

Joint Action by Tunisian and Algerian Resistance Fighters at the Outset of the Algerian War of Independence

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Abstract

The outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence gave fresh impetus to co-operation among national liberation movements across the Maghreb, particularly between Algerian and Tunisian resistance fighters. This co-operation subsequently expanded to encompass political, military, and logistical coordination in the struggle against French colonial rule, with support from the Youssefist movement in Tunisia. Algerian and Tunisian resistance networks also contributed to efforts to unify the Maghrebi armed struggle through the project of establishing a Maghreb Liberation Army. This study examines the nature and various forms of this co-operation and assesses its impact on the course of the Algerian struggle for independence. It employs a historical-analytical approach, drawing upon archival documents and a range of historical sources.

Keywords: Algerian War of Independence; Maghreb; Tunisia; Maghreb Liberation Army; Habib Bourguiba.

Introduction

From its outbreak on November 1, 1954, the Algerian War of Independence marked a major turning point in the history of liberation movements in the Maghreb. Its effects were not confined to Algeria but extended to the various Maghrebi nationalist forces, which regarded it as an opportunity to revive the project of liberation and Maghrebi unity in opposition to French colonialism. Within this context, cooperation between Algerian and Tunisian resistance fighters emerged as one of the most significant manifestations of shared militant solidarity. Relations between the two sides evolved from mere political sympathy to effective coordination encompassing military, organizational, and logistical matters, thereby contributing to support for the Algerian Revolution and the expansion of its activities throughout the Maghreb.

This cooperation coincided with the growing influence of the Youssefist movement in Tunisia, which rejected the agreements concluded with France. This created common ground between the supporters of Salah Ben Youssef and the leaders of the Algerian Revolution and contributed to the emergence of unification projects, foremost among them the Maghreb Liberation Army project, which sought to unite resistance efforts in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco within a single strategy of armed struggle. Tunisian territory also became an important rear base for the Algerian

Revolution, serving as a site for training, provisioning, and the transit of resistance fighters, and hosting numerous coordination meetings among the leaders of Maghrebi liberation movements.

Against this background, the present study poses the following central question: To what extent did cooperation between Tunisian and Algerian resistance fighters contribute to supporting the Algerian War of Independence during its early years, and what were the principal manifestations of this cooperation and its implications for the project of a common Maghrebi struggle?

This central question gives rise to several subsidiary questions, the most important of which are the following: What was the nature of the relationship between the Algerian Revolution and the Maghreb Liberation Army project? What forms did political and military coordination between Algerian and Tunisian resistance fighters take? How did the rear bases of the Algerian Revolution in Tunisia contribute to advancing joint action and confronting French colonial policy?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a historical-analytical method that traces historical events and developments and relates them to their political and military contexts. It also draws on French archival documents, memoirs, contemporary testimonies, and specialized academic studies, thereby enabling an understanding of the scope of Algerian-Tunisian cooperation and its role in advancing Maghrebi liberation during a decisive period in the region's history.

1. The Relationship between the Algerian Revolution and the Formation of the Maghreb Liberation Army in Tunisia

Salah Ben Youssef headed the Maghrebi delegation at the Bandung Conference in mid-1955. Through his contact with the Algerian delegation, he became more familiar with the objectives of the Algerian Revolution. He and other Tunisian nationalists who supported him recognized the importance of returning to armed struggle as a strategic option for advancing the objectives of the Committee for the Liberation of the Maghreb. Ben Youssef consequently launched his campaign from Cairo in opposition to the internal autonomy agreement reached in Tunisia, relying on prominent revolutionaries such as Tahar Lassoued and Abdelaziz Chouchane.¹

Ben Youssef initiated this challenge at a time when many resistance fighters were surrendering their weapons. French sources state that, between December 1 and 8, 220,000 military weapons and 100,000 rounds of ammunition were surrendered to the French, while a joint declaration was being made with the Algerian fighters.² Ben Youssef received full support for his revolutionary position from the Egyptian authorities and from the Algerian and other Maghrebi leaders based in Cairo. He thus became an ally of the unification project advocated by the leaders of the Algerian Revolution, both inside and outside Algeria.³

¹ Abdelhafid Moussem, "The Youssefists and the Question of Military Support for the Algerian Revolution, 1955–1956," *Al-Hikma*, no. 7 (first half of 2016): 169.

² Jacques Valette, previously cited work, 2.

³ Abdallah Maqalati, *Algerian-Maghrebi and African Relations during the Algerian Revolution*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Algiers: Dar al-Sabil Publishing, Ministry of Culture, 2009), 306–7.

