

# ALGERIA AND THE FUTURE OF FRANCE

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THE future of France ultimately hinges on the war in Algeria. And this can be shown by a brief analysis in the course of which different possibilities will be held up carefully to the light.

It is enough to begin with a proposition that is, I think, clear to every democrat: peace in Algeria can only be achieved through negotiations with the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic—on the political guarantees of self-determination in Algeria, the organization of a temporary regime until public elections, the installation of mixed military and civil commissions, Franco-Algerian and international forms of control, etc. . . .

## 1. Initiative by de Gaulle

If such a policy is at last defined and pursued by the Head of State and if, as is probable, it rapidly leads to peace, this will reinforce simultaneously the personal position of General de Gaulle in the country and the conjunction of democratic and popular forces, constituting such a defeat for the right-wing factions and the French Army that both will be, in consequence, politically shattered and the whole question of how to liberalize the regime quickly settled.

This constitutes the first possibility, though unfortunately the least probable one.

In order for this first possibility to be realized, it is necessary that General de Gaulle decide to force such a solution upon the Army, or—to be more precise—upon the officers. He can unquestionably do this without great difficulties, for he need only rely on the backing of both the popular and worker forces, the trade unions, youth organizations, parties of the Left and even those parties of the middle-class outside the minority of fascist and neo-fascist elements, in freeing the other ranks of the Army—in the event of a revolt by the officers—from all allegiance other than that towards him. Such a decision would cut short, in a few hours, any inclination to disobedience possessed by the officers, except for a few hot heads and special units easily and quickly subdued. General de Gaulle would

naturally draw from such a policy the support of near to 99% of the nation, a popularity greater even than that which he enjoyed in 1944-45.

This possibility presupposes, however, that de Gaulle would not hesitate to break psychologically with the Army, which constitutes his spiritual family and his true party; that he would deliberately resort to potential support against the body of officers, a moral and if necessary, physical mobilization (through, for instance, a general strike) of the popular masses. These are the clear conditions for a bloodless victory over the officers and the factions. The consequences of such a victory are equally clear: the army would immediately become again 'the great mute' and would cease to exist as a political factor. On the other hand, of course, despite an extreme popularity with the whole of the population, de Gaulle would be obliged to reckon with the political and trade union forces which would have allowed him to win the trial of strength. He would find himself returned to the situation of 1945-46. The sentimental rupture with the Army and the revival of a normal political activity which he has found himself since 1946 incapable of dominating will therefore, I believe, hinder General de Gaulle from entering into such a trial of strength.

## 2. His hand forced

Indeed, with all this as well known to the Head of State and his entourage as to the military and the factions of the Right, the different manoeuvres of de Gaulle to find a 'middle way' will all be thwarted by the manoeuvres of his right-wing adversaries, ready to counter any negotiations directed at a peaceful settlement of the Algerian war. Inevitably, therefore, the war in Algeria will continue to worsen, international pressure from the West as from the East increasing more and more and the war slowly entering a new phase.

The worsening of the war will necessarily stir a number of responses in France. The movement of revolt amongst the youth will intensify, accompanied by growing economic difficulties and by a feeling of lassitude and profound disillusion in the hearts of the people. The militancy of the Left will increase. At the same time the military and fascist elements, those clinging to the skirts of fascism or those simply resolved to profit from military power, cannot envisage without rebellion any weakening of their influence, the development of popular discontent

and the Algerian orientation in the policy of General de Gaulle who, without terminating the war, nonetheless slowly destroys their dream of '*l'Algérie Française*'. The conspiracy of the generals and their associates to modify this situation by force is an inescapable consequence of the situation itself. The development of this fascist menace provokes a strengthening of the grip of conscience on the Left, which in turn provokes the menace further. Tension can therefore only increase without abatement, up to the moment when the generals and their associates will either find themselves pushed by their own fears into forcing an immediate trial of strength or will find themselves confronted with an accidental situation to which they must instantly respond if they do not want their hour to pass them by, leaving liberty re-established at last in France.

This leads to the second possibility. During this period of increasing tension, the military or their associates may be led by events or by their own troops to commit an error: an ultimatum which, made public, would place General de Gaulle in the position of having to oppose them, or action by reckless elements with which the chiefs would be obliged to align themselves. In such circumstances, resembling those of a war started "too soon and in error", it is possible that de Gaulle, despite his repugnance, may be obliged to react brutally and that, carried further than he would wish by the swelling anger of the masses against the military command, he would find himself—as outlined in the first possibility analysed—forcing a solution upon the army, or facing an incipient civil war, in which the seditious military would be crushed by that part of the army remaining faithful to de Gaulle and by an immediate mobilization of the popular masses. The victory of the popular forces allied to de Gaulle cannot be open to doubt, for they will find themselves possessing a legality for their actions which will promote their total union whilst their adversaries remain divided.

This second possibility, however, though less improbable than the first, remains improbable nonetheless.

The generals and their associates will do all in their power to avoid placing themselves in so difficult a situation. And it follows that de Gaulle will do all he can to avoid a real trial of strength with them.

