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NORTH AFRICA: 1956

A Summary of the Year's Events in North Africa

A Report from Charles F. Gallagher

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The year 1956 was a turning point in the history of North Africa, and future historians may look upon it as the most important year since the French landings in Algiers in 1830. In a year studded with such momentous events as the Suez and Hungarian crises, the events in North Africa, with the beginnings of the end of a 125-year-long French colonial domination, rank perhaps in third place among the vital happenings of the year in foreign affairs.

The year began with only Libya, among the four states of the area, an independent nation; it closed with three of the four self-governing. More concisely, it started with one person in 25 self-ruled; it ended with 15 of every 25 free. It saw the creation of two new nations: Morocco (March 2), and Tunisia (March 20), and witnessed their admission to the United Nations and many of its specialized agencies as full-fledged and respected members of the international community. It was a year in which the promises for a better future augured in 1955 were fulfilled in many ways, but one in which the economic and social difficulties attending a coming-of-age were brought into relief toward the close. More than anything it was a year in the fields of social and educational reforms and justice where heartening steps forward were taken. The over-all balance of accounts was good and the prognosis for the future positive.

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The first political event of the year which concerned North Africa was the French election. On January 2, electors throughout the then mother-country returned a group of splinter parties among which the extreme right and left made important gains. In last-minute apprehension the center and left-center came to terms and installed a socialist-radical government headed by Guy Mollet and seconded by Pierre Mendès-France (who had initiated the first steps toward North African freedom with his plan for Tunisian autonomy in August 1954). With the situation in Algeria worsening daily, Mollet came to power on a program of "repression of the insurrection and

(then) reforms." This "then" was to plague the government all during the year and was the cause of Mendès-France's resignation later in the spring. Mollet went to Algiers in February to survey the scene and was greeted by a rioting European population which forced him to cancel the appointment of a new Governor-general and substitute a firmer man (Robert Lacoste) in his place. Massive reinforcements of French troops were sent to Algeria during the first months of the year until an estimated 500,000 men were engaged in putting down the hit-and-run guerrilla terrorism which had spread to all the northern provinces and was making life for Europeans unsafe everywhere throughout the countryside.

Also in February began the formal negotiations in Paris between a Moroccan delegation headed by the Sultan, Muhammad V, and the French government, based upon the La Celle-St. Cloud declaration of the previous November recognizing Morocco's right to independence. Final agreement was reached and an accord signed on March 2, and a spontaneous three-day holiday was taken throughout the Sherifian Empire. Thus Morocco passed from direct protectorate administration to independence, while Tunisia, which had received home rule in June 1955, remained in this transitional state for a few more weeks. The Tunisian independence protocol, signed on March 20, contained certain reservations about Tunisian sovereignty and left open for further discussion some details which were to prove a source of friction between the two governments during the year.

Tunisia, which was smaller and more homogeneous than Morocco and had been under the occupation of a single power, rather than several states, advanced rapidly to the implementation of its independence. A Constitutional Assembly was elected at the end of March and a National Front ticket, headed by the Neo-Destour (New Constitution) party, was balloted in with a large majority. Habib Bourguiba, who had previously conceived of himself as a supreme arbiter in the country's national political life, was persuaded to become Prime Minister in April. For a brief period an extremist wing, headed by his former lieutenant, Salah ben Youssef, openly criticized the independence agreements and finally passed to assassination and open defiance. Their plot was quickly undone, however, and ben Youssef fled into exile in Cairo. An outburst of European counterterrorism directed by a gang called the "Red Hand" was broken up a short time later by Tunisian police.

Beginning in May the Tunisian government embarked on a series of reforms which were more sweeping than those attempted in any other Muslim country except Turkey. The members of the Beylical (royal) family were henceforth treated as ordinary citizens and were to be subject to the courts; their civil list was drastically reduced; public religious lands held in mortmain were nationalized; certain higher religious institutions were taken over as state universities in which a Westernized curriculum was introduced; access to Tunisian nationality (forbidden, as was access to Moroccan nationality, during the protectorate) was granted, and the first group of applicants was naturalized; polygamy was abolished (but those presently having more than one wife were allowed to retain

them); women were allowed to marry without parental consent; the divorce laws were equalized for the two sexes and divorce cases were taken out of the religious courts and made civil actions; women (if unveiled) were given the vote; and a new civil code was introduced. All in all, these steps toward the democratization and modernization of Tunisia were possibly the most important event from a long-range viewpoint in North Africa during 1956.

