

History

French invasion of 1830 shaped modern Algerian history

From the earliest days, man has left his traces in Algeria. In one vast country can be found prehistoric fossils, cave paintings, traces of the Phoenicians, Roman ruins - remnants from the Ottomans, the Spanish, the Arabs, and the French. All have left mementos of a history perhaps unparalleled in Northern Africa.

In the Seventh Century, an Arab invasion brought Islam to the country and forced the Berbers to adopt an Arab culture.

But the event that shaped the Algeria of today was the invasion by France in 1830 - supposedly because of a slap with a fan.

June 14,1830

The ruler at the time was Dey Hussein. The French version says that he unprovokedly hit the French Consul Pierre Deval with his fan during an audience in April 1827, bringing down the government's ire and the invasion three years later.

However, the Algerian side is more revealing. After the Revolution, France was in turmoil and facing economic ruin. The government had tremendous difficulty feeding the population and approached the Dey of Algiers for his help in providing wheat.



Rendition of Dey Hussain hitting the French Councul Pierre Deval with his fan in April 1827.

A little later they again asked the Dey for his help, this time in the form of an interest free loan of 1 million francs.

By 1815 France's debt for the Algerian wheat supplies had reached 18million francs.

Furthermore in 1819 a special commission set up in Paris reduced the debt unilaterally to seven million francs.

Eventually the Dey asked for immediate repayment and the withdrawal of the French Consul to Algeria.

He received no reply other than a demand for compensation for alleged acts of hostility by the Algerian Navy towards French ships. (Algiers had been attacked on several occasions).

During the famous reception held on a national holiday in April 1827 Dey Hussein asked Consul Deval why his government had not answered his letters.

Deval replied: "My government has many other things to do than to write to a man like you" and insulted him.

Whereupon the Dey asked him to leave, but Duval stood his ground in 'an insolent' fashion.

Extremely annoyed, the Dey is then said to have made an impatient gesture with the fan he used to swat away flies.

Ironically many years later the Algerian authorities decided - as many other ex colonies have done to taunt their former masters - to give his name to a part of Algiers - Hussein Dey.

Algerians feel that the French had been preparing the invasion for many years and indeed Napoleon I in 1808 had drawn up plans that were to be used in the attack on Sidi Ferruch in 1830.

On June 14, 1830, more than 600 French ships landed 37,000 men on the shores of Sidi Ferruch adjoining the town of Algiers.

It was at this time that French and Spanish settlers acquired their name - Pieds noir - black feet, reputedly from the color of Army boots.



The troops of Damremont attack the city of Constantine
October 9, 1837

On July 5 the Dey was forced to surrender and a treaty was signed guaranteeing the respect of property and religion.

By February 1831, 4,500 civilian settlers had moved in and were working the land.

On December 18, 1832, the French army attacked the Mosque of Djemaa Kechawah in the Casbah and transformed it into a cathedral.

Algeria became officially annexed to France on July 22, 1834.

Algeria was not an easy country to conquer. From the very beginning of the colonization there was resistance and insurgency.

There were pitched battles in 1849, 1851, 1852, 1853, 1857, 1864, 1870, and 1871 and again in 1881. And this in spite of agreements and treaties signed by both sides.

Thus, a hundred years before the world heard of Kamikaze, the Algerian Moussebbilines - young unmarried people- volunteered to die for their cause. They were initiated at a ceremony where the prayer for the dead was said for them and they officially gave their lives to the country and swore not to fear any danger.

There were 3 million Algerians when France invaded in 1830 - 20 years after the population had fallen to 2 million, and by 1867-68, it had fallen by 600,000 due to famine.

An event that poisoned relations between Britain and France for many years took place at Mers el Kebir in 1942.

The British, having seen France overrun by Hitler's troops in 1940 and the formation of a collaborationist government at Vichy under Marshal Petain, feared that the French fleet would go over and be swallowed up in the German navy.

A British squadron cornered a major portion of the French fleet in the harbor of this Algerian port and sent emissaries to ask them either to scuttle their ships or sail to a neutral port in the West Indies.

French navy commanders steeped in a tradition of obedience replied that they had no intention of collaboration with the Germans but they could not act without orders.

After a period of waiting for orders to come from France British ships opened fire on the anchored ships over the hills surrounding the harbor, sinking many and killing more than 1000 sailors.

