

Oran Post Office Attacks and French Reaction through French Police Reports (Arrests and Trials)

هجمات بريد وهران ورد فعل الفرنسي من خلال تقارير الشرطة
الفرنسية (الاعتقالات و المحاكمات)

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Abstract:

Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties Party began facing the French colony on two fronts: The first front being the Special Organization's activities, and the second front was more public and was represented in resisting its coercive methods. Its first step was an attack on a post office in Oran in April 1949. A group of the Special Organization members attacked the office and took over a sum of money, the goal of which was to finance the organization with the necessary funding in order to purchase weapons. The city of Oran was chosen for the likeliness of the operation' success, in addition to the party's lack of arm.

The Special Organization suffered financially, and began looking for means to self-fund, such as attacks on enemy posts. The news of the post office attack were shocking and came down like a ton of bricks on the French administration in Oran. This discovery can be seen as a big blow on the revolutionary current, which pushed the French authorities, and through their

multiple repressive means, to repress, torture and abuse those endowed with the spirit of patriotism. Therefore, the Oran court issued sentences ranging from imprisonment to house arrest, fines and deprivation of civil rights.

Keywords: The Special Organization; Oran Post Office; Arrests; Trials; the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties; Police Reports; Revolutionary current; Oran.

AlNaciriya

الملخص:

منذ تأسيس المنظمة الخاصة أصبح حزب MTLD يواجه الاستعمار من جبهتين: الجبهة الأولى تتمثل في نشاط المنظمة ، والجبهة الثانية العلنية تتمثل في مقاومة أساليبه التعسفية ، كانت المنظمة الخاصة تعاني من ضائقة مالية ، وبدأت تبحث عن تمويل ذاتي لها كالهجومات على مراكز العدو ، ومن أهم العمليات التي قامت بها هي الهجوم على بريد وهران في شهر فيريل 1949 ، التي كان الهدف من ورائها تدعيم المنظمة بالأموال الضرورية لشراء الأسلحة، و قد اختيرت مدينة وهران لاحتتمال نجاح العملية بالإضافة إلى افتقار الجهة الغربية إلى التسليح،

لقد نزل خبر الهجوم كالصاعقة على الإدارة الاستعمارية في القطار الوهراني واتخذت إجراءات تعسفية في عمليات الاعتقال و التفتيش والمداومة على كل المشييهن فيهم وحسب التقارير الشرطة الفرنسية أن الجناح السري للحركة الانتصار الحريات الديمقراطية هو المسؤول عن هذه الهجوم ، وبعد تحليل التقارير يبين نتائج التحقيق أن حزب M.T.L.D يتكون من خلايا سرية وتم اكتشاف كامل شبكتها ، اعتبر ضربة تعرضت لها التيار الثوري، والذي فرض على السلطات الفرنسية و من خلال أجهزتها القمعية والزجرية المتعددة في تسليط اشد أنواع القمع والتعذيب والتنكيل بمن تتسم فيهم روح الوطنية فاصدر محكمة وهران، أحكاما تتراوح بين السجن والإقامة الجبرية، الغرامات المالية والحرمان من الحقوق المدنية .

الكلمات المفتاحية : المنظمة الخاصة ، بريد وهران ، الاعتقالات،
المحاكمات ، حركة انتصار للحريات الديمقراطية ، تقارير الشرطة ، التيار
الثوري، مدينة وهران.

Introduction

After rebuilding the Algerian National Movement and the return of political activity, the Special Organization was founded. The latter prepared, trained and organized the ranks, as it was the military wing of the Movement for the Movement for the Triumph of the Popular Democratic Liberties party. Among its tasks included preparing for the revolution, and that by ensuring : training, reconnoitering, collecting arms and digging hiding spots.

The armament problem was the biggest issue that faced the militants of the national movement, and hindered them from declaring the start of the armed struggle. Some operations took place in order to lessen the gravity of said issue, like the operation conducted by a number of militants from Belcourt. When allied armies landed on the beaches of Algeria, the organization was able to obtain in the first amount of English-American small arms. Furthermore, the Kabyle region was more fortunate than many, as similar accidents allowed for the quick obtaining of a quantity of arms, whether by purchasing and collecting them locally, because it is known to be a hunting area and is thus poorly monitored. in addition to that, a considerable number of rural residents kept weapons in their community.

