

The Messalians and the National Liberation Front

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Abstract:

This study addresses the crisis of the Algerian national movement and the disputes that arose within the Algerian People's Party and the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties over the methods of struggle for independence. The crisis deepened between the supporters of Messali Hadj and those of the Central Committee because of disagreements over party management and leadership, leading to the party's split in 1954. This division contributed to the establishment of the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action, which decided to adopt armed struggle as a means of liberating Algeria. Its efforts culminated in the creation of the National Liberation Front and the National Liberation Army and in preparations for the outbreak of the Revolution of 1 November 1954. The study also examines the conflict between the National Liberation Front and the Algerian National Movement during the Revolution and the bloody confrontations that followed, which affected national unity. It highlights the role of figures such as Mohamed Bellounis and Kobus, who cooperated with the French colonial authorities against the Revolution. By contrast, the National Liberation Army continued to organise its ranks and expand its military and political operations inside and outside Algeria. In conclusion, the Revolution of 1 November crowned a long course of national struggle and succeeded in uniting the majority of Algerians around the goal of independence despite internal divisions and conflicts.

Keywords: Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, Messalians, Centralists, Crisis, National Liberation Front

INTRODUCTION:

The National Liberation Front, in both its political and military branches, was characterised by a complex and tightly controlled organisation. It mobilised the masses and recruited them either into the ranks of the National Liberation Army or to support and shelter the Revolution. From the beginning of the armed struggle, the revolutionary leadership sought to adopt a comprehensive national strategy focused primarily on explaining the meanings and objectives of the Revolution, convincing as many Algerians as possible, and strengthening the bonds and cooperation between the Algerian people and their revolutionary leaders. However, the success of the liberation Revolution was not easy; it encountered a number of problems and difficulties. One of the most prominent was the opposition of supporters of the Algerian National Movement led by Messali Hadj. They formed an armed organisation that conducted military operations against the Algerian Revolution, creating a crisis within the ranks of the National Liberation Army. This issue remains one of the most complex questions confronting historians and researchers in the history of the national movement and the liberation Revolution. Some consider Messali Hadj, the father of the national movement, to have laid the principal foundation for the formation of the generation that launched the Revolution, beginning

with the establishment of the North African Star in 1926, the Algerian People's Party in 1937, the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties in 1946, and finally the Algerian National Movement in 1954. The latter marked a decisive departure by the Messalians from the objective of achieving freedom. They soon fuelled discord within a single party that had been seeking to devise a disciplined and systematic military plan to confront French colonialism and secure independence. In light of this, the following research question was formulated:

What were the causes and motives of the conflict between the Algerian National Movement (the Messalians) and the National Liberation Front, and how did the Revolution move from political disagreement to armed struggle?

The Crisis of the National Movement: Causes and Consequences

The earliest roots of the crisis in the national movement, namely the Algerian People's Party, can be traced back at least to 1945-1947, as recognised by the political leaders of the time and the leaders of the first nucleus that prepared and launched the Revolution. During this period, the national political struggle witnessed a number of changes, developments, and events that had decisive consequences for the course of the national movement in general and the independence current in particular. These developments brought the national struggle to an impasse and generated a severe and suffocating internal crisis that ultimately led to the final split. (1)

1. Definition of the Crisis and Its Main Parties:

The crisis began in 1946 because of disagreement over the course the party should follow. Three currents emerged at the time:

- A current that considered participation in elections necessary.
- A current that regarded elections as futile and argued that the party should not waste time taking part in them.
- A current that considered political action ineffective and called for preparations for an armed revolution.

At that stage, Messali Hadj managed to satisfy all three currents, and the crisis was temporarily resolved. It resurfaced in 1950 after the discovery of the Special Organisation. The conflict then developed further, intensified in 1953, and ultimately divided the party into two camps in 1954:

***The Messalians:** They believed that Messali Hadj was the sole leader of the party and that his views should be implemented without debate. They held a conference in Hornu, Belgium, from 14 to 16 July 1954 and adopted the following decisions:

- Elect Messali Hadj president of the party for life.
- Dissolve the Central Committee and expel its members from the party.

***The Centralists:** They believed that the party should be governed collectively and that Messali Hadj should consult them before issuing orders. They held a conference in Algiers from 13 to 16 August 1954 and adopted the following decisions:

- Reject the decisions adopted by the Messalians at their conference.
- Expel Messali Hadj and his associates from the party.