This 'barbaric action' by a former ally strengthened the uneasy relations that the conquered French were forced to maintain with the German invaders and gave fuel to the arguments of Nazi sympathizers.

On November 8 1942 the allies landed in Algeria and the population breathed a sigh of relief, seeing a possible path towards self-determination from the arrival of the American and British forces. After an encouraging speech from President Roosevelt, a manifest was drawn up and presented to the representatives of the United States and Britain with the object of ensuring that the right of the people to self-determination, proclaimed by the allies, would also apply to Algerians.

May 8, 1945

However on May 30, 1943 de Gaulle made a declaration dashing hopes and emphasizing the 'integrity and sovereignty' of all parts of the French Empire.

In early May 1945, in response to street protests the French Army committed what many say was a genocidal massacre at Setif

Peaceful demonstrations had been taking place for some months against the unfair treatment of indigenous Algerians (an oft-mentioned example was the reservation of bread for Europeans, the others only having the right to barley) and 15,000 people had protested in the streets of Mostaganem earlier without any incidents.

On May 8, 1945, a day chosen by the allies to celebrate their victory over Nazi Germany, thousands of Algerians gathered near the Abou Dher El-Ghafari mosque in Setif for a peaceful march - for which the sous-prefet had given permission. It was a market day

At 9am, led by a young scout Saal Bouzid, whose name had been drawn for the honor of carrying the national flag, the demonstrators set off. A few minutes later the crowd, chanting 'vive l'indépendance' and other nationalist slogans, came under fire from troops commanded by General Duval and brought in from Constantine.

Saal Bouzid fell dead, becoming a national martyr. The scene soon turned into a massacre - the streets and houses being littered with dead bodies. Witnesses claim terrible scenes, that legionnaires seized babies by their feet and dashed their heads against rocks, that pregnant mothers were disemboweled, that soldiers dropped grenades down chimneys to kill the occupants of homes, that mourners were machine gunned while taking the dead to the cemetery.

A public record states that the European inhabitants were so frightened by the events that they asked that all those responsible for the protest movement should be shot.

The carnage spread and, during the days that followed, some 45,000 Algerians were killed. Villages were shelled by artillery and remote hamlets were bombed with aircraft.

A Colonel in charge of burials being criticized for slowness told another officer 'You are killing them faster than I can bury them.'

These incidents led to the upsurge of the PPA and ultimately, 17 years later to the country's independence. In the retaliatory violence that immediately followed 104 Europeans were assassinated, but by the end several thousands were to die.

These incidents were particularly hard for Algerians who had fought the Nazis alongside the French forces, some of whom came home to find that their families had been decimated by the troops of General de Gaulle.

Survivors are currently urging the Algerian government to prosecute those responsible for crimes against humanity.

The May 8, 1945 association says that France as a colonial power 'has not had the courage to recognize its crimes, carried out in its former colonies and that it pretends to be a champion of human rights'.

Even if the Evian agreement at Independence declared that extremist French soldiers will not be prosecuted for crimes carried out in Algeria the association says that crimes against humanity are not subject to limits in time or by accords.

"It is the duty of Algeria to follow the example of certain countries which have adopted national laws allowing the prosecution of those who are guilty of crimes against their peoples."

Prominent leaders also feel that it is time that France apologized publicly for the events.

It was not until November 1, 1954 that Algerian nationalists launched a series of planned attacks on colonial targets. In the ensuing seven-year war more than a million people were to lose their lives.

Led by the FLN (the national liberation front) the independence struggle caused France to draft in thousands of troops. In spite of opposition by Europeans living in the country a cease-fire was agreed to in March 1962.

July 5, 1962

The FLN went on to become the country's sole political party when independence was announced on July 5, 1962, immediately provoking an exodus of a million Europeans.

In August, the country's provisional government transferred its powers to the FLN's political bureau. Using a single list of FLN candidates a national assembly was elected and Algeria was declared a republic. Ahmed Ben Bella, the founder of the FLN was its first prime minister.

In September 1963 a referendum adopted a constitution naming the FLN as the only party, setting up a presidential regime and naming Ben Bella as the first holder of the office.



A typical day in the bustling Casbah.

The new socialist state embarked on a series of economic reforms but its weakness left power in the hands of the army and the bureaucracy. In June 1965, the Minister of Defense Colonel Houari Boumedienne, took over in a bloodless coup.