The Special Organization assumed the responsibility of preparing for armed struggle that would eventually free the country from colonization. It had taken a great interest in this side (armament) and worked towards collecting and buying

arms in whichever means possible. As for Oran, it is the least fortunate when it comes to the matter, which has caused great trouble to the Organization, who then began seeking ways to self-finance, as well as other sources such as attacks on enemy posts. Eventually, the Organization targeted Oran's post office.

The problematic of the topic is on the nature of the aforementioned attack and its effects on the Special Organization's activities in Oran, through the most important reports issued by French authorities, police, and the districts of Oran and Mostaghanem.

1. The Special Organization

The first conference of the Movement for the Triumph of the Popular Democratic Liberties was held on the 15-16 February, 1947. Members of the central committee, including Mesali Hadj, Hassan Lahoual, Benyoucef Benkhedda, Boukadoum, Houcine Ait Ahmed, Mohamed Belouizdad and Houari Souih (Abbas, Algeria's war and its fortunes, the night of colonialism, 2005, p. 252) A debate and discussion took place between the present on the methods of armed struggle, and whether or not adopting secrecy is an urgent matter? (Ammar, Algeria, the Gate of History, Prehistory to 1962, 2006, p. 355) Houcine Ait Ahmed presented a report to the conference in which was decided to maintain the Algerian People's Party, under a legal cover dubbed "the Movement for the Triumph of the Popular Democratic." The latter movement decided to participate in elections so that the people's voice be heard overseas (Mohamed Y. , 2002, p. 77) In his report, Ait Ahmed insisted on armed struggle, reinforcing preparations and military training by creating a paramilitary organization affiliated with the party, called the Special Organization (OS) and the Secret Organization (SO) (Mohamed Q. , 1982, p. 65) Where the conference members

discussed the tools of struggle. And whether or not return to secrecy is a must. In addition to the case of armed struggle (Slimane K. , 2010-2011, p. 65)

The April conference ended with a settlement of a set of problems despite the essential differences and conflict of ideas. However, this settlement enabled the preservation of the unity of the party, even on the expenses of ideologies and personal beliefs; especially that the movement, at the time, was divided into three parties: The Algerian People's Party (secret) - the Movement for the Triumph of the Popular Democratic Liberties (Legal) - callers for armed struggle who then formed the Secret Organization. The conference resulted in the satisfaction of all ideologies, and identified the purview of each of its wings:

1- the MTDL, being the legal actor, worked on gaining masses, and confronting reformist ideologies of other political movements (Communists, Scholars, Democratic Union)

2- The Special Organization has to prepare for armed revolution.

3 - As for the People's Party, it is the main supervisor of the movements and work of the MTDL, especially that electoral participation was maintained. However, with its application being restricted, the deputies of the movement had to explain the Algerian cause to the public opinion, ignoring with so the parliament's useless arguments The People's Party saw the necessity of maintaining reserve cells far from legitimate work, as a precautionary act to any procedure the French authorities might take against the members of the MTDL.

The conference's resolutions can be summarized in the following points:

Creating a military organization under the name “the Secret Organization”

Maintaining the People’s Party’s work secret.

Participating in elections. (Bouaziz, p. 29)

The organization took it upon itself to not endanger anyone, and to settle its financial issues on its own. Especially since the arming and supply crisis increased at the same time the organization's reach expanded. The Secret Organization assigned Mohamed Belouizdad for management until 1949. It was built on two main rules, which are:

- Selecting militants that he trusts.

Absolute discretion (Abderrahman, 2008, p. 19)

On the high command level, three changes took place before its revelation in 1950. The aforementioned changes are as follows:

The first high command, President Mohamed Belouizdad

Inspector and military trainer of all of Algeria: BelhadjDjilali

As for district presidents:

Algiers (the capita) Metidja - TitriRedjimiDjilali

Algeria (Chlef) Marok Mohamed

Kabylie region: Ait Ahmed, Oran: Ahmed Ben Bella, Constantine: Boudiaf Mohamed

The second high command: (1947-1948) : On top of which was Ait Ahmed

The third high command (July 1949): In which Ahmed Ben Bella was president

It is to be noted that the changes only affected presidents in command, while maintaining known managers and presidents of each region. (Slimane K. , 2010-2011, p. 175)