Within this context, Salah Ben Youssef met Ahmed Ben Bella in Cairo in April 1955, following his return from Bandung and after hearing from the Algerian delegation about the Algerian Revolution, to coordinate efforts to revive the front of armed struggle in Tunisia. During this meeting, the action plan formulated by Ben Youssef, in coordination with the Algerian and Egyptian sides, was approved. It provided for the following:

- Mobilizing the Tunisian people's national and pan-Arab sentiment against the Franco-Tunisian agreements by distributing pamphlets in Salah Ben Youssef's name throughout Tunisia.
- Establishing contact with trustworthy opposition elements within Tunisia in order to organize the apparatus responsible for directing the armed struggle in coordination with representatives of the Algerian Liberation Army.
- Procuring the weapons required for the struggle and smuggling them through Libya.
- Establishing a coordination committee comprising Salah Ben Youssef and Ahmed Ben Bella to coordinate the armed struggle in accordance with the general plan for unifying the struggle in the three countries.⁴

Following the meeting, Ben Youssef left Cairo for Tripoli to assess the situation on the ground. He returned to Cairo in early September 1955, where several sessions were held with him to examine the situation and gain a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding the revival of the armed-struggle front in Tunisia. These sessions reached the following conclusions:

- Bourguiba had succeeded in winning Lazhar Chraïti and Sassi Lassoued over to his side after providing them with substantial financial support, which significantly affected their capacity for militant action.
- Members of the Destour Party who opposed Bourguiba's policy agreed on the necessity of resuming the armed struggle and nominated the resistance fighter Tahar Lassoued to lead it.
- The struggle had to begin with Salah Ben Youssef's entry into Tunisia to lead the political campaign against Bourguiba's defeatist policy.⁵

The Youssefists, affiliated with the General Secretariat of the Destour Party, established a paramilitary organization known as the "Counter-Front," led by Abdelrahman Ben Mahmoud al-Shamli, a former security official. Ben Youssef approved the organization and supplied it with funds and weapons. Its establishment was announced on December 16, 1955. Another organization was subsequently created under the direction of Rida Ben Amara. These

⁴ Abdelhafid Moussem, "The Youssefist Movement and the Algerian War of Independence" (PhD diss. in modern and contemporary history, University of Tlemcen, 2015–16), 124.

⁵ Fathi al-Dib, previously cited source, 132–33.

developments encouraged calls to take up arms and led Salah Ben Youssef and Tahar Lassoued to agree to recruit resistance fighters, arm them, and coordinate with the Algerians.⁶

Following coordination concerning the possibility of armed action with the support of the Egyptian authorities, it was agreed that Tahar Lassoued would be summoned to Libya to formulate a plan for armed struggle and coordinate Maghrebi revolutionary action.⁷ In his testimony, Tahar Lassoued stated:

An Egyptian delegation, comprising several high-ranking military commanders, came to us in Libya to discuss establishing a unified command to liberate North Africa. I met with them at the Maghreb Bureau in Libya. Abdelaziz Chouchane arrived, accompanied by the military attaché and two Egyptian officers, and we discussed the unification of the revolution and the formulation of a military plan for armed operations. At the conclusion of the discussions, they told me that I would receive a response the following day. The next day, the consul contacted me and said that President Gamal Abdel Nasser wanted me to board the first plane bound for Egypt. In Egypt, I was received by Fathi al-Dib, and Bashir was with me. We remained as guests for approximately fifteen days, until Fathi al-Dib came to us and said, “Tomorrow you will meet the president.” We went to the appointment and entered a spacious hall, where we found our Algerian brothers, Ben Bella and those accompanying him, as well as our Moroccan brothers, Ahmad of the Reform Party in Tetouan and Muhammad of the Party of Consultation and Independence.⁸

Egypt, as an independent Arab state, may be regarded as having been prepared to assume this role even before the meeting of the leaders of the Maghreb Liberation Army in Cairo on February 24, 1956. This was evident in a statement made by Youssef Rouissi, who declared that “Egypt can now be relied upon to liberate North Africa” following a visit to an arms factory dedicated to the liberation of the Arab world.⁹

In this connection, Tahar Lassoued recalled their meeting with Gamal Abdel Nasser:

After some time, the others left, and only Ben Bella and I remained in the hall. We entered another office, and Gamal Abdel Nasser came in. After greeting us and asking about our circumstances, he said, “We in Egypt have committed ourselves to assisting every Arab and every Muslim who fights the enemy, particularly in North Africa.” He then emphasized the formation of a joint committee composed of five members: a president, a secretary-general, a treasurer, and two members, so that we could begin practical work on a sound basis. Ben Bella then spoke and said to Abdel Nasser, “Here is Si Tahar Lassoued. He preceded us in taking up

⁶ Rida Mimouni, “The Unity of the Maghrebi Struggle in the Ideology of National Liberation Movements, 1947–1962” (PhD diss., Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Batna 1, 2019–20), 198–99.

⁷ Rida Mimouni, “The Role of Maghrebi Nationalists in the Liberation of Tunisia and Algeria from the End of the Second World War to Independence” (master’s thesis, Department of Humanities, History Division, University of Batna, 2011–12), 77.