President of a 26-member revolutionary council, consisting mostly of army officers, Boumedienne was troubled for a number of years by opposition from left wing members of the FLN. In 1971 agrarian reforms were introduced and French petroleum interests nationalized.

In 1976 he was behind the approval of a national charter setting up a socialist system and underpinning Islam as the state religion.

In the same year he was elected as president with 99 percent of the votes cast - against no opposition, and in 1977 FLN members were elected to the assembly. Boumedienne's death in December 1978 led to the election of Col. Ben Djedid Chadli, under whom the office of prime minister was instituted and the membership of the National People's Assembly was increased to 295.

Internal troubles came to the forefront in the 1980's. A number of activists for Berber cultural and human rights were sent to prison for belonging to illegal organizations.

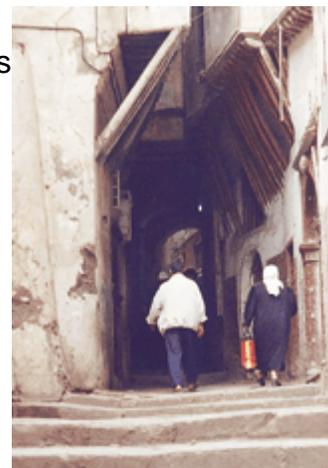
In 1986 a new charter was approved which confirmed the state's principles of socialism and Islam but encouraged the development of the private sector - membership of the assembly was increased to 295.

Students demonstrated at Setif and Constantine and, in 1987, a number of members of an Islamist Fundamentalist group were killed and 200 others were imprisoned.

The FLN named all the candidates for the general election of 1987. Because of a petroleum crisis the government reduced controls on certain sectors of the economy and introduced austerity measures.

The following year these measures caused rising prices, shortages of important supplies and eventually heavy unemployment, provoking strikes and rioting.

In October 1988 a state of emergency lasting six days was imposed and official figures say that 159 people were killed and more than 3,500 arrested. Ultimately President Chadli instituted reforms, which allowed other parties, to stand in elections, changed the Council of Ministers and made the Prime Minister responsible to the National People's Assembly. He was elected president for a third term in December with 81 percent of the vote.



Algerians, turning their backs to the past, moving towards the future.

A new constitution in 1989 ended the one party system and meant that the armed forces were no longer to have a role in the development of socialism. The state's monopoly over the press ended and its control on the economy was reduced.

Strikes and unrest continued however, over the failure of the government to improve conditions and alleged corruption.

Under a new prime minister Mouloud Hamrouche, a program of economic liberalization was launched. Local elections were postponed for six months to allow newly registered political parties (there were 47 by 1991) to solicit support.

The main Islamic party, the FIS, obtained 55percent of the votes in the local elections in June 1990, after strikes and demonstrations had confirmed the increasing influence of fundamentalism.

In July President Chadli granted requests from the FIS for an early general election to take place in early 1991. Later in the year Ben Bella was allowed to come out of exile and thousands of political prisoners were released.

The NPA decided in December 1990 that after 1997 Arabic would become the nation's official language and introduced heavy fines for the use of French and Berber in schools and businesses. This resulted in a massive demonstration by more than 100,000 people in the streets of Algiers.

The UGTA syndicate as protest against rising prices launched a two-day general strike in March 1991 and the government was forced to increase subsidies and other aids.

Chadli announced that the general elections would take place in June and the FIS organized a general strike in May in an effort to force the holding of a presidential election at the same time, demanding his resignation and changes in electoral laws.

Violent clashes with security forces in June resulted in up to 50 deaths and President Chadli brought in a state of emergency, postponing the elections and accepting the resignation of the government.

A week later the FLN and the FIS agreed that the strikes would end and that presidential and legislative elections would take place before the end of the year.

But in July , Abbasi Madani, FIS president threatened of Jihad holy war if the state of emergency did not end . Thus he and some 700 Islamists were arrested and the FIS headquarters was taken over.

Elections were fixed for December and the number of NPA seats available was raised from 295 to 430.

In the first round of the elections, the FIS won 188 seats with 47.5 percent of vote's cast and the FLN won only 15.

The FLN accused the FIS of intimidation and election frauds.

The second round of the elections was scheduled for Jan. 16, 1992, and on Jan. 11 President Chadli resigned.

