

The French Military Strategy for Expansion in the Blida Region and the Algerian Reaction to It, 1830-1840

Asma Chelgoum *

University of Oum El Bouaghi - Algeria
chelghoum.asma@univ-oeb.dz

Submission Date	Acceptance Date	Publication Date
17/05/2026	30/05/2026	10/06/2026

Abstract:

General de Bourmont led a campaign on the city of Blida on July 23, 1830, with the aim of lifting the siege imposed by the Mitidja inhabitants on the French army in Algiers. However, the resistance fighters defeated de Bourmont's army and foiled their first attempt at occupation. French campaigns subsequently followed in succession targeting strategic areas on the Mitidja Plain, such as Blida, Koléa, and Souk Ali, employing terror tactics like the Blida massacre perpetrated by the butcher General Clauzel, and the massacre of the El Ouffia tribe at the hands of the Duc de Rovigo. Despite the brutal methods and repeated military campaigns, the French were unable to impose their control over the Mitidja Plain until after the Battle of Oued El-Allagh in 1839. Following this, the French army led a campaign in the western part of the Mitidja, subsequently occupying the city of Cherrhell on March 15, 1840. Meanwhile, other campaigns proceeded through Mouzaïa, El Affroun, Oued Djer, and Boumedfaa, culminating in the French forces' seizure of Miliana.

Key words: French Occupation of Algeria 1830, Blida, Clauzel, Battle of Oued El-Allagh.

* Corresponding author.

Introduction:

This study addresses the void created by the collapse of the Algerian state in the face of the occupying forces, which resulted in a state of disorder. However, a general movement soon emerged across all regions of the country, calling for confronting the enemy and resisting him with the force of arms. In this context, the resistance in the Mitidja plain is part of a broader series of popular uprisings. After the French occupied Algiers on July 5, 1830, following Dey Hussein's signing of the surrender treaty, armed popular resistance in the Mitidja plain began immediately as a direct result of the failure of the official resistance.

Many primary historical sources have addressed French expansion in Algeria in general, and in the Blida region in particular. This is evident in the la thèse de doctorat de Ben Youssef Tlemcani sur l'expansion française en Algérie, soutenue à l'Université d'Alger en 2005, ainsi que dans les écrits du colonel TRUMÉLET sur la région, dans deux ouvrages intitulés Boufarik et Blida, publiés en 1887 en Algérie., which recount the resistance of the inhabitants of the Mitidja plain—a proactive response to the threat posed after the fall of the capital to the French occupation. Colonel Robin also provided valuable information in his work NOTES HISTORIQUES Sur LA GRANDE KABYLIE, including data on the Mitidja resistance and its leaders, Sheikh Sidi Saadi and Ben Zammoum. Furthermore, Saadallah sur le mouvement national (1992), documented that the resistance naturally originated in the rural areas after the collapse of central authority, the emergence of a political void, and the inability of the cities to form new leadership. New leadership thus emerged in the countryside, led by tribal chiefs such as Haj Sidi Saadi and Haj Muhammad Ben

Zammoum. This resistance represented the first national Algerian uprising in the rural regions, where the dual leadership of moral and material authority caused the French army to retreat.

Blida witnessed numerous military raids, such as General Brossard raid on October 1, 1832; General de Vaudre reconnaissance operation on Blida on November 21, 1832; General Bro raid against the Hajout tribes on May 18, 1834; Marshal Valée raid on Blida on May 3, 1838; and General Count d'Arlon raid on Boufarik on March 5, 1835.

In this study, we will address the collapse of central authority and the vulnerability of the Algerian people in the face of the occupying armies. Under these circumstances, the elders of the Mitidja region—located between Hajout to the west, Boudew to the east, the coast to the north, and the Blida Atlas to the south—saw no alternative but to confront and resist the French, particularly when the French army commander, de Bourmont, launched a military raid on the city of Blida to test the resolve of the local population and the tribal elders of Mitidja.

To address this topic, we posed the following central question:

How did France implement its military strategy in the Blida region, and how did the Algerians respond to it?

This main question is further divided into the following sub-questions:

What were the main objectives and military methods employed by the French army in the region?

What were the key military raids in the area?

How did the Algerians react to the French expansion in the region?

