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Egypt's Pivotal Role in Supporting the Algerian Revolution (1954-1962)

دور دول المشرق في دعم القضية الجزائرية مصر انموذجا (1962-1954)

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Abstract:

This study examines the nature of Egyptian-Algerian relations during the Algerian Revolution (1954-1962), underscoring Egypt's prominent role as the foremost Arab nation supporting the Algerian cause across political, military, and media spheres. This comprehensive Egyptian support was instrumental in garnering African, Asian, and subsequent international backing for Algeria in various international forums, notably the United Nations. Such backing effectively challenged the international isolation imposed by France, which had considered Algeria an integral part of its territory since 1830. Ultimately, this sustained support contributed significantly to France's recognition of Algeria's sovereignty and independence in 1962. The article concludes that the robust Egyptian support stemmed from deep-rooted bonds of Arab and Islamic solidarity, shared history, common values, and linguistic unity between the two peoples.

Keywords:

Algerian Revolution; Egyptian Support; Gamal Abdel Nasser; Egyptian- Algerian Relations; Arab Nationalism; Decolonization.

المخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة طبيعة العلاقات المصرية الجزائرية خلال فترة الثورة الجزائرية (1954–1962) مع التركيز على الدور البارز لمصر بوصفها الدولة العربية الرائدة في دعم القضية الجزائرية عبر الأصعدة السياسية والعسكرية والإعلامية.

لقد كان الدعم المصري الشامل أساسيا في حشد التأييد الإفريقي والآسيوي، ثم الدعم الدولي اللاحق للجزائر في مختلف المحافل الدولية، وعلى رأسها الأمم المتحدة. وقد نحج هذا التأييد في كسر العزلة الدولية التي فرضتها فرنسا، والتي كانت تعتبر الجزائر جزءًا لا يتجزأ من أرضيها منذ عام 1830. وفي نهاية المطاف ، أسهم هذا الدعم المستمر بشكل كبير في اعتراف فرنسا بسيادة الجزائر واستقلالها عام 1962.

ويخلص المقال إلى أن الدعم المصري القوي نابع من روابط عميقة من التضامن العربي والإسلامي، والتاريخ المشترك والقيم المتشابهة ، والوحدة اللغوية بين الشعبيين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثورة الجزائرية، الدعم المصري، جمال عبد الناصر، العلاقات المصرية الجزائرية، القومية العربية تصفية الإستعمار.

Introduction:

Relations between the Eastern Arab (Mashriq) and Western Arab (Maghreb) countries possess deep historical roots, which became particularly salient during the Islamic era due to a unifying religious bond largely absent in antiquity. Egypt, owing to its strategic geographical position vis-à-vis the Maghreb, has historically played a pivotal role in these relations. It served as a crucial conduit for interactions, including the Islamic expansion into the Maghreb, and these ties continued to evolve, becoming increasingly interconnected and defined throughout modern and contemporary history. This was evident during both the Ottoman period and the subsequent European colonial era in the Maghreb, particularly following the conclusion of World War II in 1945.

After World War II, Egypt emerged as a dynamic center of Arab political activity and a focal point for Arab leaders. The establishment of the Arab League with its headquarters in Cairo further solidified this status, attracting Maghrebi leaders and politicians to the city. This convergence fostered a nascent political and militant unity among these leaders, which manifested notably between 1947 and 1954. Algeria, as a prominent Maghreb nation, experienced a strengthening of its ties with Egyptian political figures, especially after the Free Officers assumed power in Egypt in 1952. These relations were further consolidated with the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution on November 1, 1954, positioning Egypt as the principal supporter of the Algerian cause on multiple fronts. This article aims to explore the extent to which Egypt's post- World War II political climate contributed to solidifying its relations with Algerian nationalists and how this support materialized.

1. Egyptian-Algerian Relations: 1945-1954

Following World War II, Egypt became a sanctuary for Arab politicians of diverse affiliations[1], including those from both the Mashriq and Maghreb,encompassing various ideological leanings. Among them were political leaders from Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, who found a supportive political environment in Egypt. This environment proved conducive to their liberation struggles, facilitating the unification of Maghrebi efforts and bridging differing viewpoints among leaders with diverse orientations.

