

Conflicts Among the Leaders of the Algerian Revolution at the Tunisian Rear Base (1955–1957) Through Archival Documents

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Abstract:

The rear military base of the Algerian Revolution in Tunisia played a decisive role in strengthening the armed struggle in Algeria, serving as a strategic hub for arms supplies, logistical support, and military training. It was established by order of the High Command of the National Liberation Army operating from abroad, as evidenced by several archival sources involving figures such as Mohamed Boudiaf, Ahmed Mahsas, and Ahmed Ben Bella. Following this directive, Bachir Chihani, known as Messaoud, initiated the organization and operational setup of the revolutionary base in Tunisia and appointed Saïd Abdelhai as its head.

However, the evolution of the Revolution transformed this base into a site of deep conflict between the internal and external leadership of the Algerian Revolution. This development motivated the present study, which draws on various archival documents obtained from the Archives d'Outre-mer – including correspondences from Bachir Chihani, Ahmed Ben Bella, and Saïd Abdelhai to trace the key developments that occurred at the Tunisian military base between 1955 and 1957. These events had detrimental consequences on the trajectory of the Revolution, particularly evident in the summary trials organized against several revolutionary leaders, including those based in the Eastern Front, the First Wilaya, and southern Tunisia.

Keywords: Algerian Revolution, Tunisia, rear base, National Liberation Army leadership, conflict, execution.

Conflits entre les dirigeants de la révolution algérienne à la base arrière tunisienne (1955-1957) à travers des documents d'archives

Résumé :

La base militaire arrière de la Révolution algérienne en Tunisie a joué un rôle décisif dans le renforcement de la lutte armée en Algérie, servant de plaque tournante stratégique pour l'approvisionnement en armes, le soutien logistique et la formation militaire. Elle a été créée sur ordre du Haut Commandement de l'Armée de libération nationale opérant depuis l'étranger, comme en témoignent plusieurs sources d'archives impliquant des personnalités telles que Mohamed Boudiaf, Ahmed Mahsas et Ahmed Ben Bella. Suite à cette directive, Bachir Chihani, connu sous le nom de Messaoud, a lancé l'organisation et la mise en place opérationnelle de la base révolutionnaire en Tunisie et a nommé Saïd Abdelhai à sa tête.

Cependant, l'évolution de la révolution a transformé cette base en un lieu de conflit profond entre les dirigeants internes et externes de la révolution algérienne. Cette évolution a motivé la présente étude, qui s'appuie sur divers documents d'archives obtenus auprès des Archives d'Outre-mer, notamment des correspondances de Bachir Chihani, Ahmed Ben Bella et Saïd Abdelhai, afin de retracer les principaux événements qui se sont déroulés à la base militaire tunisienne entre 1955 et 1957. Ces événements ont eu des conséquences néfastes sur le cours de la Révolution, particulièrement évidentes dans les procès sommaires organisés contre plusieurs dirigeants révolutionnaires, notamment ceux basés sur le front oriental, dans la première wilaya et dans le sud de la Tunisie.

Mots-clés : *Révolution algérienne, Tunisie, base arrière, direction de l'Armée de libération nationale, conflit, exécution.*

Introduction:

The National Liberation Revolution began on November 1, 1954, under a collective leadership structure designed to avoid the pitfalls of personal leadership that had previously led to divisions within the leadership of the Algerian People's Party. The first initiative taken by the Revolution's founders was to distribute roles and responsibilities in a way that would organize the movement while minimizing personal ambition. Accordingly, the role of the internal leadership was defined as directing military operations and expanding the Revolution geographically, whereas the external leadership was tasked with supplying arms, providing diplomatic support, and managing propaganda efforts—while ensuring coordination between the two spheres to secure the success of the armed struggle.

In line with this organizational structure, the Revolution was launched across five historical zones. The remarkable successes achieved in its early stages can largely be attributed to the adherence to the recommendations and directives issued by the revolutionary leadership. Among these directives was the establishment of a rear base for the Revolution in Tunisia in 1955, ordered by the High Command of the National Liberation Army abroad and implemented by Bachir Chihani. Archival documents indicate that he delegated the responsibility of founding and organizing this base to Saïd Abdelhaï.

The objective of this study in the political history of the Algerian Revolution is to shed light on the causes and consequences of the conflicts that arose among revolutionary leaders over the rear base in Tunisia. It is worth noting that these conflicts have been categorized in the historiography

of the Revolution as power struggles, or what is commonly referred to as rivalry among leaders. Within this context, several questions arise: How was the revolutionary base in Tunisia established? How did competition among Algerian leaders emerge within it? What was the nature of the relationship between the internal leadership and this base? And finally, how did the trajectories of certain revolutionary leaders on site ultimately unfold?

1. Understanding the Causes and Contributing Factors of the Conflict

The issue of conflict constitutes a significant area of scholarly inquiry due to its far-reaching effects and complex dynamics. Political scientists and intellectuals have developed various conceptual frameworks to interpret it. Conflict is often considered an inherent feature of human life, in that each party involved seeks, through everyday interactions, to maximize its own advantage while minimizing the influence of the other. This dynamic can serve to establish a form of equilibrium and stability, potentially reducing the risk of direct confrontation between the opposing sides (Badawi, 1997, p. 41,42).

In general, such competition tends to revolve around the assertion of leadership and the expansion of influence, frequently without regard for the aspirations of supporters or the broader popular base. This pursuit of dominance can sometimes escalate into violence—an outcome that was clearly observable at various stages of the conflicts experienced by the National Liberation Front (FLN) and its leadership.

Historians view conflict as a fundamental criterion for dividing individuals into distinct groups, based on the core issues driving their antagonism. These divisions give rise to

factions with differing visions and approaches, as was the case with the various political parties in colonial-era Algeria (Bouabdallah, 2011, p.39) which were often shaped by ethnic identity, social background, and historical roots. In addition, ideological differences further contributed to these internal fragmentations.

It is important to note that conflict, in its general sense, manifests as a state of divergence and opposition. This concept closely overlaps with that of crisis, which may, in some instances, serve as one of its root causes. Conflict carries multiple meanings; it can be defined as “a dispute between individuals or groups arising from disagreements in perceptions and visions.” The aim is not merely to fulfill specific demands, but also to eliminate rivals—an effort that may expose the system to instability. Such imbalance leads to a clash of interests (Hamwi, 2000, p. 415) resulting from competitive dynamics in which each party seeks to advance its objectives and safeguard its interests using various means and methods.

This competitive behavior triggers a confrontation between the parties, particularly in terms of principles and strategic orientations (Lopez, 1989, p. 20). Thus, conflict is essentially a central element in the interactions that stem from divergent perceptions and goals, often pushing actors to make hasty decisions that may negatively impact the opposing side.

