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The efforts of the Provisional Algerian Government in confronting French colonial policy abroad

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Abstract

The establishment of the Provisional Algerian Government was a necessity imposed by reality, for in the eyes of international opinion, the National Liberation Front remained merely a rebel movement. It therefore became imperative for the leaders of the Revolution to create this body, whose mission was to promote the Algerian cause by opening offices in numerous countries, thereby enabling it to counter French policies aimed at suppressing the Algerian Revolution and ultimately to lead the negotiations through which Algeria would recover its sovereignty.

Keywords: Provisional Government, French colonialism, colonial policy, Algeria

Introduction

The Provisional Algerian Government undertook considerable efforts to confront French colonial schemes, particularly on the international stage, as the French enemy spared no attempt to encircle and weaken the Algerian Revolution. In response, the Provisional Algerian Government adopted a strategic

approach that countered French colonial policy.

From the foregoing, the following question may be posed:

To what extent did the Provisional Algerian Government contribute to confronting French colonial policy?

1. The Origins of the Establishment of the Provisional Algerian Government – 19 September 1958

The National Council of the Algerian Revolution, during its second session held in Cairo in August 1957 (**Abbas, M.** 2007), entrusted the Committee of Coordination and Execution with the authority to proclaim the establishment of the Provisional Algerian Government. This decision emerged as a necessity imposed by the circumstances on the ground, for the evolution of the conflict with the French enemy made the formation of such a government in 1958 an unavoidable requirement. The government was envisioned as the political façade of the Revolution its representative and voice in all international bodies. This was reaffirmed by Colonel

Ouamrane in support of Ferhat Abbas's demand to proclaim the new government. Revolution leaders had already begun contemplating the creation of a provisional government for Algeria. Omar Ouamrane defended this idea in a report he presented to the Committee of Coordination and Execution on 17 April 1957, asserting: "To avoid being overtaken by events, a government must be established, through which we can strengthen our contacts with foreign governments and reinforce the legitimacy of the Revolution in international fora."

Forming such a government had become a pressing necessity dictated by the requirements of the stage; without it, the National Liberation Front would remain, in the eyes of international public opinion, no more than a rebellious movement even as the Algerian question had already entered the realm of international diplomacy. Following the Tangier Conference, during which the FLN consulted with the governments of Tunisia and Morocco, the National Liberation Front resolved to establish the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic between 27 and 30 April 1958 (André, C. 1990).

On the first day of the proceedings, Abdelhamid Mehri raised the issue as an imminent possibility, and Ahmed Boumendjel supported it, explaining that the progress of the war required the formation of such a government. Contacts with Arab and friendly countries thus began with the objective of securing their recognition. A preparatory campaign for the proclamation of the Provisional Government was then launched by the duo Krim Belkacem and Mahmoud Cherif in an interview published in *El Moudjahid* on 7 May 1958, in which they justified the creation of the government as follows: "In response to the desire of the Algerian people expressed on numerous occasions and as the embodiment of the nation's existence and the official end of French colonial rule in Algeria after four years of war."

Ahmed Toufik El Madani recounts that a communiqué was issued simultaneously in Cairo, Tunis, and Rabat announcing the creation of the Algerian Provisional

Government on Friday, 19 September 1958 at 1 p.m. The proclamation took place in the presence of journalists and representatives of international news agencies in a hall on Imar Street in the Cairo Press Directorate. Ferhat Abbas read the declaration of its formation, followed by a speech by Ahmed Toufik El Madani explaining the significance of the decision, in the presence of the international press and with the support of the Egyptian government.

The Provisional Government succeeded in achieving many of its objectives, particularly in the fields of military affairs, armament, and diplomacy. Several countries hastened to recognize it; among the first six were Pakistan, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, and Tunisia. Thereafter, recognition continued to grow as the government expanded its activities and the responsibilities of its members diversified.

With its formation, Algeria began to enjoy an international status. The existence of this government also provided the fighters with an official and moral impetus, enabling the Revolution to pursue its military and political activities both inside the country and on the international stage under the authority of a legitimate government. It thus refuted French claims that Algeria was an integral part of France or merely one of its departments.

Ferhat Abbas affirmed:

"The Algerian people will not lay down their arms and will not accept the so-called 'peace of the brave.' Algeria is not France, and the Algerian people are not French. Algeria will accept nothing less than self-determination, independence, and the unity of its people and territory."