Initially, Algeria's situation was not treated in isolation from other Maghreb countries; the anti-colonial activities of these nations were largely unified against French rule. Moreover, Egyptian authorities initially approached these countries as a collective entity, often termed "North African states," rather than differentiating their relations.

The early manifestations of Egyptian support for the Maghreb peoples included:

1. Providing financial and political assistance to Maghrebi political leaders.
2. Facilitating their cultural and political outreach from Egyptian territory towards Arab, Islamic, and Western countries.
3. Supporting the establishment of Maghrebi political bodies on Egyptian soil under the aegis of the Arab League, such as the *Maghreb Office* in 1947, followed by the Committee for the Liberation of the Maghreb in 1948, which was further consolidated in 1954.

Specifically concerning Egyptian-Algerian relations, Egyptian authorities received a representative from the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (MTLD) in October 1949. The purpose was to discuss Egyptian and broader Arab support for the movement and the Algerian liberation cause. This meeting, which brought together Maghrebi political leaders with Cairo authorities under Arab League auspices, saw the League's Secretary-General, Azzam Pasha, state to Dr. Lamine Debaghine (representing the People's Party - PPA): "We have full confidence that the Maghreb and Maghrebis will be able to liberate themselves from colonialism and contribute similarly to the liberation of the peoples of the Middle East"[2] .

During a meeting of Maghrebi nationalists in January 1947, which led to the formation of the Front for the Defense of North Africa and subsequently the Maghreb Office in Cairo, Chadly Mekki represented the Algerian branch. He successfully cultivated strong relations with Egyptian officials, the significance of

[1] Maryam Al-Saghir, African States' Positions on the Algerian Question (1954–1962). Algiers: Dar Al-Hikma, 2nd ed., 2012,P18.

[2] - Mohamed Qaddour, "Egyptian Support for the Algerian Revolution (1954–1962)." Journal of Military Historical Studies, Vol. 1, No. 5 (January 2023), P82.

which, as Azzam Pasha later indicated after a visit to Paris in October, would become increasingly apparent .[3]

2. The 1952 Egyptian Revolution and its Impact on Support for the Algerian Struggle

The overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy under King Farouk and the rise of the Free Officers in 1952 marked a significant shift in Egypt's political trajectory[4] . Among the leading figures of this transformation was Gamal Abdel Nasser, a central architect of the revolution who would later serve as Egypt's president from 1956 until his death. Known for nationalizing the Suez Canal in 1956 and for implementing major social and economic reforms, Nasser became a powerful symbol of Arab anti-colonialism and regional leadership[5] .Consequently, Egypt's support for liberation movements in the Maghreb—particularly Algeria—grew more assertive, especially after Nasser consolidated his authority in 1954[6].

During this period, the Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action (CRUA) was formed in Algeria on March 23, 1954, with the aim of launching the revolution and preparing for armed resistance against French colonialism. Among its key figures was Ahmed Ben Bella, a founding member of the FLN and future president of independent Algeria. Following years of imprisonment under French rule, Ben Bella rose to national leadership in 1963, advocating socialist reforms and pan-Arab solidarity[7] In 1954, he was dispatched to Cairo to secure Egyptian support—particularly weapons and ammunition—for the impending revolution[8] . The Egyptian leadership, perceiving the earnest commitment of Algerian militants to launch an armed revolution, resolved to provide comprehensive support, irrespective of their political affiliations. This assistance was framed as a reflection of the fraternal bond between the Egyptian and Algerian peoples.

1. Manifestations of Egyptian Support for the Algerian Cause

1.1. Pre-Revolutionary Support (Prior to November 1954)

Fathi al-Deeb, in his book *Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Algerian Revolution*, recounts that Gamal Abdel Nasser tasked him in 1952 with "preparing a plan to

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[3] -Ahmed Mahsas, Le mouvement révolutionnaire algérien. L'Harmattan,1979,P239.

