

The Human Dimension of The Algerian Revolution (The Deportation of Foreign Scroll Soldiers)

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Abstract: In this intervention, we address the humanitarian aspect of the Algerian revolution in dealing with the file of soldiers fleeing the foreign scroll, consisting of mercenaries brought together by France from some European and African countries to fight next to it in a battle not theirs, we find that the revolution was able to disengaging the ranks of the French army by carrying out operations that facilitate the soldiers of the foreign legion to flee the French forces and deport them to their countries and families, and this shows the human dimension of the revolution so that it was able to attract thousands of soldiers Foreigner during the Algerian war years.

Keywords: Algerian revolution ; Foreign scroll.

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1. Introduction:

The foreign legion played a significant role in its war against Algeria, where the soldiers of this unit became notorious for their crimes and excesses in the practice of killing and torturing the Algerian people. They were largely ignorant of the true nature of the war and the reasons for fighting alongside an army known for its violations of international laws in its colonies. In contrast, the Algerian revolution struck deeply at the French army from within its ranks and barracks by successfully attracting foreign legion soldiers, assisting them in deserting, and facilitating their escape to their home countries. This reflects the Algerian revolution's commitment to humanitarian and ethical principles in its struggle against France. This leads us to the central issue: What were the humanitarian and ethical values of the Algerian revolution in dealing with the issue of the foreign legion? And how did it succeed in leveraging this unit to its advantage in confronting the French enemy?

2. Definition of The French Foreign Legion During The Revolution

The French Foreign Legion is a large military unit comprised of recruits and volunteers from various races and countries across Africa, Asia, and Europe¹.

Mustafa Muller² defines the Foreign Legion during a lecture held at the Martyrs' Memorial on August 27, 1985, titled "An Overview of the Foreign Legion." He explains that the Foreign Legion is a brigade of mercenaries deployed in particularly heinous missions and perilous situations. These soldiers were not integrated into the French army; they signed contracts for remuneration without swearing allegiance under the French flag. Most of these young men were motivated to join the Foreign Legion by a desire for adventure, adverse family circumstances, or other forms of disillusionment and failure in life. The promise of a recruitment bonus, salary, and various privileges was sometimes sufficient to entice some, while others were compelled to enlist³, such as the approximately 2,000

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Hungarians who sought refuge in France following the Hungarian events of 1956⁴.

During the Algerian War, French recruitment offices employed unethical methods and tactics akin to kidnapping or detention to increase the number of soldiers in the Foreign Legion⁵. As soon as a foreign national arrived in France seeking employment, the French police would swiftly arrest them and force them to choose between two options: either imprisonment or enlistment in the Foreign Legion and deployment to Africa, where life was portrayed as better. French officers perpetuated this illusion by making false promises of wealth and glory⁶.

assuring recruits that all their past offenses and crimes would be forgiven and their identities kept confidential upon enlistment⁷. However, once the enlistment contract was signed, recruits quickly became disillusioned. They were subjected to abuse and threats, and soon discovered the harsh reality of poor treatment, including injustice and contempt from both French officers and soldiers. They were stripped of their dignity and forced into perilous assignments, adhering to the directives of the foreign government⁸, and involved in dangerous missions, while French soldiers avoided combat with the National Liberation Army⁹. In this context, General Trinquier stated, "Foreign Legion soldiers are soldiers destined to die, and we send them there to meet their end¹⁰."

The training and oversight of the Foreign Legion soldiers during the Algerian War were assigned to officers and non-commissioned officers from the Nazi military police, who were accustomed to all forms of humiliation and degradation¹¹. According to the Algerian Resistance newspaper, the Foreign Legion numbered 22,000 soldiers¹² in 1956. The Fifth Wilaya was reinforced in the summer of 1956 with significant supplies, including recruits and important military units such as the 4th Infantry Regiment (4eme I.M.), which arrived from Morocco and was stationed in Mecheria. Additionally, the Foreign Legion's Desert Division (G.S.P.D.A), established on February 1, 1955,

with its headquarters in El Bayadh and affiliated with the Ain Sefra region, included recruits from various countries¹³.

