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The Leadership Bodies of the Fourth Wilaya Through the Archives (1956–1962)

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Abstract:

The Algerian Revolution placed great importance on revolutionary organization, considering it an essential and effective element in its political, military, social, and cultural dimensions. After the Fourth Region emerged as one of the five regions, the Soummam Conference came to clarify organizational matters. Following this conference, the organization witnessed gradual development that continued until the end of the Revolution.

Keywords:

leadership bodies. Fourth Wilaya. Region. Sectors. Sections.



1. *Introduction*

The leadership of the Revolution attached great importance to organization, considering it a fundamental and effective element, whether in its political, military, social, or cultural dimensions. This organization experienced gradual development that continued until the end of the Revolution. The Soummam Conference marked a major turning point for the Fourth Region, which was consequently elevated to the status of the Fourth Wilaya, as it established the first fully structured leadership body and defined its basic framework. During the Soummam Conference, a group of leaders was appointed to oversee the Fourth Wilaya, and this leadership supervised the organization of the National Liberation Army in a manner that endowed it with a number of distinctive characteristics, under the command of six leaders.

2. *The Political Organization of the Revolution in the Fourth Wilaya*

According to the military report of the Duperré district (present-day Aïn Defla), dated 6 October 1960, on the outbreak of revolutionary activity in the region: “Open armed rebellion began within the sector’s boundaries in 1956, extending from the Dahra Mountains in the north to the Ouarsenis Mountains in the south. It was organized by well-equipped communist cadres from Duperré and Miliana, who carried out real military opposition and resistance until 1959. From that date onward, their activity continued in mountainous areas and trenches in the plains, where they succeeded in establishing a clandestine organization with branches across most of the sector, thanks to the collusion of the population and the difficult terrain¹”.

As a result of the Revolution’s tight organization, one French general stated: “The rebellion was definitively declared in the early days of 1956, and the uprising began with the establishment of a political and administrative organization that, in major population centers as well as in douars, collected taxes, supplied fighters in the mountains, and conducted propaganda. All of this operated within a clandestine organization that appeared more determined and vigilant than our own will.²”.

3. *The Wilaya*



The wilaya was an administrative body positioned at the top of the organizational hierarchy at the wilaya level. It was headed by a leader who combined both political and military authority, assisted by three deputies: the first in charge of political affairs (the political commissioner), the second responsible for military affairs, and the third for intelligence and communications. The administration of the wilaya was entrusted to a council composed of the wilaya commander, his deputies, and the heads of regions and sometimes sectors. This body, known as the Expanded Wilaya Council, was responsible for taking major decisions related to the wilaya and its various structures³.

3.1 Powers of the Wilaya Commander

His duties included being fully informed of all problems and difficulties facing the wilaya and finding appropriate solutions to them; formulating political, military, media, social, and economic strategies in line with developments in the situation; promoting and appointing cadres at the levels of sections, sectors, and regions; appointing wilaya cadres within the administrative structures from the top to the base of the political hierarchy; chairing the Wilaya Council; participating in national meetings held by the Coordination and Execution Committee or the National Council of the Revolution, both inside and outside the country; defining and distributing the responsibilities and tasks of each official within the wilaya; and intervening constructively to resolve disputes and conflicts occurring outside the wilaya⁴.

3.2 Powers of the Political Officer

These included providing political education for both civilians and combatants; disseminating propaganda; organizing a parallel administration to the French colonial administration, including judicial and civil status services, in order to handle matters such as marriage, divorce, and reconciliation among the population; as well as overseeing public meetings and meetings held for the mujahideen⁵.

3.3 Powers of the Military Officer

He was responsible for supervising military training and instruction of armed units such as commandos, battalions, and platoons; reviewing promotion proposals for cadres of the National Liberation Army at the regional level and submitting them to the Wilaya Council for approval; submitting periodic reports to the higher revolutionary

bodies on the military situation; assigning tasks to the military bodies under his authority; and overseeing the supply service responsible for the storage and maintenance of weapons⁶.

