AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN FRENCH NORTH AFRICA: THE 1958 SAKIET CRISIS AND THE GOOD OFFICES MISSION

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To Megan, my librarian.
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN FRENCH NORTH AFRICA: THE 1958 SAKIET CRISIS AND THE GOOD OFFICES MISSION

American diplomatic involvement in the French-Algerian War of 1954-1962 was never as heightened as it was during the aftermath of the French bombing of the Tunisian border town of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef on February 8, 1958. The bombardment of Sakiet, and the deaths of dozens of Tunisians, sparked a crisis drawing international attention to France’s colonial war in Algeria. Having interests on both sides of the conflict—France, a European NATO ally and Tunisia, a pro-American Arab ally—the Eisenhower administration, along with the MacMillan Government of Great Britain, offered France and Tunisia their good offices as mediators. Hoping to settle the problems on both sides of the divide, the Anglo-American Good Offices Mission struggled to deal effectively with the situation, all the time worrying about both alienating France, or losing the western orientation of key allies such as Tunisia. No agreement was reached at the end of the Good Offices Mission. Instead French Prime Minister Félix Gaillard fell from power; the Fourth Republic followed soon afterwards and was replaced by Charles de Gaulle who took it upon himself to reconcile France and Tunisia. Nonetheless, the mission was not a total failure because American relations with Tunisia were strengthened and France was forced to look at how the Algerian War affected its allies in the Cold War. However, the Good Offices Mission did not signify any true reorientation in American policy towards France as Eisenhower—and then later Kennedy—maintained a basic middle of the road policy towards the French-Algerian War.
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**INTRODUCTION**

On April 8 1958, famed American journalist Walter Lippmann wrote about what he called the “North African Nettle”—the unsatisfactory possible outcomes of the war between French army forces and Algerian nationalists for the future of Algeria. “The situation in its elemental form,” he wrote,

consists of a guerrilla war in Algeria with which the bulk of the French army is involved. It is a war which almost certainly cannot be won and which in military terms will surely not be lost. The public life of metropolitan France is dominated, indeed obsessed, by this horrid, cruel, indecisive and interminable war. The obsession has produced a political condition in France in which no government believes it can survive if it considers a negotiated settlement. All this has reached a point where there is the gravest doubt as to whether the legal government in Paris really controls the whole of the army or its own appointed officials dealing with Algeria in Paris and in North Africa.¹

Lippmann’s characterization of the French-Algerian War came at a crucial time in American diplomatic involvement in the North African conflict. Just three months earlier, the French military’s bombing of the Tunisian town of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef along the Algerian-Tunisian border on February 8 had brought unprecedented international attention towards the conflict in North Africa. The French position in Algeria, seen by the Eisenhower administration as one of intransigence, became the focus of an American-British mediation effort to deal with the fallout between the French and Tunisian governments in the aftermath of the Sakiet bombing. The Eisenhower administration approached mediation with both a critical eye towards the French, but also with a fear of moving too close to Arab nationalists, worrying that doing so would upset the French and risk the American position in Europe.

Before such publicized American diplomatic involvement in the war in early 1958, France had already been fighting the war in its North African colony of Algeria for more than three years. The French army had been engaging the Algerian nationalist organization, the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) for control of the land and the people of Algeria. The French army was indeed superior numerically and materially. French counter-insurgent tactics successfully weakened FLN insurgents who were forced out of the cities and into the Atlas Mountains, the surrounding desert, and across the Algerian border into the safer confines of Morocco and Tunisia. In Tunisia, the FLN often operated freely, and were generally welcome by the Tunisian government who sympathized with their plight—who just two years earlier gained their own independence from the same French colonizers. This greatly frustrated French commanders on the ground in Algeria who saw in Tunisia a neighbor aiding and abetting the enemy. FLN insurgents, they argued, would attack French patrols from across the border and into Algeria from various strongholds in Tunisia. Then after attacking and killing or wounding sufficient numbers of French fighters, they would slip back into the safer confines of Tunisia, leaving French troops no means of retaliation. Fed up, French military commanders authorized the French Air Force to fly a fleet of airships over the Tunisian border town of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef and bombard it in retaliation for the shooting down of a French plane from that town, killing 72 Tunisians.

The United States became involved after this border incident in part because of the nature of American foreign policy after the Second World War. American foreign policy was often constrained by competing ideologies that complicated its
approaches to world events. American policy makers exemplified the idea that there were only two ways of life—democracy or communism—and that the United States had to do everything within its power to ensure that western democracies successfully contained communism. At the same time, in this post World War II world, Americans supposedly rejected European colonialism as a vestige of the past, something that stood in the way of human rights and national self-determination. Often these two belief systems—that communism had to be resisted and colonialism needed to be done away with—created problems for American relationships with other nations. Allies in the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union were often the greatest colonial powers as well. France, specifically, was seen as a vital partner in the Western Alliance. American Presidents and Secretaries of State worked with France under the NATO umbrella to achieve a post-war European settlement of political, economic and military cooperation. However, continuing French colonial struggles, especially the 1954-1962 Algerian War, were points of contention in the French-American relationship because of the traditional American anti-colonialist stance.

The 1958 Sakiet Crisis and the Anglo-American Good Offices Mission exemplifies these points of contention between the United States and their French allies. The French bombing of the Tunisian town of Sakiet sparked a crisis drawing international attention to their colonial war in Algeria. Having interests on both sides of the conflict—France, its European ally and Tunisia, its pro-American Arab ally—the Eisenhower administration, along with the MacMillan Government of Great Britain, offered France and Tunisia their good offices as mediator. Hoping to
settle the problems on both sides of the divide, the American and British effort struggled to deal effectively with the situation, all the time worrying about both losing a NATO ally or losing the western orientation of key Third World allies such as Tunisia. No agreement was reached at the end of the Good Offices Mission. Instead French Prime Minister Félix Gaillard’s administration fell from power and was replaced by Charles de Gaulle who took it upon himself to reconcile France and Tunisia. The mission was not a total failure however, because American relations with Tunisia were strengthened and France was forced to look at how the Algerian War affected its allies in the Cold War. However, the Good Offices Mission did not signify any true reorientation in American policy towards France, as the Eisenhower administration, and then Kennedy's administration maintained a basic middle of the road policy towards the French-Algerian War.

**HISTORIOGRAPHY**

French-American relations during the Algerian War has been a subject of intense scholarship in recent years. However, it has not always been like that. For decades, the Algerian War was a seldom-debated topic in France. The French state was reluctant to describe it as a war, but instead it was referred to as a “police action.” Not until 1999 did the state acknowledge the events from 1954-1962 as a “war.” Additionally, veterans of the conflict were not given veteran status for more than a decade after it ended. Discussion of the war was not encouraged because it conjured up memories of atrocities such as torture and mass killings—hence, the
silence of collective memory. In the United States, the Algerian War was considered relatively minor compared to contemporary historical developments of the time. From the US perspective, the French-Algerian conflict did not measure up to such Cold War conflict areas as Southeast Asia, and Berlin. In addition, Nasser and the rise of Arab nationalism were considered the major developments in the Middle East during the same time period. Thus, the more specific topic of American policy towards France in relation to its North African empire received little attention. In 1973, historian Paul J. Zingg noted the dearth of historical scholarship on North Africa after World War II, calling it “an historiographical wasteland.” It was “ironic,” he wrote, “that the United States, a nation purportedly born out of revolution, should be so naive in its understanding and reticent in its recognition of other indigenous uprisings and nationalist aspirations...North Africa, in particular, provides a faithful reflection of the road to independence for the whole of Africa.” He writes that part of the reason for American reluctance to study North Africa was because of how lackadaisical the United States was to recognize their independence movements: “The four Muslim states have attained sovereignty through United Nations supervision, French concessionary reluctance, and bloody civil war. Yet, in all cases, the United States belatedly withheld sympathetic diplomatic action.” This “historiographical wasteland” would persist until the 1990s when the Algerian War in general, and American attitudes towards the war began to receive significant scholarly attention. Though many of these sources touch on the main topic of my

research, the Sakiet crisis and the Good Offices Mission, only a few discuss it in significant detail.

Among earlier studies, Egya N. Sangmuah wrote in 1990 that the Eisenhower administration’s approach to foreign policy was commonly characterized as one of restraint that “served American interests well.” He argues, however, that in fact when it came to decolonization and North Africa, the Eisenhower administration, “bent on the containment of communism, misunderstood and underestimated the force of nationalism” in the post-World War II world. These blinders, the doctrine of containment and the underestimation of nationalism, influenced American decision making during the Good Offices Mission. Fearing that the Tunisian president, Habib Bourguiba, would turn his country to the Soviet Union because of French provocation, President Eisenhower worked hard to keep him entrenched in the Western camp. Though Sangmuah shows that the American effort succeeded in ending the escalation of tension between France and Tunisia, and keeping Tunisia oriented toward the west, he also concludes that the outcome was just as much a result of President Bourguiba’s already pro-Western tendencies as it was of any efforts of US diplomacy.

Historian and 37 year CIA veteran Charles G. Cogan recounts French-American relations during and after World War II. With an eye for discussing the cultural antagonisms between the two nations, he writes that despite their similarities—based on both claiming to be “carriers of universalist messages that

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5 Ibid, 91.
came out of their revolutions”—both regarded each other with some disdain.

France, the little guy saw itself being bullied by a dominant United States that was sticking its nose in European affairs too much. This he reveals in his analysis of the Sakiet crisis and the Good Offices Mission. He writes that the American effort was already determined by pre-conceived notions of the French position in North Africa. As such, the recommendations of the Good Offices Mission went towards satisfying Tunisia by sympathizing with their position and towards further internationalizing the conflict. Cogan points out that the selection of Robert Murphy to head the mission was an unconscious hint that even before negotiations began, the US already favored Tunisia and settling the Algerian problem. Indeed, as I will discuss later, Murphy was well disliked in French political circles for his disdain of the Free French movement in World War II.

Yahia Zoubir’s 1995 studies provide great insight into American Cold War considerations in the North African conflict. Zoubir argues that decolonization of the Maghreb “posed the greatest dilemma for the United States and the Soviet Union.” The US and the Soviets were more concerned with ensuring the establishment of friendly North African regimes and stability in Europe than they were with safeguarding self-determination for colonized people. Zoubir writes that “the main concern of the two superpowers was not to accelerate the independence of the Maghrebi countries, but how best to safeguard their own strategic, political and economic interests in the region in view of the importance they accorded in their

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7 Ibid, 110-117.
respective relationship with France."\(^8\) Thus, Washington supported Paris out of fear of communism while the Soviet Union was often mute on the Algerian situation because of a desire for détente with France in Europe. Zoubir argues that the US failed in the Maghreb though, because of “its unconditional support for France during the Algerian War.”\(^9\) However, I argue that American support for France was far from “unconditional,” and many, including both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, worried that US support for France would be a reason for Algerian nationalists to run into the arms of the Soviets.

Historian Martin Thomas analyzes the impact that France’s Algerian policies had on French-American relations. He shows that the French North African dilemma became a North African dilemma for the United States because of how American ideals of national self-determination conflicted with the US strategic position in the Cold War.\(^10\) Cold War considerations hampered American support for the Algerian nationalists. However, Thomas argues that by late 1957 and early 1958, the United States, helped by British assessments, came to understand that France’s position in Algeria caused many problems for the NATO structure as a whole, perhaps too much to be worth it:

The naval and air force facilities in Algeria and the logistic support that French forces in the country could provide to NATO’s southern European command would be irrelevant if not obliterated after the first wave of Soviet nuclear attack. The strategic value of Algeria’s bases and resources did not justify the reassignment of vast numbers of French troops better employed in


\(^9\) Ibid, 81.

European defense. It was politically unwise to count upon the durability of French rule or to expect that an independent Algeria would necessarily become a Soviet or European lackey.11

This understanding on the part of the Americans and the British helped underscore the American position by the time of the Good Offices Mission in March 1958. Martin Thomas’s prolific scholarship glosses over the events of the Good Offices Mission—understandably though—as he describes the total breadth events regarding French-American relations and the North African crises.

In recent years, there has been a drive to analyze the international context of the Algerian War, in which Matthew Connelly has been very influential. He rightly believes the French-Algerian War became internationalized precisely because of “France’s increasingly desperate attempts to isolate it.”12 Connelly’s theoretical approach is refreshing as it argues that the Algerian War was fought over “the very meaning and purpose of modernity.”13 In other words, failure to sufficiently include the nine million Muslims in Algeria into the French political and cultural system greatly influenced the timing, character, and international aspect of the Algerian revolt. The desire to modernize, but on Algerian terms, not French terms, motivated Algerian nationalists and came to greatly involve many international players.

Connelly demonstrates where the United States fit into this complicated Algerian dilemma. The US had interests in Algeria and wanted stability, he argues. The Americans preferred that the French stay if they could, but on the other hand,

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13 Ibid, 12.
understood that “resistance to change threatened to drive Third World nationalists towards the Soviets.”\textsuperscript{14} The US therefore pursued a policy of sympathy toward the rebels, while at the same time supporting France financially, for fear of the breakup of the NATO alliance. Thus, Connelly shows how “the Americans preferred the role of silent partner in France’s North Africa policy.”\textsuperscript{15} However, Connelly insists that the Sakiet Crisis was much more than a diplomatic dispute among a few nations; it was “also a transnational crisis.” It concerned among other things, the development of capital markets in the Maghreb, the economic leverage of the United States, the question of refugees—all of which contributed to the creation of “communities of interest that transcended national boundaries.”\textsuperscript{16} To be sure, Connelly’s work informs my interpretation of the Sakiet Crisis and the Good Offices Mission through a look at the multi-faceted interests involved.

Irwin Wall also places the Algerian War “in an international context, to deal with it as a world crisis and not simply a French one.”\textsuperscript{17} Wall contends that the war was “central to French diplomacy” and was the main obstacle to the United States “in their own attempts to deal with France.”\textsuperscript{18} His exhaustive and straightforward historical narrative is favorable towards US diplomatic efforts, which he portrays as well balanced and prescient. He writes that the Sakiet Crisis marked the turning point of the Algerian War, leading from a politics of military escalation, to Anglo-American intervention, to a government crisis that rapidly evolved into a crisis of regime, and the coming to power of

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 51.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 52.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 169. Italics are the authors.
\textsuperscript{17} Irwin Wall, \textit{France, the United States, and the Algerian War} (London: University of California Press, 2001), 3.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 6.
Charles de Gaulle. The Anglo-American intervention was the decisive element in this series of events, and thus arguably the most important development in turning around French policy in the Algerian War.\(^{19}\)

As Wall’s account of the Sakiet Crisis and the Good Offices Mission is the most thorough account yet of the events that I describe, it is important to acknowledge his influence. However, while the Sakiet Crisis marked the “turning around (of) French policy,” as Wall points out, it did not much change United States policy.

