

Continuous French Crimes in Algeria: "Landmine Victims as a Model"

Dr. Mohamed Ben Trar,

Hassiba Ben Bouali University, Chlef.

Phone: 0770940917 / 0550218847, **Email:** bentrar1974@yahoo.fr.

Dr. Ziani Kenza,

Research Professor Section B at the National Center for Studies and Research in Popular Resistance, National Movement and the November 1, 1954 Revolution.

Phone: 0661640417, **Email:** kenzaziani990@gmail.com.

Theme: Specialization in Contemporary History of Algeria.

Received: 10/01/2026

Accepted: 11/03/2026

Published: 18/07/2026

Abstract

The intervention addresses one of the most important continuous French crimes committed against innocent Algerians during the colonial and revolutionary phases, the effects of which lasted well beyond independence. We will shed light on landmine victims in Algeria since the establishment of the Andre Morice line in the Algerian West in 1956 and the Challe-Morice lines in the Algerian East in 1957. These lines contained various types of mines that began killing and amputating members of the National Liberation Army (ALN) and continued post-independence (until 2016) to kill and amputate innocent civilians. This constitutes a crime that violates all international laws, especially given France's refusal to provide maps of these landmines until the members of the People's National Army (ANP) were able to clear these areas, remove the danger, and dry up its sources.

Keywords: French crimes - Landmines - Amputation - Challe and Morice lines - People's National Army.

Introduction

After France's success in occupying Algeria following the fall of the capital and the launch of the expansion campaign east and west to consolidate the occupation, the French army began committing massive crimes against defenseless Algerians. On November 27, 1830, General Clauzel carried out a heinous crime against the inhabitants of Blida, followed by the massacre by the Duke of Rovigo, who slaughtered the Ouffia tribe on the night of April 5 to 6, 1832, on the banks of the El Harrach River. In Chlef, the Sbiha massacre was committed near the Chlef River in the summer of 1844 by Colonel Cavaignac, followed by the Dahra massacre on June 17, 1845, executed by General Péliissier against the Frachich tribe. On December 4, 1852, another massacre was committed against 2,300 innocent residents of Laghouat. This culminated on May 8, 1945, when a massacre was committed against the defenseless inhabitants of Sétif, Guelma, and Kherrata simply because they went out to demand independence. These events lead up to the crimes of French colonialism during the revolution, spearheaded by the crime of landmines that claimed the

lives of innocents after the establishment of the Challe and Morice lines, remaining continuous until 2016, which makes it an international crime that we will address through this study.

1. Landmine Victims During the Revolution

Following the outbreak of the liberation revolution and the success of the battles led by the National Liberation Army across the country, fueled by the strength of the arming process through the western and eastern borders, France decided to establish two electrified and mined lines along the western and eastern borders. These extended from Marsa Ben M'hidi to El Menabha in the western region, and from Negrine to El Kala in the eastern region. The construction of the Morice line in the west started in the spring of 1956 after the successful attack on the Sababna barracks on 02/19/1956. This made it difficult for the revolutionaries to move between the interior and exterior due to the dangers of mines, electricity, and the forty (40) observation posts that extended along the western borders from Marsa Ben M'hidi, northwest of Tlemcen, to El Menabha, west of the Bechar province, and from Negrine to El Kala.

However, the determination of the Mujahideen and the elements of the ALN was not affected by this line, which was intended to isolate the revolution and block aid from sister countries. New crossing routes were discovered, which increased the number of landmine victims, either directly within the barbed wire or outside it. This occurred as colonial authorities pursued ALN members detected by observation posts and scattered radar systems, leading to fierce battles in the areas near the barbed wire. The incidents that occurred between 1956 and 1962, coinciding with the reinforcement of the barbed wire barrier with new technologies, enabled the recording of many victims. The statistics can be summarized in the following table:

Civilian victims	Widows of the victims	Ascendants of civilian victims who died during the liberation war	Total
829	808	193	1830

Source: Report of the Algerian Republic for the year 2018 addressed to the United Nations body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Ottawa Convention, p. 45.

