

The WAR of ALGERIA

1954-1962

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The conflict begins on November 1, 1954. It is integrated in a process much vaster of decolonization after the second world war which is balanced by the weakening of the colonial powers and in particular France which has been just overcome by the Vietnamese soldier with Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. For France, Algeria is a part of itself while refusing the political and social equal rights in the majority Moslem. It creates of this fact a political dead end which leads to the armed struggle. Moreover the traumatism of the repression of Sétif in 1945 weighs heavy in perception that many Algerians have about France.

On November 1, 1954 a series of attacks (about thirty counters military objectives and of police force) on the whole of the Algerian territory functions like an alarm by showing with the authorities the existence of a structure able to organize and carry out violent actions. The French authorities do not believe in a subversive movement interns and show by interposed press the Arab League and the nationalist movement (PPA-MTLD) of Messali Hadj. Some reinforcements are sent in Algeria for the maintenance of law and order. Nobody still intended to speak about the six members who control interior the attacks of Novembre 1 asserted by an organization entitled FLN: Larbi Ben Me Hidi, Didouche Mourad, Rabah Bitat, Krim Belkacem, Mohamed Boudiaf, Mostefa Ben Boulaïd. They all are resulting families from notable socially displaced by the colonizer. FLN is represented outside by Hocine Aït Ahmed, Ahmed Ben Bella and Mohamed Khider. All these men come from PPA-MTLD of which they are separated by criticizing vigorously the opposition to progress from its chief. They are partisans of a radical action to fight against the colonial system in Algeria. They rather quickly will run up hard against the partisans of Messali Hadj which melts in December 1954 the MNA (National Algerian Movement). For French government, the policy position is based on two shutters: Repression and reforms. Repression because no one does not think "of releasing" Algeria which is integrated administratively with the metropolis, with however a different legal status. Moreover the army very badly saw the defeat of Dien Bien Phu in Viet-Nam in this same year 1954 and which was presented in certain mediums like the result of the treason of Pierre Mendés France reforms, because the government is aware that the maintenance of Algeria in France needs deep transformations in order to allow promotion of a greater number of Moslems and the search for one more great social equity.

The year 1955 knows a reinforcement of the repressive military effort and it launching of a series of reforms (school of Administration, reduction of the variation of the wages...). Very quickly repression takes the step on the reform. On March 31, 1955, the French National Assembly votes the emergency state which reinforces the military capacity in Aurès. One attends the first forced regroupings of population and with the opening of "camps of regrouping". The bloody riots of August 20 involve a violent repression. The army gradually takes the step on the police force. One enters a true war which does not say its name. The government hastens of to give the free hands in Algeria while discharging politically from Moroccan and Tunisian burden. Morocco is independent in November and Tunisia on March 1956.

On March 12, 1956, the French National Assembly votes the special capacities in Algeria, which causes to suspend the majority of the personal freedoms. French Communist Party approves this vote. This vote marks a decisive stage. Of one « funny from war » one passes to the all-out war. The first attacks of FLN touch Algiers. The country is gradually infiltrated by the maquis. On May 18, 1956, the ambush of Palestro costs the life a score of young people recalled and the public

opinion strikes. It appears necessary to reorganize the army in order to make it less vulnerable. SFIO (French Socialist Party) tries secret contacts with FLN in Belgrad but the interception of the Moroccan plane transporting Ben Bella by French Air Forces ruins these discussions. Moreover, on November 5 Franco-English troops arrive in Suez. It's the direct confrontation with Nasser. USA and Soviet Union make hood forwarding. The Algerian question is registered on UNO agenda on November 15. It's on this same date that Guy Mollet installs Raoul Salan like commander in chief of the army in Algeria. It is old of Viet-Nam and specialist in the subversive war. France is losing ground on the political level international and tries to give the means of regulating militarily the conflict. The assassination of Amédée Froger, president of federation of the mayors of Algeria and spokesman of the small colonists is the detonator of a stage additional in violence. The "battle of Algiers" begins. A series of murderous terrorist attacks and the general strike call launched by FLN encourages the French "to clean" Algiers.