Morocco's problems during the spring and summer were still primarily international and political. Priority was given to negotiations with Spain to secure the unity of the empire. On April 9 in Madrid an agreement was signed by the two governments in which Moroccan sovereignty over what had been Spanish Morocco (an area which had legally been only a zone of influence granted by France to Spain in 1912) was formally re-established. No provision was made for the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, predominantly European cities on the Mediterranean coast which are considered part of metropolitan Spain by Franco's government; nor for the enclave of Ifni on the Atlantic, or Southern Spanish Morocco, a desert waste administered by the Spanish as part of Rio de Oro colony. The question of the internationalized zone of Tangier also remained to be settled. A provisional agreement on July 1 provided for the transfer of powers to a Moroccan governor pending an international conference slated for later in the year. Economic, as distinguished from political, integration of the various ex-zones of the Sherifian Empire had hardly begun by the end of the year.

In May the Royal Moroccan Army, comprising 14,000 (now about 30,000) men armed with French and Spanish equipment, was established. Crown Prince Moulay Hassan was named its chief-of-staff, and a parade in Rabat on May 14 formalized its existence. Its formation had been made urgent by the continuing unsettled conditions in remote parts of the country where the unofficial "Army of Liberation" was still operating. In mid-July the Sultan visited these back areas of Northern and Eastern Morocco, where the Army of Liberation had been most active. The royal inspection tour met with an overwhelming reception everywhere. Later in the month Moulay Hassan went to the same areas and arranged for the orderly screening and integration of some of the guerrillas into the national army and the disbanding of the rest. Since then insecurity in the mountains has been greatly reduced, although parts of the far south, beyond Agadir, still seem tacitly to be in the hands of irregulars.

Tunisia broke off negotiations with France early in July on details of the independence agreement. The reason was an irreconcilability of views on the matter of stationing French troops in the country. French opinion for its part was incensed by Tunisian support of the Algerian rebels over the French-built and operated (but largely Tunisian-staffed) Radio Tunis; this issue was satisfactorily solved later in the year by turning the station over to the Tunisian state. With talks suspended, Prime Minister Bourguiba made the first overtures to the United States for financial assistance. American officials in Paris who were approached showed great understanding, but nothing further came of the idea at this time.

Increasing economic difficulties and unemployment, and governmental bickering, in Morocco during the summer paved the way for attempts to dissolve the national unity coalition government which had been in power since December 1955. The dominant Istiqlal party, supported by the Moroccan Labor Union (UMT), demanded that it be allowed to form a single-party government and carry out its own program. Party congresses during the month produced much oratory but little action, and the Sultan quietly vetoed the idea for the time being (see CFG-3-'56).

French hopes for a solution of the Algerian problem were shaken in September when Abderrahman Fares, speaker of the defunct Algerian Assembly, reversed his mildly pro-French stand and called for negotiations with the National Liberation Front, describing the Front as France's "only valid interlocutors" in Algeria. His action followed that of Fehrat Abbas, ex-leader of the Algerian Manifesto Union (UDMA) and probably the top Algerian political figure, who in April had rallied to the Liberation Front (FLN) in Cairo.

Governor-general Lacoste had promised earlier in September that a reform plan, giving Algeria a significant degree of autonomy within the French Republic, would soon be worked out. This plan, which included the promulgation of a new statute for Algeria by unilateral government action, was criticized on the grounds that it violated the government's promises that free elections would be held as a prelude to negotiations. M. Lacoste rejected proposals for a conference with Algerian leaders and equally refused to hold a referendum. The proposals, which have not been officially presented as of this writing, were described as making Algeria something between an autonomous entity and a simple department of France.

It seems clear in retrospect that during the month from the time of Fares' announcement (September 24) until the capture of the FLN leaders (October 22) chances for negotiation were at their best. Some contacts were actually made, through the intermediary of Crown Prince Moulay Hassan and other North African statesmen.