The next day the High Security Council - the prime minister, two ministers and three generals - canceled the elections and appointed a five member High Council of State (HCS) to rule until December 1993.

The 188 elected FIS deputies formed a shadow assembly to protest.

During the next three months the security forces took over the FIS offices and dissolved the party and the HCS declared a 12-month state of emergency. An estimated 30,000 people were detained in centers in the Sahara and 150 were killed.

Muhammad Boudiaf, the head of the HCS, took measures in June to prepare for a multiparty democracy, promising a presidential election and the dissolution of the FLN and ordered the release of 2,000 FIS prisoners.

Boudiaf was assassinated whilst making a speech at Annaba on June 29 and the FIS, although suspected, denied responsibility.

Three years later Lt. Lembarek Doumaarafi was sentenced to death for the killing but few details came out about the affair.

In July 1992, two FIS leaders - Madani and Belhadj were sentenced, amid violent demonstrations to 12 years of imprisonment for conspiracy against the state. On August 26 a bomb at Algiers airport killed nine people and injured many more. The FIS denied any implication.

In December the government clamped a nighttime curfew on Algiers and six surrounding departments and later renewed the state of emergency indefinitely.

A series of attacks on top government officials followed and in May 1993 the UGTA syndicate organized massive demonstrations against terrorism and demand that no compromise be made with those responsible.

Attacks on officials continued and attacks turned towards intellectuals and ordinary civilians.

The HCS announced that it would be dissolved by the end of December and that a democracy would be brought in within three years.

Retired general Liamine Zeroual was named minister of defense and was later made head of state for three years. He made moves to establish a dialogue with Islamic militants and opposition groups.

After an alleged offer of a truce from Abbasi Madani he was released together with Belhadj and placed under house arrest. But the FIS said that it would not negotiate unless a general amnesty was granted and the state of emergency ended.

The Groupe Islamique Arme(GIA) warned that it would take reprisals if the FIS negotiated and stepped up its campaign or violence. It told teachers and children not to go to school and destroyed educational buildings.

Then the Berber RCD began a campaign protesting the banning of their language, Tamazight from schools, asking that it be recognized as an official language. Their protests were dealt with by the formation of a new government body to oversee the teaching of tamazight in the educational system and promote its use in the media.

President Zeroual announced elections for 1995 and began discussions with the legal opposition parties to prepare for this but talks collapsed when some of the parties refused to take part in elections that excluded the FIS.

The Government then announced that prospective candidates would have to obtain 75,000 supporting signatures from at least 25 wilayas to take part. After Zeroual announced that negotiations with the FIS had failed and that he intended to end Islamist terrorism by military action, one of the co-founders of the FIS Sheikh Sahraoui was assassinated in a mosque in central Paris, a crime variously blamed on security forces or the GIA.

In heavily surveyed elections on November 16 with a turnout of 75.7percent, President Zeroual polled 61percent of the votes against the other three eligible candidates.

A referendum resulted in the adoption of constitutional amendments, limiting the President to two terms of office, creating the Council of the Nation - a second parliamentary chamber and banning political parties based on religion, regional appurtenance or language.

National People's Assembly Elections in June 1997 resulted in the RND (Rassemblement National Democratique) gaining 156 seats, the MSP (Mouvement de la Societe pour la Paix, formerly the Hamas) winning 69, and the FLN 62.

The government made conciliatory steps toward the Islamists but there followed a suggestion from Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General that the UN should intervene in Algeria to bring back peace.

Abbasi Madani, who was quickly confined to house arrest once again, wrote to Annan and in an open letter offered to ask for a truce.

Annan, whose suggestion had caused considerable outcry, later said that the UN would not be considering intervention.

A cease-fire declared by the AIS (Armee Islamique du Salut) on Oct. 1, 1997 was said to be an attempt to show that it was the GIA that was massacring civilians. The GIA has admitted carrying out 'God's work' in committing the massacres.

The RND won more than half of the seats in regional and municipal elections in October 1997, but the results were denounced by opposition parties as a fraud, causing demonstrations in Algiers.

March 1999

After the resignation of President Zeroual for supposedly health reasons, the elections in March 1999 this year brought President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a former foreign minister under Boumedienne, to power - his six competitors having stood down on the eve of the election which gave him 73.6percent of an announced 60.91 percent turnout.



Traditions remain strong despite history.

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