1.1. The Purpose Behind the Establishment of the Provisional Algerian Government – 19 September 1958

The objective for which the Provisional Government was created, along with its mission, is summarized by Ahmed Toufik El Madani in his statement: "...Its purpose is to convince world public opinion that the Algerian negotiator exists, and that he expresses his desire to engage in official negotiations with the French government according to the conditions

proclaimed by the Revolution. The essential mission of the Provisional Government is to achieve independence, to enable Algeria to make its voice heard within the international community, and to prepare the way for this endeavor."

The aim of establishing the Provisional Government is also evident in the message it addressed, immediately after its formation, to President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The message stated:

"The creation of this Government at this precise moment is an open response to the blatant challenge issued by the French colonial government against the struggling Algerian people when it proclaimed its policy of complete integration. France then sought to implement this policy by forcing the people to take part in the referendum scheduled for 28 September on the new French Constitution... The Provisional Government puts an end to the repeated French claim that it cannot find a legitimate representative with whom to negotiate officially in order to reach a solution to the Algerian question."

2.1. The Policy of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic

The Provisional Government adopted several fundamental principles, most notably:

- A pledge before the Algerian people to achieve freedom, justice, and social emancipation.
- The formulation of the basis for negotiations with France, centered on the Algerian people's right to independence and self-determination.
- A commitment to Maghreb federal unity and to Algeria's Arab identity. The Government emphasized that Algeria was an integral part of the Arab world and that the liberation struggle was free from religious fanaticism contrary to the claims made by France an effort likely aimed at gaining international sympathy.
- The definition of its policy on resolving the Algerian question with France and the European minority, promising the future Algerian state would grant them citizenship and all guarantees

necessary to protect their legitimate interests.

- Concerning relations between an independent Algeria and France, the Government clarified that these would be built on equality not only with France but with all nations. It also affirmed its respect for the UN Charter, human rights, and the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war. These principles constituted the core of the Government's international policy.

The proclamation of the Provisional Government brought immense joy to the Algerian people, who organized celebrations across the country to mark its birth an event that soon came to be known as Republic Day.

2. The Provisional Government Confronting French Colonial Policy Abroad

2.1. In the Maghreb

Following the Tangier Conference (27-29 April 1958), which produced the foundations of a Maghreb front, De Gaulle sought to undermine this emerging regional unity. The Conference had been held in the aftermath of the French attack on Sakiet Sidi Youssef and the wave of solidarity it provoked among Maghreb states developments that De Gaulle considered dangerous for French strategy. Weakening Maghreb cohesion would, in his view, isolate the Provisional Algerian Government regionally.

De Gaulle notes in his memoirs:

"On 7 June, I returned to Paris. The following week, I implemented the agreements I had proposed on 3 June to the leaders of Tunisia and Morocco, under which our forces would withdraw from their territories, except from the port of Bizerte in Tunisia, and from Meknes, Marrakech, Agadir, and the naval base of Lyautey in Morocco."

These French overtures, accompanied by promises of economic projects in the Sahara involving both Tunisia and Morocco, were part of a broader attempt to sever Maghreb ties with the Algerian Revolution. France sought:

- a. To achieve a political victory in the Maghreb by applying the colonial principle of divide and rule.
- b. To hinder armed struggle inside Algeria,

- especially in the eastern regions.
- c. To create a profound rift between the Algerian and Tunisian peoples.
- d. To exploit the Igli region in Algeria at minimal cost.

Such moves aimed also at consolidating the stability of both the Tunisian and Moroccan regimes. This translated into increased pressure on the FLN and the ALN. French-Tunisian and French-Moroccan rapprochement eventually persuaded both governments to exert pressure on the Algerian side to hasten a peaceful settlement that aligned with French conditions, thereby ensuring the survival of the two neighboring regimes.

In Tunisia, the authorities halted the transit of arms in June and seized significant quantities, including **5,070 rifles, 2,037 machine guns, 2,037 submachine guns, 20 bazookas, 30 mortars, and 10 million rounds of ammunition**. Meanwhile, Morocco banned the passage of ALN units across its territory. French maneuvers sought to suffocate the Revolution by exploiting the growing tension between the Provisional Algerian Government and the Tunisian government. De Gaulle was able to capitalize on this climate of mistrust, transforming cautious relations into a real crisis due to Bourguiba's fear of the expansion of the conflict in North Africa and the possibility of an ALN-Egyptian alliance threatening his regime.