3. Humanitarian and Ethical Values of the Algerian Revolution in Its Treatment of Foreign Legion Soldiers

Foreign Legionnaires who had been conscripted into the French army and stripped of their humanity found themselves, over the years of war, facing issues that altered their perspective on life and revealed aspects of their humanity contrary to their previous reputations. This transformation was largely due to the influence of the National Liberation Army (ALN), which imposed a new outlook on many Foreign Legion soldiers. They discovered that true liberation from colonial mentality involved remaining true to their consciences¹⁴, which had come to understand the reality of the situation. As a result, they revolted against French torture methods, describing French brutality as unparalleled globally¹⁵. Many of them returned to their home countries and became advocates for the Algerian revolution, defending its cause¹⁶.

Of course, the desertion of Foreign Legion soldiers was not a mere coincidence but rather the result of significant efforts undertaken by prominent leaders of the revolution before the emergence of the Soummam Conference organizations. Similarly, the armament process, which was initially overseen by the Political and Military Affairs Department since 1956, and later by the Armament and General Organization Department from 1958, eventually led to the establishment of the Ministry of Armament and Public Communications (MALG) under the National Liberation Army. This ministry, particularly its subsidiary department, played a crucial role in encouraging Foreign Legion soldiers to desert and arranging their repatriation after obtaining weapons and some ammunition from them¹⁷.

Some deserters from the French Foreign Legion joined the National Liberation Army, driven by a desire to erase the stigma attached to their past and to contribute to the liberation struggle. Among them was Mustafa Muller, an Austrian who used his extensive experience in the Foreign Legion to support the revolution. Muller traveled across Europe to raise

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awareness about the dangers of having their sons in the French Foreign Legion. He frequently coordinated between the families of Foreign Legion soldiers and their sons enlisted in the French army¹⁸, urging them to desert by presenting letters from their parents and appeals published in the press and broadcasted through radio. There were also European organizations, such as the Austrian branch, actively involved in delivering messages and appeals from families to Foreign Legion soldiers¹⁹.

In this context, the National Liberation Army issued orders for the population to make contact with Foreign Legion soldiers, treat them well, and gather information about them. The National Liberation Army also engaged in a systematic and focused effort to influence the morale of Foreign Legion soldiers, as evidenced by the following messages included in their propaganda leaflets:

- "You are a tool in the hands of a crumbling colonial power. This is the fourth colonial war imposed upon you... We draw your attention to the role assigned to you as a keeper of security serving French interests... The National Liberation Army addresses your spirit and conscience today and poses the following questions: For whom are you fighting? Did you desire this struggle? The people you were compelled to fight were right and just... It was necessary for you to use the most barbaric means, which your conscience often rejected²⁰..."

Mujahid Moulay Abdelwahab notes that the desertion of soldiers from the French army who then joined the National Liberation Front (FLN) saw significant development. German soldiers would directly contact the FLN to assist with their escape. He also mentions that during an ambush in 1958, approximately 18 Foreign Legion soldiers were integrated into the FLN and were assisted in crossing into Morocco. This counters reports from some French newspapers about the FLN allegedly eliminating French Foreign Legion soldiers²¹. In the same year, Abdelhafid Boussouf reported that around 1,000 Foreign Legion soldiers had been smuggled out, including the

son of a German general, who was kidnapped by the FLN at his father's request²².

Estimates suggest that between November 1, 1954, and November 30, 1956²³, approximately 950 Foreign Legion soldiers deserted the French army with the assistance of the FLN²⁴. This number increased to 5,000 by 1962, aided by a special department within the FLN. These soldiers were sent to Morocco and Tunisia and subsequently returned to their home countries ²⁵.

Regarding the smuggling of recruits from the French army, the FLN utilized the western borders. They established special networks to facilitate the passage of these soldiers. Many questioned the choice of the eastern and western borders for smuggling operations. The FLN's response was that this strategy ensured their safety and security, preventing France from tracking their movements through villages. This precaution was particularly important as the enemy might deploy spies among the deserters to gather intelligence on the FLN's routes and key locations. Once the deserters reached Morocco, they would return and report to French authorities about the FLN and its operations.

To address this, the FLN established specific routes, such as the mountain and desert paths, to ensure the safe transfer of Foreign Legion soldiers. Coordination between the intelligence and security services was crucial in this process. Deserters were interrogated for several days before being smuggled out, providing the FLN with valuable information, including names of friends seeking to desert²⁶.

