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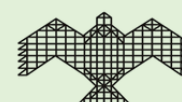
IN FOCUS

60 years of Algerian independence

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COMMENTARY

60 years of Algerian independence

Worsening relations between Algeria and France mirror the dwindling foothold of France over its former colonies in the African continent.

Poulomi Mondal



Image Source: AFP/The Jakarta Post

On 19 March, France's Elysée Palace held a ceremony to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Algerian independence from the French colonial rule in 1962. The relations between the two countries have often been topsy-turvy, with deep-rooted disagreements from the shared past fueled by domestic politics, different interpretations of terrorism and a long history of mistrust. Yet, there have been instances of mutual cooperation and good relations for almost four decades, which only started to fall apart since the 1990s.

France-Algeria Relations: Five things to know

First, the colonial history. France occupied Algeria from 1830 to 1962, when the signing of the Evian accords marked the end of the Algerian war of independence. The colonial era saw brutal crimes and exploitation, including economic drain, ethnic and religious reversal, physical torture, and sexual assault. Reportedly, 1.5 million Algerians were killed during the war of independence. Lack of any official apology from France remains a primary bone of contention between the countries.

Although Emmanuel Macron in 2018 acknowledged French colonization as a 'crime against humanity' and set up a memory and truth commission in 2021 to review its colonial past and take a reconciliation approach, the commission's report ultimately ruled out any possibility of a formal apology or reparations.

Second, the nuclear testing. France carried out 17 nuclear tests between 1960 and 1967 in the Algerian desert. Some were even carried out after independence under an agreement between the two countries; there were also secret deals with the new Algerian state to allow chemical weapons tests until 1978. However, the underground shafts were not properly sealed during these tests and many people living near these sites were reported with birth defects and cancer which gave France the tag of an irresponsible colonial power as it refuses to clean up the area even after several activists and environmentalists have repeatedly warned about the persisting contamination in the sites.

Third, domestic issues. The confusing narrative in the domestic political inclinations of France in Algeria and its continuing interference is a major driver behind the conflicting relations. France's aid to former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in the fight against Islamist's victory in 1992 was returned with an anti-French discourse by the then president to garner domestic support. Similarly, Emmanuel Macron's acknowledgement of having good relations with the current Algerian president Abdelmadjid Tebboune against pro-democracy groups like the

Hirak is in contrast with his remarks of Algeria being 'ruled by political-military system' and vocal concerns regarding authoritarian military rule in the country.

Fourth, diplomatic miscalculations. The 'irresponsible' statements made by Macron in a semi-public meeting in 2021 with the presence of some youth having French-Algerian descentance in the presence of Le Monde newspaper, had inflammatory impacts on the relations between the countries. His remarks on Algeria's non-existence as a country before the French colonization, slashing of French visas for Algerians and the disputed involvement of Algerian military in Mali's Operation Barkhane without consent cements domestic nationalism based on hatred for France. In response, Algeria recalled Algerian diplomats in Paris and banned French military planes from entering Algerian airspace which is critically important to France for accessing the rest of Africa.

Fifth, interpretations of terrorism. Both Algeria and France differ highly in their dealings with different terrorist groups in the Sahel region. For instance, while Algeria takes on a rather reconciliatory and negotiations-based approach towards the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, France has strictly prohibited any forms of negotiations with the group. Similarly, they differ in their view of the G5 grouping in the Sahel with France taking a middle way while Algeria opts for strict intolerance due to core security concerns. This creates a conflict of interest within the anti-terrorism efforts based on individual interests.

Anti-French Sentiment in Africa

The Franco-Algerian relations can be taken as an archetype to understand the main reasons behind the rising Anti-French sentiment in the African continent.

First, the neo-colonial arrogance. Despite several efforts by Macron to open and

address the ancient African wounds, by returning cultural artefacts, engaging younger generations and publicly acknowledging the failures and systematic torturers under French rule, the underlying colonial arrogance works as a deal-breaker. This can be seen in irresponsibly questioning the existence of Algeria as a nation or demanding the West African leaders to fly to France after 13 French troops were killed in Mali.

Second, terrorism in the Sahel. Despite a sustained and massive military effort with more than 5,000 troops deployed, France has not been able to decisively overcome the threat from Islamic extremism in the region. A recent example would be the withdrawal of troops from Mali after President Macron acknowledged the failure of French troops in combatting extremism.

Third, the Russia factor. As anti-French sentiments rise in West Africa, the vacuum was filled by growing Russian influence with the help of private mercenaries from the Wagner Group. This concerns France and the rest of Europe, especially as the Ukrainian crisis unfolds. Russian influence is also getting legitimized by the popular support among the citizens in former French colonies like Burkina Faso as opposed to dwindling French foothold over the region.