3.3 Powers of the Intelligence and Communications Officer

The role of the informant was considered vital and strategic, as he represented the eyes of the Revolution. The revolutionary system relied heavily on this role in its planning, aiming to gather information on the movements of the French army stationed in the area, including the number of its troops and the number of Algerians serving in the French army in order to persuade them to join the Revolution. This task required meticulous accuracy, including recording the number of tanks, trucks, French soldiers, and the routes they used. The Soummam Conference did not define the duties of these officers in precise terms, except for the political and military officers and the political commissioner; the responsibilities of the others were defined progressively over time as auxiliary services⁷.

4. The Leadership Bodies of the Fourth Wilaya

4.1 The First Leadership Body

The first leadership body of the Fourth Wilaya was formed following the Soummam Conference, under the leadership of Colonel Omar Oumrane, and lasted from September to December 1956. Omar Oumrane was appointed commander of the Fourth Wilaya and granted the rank of colonel (second-class major), serving as both political and military leader. The Wilaya Council consisted of three deputies holding the rank of major (first-class major), namely:

- The military officer of the wilaya: Major Slimane Dehiles known as Si Sadek.
- The political officer of the wilaya: Major Ahmed Bouguerra, known as Si Mohamed.
- The intelligence and communications officer of the wilaya: Major Omar Ousseddik, known as Si Tayeb⁸.

4.2 The Second Leadership Body

Following the departure of Omar Oumrane to Tunisia on a mission, Slimane Dehiles, known as Si Sadek, was appointed commander of the Fourth Wilaya in December

1956, serving as political and military leader with the rank of colonel (second-class major).

- Military officer of the wilaya: Major Ahmed Bouguerra, known as Si Mohamed.
- Political officer of the wilaya: Major Omar Ousseddik, known as Si Tayeb.
- Intelligence and communications officer of the wilaya: Major Mohamed Zemmoum, known as Si Saleh⁹.

4.3 The Third Leadership Body

The council continued until April 1957, when Slimane Dehiles left for abroad. After that, Colonel Ahmed Bouguerra, known as Si Mohamed Bouguerra, was appointed commander of the Fourth Wilaya, serving as political and military leader with the rank of colonel (second-class major). This marked the beginning of a distinguished period in the history of the Fourth Wilaya under the leadership of this hero, assisted by three deputies:

- Military officer of the wilaya: Major Saïd Megrani, known as Si Lakhdar.
- Political officer of the wilaya: Major Omar Ousseddik, known as Si Tayeb.
- Intelligence and communications officer of the wilaya: Major Mohamed Zemmoum, known as Si Saleh¹⁰.

Si Mohamed began his activity within the Fourth Wilaya by moving throughout all its areas, holding meetings, listening attentively to all proposals and opinions with great precision, responding to them, and issuing immediate guidance, particularly in the political sphere.

Si Mohamed Bouguerra believed that the strategic factor which deepens the concept of the Revolution among the Algerian people, in both urban and rural areas, lies primarily in the role played by every official, whether at the level of the region, sector, section, or douar. This, in turn, lends credibility and fosters trust between officials and the general population. Si Mohamed initiated this approach by laying the foundations of a distinctive revolutionary practice within the Fourth Wilaya, as recounted by many leaders who worked alongside him and knew his qualities closely. From the numerous accounts of his companions who knew him before and during the Revolution, it can be concluded that he always prioritized the moral dimension in his activity before



engaging in action, believing that revolutionary work required a specific code of conduct that endowed it with strength and momentum in the field, provided that its members adhered to revolutionary ethics, whether among the ranks of the National Liberation Army or the wider population in both rural and urban areas.

During this period, commando and sabotage operations against the enemy's economic installations continued, along with confrontations against counter-revolutionary elements, whether infiltrated or organized into armed groups opposing the National Liberation Army. In terms of wilaya organization, Si Mohamed Bouguerra assumed command of the Fourth Wilaya following Colonel Slimane Dehiles, who left for abroad in April 1957. He remained in command of the Fourth Wilaya until his martyrdom on 5 May 1959 at Ouled Bouachra¹¹.

After the martyrdom of Saïd Megrani, known as Si Lakhdar, he was replaced by Major Rabah Zerari, known as Si Izzedine, during whose tenure the wilaya witnessed numerous victories and a strengthening of its forces.