Financial negotiations with Morocco and Tunisia were resumed in September and agreements reached. France would provide Morocco with Frs. 24,000,000,000 (about \$68,000,000) for its capital investment budget. Of this sum Frs. 9,000,000,000 were actually advanced before the October break in relations and the rest made up at the very end of the year. The Tunisian investment budget was simultaneously set at Frs. 19,000,000,000 (about \$54,000,000), of which Frs. 16,000,000,000 were negotiated this year in Paris while the balance came from unused parts of loans from former years. The money was to be used for irrigation, land improvement projects, road-building, and the encouragement of small industry.

October saw profound changes in the North African picture.

At the beginning of the month the United States announced that it was renouncing its extraterritorial rights in Morocco.

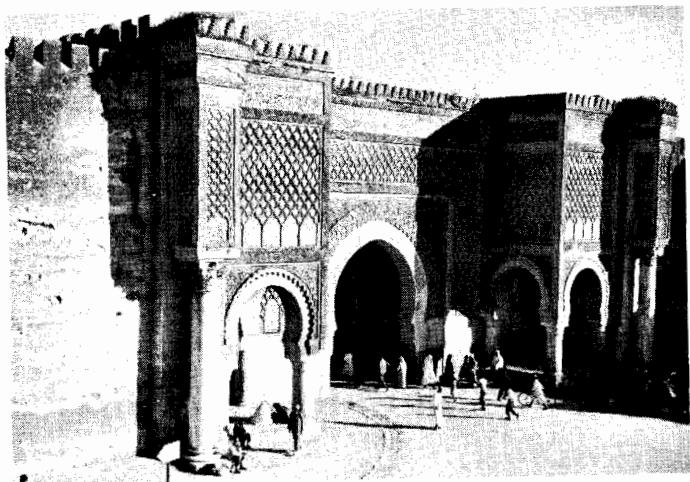
These rights, first acquired by treaty in 1787 and reiterated in an 1836 agreement, were confirmed in the multination Treaty of Algeciras of 1906. All other countries benefiting from equal rights had previously surrendered them to France during the period of its protectorate (1912-1956). Americans in Morocco will henceforth be justiciable on the same footing with other nationals in the Europeanized courts now functioning in Morocco.

This act came diplomatically on the eve of an international conference, opened at Fedala and continued in Tangier, to decide the fate of the international zone. After twenty-one days of intermittent negotiation the principle of Moroccan sovereignty, which had never been denied by the eight powers who participated in the international administration of Tangier, was reaffirmed, and it was agreed to reintegrate the zone into Morocco. The Moroccan government for its part declared that it would continue a "liberal economic regime" for the zone, whose existence is completely dependent on its free money and banking facilities plus the tourist trade attracted there in part by freedom from controls. It was speculated that this regime would be valid for perhaps five years, during which time a permanent statute, comprising a free port, could be elaborated by the Moroccan government. Complete change-over of the administration was set for January 1, 1957. United States interests in the Tangier zone center in the \$5,000,000 Voice of America relay station, whose twelve transmitters broadcast a total of 244 hours a day to the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Also important are the Mackay and RCA commercial stations, valued at \$3- to \$4,000,000 together, which handle a total traffic of fifty million words annually.

Probably the most immediately important--and certainly the most theatrical--happening of the year in North Africa, however, was the capture late in October of five top Algerian rebel leaders. The event had repercussions at once on both popular and diplomatic levels, and the long-range effects of the act on co-operation between France and her ex-protégés are still reverberating. The incident had its origin in the state visit of the Sultan of Morocco to Tunisia on October 22, 1956. One of the main subjects for discussion at this meeting of leaders of the newly-independent countries was the Algerian problem, and just before the visit a group of Algerian nationalists was received by the Sultan in Rabat. According to North African sources consultations with the rebels were undertaken with French approval, but the latter claim they had warned the Moroccan government not to receive "French subjects in rebellion" with public honors. The Algerian leaders then flew from Rabat to Tunis, detouring via the Balearic Isles in order to avoid passing over Algerian territory. While traveling over international waters in the Mediterranean, the plane, a civil craft belonging to the Moroccan government-operated Air Atlas-Air Maroc Co., was shadowed by French fighters, and the pilot (a Frenchman) was "invited" by French military authorities in Algiers to land there. The military, well tipped off, had decided to present the French government with a fait accompli. The pilot, caught in a fine dilemma, finally agreed to deposit his precious cargo on the airstrip at Maison Blanche outside Algiers, where the rebels were met at the plane door by machine-gun-carrying soldiers who whisked them away to a maximum-security jail.



