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The Egyptian Leadership's Position on the Soummam Congress and its Resolutions, August 20, 1956

موقف القيادة المصرية من مؤتمر الصومام ومقرراته 20 أوت 1956

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Abstract:

This study examines the position of the Egyptian leadership toward the Soummam Conference held in Algeria on 20 August 1956 and its resolutions, on the grounds that this position took shape in light of Ahmed Ben Bella's reservations, since his relationship with the internal leadership was marked by clear divergences in vision and in assessing the available options. It focuses on the account presented by Fathi al-Dib - an Egyptian intelligence officer tasked by Gamal Abdel Nasser with coordinating with the leaders of the Algerian Revolution - as an account that reflects the official perspective that governed Cairo's view of the Soummam Conference and of developments in the Algerian Revolution more generally. In addition, the study seeks to clarify elements of truth by presenting and comparing the most prominent historical testimonies that addressed the conference and its resolutions, especially since a number of decisions that were later described as controversial did not endure for long in field practice. In the context of the transformations that followed the conference, the reading adopted here indicates that the principle of the primacy of the political over the military was soon bypassed at a meeting of the National Council of the Algerian Revolution in Cairo, and that the relocation abroad of the Coordination and Execution Committee established by the Soummam Conference caused the principle of the primacy of the internal over the external to lose much of its practical significance.

Keywords: Soummam Conference, Fathi al-Dib, Abdel Nasser, Ahmed Ben Bella, Liberation Revolution.

المخلص:

تناول هذه الدراسة موقف القيادة المصرية من مؤتمر الصومام المنعقد في الجزائر بتاريخ 20 أوت 1956 ومقرراته، انطلاقاً من كون هذا الموقف تشكّل في ضوء تحفظات أحمد بن بلة الذي كانت علاقته بقيادة الداخل مطبوعة بتباينات واضحة في الرؤية وتقدير الخيارات. وتركّز الدراسة على الرواية التي قدّمها فتحي الديب بوصفه رجل المخابرات المصري المكلف من طرف جمال عبد الناصر بالتنسيق مع قادة الثورة الجزائرية، باعتبارها رواية تعكس التصور الرسمي الذي حكم نظرة القاهرة إلى مؤتمر الصومام وإلى تطورات الثورة الجزائرية بشكل عام. وإلى جانب ذلك، تسعى الدراسة إلى استجلاء عناصر الحقيقة من خلال عرض ومقارنة أبرز الشهادات التاريخية التي تناولت المؤتمر ومقرراته، خاصة أن عدداً من القرارات التي ظلت تُوصف لاحقاً بأنها مُثيرة للجدل لم يُكتب لها الاستمرار طويلاً في الممارسة الميدانية. ففي سياق التحولات التي أعقبت المؤتمر، تشير القراءة المعتمدة هنا إلى أن مبدأ أولوية السياسي على العسكري سرعان ما جرى تجاوزه في اجتماع للمجلس الوطني للثورة الجزائرية بالقاهرة، كما أن انتقال لجنة التنسيق والتنفيذ المنبثقة عن مؤتمر الصومام إلى الخارج جعل مبدأ أولوية الداخل على الخارج يفقد أثره في الواقع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مؤتمر الصومام، فتحي الديب، عبد الناصر، أحمد بن بلة، ثورة التحرير.

INTRODUCTION

No one denies the strength of the ties that linked the leadership of the Algerian Liberation Revolution with the Egyptian leadership. Algerian militants took great care to strengthen their connections with Cairo, given Egypt's regional and international standing during that crucial phase of

liberation movements. Thus, Cairo became, in that pivotal moment of contemporary history, a primary hub attracting leaders of the liberation struggle from Arab Maghreb countries

Consequently, it can be said that the Egyptian leadership was informed about the preparations preceding the outbreak of the

revolution. From its early stages, it promptly provided various forms of support, particularly diplomatic, political, and media support. However, the evolution of events inside Algeria led to divergences in perceptions, positions, and choices between the two sides. The Soummam Conference stood out as one of the most prominent points of contention, especially since it convened under exceptional circumstances that limited the Egyptian leadership's ability to closely monitor developments in Algeria. From this perspective, the problematique of this study revolves around: How did the Egyptian leadership view this meeting that shaped the organizational and political roadmap of the liberation revolution? And how did it evaluate its resolutions and implications? The study seeks to address these questions by combining the descriptive method, the analytical method, and the comparative method, aiming to provide an interpretive reading grounded in an objective, balanced scientific approach that avoids preconceived judgments and polarizations often associated with this type of topic.