We relied on the descriptive historical method to depict the French military strategy in the region, in addition to the analytical method to examine the course of events and the key battles during the military expansion. Our study was based on primary and diverse sources, such as Colonel Robin NOTES HISTORIQUES Sur LA GRANDE KABYLIE, colonel TRUMELET sur la région, Boufarik et Blida, Julien Histoire de l'Algérie,, which were cross-referenced with Algerian sources to provide a well-documented analysis

1- The French army strategy for expansion towards Blida:

The first confrontation took place when French forces, led by General de Bourmont, launched a campaign on the city of Blida with the aim of lifting the siege imposed by the people of Mitidja on the colonial army in Algiers. However, the resistance fighters defeated de Bourmont's army and foiled the first French attempt to occupy Blida. French campaigns subsequently followed in succession targeting strategic areas on the Mitidja Plain, such as Blida, Koléa, and Souk Ali, employing methods of both intimidation and inducement, such as the Blida massacre—which claimed the lives of many of Blida's inhabitants and was perpetrated against them by the butcher General Clauzel—and the massacre of the El Ouffia tribe at the hands of General the Duc de Rovigo. Despite these brutal methods and the repetition of military campaigns, the French were unable to impose their control over the Mitidja Plain until after the Battle of Oued El-Allagh.

After El-Hadj Mohamed Ben Zaamoum learned of the Commander-in-Chief's plan to conduct a reconnaissance mission in Blida, he wrote to him again to dissuade him, informing him that despite the surprise caused by the defeat of the Turks, the mountains of the region were preparing to fight for the independence of their lands. He urged him to refrain from advancing into the country until a good treaty was reached to regulate the nature of relations with them, but General de Bourmont did not accept these observations ¹. On July 23, 1830, General de Bourmont led an infantry force of 1,500 soldiers ²

in a field operation to reconnoiter Blida. His convoy moved from Algiers at four o'clock in the morning, passed the Oued El Kerma bridge, and stopped for a long time at the Boufarik well. After twelve hours of marching in extreme heat, it reached Blida in the evening. The inhabitants gave it a good reception. This point, which drew the displeasure of the mountain tribes upon which the city rests, was carried out despite the observations of El-Hadj Mohamed Ben Zaamoum, one of the region's dignitaries, who had sought to dissuade the General from advancing into the country before a treaty could organize the nature of their relations with the Arabs, which rendered this campaign unsuccessful as the enemy had anticipated³.

On July 24, 1830, they arrived in the city of Blida, prompting the inhabitants to meet their soldiers and offer them fruit and refreshments, for which they were generously paid. Encouraged by this welcome, the General agreed to remain in the city, where he permitted only a single battalion and set up his camp outside the Algiers gate ⁴.

The country dwellers—whom Colonel Trumelet describes as "mountaineers"—descended upon the city with clearly hostile

intentions; shots were fired at a detachment sent to reconnoiter the road leading to Médéa.

On the morning of July 25, 1830, the Beni Salah fired several shots at a reconnaissance unit dispatched to the entrance of Oued Sidi El-Kebir. During the day and into the evening, the Beni Salah, who had not previously shown any hostility, descended and spread out in large numbers throughout the city, but without visible weapons. Officers and soldiers left the camp in large numbers to visit the city, and some partial demonstrations revealing malicious intentions on the part of the Beni Salah prompted them to quickly consolidate their position⁵.

Blockier de Trilhan, Squadron Commander of the General Staff and Aide to General de Bourmont, went out around eleven o'clock in the morning to ascertain the cause of the gunfire heard in the city streets, and fell, fatally wounded by a bullet. This incident hastened the enemy's return toward the capital, exposing them to attacks from the tribes that inflicted heavy losses. However, upon reaching the plain, the enemy's attack became weak and hesitant. Nevertheless, they pursued the column as far as the zaouia of Sidi Aïd Ech-Cherif, located 5 kilometers behind Boufarik ⁶.