[4] - Fraouk Fahmy, Abd al-Nasser, Gamal. Abdel Nasser: From Siege to Revolution. Cairo: Amoun Modern Foundation, 1st ed., 2023,p68.

[5] -J. Fathikios ,Jamal. Abdel Nasser and His Generation. Edited by Elias Sahab, translated by Sayed Zahran. Cairo: Dar Al-Tadamun, 1992,p15.

[6] -Mohamed Qaddour,Op.cit,P82.

[7] -Mohamed Harbi, The Algerian Revolution: The Years of Gestation. Translated by Najib & Ayad Saleh El- Makhloufi, National National Institute of Graphic Arts, Algiers,1994,p186.

[8] - Ammar Qalil, The Algerian Epic. Constantine (Algeria): Constantine Publications, Vol. 1, 1991,p39.

liberate all Arab territories, giving priority to North African Countries[9]. Al-Deeb adds, "I made numerous contacts, movements, and meetings with Maghreb leaders present in Cairo, eventually reaching the conclusion that a meeting should be held including all leaderships of North African parties under the patronage of the Arab League to ascertain the readiness of these leaderships to embark on the liberation struggle".[10]

This meeting, held on April 3, 1954, brought together leaders of several Maghrebi political movements. Algeria was represented by Mohamed Khider, a prominent nationalist and co-founder of the FLN known for his role in the 1949 Oran post office operation to finance the MTLD and for his later diplomatic efforts abroad during the Algerian Revolution. Alongside him was Ahmed Bayoud, representing the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto (UDMA)[11].

Significantly, during this meeting, Ahmed Ben Bella, representing a cohort of young Algerian militants disillusioned with existing party politics, advocated for armed action as the decisive means to end French colonialism. This appeal marked a turning point in the nature of Egyptian-Algerian relations and support[12].

Ben Bella captured the attention of the Egyptian political leadership. Consequently, Fathi al-Deeb, representing Egyptian intelligence, and his assistant, Izzat Suleiman, were assigned to meet with Ben Bella, facilitated by Mohamed Khider, on April 5-6, 1954. Ben Bella successfully conveyed the seriousness of their objectives, providing a detailed account of the ongoing preparations in Algeria by these youth activists to launch the revolution imminently, despite their limited resources. He emphasized their critical need for weapons, funding, and ammunition[13].

His persuasiveness with the Egyptian leadership, particularly President Gamal Abdel Nasser, led to the authorization of comprehensive support for these militants to expedite the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution[14]. By October 1954, the arrangements for solidifying relations and support were finalized.

Ben Bella received 5,000 Egyptian pounds to procure weapons and ammunition from the Libyan black market, with assurances of further arms shipments from Egyptian depots if they successfully initiated the revolution.[15]

2.1. Egyptian-Algerian Relations during the Liberation

[9] -Fathi Al-Deeb,op.cit,p25.

[10] - Al-Deeb, Fathi. Abdel Nasser and the Algerian Revolution. Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, 1st ed., 1984,p26.

[11] -Op.cit,p27.

[12] -Op.cit, p28.

[13] -Robert Robert,Memoirs of Ahmed Ben Bella. Translated by Al-Afif Al-Akhdar. Beirut: Dar Al-Adab Publications, 1981,P99-100.

[14] -Fathi Al-Deeb,op.cit,88.

[15] - Maryam Al-Saghir, op.cit, p50.

Revolution (1954-1962)

Relations between Egypt and the Algerian revolutionaries solidified significantly during the Liberation Revolution, with Egypt becoming the primary external supporter and rear base for the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and its National Liberation Army (ALN). Support diversified to encompass military, political, and media domains. The Egyptian government and populace demonstrated unwavering commitment to the Algerian cause.