The Messalians and the Centralists entered into bloody clashes in cafés and streets, using edged weapons and even firearms. The French authorities remained passive and may even have encouraged the conflict, welcoming the prospect that the party that had troubled them with its demands for many years would be destroyed by its own members. It is reported that André Lacoste, head of the General

Intelligence Police, rubbed his hands with satisfaction and said: "As long as they are fighting among themselves, that is a good sign." (2)

The crisis brought the supporters of Messali Hadj into confrontation with the members of the Central Committee. Apart from the inevitable personal issues, the crisis had longstanding causes. On the one hand, Messali Hadj possessed dominant prestige within the party. This prestige stemmed from the reputation of a leader who, above all, had been a symbol of nationalism since the beginnings of the North African Star. In every speech and in everything written in the party press, he was presented as the primary reference in the struggle for independence. For many years he had also been imprisoned or exiled, becoming a martyr to the national cause. This prestige gave him a moral authority that carried considerable weight in most major party decisions, and questioning it could be regarded as almost heretical. On the other hand, there were leaders who had transformed the Algerian People's Party/Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (PPA/MTLD) into a modern and organised party that used every means in the political, social, and cultural fields and was capable of clandestine organisation in preparation for the armed struggle undertaken by the Special Organisation. (3)

Clashes between Messali and several party leaders deepened the crisis. The most important disputes involved Secretary-General Lahouel over party management and Chawki over the proposed union with the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto (UDMA). These disagreements quickly led Lahouel to resign in March 1951. Three other leaders, Chawki, Chetouf, and Omrani, left in May 1951. When Messali was travelling to Mecca, the leadership asked him to tour Arab and Asian countries. He ended the tour without informing the leadership and returned to France to follow the proceedings of the United Nations. (4)

At a meeting of the Central Committee in March 1952, Messali's report on his journey to the East was judged unsatisfactory. Committee members were also dissatisfied with his reservations concerning the national congress and the North African Union. In April and May, Messali conducted a campaign tour in Algeria despite the leadership's concerns about inflammatory speeches and police provocation. He was then arrested and placed under house arrest in Niort. In April 1953, the party held a congress at which it set out the objectives of its policy: democracy, republican government, social justice, and Arab-Islamic culture. The congress appointed the members of the Central Committee, who selected Youcef Ben Khedda as secretary-general. In September 1953, however, Messali withdrew his confidence from the new secretary-general and demanded absolute powers to reorganise the party. The Central Committee rejected this demand. In January 1954, Messali withdrew his confidence from the entire leadership and formed a Public Salvation Committee. It instructed party structures to freeze funds, sever relations with the leadership, and recognise only Messali's representatives, Moulay Merbah and Mezghenna. The party base remained loyal to Messali, which led the members of the Central Committee to approve his organisation of a congress. The conflict nevertheless worsened. The Central Committee considered that its authority was no longer accepted and that it had become powerless. At its meeting in March 1954, and under pressure from motions submitted by local branches and groups supporting Messali, it transferred responsibility for administering the party to Messali while retaining financial management. The members of the Central Committee also relinquished their executive functions within the party. This angered the Messalians. In June 1954, the Central Committee reversed its decision and withdrew the powers granted to Messali. Despite all attempts at reconciliation, the two rival congresses organised by the Messalians and the Centralists moved the party towards division. (5)

At the extraordinary conference convened by Messali Hadj in Hornu, Belgium, in July 1954, he excluded all members of the Central Committee and, naturally, the members of the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action (CRUA). This was not difficult, for, as the party's sole president, he was preparing to launch what he considered his second revolution, which would lead him towards betrayal. As a direct result of these developments, the CRUA disintegrated. The two Centralists, Dakhli and Bouchouba, withdrew, and the final rupture occurred on 20 July 1954. Since the CRUA had been established to preserve party unity, there was no longer any reason for it to continue once the party had split. (6)

During the conflict, the Messalians threatened to summon Kabyle militants from the mountains to eliminate the Centralists. At the beginning of the dispute, many of these militants had supported the Messalian position. The party had dissolved the special organisation in Kabylia in 1948 during the so-called "Berberist Crisis," which it described as the emergence of a separatist tendency that threatened national unity. The episode ended with the expulsion of many activists. During the later crisis, Krim Belkacem and Omar Oumrane sent Ben Aouda from Kabylia to North Constantine to join Zighoud Youcef and other militants. Their objective was to move in force towards Constantine and compel neutral elements to join the Messalian ranks, even through the use of force. In short, until May, the organisation in Kabylia clearly supported Messali Hadj. Yet the region contained many committed militants and occupied a strategically important geographical position. It could not therefore be left outside the movement. (7)

2. Causes of the Crisis in the National Movement:

The main causes of the crisis may be summarised as follows:

- Large numbers of young Algerians who had participated in the Second World War joined the MTLD. This strengthened the revolutionary current within the movement and reinforced calls for armed struggle as the means to independence.
- The party adopted a policy of participating in elections, which some members of the leadership rejected.
- Messali Hadj refused to open the party to other Algerian political currents or establish relations with them. He considered their principles incompatible with the demands and objectives of the MTLD, whereas another group within the party supported broader relations with Algerian political forces.
- Some party members rejected Messali Hadj's exclusive control over party management. They argued that all members should participate in decisions concerning the party and its future. (8)
- The Central Committee removed Messali Hadj's associates, Ahmed Mezghenna and Moulay Merbah, from the Administrative Committee.
- Messali Hadj rejected the appointment of Youcef Ben Khedda, a Centralist, as secretary-general of the party.

The remaining members of the dissolved Special Organisation, together with several Centralists who opposed the internal conflict, attempted to reconcile the two sides. When these efforts failed, they established the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action on 23 March 1954. It included twenty-two militants, among them Didouche Mourad, Mohamed Boudiaf, and Mostefa Ben Boulaïd. They met on 23 June 1954 at the home of Ilyas Derriche and adopted the following decisions:

- Launch the armed Revolution.
- Search for weapons and distribute them.

- Begin military training.
- Elect a six-member national leadership consisting of Mohamed Boudiaf, Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, Didouche Mourad, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Rabah Bitat, and Krim Belkacem. Three members based abroad were also included: Ahmed Ben Bella, Mohamed Khider, and Hocine Aït Ahmed.

On 10 October 1954, the Committee of Six met and agreed on the following points:

- Divide Algeria into five zones and appoint a leader for each zone.
- Include the members of the External Delegation in the revolutionary general staff while maintaining their membership in the FLN's external delegation.

On 23 October 1954, the Committee of Six met in the municipality of Raïs Hamidou and decided to:

- Establish the National Liberation Front and the National Liberation Army.
- Draft the Proclamation of 1 November, which defined the course, principles, and objectives of the Revolution.
- Set Monday, 1 November 1954, as the date for the outbreak of the Revolution.

The consequences of this crisis at the levels of leadership, organisational structure, and the popular base may be summarised as follows:

- The first and most direct result was the division and eventual disappearance of the major nationalist party in which committed militants had placed great hopes. This produced several negative consequences.
- The crisis accelerated the armed Revolution, which was initiated by a relatively small group of young militants.
- It dispersed nationalist forces and drew them into secondary conflicts. This became especially evident after the declaration of the armed Revolution and the emergence of movements opposed to it, particularly Messali Hadj's Algerian National Movement (MNA).
- In France alone, the bloody conflict between the Messalian Algerian National Movement and the National Liberation Front resulted in approximately 9,000 cadres

and militants being killed or wounded, in addition to substantial material losses and wasted time. (9)

Second Section: Messalian Hostility toward the Revolution and Agents on the Path of Betrayal

In the autumn of 1956, the Fourth Wilaya assigned the martyr Zouiouche the task of contacting the Messalians. He was to persuade them to end their opposition to the Revolution and negotiate a form of joint cooperation against the common enemy. He travelled with a group of about thirty-five mujahidin. No news was received from the mission until after French forces hijacked the aircraft carrying the five Algerian leaders. They were travelling from Morocco to Tunisia to attend a meeting with the King of Morocco and President Habib Bourguiba. The operation was unprecedented in the history of aerial piracy, as the passengers were arrested after the aircraft was intercepted. French forces later repeated such interceptions, including the case of a British aircraft forced to land on 4 November 1960 under unclear circumstances (10)

As events accelerated, one of the mujahidin assigned to contact the Messalians returned alone and terrified. He immediately requested a meeting with the commander of the Wilaya and reported that he had narrowly escaped death after discovering that the Messalians had betrayed the cause and its leadership and had slaughtered his companions like sheep after assuring them that they were safe. The Messalians committed this grave crime after news spread that the aircraft carrying the five leaders had been diverted. They assumed that the Revolution was on the verge of failure after its external leadership had been captured and thus offered the enemy a precious gift: more than thirty mujahidin.