Daniel Byrne aptly points out in his Georgetown dissertation that the United States position toward the war in Algeria changed little from 1954-1962. Byrne meticulously tracks the slow evolution of US policy toward the Algeria war, with its built in worries about French reaction, the NATO alliance, and Soviet and Arab backlashes. He sets out “to discover the motives and mindsets that built United States policy and the factors that allowed the policy to remain so poorly defined for almost two decades.” Additionally, he resolves to place US policy “in the broader context of United States response to decolonization and to the Third World, both in the postwar period and in the wider span of United States history.” He argues that “the United States preferred to act on a case-by-case basis or avoid action all together. As a result, metropolitans and nationalists alike had a difficult task of predicting or comprehending United States policy.”\(^{20}\) In other words, Byrne argued that US policymakers, underestimating Arab nationalism and focusing heavily on the repercussions of French non-cooperation in the Western alliance, missed opportunities to formulate a strong policy in North Africa against decolonization.

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 99.

Byrne discusses the Sakiet Crisis and the Good Offices Mission in some detail. Following the overall theme of his dissertation, Byrne writes that while Eisenhower and his administration were prepared to watch the fall of the Fourth Republic as a result of the crisis, “United States policy on decolonization remained centered on the hopes of evolutionary change,” instead of forcing change through abandoning the policy of drift. Any fundamental change of American policy in Algeria after Sakiet, Byrne writes, “was indeed more apparent than real.”

The historical literature on American foreign policy towards the French-Algerian War reveals the complexities that the greater Cold War had on efforts to formulate a coherent approach towards both the French government and North African nationalists. The Sakiet Crisis could have been the impetus for the United States to formulate a policy that turned away from the French position. Instead, the crisis revealed the various concerns that American policy makers had to contend with, something that makes the policy of “drift” at least somewhat understandable. The Sakiet Crisis of 1958 and the Good Offices Mission is a look into the nature of American foreign policy towards French imperialism after World War II, and reveals a trend of indecisiveness that stayed more-or-less continuous throughout the nearly eight years of warfare in North Africa.

FRANCE AFTER WORLD WAR II: “ALLERGIC TO CHANGE”? 

In the middle of the twentieth century, France was a deflated nation. The humiliation of the six-week defeat in the Battle of France during World War II, Nazi

21 Ibid, 312-313.
Germany’s occupation, and French collaboration all contributed to a sense of mistrust between politicians and the military. After the war, France struggled to formulate a foreign policy that matched its ambitions. It tried taking back its imperial territories in Africa and Asia. This, it was thought, would ensure that France stayed a world power. In 1945, the *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission)\(^{22}\) still held ideological weight and France went about it with vigor. But the postwar world held seemingly new promises for colonized peoples. The subjects of European empires were no longer willing to tolerate foreign domination. The United Nations charter framed national self-determination as an aspect of international law, adding legitimacy to nationalists who felt it was time to throw off European rule.

Nonetheless, France went back into Indochina after the Empire of Japan was expelled and waged a bloody war against native communist forces. The Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 signaled the end of French Indochina in a humiliating French defeat on the battleground. Many veterans of Dien Bien Phu went straight from Southeast Asia to Algeria, where in 1954, the FLN declared a war for liberation.

Compared to Algeria, Indochina was easier to let go of. It was far away and there was no significant European settler population. Algeria was different.

Colonized in 1830 only 400 miles south of France and with a settler population of more than 1 million people, Algeria was seen as an integral part of France—legally and psychologically. Law made it three French departments: Algiers, Oran and

\(^{22}\) The *mission civilisatrice* was the legitimizing factor of French colonial expansion in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. It promised to give the ‘benefits’ of French culture, religion and education to those who otherwise were considered ‘uncivilized.’ In reality, while it facilitated the formation of a small indigenous elite, it mostly helped to marginalize the native Arab and Berber populations of Algeria while ensuring the dominance of the European minority.
Constantine. Technically, it was just as French as Paris. According to French history books published before Algerian independence, Algeria was the breadbasket of ancient Rome and France was simply carrying that enlightened legacy.\(^{23}\) They were restoring greatness in the Maghreb, in turn granting ideological legitimacy to the *mission civilisatrice*.

However, the colonial historical narrative greatly differed from reality. Algerian Muslims were treated as second-class citizens, considered unable to assimilate as Frenchmen, and hardly benefited from any of the reforms that France brought across the Mediterranean. Still, when Algerians began revolting in 1954, French administrators could not understand why. Accordingly, the French civilian government and the French military resolved to quash the insurrection through force, killing thousands of Algerians, torturing many, displacing many more thousands and evoking the ire of the democratic, communist and non-aligned worlds.\(^ {24}\)

However, the French military did not see their part as that of oppressor. Many soldiers felt a closeness to Algeria that they did not feel with their own countrymen. Though their views were biased—they usually only came to know European Algerians or wealthy natives, and neglected and ignored the majority of poor Muslims—they felt Algeria was too important to give up. According to


historian Paul Marie de Gorce, the French military at the time of the Algerian War was full of

men whom war had exiled far from the homeland and whose long-drawn-out adventures had cut them off from the shared sensibilities of French opinion. They embodied the drama of an Army utilized in every corner of the world for wars of adventure in which neither personal conviction nor the will to conquer buoyed them up. In their own persons they felt the bitterness of being forgotten in their own land, while they carried out fearful tasks in Indochina or in Algeria.\textsuperscript{25}

Nonetheless, Algeria proved an insurmountable challenge and it would take eight bloody and tragic years for the ugly French-Algerian divorce to conclude.

This focus on Algeria may have ironically sped up decolonization in France’s other imperial holdings, including the North African states of Morocco and Tunisia, which both received their independence in 1956. Additionally, the French viewed the decolonization of Morocco and Tunisia as proof of their benevolence, “thus proving the falsity of accusations” stated Foreign Minister Christian Pineau during a New Year speech, “of colonialism launched against her (France) by countries which could take lessons of democracy and social progress from us.”\textsuperscript{26} However, decolonization in effect created safe-havens and next-door allies for Algerian insurgents in the nations of Tunisia and Morocco.

The war between France and the Algerian nationalists brought in other nations who had an interest in the outcome such as the United States and the Soviet Union. Declaring the war to be a domestic dispute because of Algeria’s status as a

\textsuperscript{26} Christian Pineau, quoted in American Embassy, Paris to the State Department, “Pineau New Year Speech,” January 3, 1957, National Archives and Records Administration, Central Files (CF), Record Group (RG) 59, 651.00/1-357.
legal part of the nation, France worked tirelessly to keep the “Algerian problem” off the UN docket. However, French diplomats and administrators also argued that Algeria was important for the NATO alliance—that to “abandon” Algeria would invite communist infiltration into North Africa. This dual argument—that Algeria was both a domestic affair and held international importance as a NATO front in the Cold War—dogged French relations with other nations. Their argument was successful though in persuading the United States to vote against discussion of Algeria at the UN for several years. It was also important in persuading the United States to provide military supplies. Martin Thomas points out that since Algeria fell within NATO’s purview, France concluded “that the United States...had a direct stake in keeping French North Africa off the UN agenda.” This is true insofar as the United States worried that whoever was left to rule Algeria would be associated with or directly controlled by the Soviet Union or President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egyptian regime. Unfortunately for the French government, overt support for its colonial rule of North Africa never came.

Yet from time to time, the United States felt compelled to express a level of support for France in order to mollify French charges of undue US influence in the region. In 1956, Douglas Dillon, the American Ambassador to France, spoke before the French Diplomatic Press Association to address charges that the US did not support France in North Africa. “Nothing could be farther from the truth,” he said. However, he clarified what he meant by saying “my Government has loyally

28 Ibid, 91-121.
supported the French Government in its search for solutions to North African problems.” In expressing support for France in such a manner, the United States merely sought to avoid the impression that it was totally against French policy, while at the same time restraining from declaring total sanction for their North African ventures. Indeed, the United States supported a “liberal and mutually acceptable” solution to Algeria, letting both the French government and North African nationalists to take whatever meaning they wanted to take from it.29

To be sure, American policy makers were very frustrated with what they saw France doing in North Africa. American diplomat and Consul General at Tangier, Julius Holmes, wrote in a memorandum to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that he believed France’s problems stemmed from:

the consequent inability of successive French governments to pursue policies vigorously and consistently since their very existence depends upon constantly shifting parliamentary majorities; the lingering national psychosis of defeat in World War II expressed by hypersensitivity and often strident self assertions; the clinging to a traditional concept of greatness and glory in the face of failure to meet a changing world, without the sharp logic with which this logical people are supposed to be endowed...France is allergic to change.30

Ambassador Holmes made some good points. It had still been in recent memory when France could boast that it was the master of an Empire more than ten times the size of the métropole. France fought fiercely in World War I, losing an entire generation of men, but winning the war and proving its resiliency. Those

“traditional concept(s) of greatness and glory” were appealing in a post-World War II era; an era in which France was trying to forget that it was defeated in the Second World War in six weeks, an era in which it then lost Indochina in a humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and an era in which it was finding out that its self-assertions of greatness were not appreciated in their colonies like they had hoped.

The perception that France was “allergic to change” frustrated US policymakers who were trying to find a settlement of the question of European security. After World War II, the Western powers debated how to maintain peace in Europe against the spectre of Soviet Russia. Both Presidents Truman and Eisenhower felt the best way to stave off Soviet designs in Western Europe was for greater integration between the European nations, including an integrated military command. For that to happen, Western Germany, France’s enemy from its previous three European wars would have to remilitarize. However, the Federal Republic of Germany was a new political entity; democratic and firmly pro-Western. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the French government understood that German rearmament, within the greater structure of an integrated European force under an American commander might be necessary. However, doing so would make West Germany an almost equal partner with France in Europe. This is where French politicians and the public hesitated to follow the American lead. Historian Marc Trachtenberg states that “The French wanted to take what the Americans were offering in terms of U.S. combat divisions, an American NATO commander, and an

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integrated military system, while dragging their feet on German rearmament.”32

Additionally, American policymakers including both Truman and Eisenhower hoped to one day withdraw American forces from the continent, allowing for a “European” solution to European security, and thus an agreement was strongly hoped for; one that required France to view Germany as an equal partner in a united Europe.33

Eventually, European military cooperation also meant nuclear sharing if the United States ever hoped to leave Europe to its own defense. France would have to understand and accept that it “meant a German finger on the nuclear trigger.”34 The French, who hoped to have their own nuclear force someday, viewed this with consternation. But the US was not willing to just share with France and Britain and not the Federal Republic.

This European problem of Western Germany’s status in the defense of Western Europe against the Soviet Union contributed greatly to the Americans grudging support for France in its North African exploits. Because France was so important to the European settlement, it was hard to prevent them from threatening to disintegrate the Western alliance if the US ever forced their hand in North Africa. The importance of the French position in Europe made it very hard to criticize them in their colonies. American ambassador Douglas Dillon lamented what he believed to be an irrational French view of the importance of Algeria to its national self-perception. In 1955, he wrote that the “French believe that their very existence as a

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32 Ibid, 103-111.
33 Ibid, 114.
factor on the *European and world scenes* depends on their position in North Africa.”

But the Americans saw the French position in North Africa in a wholly different light. A National Intelligence Estimate report of August 31, 1954, mere months before the FLN’s declaration of war, presciently reported the possible consequences of the status quo in North Africa:

> ...increasing native resistance will probably—within the next decade (possibly even within the next three to five years)—create a serious drain on French resources, strain the determination of the French to maintain their dominant position, and impede use of the area as a base by France and by the US. In the long run France will probably either have to grant independence voluntarily or result to increasingly costly military repression.

The French, “allergic to change” as they were, were seen by US policy-makers to severely cripple American hopes for stability in North Africa.

But were the French totally unwilling to change their policy in Algeria? Not necessarily. It is true that there were genuine attempts at reform in Algeria. Guy Mollet, Prime Minister from 1956-1957 spoke before the National Assembly on January 31 1956, more than a year after the FLN’s declaration of war, saying that “the most urgent, the most painful (of the problems currently facing France) is that of Algeria. The government must give it priority.”

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prevent the Muslim population from siding with the rebels, Mollet introduced measures of reform called the *loi-cadre*, meaning “political framework.” The *loi-cadre* was a policy of electoral, economic and tax reform, which later Premiers Bourgès-Maunoury and Félix Gaillard attempted to expand upon.\(^{38}\) However, the *loi-cadre* reforms were based upon the assumption that France and Algeria were integral to each other, that what Algerian Muslims wanted was closer association with France. Lastly, the *loi-cadre* was implemented at the same time that the French military was fighting a ruthless war against that same population. Thus, the reforms were much too little and much too late.

THE UNITED STATES AND NORTH AFRICA

The Maghreb was important to the United States for its strategic value after World War II. Then-General Eisenhower learned of its importance as a staging area for entrance into Nazi-occupied Europe and it was not hard to imagine its future use in case of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Because of the French presence, the US had to carry out two policies: support France in North Africa because the US needed their cooperation in NATO and Western Europe, and empathize with national liberation movements, lest US hostility to the movements drive nationalists into the Soviet or Arab nationalist camps.

Historian Yahia Zoubir argues that because of the US stance on colonialism (or at least because of their rhetoric of support for national self-determination since

\(^{38}\) Ibid, 80-87.
the Second World War), “the French remained extremely distrustful of US intentions in the region.” The US was accused of “playing a double game in the Maghreb,” pretending to support France while encouraging anti-colonial revolt. At the same time, US support for France undermined its commitment for self-determination, as groups like the FLN began looking toward the Arab and Soviet blocs for support.39 The US was aware of this as far back as 1954. Less than a month after the FLN declared war in November, 1954, a summary of a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) called the situation in Algeria “a very grave dilemma,” involving “the possibility of either losing our whole position in the Middle East by offending the Arabs, or else risking the rupture of our NATO position by offending the French.”40 This worried Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who believed France to be the lynchpin of a united Europe, an important ally against the Soviets. Nonetheless, he warned publicly against stifling indigenous liberation movements for the sake of European colonialism. Non-Europeans, he said, were “suspicious of the colonial powers. The US, too, is suspect because, it is reasoned, our NATO alliance with France and Britain requires us to try to preserve or restore the old colonial interests of our allies...The day is past when [nationalist] aspirations can be ignored.”41

French distrust of America in North Africa was accelerated by events of the Suez Crisis in 1956. Egypt’s nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the tripartite reply of France, Britain and Israel for preemptive military action against Nasser caused a

39 Zoubir, 68-69.
less than enthusiastic response from the United States (which worried about Soviet intervention in the region). Pressure on the pound and an oil embargo forced all three to withdraw their forces, in what the French especially saw as evidence that the United States could no longer be depended on as a reliable ally. Britain took less offense than France however, and Anglo-American relations remained rather amicable.