The emergence of conflict is linked to a set of contributing factors: some are intrinsic to the individual, while others pertain to the structural system that imposes its own principles, or to the environment whose specific characteristics foster competition. In some cases, conflict may escalate and

take the form of violence(Khalifa, 1999, p. 173) . Among these factors are:

1.1. The Social Factor:

Understanding the political and social environment in which political forces or an organization operate – whether internally or externally – is of paramount importance (Al-Jouhari ; Al-Khariji, 1996, p. 25) . Indeed, according to certain thinkers, the impact of this environment on conflict is reflected in the emergence of political unrest, which is itself linked to the growing number of individuals within a given group (Khalifa, 1999, p. 174)

For example, colonialism led to profound transformations in the social structure of colonized societies, particularly in Algeria(Turki , 1991, p. 32). This factor thus represents a central element in the outbreak of conflict. Some studies also highlight the link between conflict and human activities(Khalifa, 1999, p. 174), viewing it as a struggle over values, objectives, and means. Moreover, its primary goal lies in the elimination of the competitor.

Class conflict thus emerges as a major cause of political rivalries, particularly in the context of the proletariat's struggle to reclaim its legitimate rights from the bourgeoisie – an important driver behind the eruption of such conflicts (Khalifa, 1999, p. 180). This type of conflict also fostered broader competition within society for control of power and access to key positions.

Harsh social conditions further provide fertile ground for all forms of conflict. In such a context, societal values undergo transformations, and attention shifts away from collective causes toward personal interests and agendas. Within this framework, it is not uncommon to witness the exclusion of less-educated individuals under the pretext that they are

unfit to contribute to political construction. A notable example of this was Abane Ramdane's stance toward certain leaders of the Revolution, whom he dismissed as mere peasants lacking any scientific competence (Khalifa, 1999, p.181)

Others, by contrast, were influenced by Western civilization, seeking to transform reality, reshape modes of thinking, and even alter lifestyles (Khalifa, 1999, p.181) Ferhat Abbas being a prominent example.

This analysis aligns with that of Daniel Drukman, who emphasizes that class conflict and the study of this phenomenon are linked to the interpretation of theories of social evolution and its variables, including perception, a set of values and principles, as well as ethnic and ideological origins in particular (drukman,1993, p. 27). Individuals are an integral part of society and are connected through interactive relationships, that is to say, a process of reciprocal influence, although each group has a system of thought to which it adheres and which it defends.

Thus, divergences in ways of thinking can lead to the emergence of disagreements, which, after developing and under the dominance of the stronger party, naturally transform into centers of conflict (Khalifa, 1999, p184). Personal ideas can therefore be sources of conflict. Moreover, the environment often lacks political cohesion, which leads many individuals to join political (Harbi, Meynier, 2004, p. 17) organizations in order to develop their thinking.

1.2. The Ideological Factor:

Many researchers agree that ideology can draw its intellectual foundations from ideological doctrines, notably Marxism, whose methodology, inherently conflictual, can itself become a deep contradiction that is difficult to man-

age((drukman,1993, p. 35)whether by peaceful means or by the use of force. In this context, ideology becomes a true fuel feeding the flame of conflicts (Khalifa, 1999, p.184) .

From this perspective, Marx linked ideology to class social relations, which tends to limit its scope. Competing ideologies can even emerge within the same class, often connected to centralization and bureaucracy, which reflect the tensions that may arise between leaders and their deputies (Khalifa, 1999, p.193). For this reason, disputes arising from ideological factors are considered particularly serious compared to other causes (drukman,1993, p. 35) .

Thus, the ideological factor plays an important role in triggering conflicts through the intellectual actor who disseminates ideology within society. This role is manifested through two aspects:

1. Gathering a set of disparate ideas into a coherent form in order to oppose or support, which allows for the creation of a doctrine or belief and encourages the opposing party to prepare to confront it.

2. The formation of ideologies that may contradict the values and principles inherent to the individual, which weakens social cohesion and naturally leads to the emergence of conflicts(Khalifa, 1999, p.193) .

From this perspective, historical writings suggest that the emergence of conflicts results from ideological divergences and personal interests between a single party or among a group with differing positions on a given issue or stake(drukman,1993, p. 22). This leads us to assert that ideology is the expression of the experiences and memories of peoples, and that it is not necessarily a tool used to justify the legitimacy of a ruling elite. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that ideology reflects the historical outcome to which con-

flicts within an organization, institution, or even a state have led (Khalifa, 1999, p.194).

Some researchers have attempted to establish a link between the ideological dimension and the way conflict can be related to a social variable (drukmán,1993, p. 31), as it generates contradictions in ideological visions and in the resulting outcomes. These contradictions can sometimes be severe and difficult to manage. Ideological conflicts indeed involve motivations and causes linked to divergences, which most often reside in the distinct convictions and orientations of individuals, whether they concern values or principles.

It appears that conflicts surrounding the political sphere carry multiple orientations incorporating ideological principles(drukmán,1993, p. 31) . In this context, the first party may have a different reference point than the orientations of the second, which leads this clash to generate ideological conflicts. This idea can be illustrated by highlighting that the emergence of disputes over leadership prevented the Algerian Revolution from adopting a program capable of resolving internal problems, especially after the departure of the national coordinator Mohamed Boudiaf, who settled abroad. This contributed to the fragmentation of the revolutionary forces. Furthermore, some regions became mired in internal conflicts, and the situation later spread to border areas (Hamid, 2003, p. 33) .

From another perspective, Ferhat Abbas considers that the Revolution triggered on November 1, 1954, deviated from its natural course. To identify the source of this drift, it is necessary to refer back to the November 1 Declaration as well as the work of the Soummam Congress in August 1956, in order to conclude that the cause of this deviation lies in

the adherence to the Revolution of certain individuals aspiring to power (Abbas, N .d ,p. 135) .

Psychological behaviors and attitudes are among the essential causes of conflicts, as they generate a form of intellectual imbalance. From the psychological perspective, divergences arise due to a lack of adaptation between the expected responses (Al-Safi, 1987, p. 123) . Among the psychological causes contributing to the emergence of conflicts are hatred, jealousy, prejudice against a person, and bias in favor of one side to the detriment of another. For example, Bachir Chihani, deputy to Mostefa Ben Boulaïd in the first historical zone, was eliminated by “Abbas Laghrour” and “Adjel Adjoul,” themselves deputies of Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, out of jealousy, notably because of his youth and the fact that he was a foreigner to the Aurès region.

Moreover, some consider that the selfishness inherent in human nature, as well as personal divergences that are part of fundamental human psychology, are among the triggering factors of conflicts. Added to this is the feeling of frustration experienced by some individuals when their projects or plans fail, compared to the opposing party (drukman,1993, p. 28) that has triumphed over them .

