

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RKM-1
Partition For Algeria?

January 12, 1962
31, rue Maurice Ripoche
Paris XIV, France

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Algiers, 10 January - Fourteen aggressions were committed in Algiers Tuesday causing ten dead - six Moslems and four Europeans - and six wounded...four members of a Moslem family were assassinated; they were strangled and their throats were slit. Police found a butcher's knife on the spot and the letters "OAS"...another aggression was committed a little later in the evening...on the pavement the bodies of two Europeans were found. On their backs signs were discovered reading: "Thus perish those who betray French Algeria. OAS." ...at Bal-el-Oued a former journalist was found on his doorstep with a bullet in the head. The killers were asserted to be Moslems... Finally, the cadaver of an unidentified man, badly scarred by knife wounds, was discovered at the bottom of a well...

-Le Monde. January 11, 1962

The disturbing thing about such press dispatches is not that ten people were murdered in such and such a fashion on January 10 in the single city of Algiers, but that one could clip similar articles out of yesterday's paper, or last week's, or tomorrow's, or next week's. Indeed, the above dispatch was relegated to page six of Le Monde; a series of incidents like this have ceased to be real news. There are variations on the same theme: sometimes a rattonade in Oran where gangs of young Europeans lynch any Moslem who happens to be in sight; sometimes an FLN grenade exploding in a European café; sometimes a liberal or Gaullist Frenchman assassinated by the Organisation de l'Armee Secrete (OAS); often Moslems ruthlessly settling accounts among themselves, or gunning down Europeans.

For Algeria has degenerated into a three-way armed struggle. The protagonists are the nationalist Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), benefiting from the support of or control over most Moslems; the OAS, solidly backed by the great majority of Algeria's one million residents of European descent; and, finally, the French administration and army, harassed by both FLN and OAS and patently unable to put an end to the violence.

Now that the Algerian problem is in its eighth year and has been with de Gaulle's "strong" government longer than with all its more unstable predecessors, a solution appears at once closer, and more difficult to obtain, than ever. For while negotiations between the FLN and the French government seem on the point of leading to an agreement, the continued growth of European settler activism, implacably hostile to any arrangement between the two, puts such an agreement in jeopardy. What was a terribly complicated situation a year ago has only become more so since, for there are now three contenders in

the ring. Intercommunal hatred has grown to a point inconceivable even a few months ago.

With increasing anguish, Frenchmen are asking themselves what might constitute a realistic way out of the present impasse. Is there a framework in which the present balance of forces can be peacefully contained? If not, how can this balance be altered? Can racial harmony be re-established in such a manner that the Moslems will have a degree of influence proportionate to their numbers (roughly 9,000,000, or 90% of the population), while at the same time the European community is assured of its legitimate rights? One possible solution, occasionally reflected in official thought and at the moment a topic of lively non-official debate in France, is partition.

The immediate impetus for thinking in terms of splitting up Algeria is, of course, the daily fact of bloodshed between the two communities. It is dramatically evident, in Algeria's large cities at least, that the two communities under present circumstances are incapable of peaceful coexistence: they must either be separated, or the present circumstances must be changed. However, despite his protean personal effort, de Gaulle has been unable to change these circumstances. The OAS, which stands for an undiluted independent French Algeria, and the FLN which stands for an undiluted independent Algeria, are too deeply rooted in their respective communities to be extirpated by the divided and equivocal French army and administration. Hence, since politics is the game of the possible, not the ideal, it has become relevant and realistic to examine the possibility of partition. It is by no means a pleasant one to look at. Ireland, India and Pakistan, and Israel and the Arab countries all know its price. Yet the fact remains that they are all still on the map today and are enjoying internal peace. Partition, if it has represented the painful dislocation of peoples and the relinquishment of ideals, has at least provided a modus vivendi. It is particularly interesting to examine partition in an African context, for just as it is discussed now in reference to harassed Algeria, it will inevitably be pondered for other African areas of dense European population: Southern Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola and the Union of South Africa. Indeed, in the Union it has already been thought of; apartheid extended to its theoretical limits is nothing other than a form of partition.

French advocates of Algerian partition represent many different points of view and political orientations. Some support it because they see it as the only way to preserve a French foothold overseas, a sort of miniature museum comprising the last bit of a once great empire. Others, especially in the army, view it as an alternative to what would certainly look like a French military defeat (or perhaps, to put it more gently, a non-victory), i.e., an abandonment of a battle-ground to those with whom one has fought. Still others are deeply concerned with the moral commitment of France to the Europeans of Algeria and to those Moslems who are pro-French. Finally, there are the "realists" who are searching for any practical solution to a particularly acute problem.