Despite the negative US reaction to the tripartite invasion of Suez in 1956, the United States did not necessarily trust the Nasser regime, and especially feared that the decline of British influence in the region would lead to a power vacuum susceptible to Soviet influence. To cut off the Soviets and Nasser’s brand of Arab nationalism, President Eisenhower unveiled the Eisenhower Doctrine in an effort to exert US power morally, politically and militarily. Though ostensibly designed to give aid to Middle Eastern countries for the purpose of protecting nations from “international Communism,” the Eisenhower Doctrine, in the words of historian Salim Yaqub, “also sought to contain the radical Arab nationalism of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and to discredit his policy of ‘positive neutrality’ in the Cold War, which held that Arab nations were entitled to enjoy profitable relations with both Cold War blocs.”42 Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles saw “positive neutrality” as neither “positive” nor “neutral.” Instead, they assumed it signified a pull towards the Soviet bloc.

The Eisenhower Doctrine was envisioned though, as a humanitarian effort. As Salim Yaqub states, “there can be little doubt that Eisenhower and Dulles

genuinely hoped to reduce tensions and increase living standards in the Middle East” through the Eisenhower Doctrine. But unfortunately the Eisenhower Doctrine failed to foster the kind of relationships with Middle Eastern countries that Eisenhower and Dulles intended from its outset. Much of the American effort to resist communist aggression in the Middle East instead went towards supporting authoritarian and unpopular Arab leaders. It ignored the regional threats to Arab security in the region—such as ongoing tension with Israel—in deference to a grander Cold War view of a more ominous Soviet threat. For these reasons, the Eisenhower Doctrine never gained the support of the majority of Arabs in the Middle East.

As long as the US kept out of North Africa, the French government was generally supportive of the Eisenhower Doctrine. The French fear though, was that the Eisenhower Doctrine would be used as an impetus to replace French influence in the Maghreb. American policymakers hoped that if the French maintained their presence in the Maghreb, that they too would be a bulwark against communism. However, by the time Eisenhower announced his Doctrine, the war in Algeria had been going on for years and there was an increasing understanding in American circles that France could not maintain such a permanent presence in the region forever; that they would eventually retreat from empire.

More than a year before the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine, a June 1, 1955 OCB progress report on American policy in North Africa described the

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44 Ibid, 117.
complexity of the situation as much more than a simple fight against communist
aggression. Many more Cold War considerations than that were on the minds of
policymakers, helping to constrain the formation of a strong American policy in the
North African region:

French North Africa has been and will continue to be one of the world’s key
trouble spots. Arab nationalism clashes there with France’s determinations
to retain its control over the area. Solutions are made more difficult by the
pressures of selfish French interests, the intransigence of important French
political forces and the weakness of successive French governments.
Reverberations of the North African problem affect both NATO solidarity and
our relations with the Arab-Asian world. Our policy is to steer a middle
course and does not assure long term success in carrying out U.S. policies and
objectives in that area. However, it is succeeding in limiting friction between
the U.S. and France, on the one hand, and the U.S. and the Arab States on the
other. Any alternative courses of action visible at this time would seriously
undermine our relations with one or the other.46

The Eisenhower administration understood that Arab nationalism was more than a
battleground against communism, even if the later Eisenhower Doctrine reduced
events in the Middle East to a “democracy versus communism” mentality. Instead,
the complexity of the situation encouraged the administration to maintain a middle-
of-the-road course, as can be seen in such high-level policy discussions.

Clearly, the American policymakers were troubled by French shibboleths
about l’Algérie Français and la mission civilisatrice, and would have rather they
focused on European affairs and NATO solidarity. But at the same time, this anxiety
over who to support was enhanced by the fear of what was to come if France was
forced out of North Africa. Washington’s attitude toward the Maghreb was no doubt

46 Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), Progress Report on U.S. Policy on French
North Africa, June 2, 1955, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (DDEL), White House
Office (WHO), National Security Council (NSC) Series, Policy Papers Subseries,
box 13.
attributable in part to old-fashioned American caution towards revolution. Ideas based on race informed the American approach towards the Third World and decolonization. As late as 1957, a National Security Council Report warned, “To a considerable extent, the African is still immature and unsophisticated with respect to his attitudes towards the issues that divide the world today.”47 Though Algerians were considered more Arab than African, American generalities about non-Europeans often ignored the differences. Historian Michael Hunt argues that by framing foreign policy in such a way, the United States “had by the Eisenhower years shaped a Third World policy of active support for neo-colonial arrangements, for strongmen and military regimes over ‘irresponsible’ populists, for covert operations to restore ‘order’, and, where necessary, for the direct use of the US military.”48 Thus, while the United States professed support for decolonization especially after World War II, there were many in foreign policy circles that saw the French presence in North Africa as a necessary evil.

This is not entirely true for at least one politician in the United States: Senator John F. Kennedy. He was well known for making pre-presidential speeches on foreign policy that criticized the current administration and its policy towards French colonialism. On April 6 1954, he made a major speech against American support for France in Indochina, wetting his feet in foreign policy experience. “I am frankly of the belief,” he told the Senate, “that no amount of American military

assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, ‘an enemy of the people’ which has the sympathy and covert support of the people.”

Three years later he saw in the French North African experience the same dynamic of imperialism. His speech entitled “Imperialism – The Enemy of Freedom,” also on the Senate floor, sought to light a fire under American foreign policy. “The war in Algeria confronts the United States with its most critical diplomatic impasse since the crisis in Indochina,” he stated. “And yet we have not only failed to meet the problem forthrightly and effectively, we have refused to even recognize that it is our problem at all.” He continued to criticize not only Eisenhower’s policy in the region, but the whole French colonial experiment in general as an affront to human dignity and to the basic concept of freedom.

Senator speeches notwithstanding, larger developments in the Middle East detracted US focus from the Maghreb. In late 1957, the conservative Syrian ruling class, under pressure from its own people began stocking its cabinets and government with leftist radicals, orienting it closer to the Soviets. The US had a diplomatic crisis on its hands, as it feared a communist takeover of Syria. Evidence suggests that US officials began planning the overthrow of the existing regime, unsuccessfully as it turned out. Syrian authorities were well aware of the planned coup and put a stop to it. The result was a “radicalization of Syrian politics.”

The failure of this initial attempt only made the Eisenhower administration redouble its efforts to overthrow the Syrian regime, hoping to provoke them into skirmishing

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51 Yaqub, 157-158.
52 Ibid, 158.
with Iraq or Jordan, and thus enable the US to label Syria a communist controlled aggressor. Instead, US dealings in Syria threatened to bring the whole region into war involving the Soviet Union. Late 1957 was a dangerous time in the Middle East. According to Salim Yaqub, “the Syrian crisis had mercilessly exposed the inadequacies of the Eisenhower Doctrine as an instrument for shaping Arab politics.” It showed that when push came to shove, the Eisenhower Doctrine was no more than a political tool designed to justify propping up authoritarian dictators who simply had to espouse anti-communist credentials (such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia). No matter how much the United States hoped, the doctrine could not stifle Arab nationalism nor prevent Arab leaders from eliciting help from the Soviet bloc.\(^5^3\)

Perhaps it was its fear of alienating other regimes in the Middle East, or perhaps it was the continued fear of communist infiltration in the region, either way, after the failure of containing Arab nationalism in Syria, the United States renewed its efforts to inculcate friendly relationships with other Arab regimes to counter Syrian and then Egyptian nationalism.

Luckily for the American administration, Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba strongly supported the Eisenhower Doctrine, saying that it would be “decisive for the strengthening of peace and removal of fear from the hearts of weaker peoples.”\(^5^4\) In *Foreign Affairs*, the Tunisian president laid out his case for allying with the United States and the West against communism. He believed communism to be antithetical to the Muslim faith and to indigenous nationalism. He

\(^{53}\) Ibid, 179.
\(^{54}\) Ibid, 100.
felt instead that the West could better promote his idea of Tunisian independence. Appealing to the democratic idealism of Americans, he wrote, “From the very first stirrings of their independence movement, North Africans have had a latent tradition of democratic liberalism which binds them to the nations of the free world.”55 As a pro-US bastion just west of Egypt, Eisenhower felt it was important to maintain Bourguiba’s enthusiasm for the West, fearing that if he turned to the Soviet Union or to Nasser’s Egypt, the whole of North Africa would follow.

Eisenhower had a true affinity for Bourguiba. After meeting him, Eisenhower wrote, “I was struck by his sincerity, his intelligence, and his friendliness.” He agreed with Bourguiba that the French cause in Algeria was a “useless struggle.”56 However, in a conversation between the two presidents at the Oval Office in 1956, the Tunisian leader complained to President Eisenhower that “The French are a century behind the time...particularly in the way they want to retain control over their formerly extensive empire.” To this, Eisenhower only cautioned patience with the French: “France’s relationships with her colonies have advanced considerably,” he said, “and there is much evidence that traditional French ideas are changing.”57 Such a divergence in attitude for President Eisenhower—deriding the French in his diary for their “useless struggle,” and then calling for patience on the part of Bourguiba in regards to the same event—reflected both the need for change in

French policy and the unwillingness on the part of the United States to effect that change.

Eisenhower’s National Security Council reflected his own views in a 1956 report describing important aspects of the Maghreb to US policy: North Africa was “strategically important” because of the US bases already there. Events in the Maghreb, “and particularly in Algeria, could provoke a most serious internal crisis in France, with unpredictable results on the future of French democracy and on France’s alignment with NATO.” The NSC acknowledged that US actions in the Maghreb would “be regarded as a test of US intentions and capabilities with respect to other dependent peoples.” The US needed to tread carefully and balance the interests of several parties. The NSC wanted neither to cause unrest in France nor to alienate Bourguiba and other pro-Western regimes.

The US felt the best course of action was to build up Tunisia’s economy, as Eisenhower “viewed economic development as a generator of public stability and, therefore, a bulwark against communism.” In 1956, just after Tunisian independence, the US sent a special mission to Tunisia to decide how best to aid the new nation. A treaty was signed, guaranteeing that the United States would “furnish such economic, technical and related assistance...as may be requested by representatives” of the Tunisian government. In exchange, Tunisia agreed that US government personnel and businessmen “be exempt from any taxes on ownership

59 Sangmuah, 81.
or use of property” within Tunisia.\textsuperscript{60} This favorable treaty was important to both the United States and Tunisia, who hoped it would stabilize the Tunisian economy and provide prosperity in the long run. However, the early phase of the economic treaty was designed as “a holding operation.” In other words, “post-independence economic difficulties,” such as the exodus of European professionals and capital, as well as bad harvests and increasing unemployment caused American aid to be used to slow down Tunisian economic woes instead of providing true growth.

Additionally, the agreement was made in phases, with the bulk of aid coming in a second phase, after 1961.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, in the early years of Tunisian independence, the money and aid sent by the United States was significant, but in terms of keeping Tunisia stable and prosperous, it was not nearly sufficient.

In addition to Tunisia’s economic woes in its early days of independence, problems with France, its former colonizer, contributed to the air of uncertainty. After Tunisian independence in 1956, France agreed to sell arms to Tunisia. However, worried that the arms they supplied Tunisia were going to the Algerian rebels, France stopped selling to the Tunisians by early 1957 and tried blocking others from shipping them weapons. In response, Bourguiba threatened to turn to the Soviets and Egypt for his acquisition of weapons, creating an arms crisis. Coming to the side of Tunisia, the White House promised that either France or the US would


\textsuperscript{61} Andrzej Krassowski, \textit{The Aid Relationship: A Discussion of Aid Strategy with Examples from the American Experience in Tunisia} (London: Overseas Development Institute, 1968), 75-78, 115.
be their suppliers, encouraging them to only buy from Western nations. France still refused to sell the weapons and threatened to leave NATO if the US sold Tunisia weapons. Eisenhower wrote to Prime Minister Gaillard, imploring him to supply the arms for the sake of keeping Tunisia within the Western sphere. Gaillard replied that he could not do so. His response did not matter though because Eisenhower kept his promise and on November 14th 1957 he approved the delivery, fearing the Soviets would if the West did not.\textsuperscript{62}

There were indeed weapons making their way into Algeria and into the hands of the FLN. Not just from Tunisia, but also from many sources in a chain of supply involving the Soviet Union, Egypt, Yugoslavia, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia.\textsuperscript{63} From Tunisia alone however, it was thought by members of the French military that 1,200 weapons a month reached the Algerian rebels in 1957.\textsuperscript{64} Yes, the illegal arms supply to Algeria was a problem for the French military, but as historian Martin Thomas writes, “it is crucial to remember that the bulk of ALN weapons were [in fact] always derived from captured or killed French forces.”\textsuperscript{65}

Historian Egya Sangmuah writes that “the arms crisis marked a major turning point in US North African policy.”\textsuperscript{66} Not only was it a diplomatic victory for Bourguiba, but also France did not withdraw from NATO as it had threatened. France showed itself to be too dependent on NATO to have a truly independent

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{62} Sangmuah, 82-85.
\item\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 86.
\item\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 87-88. The ALN (\textit{Armée Libération National}) was the military branch of the FLN.
\item\textsuperscript{66} Sangmuah, 85.
\end{itemize}
policy, thereby stirring up desires in the United States to begin nudging towards a Maghrebi foreign policy independent of the French. Indeed, Eisenhower’s letter to Gaillard hinted at a rebuff of French supremacy in the region. “While we appreciate the traditional concern of France in the area of North Africa,” he wrote,

and while we hope that in fact France would continue to be a normal source of supply of Tunisia we could not agree that Tunisia, as an independent country, should feel constrained to accept any one country as sole supplier of arms and thus in effect make its own defense and security requirements a subject for determination by another country and not of its own government. This, in our opinion, would be incompatible with genuine independence.67

In some ways, the Tunisian arms crisis created a forum for the United States to express to France the bind that it felt it was in. Eisenhower, by explaining American interests in the region to Gaillard, seemed to be hinting to French policymakers that the United States desired to move away from its blind support of their activities in North Africa.

The Maghreb was beginning to play a more prominent role for the US in the Middle East than it had before. The next great crisis in the region, the French bombing of Sakiet, compelled Eisenhower to seek further involvement, embroiling the United States even more in the conflict between France, Tunisia and the Algerian nationalists.

67 Letter from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Félix Gaillard, November 13, 1957, DDEL, John Foster Dulles Papers (JFDP) 1951-1959, Chronological Series, box 15.
The Bombing of Sakiet

The bombing of Sakiet threatened the United States’s position in Europe and North Africa to a much greater extent in 1958 than the arms crisis had the year before. Because of the war in Algeria, the border with Tunisia became a hotspot for insurgent activity. Indeed, Tunisia was a safe haven for FLN militias and Bourguiba did not act positively to prevent them from operating within his borders. As such, attacks against French forces often originated across the border in Tunisia. After a surprise attack in Algeria, it was not uncommon for insurgents to slip back across the border into the safer confines of Tunisia. France claimed that the Tunisians played an active role against them and diplomatic relationships between the two nations disintegrated. The US took an interest in the ramifications of this dispute, worrying about the stability of North Africa against communism and Nasserism.

