

Popular Support and Its Role in Preserving Algeria's Territorial Unity Insights from Algerian and French Archival Sources (1956–1962)

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Received : 21/06/2024 ; Accepted : 25/02/2025 ; Published : 07/08/2025

Abstract

This article examines the role of support from Algeria's popular masses in consolidating the principle of territorial unity during the War of Liberation (1956–1962), in the face of French colonial projects aimed at partitioning the country most notably by separating the Sahara. The study highlights how the National Liberation Front and the Provisional Government wagered on popular mobilization and mass demonstrations as a political and militant instrument to thwart these schemes. Drawing on Algerian and French archival documents, the article sheds light on pivotal demonstrations such as those of 11 December 1960, the day of 5 July 1961 against partition, and the southern protests in Ouargla and al-Ṭayyibāt. It also reveals the degree to which the masses understood the danger of tampering with territorial unity and how broadly they responded to the calls of the revolutionary leadership. The article concludes that popular alignment with the revolution was a decisive factor in undermining Gaullist policy and strengthening the revolution's negotiating position. In this way, mass action helped entrench the principle: "No independence without territorial unity".

Keywords: National Liberation Front – territorial unity – popular support – mass demonstrations – Algerian and French archives

Introduction

The question of preserving Algeria's territorial unity during the War of Liberation was of the utmost importance, especially after the challenges the Algerian Revolution faced from 1956 onward. In response, the revolutionary leadership sought to rely on popular support to safeguard that unity something that took concrete form in numerous mass demonstrations across the country, from North to South. Among them were the demonstrations of 11 December 1960, the demonstrations in the cities of Ouargla and al-Ṭayyibāt, and the designation of 1 November as a national day against partition. All of these actions converged in service of one aim: upholding the principle of territorial unity non-negotiable in the face of French intransigence and the insistence of the Gaullist administration on creating a territorial rupture in colonial Algeria.

The Algerian popular response was frank and unequivocal: no Algeria without the Sahara. This, in turn, reinforced the revolutionary leadership's thesis that there can be no Algerian independence without Algeria's territorial unity. Through this field mobilization and these purposeful demonstrations insisting on the Algerian character of the Sahara the guiding idea embraced by the leadership of the revolution was made unmistakably clear: unwavering adherence to territorial unity.

From the earliest days of armed struggle, the revolutionary leadership worked to draw in human energies, raise awareness, and cultivate popular consciousness through mass mobilization anchoring an understanding of the stakes confronting the Algerian Revolution. Time and again, whenever there was an attempt to undermine the foundations of Algerian identity, the people responded with categorical refusal through a variety of means, including demonstrations at both local and national levels. National demonstrations rejecting the idea of partition and territorial fragmentation whether spontaneous or in response to calls issued by the revolutionary leadership and the Provisional Algerian Government proved the maturity of national feeling and awareness regarding territorial unity. They also constituted a genuine impetus and an open challenge by the Algerian people to Gaullist policy and its practices.

1-The Demonstrations of 11 December 1960

Colonial Algeria witnessed political developments on both sides. On the Algerian side, the demonstrations of 11 December 1960 stood out as the most prominent event in Algeria particularly in some major cities marking a turning point in the revolution's trajectory and a moment of major significance.

These uprisings revealed the spirit of struggle and the militant capacities that remained high among the masses, despite the repression and police terror inflicted upon them

¹They gave the FLN a powerful push to negotiate from a position of strength² In the background to these demonstrations, we find that de Gaulle returned "from afar" to deliver his resounding speech on 04/11/1960: "When I assumed the presidency in France, I decided in its name to follow a path that does not lead to an Algeria ruled by France, but rather to an Algerian Algeria," meaning that Algeria would become independent and would enjoy if it so wished, and such is the reality its own governments and institutions, its own laws; adding that "tomorrow's Algeria will be built according to what self-determination decides, with France or against it."³

From this resounding speech if the expression is apt we can discern that he presented himself as working to achieve peace in Algeria, opening a door to mutinies and unrest, especially among those who championed the idea of "French Algeria." He proceeded to assert that he would be master of the situation henceforth, promoting his project through his visit to Algeria on 09/12/1960, in order to prepare the climate for the referendum on self-determination. According to the report⁴ submitted by Chelou Teker, leader of a gendarmerie unit in the capital, on the December 1960 demonstrations, Greater Algiers and the city of Algiers witnessed demonstrations from 7 to 14 December 1960, following General de Gaulle's visit to Algeria.

The report notes that the demonstrations were initiated by the French of European origin on 09/12/1960 and on the morning of 10 December 1960, while Muslims carried out counter-demonstrations on the evening of 10/12/1960, carrying the Algerian national flags.

It was, then, the Europeans who seized the opportunity to stage loud demonstrations against de Gaulle and his policy demonstrations organized by the "Front of French Algeria" (F.A.F). This front, which had come to enjoy wide influence among the settlers, decided on a strike lasting four days and twenty hours, to coincide with de Gaulle's arrival in western Algeria. In addition, demonstrations began in Algiers, Oran, Constantine, Skikda... Confronted with this desperate attempt by Europeans

present in Algeria driven not by the pursuit of gains for Algeria or service to the Algerian cause, but rather by fear of losing the privileges acquired in Algeria another aim also emerged: pressuring the French government to reverse any decision that might allow Algeria to attain independence under FLN conditions.

