



AT HOME & ABROAD

Algeria:

A Showdown Is Postponed

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EVER SINCE the Second World War, when Charles de Gaulle eloquently offered the Algerian Moslems autonomy in a liberalized French Union, he has remained in their minds as the only French leader honest and courageous enough to understand them. Today many of them think that he still has prestige and strength enough to end the Algerian conflict. "He keeps his promises," an Arab shopkeeper told me simply. "He understands us. He will bring peace." And because leaders of the rebel National Liberation Front (F.L.N.) have felt this as strongly as everyone else—though somewhat less so of late—they have been on the defensive since de Gaulle came to power.

The evidence of this is most striking in Algiers. Two winters ago, the capital was in a state of siege. Terrorists roamed the streets, business was at a standstill, and no European could set foot in the Casbah without risking death. Today, there is scarcely a rifle shot heard in the city from one week's end to another. Business

is booming, new buildings are going up everywhere, shops are crammed with luxury goods and customers, and the Casbah is safe again for the tourist.

Algiers is not Algeria, of course, and anyone looking for the war need not go very far to find it. There is not a highway leading out of the capital that can be traveled after dark, and few stretches are comfortable even in broad daylight. On a sixty-mile drive to Ben-Chicao, for instance, I was stopped twelve times by military roadblocks, and required to make the last leg of the journey with a military convoy.

Nevertheless, there are signs everywhere of a slackening in F.L.N. activity. In the hills around Palestro, it is the French patrol that waits nightly in ambush for the rebels now, rather than the other way around. In Constantine, where seven or eight grenades used to explode daily last spring, life has returned almost to normal. In certain zones of the surrounding Constantinois, the French Army once dared not venture with fewer than ten battalions; now it

moves with one. And in all five of the F.L.N.'s strongholds—the Tlemcen area, the Oursenis mountain chain, the Kabylie, the Collo Peninsula, the Aurès—the formerly mighty fellagha bands have shrunk noticeably and more often than not refuse combat.

The French attribute this success in part to the Morice Line, a radar-equipped double barrier of electrically charged barbed wire that runs along the Tunisian border and is patrolled by fifty thousand French troops on land and in the air. Since its completion last spring, the rebels' flow of arms from Tunisia has been averaging no more than two small caravans a month, and very few fighters have enjoyed leisurely training on Tunisian soil. As a consequence, the F.L.N. has been forced to put raw recruits into the field with as few as five or six cartridges to a gun, to bury quantities of automatic weapons for lack of ammunition, and to alter its whole military strategy so as to hoard bullets and men.

Yet the Morice Line is not likely to produce the unconditional surrender of the fellagha. Everyone in Algeria knows that they can get fresh troops by forced recruiting, and could probably go on fighting for years with the weapons they can filch from the French Army. The help they need the most comes from the native population: food, shelter, military information. The French say that this assistance is about to be withdrawn if it has not been already.

The Moslems and the Elections

One has a hard time finding F.L.N. resisters in Algiers. Their most authoritative spokesmen have long since either gone to prison or fled to Tunis and Cairo. But outside the capital, in Constantine and Bône, in Palestro and Blida and Médéa, they can be found by the dozen; and they will tell you that neither the Morice Line, nor integration, nor anything else de Gaulle may offer can bring an end to the war until independence is won. "Tired?" a Berber lawyer said to me. "Of course we're tired. Not only have we had to put up with a French occupation army for all these years, but we've had our own not very angelic army as well. Kidnapping, blackmail, killing—we know all about it, and from both sides. But let me tell you,

if the F.L.N. should call for half a million volunteers tomorrow, it would have them in twenty-four hours."

Assuming this is true, or partly true, there are still large masses of Moslems whose ties with France have not yet been broken. Their acceptance of French rule is by no means unconditional. The Moslems who came—or were summoned—to the Algiers Forum last May were surely not there to cheer Pierre Lagailarde, the ex-paratrooper who had been notoriously fond of slitting a Moslem belly, "like a melon." And when Lagailarde led the assault on the Gouvernement Général building on May 13 there were no Moslems around at all. It was only three days later that they came out of the Casbah, with army protection, to cheer for de Gaulle—the honest soldier who respected them, understood them, and offered them—or so many thought—an honorable peace.