This engagement is considered the first defeat of the French army since the occupation of Algiers and consequently the first victory achieved by the popular resistance, which had a positive impact on mobilization and consolidating the resistance ranks. Robin reports a statement from a French witness: "... A kind of organization was noted for the first time among these savages. We met Ben Zaamoum's army in an almost straight formation:

the infantry were positioned on the mountainous side in two lines, and the cavalry on the right flank.”⁷

General Clauzel was appointed to the General Command of the French Army, replacing Marshal de Bourmont. Clauzel arrived in Algiers on September 2, 1830, and quickly realized that the time had come to put an end to the Bey of Titteri, Mustapha Boumezrag, who, relying on his mountains, believed he could challenge French power with impunity. A decree was issued on November 15, 1830, dismissing him and appointing Moor Mustapha Ben El-Hadj Omar in his place. It was decided that an expedition to Titteri would be necessary to support this appointment. The Commander-in-Chief himself took command of the column that was to march to Médéa. This army corps of 7,000 men arrived at a temporary camp in Boufarik on November 17, 1830. Heavy rains, which continued until the following morning, prevented the soldiers from preparing their soup, and the column was only able to leave Boufarik at noon on the 18th to head toward Blida⁸.

Commander-in-Chief Clauzel personally participated in this campaign, whose operational command he entrusted to Officer Boyer. The campaign began on November 17, 1830, and reached Blida the following day. When Clauzel realized the mosque's importance in stirring the sentiments of the Muslims, he seized this holy place and converted it into a military hospital. He ordered his soldiers to pursue the unarmed inhabitants in Blida and burn their homes after they had plundered the foodstuffs. After Clauzel consolidated his grip on the city, he established a military garrison there, then proceeded to Médéa on the 21st of the same month. No sooner had he reached the Chiffa Gorges than Bey Boumezrag's followers

ambushed him, engaging in a battle that resulted in the death of 3 French officers, 24 soldiers, and 80 wounded.

Following the defeat of Marshal de Bourmont in Blida, he concluded a truce and peace agreement with the governor of the Titteri province, Bey Boumezrag. Pursuant to this agreement, the occupation armies, led by General Berthezène (Safar 3, 1246 AH/June 25, 1830 AD), entered the province. No significant resistance was noted at that time. However, the occupation army had barely settled before it began acts of repression, terror, and slaughter against the populace, which compelled the residents to take up arms against the enemy, and the people rallied for Jihad. Crowds poured in from the Mitidja Plains and the Beni Salah Mountains, gathering outside the gates of Blida. They stormed the city on Safar 6 (June 28), seized the French flag from its bearer, and wiped out the occupation forces stationed there. This incident in the Mitidja capital is considered the first spark of the Algerian resistance, and among those killed was the son of Marshal de Bourmont. The Marshal retreated from the city with the remnant of his soldiers, returning to the capital. This incident contributed to the weakening of the Marshal's influence and the collapse of his reputation among his people. It coincided with the political revolution in France, where the people across the seas were changing the system of government, abolishing the monarchy and replacing it with the Second Republic. Marshal de Bourmont was a supporter of the monarchy, so he was relieved of his post and General Clauzel took his place ⁹.

General Berthezène, who succeeded General Clauzel in command of the African Army division, led an expedition to Médéa in June to support Bey Mustapha Ben El-Hadj Omar,

who had been appointed in November 1831, and whose position had become extremely precarious following the French forces' evacuation of that location. The force that departed Algiers on June 25 deployed near Boufarik the following day, June 26. Berthezène, who had not ceased fighting upon his return from this campaign since leaving Médéa, arrived near Boufarik on July 4 at four o'clock in the morning, and continued his route toward Oued El Kerma ¹⁰.

Battles between the popular forces and the French recurred between the capital and the Atlas Mountains. The efforts of the leaders located particularly in the eastern part of the Mitidja united, and they cut off the French supply route to the garrison left in Médéa with the new Bey, Mustapha Ben El-Hadj Omar. Blida returned to the arms of the resistance, and Clauzel's successor, Berthezène, and his soldiers were once again confined within the walls of the capital. The resistance tightened the noose when they attacked the Model Farm that Clauzel had established, causing them to flee it, and spreading fear and renewed hope in the capital. This was further supported by additional forces brought by Ahmed Ben Mustapha Boumezrag, who settled near Boufarik and then advanced toward El-Fahs, the suburbs of the capital. In mid-July 1831, the popular forces led by Ibn Zaamoum Al-Hussein crossed the Oued Harrach and attacked the Model Farm again, burning the entire harvest and threatening the forward garrisons that the French had established for the defense of the occupied city. Berthezène himself marched out against them at the head of a force of three thousand soldiers, causing them to retreat slightly. However, the following day, the detachments gathered in Boufarik, which were supported by El-Hadj Saadi, attacked the Model Farm once more, until Berthezène marched out to fight them again.