Since the ideas of this last group are the most clearly and rationally articulated, it is to them that attention is paid here. Their argument runs as follows: Even if the de Gaulle government were able to negotiate a treaty with the FLN, it would not be able to induce the European population, directed by the OAS, to cooperate with this former enemy. (As for trying to call forth more moderate elements in each community to form a third force, this has already

been attempted and has failed completely.) Nor would the FLN on its side be especially disposed toward compromise and conciliation. On the contrary, FLN leaders have already expressed their desire to expell certain parts of the European community, and certainly their plans for a much-needed land reform would cause others to be expatriated.

Indeed, it is not unlikely that any definite accord between the Paris government and the FLN would lead to a violent insurrection, led by the OAS, in areas of dense European population. The Europeans, it is felt, would be likely to seize control of Algiers, Oran and other sizable cities in western Algeria. At this point, the French army, in order to re-establish metropolitan control and to implement the hypothetical Franco-FLN agreement, would be called upon to fight a military grouping defending European Algeria under the direction of the former commander of all forces in Algeria, ex-General Salan. But this, it is argued, large parts of the army would refuse to do, for in fighting the OAS it would be objectively working for the FLN, just the opposite of its goal during the last eight years. Loyalties and attachments, especially in the officers' corps, cannot be snapped so quickly and brutally. The unwillingness of the army to crush an OAS rebellion is one of the most important factors in OAS calculations.

This probable unwillingness on the part of the army would allow the Europeans and their Moslem allies to persevere in their strongholds. This, in turn, would mean the de facto partition of Algeria, with the Paris-controlled administration and the FLN cooperating in part of it, and the OAS controlling the rest. However, it is argued, such a partition, emerging in the heat of revolution and perhaps civil war and in the absence of a central authority, would lead to terrible carnage. Also, it would be arbitrary: towns would be cut off from their hinterlands, parents from their children and roads from their destinations. Partition a chaud like this would be as haphazard as it was in Palestine, where I have seen houses isolated from their wells and villages from their fields. Worst of all perhaps, nobody would have had the freedom to decide in which part of Algeria he was to reside.

In short, according to the "realistic" view, partition-in-chaos is inevitable if partition-in-order is not carried out first. Thus, the separation of the mutually hostile communities, in as logical and economical a manner as possible, is felt to be a matter of urgency. Although few have specified in detail how this should be accomplished, a plan has been envisaged whereby each chef de famille would decide whether to live in a European-dominated or a Moslem-dominated part of Algeria. Following his decision, he and his family would be repatriated by the French administration, presumably taking the place of a family repatriated in the other direction. He would thus have "voted with his feet," as one French commentator put it. Such a system could presumably be accomplished in relatively good order; the French army would be on hand to maintain physical security. The advocates of partition feel that if it were carried out in any other manner there would be little chance of avoiding what happened in India in 1947-1948.

After a clear and distinct line of demarcation had been established and all those repatriated who so desired, it is assumed that an FLN-directed state would be created in eastern and southern Algeria according to a timetable worked out between the French government and the nationalists. Some 70% of

Algeria's population and three-quarters of its area would be included in this region. The 300,000 Europeans now living there would presumably move either to the west or back to France. The same would be the case for the half-million or so Moslems in this area who have served in the French administration and army, and who would be in danger of being discriminated against, if not liquidated, in an FLN-controlled state.

The "European" part of Algeria would, it is estimated, contain about 3,000,000 people, of which slightly less than a million would actually be Europeans. Close economic ties with France would allow it to prosper financially. Its physical security vis à vis the FLN would be assured by the fact that the latter, once territorially established, would be subject to the reprisals of a modern army. If the nationalist rebels were again to appear in Algiers, parts of Bone and of Constantine, important cities in the FLN zone, could be bombed. The FLN's military success up until now has derived in good part from a lack of fixed bases; but, anchored by cities and bases, FLN invulnerability would vanish, and with it some of its military threat.

The proponents of partition have often been those who have not believed in the practicability of inter-racial or inter-cultural harmony. This was the case in Ireland, in India, in Palestine, and it is the case in the Union of South Africa today. French advocates of partition in Algeria, however, are not necessarily racists. They believe, however, that it will be impossible for the European and pro-French community to cohabit with Algerians represented by the FLN which they feel is an organization dominated by radical xenophobes and ruthless fanatics. (This opinion, like many concerning Algeria, is often more the result of emotionalism than of careful analysis.) The "European" part of Algeria would thus not be a racially based state like Israel, but would include Moslems. It would exclude, however, all those supporting the FLN.

This, then, is the essence of the "realistic" argument for partition. It undoubtedly has adherents in high places in France today, but it is felt that de Gaulle is not one of them. As racial strife becomes more and more bitter in Algeria, however, and as the weeks pass without fruitful results in the Franco-FLN talks, it would not be surprising if the idea quickly gains supporters. On the other hand, if sufficient guarantees are obtained for the Europeans in the negotiations now secretly taking place, the idea of partition would rapidly lose its attraction.