It appears that the reaction of Algerian Muslims was spontaneous: they demanded Algeria's independence instead of an "Algerian Algeria," raising Algerian flags.⁵ The Algerian people men and women, elders and youth took to the streets across the country, chanting slogans calling for independence and freedom, and offering an explicit response to France's claims that Algeria was French, and had always been so.⁶

As a result, the intervention of the security forces (police and gendarmerie) against the demonstrators, and the clashes that occurred between French civilians and Muslims, led to casualties. According to the toll still not final⁷ the losses were:

- French of European origin: 6 dead and 47 injured/wounded.

- French from North Africa.

- Algerians: 90 dead and 226 injured/wounded.

Despite the repression and the fall of victims, this uprising received extensive media coverage.⁸

This uprising convinced General de Gaulle that it would be difficult for France to regain the trust of Algerian citizens. The clouds of "peace," in de Gaulle's view, dissipated after his visit to Algeria; and as the circle of his opponents widened, he continued implementing his policy by holding the self-determination referendum on 08/01/1961. He achieved that aim: he won the support of his own people for the policy of self-determination in Algeria at a rate of 75%, and in Algeria at 53%.⁹

With these results, the matter was settled for de Gaulle, and on the basis of them he imagined Algeria's fate after the self-determination referendum.¹⁰ Having secured this endorsement, de Gaulle returned to the negotiating table once again.

Talks between Algerians and the French resumed after the diplomatic battle had been won and after the popular masses rallied around the Provisional Government. The latter then began working to continue the negotiating struggle, to wrest legitimate rights without succumbing to impossible preconditions.

Among the positive points serving the issue of territorial unity is that these demonstrations were one of the signs of popular decisiveness in the battle against colonialism whose countdown toward ending its presence on Algerian soil had begun.¹¹ Moreover, they hastened the shattering of the myth of "French Algeria," standing as proof before world public opinion of the Algerian people's commitment to territorial unity within the framework of full independence from France.¹²

2-The National Day against Partition: Demonstrations from the North in Support of Territorial Unity

The statement issued by the Provisional Government together with its call to designate 5 July 1961 as a National Day against Partition and against the French maneuver of separating the Sahara from the national territory clearly exposed the colonial project. It affirmed that partition constituted a blatant violation of the right to self-determination and, moreover, served only to prolong and perpetuate colonial rule. The Provisional Government once again reaffirmed the sacred right of the Algerian people to the unity of their national territory and their opposition to partition, which would sabotage independence at a moment when the Algerian people stood on the threshold of regaining their sovereignty. It also issued an appeal to friendly and brotherly states to lend their support, to thwart the policy of partition, and to call for genuine negotiations.¹³

The demonstrations staged by the indigenous population in favor of Algeria's territorial unity revealed that the French government, in the remaining part of Algeria, could no longer rely on Muslim loyalty in those regions that were to remain French, nor on any willingness among Muslim masses to abandon a policy of confrontation toward an Algeria that would remain under French rule.¹⁴

It is worth noting the efforts exerted by the Algerian Revolution in the Sahara, which yielded remarkable results at the popular level. These efforts demonstrated the population's political awareness and culminated in the broad response to the Provisional Government's declaration of 5 July 1961 as a National Day against Partition.¹⁵ In order to block French intentions to fragment Algeria once again, this call urged all Algerians to mobilize and engage in a general strike.¹⁶ The Provisional Government called for the organization of this day through a strike encompassing all cities and villages, and the people's response to the call was extraordinarily widespread.¹⁷ The appeal stated in particular:¹⁸

...“At the same moment, in all the cities of Algeria from the capital and the major cities to the smallest hamlet and the most remote douar the general strike shall be carried out precisely and comprehensively, and demonstrations shall take place with the participation of all citizens: men, women, elders, and children... At the same time, the National Liberation Army shall launch swift and victorious attacks against French military centers and set up ambushes for patrols and convoys of the French army”...

Accordingly, residents of Algiers, Biskra, Djelfa, and Laghouat took part in demonstrations demanding national unity,¹⁹ carrying slogans such as “The Sahara is Algerian.”²⁰ The magnitude of the demonstrations in Algiers was such that El Moudjahid, in an article entitled “The People Who Did Not Miss the Appointment,” described them as follows:²¹

...“On the afternoon of 5 July, the Algerian capital resembled a city emptied of its inhabitants and transformed into an exhibition ground for a massive army of varied origins, multiple weapons, and diverse uniforms”...

Through these demonstrations, the Algerian people embodied national unity and demonstrated their compliance with the call of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic in its endeavor to preserve Algeria's territorial unity. Indeed, twelve million Algerians responded simultaneously to the appeal and made 5 July 1961 a National Day against Partition in the history of the Algerian Revolution.²² This stance received support from neighboring states as well as European countries. Given the abundance of such endorsements, it suffices to cite two testimonies. The first is that of the President of the Republic of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who declared:²³

...“When the French government begins genuine negotiations, it will recognize Algerian sovereignty over the Sahara”.