Faced with this intolerable situation, he yielded to the counsel which stated: "Stay where you are and we will stay where we are, otherwise the war between us will not cease until you return whence you came." ¹¹

During July, the Arabs began to form numerous, overtly hostile gatherings around Boufarik. On July 18, 19, and 20, they attacked the Model Farm and the fort of Oued El Kerma. On July 21, enemy skirmishers advanced as far as Bir Khadem. On the 22nd, the Commander-in-Chief marched against the Arabs, pushing them onto the road leading to Blida, and pursuing them until Bir Touta. The French cavalry, which inflicted significant casualties upon them with the saber, advanced until they were within sight of Boufarik. On December 25, 1831, General the Duc de Rovigo succeeded Berthezène to take command of the occupation division ¹².

Under the Demichels Treaty of February 26, 1834, General Desmichels, who commanded Oran, recognized Emir Abdelkader, retaining only a few cities. In March 1835, Emir Abdelkader defied the threat of being treated as an enemy of France if he crossed the Oued Fodda, a threat communicated to him by the Governor-General. He entered the province of Algiers, installing Agha El-Hadj Muhieddine Ben El-Mubarak as Khalifa in Miliana, and Mohamed Ben Aïssa El-Barkani as Khalifa in Médéa. His victory on June 28, 1835, at Macta, over General Trézel, roused the enthusiasm of all the tribes, who saw in him the man capable of permanently expelling the French occupation from Algeria. El-Hadj Ali Ben Sidi Saadi went to find Abdelkader in his camp. He assured him that the tribes were ready to wage Jihad, and that they were only awaiting his

arrival; he proclaimed himself the Emir of all the tribes located east of Algiers ¹³.

On September 28, 1832, the Commander-in-Chief established his headquarters in Bir Khadem and from there dispatched a column of 3,000 men to Souk Ali during the night of October 1st–2nd, placing it under the orders of General Faudoas. The revolutionaries were always better informed of the French army's movements; consequently, it was always very difficult to surprise them. Therefore, upon leaving the forest of Bir Touta for Souk Ali, Faudoas's column intended to take up position at Sidi Abed, about 4 km from this initial point. Nevertheless, he continued his movement toward Souk Ali, and at four o'clock in the morning, they approached the zaouia of Sidi Abed, located to the right of the old road leading to Blida. They suddenly found the revolutionaries confronting them and a skirmish ensued ¹⁴.

General Brossard's Campaign: Towards the evening of October 1, the campaign, led by Faudoas and comprising 1,600 officers and soldiers, set out via Bir Khadem, Oued El Kerma, and Bir Touta. At the very moment General Faudoas was planning to surprise the resistance fighters at their center in Souk Ali before dawn, the resistance fighters had taken precautions by establishing a forward observation post at the place called Sidi Aïd. This went undetected by the French army, causing the advance division to fall into an ambush, resulting in the death of 7 soldiers and 14 wounded, which forced the French army to withdraw ¹⁵.

General de Faudoas's reconnaissance operation on Blida passed Boufarik Well on November 21, 1832, the point it crossed again on November 23, 1832, after destroying the douar

(hamlet) of the marabout Oulad Sidi Ahmed El-Kebir. The Duc de Rovigo left Africa on March 3, 1832, and General Avizard took interim command of the occupation army. On April 26, 1833, General Voirol arrived in Algiers as the high commander of the forces. He took temporary responsibility and replaced the Duc de Rovigo ¹⁶.

As for the campaign directed towards Koléa, it spread terror among the unarmed population and imposed a financial fine on them, taking some relatives of Sheikh Mouhi Eddine Ben El-Mubarak as hostages with the intention of pressuring him to surrender. The situation continued in this manner until the French administration succeeded in penetrating the ranks within the tribes after appointing loyal quids (local leaders) and sowing discord among brothers. It also succeeded in establishing forward military posts, which caused the resistance to retreat somewhat and become confined to the far western and eastern regions and the highlands. In the western region, Agha Mouhi Eddine escalated his threats to the French, vowing vengeance if they did not release his relatives arrested during the raid ¹⁷.

General Bro's Campaign against the Hadjout tribes: General Voirol was not content with correspondence or dialogue; instead, he launched a campaign whose command was entrusted to General Bro, commander of the Douéra center, against the Hadjout tribes on the night of May 18, 1834, in an attempt at revenge, utilizing some members of the Beni Khalil and Beni Moussa tribes. The French army was composed of 3 divisions: two divisions led by General Bro, and one division of the Foreign Legion and 300 Zouaves led by Lamoricière, along with 100 African sharpshooters and two artillery companies. These forces were able to cross the territory ¹⁸.