The distribution of these statistics varied from year to year, depending on the progress of the construction of the Challe and Morice lines on one hand, and the movements of the liberation army on the borders on the other hand. Furthermore, these statistics neglected the victims of the fierce battles that took place near the barbed wire after the mines hindered their progress, making it easier to besiege them in the mountains and forests near the borders. The number of landmine victims on the western borders varied from year to year and from region to region. The number of victims was linked to the Morice line mines and the progress of its works from the beginning of its establishment in mid-1956 until independence, as well as the dynamism of the liberation army on the western and eastern borders on the one hand, and the evolution of their interaction with the

barbed wire barrier on the other. This prompts us to trace a statistical study by year, relying on some reports of the French army and its intelligence services, and the written or oral testimonies of members of the National Liberation Army.

Victims in 1956

Available statistics in most historical studies confirm that the number of victims of the Morice line mines is imprecise, and we derive them from French military reports. These were closely linked to arms smuggling operations from rear bases in Morocco to ALN elements in Wilaya V, from where they were distributed to the rest of the Wilayas. They were also linked to the beginning of the Morice line works and its fortifications as it was the first. These statistics, which did not separate the number of dead and wounded and grouped them into one category as victims, indicated that about 165 victims were recorded during the second semester of 1956, starting from the month of June. We will try to work with this and compare the French statistics with some Algerian studies and living testimonies, which unanimously agreed on counting landmine victims starting from mid-1956, when the Morice line was reinforced with mines.

However, it is certain that this point is linked to August 1956 instead of June. The more likely assumption is that the census starting from June is closer to the truth, given that the border control operation was launched during the period when the French Army services began to tighten control over the border strip. This was done by the half-brigade battalions of the marine skirmishers, which began setting up barbed wire in the northern areas of the Algerian western borders. This makes us rely on these statistics as they are close to accuracy since they are taken from military reports. On the other hand, the Mujahid "Guelamine Cheikh" indicates that he worked on the Morice line in mid-1956 when he was imprisoned after being sentenced, and he witnessed the death of 27 people, some of whom died by a mine or in work accidents. This makes us rely on the statistics starting from the month of June.

Source: Contre amiral Bernard Estival, op.cit. p388

Victims in 1957

The danger of the Morice line and its mines doubled during 1957 in the western region, coinciding with the completion of the Challe line in the eastern region, after the barbed line was reinforced with electricity and various mines that raised the number of victims to more than 210 during this year. This was due to the large number of attacks carried out by the members of the National Liberation Army during this year in an attempt to break the stranglehold on the revolution. In early 1957, three battalions carried out raids on the wires, heading towards the cities of Maghnia and Tlemcen. Significant crossing operations were also recorded, as well as an attack by 300 Mujahideen on the barbed barrier, which allowed two battalions to cross into the Algerian territory. In the same year, squads loaded with weapons were equipped to cross.

Victims in 1958

The year 1958 is considered a decisive turning point on the western and eastern borders, due to the completion of the reinforcements of the Challe and Morice lines from "Marsa Ben M'hidi" to "El Menabha" (Colomb) on the borders of "Western Bechar", as well as from Negrine to El Kala.

Technical updates were introduced to the line by increasing the number of mines, doubling the surveillance of the line, and introducing radar surveillance. A network of these devices was completed between "Sidi Aissa and Mokta-Delli" over a distance of 250 km, a barrier network between Mokta-Delli and Merires over 200 km, and a radar network between Merires and Bechar over a distance of 100 km, in addition to strengthening the control routes for the barbed barrier.

Victims in 1959

The danger of the Challe and Morice lines grew in 1959 due to the development of the fortifications carried out by the French authorities on the two barbed and electrified lines during this year. Concurrently, the crossing operations of the ALN members decreased after expanding the barrier surveillance operations with additional forces, as well as relying on aircraft after the establishment of 3 airports along the borders in "El Aricha, Mecheria, and the environs of Djenien Bourezg" in addition to "Es Senia Airport" in the West, and the airports of Tebessa, Constantine, Guelma, and Annaba in the East. These began monitoring the barbed wire along the eastern and western borders. Radar devices, searchlights, and multiple patrols, including foot patrols and those mounted on armored vehicles, also contributed to tightening surveillance and preventing movements, which led to a reduction in the number of victims.

Victims in 1960

The year 1960 is considered a pivotal date in the Algerian revolution on the western and eastern borders because it is linked to important events that occurred in these areas, which led to an increase in landmine victims in the border strip, whether directly or indirectly, in battles that occurred on the banks of the Morice line, whose fortifications made it difficult for ALN elements to advance. This year is associated with a high number of crossing operations to ensure the revolution was supplied with weapons, especially in light of the demands of the internal soldiers for the entry of soldiers stationed at the rear bases on the one hand, and the emergence of divisions among the elements of the liberation army, such as the incident of Captain Zoubir and Captain Moussa.