1. Circumstances of the Soummam Conference

The Soummam Conference was held in a revolutionary context characterized by the urgent need to reorganize the political and military leadership structure and unify the strategic vision to confront the escalating French colonial violence against Algerians. Mujahid Ali Kafi points out that the period preceding the conference was marked by weak national coordination, with initiatives taken in a fragmented manner according to the specificities of each region, coupled with an almost complete absence of communication channels and a clear shortage of required armament and equipment. This context also highlights the lack of a central leadership and a unified action program to activate the objectives of the November 1st Proclamation, in addition to the impact of leadership conflicts between the internal and external currents in complicating the revolution's organizational

landscape.¹

As for the armed confrontation with French forces, the field situation reflected a harsh reality, which can be vividly illustrated by the very location that hosted the Soummam Conference. In a report published by El Moudjahid newspaper in its second issue under the title "Surrender of Soummam Valley Villages," the article's author described his visit to the Aqbou area on June 26, 1956, stating: "I saw nothing but ruins, destroyed homes, and ruined fields, with no trace of human life during the day due to the planes continuously flying over the area."

The article added that the walls of Sheikh El Mokrani's mosque, which houses his shrine, bore marks of bullets and bombs, indicating a fierce battle had taken place there. In the "Biban" area, the inhabitants had completely disappeared, while in the village of Ouled Boukaitoun, which was subjected to heavy bombardment, nine people were killed - including three men, two women, and four children- large quantities of grain were burned, and women were subjected to rape. In the nearby village of Ouled Rached, six bombs each weighing five quintals were dropped, resulting in the deaths of six women and ten children.² This is a miniature picture of what Algerian villages and countryside were experiencing, a situation that accelerated the necessity for the revolution's leadership to convene and define a confrontation strategy against the colonial forces that intensified their strikes on the revolutionaries' strongholds.

2. Course of the Conference Proceedings

The Soummam Conference represents a pivotal milestone in the course of the Algerian liberation revolution, as it contributed tangibly to transitioning the revolution from a phase of fragmented and sometimes contradictory field management to a phase of centralized framing and organization. This was manifested through a series of organizational reforms aimed at

¹ Alī Kāfī: min al-Munāḍil al-siyāsī ilā al-qā'id al-
‘Askarī, Dār al-Qaṣabah lil-Nashr, al-Jazā'ir, 2012,
p105

² al-Mujāhid: Issue No. 2, Algeria, p 95.

regulating relationships between leadership bodies at various levels, expanding the base of popular engagement, and promoting the creation of mass organizations that had a significant impact on consolidating the revolution's continuity and enhancing the conditions for its expansion and success.

In this context, Ahmed Tawfiq El Madani offers an appreciative reading of the conference's outcomes, considering that it helped reduce the manifestations of confusion and turmoil that characterized the early stages of the liberation revolution, and ushered in a phase marked by a high degree of order, stability, and unity of decision-making. He also points out that the conference established the logic of defined responsibility, clarity of powers and competencies, and entrenched the principle of recourse to central authority, which led to a decline in conflicts related to leadership issues and multiple decision-making centers. This was also reflected in the clarity of the external delegation's role and the limits of its organizational and political subordination.³

The Soummam Conference, as stated in Resistance newspaper, established the chain of command and defined responsibilities, and it set up the leadership bodies—namely the Coordination and Execution Committee and the National Council of the Algerian Revolution—which consisted of 34 members: 17 full members and 17 alternate members.⁴

The Soummam Congress approved the formation of the Revolution's actual leadership through the creation of the Coordination and Execution Committee, as a central leadership body consisting of five members. In the same framework, the Soummam Congress worked to regulate the relationship between the National Liberation Front and the National Liberation Army by enshrining the principle of the primacy of the political over the military, while

emphasizing that the political-military official within command centers is required to oversee maintaining balance among the various branches of revolutionary action.⁵