1.3. The Political Factor:

Conflict exerts a considerable influence on political science, insofar as the state or ruling organization, which assumes responsibility for the unity of society, is the entity that oversees the conflict dynamics occurring within or outside its territory. It is clear that the data and motivations of the conflict are the driving elements of the parties involved (Khalifa, 1999, p.185) .

Among the structures that have dominated political life and caused the emergence of conflicts are the rise of political

parties seeking to seize power, despite their diverse social backgrounds. This evident rivalry between parties has contributed to establishing an intense climate of confrontation. Indeed, a party can only achieve its objectives by either gaining leadership, on the one hand, or by allying with certain other parties to guarantee its interests, on the other hand, or by obtaining popular support (Khalifa, 1999, p. 185,186).

It should be emphasized that political parties carry the demands of the people to the authority holding decision-making power, and the divergence of these demands has made them a source of conflict. Applying this reality to the case of political parties in Algeria, we observe that some of them have exerted a predominant influence on the political scene, such as the Algerian People's Party. This dominance is notably explained by the massive support from the popular base for its leader, Messali Hadj, who was perceived as a charismatic figure.

It seems that these political parties attempted to ease the internal tensions opposing them by seeking to create a unified political entity through what is called political participation, with the aim of taking part in power management. This approach aimed to establish unity but failed, as was the case with the February 1943 Declaration, considered an attempt by Algerian parties to achieve unity. Political participation appears as a means that can lead to political stability, although conflicts clearly manifest during elections, meetings, encounters, conferences, and in the press. However, they tend to diminish thanks to a relaxation in relations and the adoption of moderate policies. Sometimes, however (Khalifa, 1999, p.188, 189), these conflicts can escalate to the use of force.

On the other hand, some writings argue that internal conflict spills over by provoking external conflict, as groups seeking to preserve their entity internally may, in doing so, become an important factor in triggering external conflict. One must also not forget the role of colonialism in fueling conflicts (Saadallah, 1992, p.61) , as exemplified by the Coordination and Execution Committee, which sought to preserve its influence and leadership and aimed to subject all historical zones to its decisions, based on the principle that, being present internally, it had direct knowledge of what was happening on the ground.

Within this framework, some studies strive to clarify the nature of the relationship between internal and external conflict, to demonstrate their interconnection, and to highlight their strengths and weaknesses, while emphasizing the direct and indirect effects in the outbreak of conflict. Very often, internal events and circumstances influence the evolution of external conflict (Khalifa, 1999, p.207, 208).

Among the criteria and indicators adopted by researchers to study the relationship between internal and external aspects in the context of conflict are the phenomena of assassinations, internal crises, the spread of violence and physical eliminations, the dismissal and demotion of certain officials within the leadership, as well as the exclusion of certain actors ((Khalifa, 1999,p. 221).

This was the case, for example, with Saïd Abdelhai within the rear base of the Revolution in Tunisia, whom the Coordination and Execution Committee attempted to sideline.

All of these indicators contribute to the formation of internal conflict and the emergence of its repercussions at the external level.

The revolutionary project embodied by the revolutionary elite itself constitutes a concept expressing conflict, insofar as

some parties rejected this project under various pretexts. The reason lies in the principle of divergent interests between certain factions. However, it appears that this project draws its legitimacy from the active social categories that played a decisive role in triggering the revolution, those designated as the “first revolutionary category” (Sheikh, 2003, p.14)

When speaking about conflict during the Liberation Revolution, it is observed that, in the initial phase, martyrdom was, for the revolution’s initiators, closer and more honorable than occupying important positions within the ruling institutions. At that time, there was no personal ambition for power (Khaither, 2006, p. 325) However, a turning point began to affect the National Liberation Front (FLN) with the inclusion of political party leaders, which led some to desire to consolidate and strengthen their positions in order to remain at the head of both political and military leadership bodies, and to prevent latecomers from accessing higher posts.

Some Algerian writings agree on an important point: this conflict between the leaders of the Algerian Revolution finds its roots in a period prior to the outbreak of the armed struggle. On this subject, Abdelhamid Mehri states: “The Front of Liberation today is hindered and filled with conspiracies that accumulate on its historical capital and its precious experience in a struggle tossed about by passions and political calculations...” (Zebihah, 2009, p. 97) This observation reveals a similarity between past conflicts, notably those that marked the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD) between 1953 and 1954, opposing Messali Hadj to members of the central committee, and the internal tensions within the FLN during the Revolution.

It is clear that the attempt to impose legitimacy was the primary cause of these divergences, which could have been resolved if the conflicting parties had chosen to commit to respecting fundamental rules in the name of the general interest. However, this possibility depends on the context and conditions specific to the conflict, as well as the severity of the crisis – factors that determine the prospects of confrontation (Sayel Al-Khatabiya, 2010, p. 190) . This means that the conflict could target either the form of the system or its content. From this, it is possible to assert that the essence of the struggles that marked the Algerian Revolution lies in the race and aspiration for leadership of the revolutionary movement.

2. Historical Context of the Creation of the Rear Base of the Algerian Revolution in Tunisia:

2.1. Context of the Creation of the Revolutionary Base Core in Tunisia:

Numerous archival documents indicate that Bachir Chihani, as the representative of Mostefa Ben Boulaïd and responsible for the revolutionary administration in the Aurès region¹, became aware of the importance of the eastern borders to strengthen the revolution and establish a military² base serving as a center for armament and training. In this context, in 1955, he tasked Saïd Abdelhai with creating an organizational base in Tunisia, in coordination with the high command of the National Liberation Army abroad, notably led by Mohamed Boudiaf, Ahmed Mahsas, and Ahmed Ben

¹ S.H.D, Vincennes, Box 1H 1944/D3, Intelligence Bulletin, 1955

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Intelligence Note – Algerian Fellaghas, 1955

Bella¹, the latter being present in Tripoli (Abbas , 2009, p. 76, 77) at the time to coordinate with Saïd Abdelhai.

Saïd Abdelhai held a predominant position at the border, overseeing supply and armament depots², which meant he represented the revolutionary authority and leadership in Tunisia following his appointment by Ahmed Ben Bella³. He was in constant contact with the high command of the National Liberation Army based abroad, (Ouadi, 2020, p. 417) with whom he coordinated the operations for introducing weapons into the military operation zones inside the country.

What can be deduced from the data contained in the archival documents is that Saïd Abdelhai was the head of the revolutionary administration at the rear base in Tunisia⁴, carrying out the instructions of Ahmed Ben Bella⁵. He used several pseudonyms, including “Al-Soufi” and “Tidjani,”⁶ which means that this rear base in Tunisia, led by Saïd Abdelhai, coordinated its actions with the Aurès⁷ administration under the leadership of Bachir Chihani.