Undersecretary of State Christian A. Herter sent a telegram to the American embassy in France with instructions to inform the French that the United States was deeply concerned with the situation. He wrote that the US was “hopeful” the French could “resume talks with [the] Tunisian Government with [the] view [of] restoring [the] close French-Tunisian relationship.”68 Despite this message, skirmishes between French troops and FLN insurgents along the border increased.

On January 11, 1958, FLN insurgents originating from the Tunisian border town of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef ambushed a French patrol on the Algerian side of the border, killing twelve soldiers and taking four prisoners. Immediately, the French

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government charged Tunisia with co-belligerence in the Algerian insurrection, accusing them of willingly aiding the rebels. The French military believed the prisoners were taken across the border into Sakiet. The Tunisian government replied to this charge “with certainty” that “no Algerians with or without French prisoners crossed into Tunisia” any time after the attacks.

The British Embassy in Tunis accepted Tunisia's view. Ambassador Dearden made a personal visit to Sakiet, and he wrote:

to see whether there was any openly apprehensible evidence for French assertions that (a) the frontier areas were not under Tunisian Government control, and (b) these areas were providing headquarters, training centres and supply depots for the F.L.N.

His findings disputed the French claims:

...at least to all outward appearances, these sections of the country (along the border) were under the control of the Tunisian Government. The govenors seemed to exercise complete authority over both the civil and security forces. Of F.L.N. influence there was no sign; nor indeed did there seem to be any evidence that F.L.N. groups were operating in the countryside.

What he found instead, were “large numbers of genuine refugees, among whom there may or may not be F.L.N. elements, disarmed and probably, in the strict military sense, disorganized.” In the same vein, the US embassy reported “absolutely no signs [of] Algerian activity,” in the area. Instead, it “appeared to be under firm GOT (Government of Tunisia) control.”

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70 Embassy in Tunis to Dulles, January 13, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651G.51S/1-1358.
73 Embassy in Tunis to Dulles, January 28, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.51S/1-2858.
The French embassy in Tunis however, felt that the attack showed the ease of movement “which [the] Algerian rebellion has been enjoying on Tunisian territory.” Furthermore, they took it as proof that attacks had occurred with the “consent of Tunisian authorities or at least with their knowledge.” French military intelligence came to the conclusion that “Sakiet has become an Algerian town.” It was believed to be an FLN stronghold and the central destination of illegal arms from Egypt to the rebels. As Irwin Wall states, Sakiet “became a French obsession.”

After the January 11 cross-border raid by the FLN, calls by members of the French military to retaliate in kind across the border into Tunisia became frequent. The CIA predicted that “French military leaders in Algeria, still smarting over the rebels’ capture of four French soldiers, may engage in actions across the border on the assumption that they have Paris’ implicit backing.” Calls for action became stronger as reports reached France of a possible FLN “spring guerilla offensive.” Better strike first and deny the FLN the chance, the French commanders thought. Though Prime Minister Gaillard was nominally against an attack into Tunisia, a CIA briefing paper produced for the National Security Council Staff stated that “new incidents—which can be expected at any time—could force his hand, and create a crisis which might induce Tunisian President Bourguiba to appeal to the UN, and directly to [the] US for assistance.”

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74 Embassy in Tunis to Dulles, January 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.51S/1-1758.
75 Wall, 104.
76 Central Intelligence Bulletin, January 25, 1958, National Archives and Records Administration, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST).
77 NSC Briefing Paper, February 5 1958, CREST.
For a long time, France had been grappling with isolating the FLN inside Algeria. The military had gone to great lengths to do so. Most dramatically, they installed
Border clashes increased over the next few weeks, ratcheting up the tension to unprecedented levels. In retaliation for shooting down a French reconnaissance plane flying near the border, the French military took unprecedented action by bombarding Sakiet on February 8, killing 72 people in what French Defense Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas called “legitimate defense.”78 His characterization of the incident was meant to cover the fact that the military was partially acting of its own accord, in what the Eisenhower administration perceived “as the most flagrant case of an independent military run amok and a civilian regime unable to control its military.” Recent historians, however, have disagreed with this characterization. Irwin Wall argues that “From the standpoint of the military, the attack was within the framework of the standing orders of the army that had been in effect since September 1957, when the French government placed its first of many protests with the Tunisian authorities.”79 Matthew Connelly concurs that Sakiet was actually not unique in terms of previous doctrine: “Like the use of torture in the Battle of Algiers, the Sakiet raid was not a new departure in terms of French tactics; many Algerian villages had suffered the same fate. But in both cases, standard practice stunned the

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79 Wall, 104.
international media when they were able to witness it firsthand.”

Even American diplomatic representatives in Algiers stated that the “army did not act contrary to clear directives but merely made [the] most [out] of vaguely worded authorization [to] undertake riposte in self-defense.”

Still, the French government found the view that their military was out of control both offensive and embarrassing. After meeting with Prime Minister Gaillard in Paris, American Ambassador to France Amory Houghton wrote that Gaillard “admitted personally and privately that French action had been a mistake.” Nonetheless, he was compelled to accept responsibility for his army’s actions.

The incident was also embarrassing for the United States, for 11 US-built bombers and seven US-built fighters were used in the attack. Utilized by the French military ostensibly for the purpose of filling its strategic role as a member of NATO, the American made planes were donated under the Military Defense Acquisition Program (MDAP). Their use as offensive weapons against an American ally threatened to sour relations between the United States and Tunisia—and by extension, the Arab world.

In response to the bombardment, the Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations issued a complaint to the President of the Security Council and asked the SC

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80 Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution...*, 160.
81 Clark to Dulles, March 10, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1058.
82 Amory Houghton to Dulles, February 11, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/2-1058.
84 It did not help that prior use of American equipment by the French was already known as far back as 1955 when the CIA reported that “Previous use of MDAP-supplied equipment by French forces in North Africa has resulted in nationalist resentment toward the United States, which has been exploited in Communist propaganda.” Central Intelligence Bulletin, May 28, 1955, CREST.
to consider tackling the incident, calling it “an act of aggression committed against it (Tunisia) by France.” The next day, the French Representative to the UN issued a counter complaint regarding the “Situation resulting from the aid furnished by Tunisia to rebels enabling them to conduct operations from Tunisian territory directed against the integrity of French territory and the safety of the persons and property of French nationals.” Needless to say, France and Tunisia were at an impasse.

**The Decision to Mediate**

Upon hearing the news from Sakiet, President Eisenhower was irate, commenting that “the French were proving incapable of dealing with the North African situation.” Just a month earlier, French Ambassador Hervé Alphand had asked the President to make a public statement recognizing France’s “special position” in North Africa. Such a statement would be impossible after the bombing of Sakiet with the Western world, the USSR and the non-aligned nations watching. Historian Alistair Horne wrote that nothing “could have done more to ‘internationalise’ the war than the French bombing of Sakiet.”

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88 Horne, 250.
angrily told Alphand that the Sakiet incident “will eventually lead to a major disaster for everyone.” He criticized the French for demanding that the United States recognize their “special position” even though they showed no “real ability to solve these problems (the border incidents specifically and the Algerian situation in general).” Worried about larger Cold War considerations, Dulles further warned Ambassador Alphand that they risked a general North African war against France with the backing of the Soviet Union.89 The Soviet Union, for its part, accused the United States of complicity in the attack, saying the White House had “master-minded” the whole operation.90 Although there was no basis for the assertion, the use of American MDAP equipment in the attack was extremely troublesome.

The United States, understanding that France was a very important ally in the Western Alliance, had to tread carefully. NATO was based in France and France was a member of the United Nations Security Council. As previously discussed, the US had to consider France as a close European ally before it could force it to do anything in North Africa. Thus, American diplomats could not display excessive sympathy for Tunisia. For example, the US mission to the North Atlantic Council was instructed by Undersecretary of State Christian Herter not to bring up the subject of the Sakiet bombing during their February 12 meeting. But if they were implored to discuss it, they were to express concern over the loss of life, the effects in Tunisia.

Time Magazine reflected the same sentiment: “For years French governments fought jealously to keep Britain and the U.S. from ‘meddling’ in France’s North African sphere of interest. But the thesis that whatever happens in North Africa is purely a French concern was blown sky-high in the bombing of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef.” Time, “Good Offices from Friends,” March 3 1958: 26.

89 Alphand to Pineau, February 9, 1958, Documents Diplomatiques Français (DDF), 1958, Tome I (January 1- June 30), no. 81.
over Bourguiba’s pro-western policies, and the overall importance of North Africa to NATO; nothing indicating anger or disappointment towards France. Additionally, they were specifically ordered not to comment on the role played by American MDAP planes in the bombing, something that could implicate the US but also illustrate how France was misusing loaned equipment.\textsuperscript{91} Even Secretary of State Dulles held his tongue from criticizing France too openly in regards to MDAP equipment. Confidentially, however, he told Republican Senator and Senate Minority Leader William Knowland that he suspected the French had “deliberately used American planes to get us into it.”\textsuperscript{92} A \textit{New York Herald Tribune} article shortly after the bombing of Sakiet illustrates the frustration of western diplomats who “agree that France has a role to play in Africa but that bombs, rockets and machine-gun bullets on a crowded market town in Tunisia are bad ways of playing it, even if Tunisia has been actively aiding the Algerian rebels or winking at their activities.”\textsuperscript{93}

The Eisenhower administration felt that the US had dealt with the deficiencies and contradictions of the Fourth Republic for far too long and hoped to begin reducing support for its North African policy. Tens of thousands of French NATO soldiers were being used to hold onto the vestige of a long-past empire, diverting vast resources to what the US felt was a lost cause. The real threat to Western security was the USSR, staring at Western Europe and the USA from behind.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Christian A. Herter to the Embassy in France, February 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651G.51J3/2-1759.
\item Memorandum telephone conversation between Dulles and William F. Knowland, February 10, 1958, DDEL, JFDP 1951-1959, Chronological series, box 8.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
its iron curtain. It was clear to American policymakers that depending on a fragile French government was becoming more and more troublesome.

Additionally, the merger of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic (UAR) in the early part of 1958 underlay the decision to mediate in North Africa. In early 1958, Nasser’s Pan-Arab movement was at its absolute peak. Running scared were conservative Arab regimes who feared the instability caused by Nasser’s appeal to Arab populism. Many of these regimes, such as King Saud of Saudi Arabia, King Faisal of Iraq, and President Bourguiba of Tunisia looked towards the United States for support.

In a meeting with Secretary of State Dulles, Eisenhower even toyed with the idea of disregarding the French in NATO—in case they decided to leave over the Algerian situation—by proposing the “greater use of German ports of entry rather than reliance on the French infrastructure.” However vulnerable France might have been, Secretary Dulles was still worried that alienating France would cause the end of NATO. Speaking with his brother, CIA Director Allen Dulles, the Secretary of State confided that if the United States exerted too much pressure on France they would withdraw from NATO. Allen warned him that in the long run though, continued support for France would put the US “into an anti-Arab position...that would have tragic repercussions and lose us the oil of the Middle East.”

94 For a description of the height of Nasserism, read Yaqub, chapter 6, 181-203.
95 Memorandum of conversation (Memcon) between Dulles and Eisenhower, February 10, 1958, DDEL, JFDP 1951-1959, Special Assistants Chronological Series (SACS), box 12.
these concerns, the US felt the Fourth Republic was morally bankrupt and was putting Western interests at risk because of their desire to dominate North Africa.

Following very closely the events in Algeria and Tunisia were various members of the United States Congress—legislators who were wary of the French and who questioned the wisdom of US policy in the region. Less than two weeks before the Sakiet bombing, Senator Mike Mansfield of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations submitted a report of the situation in North Africa. The report, *North Africa and the Western Mediterranean*, sought a change in United States policy. The crux of his argument was that Algeria was “key” to stability in the region. Until the US helped to find a solution to the Algerian problem, nothing constructive could be accomplished. But the troubles in doing so were many, he argued. The main difficulty for the US was “the dilemma of a desire to support self-determination and independence for a subject peoples while it is inhibited from taking action offensive to metropolitan countries that are friendly.” He was bothered by France’s sense that national honor was at stake, writing that “a clinging to the mirage of territorial control as a hallmark of greatness continues to inhibit the French from coming to grips with the realities of the Algerian problem.” Hampered by France and the Eisenhower administration’s intransigence, Mansfield stated simply: “We have drifted.”

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98 Ibid, 2.
99 Ibid, 4.
100 Ibid, 22. For an extensive analysis of the United States policy of “drift” regarding France and North Africa, refer to Daniel Byrne, “Adrift in a Sea of Sand...”. 
Sakiet would help the Eisenhower administration realize the danger of "drift" as well. As such, Secretary of State Dulles told the President that his administration risked losing congressional support of his foreign policy toward France. Congress was becoming critical of providing aid to France just so they could use that aid to carry on the war in Algeria. Though frustrated by the State Department’s lack of direction in North Africa, and by the indiscriminate use by the French of American military equipment, Senator Mansfield and others understood the precarious balancing act that the Eisenhower administration was engaged in. As a member of Congress, Mansfield was on the outside looking in and acknowledged privately to Secretary Dulles that he could be more critical of French policy than the President who had to deal with them. As such, he informed the Secretary that he hoped his report would be helpful.

As Dulles predicted, Sakiet sparked Congressional debate regarding the purpose and nature of American support for France. At a February 10th meeting of the Senate, two days after the bombing, Minority Leader William F. Knowland expressed worry that “France, by such short-sighted action, will likely not only rally the Arabs of Africa and the Middle East against her, but will also alienate public opinion around the world.” Senator Wayne Morse subsequently agreed, reminding his fellow Senators that “the Tunisians have been among the most loyal allies of the United States in all Africa.” He worried about “the misuse of American

military equipment by the French” as well.104 Three days later Senator Mike Mansfield repeated the thesis from his report, that “the key to the difficulty” of American policy towards France and the Maghreb “and the basic cause of the present incident, is Algeria.”105

Connecting the Sakiet incident to the war in Algeria was an acknowledgment that the French bombing stemmed not just from a simple border dispute, but also from the French inability to control the violence in its colony. Senator Mansfield felt the United States needed to take a lead steering France toward a settlement of the Algerian situation. At the same time, however, he called for a strong Western presence in North Africa. He proposed a solution that he thought would ameliorate both sides in light of the Sakiet bombing. He wanted to support “the claims of the innocent against those who bombed” and for the “establishment along the Tunisian-Algerian and the Moroccan-Algerian border of limited nations emergency patrols” similar to those at the Israeli-Egyptian border.106 The proposal for neutral observers would in fact be one of the main propositions of the Good Offices Mission.

It was Senator Hubert Humphrey, future Vice President of the United States, who really expressed scorn towards the French:

In a single act of idiocy, the Tunisian market town of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef was the victim of a premeditated attack by French fliers using American-made planes, raining death and destruction on the town hall, the post office, a school, 84 shops, and 2 Red Cross trucks carrying Swiss license plates. A total of 68 persons dead, including women and children, and a hundred wounded were left when the B-26’s and Corsairs retired across the border into that other scene of terror and death, Algeria.