Regarding the situation of the revolution after the Soummam Congress, Abane Ramdane expressed in an article published in El Moudjahid newspaper about the congress that it opened a new chapter in the course of the Algerian Revolution. He affirmed that the expansion of the revolution's scope made it necessary for the main officials to meet, and that this meeting took place despite the presence of about six hundred thousand French soldiers, and despite the precise military surveillance organized by both Guy Mollet and Robert Lacoste in the Kabylie mountains. Abane Ramdane viewed the congress as inaugurating a new organizational phase in which the National Liberation Army became more organized with clearer institutional features, in terms of leadership personality and unified command, alongside the reorganization of services and departments such as communications, intelligence, supplies, and political bodies.⁶

2. Background on the Egyptian Position

The Egyptian leadership's view differed entirely from what was mentioned earlier, as it relied on Ahmed Ben Bella's reservations, who considered what happened in the Soummam Valley "maneuvers that ended with the issuance of dangerous decisions that will have destructive effects on the continuation of the armed struggle."⁷

Fathi Al-Deeb, as one of the Egyptian intelligence officers tasked by Gamal Abdel Nasser to coordinate with the revolution's leaders, views Abane Ramdane as standing behind many of the arrangements for the Soummam Congress, supported by a group of professional politicians. According to his perception, their experience in party maneuvers enabled them to direct the course

³ Ahmad Tawfiq al-madani: hayāt Kifāh, j3, al-Mu'assasah al-Waṭanīyah lil-Kitāb, t2, al-Jazā'ir, 1980, pp 230-231.

⁴ Al-Muqawama: Issue No. 2, dated November 15, 1956.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ El Moudjahid: Issue No 2, p 107.

⁷ Fathī al-Dīb, 'Abd al-Nāṣir wa-thawrat al-Jazā'ir, Dār al-mustaqbal al-'Arabī, al-Qāhirah, 1984, p245.

of the discussion and control it, taking advantage of the military leaders' limited experience in managing political debate. Al-Deeb goes further to argue that the congress was not merely an organizational station, but resulted from an effort led by Abane Ramdane to tighten control over the revolution and sideline Ahmed Ben Bella from the path to leadership. In this context, Al-Deeb reports that Abane Ramdane devised a plan based on convincing the armed struggle leaders of the necessity for the internal leadership to take charge of all matters of the struggle, internally and externally, while confining Ahmed Ben Bella's role to external representation and implementing the directives and instructions issued by the revolution's leadership.⁸

And instructions. It is noted that Fathi Al-Deeb, in his treatment of the Soummam Congress, presents a critical reading that diminishes the congress's weight and links its convening to subsequent negative repercussions in the revolution's course, suggesting that the congress was an entry point for those outcomes or a cause of them. This reading centers primarily on elements that Al-Deeb considers decisive, especially those related to preparation circumstances, the extent of geographical representation, and the position of the external delegation within the congress's proceedings and outputs.

And specifically regarding the preparation aspect, Fathi Al-Deeb tends to attribute the initiative to Abane Ramdane and highlight him as the main driver of the idea to hold the meeting, which he states explicitly by quoting Ahmed Ben Bella that the latter received information indicating Abane Ramdane's direction toward holding a meeting inside during August 1956, including wilaya leaders to draft the upcoming action plan, define work methods, and distribute responsibilities, and according to this perception, Abane Ramdane's efforts are understood by Fathi Al-Deeb within the framework of leadership struggle,

particularly what concerns rearranging roles between inside and outside, and confining Ahmed Ben Bella's function to external representation and implementing the internal leadership's directives.

And it is recorded against this approach that it makes no mention whatsoever of the organizational role undertaken by Arabi Ben M'hidi in managing the congress's proceedings, as it predominantly attributes most preparation and direction efforts to Abane Ramdane alone, which may be linked to an inaccurate assumption about the timing of Ben M'hidi's martyrdom, which we have referred to previously.⁹

In fact, available testimonies vary regarding attributing the idea of holding the congress to a specific person, as some attribute it to Abane Ramdane, while other accounts indicate that Zigoud Youcef was the originator of the idea. Regardless, the idea itself was not born of the moment but dates back to the early beginnings of the revolution, as its detonators agreed to hold a meeting three months after the launch of the armed action. However, this meeting did not materialize at that time due to the violent reaction of the colonial authorities, which resulted in those early months in the martyrdom of Didouche Mourad and the arrest of both Mustafa Ben Boulaid and Rabah Bitat.¹⁰

Regarding the issue of geographical and organizational representation at the congress, Fathi Al-Deeb relies on a narrative attributed to Ahmed Ben Bella that minimizes the extent of participation, asserting that attendance "was limited to leaders of the Algiers and Petite Kabylie wilayas and representatives from northern Constantine, while the remaining wilaya leaders or their representatives were absent, especially from Oran, the Aurès, Souk Ahras, and the Sahara," and adds that "no external representative attended"¹¹

⁹ Ibid, p 235.