To reinforce these relations, the Egyptian leadership provided unconditional support to Algerian revolutionaries and diplomats. Key manifestations included:

2.1.1. Military Support

Military aid was a cornerstone of Egyptian assistance. President Gamal Abdel Nasser issued directives to supply the Algerian Revolution with weapons and ammunition, aiming to break the siege imposed on the revolutionaries. Coordination commenced between Ahmed Ben Bella, representing the ALN, and Fathi al-Deeb, for Egypt, to devise a precise plan for arms delivery. As noted, Ben Bella initially received 5,000 pounds, followed by another 3,000 pounds, to purchase weapons from smugglers in Libya, coordinated with an Egyptian diplomat at the Libyan embassy, for subsequent transfer into Algeria.[16]

Key aspects of Egyptian military support included:

- Allocating secure military training grounds in Egypt for Algerian fighters, supervised by experienced Egyptian officers.
- Training and forming a specialized unit of combat swimmers (often referred to as 'human frogs') from July 14, 1956, for specialized military operations such as diving, mine defusal, mine-laying, and arms shipment delivery.
- Assisting in the training of Algerian pilots; Omar Oumrane was tasked with supervising these officers in Cairo, where Egyptian Air Force facilities were utilized.[17]
- Playing a crucial role in procuring and transporting weapons to Algerian borders, via land and sea through Libya, Tunisia, or Morocco. In an interview for the "Witness to the Era" program, Ben Bella stated that Egypt was the sole arms supplier to the revolution during its first two and half a years.

[16] -Fathi Al-Deeb,op.cit ,p60.

[17] -Hamri Issa, "Training in the Air Force during the Algerian Revolution." Journal of Military Historical Studies, Vol. 2 (2020),p137.

- Facilitating an arms deal with Czechoslovakia in 1955, in exchange for Egyptian cotton, for the benefit of the Algerian Revolution, with Soviet mediation.
- Several arms shipments were dispatched across the Mediterranean to supply Algerian revolutionaries, primarily via routes passing through Libya or Morocco. Among the most notable vessels involved was the *Intisar* (Victory), which departed Alexandria on September 2, 1955, carrying Egyptian-supplied weaponry and successfully offloaded its cargo at Nador, on the Moroccan coast, during the night of September 12, 1955[18].

Similarly, the *Dina* vessel followed the same logistical route, departing from Alexandria on the same date and delivering its arms shipment to Nador ten days later.[19]

Another important vessel was *Al-Haz Al-Saeed*, which also contributed to transporting weaponry to North Africa, though fewer operational details about its missions are documented. In addition to these, Greek-crewed ships such as the *Devax* (operational by May 20, 1956) and the *Athos* played a strategic logistical role.

The Athos [20] in particular, was loaded jointly by Algerian and Egyptian operatives and carried one of the largest single consignments of arms and ammunition for the Algerian Revolution. Notably, it also transported trained Algerian combatants returning from the Mashriq, thereby linking military logistics with the movement of personnel. This maritime support remained vital until Algeria's independence in 1962[21].

2.1.2. Media Support

Egypt played a pivotal role in amplifying the Algerian cause on the international stage, most notably through *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs), a Cairo-based radio station established in July 1952 following the success of the Free Officers' Revolution. Designed as a powerful platform for promoting Arab nationalism and supporting liberation movements across the region, *Sawt al- Arab* was the first station to announce the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution.

and broadcast its foundational proclamation—the November 1st Statement—directly to Arab and international audiences[22].

[18] - Al-Tahir Al-Jabali, Arms Supply during the Algerian Revolution (1954–1962). Algiers: Dar Al-Umma, 2015,p193.
[19] -Op.cit,p190.
[20] -Wahiba Saidi, The Algerian Revolution and the Arms Supply Problem (1954–1962). Algiers: Dar Al-Ma'rifa, 2009,p56.
[21] - Fathi Al-Deeb, p62-63.
[22] -Turki Rabeh, The Voice of Algeria from the Voice of the Arabs Radio in Cairo (1952–1962). Proceedings of the Conferences Series on the Algerian Revolution, Proceedings of the Conferences

Sawt al-Arab became the de facto official mouthpiece of the Algerian cause, leading to its denunciation by French authorities; one French deputy reportedly declared, "The evil came from Cairo Radio"[23].