The Wilaya Council was later restructured under the same commander after the arrest of Major Rabah Zerari (Si Izzedine), who was replaced by Major Djilali Bounaama, known as Si Mohamed¹².

The Fourth Wilaya Council came to be composed of Colonel Si Mohamed Bouguerra as wilaya commander, assisted by Major Djilali Bounaama as military officer and Omar Ousseddik as intelligence and communications officer. Following the *La Bleuite* affair in the Fourth Wilaya and the implication of Major Omar Ousseddik, he was sent, along with Major Rabah Zerari, to Tunisia for their case to be examined at the headquarters of the revolutionary leadership. Subsequently, Major Lakhdar Bouchamaa joined the wilaya leadership.

After the martyrdom of Colonel Si Mohamed Bouguerra on 5 May 1959, the council was reconstituted under the leadership of Major Mohamed Zemmoum, who assumed political and military command as head of the Fourth Wilaya, assisted by Major Djilali Bounaama in charge of military affairs¹³.

4.4 The Forth Leadership Body

A meeting was held in the Fourth Wilaya, in Médéa, on 14 January 1960, in the Rouabeh area, to select the members of the Wilaya Council, study and assess the general situation, and develop a new strategy for the national struggle. This meeting, which lasted a full month, confirmed Si Saleh in his position as commander of the wilaya, and Si Mohamed, who was wounded, as military deputy. The Wilaya Council was completed by promoting Captains Lakhdar Bouchamaa and Halim (Hamdi Ben Yahia) to the rank of major¹⁴.

During the period February–March 1960, the French air force carried out heavy attacks, dropping napalm bombs on several sectors of the Third Region of the Fourth Wilaya.

- Major Mohamed: Military commander of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Hamdi Ben Yahia (Halim): Commander of the First Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Abdelatif: Commander of the Second Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Lieutenant Rachid: Representative of the Third Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Lakhdar: Commander of the Fourth Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Hadj Ben Aïssa: Commander of the Fifth Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Dr. Yahia: Health representative of the Fourth Wilaya¹⁵.

The proceedings of this meeting were conducted under the acting head of the Fourth Wilaya Council, Si Saleh, and in the presence of the regional commanders, as follows:

- Political and military officer, commander of the Fourth Wilaya: Major Mohamed Zemmoum, known as Si Saleh.
- Military officer of the wilaya: Major Djilali Bounaama, known as Si Mohamed.
- Political officer of the wilaya: Major Hamdi Ben Yahia, known as Halim.
- Intelligence and communications officer of the wilaya: Major Lakhdar Bouchamaa¹⁶.

The agenda of this meeting included organizational issues of the Fourth Wilaya, relations with the other wilaya, and the situation with external entities. The meeting lasted approximately one month due to French army operations in the area where it was held, following the leak of information about the meeting. As a result of these military operations, Captain Hadj Ben Aïssa, commander of the Fifth Region, and

Lieutenant Rachid from the Third Region were martyred, having fallen on the field of honor. Dr. Yahia was seriously wounded and received medical assistance. The meeting ultimately concluded with three of its members.

After examining the various issues listed on the agenda, the distribution of responsibilities among the members of the Wilaya Council was approved. It was also decided by Majors Si Saleh and Si Mohamed to add two members to the Wilaya Council, selecting and appointing the two most senior captains, Lakhdar and Halim.

- Among the decisions taken during this meeting were:
- Appointment of the command staff of the Wilaya headquarters
- Assessment and balancing of military forces across the different regions

Lifting the ban on smoking

- Pressuring the external leadership to facilitate the delivery of weapons and ammunition¹⁷.

The meeting was chaired by the acting head of the Fourth Wilaya Council, Mohamed Zemmoun, known as Si Saleh, and attended by the regional commanders as follows:

- Major Djilali Bounaama, known as Si Mohamed: Military commander of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Hamdi Ben Yahia, known as Halim: Commander of the First Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Abdelatif Toulba: Commander of the Second Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Lieutenant Rachid: Representative of the Third Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Lakhdar Bouchamaa: Commander of the Fourth Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Captain Hadj Ben Aïssa: Commander of the Fifth Region of the Fourth Wilaya
- Dr. Yahia: Representative of the Algerian Red Crescent in the Fourth Wilaya¹⁸.