Then, when they heard that one of the few Frenchmen in Algiers who stood for the same things, Mayor Jacques Chevallier, was about to be thrown out of office by Lagailarde's men, they stopped cheering and went back home.

Late in September, they came out again to vote "Yes" for de Gaulle. But while some three hundred reporters can testify that this referendum was an authentic poll of Moslem sentiment, they would agree that the November election was not.

BY THE TIME this election was held, the army was taking no chances. Though de Gaulle had said publicly that he hoped for a truly representative group of Moslem deputies "with whom we will then see how to do the rest," the colonels in the Gouvernement Général were not disposed to leave him with any "rest" to do. Under the watchful eyes of the general's personal electoral representative, Henri Hoppenot, they could not do much to keep dangerous Moslem voters off the register—although only seven thousand got on the rolls out of a population of ninety-two thousand in the F.L.N.-dominated town of El-Milia, and less than a third of Algeria's adult Moslem population actually voted. But they could and did hand-pick the candidates. And with helpful co-

operation from the F.L.N., whose boycott of the election kept practically every important native out of the race, they produced a list of 271 Moslem candidates without a single independent among them.

Not all these candidates were *Beni-Oui-Ouis*. It took courage to run in the Kabylie, for instance, where the F.L.N.'s dread Amirouche is inexorable in his vengeance: among the Moslem candidates in that region, there was one whose entire family had been assassinated by the F.L.N., another who had lost nine relatives in the same way, and a third—still carrying an F.L.N. bullet in his neck—who had buried nine members of his family with the epitaph "Killed by the fellagha; Died for France."

Nevertheless, the Moslem candidates were not a distinguished lot. Few of their constituents either knew or much cared whom they were voting for—they were simply rounded up in army trucks and brought to the polls. One cannot help wondering whether Mlle. Nefissa sid Cara, for example, who refers to the French as "us" and to the Moslems as "them," will be speaking for a considerable body of her fellow Moslems in Paris as a secretary of state.



At any rate, these are the Moslem deputies with whom de Gaulle must supposedly "do the rest"; and since they are all unequivocally committed to the principle of integration, his duty is presumably plain. "I am too loyal to de Gaulle," says Alain de Sérigny, the editor of *Echo d'Alger* who for many years was loyal to Pétain, "to believe that he would ignore this mandate from our Moslem fellow citizens—still less that he would betray us all by negotiating with the F.L.N. Algeria is now a department of France. The question is closed."

As de Gaulle well knows, however, it is not. Unlike the *colons* and certain army officers, he has never pretended not to see a massive object standing right in front of him. Though he may not admit that the F.L.N. point of view is legitimate, he recognizes that it exists and that a large if undetermined number of Moslems share it. He must, since he entered into secret negotiations with the F.L.N. shortly after taking office. The negotiations were well advanced last October, when he publicly offered F.L.N. leaders a safe-conduct to Paris for peace talks. But the Algerian press interpreted his reference to the "parliamentarians' white flag" as the flag not of truce but of surrender. So did the F.L.N., which thereupon turned the offer down.

A Five-Year Plan

It is not so easy, of course, to determine what de Gaulle himself had in mind when he issued the invitation. Plainly, however, he did not intend simply to suggest that Algeria should remain an integral part of France. Though he has never implied that France might leave Algeria—"What a hecatomb this land would know," he has said, "if we were so stupid and cowardly as to abandon it!"—he has frequently spoken of an "Algerian personality," and of "Algeria with France and France with Algeria." Not once in all these dramatic months has he pronounced the word "integration," and if the concept was partly implied in his famous Constantine speech on October 3, he and the *colons* are clearly not talking about the same thing.