These Tunisians are learning to read and write in one of the new girls' night schools established by the Tunisian government in its adult education program



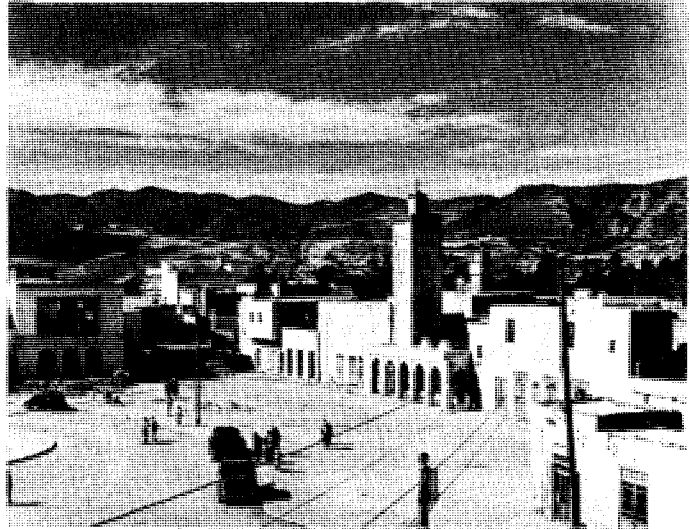
Meknes (Morocco), scene of the October riots, with its Bab al Mansur, or Great Gate, built in the late 17th century



Members of the "Red Hand," a European terrorist organization, being taken into custody by the Tunisian police

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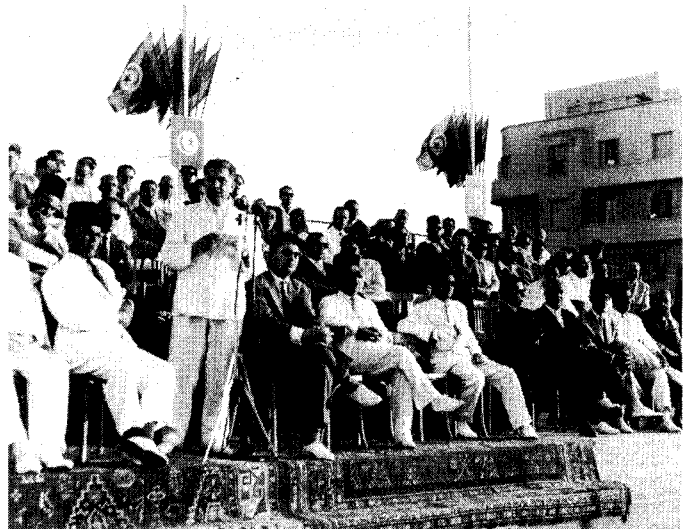
Taza (Morocco), nestled in a valley between the Rif Mountains and the Middle Atlas, was a scene of many of the activities of the unofficial "Army of Liberation" in the spring and summer of 1956



Prime Minister Bourguiba inspecting a pottery factory in Nabeul (Tunisia)



Dedication of the Labor Exchange in Tunis. Seated to the speaker's right is Prime Minister Bourguiba, and to his left is Ahmed ben Salah, head of the Tunisian Labor Union (UGTT)



[Photographs courtesy of the Tunisian and Moroccan governments.]

The French government in Paris, apparently caught without foreknowledge of the deed, was at first angry and surprised, but soon decided it could reap some benefit from the haul. (It should also be remembered that this occurred at a time when presumably it had already been decided to take action against Egypt; the unexpected situation therefore coincided with the new "no-concession" policy, and the deed was upheld.) The Tunisian, and especially the Moroccan, government, which considered the men under the Sultan's personal protection in accordance with the Arab laws of hospitality, called the act "piracy," a definition which seemed legally and morally correct. Public opinion in Asia and the Middle East was strongly disapproving and doubts were expressed in other European countries; in Morocco and Tunisia the reaction was, as might have been expected, violent. Riots broke out in both countries and the most severe ones in Morocco, centering around the city of Meknes and the fertile Vallée Heureuse that surrounds it, claimed sixty European lives. In subsequent weeks the exodus of settlers and capital from both countries, already great, was intensified.