In another battle in March 1959, southwest of Ksar El Boukhari, the Messalians captured eleven of the finest young mujahidin and subjected them to acts that exceeded the limits of criminality and fascism. The victims included the martyrs Omar En-Nakis and Abderrahmane Ben Aafou. The Fourth Wilaya was therefore fighting not only France but also the Messalians, ignorance, disorder, and lack of awareness (11)

One of the Messalians' objectives was to prevent the National Liberation Army from establishing itself around the districts of Algiers and controlling strategic locations that enabled it to obtain supplies and equipment. The Messalians also allied themselves with the French army in an effort to destroy the Revolution and annihilate the population. Among them were extremists whom the enemy turned into leaders and opponents of the people's cause, such as Kobus, Bellounis, and others who betrayed the homeland. (12)

1. General Bellounis: From Loyalty to Messali to Allegiance to France:

The Bellounis movement was created as part of the French strategy to destroy the Algerian Revolution by undermining it from within. It was one of many attempts aimed at suffocating the Revolution and eliminating it at its inception. Bellounis therefore began to establish his own organisation in the Sixth Wilaya. (13) The French colonial authorities had long awaited such an opportunity. They knew that the descendants of Emir Abdelkader and Ibn Badis would neither submit nor accept humiliation and degradation. They therefore prepared men loyal to France and willing to betray their homeland. One of them was Mohamed Bellounis, who exploited the name of Messali Hadj, in whom he had placed complete trust. After the outbreak of the liberation Revolution in 1954, Messali entrusted him with establishing an armed wing under the name of the Algerian National Movement. When Bellounis entered into open confrontation with Krim Belkacem in Kabylia, he sought assistance from those whom he believed still followed Messali Hadj, including Sheikh Ziane Achour and Si El Haouès. Both expelled him from the borders of the Saharan region at the beginning of 1956. This pressure drove him into the arms of the French forces, especially after the Beni Ilmane massacre of May 1957, carried out by the National Liberation Army under the command of Mohammedi Saïd and Abdelkader Briki against the followers of Mohamed Bellounis. Bellounis eventually decided to sign an agreement with the French. Nevertheless, he continued to appeal to the people in the name of Messali Hadj. This occurred at Haouch En-Naas, which he entered carrying the Algerian flag and raising slogans in support of Messali Hadj. He and his army distributed leaflets that invariably ended with the words: "Long live the Algerian National Movement; long live Messali Hadj." However, once Bellounis gained control of a vast territory under French protection, he abandoned his advocacy of Messali Hadj and discarded the Messalian slogan, thereby revealing the reality of his direct cooperation with the French military authorities.

When Messali Hadj learned of the contacts between Bellounis and the French military authorities, he sent an envoy at the end of 1957 to investigate these contacts, which were apparently being conducted in secret. Messali continued to await the results of his envoy's mission from December 1957 until after April 1958, but to no avail. He referred to this long wait in a report submitted from his exile in the prison of Belle-Île in the Atlantic Ocean to a conference of Algerian National Movement cadres in April 1958. He wrote: "To this day, the party remains unaware of the facts that led to the Bellounis affair. If we rely only on press statements, we must acknowledge that Bellounis was the victim of manipulation by the Arab Bureau services responsible for Indigenous Affairs within the General Government of Algeria." At the same time, the Messalian movement was suffering further losses

within its leadership structures. After Bellounis gained control of a large geographical area and an army of more than 3,000 soldiers, he fell into the trap of personal leadership ambitions. One of his principal assistants, Meftah, commander of the Messalian army, turned against him and contributed to his elimination at Dar Chioukh on the grounds that Bellounis had broken his commitment to Messali. Before the revolt against him, Bellounis had declared that he no longer recognised Messali Hadj. This was a direct cause of his assassination by one of his followers in July 1958. Meftah later met the same fate after becoming the new commander of the Messalian army.

*** Bellounis's Relations with the French Administration at the Political and Military Levels: (14)**

a) Political Relations:

Once Bellounis's relationship with the French became operational, he began issuing statements and publishing declarations reflecting this cooperation. On 6 November 1957, he submitted a statement to General Siozzi, Inspector-General of the Corps of Officers for Indigenous and Social Affairs. In it, General Bellounis explained his policy and the objectives of his army. He stated that he had never imagined that a day would come when Algeria would be completely separated from France. He claimed that the purpose of taking up arms was to free Algeria from the ideological servitude and domination of the National Liberation Front. He also presented his objective as the construction of an Algeria liberated from colonial domination and linked to France without being absorbed into it, provided that it remained free to choose its own destiny. He stated that the necessity of freedom of choice was the only idea that drove him to fight and that the immediate objective should be to defeat the common enemy, namely the revolutionary forces led by the National Liberation Front.

Bellounis gave practical expression to his association with the French when he met Siozzi in the Djelfa region. An agreement was concluded in the presence of a representative of Lacoste and several officers, including Katz and Rocoul. Siozzi carefully arranged the meeting, and discussions took place between the two men. Bellounis was accompanied by eight close assistants, most of whom took pride in their French education. Siozzi also recognised Si El Hocine, chief of the general staff of Bellounis's army, as one of his former students.