The second is the testimony of the Polish newspaper *Życie Warszawy*:

“There is no Sahara without Algeria... The only logical solution is to recognize that the Sahara is Algerian...”²⁴

In Algiers, for example, faced with this revolutionary call, the French authorities decided to oppose the strike. They mobilized their officials and employees in public services and issued orders to their representatives throughout Algeria’s cities and villages to implement measures with utmost severity. On that day in the capital, they deployed 35,000 police officers and security personnel, 30,000 soldiers including infantry, paratroopers, and units of the Foreign Legion and five units of the Republican Guard, airlifted at top speed from France. Despite all these preparations and threats, the Algerian people responded to the call and took to the streets to proclaim to the world their unity and the unity of their country. Demonstrations erupted in Algiers’ neighborhoods (Climat de France, Bab El Oued, Bir Mourad Raïs), where demonstrators raised national flags, chanted slogans in support of the Provisional Government and the National Liberation Front, and called for resistance to the partition of the country.²⁵

Across the rest of Algeria, demonstrations also took place. In Oran, three citizens were killed and seven wounded; in Constantine, demonstrations involved some ten thousand citizens; in Jijel, fourteen citizens were killed and more than fifty wounded; in Sétif, seven were injured; and in Batna, demonstrations resulted in ten wounded. Protests were also recorded in Béjaïa, Skikda, Telaghma, Annaba, Aïn Beïda, Mila, Koléa, Médéa, and Miliana.²⁶ In addition, demonstrations took place in the Mزاب Valley whether in Ghardaïa, Metlili, or Mokrane as well as in Touggourt in September 1961, which witnessed a general and completely successful strike, as acknowledged by French and international press alike.²⁷

France failed to manufacture diversions or erect obstacles on the path to independence, and it failed in its attempt to separate the Sahara and impose territorial fragmentation on other parts of the country.²⁸ This was because France had made it clear in its statements that partition would be its alternative as long as the National Liberation Front was unwilling to safeguard French interests or those of the European minority.²⁹

Spokespersons for world public opinion unanimously considered 5 July 1961 to be among the decisive days in the history of the Algerian Revolution. It buried forever the myth of partition and territorial fragmentation. The general strike of 5 July 1961 encompassed the entire Algerian territory an admission made even by French newspapers. More than that, major states regarded it as an international day against partition.³⁰

3-The Demonstrations of 1 November 1961: From the North

Among the initiatives that emerged in the South were the demonstrations that took place in its eastern and western parts on 1 November 1961. These demonstrations constituted yet another link in the chain of popular cohesion rejecting fragmentation and partition, and supporting the revolution’s strategy to preserve the principle of national territorial unity.

This date appears to carry a strong symbolic significance: it marks the anniversary of the outbreak of the November Revolution, and, on the other hand, the National Liberation Front was keen to make it a national day for achieving Algerian independence within the framework of unity both the unity of the people and the unity of Algerian territory.³¹

In the same context, a Top Secret report detailing the course of the demonstrations of 1 November 1961 in southern Algeria filed under box 81F 2446 in the French archives and entitled:

Bulletin mensuel des activités des forces au Sahara, Novembre 1961

records the following developments:³²

-South-Western sector: Demonstrations took place in the districts of Colomb-Béchar. According to the report, a group of youths aged between 15 and 20 gathered at 10 a.m. on 1 November 1961, proceeded to vandalize Place des Chameaux, and carried banners supporting the National Liberation Front.

-Debdaba area: About one hundred individuals, divided into three groups, gathered between 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. They did not clash with French forces, as they dispersed quickly. However, more than 107 Algerians were summoned by security authorities for questioning, after which a curfew was imposed from noon until 7 a.m. on 2 November.

-New Béchar: A large crowd of residents children and youths demonstrated while carrying FLN slogans. Security forces intervened, dispersing the crowd and confiscating their banners glorifying the FLN; three demonstrators were arrested. The report notes that no strikes were recorded in this area on 1 November 1961.

It appears that demonstrations in these areas did not combine protest and strike, but rather took the form of civil disobedience, involving targeted actions such as the destruction of colonial vital facilities. This prompted French authorities to impose curfews and carry out arrests in order to intimidate others and deter similar actions.

As for the south-eastern sector, the report indicates that demonstrations were largely peaceful and did not witness clashes with settlers, except in the area known as Malika, where a settler was subjected to violence.

Malika: Violent incidents occurred, including stone-throwing and the destruction of settlers' vehicles, ending with the arrest of a group of youths.

Laghouat and Touggourt district: On the eve of the demonstrations, numerous leaflets were distributed and wall writings supporting the FLN appeared. On 1 November 1961, a daytime demonstration by a group of 30 to 60 youths took place, but was met with the confiscation of banners and the arrest of demonstrators. In Touggourt district, similar events occurred: on 1 November 1961, a mobile unit of the French army discovered and confiscated FLN slogans and wall writings in both French and Arabic.

Ghardaïa: There was a strike by Mozabite merchants and demonstrations by Arabs, which ended with the arrest of demonstrators.³³

What is noteworthy about the activity in the eastern sector is that it combined strikes and demonstrations as a means of expressing categorical rejection of French practices in the region. Moreover, there was no ethnic division between Arabs and Mozabites despite French attempts to engineer such divisions through policies aimed at courting tribal leaders an effort that ultimately proved unsuccessful.