### 3. Erosion from within

We now come to a third possibility—the generals and their

associates manoeuvring easily, with the assistance of their creatures, into the heart of the government, using the menaces of conspiracy much as they have continually done for some weeks past in order slowly to bring round to their way of thinking the majority of the members of the government. They would thus obtain a range of concessions from the Elysée which would place them in a favourable situation in the event of any trial of strength; they could, for example, neglect the development of the already very long drawn-out Algerian policy of General de Gaulle and obtain in exchange for a certain patience a series of pledges over France itself; they could, with the help of their accomplices in the midst of the police, create local situations which they would claim necessitate their intervention. These, of course, are only a few examples: their tactics would consist of taking the regime from within, and it is certain that they have already made some progress in this direction. It can easily be imagined that, taken to the limit, this process might lead to a completely fascist regime in France, de Gaulle remaining as a figure-head and the Algerian policy continuing to develop its own rhythm, marked by an intensification of warfare without and repression within.

De Gaulle would disappear like a ripe fruit, once the operation was securely concluded, in the same way that Hindenburg gave way to Hitler. This possibility seems to me far more probable than the two previous ones. It supposes, however, an even development without any unforeseen incidents, success for every manoeuvre and an exceptional political intelligence amongst the organizers of the conspiracy. It seems to me that the probability of hitches, very great in every development of this nature, works strongly against its success.

#### **4. The Disappearance of de Gaulle**

The fourth possibility is precisely that of one of these hitches; of an incident in the development of the conspiracy which would end in the elimination of the Head of State. It seems to me that such a possibility is quite the most probable for the following reasons: it will be very difficult for the generals and their associates to avoid a dangerous acceleration of the process resulting from the progressive reinforcement of the Left and the growing belief of all the active members of the Right that it is necessary to move quickly. External events are bound to intervene: changes in the form of the Algerian war following

on a vote at U.N.O., the creation of an Algerian-Tunisian federation or some such development, with the intervention of French forces in other parts of the Maghreb, perhaps even the intervention of U.N.O. . . . Lack of any real unity amongst the different groups in the conspiracy can give rise to isolated actions, such as the unauthorized landing of units in France. . . . And it is necessary to take into account the health of General de Gaulle.

In all these different eventualities, the Head of State would find himself brought to a terribly difficult and cruel choice—if we are to exclude the second possibility mentioned, in which he would ally himself, whether he liked it or not, with the Left, and the third, in which he would allow himself to be used, a possibility more in accord with his character. He would experience an immense self-rending, a feeling of complete failure, and find himself emotionally incapable of choosing the army against the people or the people against the army. In this event, it is possible that he would depart from power; it is equally possible that, with the steady deterioration in his health, he will die naturally or reach the point where he would no longer feel able to govern. It is not to be completely ruled out as well that the conspirators would assist in his disappearance through an attempt on his life, carried out on behalf of the Left or of the F.L.N. . . .

The theories of voluntary resignation gain greater credit following the statements made by the Head of State to parliamentarians of the Right on October 28 and reproduced by 'Le Monde'† and other papers. In linking the idea of resignation not only to his own refusal to countenance independence for Algeria, but also to the *refusal by the army* to accept this independence, de Gaulle has clearly shown that in the event of a trial of strength with the Army he would stand down; and this greatly reinforces the power of blackmail possessed by the Army. The denial circulated by the information services of the Elysée on this important statement, which had been made before several witnesses, has convinced no one; especially as it is known that during the crisis in January, 1960, de Gaulle had already toyed with the idea of resignation.

†The text of 'Le Monde' October 30-31st " . . . General de Gaulle promptly replied that he would not allow an independent Algeria to be established. The Army would not allow it, he stated, adding that if—against his wish and despite the prospects that he perceives at the present time—it was necessary to do so, he would no longer retain his place at the head of the State and would return to Colombey."

Should his disappearance by any means whatsoever come about, we would find ourselves with a vacancy for the Presidency, with the immediate establishment of a government to all appearances legally camouflaged by a certain number of politicians such as Bidault, Lacoste, Pinay and Soustelle, who would act as figureheads while in reality being manipulated by the officers. According to the context of these events, it may or may not be possible to mobilize immediately the mass of popular forces. If it is possible, as I believe it would be, we would find ourselves plunged into an immediate and probably brief civil war, the legal fiction of the military regime being transparent since de Gaulle would no longer be there to cover up the actions of the army, and the regime itself facilitating the mobilization of the trade unions and popular forces against it through the unleashing of repression.

It is possible, however, that this train of events would occur so gradually that popular reaction would arise too late. In this event, French fascism would come into being without de Gaulle, but in conditions very similar to those outlined in the third possibility. The resistance, the Maquis and the concentration camps would spring up very quickly; torture would become the means of governing Frenchmen in France, just as it is already the means of governing Algerians. The incapacity of such a regime to resolve either the Algerian or any other political or economic problem, with the absence from its head of a respected personality, would lead to a gradual unleashing of hostilities within the country and perhaps foreign intervention. In any case, it seems to me that in the present-day world the establishment of a military-fascist regime (even if fronted by men of straw) is absolute nonsense. It appears probable to me that the result of such an experiment—whether at the end of weeks, months or years following upon the setting in motion of the process—would be liquidation not only of the regime itself, but of the society which bred it, and the advent in France at last of a socialist society.

It is possible, indeed probable, that such a trial of strength would bring in its wake ruination and irreparable human losses. In theory, a very rapid reinforcement of the unity and activity of the Left, together with *powerful international pressure*, would provide a way out by obliging de Gaulle to negotiate and imposing on him a common front against the Army. It is doubtful, however, whether these positive factors can be assembled with

sufficient speed. France—and as always the finest of the French—will then have to pay the bill that the country has believed it could avoid meeting by refusing a trial of strength in order to survive more comfortably the 13th May, 1958.

*Translated from the French*