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/5Q/237, Cipher Telegram, 1955.

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Translation of the Main Passages of a Typewritten Letter in Arabic Addressed on November 5, 1955 by Abdelhai A to Sidi Cheikh (Chihani), 1955.

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, Carton 9886/63, Said known as Tijani Abdelhai, Intelligence Note, 1956

⁴ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Translation of the Main Passages of a Typewritten Letter in Arabic Addressed on November 5, 1955 by Abdelhai A to Sidi Cheikh (Chihani), 1955.

⁵ S.H.D –Vincennes, (n.d) Carton 1H 1698, Files on External Leaders (Ben Bella, Tebib, Mahsas).

⁶ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, Carton 9886/63, Said known as Tijani Abdelhai, Intelligence Note, 1956

⁷ S.H.D, Vincennes, Box 1H 1944/D3, Intelligence Bulletin, 1955

This is confirmed by a series of letters bearing the seal of this leadership under the name "Commander of the Supreme Administration of the Aurès."¹ From this data, it appears that Saïd Abdelhai succeeded in establishing a link between the interior and the exterior by forming and structuring a revolutionary system within the Algerian rear military base in Tunisia², as also emphasized by Ahmed Mahsas in his testimony.

Along the same lines, Ahmed Mahsas, as a leading member of the National Liberation Army abroad³, was tasked in 1955 with resolving certain disputes between the Nemmencha group⁴ and the border community. This mission was entrusted to him in Tunisia to address gaps in logistical support for the revolution and to strengthen cooperation with the Tunisian military wing led by Tahar Lassoud, within the framework of the common Maghreb struggle⁵.

It is worth noting that the responsibility for supplying the revolution was assigned to Ahmed Ben Bella, based in Cairo⁶ and sometimes in Tripoli. As for Ali Mahsas, he was tasked in Tripoli with negotiating the introduction of weapons into the revolutionary zones inside the country via the eastern

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Letter from Ahmed Ben Bella to Chihani Bachir, 1955.

²FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Translation of the Main Passages of a Typewritten Letter in Arabic Addressed on November 5, 1955 by Abdelhai A to Sidi Cheikh (Chihani), 1955.

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Translation of the Main Passages of a Typewritten Letter in Arabic Addressed on November 5, 1955 by Abdelhai A to Sidi Cheikh (Chihani), 1955.

⁴ S.H.D -Vincennes, (n.d) Carton 1H 1698, Files on External Leaders (Ben Bella, Tebib, Mahsas).

⁵ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Tripolitania, undated

⁶ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/5Q/237, Cipher Telegram, 1955

borders¹. He took charge of this mission upon his departure for Cairo², following Ahmed Ben Bella's call.

In the same context, some studies indicate that Ahmed Ben Bella informed Ahmed Mahsas of the necessity to create a logistical base in eastern Algeria. However, Hocine Aït Ahmed expressed surprise at this decision, which was made without consulting the external delegation based in Cairo. In response, Aït Ahmed also requested clarification about the identity of Saïd Turki³, who was the representative of the National Liberation Front in Tripoli and a member of the Common Maghreb Liberation Army⁴. Ahmed Ben Bella informed him, however, that Saïd Turki had been eliminated, without providing further details on the matter (Courrière, 1969, P. 260).

It should also be noted that documents confirm that the base in Tunisia was one of the strategic rear bases for arming the Algerian revolution. For this reason, on February 18, 1955, Ahmed Ben Bella supported it by sending students to the administration of the Aurès to reinforce its fighters⁵, among whom were Saïd Abdelhai and Abdelkrim Hali.

In reality, the leaders of the Algerian revolution abroad were sympathizers of the Tunisian opposition led by Saleh Ben Youssef and its military wing led by Tahar Lassoud. They insisted on continuing the armed struggle in southern Tunisia and maintaining Maghreb coordination with the

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, F.L.N Administration A3, undated.

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Intelligence Summary During Operation Timgad, 1955.

³ S.H.D, Vincennes, Box 1H 1944/D3, Intelligence Bulletin, 1955.

⁴FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/5Q/237, Cipher Telegram, 1955

⁵ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/5Q/237, Intelligence Note, 1955

leaders of the Algerian revolution ¹until the full independence of the Maghreb was achieved (Meynier, 2003, p .197) especially after Habib Bourguiba signed the internal autonomy agreement in 1955.

The situation experienced by the leadership of the revolutionary administration in Tunisia became difficult starting in September 1956 due to pressure exerted by the Tunisian authorities under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba (Soufi, 2006, p. 196). It appears that Saïd Abdelhai and the student Larbi Qamoudi ²were collaborators of Saleh Ben Youssef's supporters since the time of Bachir Chihani, owing to the convergence of their visions, strategies, and means of action.

It is noted that the Tunisian path toward negotiations adopted by Habib Bourguiba with France was the cause that pushed the Benyoussefist faction to take up arms in November 1955 under the leadership of Saleh Ben Youssef. On this basis, some communications were initiated between the three Maghreb countries—Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco—with the support of Egypt³, with the aim of launching the idea of creating a Maghreb Liberation Army⁴ to unify the struggle. This led to a meeting on January 28, 1956, bringing together the external leadership and Saïd Abdelhai's group, where it was decided to create a unified leadership for the Maghreb liberation armies and to commit to continuing the revolution until the liberation of the Maghreb.

¹ Tunisian National Archives, Tunis, Reference: FPC-E-0550-0035-0018, Youssefist Crisis, 1955

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Rebel Band Souafa in Tunisia, 1956.

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, Carton 9886/63, Saïd known as Tijani Abdelhai, Intelligence Note, 1956

⁴ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/5Q/237, North African Commandos, 1955.

However, according to some testimonies, these movements seemed to have displeased Habib Bourguiba (Al-Dheeb, 1990, p p. 164, 165).

On the other hand, Abdelkrim Hali played an important role alongside Saïd Abdelhai at the base in Tunis, where he helped establish a strong system. The latter succeeded in establishing himself as the representative of the Army and the National Liberation Front until mid-1956, based on the legitimacy granted by his appointment in 1955¹, a decision authorized by the revolutionary regime since the time of Bachir Chihani.

2.2. The First Signs of Divergence at the Rear Base in Tunis in 1956:

The achievement of internal autonomy by Tunisia was part of France's attempt to abort the formation of a common Maghreb front. Thus, France granted Tunisia political independence on March 20, 1956. During this period, Habib Bourguiba sought to eliminate the Youssefist opposition as well as all elements supporting it among Algerian leaders², notably the leaders of the first region and the student Taleb Larbi Qamoudi in southern Tunisia³, who had established his headquarters in Redeyef.

