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The Internationalization of the Algerian Problem and Its Inscription on the Agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations from 1957-1959

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Summary:

Detailed summary charting the development of United Nations debates and discussions about the Algerian problem, from 1957-1959, told from an Algerian perspective. Narrates the context and time-line of key events spurring four UN debates on the Algerian problem (from the first, in February 1957, to the fourth, in 1959). Focuses heavily on the foreign policy of France, under Charles De Gaulle's government, highlighting France's reluctance to negotiate, and recognize the independence of Algeria, and France's objections to the United Nation's recognition of Algerian independence.

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The Algerian problem is the product of the permanent conflict between French colonialism and a people which, unanimously, demands its legitimate right to sovereignty and its dependence.

On 1 November 1954, this conflict reached the limits of antagonism and exploded into an armed struggle. Since that time the Algerian problem has been added to the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations six times. Between 1957 and 1959, it was the object of four debates.

The resumption of this debate, which has almost become ritualistic, parallels an unjust and anachronistic war instigated by French colonialism and characterized by the accumulation of untold crimes committed against the Algerian people.

The UN General Assembly is once again called upon to consider the Algerian question.

The states of Africa and Asia which, for the most part, have experienced in their recent past a drama comparable to that currently unfolding in Algeria, are among the UN members most directly interested in our problem. And a brief assessment of the efforts attempted to this point to put an end to a conflict that has lasted for six years will undoubtedly help you infer a lesson from those aborted experiments. You will recognize the need for the UN to take an unequivocal decision on the selection of the most effective means to bring about a solution. Several attempts, preceding formal recognition by the French government of our right to self-determination, have been made, without success, to reach a bilateral settlement. Since 1 November 1954, the day the conflict broke out, the Algerian National Liberation Front, in a solemn declaration requesting the right to exercise self-determination, submitted a platform for an honorable dialogue with the French government. This latter responded with war and rejected the offer for talks.

During the year 1956, direct contacts took place between representatives of the French government and of the FLN, without results.

The Algerian problem had just been brought to the attention to the UN. Aiming to mystify international opinion and to manipulate French opinion, the French government began using peace and negotiations as "mots d'ordre." At the same time, the French government intensified its war effort using the alibi of "legitimate counterpart."

In February 1957, the UN General Assembly opened the first debate on the Algerian problem. The French government, never ceasing to challenge the authority of the UN, all the while protesting against its interference in a matter which it claimed was internal, exposed before the same Assembly French policy in Algeria. This debate succeeded in obliterating the myth of French Algeria and confirmed the competence of the UN. Seeking to grant a reprieve to the French government, the General Assembly of this session expressed in its final resolution the "hope" that, in a spirit of cooperation, a peaceful, democratic, and just solution would be found by legitimate means consistent with the principles of the UN Charter.

The Algerian problem came back before the Assembly six months later, as blood continued to be ceaselessly shed in Algeria. The promises of imminent peace and the provisions of the "loi cadre" exposed by the French Delegation proved only a dilatory means intended to appease international opinion.

Twenty-two Afro-Asian countries, by introducing a request to add the Algerian problem to the agenda, had attempted to underscore that: "The UN has received no indication that any progress has been made toward the implementation of the resolution." The Heads of State of Morocco and of Tunisia, seeking to support the legitimate aspirations of the Algerian people and put an end to a war that directly threatens their countries, offered their good offices to open bilateral peace talks on the basis of the recognition of Algerian sovereignty. Taking into account this offer, in December 1957 the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution in which it expressed its wish to see negotiations begin. The FLN accepted this Tunisio-Moroccan offer. The French government rejected it.

The year 1958 has been marked by two concomitant but contrary events in their significance. On the Algerian side, it is the declaration by the R.A.L. and the creation of the GPRA. This event, awaited for over a century, was greeted with enthusiasm by the entire Algerian people. Algeria thus affirmed its willingness to restore its national independence and made its entry into the international community as a sovereign country. The Algerian government was immediately recognized by a large number of friendly countries and the list of those recognitions is not closed.

In France, the disarray caused by the pursuit of this colonial war has brought about the collapse of the Fourth Republic. General de Gaulle came to power giving himself six months to solve the Algerian problem and bring back peace. While continuing, like his predecessors, to avoid bilateral negotiations and political discussion, he multiplied psychological operations. In his Constantine speech, he outlined a plan to reorganize and develop Algeria, in order to suggest change and conceal the reality of a policy of endless war. He launched the "peace of the brave" and organized elections under the supervision of the expeditionary corps to suggest a return to normal life in Algeria.