⁸ Moussa al-Dawi, previously cited work, 85.

⁹ Ammar al-Soufi, previously cited work, 172.

the revolution and has experience; he should assume the presidency.” I rejected the proposal. Gamal Abdel Nasser then said, “The group has confidence in you; you must assume responsibility for the presidency.” I refused again, and Gamal Abdel Nasser became angry at my insistence. I explained the reason, saying, “Tunisia will attain independence, and it may do so before Algeria. It would therefore be preferable for the nucleus and command centers to which the weapons will be delivered to be located in Algeria. Should we require some weapons, they will be close to us.” Gamal then turned to Ben Bella and said, “This is correct. We can entrust the general command and coordination to Si Tahar, while Algeria will serve as the base for the weapons required by North Africa.”¹⁰

The French archives record that, on December 3, 1955, Tahar Lassoued issued a statement addressed to the revolutionaries and leaders of the liberation struggle in Algeria, in which he explained the strategy of the common struggle and outlined the means of cooperation among comrades-in-arms in defense of the homeland and the true Islamic faith. He concluded his statement with an appeal imbued with a sacred character: “Jihad -jihad, the brotherhood of Arabism.”¹¹ In another statement addressed to Tunisians and published in *Al-Sabah*, as cited by Tahar Abdallah, Tahar Lassoued was presented as the commander of the resistance fighters in Tunisia. Entitled “Let the Fainthearted Hear,” it declared:

I do not accept the agreements concluded with France, because we paid the price of freedom with blood dear to us. We paid with the blood of our leaders--Hached, Chaker, and the Hafouz brothers, heroes of struggle and resistance. . . . How, then, can we forget their pure souls and sacred blood and accept these false agreements in return? I declare my support for the leader, Salah Ben Youssef, because he safeguards the people's trust and mission.¹²

The role played by the resistance fighter Tahar Lassoued in mobilizing support for the resistance, particularly after he formally announced his allegiance to Salah Ben Youssef on November 11, 1955, would not have been possible without the network of cells maintained by the Youssefist opposition in southern Tunisia. This network provided the means to collect donations and possibly weapons. The party branches dispersed throughout the south served as sources of information and food supplies for the resistance fighters. Before Salah Ben Youssef's return, French military intelligence had detected movements by former resistance fighters to recruit volunteers and collect weapons. Recruitment to the mountain resistance subsequently continued and intensified within the framework of the Youssefist resistance, particularly from late 1955 onward.¹³

¹⁰ Moussa al-Dawi, previously cited work, 85–86.

¹¹ Ammar al-Soufi, previously cited work, 171.

¹² Tahar Abdallah, previously cited source, 118.

¹³ Alia Amira, *The Youssefists and the Liberation of the Maghreb*, previously cited work, 103.

2. Joint Action by Algerian and Tunisian Resistance Fighters at the Outset of the Revolution

On the second day after the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution, French reports indicated an organic alliance between veteran Tunisian revolutionaries and Algerian revolutionaries. Jacques Chevallier, described as a leading figure within the French deep state and the French secretary for defense, therefore met with the governor-general of Algeria to discuss the infiltration of Tunisian revolutionaries into Algerian territory. At the same time, he visited the Algerian-Tunisian border to examine the measures required to halt their entry into Algeria and prevent them from continuing the activities that had already been recorded for some time.¹⁴

On November 3, 1954, French sources, as cited by Hafidallah, reported the presence of Tunisian volunteers seeking to join the Revolution. French documents further record that, at six o'clock on the morning of November 6, 1954, French forces launched a major military operation in Douar Thlidjene. The operation involved units of the French army and a mobile detachment of the French National Gendarmerie at Jabal al-Ghanjaya, Douar Thlidjene, in the mixed commune of Tebessa. According to the French report, the operation resulted in the deaths of two soldiers of the National Liberation Army. The first was killed on the battlefield, while the second died two hours after being captured by French forces. Shortly before his death, the National Liberation Army soldier was interrogated and confirmed that they were of Tunisian origin.¹⁵

The same sources state that the documents seized from the deceased soldier were translated by the head of the intelligence center in order to prepare a comprehensive investigation into the operation. Before dying from his serious wounds, the soldier stated, "My name is Mubarak Ben Salah Ben Mansour." Membership cards issued by the Neo Destour Party and bearing his name confirmed his Tunisian origin. His companion, who was also killed, was likewise Tunisian.¹⁶

Such operations prompted French Minister of the Interior François Mitterrand to declare on November 7, 1954, that "he believed there were some Tunisian advisers among the Algerian resistance fighters." French newspapers consequently reported on November 16, 1954, that coordination existed between the liberation movements of the two countries, noting the presence of several Tunisian resistance fighters among the ranks of the Algerian Revolution. On November 9, 1954, Roger Léonard, governor-general of Algeria, stated to the press:

He is certain that a considerable number of Tunisian revolutionaries volunteered to fight alongside the Algerian revolutionaries, particularly in the Aurès Mountains. Events on the ground substantiate these statements, as the French gendarmerie arrested five Tunisian revolutionaries at Aïn Mokra, near Annaba, who had come to assist the Algerian revolutionaries.¹⁷

¹⁴ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 227.