Before the Soummam Congress held on August 20, 1956, Aban Ramadhan sent Hamed Arouabhia and Aït Hassan to the rear base in Tunis on May 12, 1956, where they met Saïd

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Letter from Ahmed Ben Bella to Chihani Bachir, 1955.

² S.H.D, Vincennes, Box 1H 1944/D3, Intelligence Bulletin, 1955.

³ S.H.D, Vincennes, GR 1H 1698, Conflicts and Problems in Wilaya I, 1957

Abdelhai, the official representative of the revolution¹. They agreed to represent the revolution before the Tunisian authorities. This visit by Hamed Arouabhia was apparently intended to take stock of the situation at this base and to report to the new leadership led by Aban Ramadhan, who was closely monitoring the organization and influence of Saïd Abdelhai in Tunis.

The report presented by Hamed Arouabhia to the leadership in Algiers prompted Aban Ramadhan to take swift action before the Soummam Congress. He then issued a decision appointing Hamed Arouabhia as the representative of the National Liberation Front and Army in Tunis, accompanied by Aït Hassan². This decision seems to have been part of an attempt to oust Saïd Abdelhai from his position at the base in Tunis and to appoint new members loyal to the internal leadership (Hefdhallah, 2021, p. 292) .

We believe that the authority of Saïd Abdelhai and his group began to decline due to the circumstances Tunisia experienced following Habib Bourguiba's successful establishment of his authority starting in March 1956, which led to the spread of chaos—a consequence of the weakness of the Ben Youssef faction allied with Saïd Abdelhai³. All these facts and developments contributed to the emergence of conflicts not only within the rear base in Tunis but also among the leaders of the first region, as well as to the attempt by the Nemmencha region to separate as early as June⁴. For this

¹ S.H.D, Vincennes, GR 1H 1698, National Liberation Front (FLN), 1956

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 91/1F/280, Intelligence Note, undated

³ ANOM. (1956). *Tunis* [Activity note]. 93/146

⁴ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, GGA 11 CAB 57, Intelligence Summary on the Aurès-Nementcha Region, 1956.

reason, efforts were made at the revolutionary base in Tunis to resolve internal ¹disputes and avoid divisions.

Moreover, the archival document relating to Saïd Abdelhai, dated December 1956, lists all the parties that entered into conflict with him, beginning with the regime of Habib Bourguiba, then the internal leadership represented by Aban Ramadhan, who tried to remove him from managing the Algerian revolution in Tunis, and finally the conflict with the leaders of Nemmencha, who supported Abbes Laghrour².

The arrival of Hamed Arouabhia in Tunisia in May 1956 apparently raised concerns among Saïd Abdelhai and his group regarding Arouabhia's new mission at the rear base in Tunis, especially after they were informed that the formation of the Front's core at the start of the revolution had taken place without them, and that their continued presence at this base was refused (Abbas, 2004, p. 293).

Following the disputes between Saïd Abdelhai and Aban Ramadhan's emissaries, and to avoid an escalation to the use of force, a committee was formed composed of Abdelhai and his two deputies, Arouabhia and Aït Hassan, the latter being sent to Cairo to coordinate with the external delegation. However, Ahmed Ben Bella did not approve these activities, fearing that this base would slip from his control³. He then encouraged Abdelhai to oppose Aban Ramadhan's representatives, which led to the arrest of Cheikh Hamed

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Dissension Within Rebel Bands, 1956

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, Carton 9886/63, Saïd known as Tijani Abdelhai, Intelligence Note, 1956

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, F.L.N Administration A3, undated.

Arouabhia and several supporters of the Coordination and Execution Committee.

In this context, the moudjahid Arzeki Basta explained in his testimony that, since the beginning of the revolution, Ahmed Ben Bella had coordinated the management of Tunis¹ with Saïd Abdelhai. However, developments in the revolution led him to change his policy of support for the latter. Evidence of this is that he ordered Ahmed Mahsas to go to Tunis to remove Saïd Abdelhai from the rear base of the Algerian revolution and to implement the orders of the Coordination and Execution Committee (Arzeki Basta, 2009, p. 370) .

However, Ahmed Mahsas denied this accusation, asserting that his actions in Tunis aimed to strengthen Abdelhai in his functions (Zouzou, 2019, p 490) . Faced with this situation, the Coordination and Execution Committee tried to address the internal crisis by engaging in contacts with Ben Bella from prison, through the lawyer Ahmed Boumendjel, in order to convince Ahmed Mahsas to return to the system and accept the decisions of the Soummam Congress.

In response to this situation, Aban Ramadhan continued to seek the intervention of the Tunisian authorities to restore order. These authorities succeeded in arresting Saïd Abdelhai and his group². Thus, the struggle for control of the rear base in Tunis reached its peak, exacerbated by the conflict between Salah Ben Youssef and Habib Bourguiba, which intensified the rivalry between the internal group led by Aban Ramadhan and the Tunisian administration headed by Saïd Abdelhai.

¹ S.H.D, Vincennes, Box 1H 1944/D3, Intelligence Bulletin, 1955

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, F.L.N Administration A3, undated.

3. New Developments within the Rear Base of the Algerian Revolution in Tunisia:

The rear base of the Algerian revolution in Tunisia experienced a major crisis as a result of serious events that occurred among the leaders of the Aurès, the Nemmencha, the Swafa community, as well as the Coordination and Execution Committee—all present in Tunisia for various reasons. These events had a significant impact on this military base.

3.1. New Appointments by the Coordination and Execution Committee in Tunisia:

The first measure taken by the Coordination and Execution Committee, following the kidnapping of four leaders in October 1956, was to expedite the appointment of Mohamed El Amine Debaghine as president of the external delegation in Cairo, in order to control the difficult situation that could arise after the Soummam Congress¹ and the opposition to its decisions by certain parties who did not participate in the congress for unknown reasons, but which were interpreted as an attempt at exclusion.

During this period, conflicts arose within the First Region, marked by the decision of the Nemmencha group to separate from the Aurès², which caused the conflict to shift toward the Tébessa region. Consequently, attempts were made to seek solutions between the two conflicting parties, notably through Ahmed Mahsas being invited to organize a meeting in Tunis³. At this meeting, he declared that "the revolution continues and will not stop" following the kid-

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 91/1F/257, Intelligence Note, 1956.

² S.H.D, Vincennes, Box 1H 1698, Intelligence File, 1956

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Meeting of Rebel Leaders in Tunis, 1956

napping of the four leaders—a statement that displeased Abane Ramdane,¹ who later accused Ahmed Mahsas in a letter of attempting to present himself as the leader of the revolution.