In Constantine, he called for a five-year plan that would "profound-

ly transform" Algeria, including the reservation for Moslems of one out of every ten posts in the civil service of metropolitan France; raising of Algerian wages and working conditions to a level comparable to those prevailing there; distribution of 620,000 acres of land to the Moslem fellahin; exploitation of Saharan petroleum and natural gas to create vast metallurgical and chemical complexes; construction of housing for a million people; development of adequate sanitary facilities, ports, and highways; the creation of 400,000 new jobs and enough new schools to absorb two-thirds of Algeria's children, the rest to be absorbed in the following three years.

All this would cost 100 billion francs a year for five years—a total of \$5 billion; and even after such a monumental expenditure of money and effort, de Gaulle's only promise for the future was that "Algeria's destiny will have as its basis both her own personality and a close solidarity with metropolitan France."

The *colons* of Constantine heard him out in cold silence; and when he started singing the "Marseillaise" at the close of his speech, they left him to sing it through alone.

Can He Control the Army?

De Gaulle's problem at the moment, however, is not so much the *colons* as the army, which is obsessed with maintaining the French "presence" in Algeria as a point of patriotism and pride. From their painful experience in Indo-China, French army officers have learned how to recognize a popular revolution when they see one; and though they may not be masters of Marxist doctrine, they are assiduous students of the psychological-warfare techniques used so successfully by Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse-tung. "The army," as Mao used often to say, "must move among the people as a fish swims in water." There is hardly a captain or lieutenant in Algeria who doesn't know the maxim.

For two years now, highly trained officers in the army's SAS (*Service d'Administration Spéciale*) have been at work in the remotest ends of the Bled, the vast, misery-ridden Algerian hinterland neglected by the *colons* for more than a century. In nearly seven hundred villages, the SAS officer



fills the role of doctor, engineer, teacher, mayor, lawyer, judge. If he does not always win the Moslems' love, at least he earns their respect. In the relatively short time they have been at work, the SAS officers have given free medical care to 673,000 people, established work projects for ten thousand unemployed, rebuilt three hundred schools destroyed by the F.L.N. and added as many more, and resettled nearly 750,000 Moslems who had either sought French protection from the F.L.N. or lived directly in the theater of war.

The SAS men's effort may be futile. "It's a wonderful idea," one of them told me, "but I'm afraid we're ten years too late." Still, it has brought them far closer to the Moslems than the *colons* ever were; and through this intimate contact they have come to believe in integration in the full sense of the word.

Accordingly, the army here is all for de Gaulle's Constantine plan—provided it ends by keeping Algeria as a fully integrated part of France. But that would require an end to the war, and at once. For the war has been costing France a billion dollars a year; and however stringent an austerity program de Gaulle may try to impose, it is highly improbable that he can afford to pay both for pacification and for war. Indeed, Algerian industrialists take this for granted. "Naturally," says the secretary of the Bône chamber of commerce, discussing a multi-million-dollar steel plant projected in the plan, "we can't get

started on this until pacification is completed."

There are no signs, however, that pacification is anywhere near attainment. On the contrary. The rebel leaders may be preoccupied by recent military setbacks, they may fear the civilian Moslems' weariness and even share it; yet their reaction is not to call off the fighting but to extend it. "We will give de Gaulle six months to offer us our independence," says a spokesman for the Algerian government-in-exile in Tunis. "And if he doesn't by then, we will bring Tunisia and Morocco into the war. The people are with us. If Bourguiba and King Mohammed V aren't, they'll be pushed."

THIS is a much more serious threat than others the rebels have used, such as to call in Nasser or the Soviet Union. For Soviet intervention in the Algerian war would bring all the West to France's side, whereas the entrance of Tunisia and Morocco would add immensely to its already colossal burden. Of course this may be a bluff. Bourguiba can hardly feel much enthusiasm for the idea: if the French army should spill over into Tunisia, he has no more than five thousand poorly equipped troops to send against it. Yet feelings have been running high in his country since the French bombed the Tunisian village of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef last February. One more incident like it might be the final push that's needed.