¹⁵ Boubaker Hafidallah, *A Study of Military Organization in Wilaya I: The Aurès–Nemencha during the Algerian War of Independence through French Archival Documents* (Batna, Algeria: Dar Qana Publishing, 2021), 240.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁷ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 227–28.

Confrontations between Algerian revolutionaries and French colonial forces intensified from the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution, both within Tunisian territory and near the border, as part of a joint Algerian-Tunisian framework. Some French newspapers reported coordination between the Tunisian and Algerian resistance movements. In this context, Salah Ben Youssef stated to *Le Figaro*, as cited by Ammar Soufi:

Tunisian resistance fighters engage the French army daily and fight numerous battles against it. These are not isolated incidents, as some French politicians claim; rather, there is a plan of action and joint coordination between the Tunisian revolutionaries and the Algerian liberation movement.¹⁸

The press also reported a clash on December 7, 1954, north of the El Oued region, between a group of ten Tunisian revolutionaries traveling toward the Tunisian-Algerian border and a unit of French méharistes. One of the revolutionaries was wounded during the engagement and taken prisoner.¹⁹ Three battles also took place in the regions of Gafsa, Redeyef, and Métlaoui, which may be regarded as the spark that paved the way for the outbreak of confrontations on the Tunisian front.²⁰

French Army documents, as cited by Maqalati, reported that intelligence indicated that a meeting attended by more than eighty officials had been held at Jabal Boujellal, near Tebessa, in May 1955. Tunisia was represented by Tahar Lassoued; Algeria by Bachir Chihani; and Morocco by Moulay Abdallah.²¹

The French authorities also stated that the al-Yaqubi Unit was a Tunisian military formation that served as a clandestine committee working to liberate Tunisia and Algeria. It received its information and orders from the Committee for the Liberation of the Maghreb in Cairo through Libya. Its military activity was not confined to Tunisia; it also extended into Algeria, where it sent Tunisian revolutionaries to maintain contact with Algerian revolutionaries.²² The archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs also record the somewhat unusual information, derived from the testimonies of leaders involved in the events of that period, that actual contacts and understandings existed between resistance fighters from Algeria and Morocco, Rabat, and Egypt concerning the establishment of a unified command for the liberation movements within the framework of what was called the “Maghreb Liberation Army.” The organization issued its first communiqué in October 1955, signed by the “Moroccan Resistance Movement... and the Algerian National Liberation Front,” but without the Tunisian side's signature.²³

¹⁸ Houria Ouamane, “The French Strategy for Confronting Maghrebi Support for the Algerian Revolution, 1954–1962: Morocco and Tunisia as a Case Study” (PhD diss. in modern and contemporary history, Department of Humanities, Djilali Bounaama University, Khemis Miliana, 2016–17), 335.

¹⁹ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 227.

²⁰ Ammar al-Soufi, previously cited work, 184.

²¹ Abdallah Maqalati, “The Maghreb Liberation Army and the Algerian Revolution: Toward Realizing the Project of Maghrebizing the War, 1955–1956,” *Al-Haqiqa* 8, no. 2 (December 30, 2009): 30.

²² Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 227–28.

²³ Alia Amira, *The Youssefists and the Liberation of the Maghreb*, previously cited work, 104.

3. The Algerian Revolution's Base in Tunisia and Its Role in Activating the Maghreb Liberation Army

The revolutionary base in Tunisia constituted the practical outcome of all the agreements concluded in Cairo or Bandung. It undertook an immense effort, as confirmed by a document obtained by the author, signed by Commander Abdelhai and bearing a stamp inscribed "National Liberation Army." The document was addressed to his commander, Bachir Chihani, whom he called "Sidi al-Shaykh" in the letter. Dated November 5, 1955, the letter was translated into French by the French Army and included the following:

I inform you that, after great hardship and arduous work, we have achieved the desired objective. Tunisia has come close to regaining the initiative in the resistance, a development that has troubled us. We have taken no internal action, pending a collective initiative, God willing, in the near future, of which we shall inform you. The measures are as follows:

1. Organizing a local group to establish contact with you, that is, with the command in the Aurès under Bachir Chihani.
2. Organizing a local group that has gone to Libya.
3. Organizing a local group for military missions and training.
4. Not abandoning any Algerian present in the territory.
5. Beginning the organization of a Tunisian-Algerian army.²⁴