The two sides discussed a cooperation project between France and Bellounis. Siozzi informed him of the seventy million francs that France had decided to provide each month. The agreement was signed, and Bellounis stated that he had always believed in a complete association between Algeria and France. He proposed several solutions, including integration, rejected the idea of separation, and agreed to respect the boundaries of the territory recognised for him by France. He also expressed satisfaction with Lacoste's municipal reform, promised to respect the judicial system, and affirmed that there was no justice other than French justice.

b) Military Relations:

Relations between the French authorities and Bellounis became increasingly close. He began receiving prominent figures, especially journalists, at his headquarters in Dar Chioukh. (15) He also repeatedly pressed Katz to allow him to conduct activities beyond the territory assigned to him. This showed that Bellounis had not abandoned his original plan despite signing the November 1957 agreement. Katz wrote a report on the matter and requested one hundred additional soldiers. One of the first consequences of this report was that General Delac, chief of staff to Salan, prohibited journalists from visiting Bellounis. A further difficulty arose at the end of December. The Second Division possessed a quantity of rifles intended for Bellounis, but the army's Fourth Bureau suddenly

ordered the weapons to be delivered. Katz objected and contacted Salan, who instructed him to implement the agreement. In addition to the rifles, Bellounis was to receive clothing and vehicles. On 1 January 1958, the commander-in-chief issued new instructions and appointed Commander Dumas-Signac as his representative on the ground. His mission was to regulate the conditions under which Bellounis's army would be used and to ensure that Bellounis could maintain control over all his forces. During the first weeks of 1958, Bellounis took part in several operations. The first occurred on 28 and 29 January at Mount Menaâ near Dar Chioukh and aimed to capture Omar Idris and his men. The French forces and Bellounis's soldiers were surprised by fierce resistance and lost dozens of men. The operation lasted two full days but ultimately failed because the National Liberation Army forces were well positioned. The colonial forces and their auxiliaries in Bellounis's army could not accept the defeat. On 2 February 1958, they pursued Omar Idris's battalion as it moved eastward. The combined forces entered Mount Zerga near El Hamel and were caught in a pincer movement. Revolutionary units subjected them to heavy fire from all directions. Captain Rocoul was killed by the first bullet, which struck him in the head. The weapon had been captured in a fierce clash with Bellounis's forces. This was therefore a joint operation by the French forces and Bellounis's troops against the National Liberation Army.

2. The Collaborator Kobus and the Account of His Death:

The name Kobus is cursed wherever it appears in the history of the Revolution. It became associated with betrayal and deception until he met the fate of a traitor at the hands of loyal revolutionaries. (16) His real name was Belhadj Djilali Abdelkader, and he was born in the village of Zeddine in Aïn Defla Province. He attended the Non-Commissioned Officers School in Cherchell and graduated with the rank of corporal. He joined the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties and became a member of the Special Organisation (OS). When the organisation was discovered, the French police arrested its militants, including Belhadj. Unlike the others, he was released after only a short period because he disclosed all its secrets, in defiance of the leadership's strict instructions to maintain secrecy and reveal nothing, regardless of the conditions of interrogation and torture. He then became an informant working for the colonial police. Belhadj performed this double role skilfully, maintaining regular contact with the national movement on the one hand and with the enemy police on the other. When the liberation Revolution began, he joined the Messalian ranks and adopted the name "Kobus" instead of Belhadj at the end of 1956.

At first, Kobus succeeded in deceiving residents of the Chlef region, then known as Orléansville, by presenting himself as a former political prisoner and a militant in the national movement. He trapped many people and recruited them into his ranks, claiming that he would form from them the authentic nucleus of the liberation Revolution. The French intelligence services supported him materially and morally, and his forces were based in a French barracks. He deceived all his followers through false promises and misrepresentation, convincing them that they were the group destined for salvation and charged with renewing Algeria. In reality, Kobus was merely executing the enemy's plan to strike the Revolution from within and ignite discord among Algerians. At his request, which the enemy maliciously accepted, the Algerian flag was raised beside the French flag over his barracks. He then began fighting the Revolution, ambushing the mujahidin, and engaging them with a force of approximately five hundred men equipped with substantial matériel and modern weapons supplied by the enemy. Most members of his fighting groups knew nothing of what was really taking place, except for a small number of assistants blinded by betrayal and driven by greed.