2.2. In the Middle East

Arab states played a decisive role in internationalizing the Algerian question through the Afro-Asian bloc, leveraging their influence in the Arab, Islamic, and non-aligned worlds, particularly within the United Nations. They helped draft resolutions for adoption by the General Assembly, strengthening the legitimacy of Algeria's cause.

Overall, French policy in the Middle East did not produce the results De Gaulle had hoped for. Rather than reducing Arab support for the Provisional Algerian Government, it strengthened solidarity with the just cause of the Algerian people.

3. De Gaulle and the Encirclement of the Algerian Revolution

3.1. Africa

The French government sought to counter the expanding Algerian liberation movement in Africa by implementing a series of phased policies aimed at securing legal legitimacy for containing the continent within the framework of the French African Community. The overarching objective was to strip the Algerian Revolution of its African support bases.

In this context, France introduced a revised version of the project for a federal union the "new framework" through which it hoped to maintain dominance over its African colonies. This project ultimately failed, largely due to the evolution of the Algerian War. De Gaulle then attempted to cultivate loyal allies among certain West African states, an endeavor in which he partially succeeded. Several such states voted alongside France in the UN General Assembly and supported its continued presence in Algeria and its African colonies. Among the most prominent of these were Madagascar, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. El Moudjahid quickly perceived the danger posed by this alignment and warned these states against being drawn into colonial schemes that undermined shared interests and threatened the unity of Africa and the broader Afro-Asian movement.

3.2. Asia

Asia served as a gateway for the Algerian cause beginning with the participation of an FLN delegation led by Hocine Aït Ahmed and Mohammed Yazid in the founding conference of the Afro-Asian group in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1956. As is well known, the conference recommended placing the Algerian question on the agenda of the UN General Assembly. That same year witnessed the establishment of the FLN office in Jakarta its first representation outside the Arab world.

France could respond to this Asian solidarity only with protest, threats, and pressure. It strongly objected in 1958 when the Indonesian government took part in commemorating the Afro-Asian Solidarity Day for the Algerian cause, held on 30 May. France protested again in 1959 following the scheduled visit of Ferhat Abbas at the head of a delegation from the Provisional Government. The French

ambassador in Jakarta wielded the weapon of intimidation, threatening Indonesia by hinting at a change in France’s “neutral” position regarding the unrest then taking place in Sumatra. This tactic failed: Indonesia continued, and even intensified, its support for the Algerian struggle, granting a second financial donation to the Revolution amounting to 500,000 USD, following an earlier contribution.

French misinformation and media obstruction in various Asian countries occasionally created confusion among official and public circles regarding the Algerian question. This was especially true in Malaysia, where misunderstanding and lack of solidarity were pronounced. Consequently, the Provisional Government launched a counter-propaganda campaign, which eventually shifted both elite and popular opinion in Malaysia. The Malaysian king pledged material support and affirmed his backing for the Algerian cause at the United Nations General Assembly.

3.3. De Gaulle’s Measures to Confine the Revolution within the Eastern and Western Blocs

Contrary to its experience with the Western camp, France failed to achieve its objectives within the Soviet bloc. French propaganda there was limited and lacked real effectiveness. This is demonstrated by the position of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who adopted a strategy of calculated ambiguity toward the Algerian conflict. While he did not oppose providing material assistance to the FLN—covertly, of course—he avoided the political obligation of formally recognizing either the FLN or the Provisional Government after its emergence in 1958.

De Gaulle, for his part, strained every effort and employed every available means to curb the diplomatic momentum of the Provisional Government, particularly in capitalist Western countries, long-standing allies of France.

Conclusion

French colonialism sought relentlessly to distort the image of the Algerian Revolution and diminish its legitimacy by mobilizing various governments and international platforms. Yet the Algerian Revolution

through the steadfast efforts of the Provisional Government stood firm against French colonial policy, countering and exposing every claim and fabrication.

Among the many methods used by France to hinder FLN activities in Europe were violent operations conducted by its intelligence services, targeting FLN representatives. Between late 1958 and mid-1959, these operations escalated into attempts to assassinate leading figures of the Revolution.

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