Some French officers would like

nothing better than another Sakiet, including the commander of the airfield from which the bombers took off last February. This does not apply, however, to the top army men in Algiers. "The F.L.N. mustn't believe in Santa Claus," one of them told me. "Our strategy isn't to give the fellagha more room to fight in but to squeeze them until they have no room left."

Still, for more than four years now, a French army half a million strong has been hunting down a guerrilla army ten times smaller; and anyone who travels through the Our-senis mountain chain, the Kabylie, or the Aurès can see that the rebels still have plenty of room. Whatever the optimism in Algiers, there are no realistic grounds for assuming that de Gaulle has any but two choices: either to go on fighting the war for another year or two or ten or to find some basis for resuming negotiations with the F.L.N. If he chooses the latter course, however, he must first find a way to break the army's power.

THERE ARE French officers here who would support de Gaulle whatever he did. "I'd follow him with my eyes closed," said a colonel in the air force, "and if the *colons* didn't like wherever he was going, I can think of a good place to send them." But there are not many like him in the Gouvernement Général. The famous colonels who have made one revolution and can make another insist that they have been "negotiated out of the last piece of French territory we're ever going to leave." They want no more Indo-Chinas or Tunisias or Moroccos. "*J'y suis; j'y reste.*" No group of French officers was ever more determined to stand fast.

In the end it may turn out that they are no match for de Gaulle, who has been prying them out of Algiers, one by one, almost from the day they put him in power. When the last and biggest to go, General Raoul Salan, took off for Paris, Algiers was silent and sullen, and there was not a single important personage present at the airport to greet his civilian successor, Paul Delouvrier. But apart from a few hardy souls who shouted "Down with de Gaulle!" the *Algérois* did not show any inclination to go on a rampage against de Gaulle.

Europe Looks The Dollar in the Face

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ON MONDAY, December 29, 1958, ten countries of western Europe made the greatest collective move toward freedom of payments since exchange controls were clamped down when war broke out in 1939. They decided to make other currencies freely convertible, not merely among one another but with the dollar; in most cases, however, convertibility will be restricted to people not residing in the country that issues the currency in question.

The pound sterling was made convertible for anyone residing outside the United Kingdom and other sterling countries. The French franc in its newly devalued form was made convertible for those outside France, the Dutch guilder for those outside

among European countries to convertibility with the dollar. It will help do away with the specter of an economically insulated Europe that might become increasingly inward-looking and discriminatory in its trade with the dollar world. The fear had increased recently with the discussions on linking the Common Market with a Free Trade Area. The Common Market of France, West Germany, Italy, and the three Benelux nations, which came into effect on January 1, had begun to acquire a protectionist philosophy and might well have become an expression in economic terms of the desire for political neutralism cherished by many Europeans. Nothing would have been more dangerous to the free world. The new convertibility of European currencies, even though reserved to nonresidents, goes a very long way toward removing the menace of economic division.

BUT THE MOVE is also important because it is a genuinely collective effort. The effort is all the more remarkable in that there had been evidence that western Europe might split into two camps—the six of the Common Market against the rest. The attempts to associate them all in a Free Trade Area had come to grief at a meeting in Paris on December 15 that ended in what was probably the most angry and open clash between France and Britain that has occurred at any postwar international conference. Now we see sterling and the franc moving together into convertibility and, most significant of all, the Bank of England offering considerable help to the Bank of France in order to buttress the new revalued franc. After that evidence of collaboration, the fears of an economic division in western Europe were considerably diminished.

The background of these decisions is provided by the tremendous im-



the Netherlands—and so on with the other seven countries involved in the December 29 announcement: Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and West Germany. (The latter, however, has promised that the mark will soon be freely convertible for German citizens as well as foreigners.) Austria and Portugal got on the band wagon a few days later. Unlike charity, convertibility in Europe has not begun at home. But when so many countries are distributing this particular largesse on their neighbors, each one will in fact get the benefit of all the others' concessions.

This move into partial convertibility is important in itself, because it extends the mutual convertibility