Kobus's men preoccupied the population and the Revolution through the disorder and looting they caused, their attacks on the mujahidin, and their assaults on unarmed civilians, while enemy forces supplied them with equipment and weapons and extended protection to them. In response, a group of National Liberation Army fighters devised a highly elaborate secret plan to kill this agent. The operation was supervised by the mujahid Bouchouchi and M'hamed Belhadj, Kobus's brother-in-law. After collecting detailed information about the agent's movements, location, activities, and the times at which he was present, they prepared the plan for his elimination and assigned some of the best mujahidin to carry it out. The group travelled to the Aïn Defla region, where the agent's barracks were located, and established strict surveillance to determine when and where he could be found. Kobus was known for moving frequently and rapidly between his units to inspect and resupply them. His position was eventually surrounded and attacked. He was killed, and his head was taken to the headquarters of the revolutionary command. This daring operation was carried out on 16 February 1958. (17)

From Political Division to Armed Struggle:

Algerians had already experienced armed struggle by adopting popular armed resistance as a means of liberating the country and achieving independence. All the resistance movements known in Algeria failed because they were limited and local, because of the unequal military balance between them and the French, and because these movements generally ended with the death of their commander or leader. The general situation in Algeria reached a high level of frustration and despair, which developed into a firm conviction among Algerians that radical change had to be brought about by all available means in order to achieve national independence. At the international level, global conditions and rapidly unfolding events helped to bring about the Algerian Revolution on 1 November 1954. These included the success of the Egyptian Revolution in 1952, the Tunisian Revolution in the same year, the outbreak of the Revolution in Morocco in 1953, and the Vietnamese Revolution in 1954. All these events influenced internal developments and encouraged the adoption of the military option.

The current led by Messali Hadj rejected military action during the period in which the party was divided, arguing that the time had not yet come. Although it remained committed to the idea of complete independence, it believed that this objective could be achieved only by strengthening the party through legal political action. Following this, the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action, mentioned above, was established under the leadership of militants such as Mohamed Boudiaf and Mostefa Ben Boulaïd. They succeeded in mobilising the party's activist base and convincing it of the need to adopt armed struggle in order to achieve national independence. (18)

The political impasse reached by the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action led to the historic meeting of 23 June 1954, which brought together twenty-two revolutionary leaders. The meeting was held in the El Madania district of Algiers and approved the transition from political struggle to armed struggle. Mostefa Ben Boulaïd chaired the meeting, while Mohamed Boudiaf, Larbi Ben M'hidi, and Didouche Mourad presented different reports providing a general assessment of the country's political situation. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a resolution centred on the need to launch a national armed revolution as the only means of liberating the country from foreign occupation. The committee held several meetings, the last of which took place in the municipality of Raïs Hamidou, now part of Algiers, on 23 October 1954. It was decided to rename the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action as the National Liberation Front and the Special Organisation as the

National Liberation Army. The password for the military operations that night was “Khaled,” and the response was “Okba,” allowing the mujahidin to recognise one another. (19)

The actual territorial division resulting from the agreement of the revolutionary leadership greatly helped to shape the forms and patterns of military action. The most important tasks undertaken by the first revolutionary elements included the following:

- Identifying militants capable of carrying weapons and those engaged in clandestine work, such as sheltering people pursued by French forces.
- Recording the military weapons held by militants and other civilians, including hunting rifles and pistols.
- Conducting topographical and territorial surveys that identified water sources, shelters, peaks, mountains, wadis, enemy barracks, police stations, gendarmerie posts, forest guards, armed auxiliaries, douar authorities, and the weapons available to them.
- Producing the official uniform of the National Liberation Army and obtaining essential military items such as footwear and helmets.
- Accelerating the collection, harvesting, and sowing of agricultural crops.
- Financial matters were also of the utmost importance to the effective launch of the Revolution. Membership contributions, donations, and zakat were collected, and militants were prohibited from directing these funds outside the structures of the National Liberation Front.
- One of the most important sources of weapons was a series of caches in the town of Guemar in Oued Souf, in southeastern Algeria. Some accounts state that the mujahid El Hadj Mohamed possessed a large number of rifles and pistols in the region, amounting to nearly 3,000 weapons, which he delivered to the martyr Mostefa Ben Boulaïd. (20)

1. Preparations for the Uprising:

The Revolutionary Committee began preparing for the uprising. Most of its members were clandestine militants who were unknown to the wider public. The committee therefore sought a prominent and representative political figure from among the party cadres. It was unable to persuade the individuals it contacted because they regarded the proposed action as an adventure. The committee consequently relied on itself and on the Algerian people. It drafted a proclamation that defined national independence as the principal objective:

- Restore the sovereignty of a democratic and social Algerian state within the framework of Islamic principles.
- Respect all fundamental freedoms without racial or religious discrimination.