Victims in 1961

Sources and references differed on the number of landmine victims during 1961. While some French statistics point to a decline in the number of crossing cases, and with it the number of victims, other data indicate the opposite. For example, French data indicates that the number of victims declined significantly during 1961 and ranged between a single case and 3 during the first four months only.

Victims in 1962

Unlike other years, French reports did not refer to the statistics of landmine victims during 1962, but we find the Mujahid Daho Ould Kablia counted them at 135 crossing operations during the first half of the same year, marked by the martyrdom of two mujahideen and the injury of another. This decrease in crossing operations is due to the tightening of the noose by the French authorities, who reinforced the barbed line with electronic guarding via radar devices on the one hand, and the signs of independence that began to clearly emerge with the beginning of 1962 through the

progress of negotiations on the other hand.

3. Landmine Victims After Independence

Algerians succeeded in securing their independence after a fierce war that lasted more than seven and a half years, which forced the French government to enter into serious negotiations. These ended with the organization of a referendum in France on 08/04/1962, the results of which were in favor of Algeria's independence by 91%. A referendum was also held in Algeria on 01/07/1962, which likewise ended in favor of Algeria's independence by 99% out of 90% of the participants in the referendum.

The French armies began leaving Algeria, leaving behind lines of death on the western and eastern borders. The mines they planted caused the loss of the lives of hundreds of innocents, widows, shepherds, farmers, breeders, and children, despite the efforts of the Algerian authorities to clear these mines. This was due to the procrastination of the French authorities in handing over the maps of the minefields planted on the Morice and Challe lines, which were finally handed over by the Chief of Staff of the French Army, General Jean-Louis Georgelin, only on October 8, 2008. Algeria counted a large number of landmine victims after the liberation revolution, which can be summarized in the following table:

Landmine victims	Landmine victims	Ascendants of landmine victims	Total
1734	315	421	2470

Landmine Victims on the Western Borders (1962 - 2016)

After the end of the revolution and the departure of the remnants of the French colonizer from Algeria, Algerians in the Algerian region entered a new war against the remnants of the liberation war, which were the Morice line mines, which turned into a daily obsession for the border residents from Chaib Rassou in the far north of Tlemcen to El Menabha in Bechar. This is despite the allocation by the FLN and ALN of border crossings from the western borders to facilitate the return of refugees from Morocco to participate in the celebrations and joys experienced by the Algerian people after gaining independence.

Province	Number of victims	Number of male victims	Number of female victims	Total population	Mortality rate
Tlemcen	274	254	20	25847	0,01
Naâma	292	260	32	2114	0,14
Bechar	100	95	5	4823	0,02

Province	Number of victims	Number of male victims	Number of female victims	Total population	Mortality rate
Total	666	609	57	32784	0,17

Landmine Victims on the Eastern Borders (1962 - 2016)

Province	Number of victims	Number of male victims	Number of female victims	Total population	Mortality rate
Souk Ahras	367	294	73	11130	3.3
Tebessa	317	296	21	14217	2.22
El Tarf	143	137	6	9495	1.5
Guelma	132	111	21	11578	1.14
Total	959	738	121	46420	8.16

Conclusion

The file of landmine victims is considered one of the continuous French crimes committed by France with premeditation and deliberation, given that it established them without regard for the victims they would create. Moreover, it left Algeria after the Evian Accords without clearing these mines, which left innocent victims who were not soldiers who participated in the war against it or caused it. Add to that, although all international laws and charters forbid and prohibit the use of landmines and require their removal, France did not even bother to grant the maps of these mines to the Algerians, which caused the operation to be delayed from 1962 to 2016, causing the number of victims to rise. It also deprived the inhabitants of the western and eastern borders of exploiting and moving within Algerian land that is supposed to be independent. This obliges the French authorities to compensate for the damage and not to evade responsibility under the pretext that Articles 15 and 18 of the Evian Accords put an end to prosecutions, as these agreements are not legally binding on the Algerian side because they are not published with the United Nations on the one hand, and those who represented Algeria were a group of FLN representatives, not the Algerian state, which France did not recognize at the time.