The date of this letter indicates that the practical agreements concluded thereafter confirm the accuracy of Abdelhai's account. The work he undertook was indeed arduous and produced substantial results. In early 1956, before Salah Ben Youssef fled Tunisia for Tripoli, he convened a meeting of the leaders of the Liberation Army at his home in Montfleury, Tunis, on January 28, 1956.²⁵ This army was intended to become the Liberation Army of the entire Maghreb. The Tunisian delegation comprised Salah Ben Youssef, Ali al-Zlitni, Tahar Lassoued, and Tayeb al-Zallaq; Algeria was represented by Said Abdelhai and Abbas Laghrour; and Morocco by a group of Liberation Army leaders headed by Mohammed Basri, commander of the Moroccan Resistance and Liberation Army.²⁶ Ben Youssef informed those present that Abdel Nasser wished to meet with them to discuss how they might obtain weapons to liberate the Maghreb.²⁷ Abdelhai had anticipated all these agreements in his earlier letter of November 5, 1955, because he knew that the contacts he had established would produce results on the ground. He wrote: "I wish to inform you that I have met with a large number of Tunisians who desire to assist the Revolution.

²⁴ S.H.A.T., box 1H1248, "Translation of the Main Passages of a Typewritten Letter in Arabic Addressed on November 5, 1955, by Abdelhai to 'Sidi Cheikh' (Bachir Chihani)"; see appendix 6.

²⁵ Ammar al-Soufi, previously cited work, 161.

²⁶ Tahar Abdallah, previously cited source, 131.

²⁷ Mohamed Belkacem, *The Unity of the Arab Maghreb in Idea and Reality: The Reality of the Idea of Unity, 1954–1975*, previously cited work, 194.

Once the final discussions with them have been concluded, we shall inform you, God willing, Sidi.”²⁸

Fathi al-Dib, head of Egyptian intelligence, records that Dr. Abdelkrim al-Khatib, commander of the Moroccan Liberation Army, arrived in Cairo accompanied by the resistance fighter Abbas Laghrou, commander of the Atlas Front in Algeria. They were joined by Mahdi Ben Abboud and Ahmed Ben Bella, representing the Algerian Liberation Army. On February 24, 1956, the resistance fighter Tahar Lassoued, commander of the Tunisian Liberation Army, arrived, accompanied by his chief of staff, Bashir al-Sabah.²⁹

At this meeting, it was decided to establish a unified command for the three liberation armies and to commit to continuing the armed struggle until the entire Maghreb had been liberated. Egypt, for its part, pledged through President Abdel Nasser himself to supply the resistance with weapons.³⁰ As Tahar Lassoued stated earlier in his account, it was agreed that he would serve as president of the Committee for the Liberation of North Africa.³¹ The meeting also agreed to unify the liberation armies in the Maghreb, formulate common plans for them, and send army personnel abroad for training in combat methods and the art of warfare. After Ben Youssef arrived in Tripoli and remained there for some time, the Tunisian Liberation Army began coordinating joint action with the Algerian Liberation Army.³²

Within this context, Tahar Lassoued addressed a letter to the leaders of the Algerian Revolution inside Algeria on December 23, 1955. In it, he affirmed the solidarity of the Tunisian revolutionaries with the Algerian Revolution and their conviction that the Maghreb must achieve independence without distinction among its three countries. He stated: “At present, we must support only the single struggle directed against the single colonial power, namely French colonialism.” The letter identified several points intended to regulate the foundations of the relationship with the Algerian Revolution:

- Moving closer to the Tunisian border to enable Tunisian revolutionaries to join the Algerian Liberation Army and incite the Tunisian people to resume the struggle and reject the Franco-Tunisian agreements.
- Keeping away from Tunisians loyal to Bourguiba and remaining vigilant toward them so that they could not undermine the unification effort.
- Obtaining information concerning the arrival of weapons from abroad, communicating with the people of El Hamma in this regard, and remaining vigilant toward Bourguiba’s followers, who were watching the route through which weapons passed to El Hamma.

²⁸ S.H.A.T., box 1H1248, “Translation of the Main Passages.”

²⁹ Fathi al-Dib, previously cited source, 170–72.

³⁰ Mohamed Belkacem, *The Unity of the Arab Maghreb in Idea and Reality: The Reality of the Idea of Unity, 1954–1975*, previously cited work, 195.

³¹ Moussa al-Dawi, previously cited work, 86.

³² Tahar Abdallah, previously cited source, 159–85.