The blame-game

The reconciliation efforts by Macron clearly have not been appealing enough in the African Continent which sees France as an arrogant and irresponsible power that failed to bring any significant change in the persisting extremism in the Sahel. Additionally, Macron is also questioned in the backdrop of pandering to the right-wing ideology to garner support for his 2022 elections with an increasing crackdown on countries like Morocco and Algeria with regard to the undocumented migrant issue or the slashing of visas.

However, for how long and to what extent can sovereign and independent countries in Africa blame a former colonial power for its lack of development, security concerns and lack of democratization is a question to ponder upon? Or, is it simply the lingering French colonial effect and the refusal to let go of its foothold that is

leading to the deteriorating relations between France and the African francophone countries?

Recent publications from the NIAS Africa Studies

“Instability in Burkina Faso: Five things to know,” *Africa Weekly*, 1 March 2022

“Conflict over the Nile Dam,” *Africa Weekly*, 8 March 2022

“Europe and Africa: Will AU and EU be equal partners?,” *Africa Weekly*, 15 March 2022

Nireekshan Bollimpalli, “Africa’s slow COVID vaccination continues. Four reasons why,” *Global Politics*, 13 March 2022

“Libya: Political Polarization and Parallel Governments,” *Africa Weekly*, 22 March 2022

AFRICA IN BRIEF

23 March-29 March

By Mohamad Aseel Ummer and Apoorva Sudhakar

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopian government declares humanitarian ceasefire

On 24 March, the Abiy Ahmed administration announced a humanitarian ceasefire in Tigray which has been witnessing the clashes between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian armed forces. Since the conflict broke out in November 2020, Tigray and its surrounding regions are been facing increased food insecurity causing international concern. Both sides have accused the other of preventing food and medical aid from reaching the region as road networks have been affected. The government intends to suspend the hostilities temporarily to ensure the proper inflow of aid into the region in a "reasonable time." The enforcement of the ceasefire is yet to be clarified by the authorities. The self-declared government in the Tigray region commented that "it will do everything it can to make sure the cessation of hostilities is a success. On 27 March, the government in Addis Ababa re-declared an immediate and unilateral truce with the TPLF forces to ensure humanitarian aid reaches the region. The government statement said: "The government of Ethiopia hopes that this truce will substantially improve the humanitarian situation on the ground and pave the way for the resolution of the conflict in northern Ethiopia without further bloodshed." (["Ethiopia's Tigray region says it will observe humanitarian ceasefire," Reuters, 24 March 2022](#))

Ethiopian Air Forces claimed over 300 lives, says UN official

On 28 March, News24 reported UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet's statement; she said the Ethiopian Air Force's (ETAf) airstrikes in Tigray and Afar have claimed at least 304

lives and left 373 injured. The figure accounts for airstrikes carried out between November 2021 and February 2022; several airstrikes were carried out against markets, hotels, and schools. Bachelet said around two million students were affected as airstrikes left schools fully or partially destroyed. (Lenin Ndebele, "[Ethiopian Air Force accounts for 304 civilian deaths, 373 injuries in Tigray since December](#)," *News24*, 28 March 2022)

SOMALIA

Several killed in series of attacks by al Shabaab

On 23 March, at least 48 people, including a female MP from the opposition, were killed in a series of attacks claimed by the al Shabaab. The opposition MP was reportedly hugged by the suicide bomber during the parliamentary election campaign, before the bomber detonated a bomb. In a car bomb attack near a hospital, 30 people lost their lives. Previously on the same day, five people, including two al Shabaab gunmen were killed; the gunmen had attacked an army base near the Aden Adde International Airport in Mogadishu. ("[Female opposition MP among dozens killed in Somalia bombings](#)," *The Guardian*, 24 March 2022) ("[Somalia: Five dead in attack on military base near airport](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 24 March 2022)

SUDAN

Tensions intensify after a protester is killed in an anti-military demonstration

On 24 March, a protestor was shot and killed during a demonstration in Madani city. The country is witnessing a massive anti-military demonstration ever since the military took power in 2021. Khartoum and other major cities have transformed into grounds of tensions and clashes between security officials. Medical authorities say nearly 90 protesters have

been killed by security officials; however, most of these deaths are denied by the government. On 25 March, demonstrators erected barricades across the streets of Khartoum, paralysing daily life. The country is under a major economic limbo coupled with internal instability. Gen Abdul Fateh Al Burhan, the leader of the current military administration commented: "When all the civilian forces sit together and come to a consensus between them, we are ready to sit and come to an understanding with them or to present them with whatever they need from the military side". The unfavourable popular response to the military takeover followed with brutal crackdown has caused international condemnation and suspension of financial aiding. ("[Barricade protests bring life to halt in Sudanese capital](#)," *Reuters*, 25 March 2022)