In here, it must be noted that the most important characters who carried upon their shoulders the responsibility

of organizing and structring the Special Organization are: Mohamed Belouizdad, who worked ever since his enrollment in the Party on attempting to convince the leadership of the necessity of creating a paramilitary organization within the party. He created what he called “disruptive groups” in 1944 which is an extension of groups formed by Hocine Assila. In the same year, the leadership of the Algerian Popular Party founded an organization in the capital that consists of twenty members. From which two groups emanated, one of which was in the Casbah, and the other in Belcourt, and surrounding areas like: Hydra, Hussein Dey, Casbha, Ruisseau. These groups were called the “Youth of Belcourt” (Chabab Belcourt). Ahmed Bouda, Mohamed Taleb, Ali Touali, were assigned the responsibility of these groups, and on top of whom was Mohamed Belouizdad. (Bouaziz, p. 29)

The formation of cells was also done hierarchically, whether on degree, or the system on which the members were structured as follows:

- 1- Supporter cells: that includes the members.
- 2- Advertising cells: which includes members enrolled.
- 3- Higher cells: which include the militants and is the highest of cells.

The active militants, i.e., recruits in the Special Organization, were distributed across the country, and their hierarchical structure began from:

- Half the group Composed of two (02) or three (03) militants, on top of whom was an official.
- The full group: Composed of four (04) militants, on top of whom an official, i.e., five (05) members in total

The troop: Composed of three (03) groups, and an official, equals to 16 members.

The platoon: Composed of three (03) troops, and an official, equals to 49 members.

The General Staff sits on top of the hierarchy. (Kafi, 2005)

Conditions of enrollment:

The organizations' officials selected a set of conditions in order to enroll in the Special Organization, which are as follows:

That the member must not exceed 30 years of age.

Undergo paramilitary training after being taught the basic principles

Be disciplined, able to use weapons and explosives, which requires a good physical shape.

Courage, determination, mental balance, patience, and absolute discretion.

The members of the organization are technically and carefully watched, in addition, the officials wear masks and face covers in a way that makes it hard to be identified. Afterwards, the militant recruit passes their exam (Mohamed Y. , 2002, p. 93) and is later sworn in on the Holy Qura'an, and pledges to serve their country under the given circumstances. (Abderrahman, 2008, p. 31)

2-Achievements of the Special Organization:

Religious, military, and political training of the members:

2-1 Religious training:

The premise on which the private organization was built is moral education based on the approach of Islam and belief in Allah. (Bouaziz, p. 173) It is why Ben Kadadar Abdelkader, the head of the Secret Organization in Mostaganem, Ben Ayad Ben Habib, Ben Yahya Belkacem (A.N.O.M 5I101.G.G.A.Intelligence police, 07/12/1950) Ben AbdelhalimAldjilali (A.N.O.M 5I101.G.G.A., 13/09/1949) created the swear-in of members, after accepting to join the organization, and set it up to be on the Holy

Qur'an, as an oath not to betray the country and not divulge the secret. (Bouaziz, p. 173)

Based on the Islamic teachings in the organization, the doctrinal formation of the recruits, which was based on Islam and history, was included. The training was done through understanding the religion and knowing the story of the Prophet (PBUH), in addition to teaching history lessons based on the historical stages that Algeria went through

2-2 Military training:

The recruits in the organization were taught theoretical lessons by teachers and trainers. The most important lectures focused on revolutionary movements, and others in the Dahra range, organized by the General Staff. Most of those who supervised these trainings, were French military recruits, whether in the WWII or before. These trainers have also participated in the war of Vietnam, and thus gained experience in martial arts and guerrilla. (Bouaziz, p. 173) These trainings were applied strictly and in absolute discretion. The military training included two basic matters: (Bouaziz, p. 175)

Training on the use and mounting weapons. The absolutely secret and discrete trainings, were conducted in select locations, carefully chosen, for example near rivers, to distract French authorities into thinking hunting bullets are being shot. These operations required carefulness and caution by the officials in charge of these operations in case of any unexpected emergency. These dangers included arrival of French patrol cars, even any unexpected reactions from the militants themselves, instilling the spirit of order and organization within the recruits in a strict and severe manner, which was further strengthened by the psychological readiness of the recruits and the high morale of each of the soldiers of the Organization.