Sawt al-Arab consistently exposed French colonial policies in Algeria, publicizing atrocities and framing the Algerian cause as a just struggle for liberation, thereby working to galvanize international public opinion. The Egyptian Ministry of Information also issued regular statements condemning French actions, such as during the demonstrations of December 11, 1960, when it broadcast a strongly worded communiqué denouncing French repression.

Egyptian newspapers also supported the revolution. For instance, *Al-Ahram* published a report titled "Disturbed Situation in Algeria" the day after the revolution began, stating: "*The* revolution has erupted in Algeria, and revolutionaries have detonated no less than 30 bombs and started several fires in areas around Constantine"[24].

The newspaper characterized these events as indicative of a well-organized revolutionary movement, unprecedented in the country and enjoying popular Backing[25] Sawt al-Arab further broadcast three dedicated programs:

1. An Algerian program in French, targeting French audiences, presented by Aïssa Messaoudi (likely the intended Idda Ben Qatat, as Messaoudi was famous for the French broadcasts from Sawt al-Arab for the FLN) for fifteen minutes each evening.
2. A program titled "Voice of the National Liberation Front Addresses You from Cairo," broadcast daily in Arabic as political commentary, and later in French following the formation of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) [26].

2.1.3. Political Support and Popular Solidarity

Egypt hosted the official FLN delegation for seven years, providing consistent support, assistance, and protection. Popular solidarity from Egyptians for the Algerian Revolution was multifaceted:

1. Organizing solidarity days, including fundraising campaigns. In October 1957, Egyptians donated a day's salary, totaling 170,000 Egyptian pounds

Series Dar Houma, 2nd ed., Algiers,2005,p189.

[23] -Ismail Dabash, Arab Policy and International Positions toward the Algerian Revolution (1954–1962). Algiers: Dar Houma, 2012,p68.

[24] -Ahmed Hamrouche, Abdel Nasser and the Arabs. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, Vol. 1, July 1992,p542.

[25] -Fathi Al-Deeb, op.cit, p30.

[26] -G. Meynier, Histoire intérieure du FLN 1954-1962. Casbah Editions,2003,p571.

[27].

2. President Gamal Abdel Nasser donated a full month's salary to the revolution in 1958.

Allocating a percentage of cinema box office revenues to support the revolution

3. Utilizing cinema for propaganda: producing documentaries and feature films about the revolution to expose French policies and garner support. The most prominent example was the film **Djamila Bouhired** [28].

Conclusion:

This examination of Egyptian support for the Algerian Revolution reveals that Egyptian-Algerian relations during this period were founded on principles of brotherhood, cooperation, and solidarity, seemingly transcending narrow political or ideological calculations. These relations were underpinned by shared Arab and Islamic sentiments, common historical experiences, customs, values, and traditions. Consequently, the Egyptian leadership and populace readily provided comprehensive assistance across political, military, media, and other spheres.

The profound and multifaceted support from Egypt was a critical factor in the Algerian Revolution's ability to sustain its struggle and achieve international legitimacy. This dynamic demonstrated a significant model of inter-Arab solidarity. The bond forged in this period of anti-colonial struggle serves as a historical testament to the potential for collective action and mutual support within the Arab and Islamic world. Egypt's strategic position, coupled with the assertive leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, enabled it to function as a vital lifeline for the Algerian liberation movement, challenging colonial narratives and mobilizing international opinion. The eventual success of the Algerian cause, in turn, inspired other liberation movements and underscored the importance of unified Arab action on the global stage.

In an era of evolving regional dynamics and geopolitical complexities, the historical precedent of Egyptian-Algerian solidarity offers valuable insights. It underscores how shared historical struggles and common aspirations can forge enduring bonds and contribute to collective resilience. The legacy of this cooperation remains a significant reference point for understanding the potential and complexities of inter-Arab relations.

[27] - G. Meynier,p570.

[28] -op.cit,p570.

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