¹⁰ Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Zubayrī: *al-thawrah al-Jazā’irīyah fī ‘āmihā al-Awwal*, Dār al-Ba‘th, 1984, p123.

¹¹ Fathī al-Dīb: *op-cit*, p 245.

⁸ Fathī al-Dīb: *op-cit*, p 234.

However, this claim requires some scrutiny, particularly when considering the context in which the external delegation was operating, given the recent independence of Tunisia and Morocco, the intensity of French security surveillance on Ahmed Ben Bella and his group in Egypt and beyond, and the availability of their photos to French security services. Under these circumstances, it seems unrealistic to imagine their ability to cross Tunisian territory and reach the congress site inside Algeria, breaching the multiple forms of security barriers that controlled the area at that time. Therefore, the absence of an external representative from the congress may be read not as a sign of the interior's isolation or exclusion of the exterior, but as a logical result of operational and security realities that prevented it.

3. Incomplete information about the congress.

Fathi Al-Deeb's presentation regarding the Soummam Congress does not provide an accurate and comprehensive depiction of its circumstances and contexts, as we have seen, since it attributes many of its elements to a unilateral interpretation that leads to downplaying its weight, then loading it with subsequent negative consequences as if it were a prelude to them. In contrast, other data indicate that the preparation for the congress was not a solitary act, but proceeded through channels of communication, coordination, and exchange of correspondence between the interior and exterior, within a progression imposed by the developments of revolutionary action.

The idea of the meeting is not incidental in the organizational sense, as some accounts link it to the early arrangements that preceded the revolution's outbreak and the subsequent need to coordinate decision-making. This need intensified after the qualitative shift brought by the Northern Constantine attacks on August 20, 1955, which accelerated the transition from the logic of local initiatives to the logic of centralized control and unified vision.

Regarding representation, some studies

show that the preparatory communications focused primarily on leaders of the historically active regions, with a pivotal role for political coordination in the capital, culminating in the attendance of representatives from major areas, foremost: Zigoud Youcef, leader of the Second Region; Karim Belkacem, leader of the Third Region; Omar Ouamrane for the Fourth Region; and Arabi Ben M'hidi for the Fifth Region, alongside a political delegation in which Abane Ramdane played a coordinating role.¹²

However, Fathi Al-Deeb states that Ben Bella told him that he was considering attending the meeting or sending a representative on his behalf¹³, and after discussing the matter together, they agreed to avoid him entering Algeria to attend the congress out of concern for his life, due to Abane's known capacity for betrayal and violence.¹⁴

Some accounts indicate that members of the external delegation were not isolated from the initial preparations for the Soummam Congress, but were informed of its progress from the time it was merely an idea for holding a meeting that would include revolution leaders from both inside and outside. According to this view, a preliminary agreement was reached stipulating that Zigoud Youcef and his comrades would host a meeting including representatives from a number of regions and bodies: the capital region represented by Abane Ramdane and Karim Belkacem; northern Constantine region represented by Zigoud Youcef and his deputy; Aurès region represented by Mustafa Ben Boulaid and his deputy; Oran region represented by Arabi Ben M'hidi; in addition to the external delegation represented by Ahmed Ben Bella in his capacity as equipment officer, and a political member from the Front proposed to be Mohammed Khider or Hussein Aït

¹² Muḥammad Laḥsan Zughaydī, *Mu'tamar al-Šūmām wa-taṭawwur Thawrat al-Taḥrīr al-Waṭanī al-Jazā'irīyah*, Dār Hūmah, al-Jazā'ir, 2009, p 135.

¹³ Faṭḥī al-Dīb: *op-cit*, p 235.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 236.