104 Ibid, p. S1931. It is interesting to note that Senator Morse was one of two Senators to vote against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution six years later. 
106 Ibid.
We have been wringing our hands over French colonial policies for years. We wrung our hands over them during the bloody holocaust of Indochina, and there proved to be no solution for that problem until the French themselves gradually tired of the accumulation of bitterness and bloodshed, tears, and treasure, which that fruitless holding operation cost.

But the lessons of Indochina apparently have not been learned in North Africa...107

Senators Humphrey, Knowland, Mansfield and others were all anxious for a change in US policy toward France in North Africa. All three, active in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, were prepared to pressure Eisenhower and the State Department to take action.

The media played a part in shaping and reflecting American views on French policy. In a piece for The Washington Post, Walter Lippmann wrote that “this will have long consequences.” The bombing of Sakiet “goes to show that the Algerian war is not an internal affair of France...but an international affair which it is impossible to isolate and to ignore.”108 The New York Times criticized French tactics:

The French military and the Government, which condone the slaughter, invoke the doctrine of ‘hot pursuit’ whereby enemies making forays from the sanctuary of another country can be pursued into that country and attacked...However, ‘hot pursuit’ is one thing and killing many women and children, destroying schools and shops on a market day in an undefended village, is another. The Moslem world is not going to forget Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef.109

Time Magazine chimed in, stating that “France lost its head, and the result was a murderous display of the kind of ruthless brutality that the West commonly ascribes

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these days only to Communism.” Indeed, Senator John F. Kennedy’s 1957 speech critical of the Eisenhower administration’s support for France was now seen in a new light by the media after the bombing of Sakiet.

Indeed, Senator John F. Kennedy’s 1957 speech critical of the Eisenhower administration’s support for France was now seen in a new light by the media after the bombing of Sakiet.

Western European newspapers expressed similar concern regarding the bombardment. “This incident provides an opportunity,” wrote the French Chargé d’Affaires in Bonn, Germany, “to express again the latent hostility of public opinion against the Algerian policy of France.” One socialist paper compared the bombardment to the SS massacre of the French town of Oradour-sur-Glane during World War II, a particularly damning critique. The Times of London characterized the bombardment of Sakiet as “an essential political coup, which the Government in Paris did not initiate but found itself unable to disown.” In other words, the Times accused the French of what was evident: they were quickly losing control of the situation in Tunisia and by extension, Algeria.

The opportunity to play a bigger role in North Africa came when Tunisian President Bourguiba implored the United States to mediate. On February 12 he asked Washington to secure “the complete evacuation of French troops from his country and the conversion of Bizerte from a French naval base to a Western NATO base, ‘free of colonialism.’” This was an important opportunity Washington could

111 Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution..., 160.
112 Leduc to Pineau, February 10, 1958, DDF, 1958, I, no. 82. For an in depth analysis of the massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane and the way it has been remembered and commemorated in France, refer to Sarah Farmer, Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).
114 Wall, 114.
not pass up because Tunisia was an important NATO ally. Bourguiba was now giving an opportunity for NATO to have a physical presence in North Africa and hence, a strengthened position in the Mediterranean as a whole.

Bourguiba’s request to the US suggested an interest in maintaining strong relations with the West. However, his appeal was viewed with particular consternation among other Arab countries. After the Sakiet incident, the American embassy in Damascus informed the Secretary of State that Arab governments were watching the US “with great interest” as they viewed American actions in response to the French attack as an “acid test” regarding its “attitude towards European colonialism when in conflict with a pro-American Arab state.”115 Morocco, which before the Sakiet incident was less concerned with the Algerian conflict than Tunisia, now worried about their “inevitable involvement” in the Algerian War, fearing that it would “spread to [the] whole of North Africa.”116 In a sign of solidarity with Tunisia, Mohammed V, the King of Morocco recalled his son, Crown Prince Moulay Hassan, and his Foreign Minister, Ahmed Balafrej from Paris.117 Surely, the revolutionary spirit of the FLN had to be worrisome for sovereign Arab nations who often were at odds ideologically and politically with them.

The Arab media had a longstanding mistrust of US intentions in North Africa. The pro-Soviet newspaper Al Jamhur blamed the United States for the attack at Sakiet. France, “dependent on American supplies and political support,” would not “threaten peace in [the] Mediterranean without American consent,” argued the

115 Yost to Dulles, February 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/2-1158.
116 Cannon to Dulles, February 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/2-1158.
newspaper. Another newspaper, *Al-Hadarank*, called the UK and US reactions an “artificial concern,” that they were pretending to be offended by French actions in Tunisia.  

Most worryingly, despite his assurances of friendship with the United States, President Bourguiba’s state ran newspaper, *L’Action*, stated that

The hard reality teaches us every day that hanging onto the shirt tails of the West brings us only insults and humiliation. One thing is clear: To be respected in 1958 one cannot remain a friend of the West. To be treated with consideration and courtesy one has to be a Nehru, Tito or Nasser.”

The United States was slowly losing ground among Arab nations with its perceived policy of support for France. The last thing Eisenhower wanted was another Nasser in North Africa.

Great Britain saw its potential role as mediator and offered to work together with US diplomats to secure a peaceful settlement. The UK was very dependent on the US for its own reasons and saw benefits in helping out in an Anglo-American mediation to Tunisia and France. According to historian Jacob Abadi, Britain’s policy toward French North Africa stemmed from four main factors:

(a) its partnership with the US as a guardian of the Mediterranean region during the era of the Cold War; (b) its tendency to give priority to European defence, which discouraged it from becoming the region’s main arms supplier; (c) its reluctance to interfere in a region which it regarded as a French preserve; and (d) its desire to eliminate French objection to its quest for acceptance into the European Common Market.

Along with those factors guiding British policy in the Maghreb, the United States also encouraged their assistance: British help could stem comments that the US was

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118 Yost to Dulles, February 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/2-1258.
acting alone, trying to exercise hegemony in European affairs. The French for their part liked the idea of Great Britain being involved. “London tends to a certain modesty,” wrote Jean Chauvel, the French Ambassador in London, while the Americans were “perhaps more ambitious.” Thus, with a strong European ally working in conjunction with the US, but one who might be more sympathetic to French interests, the French could be further encouraged to agree to mediation.

Not all in Britain were keen on joining the US in the familiar role of Cold War partner in this venture. Britain’s conflicting interests as a fellow colonial power made it less desirable and very hypocritical to protest French actions in the Maghreb. Years earlier, Britain had protested vehemently at the idea of debating the independence of Tunisia at the United Nations, citing Chapter I, Article 2 of the UN Charter regarding intervention in the internal affairs of member nations. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Selwyn Lloyd therefore called debate illegal. Additionally, getting on France’s bad side did not bode well for their chances in getting into the European Common Market (ECM). Thus, Britain and the US approached potential mediation between France and Tunisia very differently. Notes from a February 18 meeting of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet ministers stated that there would be differences between US and UK goals regarding a resolution. “They (the US) want to make affirmative proposals: we want to get 2 sides talking together. Must try to keep Algeria out of these discussions.”

121 Chauvel to Pineau, February 16, 1958, DDF, 1958, I, no. 100.
representative for Britain, wrote of “‘extreme suspicion’ of Dulles’s intent” to supplant French influence in North Africa. The British Embassy stated “there was ‘no point in trying to save North Africa for the free world by means which would at least risk the loss of France.’” In other words, Britain did not want to force France to consent to anything if it meant French withdrawal from NATO or that the United States would simply replace them in the Maghreb. Of course Britain still had relics of its empire and did not want to seem contradictory by condemning the French and refusing independence to its colonies at the same time. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan commented that while France had been foolish in Tunisia, “At the same time it is surely very much to British interest and to that of the West that France should preserve as much of her position in North Africa as possible.” Instead of complete decolonization, they preferred the creation of a French Commonwealth, similar to their own. After all, it was still two years before Macmillan’s famous “Winds of Change” speech that was to ensure a more rapid decolonization of the British Empire.

There were those in the British Foreign Office who worried less about US intentions and more about France not making positive steps towards ending the conflict. W. Hayter in the Foreign Office wrote that “French policy in Algeria is an albatross tied round the neck of western policy on the Middle East as a whole, almost as disagreeable as that represented by our obligations toward Israel.”

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124 Wall, 117.
125 Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution..., 163. Emphasis is Macmillan’s.
126 W. Hayter, quoted in Wall, 117-118.
the end, it was decided within the British Foreign Office that mediation with the United States was the key to lowering tensions between France and Tunisia.

Thanks in part to the British offer of mediation, Gaillard’s administration, reeling from the negative international attention at the bombing of Sakiet, also welcomed mediation in the hopes it would take heat off them at the UN. Surely though, Gaillard’s base of support was rapidly fading and he needed to convince the Assembly that mediation would not imperil *L’Algérie Français*. He got their assent to engage in mediation, but as the CIA observed, “This tactic may boomerang...as the right becomes increasingly incensed over Bourguiba’s determination to include Algeria as a topic in any discussions of French-Tunisian relations.”

On February 17, the State Department announced “the United States Government has decided to extend its good offices, in conjunction with the United Kingdom, in order to assist the Government of France and Tunisia to settle outstanding problems between them.” Eisenhower’s trusted colleague during the North African campaigns of World War II, Deputy Undersecretary of State Robert D. Murphy, was selected to represent the United States. Murphy would spend much of the next two months meeting with French, Tunisian and British delegates in an effort to settle the conflict.

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127 *Current Intelligence Weekly Summary*, February 27, 1958, CREST.
The Good Offices

From the beginning of the Good Offices Mission, each side expressed different goals. Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba felt the primary focus of the Good Offices should have been resolving the Algerian conflict. The FLN expressed hope for such a resolution as well. The French wanted the negotiations limited to “the immediate issue with Tunisia,” as if it was not related to the overall war in Algeria. Security studies expert Edgar S. Furniss wrote that the French hoped “good offices” only meant “the carrying back and forth of messages between disputants, in the hope that they can be brought together to settle the dispute themselves.” They did not want the Good Offices Mission to become a sort of “formal foreign intervention that might tend to make Algeria an international problem,” even though the Algerian conflict underlay the entire situation. As the Economist wrote, “In a word, the French accept Anglo-American help only in order to wipe the word ‘Sakiet’ off the slate and put the clock back to before the raid.” Additionally, acceptance of the mediation offer meant that Algeria might not be discussed in meetings of the UN Security Council commencing on February 18. Such different visions of the goals of the Good Offices Mission did not bode well for a resolution acceptable to all parties.

Additionally, the selection of Robert Murphy as America’s representative for the Good Offices Mission may have been an unconscious hint that even before

133 “France and Tunisia Accept Anglo-U.S. Offer,” The Times, February 18, 1958: 8
negotiations began, the US already favored Tunisia and settling the Algerian problem. As Charles Cogan points out, Murphy was well disliked in French political circles for his disdain of the Free French movement in World War II.\textsuperscript{134} In 1942 during Operation Torch, Murphy was involved in the “Darlan Deal.” Vichy Admiral François Darlan arrived in Algiers just before commencement of the operation and convinced French Vichy forces not to fire on Allied forces, in turn taking over French operations in North Africa and taking the steam out of the leadership of the Free French movement. About this, Murphy wrote, “Right or wrong, it was President Roosevelt’s belief that French domestic politics should be subordinated to winning the war…The Good Lord knows we needed a military success in 1942.” Because of this, he argued that bringing Darlan onto the Allied side was a necessity, “and the storm of charges that the United States was foisting Darlan on postwar France had to go unanswered then.”\textsuperscript{135} Nonetheless, postwar French administrators who saw in the “Darlan Deal” yet another attempt by the United States to dictate events in France were inherently mistrustful of Murphy. That mistrust lingered for more than fifteen years and was still around in 1958 as Murphy took up his post as Good Offices representative.

The US, for its part, knew the French would attempt to reject any resolution that called for drastic changes in their Algeria policy. The Eisenhower administration thought the only hope for a solution was political, not military, as

\textsuperscript{134} Cogan, \textit{Oldest Allies...}, 110-117.
\textsuperscript{135} Robert D. Murphy, \textit{Diplomat Among Warriors} (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 139.
France believed. It was Murphy’s job to help France understand that. “The trick,” Eisenhower asked, “is—how do we get the French to see a little sense?”136

President Eisenhower, Robert Murphy, and the State Department were aware that if France did not play along, then the French would become more and more isolated from their allies. One place to start was with the status of French soldiers stationed in Tunisia. Even though France granted independence to Tunisia in 1956, it had continued to base soldiers in the country along airfields near the Algerian border and at Bizerte, an important naval base in Tunisia. They were there for ambiguous reasons, but mostly to protect Westerners who lived and worked in Tunisia. Bourguiba wanted France to evacuate its entire military to the confines of Bizerte. Murphy feared that if France did not begin evacuations, then Bourguiba would begin the expulsion himself with consequences for the soldiers at Bizerte and generalized escalation of tensions. Murphy agreed that the soldiers should begin evacuation as a precondition to resuming talks between France and Tunisia. “If this were done,” Murphy wrote, “negotiations could be resumed with some possibility of success.”137

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Gaillard told him evacuations would be nearly impossible. France needed soldiers at the airfields along the Tunisian frontiers watching out for arms shipments to the FLN. The French refused the suggestion that neutral observers could carry out that specific job. Murphy retorted that evacuation

137 Murphy to Dulles, March 3, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-358.
was the minimum requirement for Bourguiba to begin talks. Murphy was quickly frustrated with the French viewpoint, believing Gaillard was going against common wisdom, and that he was in fact a “prisoner of [the] domestic political situation” in France. He wrote that the French government was “simply incapable of [a] clean-cut, bold decision,” even though individually they were “convinced of its wisdom.” In other words, though French politicians, including the Prime Minister, were aware that the situation with Tunisia—and by extension Algeria—was untenable, they nevertheless feared what would happen to them politically if they appeared to acquiesce to the Tunisian demands. Nonetheless, Murphy was determined to work around French intransigence and come up with a solution amicable to all parties.

Even before the mediation began, the French military ratcheted up the tension in the creation of a no-mans land on the Algerian side of the border. Towns and villages within twenty to thirty miles of the border on the Algerian side were forcefully evacuated by French troops, affecting more than 70,000 residents, leaving thousands of Algerians homeless, many of whom became refugees in Tunisia. Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba vehemently protested this action by stating his support for the rebels. “We give the insurgents what help we can short of going to war. Our position is like that of the United States in the early years of World War II. We are not one of the belligerents, but we are not neutral either. We will not help

138 Murphy to Dulles, March 5, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-558.
139 Murphy to Dulles, March 6, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-558.
the French to close the border against our Algerian brothers.”