The Special Organization and arms problem:

The Organization made big efforts in order to safeguard the sources of arms, because it fell under circumstances that necessitated expansion of its branches throughout the national territory. Whilst preparing for the revolution, the Organization faced many obstacles that stood in their way of obtaining arms easily and in the quantities desired, whether in or outside the country, the Organization needed money to cover the expenses of arms and preparation. The Organization's main source of financing was the Party, who offered humble aids, in addition to securing control on the smuggling operations. The French authorities was able to hold many weapons and explosives. However, the Organization faced many obstacles strategically in order to obtain weapons, through making arming a singular operation; meaning that each militant is to obtain their own firearm. In Oran, El Hadj Ben Alla, says that every militant of the Special Organization payed six thousand French francs in order to obtain a single firearm. This procedure aimed to decrease security risks. (Saadawi Mostafa, p. 173)

Because the Oran sector is poor in regard to weapons, which caused trouble to Belouizdad, and made him send Muhammad Yousfi to the far south of Morocco in search of weapons. There, Yousfi was able to bring weapons from the vast triangle of areas (Oujda, Bachar, Tendara) despite the high control of the enemy. (Boubakeur, 2007, p. 149)

Because of these areas' lack of weapons, the Special Organization resorted to the Awrass region, it being its main supplier. This is due to several considerations regarding the region - a border region - which facilitates communication with Libya and Tunisia from the eastern and southern sides of the Algerian soil. (Ahmed, 2002, p. 183)

In 1949, Ahmed Ben Bella took over the leadership of the Special Organization after Ait Ahmed was isolated because of the suspicions that arose about him after the Berber crisis. Abdelkader Blehadj was a military trainer, Boudiaf an official and leader of Constantine region, Mahsas head of Algiers, and Abderrahman Ben Said of Oran. (Ibrahim Lounissi Sources, 2002, p. 61)

Attack on Oran Post Office and unraveling of the Special Organization

Ever since the Organization was founded, the MTDL party began facing the French colony on two fronts: The first front being the Special Organization's activities, and the second front was more public and was represented in resisting its coercive methods. The Special Organization was first unraveled as a military organization without any prior knowledge of who was behind it. Its first step was an attack on a post office in Oran in April 1949. A group of the SO members attacked the office and took over a sum of money (Al-Zubairi, 1999, p. 183) the goal of which was to finance the organization with the necessary funding in order to purchase weapons. The city of Oran was chosen for the likeliness of the operation's success, (Al Gharbi, p. 35) in addition to the party's lack of arms.

The Special Organization suffered financially, and began looking for means to self-fund, in addition to other resources such as attacks on enemy posts. It has therefore declared an attack on Oran's Post Office, as Ben Bella and Mohamed Yousfi assigned Ait Ahmed to form a group of fearless Algerians to carry out the operation. The first of which took place in March 6th 1949, it, however failed because the gas tank in the escape car ran out. The attack was attempted once more a month later, on April 5th of the same year. A group of fearless Algerians broke in and captured the treasurer "Paro"

and a sum of 3 million 17,000 francs was obtained. (Ali, the reality of arming and its confiscation from 1947 to 1954, 2016)

The news of the post office attack were shocking and came down like a ton of bricks on the French administration in Oran. Many abusive acts took place in the form of arrests, inspection operations as well as raids on all suspects. According to French police reports, the secret wing of the MTDL is behind these attacks. After many investigations, the French administration raided a shop that was rumored to be affiliated with the MTDL party, and was located on Street No. 1 Aglon Le Pen, Oran, this shop often brought together most members of the Special Organization, among whom are: SouidaniBoudjema, who was being prosecuted, Boujreda, Belhaj Shuaib, the municipal advisor to Ain Temouchent, Hamo Boutlilis and Ghali Al Jilali. The French police discovered after investigations, that the last two had the key to the shop during the next day of the post office operation. Other members were also being searched for, among them was Ben Zarga Ben Aoun, called Si Mustapha, who fled to Mostaganem, according to French reports (French Police report) Aban Ramadan and Hassan Dris (A.N.O.M. b. /.)were also arrested in Mostaganem. After French investigations, it was confirmed that Aban Ramadan, during this period was in the process of enlisting members in a secret organization, (A.N.O.M. b. /., April 24, 1950) after he was an active official in the MTDL in the Kabyle region, and before that a war official in Constantine (A.N.O.M. b. /.-p.).

Four members of the Special Organization were also captured in Mostaganem, including two consultants in the Municipality, Ouled Moussa Belkacem, and Mazaja Mohamed, who were temporarily jailed. Once released, they refused to leave the detention center in solidarity with the

other militants in prison, and declared that these accusations are made up by the president of Mostghanem Municipality at the time Lemoine-Aiden. (A.N.O.M. b. /., September 21, 1951)

The French Police found in the shop a mask concealed in a bag, which later led on discovering the hideout of the group who conducted the attack. Through investigations Police also found some important documents relating to the Organization's network, such as books, political writings and even military ones, some maps of the city of Oran, as well as several documents and manuscripts from Kadifi Ben Ali where the organization's private network was discovered in the Oran sector (N.O.M. B. /., May 21, 1949).