Relations deteriorated at both ends. Both North African governments recalled their ambassadors from France, the French suspended economic credits after the riots, and French-national civil servants in Rabat called a general strike which embarrassed the Moroccan government by showing it how dependent it was on foreign personnel to staff its governmental posts. The shaky coalition government in Morocco broke down, and the Istiqlal formed a single-party government, although Si Bekkai (Independent) remained as Prime Minister with a few nonparty members in the Cabinet. From this time on until the end of the year relations remained tense-- and the Anglo-French attack on Suez within a few days did nothing to improve them.

For a few weeks after the seizure of the Algerian leaders and the Suez action highest-level French policy, hitherto often hesitant and contradictory, seems to have hardened and turned away from any conciliation of the Arab world. The high-water mark of the "get tough" policy was reached in early November, but after that its demise was swift and it would seem that the psychological repercussions of failure at Suez are likely to drive the Algerian pendulum back in despair toward the compromise that was somewhere near being effected in the months before. If and when such a compromise is finally made it will certainly be on worse terms for the French than would have been obtainable some months ago. One first sign of such a turning being in the offing would be the replacement of Governor-general Lacoste, who has been until now the leader of the "hard" school in the government's Algerian policy.

As French influence and prestige in North Africa sank to a new low, North African feeling toward the Americans grew warmer. Notable was the Sultan's decision to return to Rabat in an Italian (he refused to set foot in a French) plane, and to land at the U.S. Navy base at Port Lyautey, thus indirectly recognizing its existence for the first time. Soon afterwards Moroccan and Tunisian leaders, faced with grave economic problems if French financial

assistance were completely withdrawn, moved to sound out the United States on the chances of economic aid. The preliminary response was favorable in principle and as the year ended an American economic mission was in Morocco studying how that country could best use any money allocated. Last word was of \$30,000,000 to be given for the year ending June 1957, with further assistance in fiscal 1957-58. In addition, just as French prestige was further shaken by the Middle East crisis, American stature in North Africa went up owing to its position on this issue. During November members of the Moroccan royal family, and the foreign ministers of Morocco and Tunisia, came to the United States and were given a warm welcome. On November 12, both new countries were officially admitted to the United Nations as the 78th and 79th members of that body.

The first international reactions of the new members, as expressed in their UN votes, were carefully appraised by Americans, and many were gratified to see signs of independent thinking and an understanding of some American problems. On the question of seating Communist China, Morocco voted against and Tunisia abstained. Tunisia's Habib Bourguiba was one of the rare Muslim statesmen who publicly denounced the Soviet Union on the Hungarian issue in a radio address to his people, and Tunisia voted to condemn the Soviet Union in the UN General Assembly resolution on that subject (while Morocco abstained).

Morocco took a significant step forward toward parliamentary democracy in November when the National Consultative Assembly, an appointed interim legislature, held its first meeting. The body, composed of 76 representatives of political parties, unions, professions, cultural and youth groups, farmers' associations, and business houses, and religious leaders (4 Muslims and 1 Jew) will "consult and advise" but will have no legislating power for the present. It is planned to convert it into an elective body when, according to the Sultan, Moroccan democracy is sufficiently mature.

The year closed with relations between Morocco and the United States on perhaps their highest plane ever--certainly better than at any time since 1943. The favorable response in Washington to feelers for economic aid and the reception given visiting dignitaries was partly responsible. On December 23, Foreign Minister Balafrej said that Morocco was sympathetic toward the presence of United States forces on bases in his country and that these forces constituted a guarantee of Moroccan liberty and security as long as there was no American interference in Moroccan internal affairs. He suggested that the time was propitious for the opening of negotiations on the base question. (The bases were built in 1951-54 at an estimate cost of \$400,000,000 plus. Their legal existence must now be validated by the Moroccan government which was not consulted when the original Franco-American agreement was drawn up.)