BURKINA FASO

Civil society organisations demand end to military cooperation with France

On 28 March, Africanews reported a rally held by a coalition of 72 civil society organisations demanding the termination of Burkina Faso's military cooperation with France. The news report quoted the coalition's Secretary-General Soumaila Nana: "We contest the installations of foreign armed forces that no longer deserve our trust on our soil. We demand the cancellation of the colonial agreements that have kept us in stalemate for years." Nana accused France of plundering Burkina Faso and supplying arms to terrorists. The Deputy Secretary-General praised Russia: "But we take into account Russia because, in the whole world, it is Russia that has worked positively to remove the terrorist hydra in Syria, Venezuela, Central African Republic and neighboring Mali where we see positive progress." ("[Burkina Faso civil groups protest against French military cooperation](#)," *Africanews*, 28 March 2022)

MALI

UEMOA court orders lifting of certain sanctions against Mali

On 24 March, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) court has ordered the lifting of various sanctions laid against Mali earlier in January by the regional bloc. The sanctions have cut off Bamako from its regional market and with the borders closed, the country faces \$180 million in debt. The sanctions were placed when the military government conveyed its transitional plan to remain in power for and refused to step down for democratic elections in early 2022. The sanctions have choked Malian economy, forcing Bamako to approach the bloc's court demanding removal the sanctions as it has serious impact on the country's population. On March 25, the heads of the ECOWAS regional bloc met in Ghana to discuss matters in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea. The leaders conveyed their willingness to accept another 12-16 months of transitional period in Mali. This can follow with a gradual relaxation of the existing sanctions laid against Bamako, in effect rendering the country some financial relief. ("[West African court orders lifting of some sanctions against Mali](#)," *Reuters*, 25 March 2022)

NIGERIA

Dutch court rejects legal plea from 'Ogoni Nine' widows against Shell

On 23 March, A Dutch court turned away a legal suit filed by the wives of the executed activists who took part in a series of protests against the French oil giant Shell for its alleged exploitation in oil-rich Niger region. The case was rejected on the grounds of lack of substantial evidence to prove the accusations laid against the company and its Nigerian subsidiary. But after hearing the testimony from five witnesses, the court ruled that "The witnesses testimony relies for a large part on assumptions and interpretations" Judge Larissa Alwin said. The activists were hanged in 1995 by Nigeria's former

military general Sani Abacha after a military trial, attracting international outcry. The pleaders are planning to take up the suit to Hague as they have long abandoned their hopes in Nigerian and Dutch Judicial systems. ([Nigeria: Dutch court rejects suit of 'Ogoni Nine' widows against Shell](#), *Al Jazeera*, 23 March 2022)

7000 ISWAP and Boko Haram militants surrender in northern Nigeria

On 23 March, local news agencies reported the surrender of nearly 7000 Boko Haram and ISWAP militants in the past week. The reports quoted military general Christopher Musa claiming: "This is evident as thousands of insurgents comprising combatants, non-combatants, foot soldiers, alongside their families, continued to lay down their arms in different parts of Borno to accept peace," he said. The surrendered militants and their families are expected to undergo profiling by the Nigerian armed forces before rehabilitation. Nigeria has been facing severe insecurities caused by militancy by various terror organizations like Boko Haram, ISWAP and other groups. The UN estimates nearly 350,000 people have lost their lives since 2009 in various attacks and abductions. ("[7,000 Boko Haram, other fighters surrender in a week](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 24 March 2022)

INTERNATIONAL

US sanctions six Nigerians for aiding Boko Haram

On 26 March, the United States treasury department imposed sanctions against six Nigerians found guilty in the UAE, of running a Boko Haram cell and for attempting to raise finances for the militant outfit. With this, the US aims to coordinate with the UAE against terror funding for

mutual concerns. Secretary of US treasury, Brian Nelson commented: "Treasury continues to target financial facilitators of terrorist activity worldwide. We welcome multilateral action on this Boko Haram network to ensure that it is not able to move any further funds through the international financial system." The US enlisted Boko Haram as a 'foreign terrorist organization' in 2013 following its brutal and inhuman attacks that has killed thousands in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. The group was infamous for its mass abduction, and executions and in 2021, various reports also suggested that they have claimed allegiance to ISIS. ("[US sanctions six Nigerians for aiding Boko Haram](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 26 March 2022)

Turkey calls on Libya to avoid escalation of current tensions

On 24 March, Ankara urged Tripoli to avoid any escalation of the ongoing political tensions that erupted in December 2021. Turkey was a major military partner of the former National Government of Accord and played a major role in resisting Gen Khalifa Haftar's attempts to take control of Tripoli. On 23 March, President Tayyip Erdogan opined that "calm in Libya that was achieved through big sacrifices" was an opportunity for peace. The council also called on parties involved in Libya to "refrain from steps that could cause new clashes" and urged authorities in the country to "follow democratic processes on a basis of legitimacy for the achievement of lasting peace and stability." ("[Turkey urges Libya to avoid steps that could renew clashes](#)," *Reuters*, 24 March 2022)

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About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

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