On January 5, 1835, a reconnaissance column assembled, including four infantry battalions, Zouaves, African sharpshooters, Spahis cavalry, four mountain howitzers, and two field pieces, at Oulad Mendil in the southeast of Douéra. These forces were under the orders of General Rapatel. On the same day, Monday, Lieutenant Colonel Marey proceeded with a detachment to Boufarik Market, where he arrested two Hadjout individuals reported for their cooperation in raiding a cattle herd. This strong action served as a warning to the Hadjout to be cautious, and thus, when the reconnaissance column arrived in their lands on the morning of January 6, 1835, they secured their possessions ¹⁹.

General Rapatel divided his forces into two divisions and ravaged the country in all directions during January 6 and 7, 1835, burning the douars and inflicting as much damage as possible on the enemy. After reaching a point on the Mouzaïa, the two columns, one of which was under the orders of General Acho, returned to sleep on the banks of the Chiffa, followed at a distance by the Hadjout and Mouzaïa. The forces returned to Boufarik on January 8, 1835, and returned to their camps the following day. War would once again drag its torches and cannons across the plain. The Hadjout and their helpers took up arms, and the war for spoils began. Not long after seeking vengeance on the Hadjout, 150 cavalymen suddenly invaded the coastal region during February 1835, obtaining large spoils, and as they retreated on the road from Dely Ibrahim to Douéra, they massacred all travelers and passersby they encountered there, including isolated soldiers. They only withdrew after an exchange of fire with forces from the Baba Hassen workers' camp ²⁰.

After General Count d'Erlon decided on the permanent occupation of the Boufarik point, the time came to implement this measure which aimed to solidify the enemy's authority in the heart of the plain and prove it to the people. On March 5, 1835, under the direction of Colonel Lemer cier, Engineering Captain Grand, and under his orders Lieutenants Renoux and Genet, from the same corps, began laying out the camp enclosure. The adopted shape was a horned structure, with very long branches, to each of which two more works of the same type were added; this arrangement gave the whole the shape of a cross. This work was planned to contain barracks made of masonry or planking capable of accommodating 1,500 men, stables for 600 horses, and all necessary services. A column composed of the 10th Regiment, the Foreign Legion, and the 9th battery of the 10th Artillery, was directed from Douéra to Boufarik in the last days of February 1835, to be used for the protection of the workers and the construction of the new camp

21.

Marshal Clauzel considered marching towards Médéa. His goal was to assist the old Mohamed Ben Hussein, the Bey he had appointed, who had been forced to remain in hiding until then, to finally seize the capital of the Titteri Beylik. A division of approximately 7,000 men, consisting of 5,000 infantry, 1,200 cavalry, two artillery batteries, and five engineering companies, was assembled at Boufarik on March 29, 1836. This division, commanded by General Rapatel, was formed into four small brigades placed under the orders of Generals Desmichels and Acho, and Colonels Königsegg and Hekket. Marshal Clauzel had reserved supreme command of this army corps for himself. The reconnaissance column set out on the morning of March 30, 1836, heading toward Haouch El-Agha. As they passed the

Chiffa, they faced attacks from the Hadjout, followed by skirmishes between the Spahis and the Beni Salah and the inhabitants of Mouzaïa. On March 31, they entered the Mouzaïa Mountains. This ten-day campaign cost 200 men in dead and wounded ²².

Due to the fierce resistance that prevented him from achieving his goal after it confronted him and inflicted some losses, Clauzel contented himself with the following forward posts: the Douéra, Boufarik, and Oulad Yaïch centers ²³.

According to a new plan by Marshal Clauzel, all population centers and strategic points were to be militarily occupied. In accordance with this measure, he ordered the immediate establishment of a camp at the Chiffa to serve as a base for operations for an expedition he intended to undertake on the Titteri River. General Marquis de Brossard left Boufarik on August 17 with a column of approximately 2,000 men to go and construct the Chiffa camp ²⁴.