He wrote directly to President Eisenhower expressing his concern:

Already, refugees, children, and old people are pouring by the thousands into Tunisia, abandoning their homes and, in many cases, their families... Should the scorched earth practices be continued and tolerated along the frontier, this operation, because of its scope and its inhuman character, would assume the aspect of one of the most horrible tragedies of our times...

Both in public and in private, Bourguiba appealed to American values, comparing Tunisia to the US in its support of Britain during World War II, and alluding to America’s “spiritual values which constitute the true foundation of [its] position as a beacon in the free world.”

President Eisenhower wrote back to Bourguiba in a non-committal manner:

“We have had somewhat conflicting reports as to the situation in this area, which I hope will not lead to consequences of the proportion which you fear.” Perhaps with Robert Murphy arriving soon, Eisenhower was being careful not to come out totally against the French in this situation. There were indeed “conflicting reports” as to how many people were being displaced along the border. While Bourguiba claimed 70,000 were at risk, a French Foreign Office spokesman said the amount of people to be moved “would not exceed 5,000 families, who would be regrouped around certain protected localities near their homes.” The Mayor of Algiers said it would result in no more than the “dislocation of 500-5000 families.” Naturally though, depending on whose definition of “families” was being used, the number of

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141 Bourguiba to Eisenhower, February 28, 1968, DDEL, WHO, Office of the Staff Secretary (OSS), Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 2.
individuals could very well approach the 70,000 as claimed by Bourguiba.

Eisenhower was also being noncommittal on the no-mans land situation partially based on the American Consul in Algiers recommendation that any pressure put on France by the United States to “abandon the creation of a no-man’s land...must be accompanied by alternative proposals for effective neutralization of the border.” The problem was, there were no good proposals.\textsuperscript{143}

The French denied that what they were creating along the border was a no-mans land. Christian Pineau, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that “There is no intention to create a vast no man’s land along the border, but to ensure an effective defense of the territory, to regroup the scattered population who are few in number living in the mountainous and forested regions near Tunisia, where rebels can hide and move.” He called reports of a vast refugee exodus “fanciful and unfounded,” maintaining that the Tunisian government and press were simply launching “a campaign of lies of extreme violence.” Any Algerians who did in fact flee across the border were doing so “under the threat of the FLN.” Lastly, he insisted that those families that were removed were simply “relocated a short distance...and all arrangements” would be made “to ensure their food and shelter and that householders are finding work.”\textsuperscript{144} However, such relocation camps, which sprouted

\textsuperscript{143} Good Offices Summary of Developments, March 5, 1958, DDEL, WHO, OSS, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 5.


The forced relocation of Algerians along the Tunisian border in March 1958 foreshadowed events in 1959. An attempt to sweep the Algerian countryside of all rebels, the Challe Plan, eventually resulted in one million Muslims forced into these relocation camps, which historian Alistair Horne describes as places
up as a result of the no-man’s land along the border, were sure to upset international opinion no matter which way the French authorities justified it.

The Good Offices Mission thus began in light of this extreme tension along the Algerian and Tunisian border. The first official meeting between Good Officers Robert Murphy and Harold Beeley and Prime Minister Gaillard began on March 9th in Paris. After niceties were exchanged, the American and British representatives listened to Gaillard’s proposal. Galliard imagined the formation of an “economic cooperative arrangement” with North African nations as well as an “organization for common defense,” both as a means of bringing the nations closer economically and militarily. He argued that if they were brought together into a common cause, there would be more incentive to work together. The idea was definitely not new. For years, the State Department had advocated European development of independent African nations, as opposed to direct European control. By investing in independent states, the United States believed that nations like France would gain trading partners and maintain amicable relations with their former colonies.145 Bourguiba, the Tunisian President, echoed the call for economic cooperation between the Maghreb and Europe when he wrote in 1957 that “Indeed, the affinity of North Africans for the liberal democracy of the West, their geographical proximity to Europe and the need to enjoy the economic coöperation of the great nations of the free world are further obstacles to the advance of communism.”146 However, the

“which varied from resembling the fortified villages of the Middle Ages to the concentration camps of a more recent past,” Horne, 338.

French for their part worried that independent nations in the Maghreb would form their own “North African federation,” which would serve not just North African interests, but also act as a soapbox for the FLN and Algerian liberation.\textsuperscript{147} A French led commonwealth-like organization would be eminently preferable. Murphy and Beeley thought about the proposal, believed it to be sound, and promised to present the idea to Bourguiba.\textsuperscript{148}

After further reflection, however, Murphy and Beeley felt the proposed solution of a military and economic cooperative strayed too far from the immediate situation of French and Tunisian relations, and at the same time, ignored the Algerian situation. The French reviewed the prospects of creating a French-North African economic cooperative and determined that it was “too early...to embark on a project of this magnitude.”\textsuperscript{149} Prime Minister Gaillard feared that Bourguiba would agree to a “Mediterranean pact” “only after the Algerian question had been solved,” or that “he saw in it a way to internationalize the Algerian problem.”\textsuperscript{150} As such, the Anglo-American representatives and Gaillard agreed to put the idea of any economic cooperative arrangement on the backburner in favor of solutions with a more immediate impact. What they worked out instead were the conditions in which France would finally agree to withdraw its troops from Tunisia (except for Bizerte). The first condition for withdrawal was the reestablishment of normal relations between the two governments. This would mean freedom of movement for French

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{147} Parodi to Pineau, March 9, 1958, \textit{DDF}, 1958, I, no. 168.
\textsuperscript{148} Murphy to Dulles, March 9, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-958.
\textsuperscript{149} Memorandum from the Diplomatic Advisor in charge of coordinating with the OCRS, March 11, 1958, \textit{DDF}, 1958, I, no. 175.
\textsuperscript{150} Good Offices Summary of Developments, March 11, 1958, DDEL, WHO, OSS, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 5.
\end{footnotes}
citizens in Tunisia, something they had not had since the bombing. The second condition was that a neutral party sent to maintain Tunisia’s neutrality and prevent arms from reaching the FLN should replace the observers on both sides of the border.\textsuperscript{151} The third condition was that French troops stay in Bizerte and that they not be supplanted by the United States or Great Britain. What Gaillard wanted most of all though, in exchange for staying out of Tunisian affairs, was a promise that Tunisia would not interfere in French affairs— “That is to say, Algeria” clarified Gaillard. When Murphy told him that Bourguiba had not been interfering in French (and therefore Algerian) affairs, Gaillard retorted that Bourguiba had been using the media to incite hatred for France in North Africa and to glorify the FLN ever since Sakiet. To Gaillard, that was interference. To an extent, Gaillard was correct.

Bourguiba had told the Tunisian daily newspaper, \textit{L’Action}, that the FLN

\begin{quote}
...is already finding and will continue to find refuge and help on our soil. If need be, Tunisian volunteers will go to fight for liberty beside their Algerian comrades... We will aid the Algerians morally and materially with all the means at our disposal.\textsuperscript{152}
\end{quote}

However, President Bourguiba was speaking as the leader of a country taking in thousands of Algerian refugees, and whose economy was being negatively affected by the war across the border. To this idea that Bourguiba should stay out of Algerian

\textsuperscript{151} Perhaps the French Prime Minister had domestic politics in mind, because his proposal for neutral observers was very much like the advice given to him by members of the French Socialist party. Earlier, on February 17th, former Prime Minister Guy Mollet and other eminent socialists had proposed to American diplomats at the American Embassy in Paris that troops on both sides of the Algerian-Tunisian border be “placed under the command of an international organization” such as NATO. John K. Emerson, Counselor of the American Embassy in Paris, to the State Department, February 17, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/2-1758.

affairs, Murphy commented that “if we try to settle everything we will end up by settling nothing.”153 The demands were too high Murphy felt. Even if Bourguiba formally agreed not to interfere in Algeria, and even if both sides agreed that neutral observers would be installed along the border, he would still not be able to fully prevent Tunisians from sympathizing with the FLN or provide them safety. Additionally, Bourguiba’s domestic legitimacy stemmed in part from his nationalist attitude: Unabashed friendliness towards France would harm Bourguiba politically.

After their second meeting with Gaillard, Murphy and Beeley flew to Tunis on March 11 to meet with Bourguiba. After exchanging pleasantries, they went straight to business. Murphy, the diplomat that he was, told the Tunisian President that he was struck with the similarities between his and Gaillard’s ideas for a solution, and expressed hope they come to make an agreement. However, it is not known based on the sources exactly what Bourguiba proposed on that day. The Tunisian president was also sick, and Murphy believed that may have “considerably affected his attitude.” Unbeknownst to Gaillard, Murphy discussed the “larger Algerian problem” with Bourguiba. Not to discuss the crisis between France and Tunisia in the context of Algeria would have been impossible, no matter how much Gaillard believed otherwise.

Bourguiba, presenting his side of the situation, expressed indignation at France for violating Tunisian sovereignty. Tunisia was an independent nation, but France declared it had the right to base soldiers there. Bourguiba showed Murphy and Beeley an issue of Le Monde with a text of Gaillard’s speech explaining why he

153 Houghton to Dulles, March 11, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1158.
thought that France had the supposed ‘right’ to Tunisian soil. Murphy contended that France considered Tunisia to be 100% independent to which Bourguiba replied, “[the] way they behave shows this is not their true view.” France still had a “colonialist mentality” and it was “up to great powers to help [France] rid itself of this virus.” He had called upon the United States and Britain for mediation because he believed that only they had the persuasive power to help France see the light.

Bourguiba wasted no time giving ample warning of the possible repercussions if nothing positive for Tunisia was to come of the Good Offices. He reminded the representatives that Tunisia was one of the West’s true hopes in the Middle East. If the United States was going to waste its time pandering to French priorities, Soviet-backed Nasserism would eat all of the Middle East up, he alleged. Undeterred, Murphy and Beeley argued that the steps the French wanted to take—the evacuation of troops outside of Bizerte and neutral observers on the border—meant that France accepted the “principle of total evacuation of Tunisia.” In other words, it was understood that France would eventually leave Bizerte. Whether or not Murphy and Beeley actually believed that the French would totally evacuate one day is unclear. Because of Murphy and Beeley’s argument, or in spite of it, Bourguiba reluctantly reached out an olive branch, momentarily agreeing in principal to the French proposals, as long as the US and UK guaranteed their implementation.154

The situation in Tunisia drew the attention of the American Secretary of State and the British and French Foreign Ministers who were at that time discussing much higher profile diplomacy in the Philippines. In Manila, they were attending the South

154 Murphy to Dulles, March 11, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1158.
East Asia Treaty Organization’s (SEATO) Council of Ministers meetings, discussing the military and economic cooperation of member states in relation to the communist threat in the region.155 Outside of the formal meetings of the Council, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd and French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau sat down together to discuss the North African developments. “To defuse the situation,” said Pineau regarding Tunisia, “we are ready to take a number of actions.” One of those actions was abandoning all troops outside of Bizerte. However, the catch was that the airbases currently used by the French be handed over to “international control,” as opposed to Tunisian control. Pineau’s great fear was that Bourguiba would allow Cairo, a friend of the FLN, to use the airbases. Additionally, Pineau stated that he was prepared to go ahead with installing a French pipeline through Tunisia—something that would provide some 2,000 desperately needed jobs in Tunisia—without the pre-condition that French soldiers be present to protect the pipeline, as long as they be replaced by some form of international control as well.156

Secretary Dulles worrily listened to Pineau’s proposals of possible French concessions. He felt that France failed to look at the big picture, at how North Africa fit into the context of the greater Cold War. “The prospect of hostilities growing throughout North Africa from Algeria to the Persian Gulf—with the communists providing logistical support and military assistance” was “terrifying” he said.157

implored Pineau to push for a quicker peace with Tunisia for the sake of NATO and the Western alliance. Pineau retorted that he could not do so, that even the measures he proposed “would never be accepted by the French Parliament.”158

On the same day in Tunisia, Murphy met with Tunisian Prime Minister Bahi Ladgham, who, in concord with President Bourguiba, informed him that Tunisia was actually not interested in French control of Bizerte. Instead, they wanted Bizerte to be a “free world base,” controlled by NATO with Tunisia as a willing participant. Ladgham stated that to have it as a ‘France only’ base implied that France still “retains some special ties or privileges in Tunisia.” Murphy, knowing that France would not accept abandoning Bizerte, opined that France was trying to make amends with Tunisia through the evacuation of its troops in all other parts of the country. He knew that if Tunisia demanded that the French leave Bizerte the talks would be over. “Closing [the] door on talks” with France would be “a mistake.” Prime Minister Ladgham also brought up Algeria, just as Bourguiba had, warning Murphy that the US would lose North Africa to the Soviets if the Algerian problem was not resolved. As regarded the future of any Mediterranean federation of North African countries and France, Ladgham felt it was useless to talk if the Algerian War was not resolved.

By that point Murphy and others were beginning to worry about the success and purpose of the Good Offices Mission. It seemed the Tunisian authorities were both accepting and rejecting the French proposals. At the same time, the French were adamant that they had the right to remain in Bizerte and that the Algerian

situation could not be part of the discussions. Neither side could agree on the specifics of having neutral observers; France wanted neutral observers on both sides of the border and Tunisia wanted neutrals only on the Algerian side of the border, not wanting their internal security situation affected by the Algerian war. If there was no desire between France and Tunisia to begin seeing eye-to-eye, there was little hope that an amicable solution was forthcoming. Additionally, there was increasing worry that the French Parliament would reject any constructive proposals. On March 14, the French Social Republican (Gaullist) Party adopted a resolution reminding the Gaillard government neither to support any agreement with Tunisia that recognized the future need of a settlement of the Algerian situation nor to accept any measure agreeing to the abandonment of French troops from Bizerte.\footnote{Good Offices Summary of Developments, March 14, 1958, DDEL, WHO, OSS, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 5.} Anglo-American unity on the goals of the Good Offices Mission was not assured either. Disagreements on the acceptability of the various proposals caused friction between Murphy and Beeley, his British counterpart. Murphy wrote that

\begin{quote}
Beeley gagged…on the suggestion that if France finds itself unable to take the necessary initiative to improve the North African situation, we state we would be forced to take those steps necessary to preserve the western orientation of Morocco and Tunisia. In Beeleys [sic] view this would align us with Morocco and Tunisia against the French.\footnote{Good Offices Summary of Developments, March 13, 1958, DDEL, WHO, OSS, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 5.}
\end{quote}

Nonetheless, there was hope still. Murphy authorized a cable to Secretary of State Dulles, saying “Good Offices Continuing in Friendly Atmosphere and Further Talks
Contemplated.” If talks were going to stall, Murphy was at least determined to maintain the illusion that they were progressing.\footnote{Murphy to Dulles, March 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1258.}

The press reflected the frustration in getting France and Tunisia to agree on a solution. The Tunisian newspaper \textit{Petit Matin} was greatly skeptical of Anglo-American Good Offices. It argued that Algeria was the problem and nothing would come of mediation unless something was done about that situation. Murphy’s job should have been to intervene in Algeria, because “sooner than expected North African problems in general and Algeria in particular will have to be placed before the UN.”\footnote{\textit{Petit Matin}, quoted in: Jones to Dulles, March 13, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1358.} The \textit{New York Times} C.L. Sulzberger wrote that the long term American strategy to integrate North Africa into NATO was severely hampered by the situation between France and Tunisia. Uncertain that the Good Offices negotiations would lead to any long-term positive developments, he wrote that “One can only hope Murphy’s quietly persistent diplomacy and Gaillard’s willingness to consider new approaches will at least get the crisis off dead center.” Until then, North African integration into NATO and peace in Algeria “remains only a dream.”\footnote{C.L. Sulzberger, “Foreign Affairs: Moving the Horse Before the Cart,” \textit{New York Times}, March 12, 1958: 30}

On March 12, the day after their first meeting with Bourguiba, Beeley and Murphy discussed the proposals with Tunisian Prime Minister Bahi Ladgham and Foreign Secretary Sadok Mokaddem who said they spoke for the official Tunisian position, i.e. for Bourguiba. Neither Murphy nor Beeley could obtain further concrete Tunisian acceptance of the French propositions from Ladgham or
Mokaddem. Ladgham and Mokaddem wanted the French completely out of Tunisia—including Bizerte. Just the day before, in the presence of Murphy and Beeley, Bourguiba had vaguely accepted the French proposals for evacuation of the rest of Tunisia with the assumption that Bizerte’s status would be discussed at a later date. Now, once again, after much hand wrangling, he changed his mind and stuck to the hard line.  