Although Ahmed Mahsas announced during this meeting that responsibilities would be handed over to Amar Ouamrane², the latter was indeed appointed as the new head of supply and armament. However, some archives indicate that several local leaders, such as Lazhar Cheriet, refused this appointment. Nevertheless, the Coordination and Execution Commission declared that it was responsible for guiding and leading the revolution³ and held the legitimacy to make appointments and exclusions, as it is one of the revolutionary institutions recognized by the Soummam Congress.

The appointment of Amar Ouamrane by Abane Ramdane in early December 1956 as head of armament and supply in Tunisia⁴ was part of resolving the dispute with Ahmed Mahsas and an attempt to eliminate his opposition to the Soummam Congress, which he considered a deviation from the November 1st Charter due to the representation status and the non-involvement of all regions in this congress⁵. For this reason, he encouraged certain interior regions, such as Wilaya I and the Eastern Base, while appointing Ammar

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, Archive of Correspondence Sent by the Executive Committee of Wilaya No. 2 to the C.C.E and to the F.L.N Delegation in Tunis, 1957.

² ANOM. (1956). Intelligence note. 91/1F/280.

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, Carton 9886/63, Said known as Tijani Abdelhai, Intelligence Note, 1956.

⁴ S.H.D, Vincennes, GR 1H 1698, National Liberation Front (FLN), 1956

⁵ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Transfer of Abane Ramdane to the C.C.E, 1956.

Benaouda and Ibrahim Mazhoudi to important positions within the rear base in Tunisia¹. It appears that the objective of these new appointments by the Coordination and Execution Commission was to strengthen Amar Ouamrane's work and extend the influence of this executive commission.

However, some argue that Abane Ramdane's orders to Ouamrane were limited to eliminating elements opposed to the Congress, particularly Ahmed Mahsas, and to compel the border regions to recognize the decisions of the Soummam Congress as well as the authority of the Coordination and Execution Commission . It should be noted, however, that certain factors facilitated Amar Ouamrane's task in his new role, notably the unification of Wilaya I under the authority of Mahmoud Cherif starting from April 1957(Ould El Hocine, 2009, p. 15) . Despite strong opposition to his appointment and a propaganda campaign portraying him as supported by the leadership of the Coordination and Execution Commission, he was installed at the head of Wilaya I and established his headquarters at the rear base in Tunisia².

It should be noted that Amar Ouamrane's efforts yielded the expected results by reorganizing the leadership structures in the Aurès-Nemmencha region in 1957, as he succeeded in reaching an agreement among the local leaders, to the detriment of Omar Ben Boulaid, who was removed from Wilaya I(zouzou, 2019, p.85) . The appointment of Mahmoud Cherif came following a clever proposal by

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, F.L.N Administration A3, undated.

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, New Organization of Rebel Command Following the Massive Return of Rebel Bands from Tunisia, 1957.

Louardi Guetal to Ibrahim Mazhoudi to convince the Nemmencha delegation, aiming to resolve internal conflicts and prevent division. Furthermore, Lakhdar Benttabal noted in his memoirs that “Ouamrane” himself made the decision to appoint Mahmoud Cherif (Benttabal, 2022, p. 10,11) as soon as he assumed responsibility for arms supply in Tunisia.

Along the same lines, Mahmoud Cherif succeeded in organizing Wilaya I in coordination with Ouamrane and his assistants, Ben Mostefa Benaouda (known as Si Amar) and Brahim Mezhoudi¹, as well as structuring the Nemmencha region. He also mobilized a group of local leaders to help unify the Tébessa and border regions and consolidate the authority of the Coordination and Execution Commission², which became the main decision-making body, particularly in the Nemmencha areas. Additionally, he compelled his chief, Lazhar Cheriet, to surrender to the Tunisian authorities on May 13, 1957 (Benyahia, 1988, p. 61). Moreover, Mes-saoud Aissi³, who also demanded the separation of the National Liberation Front leadership in Tunisia, was arrested⁴.

Furthermore, in order to gain the support of Habib Bourguiba’s regime, Amar Ouamrane reached an agreement with him in February 1957 to pursue elements opposed to the authority of the Coordination and Execution Commission, such as the group of Saïd Abdelhai, who was allied with Salah Ben Youssef⁵. This move seems to have convinced Bourguiba to recognize Ouamrane as the Commission’s representa-

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Activities of Rebel Leaders – Rest Leave in Tunisia, undated.

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, F.L.N Activity in Tunis, 1957.

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Constantes Message, 1956.

⁴ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Intelligence Bulletin, 1957.

⁵ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, Carton 9886/63, Said known as Tijani Abdelhai, Intelligence Note, 1956

tive, due to his conviction of the necessity to support the legitimacy represented by this body.

Among Amar Ouamrane's achievements was the holding of an important meeting with Habib Bourguiba, in the presence of the head of the external delegation, Mohamed El Amine Debaghine, and si Ahmed Ali Mahsas. The latter received a message from the five detainees containing instructions ordering him to comply with the directives of the Coordination and Execution Commission¹.

It can be concluded that the appointment of Amar Ouamrane as the military leader at the rear base of the Algerian revolution in Tunisia proved fruitful, as he sought to carry out the orders of the Coordination and Execution Commission at this base by sidelining the leaders appointed during the initial phase of the revolution, notably Saïd Abdelhai. This period was also marked by the formation of new alliances with Habib Bourguiba aimed at eliminatioopponents to the Soumoummam Congress.

3.2. The Confrontation Between the Coordination and Execution Committee and Ahmed Mahsas in Tunis:

Among the important appointments made by the Coordination and Execution Committee in Tunis after the Soummam Congress was the nomination of Commander Ben Mostefa Ben Aouda in 1957 as head of the armament department in Tunis, succeeding Ahmed Ben Bella. However, this appointment did not fully satisfy Ahmed Mahsas²,

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Meeting of Rebel Leaders in Tunis, 1956

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, Archive of Correspondence Sent by the Executive Committee of Wilaya No. 2 to the C.C.E and to the F.L.N Delegation in Tunis, 1957.

who had been responsible in Tunis during the first phase of the revolution.

In the same vein, Ahmed Mahsas emphasized that the main objective of his opposition, as well as the encouragement of certain leaders in the eastern regions, was to nullify the Soummam Congress document, as it had excluded some historic leaders from its political and military leadership bodies¹. Following this, he established contacts with fighters from the interior regions and the Tunis base and proclaimed himself the successor to Ahmed Ben Bella² as a member of the leadership of the National Liberation Army (Al-Dheeb, 1990, p.290) , based on a letter of appointment he had received prior to the airplane abduction.