Ahmed.

The same account adds that in mid-May 1956, Abane Ramdane informed the Cairo group of a decision to change the meeting location without specifying the alternative, then about a month later notified them of postponing the meeting, coupled with a decision to expand its nature from a limited coordination meeting to a congress in its full organizational sense.¹⁵

It appears that this chronological sequence of events sheds light on what Ahmed Ben Bella proposed in his testimony, which remains vague in details; he recounted that he traveled with another member of the external delegation to Tripoli at the request of the internal leadership, intending to join the congress, and that they waited there for twenty days hoping someone would come to escort them to the convening site inside Algeria, but no one came, and the account ends with their surprise upon receiving news of the congress's convening in their absence.¹⁶

Fathi Al-Deeb is criticized for deviating from historical accuracy when he denied the representation of the Oran region at the congress, completely ignoring the presence of Mohammed Arabi Ben M'hidi and his pivotal role in managing the congress sessions. This omission appears linked to Deeb's erroneous belief that Arabi Ben M'hidi was martyred before the Soummam Congress convened.

This error is evident in Deeb's own narrative, where he states that at the end of the first week of June 1956, he traveled to Madrid and met Abdelhafid Boussof as the leader of the Oran Front, after the killing of its first leader, Arabi Ben M'hidi, by French authorities in the Algerian capital—an act carried out brutally as he was arrested during his presence in the Algerian capital for a preliminary meeting of wilaya leaders to agree on their demands from France in

exchange for accepting a ceasefire.

According to Fathi Al-Deeb, this means Ben M'hidi's martyrdom occurred before June 1956, and it is understood from this that he was martyred more than two months before the Soummam Congress on August 20, 1956, which completely contradicts established historical facts confirming that Arabi Ben M'hidi actually participated in the congress and was not martyred until February 1957.¹⁷

Fathi Al-Deeb's historical inaccuracies in his narrative do not stop at the issue of Arabi Ben M'hidi's martyrdom, but extend to linking the martyrdom of several early leaders to the outcomes of the Soummam Congress, including Mustafa Ben Boulaid and Zigoud Youcef. However, this linkage lacks precision at the chronological level; the martyr Mustafa Ben Boulaid, leader of the First Region, was actually martyred before the Soummam Congress even convened. Multiple sources confirm that his killing occurred in March 1956 following the explosion of a booby-trapped radio device targeted at him during his work in the region.¹⁸ This means his martyrdom preceded the Soummam Congress by nearly five months, and the absence of the First Region from the congress stems originally from his martyrdom, as well as the lack of appointment of a successor after the martyrdom of his first deputy, Cheihani Bachir, also in October 1955.¹⁹

How could the Soummam Congress be the cause of Mustafa Ben Boulaid's martyrdom? This is what Fathi Al-Deeb mentions when he says: "The distressing news continued about the beginning of the internal conflict phase and physical liquidation among members of the wilaya leaderships opposing the congress decisions, in a way that greatly disturbed us, and the first victim was the heroic fighter leader Mustafa Ben Boulaid, who had the greatest merit and favor in the

¹⁵ Mabrouk Belhooucine: *le Courier Alger*_ le Caire, Casbah Editions, alger, p168.

¹⁶ Aḥmad ibn Billah, *al-Jazīrah*, (program shāhid 'alā al-'aṣr), Episode 5, 2002.

¹⁷ Faṭḥī al-Dīb: *op-cit*, p 217.

¹⁸ Muḥammad al-'Arabī al-Zubayrī: *op-cit*, p 119.

¹⁹ Abd al-Ḥafīz Amīqrān al-Ḥusaynī: *Mudhakkirāt min masīrat al-niḍāl wa-al-jihād*, Dār al-ummah, Ṭ1, al-Jazā'ir, 1997, p 52.

success of the Algerian Revolution... and he was assassinated by planting a radio device on him that exploded and ended his life."²⁰ Fathi Al-Deeb also implicated the martyrdom of hero Ziguod Youcef as a result of the Soummam Congress, despite him being martyred in a battle against the enemy, where he says: "And if all the question marks that accompanied the circumstances of him falling into an ambush prepared by the French for him after leaving his hideout point fingers of accusation of betrayal and treachery at his assistants in the leadership, Ibrahim Mazhoudi and Ali Kafi, as I learned from all the Algerian brothers who arrived in Cairo from inside Algeria."²¹ Meanwhile, testimonies from the mujahideen who were under his command and who witnessed the .martyrdom battle indicate that it was not so