- Conducting investigations into Tunisians joining the ranks of the Revolution by establishing all relevant details concerning them, including their villages, their locations, and the chiefdoms to which they belonged.
- Requiring Tunisians who subsequently sought to join the Algerian Revolution to provide the following recognition signals as a condition of admission:

“Constantine Bridge” and “Oued Souk Ahras.” No Tunisian was to hold a command position within your ranks.³³

In the same context, a letter dated January 11, 1956, written by Tahar Lassoued following the Battle of al-Baliji near Gafsa and addressed to the Algerian resistance fighters, was discovered. In it, he reminded them of the unity of the struggle, the unity of destiny, and their duty toward religion and the homeland. He urged them to move closer to the Tunisian border, meet the Tunisian resistance fighters, and join forces with them to mobilize the rest of the population. He also warned them against Bourguiba’s followers, whom he described as traitors.³⁴

Amid these developments, the French Army command, relying on information gathered from prisoners captured during the battles fought by France against resistance units in the Sfax region during the first half of January 1956, discovered the agreement concluded between the General Secretariat of the Neo Destour Party and the revolutionary base represented by Commander Said Abdelhai, who also represented the National Liberation Front. The agreement stipulated the following:

1. Said Abdelhai would possess the authority and responsibility to contact and coordinate with the high command.
2. Large-scale Algerian intervention in Tunisia was necessary.
3. Algerian resistance fighters would communicate only with branches of the “General Secretariat” to obtain information and assistance.
4. Only volunteers approved by Tahar Lassoued could be incorporated into Algerian units.
5. Joint units had to be placed under Algerian command.
6. The Youssefists would guarantee assistance and support for the smuggling of weapons.
7. The Youssefists would, in turn, form their own armed units, and their politico-military organization would be modeled on that of the Algerians.
8. Algerian forces in Tunisia could provide the Youssefists with weapons and ammunition.
9. The Algerians undertook to provide financial assistance for the conduct of joint operations.
10. The Algerians had to be informed when the Youssefists entered into a general uprising.³⁵

This document may be regarded as a charter of agreement between the Algerian Revolution and the Youssefist General Secretariat. It regulated all attempts at infiltration by French agents and

³³ Rida Mimouni, “The Unity of the Maghrebi Struggle,” 199–200.

³⁴ Alia Amira, *The Youssefists and the Liberation of the Maghreb*, previously cited work, 109.

³⁵ Abdelhafid Moussem, “The Youssefist Movement and the Algerian War of Independence,” 171.

Bourguiba's agents and defined the areas of joint action within the framework of the armed struggle. This document may have been what most disturbed Bourguiba and the French administration, prompting them to order Salah Ben Youssef's arrest, though he escaped.³⁶

4. Joint Battles in French Reports and Newspapers

The scope of the armed struggle expanded, and joint Algerian-Tunisian bands were formed along the entire Algerian-Tunisian border. Pressure on the French forces increased, and armed operations intensified, dispersing them and reducing pressure on Algeria. Algerian military units were present on Tunisian territory, which they used for training, rest, and as bases from which to depart for Algeria. French reports stated that these units were positioned along the border and on the tracks and routes north and south of Haïdra, south of the Oued Rina region, west of Feriana in the Deloubira area, and in the Houidet chiefdom. Those stationed in Houidet had come from the Aïn Beïda chiefdom in Algeria. A unit of Youssefist revolutionaries at Jabal Sif joined them. They also moved within and occupied the triangle formed by Deloubira, Bou Chebka, El Alama, and Jabal al-Abyad. They were likewise stationed in barracks constructed by Tunisians and Algerians in the Houidet chiefdom, in the southern and western part of the Bou Aïssa region.³⁷

French reports further indicated that the Algerian revolutionaries in Tunisia wanted their leadership to expand military operations to include Tunisian territory. Evidence of this appeared in a letter sent from Cairo, dated January 28, 1956, which was found by the French security unit in the Nemencha region. It stated: "The spread of the policy of the leader Bourguiba in Algeria must be prevented by every means; military operations must therefore be expanded."³⁸

Based on this letter, the revolutionaries sought to give the war of liberation a Maghrebi dimension. Therefore, the number of operations near the Algerian-Tunisian border and within Tunisia increased. In its January 22–23, 1956, issue, *L'Écho d'Oran* published the following report:

For several days, terrorist activities (revolutionary-jihadist activities) have assumed immense proportions in southern Tunisia. Despite official denials, the rising number of incidents makes these reports impossible to dismiss. Security in the countryside of the central-western and southwestern regions is coming under growing threat. The armed bands formed by Tahar Lassoued--the fellagha leader who violated General de Latour's truce and who was said to support Salah Ben Youssef traveled through these districts, searched for peasants loyal to Bourguiba, and seized their money, supplies, and weapons. At the military level, fierce skirmishes occurred between government forces, comprising Tunisian foot soldiers and makhzen troops, and 100 outlaws at Tamerza, a region on the demarcation line, 40 kilometers west of

³⁶ Rida Mimouni, "The Role of Maghrebi Nationalists in the Liberation of Tunisia and Algeria," 78.

³⁷ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 243.

³⁸ Ibid.