Through the Oran Police report, dated 21 May 1949, and after analyzing the most important reports that was put forwards for the month of April, "the results of the investigation show that the MTDL party, also known as P.P.A. Is formed of secret cells, that include four militants including a president, who is responsible on collecting funds from subscribers, 50 francs for each member. These cells are grouped together in the form of a hierarchy, and every militant must know only the members of their cell and their direct official. The members are named by pseudonyms, every militant is obligated to implement the orders of officials and respect the administrative peace in the party, and the leaders responsible for holding secret meetings are masked in order not to recognize them" (Ibid, p. 02) This organization brings together all the members who have experience working in complete discretion (N.O.M. B. /., November 22, 1950).

The facts surrounding the discovery of the Special Organization are related to the fact that one of its members participated in the first attack attempt on Oran Post office,

who is FelouhMeskin, owner of a popular restaurant in the city of Mostaghanem. After his arrest for hiding one of the rebels in his restaurant, and while he was under arrest in the police district, he heard the echoes of the Oran postal operation. In order to free himself and get rid of his predicament, he denounced his brothers, and told on the participants in this operation (Al-Zubairi, 1999, p. 184) according to what was mentioned in the French police report. "The so-called FalouhMaskin, was involved in the attack on Oran Post, had surrendered to Mr. LABAT , sub-governor, PRG president, in order to search for the suspects in Algeria and Morocco, and he would be covered during trial." (A.N.O.M. b. /., June 16, 1952)

This discovery can be seen as a big blow on the revolutionary current, which pushed the French authorities, and through their multiple repressive means, to repress, torture and abuse those endowed with the spirit of patriotism. Therefore, the Oran court issued sentences ranging from imprisonment to house arrest, fines, and deprivation of civil rights (Al Gharbi)

Judicial rulings issued by the penal court of Oran during the March 6, 1951 session.

The list of convicts in the case of attack on the Oran Post: (A.N.O.M. b. /., conviction pronounced by the correctional court of Oran at the hearing, March 3, 1951)

Table (A.N.O.M. b. /., conviction pronounced by the correctional court of Oran at the hearing of , March 3, 1951)

Convicts	Sentenced to imprisonment for the year	Sentenced to house arrest for the year	Sentenced to deprivation of civil
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			rights for the year
AIT ZOCH HAMAR	5	10	10
MASALI AHMED	3	3	3
DALAE MANCOR	3	3	3
RABHI ABDELKADER	3	3	3
OUADA BEN OUDA	3	3	3
BENHADO BOUDJER	3	3	3
BELAWJI EL MILOUD	10	-	-
BEN YAHYA MOHAMMED	3	3	3
KOUINI NASER ABDELKADER	10	-	-
RAHNI YOUSEF	10	-	-

The repercussions after the Special Organization was uncovered led to a deep rift in the ranks of the MTDL (Al Gharbi, p. 38) where two stances emerged. The party leadership tried to rectify the matter by sending the most important leaders to most regions in order to raise the members and militants' spirits. One example of this is the visit of Masali Al-Hajj's nephew to Mostaghanem to Minshaoui Mohammad from Tlemcen on July 28, 1951, a group meeting was held in the beach of Kharrouba in the presence of Khallouf Abdelkader and Moulay Cherif to raise the the members of the Special Organization' spirit in order

to continue working discreetly in times of trouble and arrests conducted by the Intelligence and French police (A.N.O.M. b. /., 25 July 1951) The stage of crisis that the party went through after the Special Organization was uncovered, led to the party's division to two stances:

The first is likened to what is known as moderate reformers, who found in this incident an irreplaceable opportunity to defend the peaceful orientations and pick up the line of the Special Organization (Al Gharbi, p. 38)

Second stance Represented by the Party's leadership and was quick to deny any ties to the Organization, and that all that had happened was nothing, but conspiracy theories woven by colonial forces in order to strike down the party. It is why the leadership was quick to give orders to militants who were arrested to deny any previous confessions. Moreover, it sought to dissolve the Special Organization. (al-Gharbi, p. 38)

Conclusion

The Special Organization was able, despite the investigations, trials, and harassments, to set the bases and visions for the birth of a military institution, as it is considered to be the military framework of the revolution. And thus was born the National Liberation Army, on which the National Liberation Front would depend on in order to rid the country of colonization, and restore national sovereignty.

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