These are regrettable errors, especially if they come from someone who claims about himself: "Fate willed that I alone possess knowledge and familiarity with the secrets and intricacies of many events, and with all their details for every stage of the Arab revolutionary struggle through positive participation in all its fields."²²

He says also "starting from my exclusivity in experiencing and participating with the Algerian brothers, the planners of the November 1, 1954 revolution, and my militant follow-up of all the revolutionary events and their developments"²³

We do not know how Fathi Al-Deeb overlooked the knowledge that Arabi Ben M'hidi presided over the congress sessions and had a major role in directing the course of the discussion, nor how he overlooked that Mustafa Ben Boulaid was martyred before the Soummam Congress and not after it, and many other famous events were absent from him²⁴. The space does not allow

mentioning them, and he knows every small and large detail.

4. Egypt's View on the Congress Decisions

Fathi Al-Deeb's remarks on the congress decisions do not go beyond describing them as dangerous decisions that will have destructive effects on the continuation of the armed struggle²⁵.

He does not mention these decisions specifically, but through his use of terms like "political" and "military," as well as "internal" and "external" leaders, it is understood that the intended dangerous decisions are the two principles endorsed by the congress:

- Priority of the political over the military.
- Priority of the internal over the external.

These are decisions planned by Abane Ramdane, according to Fathi Al-Deeb, who sought to oust Ahmed Ben Bella from the leadership of the revolution, attempting to convince the armed struggle leaders of the necessity for the internal leadership to control the affairs of the struggle internally and externally.²⁶

Al-Deeb states: "...Abane Ramdane succeeded in imposing his view on the congress participants in a manner that outwardly preserved the course of the Algerian struggle, and directed his efforts toward achieving victory away from any perception by these military leaders of the selfish motives behind it for his control over the revolution's destiny and the dominance of politicians over all affairs of the struggle"²⁷.

In reality, regarding the priority of the political over the military, some participating leaders indeed feared that Abane Ramdane and the drafting committee members with him, who were politicians, wanted to contain and control the

²⁰ Fathī al-Dīb: op-cit, p 249.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, p 13.

²³ Ibid, p 17.

²⁴ Fathi Al-Deeb does not mention at all the August 20, 1955 attacks in his book despite the importance of the event in the course of the revolution.

²⁵ Fathī al-Dīb: op-cit, p 236.

²⁶ Ibid, p 234.

²⁷ Ibid, p 245.

revolution.²⁸ However, Amar Ben Ouda notes that this fear quickly dissipated after explanations were given that the priority of the political over the military meant focusing on negotiations with the enemy and regulating the conditions for a ceasefire, as military victory over one of the largest colonial powers is impossible.²⁹

Regarding the endorsement of the principle "priority of the internal over the external," the congress resorted to it, as some accounts indicate, based on several considerations, most prominently the presentation by the martyr Arabi Ben M'hidi. According to this presentation, there were reservations about complete reliance on Egypt for securing weapons, given that Cairo's stance on the Algerian revolution is influenced by its regional and international diplomatic calculations, making it a shifting position according to the requirements of Egyptian foreign policy.

In addition, the same context points out that the National Liberation Front delegation abroad suffered from internal difficulties that prevented it from becoming a unified and effective leadership, as it remained fragmented due to divisions and individual competition for leadership, which negatively affected its ability to assume a central leadership role.³⁰

Nevertheless, these interpretations remain mere justifications for what happened, as returning to some historical testimonies reveals the clear background of these two decisions: the actual empowerment of Abane Ramdane and his close associates, due to the availability of two main conditions—they being politicians and present inside the homeland. Colonel Tahar Zoubiri states in the first part of his memoirs: "After the criticisms directed at some decisions of the Soummam Congress, and at its engineer Abane Ramdane, especially those related to the priority of the political over the military and the priority of the internal over the

external, and the lack of reference to Arab-Islamic affiliation, it was decided to hold the first meeting of the Algerian Revolutionary Council."³¹

5. Fate of Soummam Decisions

Some historical testimonies indicate that the Soummam Congress resolutions, particularly the principles of political priority over military and internal over external, did not practically lead to the decisive effects suggested by a literal reading of those resolutions.