That is why he tried to convince the Tunisians and Egyptians that he spoke on behalf of Ahmed Ben Bella, promoting the idea that the Congress had strayed from the path of the revolution. It seems that the crisis triggered by the Soummam Congress had negative repercussions, notably by attracting the eastern regions to Ahmed Mahsas's side, as they did not recognize the decisions or principles of the Congress due to the absence of representatives from certain interior regions and some leaders from abroad.

In the letter from Lakhdar Benttabal addressed to Ahmed Mahsas in December 1956, there is a critique directed at Mahsas, attacking the arguments he adopted against the Soummam Congress³. One can infer from this the negative

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, Archive of Correspondence Sent by the Executive Committee of Wilaya No. 2 to the C.C.E and to the F.L.N Delegation in Tunis, 1957.

² S.H.D, Vincennes, Box 1H 1944/D3, Intelligence Bulletin, 1955.

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, Archive of Correspondence Sent by the Executive Committee of Wilaya No. 2 to the C.C.E and to the F.L.N Delegation in Tunis, 1957.

impact of this opposition on the chaos that occurred in the First Wilaya and at the border¹. From his point of view, it must be recognized that the Soummam Congress, with its national orientation, made its decisions carefully, taking into account the internal developments within the military zones. This means that the Congress had a clear vision of the stage reached during the two years since the start of the revolution, as well as the necessity to enter a new phase called the organization phase (Harbi & Meynier, 2004, p. 465) .

Within the framework of the opposition adopted by Ahmed Mahsas, the Committee of Coordination and Execution tried to manage and contain the internal crisis by establishing contacts with Ahmed Ben Bella, who was then imprisoned, in order to convince Mahsas to return to the system and accept the decisions of the Soummam Congress². At the same time, Larbi Ben M'hidi attempted to resolve the situation by proposing the integration of Mahsas into the list of the National Council of the Revolution, as indicated in his letter dated 8 September 1956³. However, Ouamrane was sent to address these conflicting issues at the rear base of the revolution in Tunis. This supply officer met with Commander Kaci and Mahsas, the latter himself announcing the official transfer of responsibilities to Ouamrane⁴.

¹ S.H.D, Vincennes, GR 1H 1698, Conflicts and Problems of Wilaya I, 1957.

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, F.L.N Administration A3, undated

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, Letter from Larbi Ben M'hidi, 1957

⁴ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Transfer of Abane Ramdane to the C.C.E, 1956.

It appears that this concession by Mahsas was merely a maneuver to escape the emissaries of the Committee of Coordination and Execution easily. Indeed, as soon as this happened, he established contacts with the leaders of the Eastern Base¹. However, Amar Ouamrane viewed this as an attempt by Mahsas to form an opposition system to compete with the revolution, and therefore gave the order to arrest Mahsas in June 1957. Nevertheless, Mahsas managed to escape to Germany.

On the other hand, Lakhdar Benttobal and Mohmmedi Saïd expressed their willingness to send soldiers to the border to eliminate any opposition hindering the passage of weapons through the rear base of the revolution in Tunis, which amounts to an attempt to counter Mahsas's opposition (Harbi & Meynier, 2004, p. 341). These positions clearly reflect the fear of the repercussions of this opposition on the border and its impact on the introduction of arms.

Based on the above, the appointment of "Ouamrane" as the head of the Tunis base and the removal of Ahmed Mahsas established a conviction among the leaders of the first Wilaya centered on the perceived abandonment of "Ahmed Mahsas" towards them. The proof of this is the handing over of the Front's base in Tunis to the representatives of the Committee of Coordination and Execution, which constitutes a recognition of its absolute legitimacy over the revolution.

It is also worth noting that after the purge of opponents at the rear base in Tunis, conditions began to improve, as evidenced by the resumption of active arms convoys on the Eastern border (Al-Askari, 2019, p. 71) . To close the case of

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, Letter from Larbi Ben M'hidi, 1957

Ahmed Mahsas, Arzaki Basta was sent to Germany to eliminate Mahsas, but this attempt failed because he had informed Mahsas of Ouamrane's orders to kill him.

In a letter addressed by Larbi Ben M'hidi to the imprisoned leaders in France in January 1957, he criticized the negative attitude adopted by Mahsas in Tunis, as the latter had refused to recognize the decisions of the Soummam Congress and ignored the authority of the Committee of Coordination and Execution (Harbi & Meynier, 2004, p. 340). He also accused him of conspiring against this committee following the imprisonment of (Doum, 2013, p. 116) Ahmed Ben Bella.

3.3. The Executions of Wilaya 1 Leaders at the Rear Base in Tunis:

The arrival of the Committee of Coordination and Execution in Tunisia in 1957 marked a significant moment, signaling the entry of the Algerian political leadership into the country as the highest politico-military authority of the Algerian revolution. At this rear base of the revolution in Tunis, several developments occurred, characterized by an agreement between the Committee of Coordination and Execution and the Tunisian authorities. However, this agreement also reflected a shift in the balance of power in favor of Abane Ramdane and the Committee of Coordination, to the detriment of the group of Ahmed Ben Bella, Ahmed Mahsas, and the Aurès region.

Numerous testimonies indicate that the executions of revolutionary leaders in Tunis are considered among the revolutionary errors, as these leaders were summarily judged, particularly those from the Aurès, Nemmencha, and Sawafa groups. Thus, Tunisia (Hamrouchi, 2023, p. 64) became the

scene of these executions. In this context, Lakhdar Benttobal briefly mentioned that the internal conflict experienced by Wilaya 1 had a significant impact on the rear base in Tunis (Benttobal, 2022, p. 11) .

On the other hand, the martyrdom of Bachir Chihani marked an important stage for the arrival of Abbas Laghrour to the high leadership of the revolution in the Aurès. However, this plan was abandoned due to messages he received. The first message came from Bachir Ourtani from the Tébessa region, informing him of the difficulty in imposing his authority there, due to the emergence of opposition from Lazhar Cheriet, who entered Tunisia on March, 1957¹. The second message came from Ahmed Mahsas, who asked him to prepare to receive arms via Tripoli ².

The internal conflict in the Aurès-Namamcha region had reached its peak, which is why all the local leaders were summoned to a meeting whose apparent purpose was to reconcile the conflicting parties. This meeting, held in Lancia in September 1956, allowed the Tunisian authorities to intervene and support the Coordination and Execution Committee. However, the meeting ended with the arrest of the group of Abbas Laghrour and Saïd Abdelhai, under the pretext that it was ordered by the high leadership of the Revolutionary Council³.

The French report dated December 26, 1956, mentions that Saïd Abdelhai had attended and participated in the settling of scores at Matildville, Tunisia, on September 18, after

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/149, New Organization of Rebel Command Following the Massive Return of Rebel Bands from Tunisia, 1957

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Porte Message, 1957.