Gafsa. The operation was extremely difficult and took place in the mountains, where air support was limited.³⁹

L'Écho d'Oran added:

Details are unavailable, but the military authorities reported that twelve rebels (resistance fighters) had been killed and eighteen others captured. An examination of the recovered matériel revealed a machine gun, automatic pistols, hand grenades, and components of British mortar shells. On the other side, two soldiers were killed, another was seriously wounded, and several others sustained minor injuries. According to the same source, troops from the Gafsa sector who participated in the operation had been engaged in the same area at least five times over three weeks. They had reportedly inflicted severe blows on the rebels (resistance fighters). Max Denan was found on Saturday in the Kasserine–Feriana mountain range with his throat cut; he appeared to have been killed by a bullet to the neck. He had been abducted on Wednesday during an attack on two vehicles, at the same time as a Tunisian border guard serving in the auxiliary forces. The Tunisian auxiliary was released by the outlaws (resistance fighters) without having been subjected to harsh treatment. Max Denan, originally from Oran, where he was born in 1931, had lived in Bizerte before joining the gendarmerie in Feriana, where he had only recently been assigned. He was brutally killed.⁴⁰

On October 5, 1956, *L'Écho d'Oran* also reported:

French forces were ambushed in the forested mountainous region of Thala, located thirty kilometers from the border with Constantine. The losses were substantial: approximately twelve men were killed, including four officers. Reinforcements immediately arrived to pursue the attackers, who numbered more than one hundred men wearing military uniforms and equipped with light and heavy automatic weapons and mortars. The group had reportedly been present in the region for at least a week. Air and artillery forces participated in the operation, which remained underway despite the results still being unknown. The ambush was attributed to the presence of between 800 and 1,200 Algerian fellaghas in the Thala–Sbiba sector, where they had remained practically inactive. Large numbers of men, along with ammunition, weapons, and other supplies, were being smuggled from the south by land and sea. This activity had been taking place for several months. More recently, the high command of the Tunisian forces had intended to disrupt it for fear of an incident. The operation that was to take place on Tunisian territory was either brought under control or postponed. It was believed that the Algerian fellagha group that had carried out Tuesday's ambush would rest and then return. Elsewhere, a degree of unrest was apparent among the tribes of Tunisia's far south.⁴¹

On October 6, 1956, the press reported that four hundred fellaghas had engaged French forces in an area near Thala and Kasserine, close to the Algerian-Tunisian border. It stated that seventeen

³⁹ *L'Écho d'Oran*, no. 30443, January 22–23, 1956, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *L'Écho d'Oran*, no. 30661, October 5, 1956, 8.

resistance fighters had been killed during these confrontations and that one had been captured. The newspaper, however, reported that only nine French soldiers, including two officers, had been killed and that sixteen had been wounded.⁴²

French reports also stated that the unit operating in the Bou Chebka–Bekkaria–Bordj Oum Ali triangle carried out an operation on Tunisian territory in which 577 telephone poles were cut down.⁴³ French newspapers reported on October 17, 1956, that two hundred Algerian and Tunisian rebels attacked a company positioned ten kilometers inside Tunisian territory and comprising sixty soldiers, killing fifteen and wounding seventeen.⁴⁴

Within the same context, the French report enumerated the Algerian units operating in the Kef region and entering Tunisian territory from the directions of Souk Ahras, El Kala, and the Beni Salah Mountains. One unit stationed there was commanded by Marzouk Ahmed, known as Ahmed al-Qabayli, and assisted by Tayeb Jaber. South of Regama was the unit of Salah Bourouina, comprising twenty men, as well as Ammar's unit, composed of twenty-two revolutionaries and also stationed south of Bou Hadjar. Louimi's unit consisted of twenty revolutionaries and was positioned west of Ouled Bechbach. Tabbash's unit comprised twenty revolutionaries and was stationed south of Ouled Bechbach, while Mekki's unit consisted of fifteen revolutionaries and was based in Douar Ouled Dahia. This region was significant because revolutionaries were transported from there into Tunisia.⁴⁵

In its May 20–21, 1956, issue, *L'Écho d'Oran* reported that fifty-three Algerian and Tunisian fellaghas had been killed southwest of Gafsa and that French forces had recovered two hundred rifles. The battle was extensive and involved aircraft and armored ground forces. As usual, France minimized its own losses, acknowledging only one soldier killed and one wounded.⁴⁶

Reports dated February 6, 1956, also indicated that the revolutionaries operating in the Souk Ahras and Ouenza regions constituted a regular army of 800 soldiers, while the auxiliary force numbered 1,500. All the aforementioned units entered and left Tunisia. A report dated February 25, 1956, also noted the presence in Tunisia of a unit commanded by the Algerian Abdelkader Soufi and assisted by a Tunisian named Aziz Belhaj Belkacem. In the Haïdra region, Ali Ben Mohamed al-Jabali and Saad Ben Saidi volunteered to serve as guides for the Algerian revolutionaries.⁴⁷

On July 20, 1956, *Paris-Presse, L'Intransigeant* reported that “the French gendarmerie arrested a group of rebels (resistance fighters) operating in southwestern Tunisia and seized a collection of weapons in their possession.”⁴⁸ Within the same context, *France-Soir* had previously reported the

⁴² *L'Écho d'Oran*, no. 30662, October 6, 1956, 8.