It is also worth mentioning that pro-French counter-demonstrations were organized by the Committee of Public Safety in Ouled Daouati and El Bayadha, featuring slogans such as “Long live France” and the raising of the French flag. Notably, these demonstrations did not face security intervention, in contrast to Algerian demonstrations, which were met with repression.³⁴

Mohamed Yazid stated, during a meeting of the Provisional Government held on 4 November 1961 to assess the outcomes of these demonstrations, that: “As for the Algerian people, they have decided their fate through these demonstrations.” Karim Belkacem, for his part, emphasized that this event constituted a new beginning for the people.³⁵

4-The Ouargla Demonstrations

The popular cohesion witnessed in the city of Ouargla represented the moment when the situation reached a breaking point. These demonstrations, which took place in the Ouargla district³⁶ in February 1962, constituted the final card that French colonialism sought to play in order to exert pressure on the negotiations that began on 7 March, with the aim of securing control over the Sahara. If we seek to identify the real reasons behind the outbreak of the Ouargla demonstrations, they may be summarized as follows:

Ouargla Sector No. 81, belonging to the Sixth Wilaya, experienced a distinctive and intensifying revolutionary activity, particularly from 1958 onward, despite the region’s specific conditions. As a militarized zone, movement was tightly restricted, with France monitoring the population’s every move. Added to this was its geographical particularity as an open area where concealment was difficult. Nevertheless, the period between 1958 and 1962 witnessed numerous events that confirmed the inhabitants’ alignment with the revolution, with demonstrations standing as a clear manifestation of this cohesion.³⁷

The colonial policy in the region, which consisted of a series of projects aimed at isolating the southern part of the country especially after the fall of the Fourth French Republic and Charles de Gaulle’s assumption of power in the Fifth Republic along with the multi-dimensional plans he introduced, which sought on the one hand to eliminate the revolution and on the other to secure greater gains and safeguard French interests in Algeria.

The firm and unequivocal stance adopted by the Provisional Algerian Government regarding territorial unity, refusing any concession whatsoever even concerning the Sahara on the grounds that it constituted an inseparable part of the national territory, whether in negotiations or on the ground.³⁸

The most immediate and evident trigger was the arrival of a French envoy in the Ouargla region, whose mission was to pave the way for winning popular support for the project of Algeria’s geographical partition. This aimed to create a rift among the southern population and to undermine

the legitimacy of the revolution's structures and institutions foremost among them the National Liberation Front, its official spokesman.

It is worth noting that General de Gaulle's attempts, since his rise to power, had been unmistakably clear regarding the issue of the Sahara and territorial fragmentation. His intensified dispatch of high-ranking state officials underscored the strategic importance of southern Algeria and revealed French fears of complete independence an outcome that would thwart their objectives and carefully laid plans for territorial division.

Efforts were made to obtain signatures attesting to the Sahara's separation from Algeria, its allegiance to France, and the establishment of a separate government.³⁹ The rejection of these efforts, however, amounted to a direct response to the call of the National Liberation Front.

From this standpoint, the FLN leadership seized the opportunity. Based on eyewitness testimonies of those who shaped the event, the sequence of developments may be summarized as follows:

On 6 February 1962, strict written and oral instructions were issued by the leadership of the Fourth Subsector, Fourth Region, Sixth Wilaya, signed by Second Lieutenant Mohamed Chnoufi, and addressed to all fourteen municipal elders affiliated with the National Liberation Front. They ordered the organization of a demonstration on 27 February 1962 at 8:00 a.m. The text of the message read as follows:

Algerian Republic – National Liberation Front and Army

Sixth Wilaya – Fourth Region – Fourth Subsector

“To Si Massoud Ben Khadija,

After the national greeting,

I send you these instructions, which must be given your utmost attention. You are to order all citizens to take part in demonstrations on 27 February at 08:00 a.m., during which our brothers shall declare that the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic is the sole representative of the Algerian people; they shall chant that the Sahara is Algerian and raise the national flag. This is the appropriate moment, and the manner of execution shall be as follows:

Gather the youths and instruct them to take the initiative, followed by all citizens women and men alike. The entire nation is watching this initiative. Through your sacrifices, you raise the head of your country high, remove all clouds of doubt from it, expose colonial maneuvers, and shake their foundations.

Peace. Execution is mandatory and certain.

Signed: Second Lieutenant Mohamed Chnoufi.”⁴⁰

From the content of this letter addressed to the inhabitants of the Ouargla region, one can discern both the gravity of the task and the weight of responsibility entrusted to them. It also reflects the revolution's unwavering commitment to territorial unity and its determination to defend it by assigning the population the responsibility of steadfast resistance. The rejection by the Sahara's

inhabitants of the policy of separation and their reaffirmation of national territorial unity found immediate expression: the people of Ouargla responded to the FLN's call and took to the streets on 27 February 1962 in massive popular demonstrations, proclaiming their unconditional support for the Provisional Government and the National Liberation Front, and rejecting the conspiracy of partition.⁴¹

These demonstrations formed part of the broader manifestations of popular rallying around the revolution and stood as clear evidence of the Algerian people's adherence to the principles of their future national state, as outlined in the 1 November Declaration notably the unity of the people and their leadership (the Provisional Government) as demonstrated by their response to the call issued.