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Intelligence Bulletin, 1957

which he was arrested. The report suggests two hypotheses regarding his fate: he was either executed by firing squad or held in prison by the Tunisian authorities¹.

As part of this crisis, the Coordination and Execution Committee sent emissaries to resolve the conflicts between the leaders of Aurès-Namamcha. They held a meeting under the leadership of Abbes Laghrour at the end of 1956 in Tunis. He was accused of having shot the leaders of Namamcha, which served as a pretext for his arrest by the Tunisian authorities on Bourguiba's orders². He was handed over to the Coordination and Execution Committee, which detained him along with several leaders of the first wilaya, including Lazhar Cheriet and Saïd Abdelhai (Hamrouchi, 2023, p. 64)

Some accounts and writings agree that the real reasons for the execution of the leaders of the first wilaya were their opposition to the decisions of the Soummam Congress. Despite the Committee's attempts to neutralize the groups of Abbas Laghrour, Adjoul Adjoul, and the Namamcha faction, the committee nevertheless appointed Mahmoud Cherif as commander of the Namamcha region in December 1956³, and then of the first wilaya in early April 1957. However, in his memoirs, Lakhdar Banttobal acknowledges that the appointment of Mahmoud Cherif as head of the first wilaya was a grave mistake against the original leaders who played a role in the outbreak of the revolution (Banttobal, 2022, p. 11) .

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, Carton 9886/63, Saïd known as Tijani Abdelhai, Intelligence Note, 1956

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Tunis, 1956.

³ S.H.D, Vincennes, GR 1H 1698, National Liberation Front (FLN), 1956.

Some French archives dated March 1957 indicate that Abbas Laghrour was held in Tunisia and threatened with execution by Colonel Amirouche and Commander Kaci¹. Other documents mention the arrest of Abbas Laghrour and Saïd Abdelhai, known as "Tidjani," by the Tunisian authorities in November 1956, followed by their handover to the National Liberation Front on April 20, 1957². This means that the arrest of the leaders of the military base in Tunis and the leaders of the first wilaya was carried out in cooperation and coordination between the Tunisian authorities and the Coordination and Execution Committee.

It appears that the arrest operation was planned, involving Tunisian forces as well as Ammar Ouamrane, representative of the Coordination and Execution Committee. The arrest campaign began on March 20, 1957, in the Tunisian capital and targeted the Aurès groups as well as the group of Saïd Abdelhai. Additionally, Tunisian guard units in the south arrested Taleb Arabi's group in May 1957, and Mahmoud Cherif was responsible for arresting the Namemcha group. If one looks for the reason behind the support from the Tunisian authorities, it may be linked to their desire to get rid of leaders loyal to Ahmed Ben Bella and Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Testimonies report that the trial was held in one of the centers of the Eastern base supervised by Amara Laskri on July 21 and 22, 1957. The court was composed of Abdallah Benttobal as president, Ammar Benaouda as vice-president, Amara Laskri as a member, and Mahmoud Cherif as the public prosecutor. The accused were interrogated, and thirteen officials, mostly from the Aurès, were sentenced to

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Porte Message, 1957.

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Constantes Message, 1956.

death, including two in absentia: Mechâsseme, who was fleeing in Europe, and Omar Ben Boulaid, who was in the Aurès.

Some archives converge to indicate that the execution of the revolutionary leaders at the rear base in Tunis was linked to their loyalty to the high command of the National Liberation Army abroad, as well as their attempt to cooperate with Ahmed Ben Bella to overturn the decisions of the Soummam Congress. However, this affiliation was not accepted by Abane Ramdane and the Coordination and Execution Committee¹, who decided to imprison and execute the leaders of the Tunis base and Wilaya I, including Saïd Abdelhai, Abdelkrim Hali, Abbas Laghrour, and Taleb Larbi Gammoudi², the latter being reported in a French report dated December 1957 as having been held in prison in Tunis since July 1957³.

Along the same lines, another French report dated October 25 indicates that “Abbas Laghrour,” “Saïd Abdelhai,” and “Taleb Larbi,” along with about twenty other people, were executed by the National Liberation Front at the rear base of the Algerian revolution in Tunis, with the agreement of “Habib Bourguiba,” approximately a month prior according to French intelligence⁴. This means that their execution took place at the end of September according to the report. It can therefore be said that the Coordination and Execution Committee also opposed the neutralized leaders after their

¹ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/177, Translation of Receipt Acknowledgment from the Army, 1956

² FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Dissension Within Rebel Bands, 1956

³ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, Porte Message, 1957

⁴ FR A.N.O.M, Aix-en-Provence, 93/146, F.L.N Activity in Tunis, 1957

opposition to the decisions of the Soummam Congress, notably the chiefs of Wilaya I and the Tunis base, who were sentenced to death following a summary trial, such as Saïd Abdelhai and Abdelkrim Hali.

Conclusion:

Through this article, we have sought to shed light on key phases of the rivalry among the leaders of the Algerian revolution at the rear base in Tunis, as well as its major repercussions. Several interpretations have been proposed to better understand these internal tensions that marked this crucial period. Despite the intense difficulties encountered between 1955 and 1957, a fundamental step was the establishment of the rear base of the Algerian revolution in Tunis, ordered by Ahmed Ben Bella in 1955. He then entrusted Bachir Chihani with the mission to found this base, which was later organized by Saïd Abdelhai to become a strategic center, ensuring logistics, armament, and training for the fighters.

This rear base played a decisive role in conducting the revolution, even though internal conflicts and power struggles deeply affected its functioning and unity. Rivalries over political directions, appointments, and strategies—reflected notably by the tensions between the Coordination and Execution Committee and certain historic leaders—led to tragic events, including the elimination of several key cadres.

Tunis, as a rear base of the revolution, experienced difficult conditions and circumstances starting in 1956 due to the pressure exerted by the Tunisian authorities under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba on the administration in Tunis, which was led by supporters of Salah Ben Youssef. These internal Tunisian circumstances significantly contributed to

divisions among the leaders of the revolution, turning the Tunis base into a zone of rivalry between the Algiers-based group led by Abane Ramdane and the external leadership established in Tunis, headed by Saïd Abdelhai, known as “Tidjani” since 1955, with each side attempting to assert its influence.

As part of its strategy to consolidate control over the rear base in Tunis, the Coordination and Execution Committee carried out several new appointments, such as those of Mohamed El Amine Debaghine, Amar Ouamrane, Hamid Arouabhia, Aït Ahcene, and Ben Mostefa Benaouda, while some leaders like Ahmed Mahsas were sidelined. Additionally, several commanders from Wilaya I and the Tunis rear base were sentenced to death, including the head of the revolutionary administration there, Saïd Abdelhai.

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