The parachutists are in the city since January 7, 1957. Directed by general Massu, they engage the battle with blow massive arrests and executions. Torture is largely used. Larbi Ben M'Hidi is tortured then assassinated. One will speak initially about "suicide". Many Europeans suspected of being favorable to FLN are also decrees, tortured and carried out (cf the book titled: "the question", Henry Alleg). The military victory is undeniable. FLN structures are destroyed but it is one serious moral defeat from which France still does not manage to go back completely (cf discusses on torture, the rapes...). Freedoms are ridiculed: Censure press, house arrests without judgement, death sentences... France does not manage to fight without giving in cause its republican values. The army is committed in a role of police force and of repression. The battle of Algiers does not prevent ALN (FLN army) from reinforcing its means in the villages. Very hard fixings take place like that which opposes the wilaya IV control by Azzedine to the parachutists of Bigeard on May 1957. The toughening of the fight engages the French power in a crisis which conduit towards its collapse one year later. Critical socialists republicans excesses of the army by denouncing the violence made against the individuals but while being unable to leave the diagram universalist of 1789 for the ones and of 1917 for the others one. Nationalist character of Algerian rising is perceived like politically even exceeded reactionary because of the influence of Islam. That does not make it possible in the majority of the socialist and communist left to see another exit only the promotion of the individual rights Moslems within the framework of the French Republic. Only a minority often led by intellectuals engages at the sides of FLN (Janson for example). The army directs the operations in Algeria. The policies only make to accompany. The outline law on Algeria is voted in November 1957 but its application is deferred at the end of the war. Parallel to their fight against colonial France, resistant Algerian tears between two main tendencies: FLN and MNA. Between 1955 and 1962, the groups of the two movements devote themselves to a brutal confrontation and murderer on the Algerian territory and in metropolis. Massacres of population push certain combatants to be allied with the French against their Algerian adversaries (It's the case of Bellounis for example). On the whole this fratricidal war will make more than 10.000 dead and 23.000 wounded. FLN leaves winner of the fight but the executives fighters killed in the two camps will miss in independent Algeria in 1962. In fact, FLN marked a decisive political point at the time of the congress of Soummam on August 20, 1956. The movement manages to associate the representatives of the religious world then Algerian Communist Party. This congress marks the preeminence of FLN in the anti-colonial fight and, in addition, the preeminence of the policy on the soldier, i.e. the political structure of FLN supervises ALN. A

political platform is worked out, ALN is organized like a regular army, the territory is divided administratively into 6 wilayas more the autonomous zone of Algiers. ALN counts in 1957 60.000 fighters. Its units of engagements are the katibas who must extremely assume themselves in a guerrilla. It mainly receives its weapons from Tunisia. Electrified Morrice line built in 1957 met fine with this provisioning and causes a quasi-collapse of ALN of the interior to the profit of an intact army of the borders which takes the top on the policies after the assassination of Abbane Ramdane organizing of the congress of Soummam. Colonel Boumediene starts to forge the tool of its future capacity. In addition to ALN, FLN opens a second front line: the immigration, which will especially provide a large effort of logistics (money...). The war isn't only military. It's also ideological and political. FLN wants to reconcile socialist ideology and Moslem tradition in order to build a unit identity of the Algerian people. On the political international level, it tries and makes a success of the international recognition of the legitimacy of its fight. The Arab League is a determining vector at one time of rise to power of the countries of the Third World (congress of Bandoeng, Indonesia) and of the East-West cold war. FLN installs missions in several countries including Western Europe and North America. France is in difficult position in UNO. Many countries help resistance by providing him weapons. In January 1958 French aviation bombards Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef in Tunisia in reprisals with an attack which cost the life 4 soldiers close to the border. The international image of France is scrambled. France is on the way to lose the political battle at the same time inside and outside. The French République is « à bout de souffle » (at the end of the lane).

On April 26, 1958, a crowd of thousands people in Algiers claims a government of « Salut Public ». In same time, FLN announces the execution of three French prisoners. A committee of « Salut Public » is created in Algiers. It settles in an insurrectionary situation covered by the army which remains the only structure constituted solid. On May 13, general Salan makes applaud by crowd the name of general de Gaulle (under discussed conditions). The days of the République are counted. General de Gaulle is recalled to the government. He is named president of the council during a few months. Rene Coty, President of the Republic, yields the presidential armchair to him. The priority for de Gaulle is to restore the authority of the State. Do the European Community of Algeria and the army think (?) that it is able to gain the ultimate battle which will anchor Algeria to France and the metropolitan public opinion estimates that it is the only one with being able to restore the order and to put an end to the war. Upon the departure it y ambiguity on the will of the General. In fact, very quickly, de Gaulle thinks of a political solution allowing Algeria to remain associated with France in a kind of federal structure. The integration appears impossible to him. FLN which created GPRA, provisional governmental structure, rejects all idea of association and the « Pieds-noirs » (French people in Algeria) are wary of de Gaulle's intentions. On September 16, 1959, the General expresses clearly its will to consult the Algerians on the way in which they want to manage their future. This orientation hardens the respective positions.