The Course of the Demonstrations

According to the aforementioned testimony of Lieutenant Chnoufi, what facilitated the preparation for the demonstration was the general strike that affected Ouargla, achieving a participation rate of 100%, along with the use of enemy resources to ensure the rapid transmission of messages particularly as the events coincided with the final days of Ramadan.

Two vehicles belonging to the French administration were used, driven by militants employed within French services. Through this, arrangements were made and the atmosphere prepared for the anticipated action. Militants undertook the sewing of the national flag, while council leaders worked to convey messages to the population in order to mobilize the largest possible number of demonstrators.

In the same context, demonstrators began arriving early in the morning around 6:00 a.m. from villages surrounding Ouargla, awaiting the launch of the march at 8:00 a.m. However, the French delegation scheduled to arrive was delayed until 1:00 p.m., according to information leaked by militants working at the airport. Orders were then given to disperse the crowds, resume work, reopen closed shops, and remove national flags displayed on balconies, so as not to alert the French authorities to the planned demonstration.⁴²

When the aircraft carrying the delegation finally appeared, a group of militants and residents from villages surrounding Ouargla called for the demonstration to proceed, starting from the Saturday Market assembly point.⁴³ A group of youths advanced at the forefront carrying two large national flags, maintaining strict discipline. Numerous banners were displayed, expressing the people's unity with their revolution, bearing slogans denouncing France's oppressive policies and calling for Algeria's territorial unity and full independence.⁴⁴

In the same spirit, demonstrators chanted slogans in praise of the Algerian people, the National Liberation Army, the National Liberation Front, and the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic affirming it as the sole legitimate representative and proclaimed that the Algerian Sahara was and would remain an indivisible part of the homeland. They also sang several national anthems,⁴⁵ which galvanized the youth and inflamed the atmosphere, as the demonstrations continued until the Maghrib prayer.

5-The French Response to Suppress the Demonstrations

These demonstrations did not pass unnoticed. Moments after the march began, the French authorities confronted the protesters and subjected them to repression with violence, using various

coercive methods first batons and truncheons, then live ammunition and tear-gas canisters. French forces police and gendarmes sealed off the main entrances and exits of the city center and the routes leading to the headquarters of the Oasis District Administration, deploying tanks and multiple categories of weapons. When the demonstrators reached the old city market (Souk al-Qaṣr), clashes intensified with the French forces. The demonstrators relied on whatever means of self-defense they had stones and sticks leading to the dispersal of protesters through different streets, while French authorities pursued them from one location to another.

According to the live testimonies of those who made the event, the losses included the fall of the martyr “al-Shiṭṭī al-Wakkāl” in the middle of the market; his body was transported to the old mosque. In addition, another unidentified person was killed, and a number of wounded were carried to nearby houses where they were treated.⁴⁶ Another account indicates that the number of martyrs was five two identified and three unidentified while the number of wounded exceeded twenty, and enemy losses amounted to fifteen wounded.⁴⁷

However, the French newspaper *Combat – Le Journal de Paris*, issue no. 1 published in March 1962, stated that these demonstrations resulted in the death of three demonstrators and the wounding of eleven people thereby challenging the oral narratives circulating on the assumption that only a single person had been martyred.⁴⁸

The Impact of the 27 February 1962 Ouargla Demonstrations on the Question of Territorial Unity

In the face of these demonstrations, the French delegation could only conclude that the project of separating the Sahara had become a mere fantasy, and return from where it had come, dragging the tails of defeat after having imagined returning to negotiations holding a “pressure card.”⁴⁹ In reality, the revolutionary leadership had been monitoring the partition project with extreme vigilance and planning to dismantle it at the appropriate moment. Although many militants contacted the leadership of the Sixth Wilaya requesting permission to move quickly and strike the project at its inception through popular demonstrations, the leadership’s response emphasized the necessity of patience and discipline: the day would inevitably come.⁵⁰

Accordingly, these demonstrations constituted a decisive turning point in four respects:

First: They accelerated the pace of settlement of the Algerian question and pushed General de Gaulle to hasten the conclusion of negotiations with the Algerians and the end of the war with the National Liberation Army. The demonstrations shocked French authorities, who still clung to colonial illusions in Algeria. De Gaulle reportedly issued strict instructions to his negotiators not to complicate matters related to the Sahara file and not to prolong negotiations with the Algerian delegation.⁵¹

Second: They compelled the French government to abandon the dream of a separation project, while affirming the demand for independence within the framework of unity both the unity of the people and the unity of Algerian territory together with the assertion that the National Liberation Front was the sole representative of the Algerian people.