⁴³ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 244.

⁴⁴ *L'Écho d'Oran*, no. 30673, October 17, 1956, 1.

⁴⁵ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 244.

⁴⁶ *L'Écho d'Oran*, no. 30544, May 21, 1956, 1.

⁴⁷ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 244.

⁴⁸ *Paris-Presse, L'Intransigeant*, July 20, 1956, 1.

presence of twenty Algerian revolutionary battalions on Tunisian territory. A report from Gabès dated April 5, 1956, also stated that the unit commanded by Taleb Larbi, which was stationed in the Gafsa region, entered Algeria by way of Jabal Chebika, Jabal Oum al-Kmakem, and Jabal al-Abyad. Another report, dated June 26, 1956, indicated that the border region was divided into four zones. The first extended northward from Menقار al-Batt al-Saghir, northwest of Roum el-Souk; the second followed the Medjerda Valley between the Oued Magras station and Ghardimaou; the third extended from Douar al-Hamama between Ouenza and Sakiet; and the fourth comprised the El Meridj–Marest–Haïdra triangle. The route used by the revolutionaries passed through Jabal Bargou, Téboursouk, Nebeur, and Sakiet.⁴⁹

L'Écho d'Oran, in its issue of November 30, 1956, also reported that twenty-five outlaws (resistance fighters) had been killed or imprisoned near the Tunisian border. They had operated from support and training centers on Tunisian territory and moved freely between Algeria and Tunisia with Tunisian assistance. All of them wore military uniforms. French forces recovered seven Lewis machine guns, three Hotchkiss machine guns, twenty-four Beretta individual weapons, eighty-one British rifles, six rifles of various types, ten hunting rifles, and twenty other pistols of various types.⁵⁰

In another report dated January 22, 1956, newspapers described a major battle near Gafsa, close to the Algerian-Tunisian border, in which twelve rebels (resistance fighters) were killed and eighteen others captured. These fighters belonged to the command of Tahar Lassoued, who was subordinate to Salah Ben Youssef.⁵¹

Reports also stated that the Destour branch in Sfax and the Destour Youth Bureau assisted Algerian revolutionaries by transporting them to the Algerian-Tunisian border in a National Guard truck. Documents record that a group of Algerian revolutionaries was transported from Gabès to Sfax and taken to Mohamed Ben Slimane at Bab Jebli. The reports further referred to meetings between the leader, Salah Ben Youssef, and Algerian revolutionaries during his week-long visit to the south. On October 31, 1956, he met in Beni Khedache with several leaders of the Algerian Revolution, including El-Hadj Abdallah of Souk Ahras and another from Tebessa. Reports dated November 21, 1956, also indicated that Algerian revolutionaries maintained six bases in northern Djerid and four bases along the Gabès–Nefta line. They further noted the existence of a camp in Kebili, affiliated with the Aurès, that could accommodate 60 Algerian revolutionaries. The reports also recorded the presence of Lazhar Chraïti, commander of the Aurès–Nemencha revolutionaries, in the Kasserine–Talabet region. Those responsible for assisting him were Lakhdar Bourгаа, a merchant residing in Talabet, and Hassan al-Boualaqi,

⁴⁹ Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 244.

⁵⁰ *L'Écho d'Oran*, no. 30709, November 30, 1956, 1.

⁵¹ *L'Écho d'Oran*, January 22, 1957.

who resided in Sbeitla. They were responsible for the Sbeitla–Talabet–Feriana line, along which coordination between the Algerian revolutionaries and the Youssefists was evident.⁵²

Conclusion

The study of joint action by Algerian and Tunisian resistance fighters during the early years of the Algerian War of Independence demonstrates that the struggle against French colonialism was not an isolated national endeavor but rather part of a broader Maghrebi liberation project grounded in the shared destiny and objectives of the region's peoples. Political and military coordination between the revolutionaries of the two countries helped support the Algerian Revolution and expand its operational reach. It also helped formulate the concept of the Maghreb Liberation Army and translate it into practice through joint meetings, the exchange of logistical and personnel support, and joint battles against colonial forces. Despite the political difficulties and internal divisions that characterized Tunisia at the time, this experience affirmed the strength of Maghrebi solidarity and its effective role in confronting colonialism, remaining a historical testament to the unity of struggle between the Algerian and Tunisian peoples in their pursuit of freedom and independence.

⁵² Habib Hassan al-Loulab, previously cited work, 245.