Marshal Clauzel left for Paris in January 1837, hoping to return soon, it was said; but he was replaced on February 12 by Lieutenant-General Count Denis de Damrémont, who arrived in Algiers on April 3, 1837. The Emir visited the eastern tribes of the Oran province and the tribes of Titteri. His arrival in Médéa caused unrest even among the tribes he commanded. The Arab villages that were under the cannon of Boufarik wanted to secure themselves against the attacks of the Hadjout. There was a danger of triggering a revolt of the Mitidja tribes, and General de Damrémont found the only remedy for this situation in the occupation of Blida. He clearly intended, by this action, to neutralize the effect of Emir Abdelkader's presence in Médéa

and prevent a general defection by separating the eastern tribes from the western tribes ²⁵.

Marshal Valée marched to Blida on May 3, 1838, and captured it, but without occupying it. It was guarded by two camps, one established to the northwest of the city, called the Upper Camp, and the other located to the north, the Lower Camp. These camps were placed under the orders of Marshal De Campo Galvao. Entry into the cities of Koléa and Blida was temporarily prohibited to Europeans. They continued to be administered by the indigenous ruler. This occurred without encountering the slightest resistance ²⁶.

Bugeaud's arrival in Algeria was marked by an existing legacy that mandated a limited occupation of the country, a legacy he could not immediately dismiss. As long as the Arabs, through their raids, obstructed the security and development of the occupation, the question became whether this occupation could be protected by means other than those used by a regular army accustomed to marching on roads and occupying fixed positions. The problem fundamentally concerned the Mitidja region, where the inhabitants of the Hadjout area continued for ten years after the seizure of Algiers to suddenly encounter an isolated army post, a detachment marching on its way, or an unprotected farm, whereupon they would kill, plunder, and quickly flee. During the second government of Minister Thiers, an extraordinary commission, headed by the President of the Council, was tasked with studying the matter, which it undertook seriously ²⁷.

This special commission included two deputies from the military engineering corps: Berthois, who designed the plan, and Chaban-Latour, who championed it. The project gained

some traction in 1840, and during his journey in 1841, Tocqueville was convinced that there was no better or more effective solution for defense against the Arabs ²⁸.

They believed it would be more effective and less costly to use, and that the local people would hesitate greatly before breaching the fence. After four months, an imperial circular recorded the demonstration presented by Berthois on February 2, 1842, before the mixed commission composed of peers and deputies tasked with presenting proposals to the government regarding the occupation of Algeria. The security challenge and the idea of overcoming it involved dividing the plain:

1) Isolating the Hadjout from the Isser region;

2) Joining the Atlas. Remusat observed that the acceptance this plan enjoyed was, in reality, merely the only remaining option. Except for the military engineering officers, no one was enthusiastic about adopting it. Nevertheless, the Duc d'Orléans, Valée, and Bugeaud did not reject it, nor did Lamoricière object. Cubières viewed it with some scorn. Bugeaud's neutrality, inconsistent with his combative nature, can only be explained by his desire not to conflict with two parliamentary officers who enjoyed the King's favor and whom he could rely on when seeking to succeed Valée. He did nothing locally to encourage the successful implementation of the project but instead denounced its ineffectiveness: the barrier is only useful for confronting those who seek plunder and theft, and repelling small detachments of enemy cavalry ²⁹.

It serves to provide security for farms during the day, which is a great benefit in itself. But it does not offer protection when serious matters arise. Instead of employing workers from the

motherland who did not respond to the tempting offers, local labor, both civilian and military, was used to carry out construction work simultaneously in Blida, Koléa, and El Harrach, under poor health conditions and without achieving any positive results.

Bugeaud wrote a letter to a friend to draw the attention of Soult, who offered no resistance, saying: “The troops have better jobs than digging trenches in often dirty places. An army must be prepared for war and another for the walled area.” While the excavation of the barrier was successfully executed in the western area, extending from the sea to the heights of Blida, its completion in the eastern area stalled due to a disagreement over its precise layout, and as soon as the General began to achieve his first victories, it was abandoned. Nevertheless, security in the Mitidja region remained unstable, as occurred when a detachment led by the hero Sergeant Blandan was surrounded and three-quarters of its soldiers annihilated near Béni Mourad by Algerians who outnumbered them tenfold, on April 11, 1842. The military campaign in 1841 showed that fortified camps, like the continuous barrier, constituted a defensive concept of occupation, which the Governor rejected. He affirmed upon his arrival that he would abandon Valée's plan ³⁰.