Third: Demonstrators displayed and confirmed the cohesion of the region’s population with the revolution, dispelling doubts and exposing the falsifications propagated by the occupier to mislead global public opinion. The demonstrations also revealed the strength of organization, its precision,

and the complete secrecy that prevented the enemy from detecting what was being planned despite possessing extensive channels for monitoring citizens' movements, especially in a militarized zone. The events further highlighted the revolution's strength and its success in penetrating enemy ranks and uncovering its plans.⁵²

Fourth: The demonstrations generated a significant media echo on the national scene. This was expressed by *El Moudjahid* in issue 116 dated 9 March 1962, which wrote: "The inhabitants of Ouargla, in the heart of our struggling Sahara, organized a thunderous demonstration after a strike movement that was fully organized and succeeded one hundred percent. During this massive demonstration held in the municipal square, men, women, and children behind the Algerian flag chanted for the life of the Front and the Algerian National Army."⁵³

It should be noted that the project to separate the Sahara was a Gaullist maneuver intended to strike at Algeria's territorial unity. It was also a strategy to prolong negotiations in order to allow France additional time to extract petroleum resources. Yet the revolution stood ready against these designs, thanks to its deep roots within the people its rear base, which could be mobilized with striking speed whenever required. The Ouargla demonstrations of 27 February made this unmistakably clear: how could an event of such magnitude be planned and executed in a single day?⁵⁴

4-The al-Manqar–al-Ṭayyibāt Demonstrations, March 1962

In compliance with instructions issued by Lieutenant Mohamed al-Ṭāhir Chnoufi, commander of the Fourth Subsector of the Sixth Wilaya, to the political official of Wādī Rīgh, an order was given to organize a popular demonstration across all areas of al-Ṭayyibāt. This was to serve as a direct response to the partition project, to affirm the unity of Algerian territory, and to express support and rallying around the National Liberation Front and the Provisional Government.⁵⁵

Based on testimonies collected by Professor Jamal al-Bous, from those who lived through the event in detail, accounts agree that the demonstrations in al-Ṭayyibāt began at 9:00 a.m. on 11 March 1962, at the crossroads of al-Naqr (the intersection known as 'Alī b. Nāṣir). Approximately 200 to 500 demonstrators marched, chanting the national anthem and "the Muslim Algerian people." It was, in truth, a peaceful march without weapons, yet it was met with the brutality and barbarity of colonial repression. Al-Ṭayyibāt was treated as a closed military zone, in what amounted to a major military operation; its inhabitants suffered interrogation, torture, and harsh reprisals.⁵⁶

Mass demonstrations national and local alike affirmed the unity of the people with their government and constituted one of the important revolutionary means through which the Algerians rejected the maneuvers of General Charles de Gaulle, his "self-rule," and his projects to partition Algeria alongside attempts to co-opt local notables. The Algerian people's awareness of the danger inherent in striking at territorial unity made resistance to such plans a necessity.

The revolution ultimately achieved one of its most significant gains: the preservation of territorial unity non-negotiable for millions of Algerians despite the French government under Charles de Gaulle maneuvering until the last moment to separate the Sahara from the North.⁵⁷ The steadfast stance of the revolutionary leadership toward French projects aimed at partitioning Algeria and exploiting its resources culminated in the failure of all methods and tactics employed by the colonizer to realize its objectives.⁵⁸

All this field mobilization and these demonstrations insisting on Algeria's Sahara clarified the central idea embraced by the revolution's leadership: adherence to territorial unity. The French occupation authorities had seriously contemplated buying time for economic advantage and extracting the greatest possible concessions, in pursuit of making their economy one of the world's most powerful.⁵⁹ Against this, the National Liberation Front deployed a well-crafted strategy, grounded in an early Algerian vision for optimal exploitation of its resources to develop its future economy and ensure positive impacts on Algerian society across sectors.⁶⁰ It also aimed to place Algeria's resources at the service of developing the Algerian economy and, in particular, that of neighboring countries given that Algeria's revolution played a fundamental role in the liberation of the African continent.

Results

-The study demonstrates that popular mass support constituted a foundational pillar in the FLN's strategy for preserving Algeria's territorial unity, particularly in confronting partition projects and attempts to separate the Sahara.

-Popular demonstrations, in both North and South, revealed a high level of national awareness among the Algerian masses regarding the danger of tampering with national territory.

-Algerian and French archival documents show that Gaullist policy collided with comprehensive popular rejection, undermining France's attempts to fabricate legitimacy for the partition project.

-The events examined indicate that the people's alignment with the revolutionary leadership and the Provisional Government endowed the revolution with political and diplomatic strength in negotiations with France.

-Broad popular mobilization contributed to shattering the myth of "French Algeria" and enhancing the image of the Algerian Revolution before international public opinion.

-Southern demonstrations especially in Ouargla and al-Tayyibāt confirmed that the Sahara was an inseparable part of national consciousness, not merely a negotiable card.

-The study shows that territorial unity was not a contingent slogan, but a steadfast principle embodied in the field through substantial human sacrifice.

Recommendations

-Greater scholarly attention should be given to mass demonstrations as an influential historical actor, rather than reducing the Algerian Revolution to armed struggle alone.

-Researchers should be encouraged to expand their use of French archives alongside Algerian archives, enriching historical studies through comparison and critical analysis.

-Events relating to southern demonstrations should be integrated into educational and historical curricula, given their importance in consolidating the concept of national unity.

-The national memory tied to defending territorial unity should be preserved especially in regions that witnessed major sacrifices yet did not receive sufficient documentation.

-Studies highlighting the role of popular masses in shaping revolutionary decision-making should be supported, recognizing them as genuine partners in achieving independence.

