

Analysis of the violent events that led to decolonization in algeria



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Post World War II era witnessed a rapid decolonization of British and French colonies around the globe. It marked the end of European rule over the world and gave way for the rise of two other superpowers; USA and USSR.

Many nations became independent in this era due to an immense struggle of emerging superpowers to create their own allies. An active role played by the newly formed United Nations backed by USA and USSR finally forced the British and French to evacuate from occupied territories. None of these transitions were smooth and Algeria was no exception.

The French ambition to remain in control of one of her last colonial possessions resulted into a war of terror between the forces struggling to get independence and the French army.

The Algerian war of independence officially launched on November 1, 1954 after passing through an eternal path of dreadfulness, horror, atrocities, and carnage finally resulted into the French eviction in 1962. Eight years of war literally devastated Algeria.

It is estimated that over one million Algerians lost their lives and over two million people were left homeless. This paper has been designed to analyze the reasons and events which led to the catastrophe on such a large scale while also throwing some light on the Algeria in post independence era.

Country Profile

Algeria officially known as the ' People's Democratic Republic of Algeria,' got independence from France in 1962. Algeria is located in Northern Africa with Mediterranean Sea on its north and Tunisia in the northeast, Libya in the

east, Niger in the southeast, Mali and Mauritania in the southwest, Morocco and Western Sahara in the west.

Algeria is the second largest country in Africa and has a population of over 33 million people, with a literacy rate of 70%.

Official language of the country is Arabic however French and Berber are also spoken and widely understood. Country's 99% of the people are Muslims while remaining are mostly Christians and Jews. Most part of the country is desert with very little fertile land available for cultivation and farming. Algerian government is republic and is separated into 48 provinces.

The Algerian parliament is bicameral and the legal system is based on the French and Islamic law. Country's major source of income is its oil reserves in Sahara region. Country had strong military intervention in political system at several occasions despite of its role curtailed to defense matters in the constitution (McFLY n. d., pars. 2-9).

The French Rule and the Violent Path to Independence

France invaded Algeria in 1830 with 34, 000 soldiers. French troops established a strong beachhead at Sidi Ferruch and were faced with a tough resistance by the local forces.

French however managed to capture Algiers (capital city) after three weeks of strenuous battle and the local ruler Hussain Dey was forced to go into exile (James 2001, pp. 14-16). The Napoleonic expansionist designs eventually subjugated another country to French regime.

Like many other victorious armies of that time, French soldiers looted, desecrated religious places, raped women, killed indiscriminately, and <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-the-violent-events-that-led-to-decolonization-in-algeria/>

commenced an arrogant, authoritarian and vicious rule which lasted for over 130 years.

The process of colonization in Algeria is no different than any other place. Whether it was Britain on American and Asian soils or it was French in Africa, the local populace never accepted a foreign ruler. There was though a segment of society helping colonial masters in exploiting local resources for their vested interests, but the majority resisted the same.

Almost all colonies have a history of freedom struggle which finally led to their independence. USA was the first to evict its colonial rulers in 1783 after a bloody campaign and paved way for other colonies to follow the suit.

The end of world war II witnessed a rapid decolonization process, yet the Algiers was denied of her due rights and they had to struggle hard and had to face innumerable atrocities before the French finally decided to grant independence to Algeria in 1962. The struggle for independence and French counter actions however left a violent tale of loss of human lives and property.

The first voice raised against the French rule in Algeria was in 1926 by a group named Étoile Nord-Africain (Star of North Africa). The group was primarily formed to start and coordinate a movement in France in order to gain political support of French polity against the colonial rule in Algeria. It was supported by the French Communist Party and its labor confederation.

The group demanded independence for Algeria but was soon banned by the French government. The group continued its underground activities through publication of material against the atrocities committed in Algeria. By then

the group had changed from communist ideology and got inclined towards Arab nationalist ideas and hence lost support of French Communist Party (Hargreaves 1996, pp. 120-123).

The roots of violent struggle for Algerian Independence can be traced back to 1945, when nearly one hundred Europeans were killed by the rebels in Algeria. French reacted very heavily and common Algerians had to face the reprisals on a savage scale.

Around 50 villages were smashed to ground by French bombers. According to Arab claims, 45000 people were massacred by the French forces. It generated a strong resentment against the colonial masters and even Algerian soldiers serving for French were forced to reconsider their loyalties.

The result was in the shape of the formation of Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) led by Ahmed Ben Bella. The Algeria was now ready to be thrown into the hell of horrors. The Algerians were to face yet another series of nightmares which were to be imposed onto them by their colonial rulers and even from their own freedom fighters (Chafer 2002, pp. 34-39).

The first official meeting of FLN was held on October 10, 1954 in Switzerland. Various strategies were formulized to start the war of independence. November 1, 1954 was selected as the dooms day; the day to commence the simultaneous outbreak of revolt throughout the length and breadth of Algeria.

The major purpose of the rebellion was not to defeat French army but they aimed at eliminating those who were against the independence from both sides. In next two years almost 7000 Arabs and 1000 Europeans were killed.

Some estimates accumulate these figures to be over 20, 000 (Chafer 2002, pp. 43-46).

The struggle for Algerian independence got a major boost when France was forced to relinquish her control over two other colonies namely Tunisia and Morocco. FLN by now had been evolved into a more disciplined fighting force of around 40, 000 soldiers with thousands of non regular mercenaries.

A full scale guerrilla war had started and FLN successfully applied hit-and-run tactics. Numerous ambushes and raids were conducted targeting army patrols, military encampments, police posts, and colon farms, mines, and factories, as well as transportation and communications facilities. FLN even did not hesitate to kill the suspected traitors and those who did not cooperate with the revolutionary forces (Matthews 1961, pp. 11-16).

Another major event which added to the intensity of conflict was the capture of Ben Bella by French in October 1956. He was flying in a Moroccan aero plane, when he was intercepted by French Air Force and made to land in Algiers. The capture of top hierarchy instead of demoralizing the revolt, rather infuriated it further.

The struggle for freedom was now on full bloom. The French anti insurgency operation also gained momentum with the capture of Ben Bella. By the end of 1956, there were more than 400, 000 French troops pumped into Algeria who were ruthlessly torturing and killing the supporters of independence (Matthews 1961, pp. 121-125).