There are, of course, many arguments against partition and these are most frequently encountered in the French left, sections of which are practically the spokesman for the Algerian rebel organization. It is said, for example, that the two Algerias will be continually at each other's throat, that the FLN will be forced to search for allies in the Communist bloc to counter the military and diplomatic strength of its neighbor to the west. Two Algerias, it is argued, would be economically ridiculous, even if financially possible; the various regions of the country are much too interdependent. The opponents of partition feel that should it occur France will lose her prestige and special position among her former

African colonies, and that her relations with the rest of the underdeveloped world will be further embittered. They foresee the European section of Algeria as a territorial base for French fascism, just as neighboring Morocco was a base for Spanish fascism. They fear that, instead of becoming a real Franco-Moslem state, European Algeria will become a bastion of white supremacy and racism.

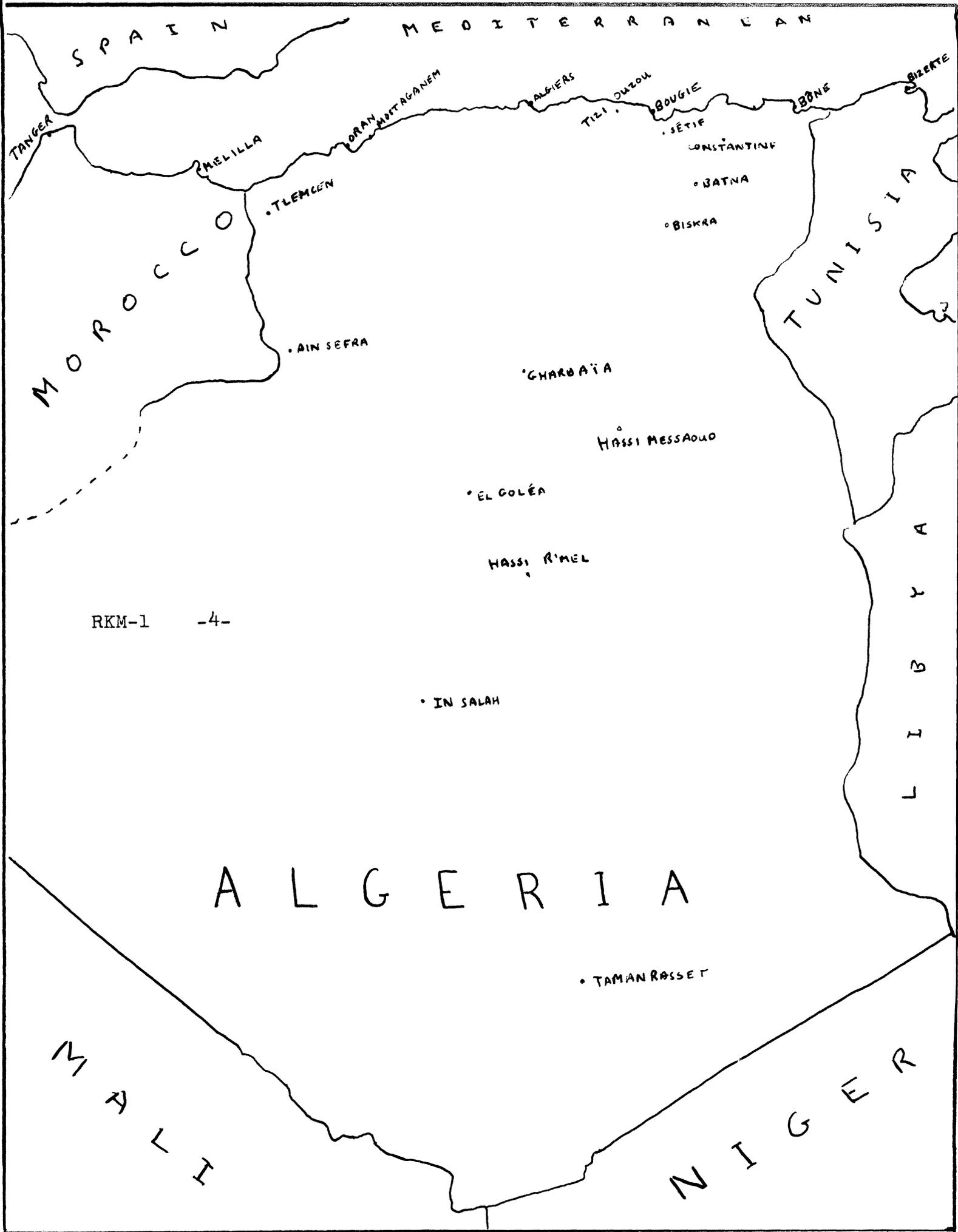
However, in that most basic of things, the question of life or death, partition is a logical response to the immediate situation; if it is the only alternative to daily assassination and bomb-throwing, it has a validity for the present. At the same time a large part of wisdom consists precisely in seeing beyond the exigencies of the present.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard Mathews". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Richard Mathews

Received New York January 17, 1962



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