2- The Algerian Reaction

The reasons for the resistance can be summarized as follows:

The Mitidja inhabitants' rejection of the French occupation that began to threaten them, especially after the fall of Algiers.

The damages inflicted upon the capital's residents by the occupation, including the confiscation of private and public property and the violation of mosques and honor.

The French army's attempt to expand outside Algiers towards the Mitidja Plains, which were rich in agricultural and animal resources.

The rural leaderships united on July 23, 1830, in a meeting at Bordj El Bahri. After speeches and deliberations, it was decided to declare war on the enemy and prevent their expansion onto their land. El-Hadj Ibn Zaamoum was present at the meeting. The meeting also resulted in the rise of morale and the return of hope for liberation, news of which reached the occupied capital, shaking it and causing panic among the French, while inspiring hope and anticipation among the Algerians. In execution of the meeting's resolutions, the rural forces attacked de Bourmont's army during its failed return from Blida and continued fighting until nightfall, right up to the outskirts of the capital. This served as a lesson for the French, who did not venture out of the capital again until the era of Clauzel. Clauzel attempted a quasi-campaign on Blida and Médéa during November 1830, but the consequences were disastrous. The popular forces, numbering around seven thousand warriors from all tribes under the leadership of Ben Zaamoum and driven by the spirit of Jihad instilled by El-Hadj Saadi, attacked the fifty artillerymen sent by Clauzel to fetch ammunition from the capital near Boufarik and annihilated them. The revolutionaries then attacked the French garrison in Blida, which was fortified in the mosque, and nearly wiped it out were it not for a ruse employed by one of the enemy soldiers, who exited through a hole in the wall and attacked the popular forces from the rear. The resistance fighters

believed that Clauzel's army, which was in Médéa, had arrived and that they were caught in a pincer movement, so they withdrew before resuming the assault ³¹.

The launch of the resistance from the rural areas was a natural consequence following the fall of the central government, the emergence of a political vacuum, and the cities' inability to forge a new leadership. New leaders emerged in the countryside from the chiefs of the Aarouch (tribal confederations), such as El-Hadj Sidi Saadi and El-Hadj Mohamed Ibn Zaamoum. It is not surprising that, in most cases, a dual leadership, or spiritual leadership alone, appeared, gradually attempting to combine both roles. The El-Hadj Saadi - Ibn Zaamoum model represents the spirit and the material force ³².

They worked to besiege the enemy, causing famine and soaring food prices. City dignitaries began fleeing to their farms in the countryside. The vegetables, dairy products, and meat of the Mitidja ceased to enter the city, and people longed for a piece of meat, finding it only in the stray cats roaming around them. However, this situation could not last long. The rural leaderships were reassessing their capabilities and uniting their ranks, while the capital's leaders sought a political solution with the French and a military solution against the rural population. On the other hand, the French wanted to attempt to lift the siege, venture into the Mitidja, and reach Blida, the capital of this fertile plain. De Bourmont started this attempt, and Clauzel, who reached Médéa, repeated it. Berthezène also repeated it, and it was during the time of Rovigo that the appalling El Ouffia massacre took place ³³.

In July 1832, a general uprising against the French occupation was prepared. This movement was instigated by the

marabout Sidi Saadi, who had already participated in the previous year's revolt, and El-Hadj Mohamed Ben Zaamoum. The former was responsible for calling those whom the latter was to lead to Jihad. The Commander-in-Chief learned of Sidi Saadi's actions from the Agha of the Arabs as early as August 26. On September 18, the same official informed the Duc de Rovigo of the presence of the alliance leader with some forces in Oued El-Hamiz. The Commander-in-Chief did not wish to rush anything; he considered it better to wait to attack the Arabs until they had gathered all their forces, so that he would know where to strike and eliminate them in one blow. Nevertheless, Agha El-Hadj Muhieddine, who was strongly influenced by the revolution's leader, held out until the end of September. But having grown weary of his resistance, Sidi Saadi and Ben Zaamoum went to Koléa to resolve his hesitation and finalize his decision, returning to Souk Ali, a haouch (farm/hamlet) located 3 kilometers east of Boufarik, the position from which the masses of the uprising gathered. The fighters of all the Mitidja inhabitants united and marched with them. Throughout the end of September, hostilities had already taken a serious turn: the Arabs mainly attacked the reconnaissance forces, and they daily attacked the entrances leading to Haouch Hussein Pacha (the experimental farm) and Bordj El-Harrach, which were the scene of minor battles ³⁴.