The proclamation was addressed to the party base and called on militants to regain the initiative. At the organisational level, two principles were adopted: decentralisation and the priority of the internal leadership over the external delegation. The National Liberation Front (FLN) was chosen as the name of the political organisation, while the National Liberation Army (ALN) was chosen as the name of the military organisation. Algeria was divided into six zones. At the strategic level, three stages were agreed upon. The first stage was characterised by the establishment of the political and military apparatus. The militants' tasks included studying the terrain, organising routes of movement and areas of withdrawal, and collecting money, weapons, and medicines. Fighters were required to harass enemy forces at night and organise surprise attacks on isolated posts. The second stage sought to create insecurity and general disruption through ambushes, the destruction of bridges, railways, roads, and electrical transformers, and numerous bold attacks against the enemies of the Revolution. The

third stage aimed to establish liberated and fortified zones that enemy authorities could not approach. Each zone was required to finance itself from its own resources. The weapons came from consignments purchased in Libya in 1947-1948. Approximately three hundred Italian weapons had been stored in Oued Souf and were later transferred to the Aurès, whereas the caches in Algiers contained only a few bombs and pistols. Preparations were rapid, resources were limited, and the political climate was uncertain. These actions and circumstances might suggest that the movement was embarking on a dangerous adventure. However, the determination of former members of the Special Organisation and the maturity of a people experienced in the struggle of the national movement transformed this beginning into a genuine war of liberation. (21)

2. The Outbreak of the Revolution of 1 November 1954:

The Algerian liberation Revolution emerged from internal and international developments that accelerated the adoption of armed struggle as a strategic choice. It marked the beginning of the end of the long period of occupation and domination imposed by the French authorities. The Group of Six consisted of Mostefa Ben Boulaid, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Rabah Bitat, Mohamed Boudiaf, Didouche Mourad, and Krim Belkacem. They decided to launch the armed struggle on 1 November 1954 and drafted the historic Proclamation of 1 November. This document outlined a political programme for the Revolution and for the period that would follow it. The revolutionary leadership defined national independence as its principal objective. Achieving this objective required the fulfilment of the following internal and external aims:

The Proclamation of 1 November defined two internal objectives:

- a) Political purification by restoring the national movement to its authentic course and eliminating all remnants of corruption and the reformist spirit that had been a major factor in the country's prevailing backwardness.
- b) Mobilising and organising all the sound forces of the Algerian people in order to dismantle the colonial system.

Its external objectives were as follows:

- a) Internationalising the Algerian question.
- b) Achieving North African unity within its natural Arab and Islamic framework.
- c) In accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, affirming active solidarity with the nations that supported the Algerian liberation cause. (22)

To achieve its objective, the National Liberation Front had to accomplish two essential tasks simultaneously: internal action, both in the political field and in the field of practical action, and external action aimed at making the Algerian question a tangible reality throughout the world with the support of Algeria's natural allies. This was an arduous and demanding mission that required all forces and the mobilisation of all national resources. The struggle would undoubtedly be long, but victory was assured.

It may therefore be concluded that the Proclamation of 1 November had both political and military dimensions. It united Algerians around the principal objective of achieving independence and freedom through armed struggle. It also called on Algerians to endorse the document and join the ranks of the Front in order to save the country and restore freedom, because the National Liberation Front was the front of the Algerian people and its victory was their victory. The Proclamation served as the political programme that defined the objectives of the Revolution and all the possible methods to be adopted in order to achieve national independence and build an independent Algerian state

within the framework of Islamic principles. It also explained how the French authorities were to be dealt with in times of war and peace, as well as the relationship between Algeria and other states. The Proclamation heralded the beginning of one of the greatest liberation revolutions of the twentieth century and disproved the French claim that French military power was invincible. (23)

Mohamed Boudiaf was assigned to coordinate with the External Delegation and arrange for the Proclamation of 1 November to be broadcast from Cairo on Sawt al-Arab radio. Responsibilities inside Algeria were distributed as follows:

- Zone One: the Aurès, led by Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, with Bachir Chihani as his deputy.
- Zone Two: North Constantine, led by Didouche Mourad, with Zighoud Youcef as his deputy.
- Zone Three: Kabylia, led by Krim Belkacem, with Omar Oumrane as his deputy.
- Zone Four: Algiers and its surrounding region, led by Rabah Bitat, with Souidani Boudjemaa as his deputy.
- Zone Five: Oran, led by Larbi Ben M'hidi, with Abdelhafid Boussouf as his deputy.
- Zone Six: the Sahara. It was established later and placed under the leadership of Si Chérif.