FLN wants independence before any idea of negotiation of peace. The army by the voice of general Challe speaks about "total pacification" and starts to stiffen. Party in power, UNR (French political party which supports de Gaulle), divides between partisans of French Algeria and in favour of self-determination. During this time, the commandos of hunting of general Challe break ALN katibas. The army counts 500.000 men on the ground. More than 2 millions Algerians are moved. The year 1959 is one year of war. In front of military successes the prospects for self-

determination become intolerable for many people. The army does not understand any more the policy of de Gaulle. A civil war between French people will start. On January 24, 1960, a great number of Europeans run up against the « gendarmes » (sort of military policemen). The week of the « barricades » starts. Pierre Lagaille and Jo Ortiz direct the rioters. At the end one week, the capacity holds good. The rioters yield. Ortiz flees in Spain. Lagaille is accused by the Justice. At the beginning of February, the government receives the special capacities to maintain the order. Several military and political persons in charge are transferred. The capacity prepares with a confrontation between French people from the point of view of inevitable self-determination. Secret contacts are established with some members of MNA executive office. The army thinks of having gained the war. Oranie is pacified. On January 8, 1961, the referendum on self-determination gives a massive “YES”. In February, de Gaulle meets Bourguiba in Rambouillet (France). Official negotiations begins between France and GPRA in Evian on April 7, 1961. It's at this time that general Salan tries a counter-revolution in order to maintain the statu quo in Algeria. The Secret Armed Organization (OAS) is created. On Friday April 21, 1961, Generals Salan, Challe, Jouhaud and Zeller supported by the 1st foreign regiment of parachutists engage in an attempt of takeover by force against the Republic. It's the putsch of Algiers. Crowd acclaims those which of de Gaulle is named a “group of Generals to the retirement”. Pursuant to the article 16 of the Constitution, de Gaulle takes the full powers and makes a speech which has a powerful effect on the troop which, in majority, did not move. On April 25, the putsch lost the game. Salan and Jouhaud enter in clandestinity. In fact from now on OAS takes the changing. OAS structure like an organization political and military including a leading office: the management committee. Salan takes the command of the organization which engages very quickly in the policy of worst by multiplying attacks and assassinations. The “commandos Delta” (D like Degueudre, their chief) make very many terrorist actions in France. On October 1961, Salan announces to have an army of 100.000 men well armed and disciplined. OAS runs up at the same time against FLN and the special services of the capacities (secret agents). The first six months of 1962 are terrible. OAS delivers to the policy ground burned in order to nothing leave in state with FLN. Oran knows the worst massacres of the war. Consequently any French presence becomes impossible. The « Pieds-noirs » leave Algeria. In a few weeks the European Community leaves the country turning the page of the french presence in this country during 130 years. However on October 2, 1961, general de Gaulle announces “the institution of the sovereign Algerian State and independent by the way of self-determination”. France always hopes for a particular payment for the Sahara rich in hydrocarbons and seat of the first atomic and space experiments. The Algerian representatives do not want to intend to speak about a distinction between Algeria and southern territories. The year 1962 sees the end of a long conflict during which the French metropolitan public opinion showed its will to benefit from the extraordinary economic development rather than to begin in a colonial war which did not relate to it that as much as the quota was present there. In fact, the metropolitan opinion ignored the reality of « Pieds-noirs » which she did not know and of the Moslems of which she admitted that tardily the legitimacy of a national claim. Colonial France did not exist any more and it is what de Gaulle translated in his Algerian policy initially while passing by a project of association then while leading to self-determination. It was interested by France, not by Algeria. The agreements of Evian are signed and the cease-fire declared on March 19, 1962. Algeria becomes indeed independent on July 5, 1962. The Moslems having been useful in suppletive French army (harkis) are disarmed and given up in Algeria. A

great number of them are assassinated under terrible conditions. This very long conflict first of all causes a true amnesia crowned by the amnesty of 1968. It is only very slowly and very tardily that the memory will return. The concept even of war was not accepted easily. During long years it was question "of police operations". It is under the pressure of ex-French fighters of North Africa that the term of war is finally accepted by the French government. More than does forty years after, French people remain confronted with the problems of torture, of the rapes, the massacre of the given up « harkis », the demonstration repressed by the « Préfet de police » Maurice Papon on March 62, of the cease-fire dated on March 19, 1962 (peace or treason?), of the conscientious objectors, the French networks of assistance with FLN, of the interminable compensation for the « Pieds-noirs », the problem of the children of harkis installed in France, of the question of the European cemeteries in Algeria. The problem of the Algerian victims of repression is hardly tackled.