term in November 1964, he turned his attention wholly to the simmering Asian crisis. However, the issue was to take all his term and even threaten the country's already shaken social cohesion. Beginning in February 1965, military operations were expanded inside North Vietnam along an aerial bombing strategy that aimed to erase the Viet Cong bases. As a consequence, the American troop buildup in South Vietnam jumped from 25.000 in November 1964 to 165.000 one year later. This critical transformation of the Vietnam conflict became known as 'the Americanization of the War' denoting a shift of fighting roles and duties between South Vietnamese and American forces. As a backlash to that swift sinking into the Asian quagmire, American opinion grew hostile to the war causing Johnson to relinquish the option of a second mandate. In March 1968, he announced his decision to that effect ending thereby the first episode of the Vietnam War. The Second episode began with Nixon's access to the White House in January 1969, and continued till the end of the conflict in the mid-1970's.

Anyway, President Johnson faced Ben Bella's harsh criticisms just as Kennedy had before him. But Johnson too began to apply the sanctions prescribed earlier on by the State Department and the N.S.C to bring Ben Bella 'back to his senses'. Finally, in June 1965, just five days before the Algiers coup that placed Colonel Houari Boumediene in power; all American aid programmes to Algeria were terminated. Thus, with the departure of Kennedy first and then Ben Bella from the political scene, the first stage of United States-Algerian relations came abruptly to an end, and a disappointing one for that matter.

Conclusion

In reviewing the two countries' bilateral relations in the formative period from October 1962 through June 1965, one can perceive the difficult start that characterized that beginning. This is traceable through both administrations; namely Kennedy's till November 1963, and Johnson's thereafter. Under the former, the American government tried to win over the Algerian leadership by showing much sympathy towards the new state and offering to help in the development of the country in critical socio-economic areas. Much magnanimously and voluntarily, the Kennedy government provided symbolic aid and encouraged Algerian oil imports to the United States.

On the contrary, the Ben Bella administration was not totally receptive to American overtures especially if it meant to temper with their radical political orientation and anti-imperialist foreign policy. Right from the beginning, Ben Bella adopted a dual political style in dealing with the United States. On the one hand, he expressed his appreciation of Kennedy's friendship to Algeria, and on the other hand never missed an occasion to vilify United States foreign policy. Whether, it was Cuba, the Congo or Vietnam, he always found fault with the American position on those thorny Cold War issues. More so, Ben Bella also found irrefutable proof of American imperialism in United States alignment with Morocco against Algeria during the border conflict in October 1963. With the death of Kennedy, the dice was cast for an uneasy relational pattern between the two countries in the future.

Under Johnson, the misunderstanding went further and entailed retaliatory sanctions between the two sides. First, the American administration began to curtail the Algerian aid programme. Then, it conditioned all improvement in bilateral relations on a genuine revision of Ben Bella's anti-American attitudes. But, Ben Bella's rising star among revolutionary leaders like Nasser and Castro, and within revolutionary movements in Black Africa made him further sensitive to American imperialism especially as the Vietnam problem began to flare up. Ben Bella saw another instance of American interventionist imperialism in the case of the Dominican Crisis in April 1965. In summary, it is no exaggeration to say that the early turbulences that crippled American-Algerian relations developed not out of national differences between Kennedy and Ben Bella but instead due to Cold War considerations. What was worse, under Johnson, the issue became the incompatibility of American neo-colonial foreign policy style with Ben Bella's radical revolutionary doctrines.

Notes and References

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²¹ Ben Bella, p. 150

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²³ Ben Bella, p. 150.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

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²⁹ Ibid.

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