The militants sought to establish arms-supply bases in Moroccan cities near the Algerian border, including Oujda, Tetouan, and Casablanca. Similar efforts were made in Tunisian towns close to Algeria's eastern border, particularly Ghardimaou, as well as at military sites inside Algeria in the eastern and western border regions. This new strategy devised by the revolutionary leaders made it possible to bring substantial quantities of weapons and ammunition across these borders. One example was the vessel Dina, which carried a large shipment of arms that supplied the National Liberation Army and enabled it to conduct military attacks against French targets and positions in Zone Five. These included the offensive launched by the leadership of Zone Five in western Algeria in October 1955, which followed the North Constantine offensive in eastern Algeria led by Zone Two. The revolutionary leadership thus succeeded in thwarting the French strategy aimed at weakening the capabilities of the mujahidin, undermining their morale, and confining the Revolution to Zone One alone. (24) The French authorities used every means available, particularly by buying the loyalty of vulnerable Algerians and employing them against their compatriots fighting in the ranks of the National Liberation Front.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the preceding discussion shows that the Algerian liberation Revolution experienced internal conflicts that shed the blood of many Algerians who believed in the restoration of national independence. The most significant conflict involving the National Liberation Front was the fighting between the Front and the Algerian National Movement led by Messali Hadj. The militant Mohamed Harbi described this conflict at the time as a "war within a war," meaning an Algerian civil war within the Revolution. This conflict had a profoundly negative effect on the course of the Revolution because of the actions of collaborators such as Bellounis and Kobus. It also affected the Revolution among Algerian communities abroad because of the influence enjoyed there by the Messalian movement. Nor should its serious consequences for independent Algeria be overlooked. The exclusion of Messali Hadj's supporters and the deaths of many of their cadres deprived Algeria of numerous political figures who had acquired long experience of struggle within the Algerian People's Party and later the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties. The split that affected the single party that had sought to launch the Revolution from the earliest years of its existence may also be added as a factor explaining some of the weaknesses of the liberation Revolution. These weaknesses were further

compounded by the deaths of many of the Revolution's early leaders and the elimination of some of them as a result of internal conflicts and the ambitions of individuals who joined the Revolution at a later stage. Nevertheless, the glorious Revolution of 1 November 1954 crowned long years of immense Algerian suffering under extermination, repression, and oppression. It also represented a new experience of armed struggle from which the Algerian people undoubtedly benefited by overcoming the shortcomings and gaps that had caused the failure of the various popular armed resistance movements that preceded organised political action before the 1920s.

Notes:

1. Bouchikhi Cheikh, *The National Movement and the Algerian Revolution, 1954-1962*, Algiers: Office of University Publications, 2019, p. 249.
2. Djeflal Omar, *Contemporary History, 1945-1989*, 2nd ed., Algiers: Dar Houma for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 2013, pp. 211-212.
3. Mahfoud Kaddache, *Algeria of the Algerians: A History of Algeria, 1830-1954*, trans. Mohamed Al-Maaraji, Algiers: ANEP Publications, 2008, pp. 386-387.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 388-389.
6. Ammar Mellah, *Decisive Stages in the Revolution of 1 November 1954*, Algiers: Dar Al-Houda for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 2004, pp. 49-50.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
8. Djeflal Omar, previously cited, pp. 212-214.
9. Bouchikhi Cheikh, previously cited, pp. 255-256.
10. Lakhdar Bouregaa, *Memoirs of a Witness to the Assassination of the Revolution*, ed. Sadek Bakhouch, foreword by Saad Eddine El Chazli, 2nd ed., Algiers: Dar Al-Umma, 2000, p. 84.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.
13. Slimane Kacem, "Messali Hadj: Between Fairness and Injustice", *El Hiwar newspaper*, 14 March 2017, available at: www.elhiwardz.com.
14. Slimane Belkacem, "General Bellounis... Between Deception and Conspiracy", article published on *Djelfa Info*, 5 July 2011.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Lakhdar Bouregaa, previously cited, pp. 86-87.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
18. Abdelwahab Ben Khelif, *History of the National Movement from Occupation to Independence*, 1st ed., Algiers: Dar Talitla, 2009, pp. 179-180.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-183.
20. Bouchikhi Cheikh, previously cited, p. 268.
21. Mahfoud Kaddache, previously cited, pp. 393-395.
22. Salah Ferkous, *History of Algeria from Prehistory to Independence: The Major Stages*, Annaba, Algeria: Dar Al-Ulum for Publishing and Distribution, 2005, pp. 430-431.
23. Abdelwahab Ben Khelif, previously cited, p. 186.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.

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