Ben Zaamoum's forces attacked the enemy army in the engagement called the Battle of Boufarik on October 2, 1832, primarily with local cavalry that did not withstand them and abandoned, without the slightest hesitation, the infantry soldiers of the sword and spear units, leaving a loss of about a hundred dead. This caused the French to retreat across terrain they knew well, leading the General to continue his withdrawal toward

Algiers. However, Ben Zaamoum's forces surprised the French army by firing again, inflicting further losses on the enemy estimated at seven killed and twelve wounded ³⁵.

Conclusion:

The French forces, led by General de Bourmont, relied on an expansion strategy by organizing a campaign on the city of Blida on July 23, 1830, with the aim of lifting the siege imposed by the Mitidja inhabitants on the colonial army in Algiers. However, the resistance fighters defeated de Bourmont's army and foiled the first French attempt to occupy Blida. French campaigns subsequently followed in succession, targeting strategic areas on the Mitidja Plain such as Blida, Koléa, and Souk Ali, employing methods of intimidation and inducement, such as the Blida massacre—which claimed the lives of many of Blida's inhabitants and was perpetrated against them by the butcher General Clauzel—and the massacre of the El Ouffia tribe at the hands of General the Duc de Rovigo.

Despite these brutal methods and repeated military campaigns, the French were unable to impose their control over the Mitidja Plain until after the Battle of Oued El-Allagh.

The resistance in Mitidja passed through several stages during which the inhabitants confronted the colonial forces in a fierce military resistance for which all segments of the population mobilized, urged by the Sheikhs of the awtan (districts) of Mitidja, who called for coordinating efforts to resist the French and prevent them from expanding within the national territory. Among the most famous resistance leaders in this first phase were Sheikh El-Hadj Sidi Saadi, renowned for his piety, and Mohamed Ben Zaamoum. This initial engagement is considered the first defeat of the French army since the

occupation of Algiers and consequently the first victory achieved by the popular resistance against the French army, leaving a positive impact on mobilization and consolidating the ranks of the resistance.

Footnotes:

¹ Joseph Nil Robin, Notes Historiques Sur La Grande Kabylie de 1830 à 1838 présentation de Alain Mahé, EDITIONS BOUCHENE, Editions Bouchène, 1999, p 43.

² Note regarding the army size discrepancy, p 43.

³ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Adolphe Jourdan, LIBRAIRE-ÉDITEUR, ALGER, 1887, p 14.

⁴ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Blida Récits Selon Légende, La Tradition L'Histoire, Adolphe Jourdan, LIBRAIRE-ÉDITEUR 4 PLACE DU GOUVERNEMENT, 1887, ALGER, p 117.

⁵ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Blida, Op. Cit., p 117.

⁶ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 15.

⁷ Benyoucef Tlemçani, The French Expansion in Algeria 1830-1870, PhD Dissertation in Modern and Contemporary History, University of Algiers 2004-2005, p 49.

⁸ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 15, 16.

⁹ Abderrahmane Ben Mohamed El-Djilali, General History of Algeria, Vol 4, Dar El-Oumma for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 2007, Algiers, p 237.

¹⁰ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 17.

¹¹ Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, The Algerian National Movement, Vol 1, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, Lebanon, 1992, p 120.

- ¹² Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 18, 19.
- ¹³ Joseph Nil Robin, Op. Cit., p 66.
- ¹⁴ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 21.
- ¹⁵ Benyoucef Tlemçani, Op. Cit., p 58.
- ¹⁶ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 23, 24.
- ¹⁷ Benyoucef Tlemçani, Op. Cit., p 58.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p 59.
- ¹⁹ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 82.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p 83.
- ²¹ Ibid., p 85, 86.
- ²² Ibid., p 110.
- ²³ Benyoucef Tlemçani, Op. Cit., p 61.
- ²⁴ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 113.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p 126.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p 151.
- ²⁷ Charles-André Julien, History of Contemporary Algeria: The Conquest and the Beginnings of Colonization 1827-1871, Vol 1, Dar El-Oumma, 2008, p 324.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p 325.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p 326.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p 327.
- ³¹ Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, Op. Cit., p 119.
- ³² Ibid., p 116, 117.
- ³³ Ibid., p 118.
- ³⁴ Colonel Corneille Trumelet, Bou-Farik, Op. Cit., p 19, 20.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p 22.