They were not translated into actual and permanent control by politicians over the revolution's course nor into stable fixation of leadership inside the country; field and security transformations quickly imposed their logic on leadership positioning, making the decision center more prone to shifts following battlefield developments.

In this context, evidence is drawn from the relocation of the Coordination and Execution Committee itself abroad, meaning the "internal priority over external" principle remained more theoretical, clashing with war realities; thus, historian Al-Arabi Zubeiri's statement gains interpretive significance when he states that Abane Ramdane "began losing much of his influence and authority" after being forced, with other committee members, to leave Algeria and settle abroad, turning the congress principle against him since he no longer counted among internal leaders granted decision-making priority.³²

During the Algerian Revolutionary National Council conference held in Cairo, this shift in power balances deepened, as military leaders dominated the council's proceedings and decision-making.

Abane Ramdane was effectively sidelined from the decision center and assigned to the media file within the Coordination and Execution Committee, interpreted as veiled marginalization of his pivotal political role from the Soummam Congress onward.

²⁸ Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Zubayrī: *Jabhat al-Tahrīr al-Masār wa-al-fikr*, p139.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, p 124.

³¹ al-Ṭāhir Zubayrī, *Mudhakkirāt ākhīr qādat al-Ūrās al-tārikīyyīn*, ānāb, 2008, p171.

³² Ibid.

The council affirmed Algeria's Arab-Islamic affiliation, enhancing the revolutionary discourse's ideological dimension, possibly responding to regional or internal sensitivities; this elevated the "three Ba's" trio—Krim Belkacem, Abdelhafid Bousof, and Lakhdar Bentobal—as the actual power holders, reflecting a shift from Soummam's political logic toward military centrality in leadership and organization.³³

Fathi Al-Deeb's presentation in his book *Abdel Nasser and the Algerian Revolution* reveals that Ahmed Ben Bella anticipated that the Soummam Congress resolutions would lead to several potential negative effects.

These included widening opposition to the decisions in some wilayas, potentially escalating to internal clashes and leadership purges; border wilayas withholding weapons from internal ones to pressure retreat; the image of division spreading abroad, threatening Arab and international confidence in the revolution; and entering a phase of tension between politicians and military within the Liberation Army, with harmful impacts on the revolutionary path.³⁴

This diagnosis of the Soummam Congress outcomes by Egyptian leadership aligns with Ahmed Ben Bella's statement in a television testimony four decades after independence, where he described the congress as a "dagger stab" in the back of the Algerian revolution.

However, a thorough examination shows that these predictions were not confirmed by subsequent events, as the revolution demonstrated considerable cohesion, cooperation, and achievements that enhanced its image in Arab and international public opinion throughout its course.

In contrast to Ben Bella's position, statements by other leaders on the Soummam Congress generally leaned toward radically different assessments and conclusions; while Ben Bella links the congress resolutions to the rise of politicians

in the Coordination and Execution Committee, affirming he was affected by them without conveying his displeasure to Al-Deeb or Nasser, he instead wrote to the internal leadership requesting non-publication of the decisions due to incomplete representation, and considered the congress severed ties with the revolution's "Arab depth," which he viewed as an extension of Nasserism, marking the start of deviation from the "authentic revolutionary line."³⁵

Ben Bella's emphasis on the Fifth Region's lack of representation in the congress, and his stripping of Commander Arabi Ben M'hidi of the mandate assigned to him in the distribution of tasks among the six members by tasking him with leading the Fifth Region, contradicts the revolutionary truth of the Algerian revolution's situation, as it did not account for regional affiliation in assuming responsibility.

This was not exclusive to the Fifth Region; similarly, the Second Region had its leadership entrusted to Commander Dida Murad, the Fourth Region to Commander Rabah Bitat, then Souidani Boujemaa with Mr. Ahmed Bouichaib from western Algeria as his deputy.