The agenda of the meeting included organizational matters of the Fourth Wilaya, relations with other wilayas, and the situation with external entities. After reviewing the various issues on the agenda, the distribution of responsibilities among the members of the Wilaya Council was approved by Majors Si Saleh and Si Mohamed,

who also decided to include two additional members in the council by selecting and appointing the two most senior captains, Lakhdar and Halim¹⁹.

4.5 The Fifth Leadership Body: Command of Djilali Bounaama

Following the Ilizi affair, Djilali Bounaama temporarily established the council under the name Military Committee for Coordination and Execution. One of its key outcomes was issuing the revolutionary judgment on those responsible for the Ilizi incident. The committee was composed of the following regional leaders, each serving as both political and military officer:

First Region: Captain Belkacem Ben Hani

Second Region: Captain Abdelatif Toulba

Third Region: Captain Youssef El Khatib

Fourth Region: Captain Youssef Ben Kharouf

Fifth Region: Captain Elias Baba Ali²⁰.

This temporary council lasted only one month, from August to July 1960, after which it was reconstituted. Djilali Bounaama presided over the temporary council to fill the vacuum created by the Ilizi affair, and once the situation stabilized, the Wilaya Council was reformed.

After the return of Major Ahmed Ben Cherif, he joined the leadership, completing the council. However, he was soon arrested on 28 October 1960 in the Sur El-Ghezlan sector by the French enemy and remained imprisoned until 1962.

The reformed council consisted of:

- Major Djilali Bounaama, known as Si Mohamed: Political and military officer, Commander of the Fourth Wilaya
- Major Youssef Ben Kharouf: Military officer of the wilaya
- Major Youssef El Khatib, known as Si Hassan: Political officer of the wilaya
- Major Ahmed Ben Cherif: Intelligence officer²¹.

The most notable features of this period included the Fourth Wilaya's confrontation with major military operations, notably the "Scorpion" Operation, which targeted the Ouarsenis area (Third Region). During this time, Major Ahmed Ben Cherif joined the leadership council of the Fourth Wilaya, and Major Youssef El Khatib, known as Si Hassan, was appointed as a member of the Wilaya Council.

Additionally, the Sixth Region was established in October 1960, covering Algiers and the coast, following a meeting held by the Fourth Wilaya leadership in the Bir Touta sector, on a farm owned by Europeans sympathetic to the Revolution. Leadership of this new region was assigned to Second Officer Mohamed Bousmaha.

4.6 The Sixth Leadership Body: Command of Youssef El Khatib (Si Hassan)

After the martyrdom of Djilali Bounaama on 8 August 1961, Youssef El Khatib assumed the presidency of the Wilaya Council as political and military officer, becoming the Commander of the Fourth Wilaya.

The council was composed of:

Major Youssef Ben Kharouf, known as Si Youssef: Military officer of the wilaya

Major Lakhdar Bouragaa, known as Lakhdar: Political officer of the wilaya

Major Mohamed Bousmaha, known as El Barouaquia: Intelligence and communications officer of the wilaya

Major Omar Ramdan: Member of the council²².

5. CONCLUSION

The revolutionary organization created a clear break from the French administration and mobilized the Algerian people to act in favor of the Revolution. The importance of this organization lies in the fact that it was one of the core tasks prioritized by the revolutionary leaders to achieve a range of objectives, including implementing decisions issued by the revolutionary bodies and institutions, such as the Soummam Conference, the Coordination and Execution Committee, and the National Council of the Revolution. The organization worked to:



Unite the revolutionary framework and apply it to mobilize various national material and human resources in support of the Revolution.

Promote and disseminate revolutionary ideas among the Algerian people.

Boost the morale of the mujahideen and encourage the population to join the Revolution.

Highlight the meaning of jihad and the status of the martyr in this world and the hereafter.

Expose colonial policies to the national and international public opinion.

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