Murphy then met privately with Bourguiba to express his “disappointment” with how things were regressing. Every time discussions were ongoing, Murphy complained, they developed into an “emotional reference” regarding Algeria, stifling any real progress. He told Bourguiba that the Good Offices Mission “could not settle anything,” if he wanted only “to settle all or nothing.” Then, while discussing the status of troops at Bizerte, Bourguiba “struck [a] hysterical note,” wrote Murphy. “I said if he were going to be utterly unreasonable on this subject that it would be better for me to withdraw entirely from the Good Offices Mission.” Bourguiba wanted France completely gone. Murphy recommended one thing at a time. End the immediate crisis, and negotiate over time with France regarding Bizerte. At the end of the meeting, Murphy felt he convinced Bourguiba to wait on Bizerte in favor of completing the other aspects of French withdrawal from the airfields along the border and resumption of normal relations with France.  

What Bourguiba then did in public threatened to bring the Good Offices to a complete standstill. On March 14th, the Tunisian president announced what amounted to an ultimatum for the United States: The Americans had to choose

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164 Murphy to Dulles, March 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1258 (1158).
165 Murphy to Dulles, March 13, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1358.
between French imperialism and Tunisian independence. In other words, the United States needed to support Tunisia in demanding French withdrawal from Bizerte, meaning a complete withdrawal from Tunisia. Bourguiba canceled the March 20th Tunisian independence celebrations, a symbol that Tunisia was not really free from France, and gave the US until that date, seven days away, to decide who to support.\textsuperscript{166}

On March 15th, formal meetings continued, though Bourguiba stayed with his plan to cancel independence celebrations on the 20th. Murphy and Beeley met with Ladgham and Mokaddem once again and essentially worked out what Murphy was trying to get them to agree on before: French forces would have to evacuate all of Tunisia minus the base at Bizerte; French consuls and residents would get free movement throughout Tunisia and neutral observers would be installed along the border.\textsuperscript{167}

Murphy arrived back in Paris on March 17th to inform Gaillard of the agreement. The diplomatic traffic is unclear however, on what was agreed upon. For example, Robert Murphy had already written on March 15th that “Arrangements will be made for neutral observers to have access to military airfields” along the border. However, on the March 17th meeting in Paris, Foreign Minister Pineau expressed concern with the “lack [of] any provision for neutral observers along [the] Algerian frontier.” It is possible that the French and Tunisian definitions of “neutral” differed, however it does not appear to come up in the diplomatic traffic.


\textsuperscript{167} Murphy to Dulles, March 15, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1558.
Pineau believed that if observers were not neutral, they were prone to be sympathetic to the Algerians and would allow and encourage the FLN to move to and fro between Tunisia and Algeria. In French politics, anything that seemed to show weakness towards the Algerian liberation movement, despite the low popularity of the war among public opinion, could lead to a fall from power. Thus, the French representatives believed that accepting Bourguiba’s terms would be political suicide for Gaillard.

Murphy then met with Antoine Pinay, former French Foreign Minister and leader of the Independents. Pinay, who was not fond of Gaillard’s government, told Murphy very candidly that “Gaillard may well fall in any event causing a wide open situation.” Since the bombing of Sakiet, there had been calls for changes in the government. The periodic calls for de Gaulle’s return to power were louder than ever by this point. Nonetheless, Murphy and Beeley were hopeful a deal would be made. British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Selwyn Lloyd, must have been in recent contact with Beeley when he said in a cabinet meeting that the situation

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168 Murphy to Dulles, March 18, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-1858.
169 French politicians differed greatly from the French public in the métropole. John Talbott’s study of French opinion polls show that “The mainland French—emotionally remote from the settlers, reluctant to spend vast sums of money on their defense or in the modernization of Algeria, pessimistic about the long-range prospects of the French presence, unenthusiastic about the prosecution of the war—were ready as early as 1957 to negotiate an end to the fighting and to accept looser ties than had previously existed between France and Algeria.” John Talbott, “French Public Opinion and the Algerian War: A Research Note,” French Historical Studies 9, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 361.
170 Murphy to Dulles, March 20, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-2058.
between France and Tunisia was greatly improved and that it “looks encouraging” that a deal would soon be struck.171

On March 18, the proposal was announced in the French assembly with fierce opposition from the political right. The worst part from the right’s point of view was “that the proposals involved a secret commitment by the United States to press France for settlement of the Algerian problem.”172 Their fears were not too far from the truth. Debate within the State Department concentrated very heavily on pressuring France to find a political solution in Algeria. The Good Offices Mission was designed in part to do so, even if that was not the explicit public purpose of the mission. President Eisenhower, his administration, and Congress were in fact very tired of the war in Algeria and very concerned with how it would reverberate in the rest of the world.

Meanwhile in Tunisia, Bourguiba stuck with the plan to cancel independence celebrations for March 20th and clarified why he was not going to give an independence speech (in effect giving a speech explaining why he was not going to give a speech). “France has chosen stubbornness, vanity and aggression,” he said. “We have chosen composure, wisdom and reconciliation.” Tunisia and France had a fundamental difference of opinion as to what the definition of “independence” was. He argued to the Tunisian Assembly that France had not granted full independence as evidenced by all the soldiers they maintained within Tunisian territory. If France had the right to maintain troops at Bizerte, then “we are neither free nor

171 Notes on Cabinet Meeting, March 18, 1958, TNA, PRO, CAB/195/17, Image 0016.
independent, and our sovereignty is limited...In this case, we are left to resume the struggle for complete sovereignty and to achieve our independence.” At the same time that he discussed Tunisian sovereignty, he also discussed the Algerian War and what it meant for the West. He feared that if the West continued to help France fight in Algeria—through continued supply of monetary and material aid directed towards maintaining the French presence in Algeria—then “the independence of Algeria will be realized not in the interests of the Free world,” but in the interests of the Soviet bloc. “It is a matter of life or death,” he continued. “It is the direction of an entire continent” allied either toward democracy or communism.

While deriding the French, Bourguiba highly praised the Anglo-American Good Offices Mission: “If despite all this, Tunisia remains independent with its dignity and its territory intact, the chief reason is the good disposition and esteem of the US and UK who took it upon themselves to bring [French and Tunisian] points of view closer together.”173 This vote of confidence in the West was a clear signal that Bourguiba meant to maintain his strong pro-western stance. Despite all the frustrations of getting France and Tunisia to agree on the basics of normalizing relations, the efforts of Murphy and Beeley at least showed Bourguiba the seriousness of the US and the UK.

Bourguiba then communicated to ambassador Jones that there was no reason for the Good Offices Mission to return to Tunis with French “counterproposals.” Bourguiba was done compromising with France and they would either have to accept the proposals as they stood, or not at all. Further discussions

173 Habib Bourguiba’s March 20, 1958 Speech to the Tunisian Assembly, emailed to me by the Librarian at the American Embassy in Tunis.
would also harm the “generally good effect” of the mission.\textsuperscript{174} Nonetheless, as a result of Gaillard’s insistence in modifying key parts of the proposals, specifically the proposal for neutral observers, Murphy put out a feeler to the embassy in Tunis. The suggestion was that an international border commission be set up at the request of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld:

Such [a] Commission would be composed of nationalities selected by [the] UNSYG (United Nations Secretary General) and would be a civilian rather than a military organization. It would have the authority to investigate border incidents and could be appealed to for investigations both by Tunisia and France.\textsuperscript{175}

This was the first time that the proposal for neutral observers along the Algerian-Tunisian border had been described with any specificity. Hopeful that Bourguiba might approve, Ambassador Jones met privately with him in Tunis. However, he received the same answer as before, that the President of Tunisia was done giving concessions to France.\textsuperscript{176}

Tunisian refusal of neutral observers along the border, however, was a calculated strategy of shrewd diplomacy. Under pressure from other Arab nations, Bourguiba feared that installing any troops with the aim of restricting the FLN in Algeria would be seen as a betrayal of Arab unity. French Foreign Minister Pineau called that a “weak argument since Egypt had herself accepted UN forces on her side of the frontier” after Suez. Gaillard and Pineau implored Murphy and Beeley to return to Tunisia and meet with Bourguiba once more to which they replied that

\textsuperscript{174} Jones to Dulles, March 22, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-2258.
\textsuperscript{175} Murphy to Dulles, March 25, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-2558.
\textsuperscript{176} Jones to Dulles, March 26, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-2658.
they would not. Gaillard felt they were “facing a very grave impasse” in light of Bourguiba’s unwillingness to renegotiate.

Murphy suggested a compromise, that neutral UN observers be placed only on the Algerian side of the border. It “would show good faith, [a] will to resolve problems, and would appeal [to] world opinion and especially [the] UN.” If France were the one proposing neutral observers on just their side of the border and not the Tunisian side, it would signify a willingness to concede and work things out. Beeley felt if UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld could be brought on board, then Bourguiba might cooperate. Though the Good Offices Mission was in dire straits, Murphy felt that the door of opportunity was “still slightly open.”

The British, on the other hand, apparently saw the door of opportunity closing. Though Beeley implored the British Cabinet to ask the Secretary General for assistance, Prime Minister Harold MacMillan felt that the time had come to decide “whether we (the UK) had anything to gain by further intervention in this problem.” He felt the Good Offices “had produced no result” and instead began worrying about the risk of “alienating public opinion in France.” Britain of course had to keep in mind the importance of maintaining pro-Anglo sentiment in France at a time they were pursuing a place of prominence in European economic and political developments. As discussed earlier, France was the main impetus to British entry into the European Common Market. The last thing the Macmillan government

177 Murphy to Dulles, March 27, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-2758.
178 Conclusions on Cabinet Meeting, March 27, 1958, TNA, PRO, CAB/128/32, Image 0026.
wanted from the Good Offices Mission was further excuses for the French to deny their entry.

Bourguiba, informed by Ambassador Jones of the plan to confer with Hammarskjöld, planned to outright reject it. The plan was a signal to him that the Good Offices could make no further progress. Nonetheless, Murphy and Beeley met with Hammarskjöld in London on Sunday, March 30. Hammarskjöld agreed to set up a "border commission" to see what authority the UN had in settling the border dispute. Jones met with Bourguiba again with the same results. For Bourguiba to make any concessions, Jones wrote, would "do him great harm not only domestically but also with the FLN and [the] Arab world." Lastly, Bourguiba saw the pressure put on him as proof that "when put to [the] test," the US and UK "always shy away from applying" pressure on France, "however ‘wrong’ [the] GOF (Government of France) may be."

Hammarskjöld came to the conclusion that the UN did not have the authority to set up neutral observers without the consent of both the governments of France and Tunisia, much to Murphy’s disappointment. Also, Ambassador Jones felt that Bourguiba showed signs of a "progressive stiffening of attitude" in his dealings. Lastly, on April 2, Gaillard informed Murphy that the French were in fact unwilling to allow neutral observers on the Algerian side of the border as well. Murphy

179 Jones to Dulles, March 29, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-2958.
180 Murphy to Dulles, March 31, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-3158.
181 Jones to Dulles, March 31, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-3158.
182 Murphy to Dulles, March 31, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/3-3158.
183 Jones to Dulles, April 2, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-258.
thought internal French politics had a lot to do with it, and he was right. Pineau and Gaillard could not be seen as ‘soft’ regarding Tunisia and North Africa, lest their political rivals take advantage. Bourguiba too, had to deal with internal Tunisian politics, and it affected his stance on the Good Offices proposals. He outright admitted to Murphy that members of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly were opposed to “accepting any neutral supervision” of airfields along the border. He even risked his own political future, he argued, by allowing French troops to stay at Bizerte. His political success depended on maintaining a favorable view of his decisions in the government, and he believed he had risked enough.

In a last ditch effort to keep the Good Offices Mission alive, Murphy decided to take one last trip to meet with Bourguiba. Over the phone, Secretary Dulles expressed his fear of a general North African war if the situation got any worse. Murphy was not as fearful of such a conflict, or at least that was what he conveyed to the Secretary of State. He told the Secretary that his trip back to Tunis would help calm things down.

Ever the optimist, Murphy met with Bourguiba on April 4. The Tunisian president told him “what is going on in Algeria is a crime which I cannot tolerate.” The fact that French troops were still in Tunisia was proof to him that France was not interested in having the Good Offices Mission succeed. He then warned Murphy that forcing Tunisia to accept unfavorable terms would make the US and UK accomplices in the “prosecution” of a “colonialist war.” He threatened to go to the

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184 Murphy to Dulles, April 2, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-258.
185 Murphy to Dulles, April 4, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-458.
186 Memorandum of telephone conversation between Dulles and Robert Murphy, April 2, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-358.
Security Council where he hoped to resolve Tunisia’s dispute with France in an international forum and pursue a resolution of the Algerian War, something France was very frightened of. “It will never be said that Bourguiba permitted his government to take action against [the] interests of our Algerian brothers fighting for their freedom!” he told Murphy. Their meeting did not resolve anything and both parties “agreed [to] ‘reflect’ and to meet again.”

Murphy next met with Bourguiba privately on April 6. In his telegram to Secretary of State Dulles, Murphy wrote that the Tunisian President’s “patience with endless French political crisis is at an end.” He was not concerned with French internal politics. Bourguiba felt the sooner the Gaillard government fell, the better, because in any case, it would signal a “discontinuance [of] French military policy in Algeria.” The French, he felt, were alienating the entire Western world from the Maghreb, and destabilizing his own rule in Tunis.