The UN National Assembly is once again called upon to address the question. The French Delegation objected to that by declaring: "Reopening a vain and malicious discussion is especially inappropriate at a time when the French government has manifested in the clearest way possible its willingness to devote all its efforts to an essential settlement and its readiness to translate this willingness into action."

This act produced and continues to produce an escalation of the war to a level never before seen. Concentration camps, the exodus of refugees, executions, and massacres of populations during major repressive operations demonstrate the way in which the current French government devotes its effort to the "essential" settlement. The issue was debated for the fourth time. The political commission adopted a resolution that recognized the right of the Algerian people to independence while taking note of the willingness of the GPRA to begin negotiations.

This resolution, which represented a significant improvement over previous ones, only expressed a pious wish, that is, to see negotiations open between the two parties. It proposed no means to impose the moral authority of the UN on the French government.

And this brings us to the year 1959.

On the eve of the annual UN session, the French Head of State solemnly recognized the right of Algerians to self-determination. Such a declaration had no other purpose than to please the UN. In reality, General de Gaulle only went as far as enunciating a right in principle while taking care to state conditions that would make its implementation impossible. The GPRA, taking General de Gaulle to his word, gave its agreement and offered the opening of peace talks on the modalities to apply this right and the guarantees for a cease-fire. The French government did not take into consideration our proposal. Our government thereafter designated 5 of its members

to participate in the peace talks. General de Gaulle never acknowledged our effort. These are facts that demonstrate the duplicity of the French government. After having been constrained to recognize our right to self-determination, the French government did an about-face and refused that recourse.

The experience at Melun exposed the real intentions of the French government and its responsibility for the continuation of the war. The GPRA, in a declaration made after the failure at Melun, denounced the double-play of the French government "whose attitude betrays a refusal to negotiate. This was also confirmed by the political positions that the representatives of the French government sought to communicate to our envoys despite the technical character their discussions were supposed to have. It is thus that the interpretation that became clear at Melun of the last declaration of General de Gaulle did not correspond at all to the terms suggested in the declaration. In this declaration it becomes clear, through new formulas, that France wants our capitulation."

The proof was thus made that the French government never abandoned its colonialist designs. It wants to impose its "dikta" on the Algerian people while seeking to obtain through political maneuver that which it cannot gain through military action.

The recent initiatives of General de Gaulle bring nothing new. They are in the tradition of the colonial policy that has always guided his predecessors, that of the "loi cadre" and of the rights granted. They seek to bring about in Algeria, with all the consequences that such a "Palestinazation" would bring, the isolation of Algerians in remote regions and the attribution of "useful Algeria" to Europeans. A division of Algeria according to the will of General de Gaulle would help him win over the majority he needs to carry out his designs. The threat he makes upon the national and territorial unity of our country will not stop the determination of the Algerian people to relentlessly pursue its struggle for independence. Such a policy, far from bringing a solution to the Algerian problem, will only turn our country into a crucible of perpetual tension. General de Gaulle understand the impossibility of realizing this diabolical plan. But he wants to buy time and sow doubt in the hope of creating a baodaisme in Algeria, as well as [finding new] allies to serve his policy. The political maturity and the patriotism that the Algerian people have manifested shows that it will not fall prey to those maneuvers. The assistance under all guises provided and which will surely be provided in the future by the countries of Africa and Asia will only strengthen its determination to reject any unfavorable solutions. The efforts of French colonialism seek not only to impose on our country a solution contrary to the aspirations of our people; it also seeks to take advantage of the painful experience of the colonial period to isolate our government and condemn it to a head-to-head.

Recognized by the French government itself as the only coordinator of the Algerian struggle and protector of the interests of the Algerian people, the GPRA will oppose all attempts to give a respite to the partisans of the Algerian war.

We believe that the solidarity among the countries of Africa and Asia calls for the denunciation of any wicked ploy, and that is only possible through a sustained pressure on the French government, which is responsible for the conduct of an unjust war. By asking the UN for the organization and monitoring of a referendum, the GPRA understands the importance of submitting concrete proposals to the Afro-Asian group, the relevance of which is highlighted by the failure of face-to-face discussions and mediation efforts.