Regarding the role of the Provisional Algerian Government, on October 4, 1960, it held a press conference in Morocco attended by numerous local and international journalists. At this conference, the Provisional Government delegation presented about 11 Foreign Legion soldiers who had deserted from the French army. These soldiers testified to the press about the ongoing war against the Algerian people by the occupying forces and the horrific massacres committed by them over six years of conflict. The Foreign Legion soldiers came to realize the significant role played by the National Liberation Front (FLN) in

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revealing the true nature of their duties, which involved repression and persecution of an innocent, defenseless population to protect French soldiers committing heinous crimes. The FLN assisted these soldiers in their escape, ensuring their safe passage back to their home countries, and encouraged this courageous movement by the deserters ²⁷.

4.Conclusion

- The Foreign Legion units were among the most dangerous military forces relied upon by the French army in the Algerian War. They engaged in various forms of torture, killing, and rape, and were notorious for their reputation as mercenaries used by France in all its wars and battles.

- The Algerian revolution struck a decisive blow to the French army from within its own ranks and military bases by actively engaging the minds of Foreign Legion soldiers and encouraging their desertion through the establishment of a dedicated service to persuade and facilitate their escape.

- The Algerian revolution's commitment to its humanitarian and ethical values in assisting Foreign Legion soldiers in returning to their homes and families demonstrates the humanistic spirit of the liberation struggle. Many Foreign Legion soldiers joined the National Liberation Army after recognizing the truth about the war and the right of the people to fight for their homeland and sovereignty.

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¹ Mustafa Hijazi, The City of El-Abbas and the Foreign Legion, *Mawaqif: Journal of Research and Studies in Society and History*, Issue 1, January-December 2007, p. 199.

² Mustafa Muller, born in Germany to an Austrian father and a German mother, inherited from his father an inclination toward environmental sciences. After completing his primary and secondary education, he chose to study social sciences. Between 1952 and 1956, he worked as a journalist in Paris, representing progressive newspapers from the Federal Republic of Germany and Austria. His activities in Paris introduced him to liberation movements, including the National Liberation Front (FLN). When the French authorities began searching for him, he went to Morocco to join the National Liberation Army in the mountains. Colonel Abdelhafid Boussouf, commander of the Fifth Wilaya, informed him that there were sufficient men to bear arms and advised him to contribute in another way if he wanted to assist the revolution. He conceived a psychological operations network called "The Service for Returning Foreign Legions to Their Homelands" and established support networks in Europe, particularly in Austria. See: Hamoud Chaid, *Without Hatred or Prejudice: Pages from the History of Revolutionary Algeria*, translated by Abdelrahman Kaboia and Salem Mohamed, Dahleb Publications, Algeria, 2010, pp. 257-258.

³ Hamoud Chaid, *Ibid*, p. 258.

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⁴ The Algerian Resistance newspaper reports that France conducted extensive propaganda in favor of Hungarian refugees who entered France, ostensibly providing them with assistance and cordiality. However, the reality was contrary to these claims. France recruited these refugees into the Foreign Legion, as testified by six Hungarian recruits who had fled from Algeria on their way to Morocco. These six recounted that there were hundreds of Hungarians who had fought for the freedom of their country while undergoing training to join the Foreign Legion. See: *Résistance Algérienne*, Issue 8.

⁵ Hamoud Chaid, *Ibid*, p. 258.

⁶ Algerian Resistance, Issue 8, Edition B, April 21-30, 1957, p. 5.

⁷ Mustafa Hijazi, "The City of El-Abbas ...," *Ibid*, p. 199.

⁸After World War I, the Foreign Legion comprised approximately 42 nationalities, with Germans representing the largest proportion, ranging between 40% and 70%. In some units, the proportion of German recruits reached up to 92%, a reflection of the social conditions in Germany following the war. See: Mustafa Hijazi, *Ibid*, p. 199.

⁹ Algerian Resistance, Issue 8, Edition B, April 21-30, 1957, p. 5.

¹⁰ Hamoud Chaid, *Ibid*, p. 258.

¹¹ Hamoud Chaid, *Ibid*, p. 259.

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¹⁴ Journal al-Mujahid, Issue 11, November 1, 1957, p. 4.

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²⁰ Lakhdar Charef, *The French Enemy's Strategy to Liquidate the Algerian Revolution*, National Center for Studies and Research on the

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²¹ Atika Mustafa, Ibid, p. 167.

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²⁴ *Journal al-Mujahid*, Issue 79, p. 11.

²⁵ Hamoud Chaid, Ibid, p. 259.

²⁶ National Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement and the November 1, 1954 Revolution, Ibid, p. 128.

²⁷ *Journal al-Mujahid*, Issue 79, 1960, p. 11.