On a more informal level this Moroccan-American friendship was highlighted in an unusual way by a Christmas party given by 3-year-old Princess Lalla Amina, the Sultan's youngest daughter, born in exile in Madagascar. The Sultan, who does not officially recognize

Christmas, chose this indirect way to show his warm feelings toward Americans, and invited about twenty American youngsters, aged five to ten, from American families stationed at Port Lyautey (now once again called Kenitra).

On the final Saturday of the year the French government decided to grant Morocco a credit of Frs. 17,000,000,000 (about \$48,700,000) of which Frs. 11,000,000,000 will be earmarked for the investment budget and Frs. 6,000,000,000 will be used for loans to semipublic corporations. These credits are in addition to the Frs. 9,000,000,000 that France had already advanced and they bring the total French aid for 1956 to Frs. 26,000,000,000. This French aid will permit Morocco to balance its 1956 investment budget and will relieve the unemployment crisis which has been aggravated by canceling some of the public works projects scheduled under provisions of that budget. Previous to this, Franco-Moroccan relations had risen a notch from their October low when Morocco asked that the question of the capture of the Algerian rebels be submitted to the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

The pace of economic developments in the Saharan regions of North Africa and the uncertain political situation in Algeria led the French National Assembly on December 14 to create an economic entity in the Sahara to be controlled by France. This TVA-like administration will direct a program of economic development for almost 1½ million square miles of desert inhabited by fewer than 500,000 persons. Parts of the new "economic area" will be taken from Algeria, French West Africa, and French Equatorial Africa--but present political boundaries will not be changed, and in this sense the decision was a compromise. Reaction in North Africa was adverse. In Algeria, the Europeans fear that France may be more willing to abandon the European-settled northern provinces of Algeria if it can be sure of holding on to the mineral-rich Sahara, and the Muslim nationalists feel that this is a first move to detach an economically-valuable area from their homeland. Moroccans, who have been claiming large parts of Mauretania and the Sahara now under French administration, are also opposed to the move.

As the year came to a close the rebellion in Algeria continued unabated. It was announced officially that French forces had killed 18,060 Algerian rebels in 1956 and lost 2,435 men of their own. Six hundred and fourteen European civilians were also slain. The real death toll, stemming from mass reprisals and atrocities on both sides, is much higher. In December, terrorism reached a new high in the capital city of Algiers. Just after Christmas the President of the Algerian Federation of Mayors, Amedée Froger, was assassinated. M. Froger was one of the pillars of the colon group in Algeria. This important killing followed by only a few days an unsuccessful attempt against Mohammed Ait Ali, a prominent Algerian political figure of pro-French views. Riots broke out at the Froger funeral; several Muslims were killed and the United States Consulate was slightly damaged. It was said that the FLN was trying to demonstrate the insecure French hold on Algeria in a dramatic way, just before the UN General Assembly took up the Algerian question in January 1957.

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In one of the last official acts of the year the solidarity of the "Arab West" was stressed in the waning days of December by a visit of Prime Minister Mustafa ben Halim of Libya to neighboring Tunisia. A treaty of friendship was signed at the end of the conference just after the turn of the year and Bourguiba called it "the cornerstone of North African unity." The mention made of a "Greater Arab Occident" stretching from eastern Libya to Morocco highlighted new moves in the direction of co-operation and possibly eventual federation among the Maghrebian states, at the same time that the Arab lands of the Middle East are discussing a similar plan of their own.

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In summation, much change of permanent nature came to North Africa in 1956. Among the most significant items were, perhaps, on the credit side: the attainment of independence by Tunisia and Morocco; the establishment of parliamentary institutions in both countries; and the growing close relations and friendship with the United States; on the debit side: a still gloomy economic picture, and a gradual separation from much that was good in relations with France.

But everywhere, except in Algeria, the picture was essentially bright; and even there it is possible that the continuation of the struggle may be bringing both sides closer to the realization of the need for a compromise. Slowly in this Year 1 which was 1956, North Africa was making its way forward, putting out searching feelers toward a new unity and dignity. Much of the progress that will be made in 1957 and possibly the future of the whole area depends on a sympathetic settlement of the Algerian revolt. Such a settlement is as vital to Algeria's neighbors as it is to Algeria itself and to France, and it is to the interest of the whole free world. It cannot be too much longer delayed.

CF Gallagher