According to Ahmed Ben Bella, this congress was a betrayal of the Algerian revolution's principles and a deviation from its Arab-Islamic affiliation; the serious aspect is that political assassinations of some revolution symbols began after the Soummam Congress, and it suffices to read the Soummam Congress statement to find not a single word about affiliation to Arabism and Islam.³⁶

In justifying the absence of any reference to Arab-Islamic affiliation in the Soummam Congress platform, one of Abane Ramdane's closest associates, Ben Yousef Ben Khedda, states: "The circumstances through which Algeria was passing in its war against the colonizer did not allow raising the

³³ Ibid, p 172.

³⁴ Fathī al-Dīb: op-cit, p 248.

³⁵ Ahmad ibn Billah, *al-Jazīrah*, (program shāhid 'alā al-'aṣr), Episode 5, 2002.

³⁶ Ibid.

ideological issue, as the brothers who participated in the congress were not concerned with this issue; their major preoccupation was the way to strengthen the revolution, unify the people, arm it, finance it, and then how to confront the French colonizer. If the ideological issue had been raised at that time, the consequences would have been dire due to the multiplicity of orientations among the revolution's leaders between Islamists and secularists, and Abane Ramdane³⁷ did not agree with the Islamists. There was a million French people in Algeria, some of whom cooperated with the revolution... how would their position be if the congress adopted the idea of an Islamic state?"³⁸

Months passed, and the expectations of Messrs. Fathi Al-Deeb and Ahmed Ben Bella mentioned above did not materialize; instead, the positive results of the Soummam Congress emerged, providing a strong impetus to the liberation revolution thanks to the structural and organizational reforms, as well as the clear strategy it set for the revolution's course.

As for the two aforementioned principles that were reserved, the revolution's leadership retreated from them at the meeting of the Algerian Revolutionary National Council in Cairo on August 27, 1957, where the minutes stated: The meeting, given that some positions established by the Congress of August 20, 1956, were given ambiguous interpretations, and given that the Algerian revolution must have leadership free from all ambiguity because that is the basic condition for preserving the unity of the Algerian people, the National Council of the Revolution affirms what follows:

³⁷ Ben Yousef Ben Khedda defends Abane Ramdane fiercely, stating that despite being educated in French, he always believed in and defended the principle of Algerian identity imbued with Arab-Islamic culture, which is the basis of the Algerian People's Party doctrine... and never objected at any time to the Islamic values in the November 1st Proclamation. ben Yūsuf ibn Khaddah: *shahādāt wamawāqif*, Dār al-ummah, Ṭ 1, 2006, p 92.p.

³⁸ ben Yūsuf ibn Khaddah, private interview, 1998.

All those who contributed to the liberation battle, whether in military uniform or not, are equal, and as a result, there is no priority for the political aspect over the military aspect, nor any difference between the internal and the external.³⁹

CONCLUSION

In conclusion of this study, the Egyptian position toward the Soummam Congress was marked by a high degree of reservation and caution.

This reservation cannot be separated from Cairo's sensitivity to any reorganization of revolutionary legitimacy that might weaken its position or disrupt the political and media support channels Egypt had woven with the liberation revolution's leadership in its early stages; this apprehension is understood in light of the tensions that characterized relations between Egyptian leadership and some components of internal and even external leadership, where security considerations, representation, and decision legitimacy intertwined with power calculations within the revolution's command.

Thus, a significant part of Egyptian leadership's reservations was built on Ahmed Ben Bella's stance and his narrative of events, whether regarding regions' and external delegation's representation or interpreting congress resolutions as an assault on the revolution's Arab extension, contributing to a skeptical Egyptian perception of Soummam more than a neutral description of its facts; the impact extended beyond the initial stance to color relations between Egyptian and revolutionary leadership with coldness and caution post-congress, affecting coordination rhythm and trust levels to the point of the provisional government's departure from Cairo to Tunis. In this context, one problematic aspect of the Egyptian role was occasional interference in the internal affairs of the liberation revolution's leadership, whether through

³⁹ al-Mathāf al-Waṭanī lil-Mujāhid, Majallat al-dhākirah ijtimā' al-Majlis al-Waṭanī lil-thawrah al-Jazā'irīyah, Year 2, Issue 3, 1995, p. 48.

attempts to influence decision-making paths or differential weighting of revolutionary leaders by Egyptian command, which sometimes provoked angry reactions from some revolution leaders who saw such interventions as an assault on organizational independence; this tension is read as part of a complex dynamic intertwining the need for support with the desire for autonomy.

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