Proposed Initiatives

-Conduct in-depth local studies on demonstrations in southern Algeria, drawing on eyewitness testimonies and underutilized archival documents.

-Establish a national database dedicated to mass demonstrations during the War of Liberation, compiling documents, photographs, and official reports.

-Encourage comparative research between the Algerian Revolution and African liberation movements regarding the defense of territorial unity.

-Document the oral memory of witnesses to the demonstrations of Ouargla, al-Ṭayyibāt, and others before it is lost over time.

-Organize specialized academic symposia on “Popular Support and Territorial Unity” to reread the Algerian Revolution from a socio-national perspective.

¹ Benyoucef Benkhedda: *Évian Agreements*, Arabic translation by Lahcen Zoghdar, Office des Publications Universitaires, Algiers, 2002, p. 19.

² (Azzedine Ma‘azza): Ferhat Abbas and Habib Bourguiba: A Comparative Historical and Intellectual Study (1899–200?), PhD dissertation (Modern & Contemporary History), Mentouri University, Constantine, 2009–2010, p. 384.

³ Charles de Gaulle: *Mémoires d’espoir – Renewal 1958–1962*, trans. by Smouhi Fouq al-‘Āda (سموحي فوق العادة), 1st ed., Oueidat Publications, Beirut, 1971, p. 102.

⁴ Algeria, Département d’Alger, 01/K/1139, Documents internes.

⁵ Ammar Bouhouche: *The Political History of Algeria from the Beginning until 1962*, 1st ed., Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Lebanon, 1997, p. 522.

⁶ Ahmed Belghith: “The Anniversary of 11 December 1960,” *Awal November Magazine*, issue 25, Algeria, 1977, p. 60.

⁷ Algeria, Département d’Alger, 01/K/1139, Documents internes.

⁸ As a result of the extensive media coverage of the event, the United Nations discussed the Algerian question for the sixth time amid growing international solidarity, and issued decisions including: recognition of the people’s right to self-determination and independence; and recognition of the guarantees ensuring the achievement of this objective. The United Nations bears responsibility for implementing the Algerian people’s right to self-determination. See: Djilali Sari: “The December 1960 Demonstrations and Their Role in National Liberation,” *Majallat al-Maṣādir* (Sources Journal), issue 2, 1999, National Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement and the 1 November Revolution, p. 148.

⁹ Charles de Gaulle: previously cited source, p. 109.

¹⁰ He states: “The matter is settled: the French people have granted their colony freedom and granted Algerians the right to self-determination, and it is certain they will choose independence. All that remains is to manage the issue so that this choice occurs at the time we choose, and to transform their country into a sovereign state by a decision we issue. Hence a final referendum is necessary. But can we French ask ourselves: is it not better that we voluntarily relinquish Algeria, which has become a box of sorrows... withdrawing everything from it—economic, financial, scientific, administrative—concentrating our rule in Algiers and Oran, [and] those inhabitants who wish to remain French? Separation is a disaster for Algeria, not for France.” See the same work, pp. 109–110

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- ¹¹ Same as [10]. See the same work, pp. 109–110.
- ¹² No author: *The New Guide to Glorious November: The People's Demonstrations of 11 December 1960*, Dar al-Huda, Algeria, 2012, p. [page number not provided in the source text].
- ¹³ *El Moudjahid*, 03 July 1961, issue 99.
- ¹⁴ Hartmut Elsenhans: *The Algerian War, 1954–1962: The Transition from One France to Another—From the Fourth to the Fifth Republic*, vol. 2, Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi, Algiers, 2022, p. 812.
- ¹⁵ 5 July: *The National Day against Partition*,” *El Moudjahid*, issue 99, 03 July 1961, p. 1.
- ¹⁶ Ahmed Maryouche: “A Reading of the 5 July 1961 Demonstrations,” *Majallat al-Mašādir*, issue 23, National Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement and the 1 November 1954 Revolution, Algeria, 2011, p. 188.
- ¹⁷ *The People Who Did Not Miss Their Appointment with History*,” *El Moudjahid*, issue 100, 17 July 1961, p. 6.
- ¹⁸ Group of researchers: “The Separation of the Sahara in French Colonial Policy,” in: *First National Symposium on the Separation of the Sahara from Algeria*, National Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement and the 1 November 1954 Revolution, Algeria, 1998, p. 69.
- ¹⁹ *The People Who Did Not Miss Their Appointment with History*,” *El Moudjahid*, previously cited source, p. 6.
- ²⁰ Khalifa al-Junaidi: *A Dialogue on the Revolution*, vol. 2, National (National Printing Arts Corporation), Algeria, 1986, p. 427.
- ²¹ *The People Who Did Not Miss Their Appointment with History*,” *El Moudjahid*, previously cited source, p. 6.
- ²² al-Ghali al-Gharbi: previously cited work, p. 271.
- ²³ *We, the Sahara, and Our Neighboring Countries*,” *El Moudjahid*, issue 100, 17 July 1961, p. 3 .
- ²⁴ Group of researchers: “The Separation of the Sahara in French Colonial Policy,” previously cited work, p. 66 .
- ²⁵ Same reference, pp. 69–70 .
- ²⁶ *The People Who Did Not Miss Their Appointment with History*,” *El Moudjahid*, previously cited
- ²⁷ Mohamed Ben Dara: *French Policy in the Algerian Sahara, 1952–1962*, MA thesis (History; Algerian Revolution specialization), Institute of History, Algiers, 1998–1999, p. 173 .
- ²⁸ Yahia Bouaziz: *With the History of Algeria in National and International Symposia*, Office des Publications Universitaires, Algiers, 1999, p. 393.
- ²⁹ Hartmut Elsenhans: *The Algerian War, 1954–1962...*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 812
- ³⁰ *El Moudjahid*, 17 July 1961, issue 100.
- ³¹ Lahcen Azghidi: *The Soummam Conference and the Development of the Algerian National Liberation Revolution (1956–1962)*, Dar Houma, Algiers, 2005, p. 250.
- ³² Mokhtar Houari: “French Projects to Separate the Sahara and the Role of Popular Cohesion among the Sahara's Inhabitants in Foiling Them,” *Al-Baḥith Journal in Human and Social Sciences*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2018, p. 139 .
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- ³⁵ Mohamed Lahcen Azghidi: previously cited work, p. 250 .
- ³⁶ Prior to the 27 February 1962 demonstrations, Ouargla witnessed—alongside fedayeen military action—uprisings and unrest during the night of 31 October to 1 November 1960, as well as wall writings with slogans supportive of the FLN and slogans of the OAS. For this reason, French security authorities placed 230 persons under surveillance. See: Mokhtar Houari, previously cited work, p. 114 .
- ³⁷ Lakhdar Aouarib: “French Policy to Separate the Sahara: The 27 February 1962 Ouargla Demonstrations as a Model of the Popular Response,” *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, issue 7, University Center of El Oued, January 2012, p. 112 .
- ³⁸ *El Moudjahid* newspaper: “The Objectives of Colonialism in the Sahara,” issue 19, 28 June 1961, vol. 4 (special edition), 2007, p. 04 .