It appeared that the Good Offices Mission was for the most part over. Tunisia and France could not agree upon some of the most basic aspects of proposals, including the status of observers along the border and the status of French troops at Bizerte. Bourguiba instructed his UN delegate, Mongi Slim, to prepare the Algerian problem for Security Council consideration. The US began strategizing its response to the SC consideration. Dulles wrote that the US would have to “take substantive positions...that France will not like,” meaning that the United States would not veto

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187 Murphy to Dulles, April 4, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-458.
188 Murphy to Dulles, April 6, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-658.
a proposal for action at the Security Council.\textsuperscript{189} Previously, when the subject of Algeria came up in the UN, the US had vetoed any discussion in a signal of support for France’s North Africa position. Now, after the bombing of Sakiet and the failure of any substantial agreements between France and Tunisia, to support France in such a way would have been unwise for the United States.

On April 10th, President Eisenhower wrote the French Prime Minister. He decided that the time for mediation was coming to an end and that France and Tunisia needed to take steps on their own to repair relations. “Dear Mr. President,”\textsuperscript{190} he wrote,

\begin{quote}
The “Good Offices” mission established by your Government and that of Tunisia seems now to have thoroughly explored all aspects of the matter with which it was charged. It would appear that the moment of decision cannot be much longer delayed...France faces the question of whether or not it is consistent with France’s own vital interests to accept the practical limits which seems to be imposed upon the Tunisian government by sentimental and even emotional ties, as well as geographical factors, which inescapably lead the people of Tunisia to sympathize with the aspirations of the Moslem nationalist elements in Algeria. May it not be that to take these practical factors into account is not only consistent with French interests, but indeed a way to promote them?
\end{quote}

If the Good Offices were to fail, then larger problems were “almost sure to erupt violently.”\textsuperscript{191} However, Eisenhower believed that if Gaillard’s government accepted the Tunisian terms, there was still “an opportunity to deal constructively with the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{189}{Dulles to Embassies in Paris, London, and Tunis, April 8, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-858.}
\footnotetext{190}{The Prime Minister was at the same time referred to as the “President of the Council of Ministers,” the name for his cabinet. The actual President, René Coty, was largely an ineffective figurehead.}
\end{footnotes}
larger aspects of the problem,” such as relations with the rest of the Maghreb.\textsuperscript{192}

Eisenhower’s letter clearly favored Tunisia’s position. Its cordial manner hardly hid the US’s growing impatience with France. Expressing the situation in terms of Algeria and not just French-Tunisian relations, Eisenhower signaled that he could not pretend the Algerian situation could be dealt with separately. Dulles instructed Murphy to tell the French Council of Ministers that failure to come to concrete agreements was due “to causes having their root in the wider problem of the Algerian conflict.”\textsuperscript{193}

Harold Beeley, the British representative, had different instructions from his government. On April 11th, he informed Murphy that Great Britain “would support the French on the question of the establishment of the Border Commission and would also support them on the general Algerian question.” The British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Harold Caccia, told Secretary Dulles the same thing. In other words, the British were trying to lessen the blow of Eisenhower’s letter, stating that they would not implore the French to solve the greater question of resolving the conflict in Algeria (i.e. granting independence).\textsuperscript{194}

Perhaps Eisenhower’s personal letter convinced Gaillard and his cabinet. On April 12, the Council of Ministers finally met to debate whether to accept the March 15th proposals. They claimed to accept the proposals “unconditionally,” but really they did not. According to Robert Murphy, the Council of Ministers stated that “the agreement on the one hand and the matter of frontier control should remain quite

\textsuperscript{192} Eisenhower, quoted in Connelly, \textit{A Diplomatic Revolution...}, 166.

\textsuperscript{193} Dulles to Murphy, April 10, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-1058.

\textsuperscript{194} Telephone call between Dulles and Murphy, April 11, 1958, DDEL, JFDP 1951-1959, TCS, box 8.
So the dispute along the border regarding neutral observers would be
dealt with at a later date, but at least there was hope it would be done so with
healthier diplomatic relations between France and Tunisia.

But debate was not complete yet. After being accepted by Gaillard’s cabinet,
the proposals had to be discussed and accepted in Parliament. And this would not be
easy. For Gaillard’s hold on power depended on maintaining the approval of
Parliament’s moderates, the group that wanted to maintain hostility towards
Bourguiba and end “Tunisian interference” in French affairs. *Le Monde* wrote about
this “dilemma,” stating that if Gaillard sided with the moderates, he could “no longer
count on the understanding and thus the support of our (NATO) allies,” but if he
sided with NATO, he risked “being abandoned by one of the most important parties
of his majority.” As *Le Monde* predicted, he was abandoned by his own
Parliament. Instead of assenting to the Good Offices proposals, the French
Parliament held a vote of no confidence on Gaillard’s handling of the Good Offices
Mission. His government thus fell from power and the proposals were never voted
on by Parliament. Historian Egya Sangmuah states that the majority of French
conservatives saw the Good Offices Mission “as an assault on French sovereignty.”
At the same time, rejection of the Good Offices was a sort of revenge against Murphy
for his attempts during World War II to limit de Gaulle’s Free French movement.

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195 Murphy to Dulles, April 12, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-1358.
196 Raymond Barrillon, “Difficult Search for a Compromise on Tunisia in the Council
of Ministers,” *Le Monde*, April 1958: 1, 3. [Charles S. Maier and Dan S. White, , *The
Thirteenth of May: The Advent of de Gaulle’s Republic (Problems in European
History: A Documentary Collection)*, ed. Charles S. Maier and Dan S. White (New
York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 175-177.]
197 Sangmuah, 89.
The influential Governor General of Algeria Jacques Soustelle asked sarcastically
“What happened between April 9th, when the good offices mission had practically
expired, and the date when the government accepted the good offices? Of course! A
single new fact: Eisenhower wrote a letter....[W]hat are we doing here, amusing
ourselves with the playthings of a spurious sovereignty?”198 The letter Soustelle
referred to was the one the American President wrote to the French Prime Minister,
imploring him to accept the Good Offices proposals and submit them to the French
Parliament. By way of that letter, Jacques Soustelle insinuated that Gaillard and his
Cabinet were mere puppets of the United States. Parliament’s anger over the letter
was ironic for Gaillard and his government. Believing that Eisenhower’s letter would
be important in convincing Parliament to approve the Good Offices proposals,
Gaillard asked Eisenhower if he could publish it. Once it was published, it had the
direct opposite effect, entrenching the opposition.199 In reality though, the
Americans knew that the French Parliament would not accept the proposals.
Expecting the government to fall, CIA director Allen Dulles even commented to his
brother, John Foster, that he should find a way to capitalize on the Communist vote
to help overthrow the Gaillard government.200

On April 17th, Murphy and Beeley left for their respective countries with a
promise from the interim government to keep the Good Offices Mission “on ice.”201

But really, their job was done. President Eisenhower wrote a letter to Robert

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198 Jacques Soustelle, quoted in Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution..., 167.
199 Summary of telephone conversation between Dulles and Houghton, April 13,
200 Summary of conversation between Allen Dulles and John Dulles, April 16, 1958,
DDEL, JFDP 1951-1959, SACS, box 12.
201 Houghton to Dulles, April 17, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-1658.
Murphy thanking him for his efforts. “It may be that you—and we all—will now have to wait some little time for the full fruition of your efforts. But I am sure that that day will come and that history will share my own great confidence in your skill.”

That day was not far off. For on April 17, Bourguiba made a speech voicing “high praise for the United States and Britain” for their part in the mediation. “The failure of the good offices is ‘apparent rather than real,’ he said.” He noted “their patience and hard work, which may yet produce a solution.” Lastly, he stated that Tunisia was “no longer obliged” to stick to the proposal of the Good Offices Mission since it was rejected by the French Parliament. “This was taken to mean,” wrote Thomas Brady of the New York Times, that “Tunisia would demand a complete French military withdrawal instead of agreeing to negotiate a new arrangement by which the French could remain at Bizerte.” However, in a symbol of understanding with the chaotic French political situation, he said that he would not immediately pursue French withdrawal or go to the UN with the Algerian question.

**Conclusion**

The vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Félix Gaillard and his cabinet after the Good Offices proposals drove him from office, leading to another great crisis for France. The French military felt betrayed by its government—once again—and called for a “Government of Public Safety” to take over in Algeria. Pretty

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202 Draft of a Letter prepared by Dulles from Eisenhower to Murphy, April 17, 1958, CF, RG 59, 651.72/4-1758.

soon a group of generals in Algeria led a putsch against the French government, ushering in the May 1958 Crisis. Threatening a literal invasion of the métropole complete with an airborne drop on Paris, French generals called for the return of General Charles de Gaulle, absent from French politics for a decade. De Gaulle was brought back to fill the power vacuum, ended the immediate May 1958 Crisis, and quickly eased tensions with Tunisia. Opposed to the Good Offices from the beginning, he felt France and Tunisia should have negotiated directly. Once in power, de Gaulle quickly arranged the details of an agreement very much like the one proposed by Murphy and Beeley. The outcome was better than what the US had in mind from the beginning: Tunisia and France reopened direct negotiations and came to an agreement and the intransigent government of the Fourth Republic was gone. In its place though, was the stubborn but effective Charles de Gaulle.

De Gaulle intended to maintain the French presence in North Africa for the time being. However, he never said anything about denying Algeria their independence. Visiting Algiers for the first time as President in June 1958, he addressed a crowd of pieds-noirs and French soldiers and declared “Je vous ai compris!...Vive l’Algérie française! Vive la République!” (I understand you!...Long live French Algeria! Long live the Republic!) The statement was taken by the French military and the European population in Algiers to mean that he intended to defeat the FLN and keep Algeria French. However, the phrase “Je vous ai compris” was very ambiguous. Additionally, de Gaulle had admitted privately in late March that Algeria

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204 Horne, 267-298.
205 Wall, 132-133.
206 Horne, 301-302.
was a hopeless situation. “Only if Algeria becomes independent can we get ourselves out of this mess,” he said.\textsuperscript{207} As such, de Gaulle’s emotional declaration to the people of Algiers and his massive presence as President of the Fifth Republic would not prevent the winds of change from occurring, and in September 1959 he declared “it necessary that recourse to self-determination be here and now proclaimed.”\textsuperscript{208} Tragically, the war would continue for nearly three more years and only came to and end with the signing of the Evian Accords in 1962, granting independence to Algeria.

Though the Sakiet Crisis ended, and France further reduced its presence in Tunisia, they did not completely evacuate either, as they still maintained the thorn in Bourguiba’s side: the naval base at Bizerte. Bizerte specifically and the whole French presence in North Africa was now a problem for the next American administration as new Secretary of State Dean Rusk pointed out to the American embassy in Tunis.\textsuperscript{209} President Kennedy was more critical of the French in North Africa than his predecessor had been, as his famous 1957 speech shows us. With JFK at the helm, France was even further isolated in Algeria and at Bizerte in Tunisia.\textsuperscript{210}

\textsuperscript{208} Horne, 344.
\textsuperscript{209} Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Tunisia, April 24, 1961, USDS, \textit{FRUS, 1961-63, Vol. XXI}, 245.
\textsuperscript{210} This does not mean, however, that Kennedy made a radical change in American policy towards Algerian liberation once he assumed power in 1961. Instead, as Ronald Nurse shows us, once Kennedy was president he tempered his fiery attitude towards France and Algeria. Just as the Eisenhower administration had, Kennedy faced what he felt was a choice between supporting a European colonial power, or gambling with a power vacuum susceptible to the influence of the UAR and the Soviet Union, Ronald J. Nurse, “Critic of Colonialism: JFK and Algerian Independence,” \textit{Historian} 39, no. 2 (1977).
Setting the tone, the Kennedy administration secured an agreement with Morocco that the United States would evacuate its military from Moroccan soil by the end of 1961, leaving an onus for France to follow suit in Tunisia. But France did not do so, and they had their reasons. As Martin Thomas points out, the FLN continued to use Tunisia as a haven, utilizing Sakiet to mount even more cross-border incursions into Algeria despite Bourguiba’s pressure on the FLN to reduce its presence in Tunisia. Instead of leaving as the Tunisians desired, the French stayed and eventually expanded their facilities at Bizerte in 1961 (though they had a reduced presence throughout the rest of the country). Maybe it was the embarrassment of French troops on Tunisian soil, maybe it was the outright expansion of the base at Bizerte, or maybe it was because of the Algerian War constantly spilling over into Tunisia, but whatever it was, President Bourguiba lost his patience with the French and had his troops attack Bizerte on July 27, 1961. The decision was ill-advised, however, as poorly equipped Tunisian soldiers sustained thousands of casualties against the well-supplied French before ending the attack.

In the eyes of Tunisia, The United States came out of the Good Offices Mission very positively. The mission was not a fundamental shift in US foreign policy regarding colonialism, but it did signal US desires to have France constructively deal with its Algerian problem. After ending the Good Offices Mission, the US began asserting itself in North African affairs through the United Nations. Until 1958 the US delegation sided with France, voting against consideration of the “Algerian question” in the UN General Assembly. The US chose to abstain at the December

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211 Wall, 226.
212 Thomas, “Policing...,” 92-93.
1958 meeting of the General Assembly, electing not to use its veto power. Consideration of the “Algerian question” still failed to reach the 2/3 majority necessary to be considered for debate, but the US abstention was a clear signal to Paris that Washington wanted France to change its North African policy.²¹³

However, it should not be thought that the United States made a fundamental policy change regarding France and the Maghreb. Though the US made token gestures to France of disagreement with their North African policy through abstention at the United Nations, they failed to fully oppose the French in support of Algerian self-determination. There were many considerations that forced American policy makers to compromise the traditionally anti-colonial stance of the United States. First of all, France was still an important NATO ally as it was headquartered in Paris at the time. Secondly, France was key in European economic integration, a policy the United States ardently supported. Also, for their part, the Eisenhower administration worried about the specter of Nasser’s Pan-Arab movement and of Soviet-directed communism finding its way to French North Africa. Secretary Dulles especially saw the French as a necessary evil because of this.

From this perspective, the 1958 Good Offices Mission can be seen as a continuation of an American foreign policy during the French-Algerian war that neither condoned nor condemned France. On that note, American policy could not declare full sympathy for Bourguiba’s Tunisia or the FLN. Instead, the United States

was moderately constrained in the Maghreb. The American representative, Robert Murphy, was thus required to seek a compromise solution that would offend neither France nor Tunisia. However, the only solution formed was one that offended everyone and satisfied no one. As a result, France and Tunisia were not able to come to an agreement and the Gaillard government fell from power in a vote of no confidence. The war in Algeria lasted another four years. In that time, the United States maintained its intransigence towards the French dilemma in Algeria. Reflected in the Good Offices Mission, American policy was fraught with trying to balance the interests of its French ally with American empathy for anti-colonial liberation movements, such as those supported by Habib Bourguiba, one of its key western allies in the Middle East.
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