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- ³⁹Testimony of Mohamed Chnoufi, previously cited reference, p. 328 .
- ⁴⁰ See the original text of the letter (appendix no. ...) by Lieutenant Chnoufi .
- ⁴¹Ridouane Chafo: *The South-East*, previously cited reference, p. 351 .
- ⁴²Lakhdar Aouarib: previously cited reference, pp. 113–114 .
- ⁴³Professor Chafo notes that the assembly and starting point was “Sunday Market.” It appears that the march began from a public gathering point—the market—hence the large crowd .
- ⁴⁴ Lakhdar Aouarib: previously cited reference, p. 114.
- ⁴⁵Ridouane Chafo: *The Algerian South-East during the Colonial Era (Ouargla as a Case Study, 1844–1862)*, PhD dissertation (History), University of Algiers, Algeria, 2012–2013, pp. 360–361 .
- ⁴⁶ The mujahid Touahri Mohamed Abdelkader recounts: “When we came out all at once, they fired a hail of bullets at us. I was hit by a bullet in my finger and it pierced my chest. I wrapped the flag around my hand and went under a car, then hid in al-Qaṣr. After that I was taken to the hospital, and I did not regain consciousness until morning, when the mujahid Si Belmir Mabrouk met me and told me the operation was successful. All the media spoke about it, including the Voice of the Arabs radio, where Issa Mas‘oudi saluted the city of Ouargla for this revolutionary act.” See: the same reference, p. 361 .
- ⁴⁷ Lakhdar Aouarib: previously cited reference, p. 114.
- ⁴⁸ Ouargla a retrouvé son calme,” 03/1962, *Combat – Le Journal de Paris*, no. 1 .
- ⁴⁹Testimony of Mohamed Chnoufi, previously cited reference, p. 328 .
- ⁵⁰Lakhdar Aouarib: previously cited reference, p. 113 .
- ⁵¹Channel al-Dhakira (Memory Channel), Ridouane Chafo: “Testimonies on the 29 February 1962 Ouargla Demonstrations,” broadcast on 27 August 2024 at 14:36 .
- ⁵² Lakhdar Aouarib: previously cited reference, p. 114 .
- ⁵³ Half-Monthly Politics,” *El Moudjahid*, issue 116, 09 March 1962, p. 2.
- ⁵⁴Lakhdar Aouarib: previously cited reference, p. 115 .
- ⁵⁵ Jamal al-Bous: *The 11 March Demonstrations and the 13 March 1962 Massacre in al-Manqar–al-Ṭayyibāt through the Testimonies of Their Makers*, University of M’sila, p. 52.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 53–56 .
- ⁵⁷ Mohamed al-‘Arabi Ould al-Khalifa: “The Popular Revolution and Its Sources in Algerian Nationalism,” *Awal November Magazine*, issue 171, organ of the National Organization of Mujahideen, Algeria, 2007, pp. 14–15.
- ⁵⁸Mohamed Lahcen Azghidi: previously cited reference, p. 260 .
- ⁵⁹ Benyoucef Benkhedda: *Algeria at Independence (The 1962 Crisis)*, p. 180.
- ⁶⁰ Colonel Lotfi: *Approach to the Future Economic Development of Algeria*, ANEP, Algiers, 2010, pp. 101–104.