

The Middle East and the Cold War

The Middle East and the Cold War:
Between Security and Development

Edited by

Massimiliano Trentin

in collaboration with
Matteo Gerlini

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P U B L I S H I N G

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FOREWORD

The Cold War in the Middle East and North Africa is a much neglected topic in the history of international affairs. The main reason for this lacuna is, I believe, the uncertainty that many scholars share with regard to how to place the global conflict within territories that were rife with conflicts of their own making or those held over from the colonial era. In the 21st century historians quite rightly shy away from subsuming the local under the international and are wary of the form of master narratives that the Superpower-centered Cold War has often been presented as containing. Why deal with the international or transnational when every border marker and every corner-stone have their own stories to tell about the primacy of the local or the primeval?

This book helps explain why – in spite of such sensitivities – the Cold War needs to be an active (or interactive) element in any historical discussion of the 20th century Middle East. Some of this is obvious: the United States and its foreign policy have played such massive roles in the making of the modern Middle East that all scholars of the region ignore them at their peril. But there are also the foreign affairs of states and movements in the region itself, which were often developed to be direct and active responses to the Cold War, as several of the contributors to this volume explain. Escaping from the international system that the Cold War created was simply not an option, even for those who strove to do so in the 1950s and 1960s.

The deeper reasons why the Cold War “belongs” in the Middle East and North Africa are the transnational elements that the larger conflict and the responses to it contain. Since several states in the region achieved full independence during the Cold War, their own transnational origins are very clear: the ideas that sustained them came out of ideologies and patterns of thinking that were shared throughout the region and beyond. In some cases some of these ideologies themselves shared important elements: Zionism and Pan-Arabism, for instance, have much more in common than most people tend to believe. In most cases local projects of state-building borrowed from the interconnected alternatives presented in the Cold War: the US and Soviet models of modernity.

Such forms of transnationalism have of course been prevalent in the Middle East, and all around the Mediterranean and the Gulf, for a very long time.¹ Concepts of state formation, cultural trends, and religious or even ethnic identities have been exchanged or borrowed. What the Cold War did was two things: it restricted the room for maneuver of those who were interested in conceptualizing wholly or even slightly different forms of political agendas than those the global conflict presented. And it created international frameworks that made the internal conflicts in the region more difficult to solve. The latter is true for a number of regional issues, from Western Sahara to Baluchistan, but it is first and foremost visible in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, whose international links came to form the barrier to meaningful negotiations.

Such constraints were not always easily visible in the 1950s and early 1960. Then – as Jeffrey Byrne points out – the globalization of the Cold War could be seen as offering opportunities to those who wanted to combat the status quo, if only because of the increasing presence of the Soviet Union in the region.² But as Soviet and East European assistance programs reached their peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it soon became clear that the form of planned state socialism that these countries represented could easily force out alternative ideologies, both of the Thirdworldist and the liberal kind. As Massimiliano Trentin's chapter shows, the class perspective (which had figured strongly in the particular form of Thirdworldism that the Ba'ath parties represented) was shunted aside – East German advice to the Syrians (as Soviet advice to the Egyptians and the Algerians earlier, and to the Iraqis later) was all about mobilization from above and the building of a powerful, bureaucratic, and centralized state.³

Such Cold War inspired attempts at stamping out alternatives was not just the case for Soviet and East European alliances. It was equally prevalent among US allies, such as Morocco, Iran under the Shah, and Egypt under

¹ See for instance David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London: Allen Lane, 2011) and, especially, Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

² For this, see also Jeffrey James Byrne, "Our Own Special Brand of Socialism: Algeria and the Contest of Modernities in the 1960s," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (2009): 427-447.

³ See also Massimiliano Trentin, *Engineers of Modern Development: East German Experts in Ba'thist Syria, 1965-1972* (Padua: CLEUP, 2010).

the disastrous regimes of Sadat and Mubarak. The US regional allies who, at times, had the most success in establishing more independent positions in foreign policy terms were Iran and Israel. But the Shah used US weakness in the mid-1970s to increase his radicalism in transforming Iranian society and thereby undermined his own rule. Israel used it to make its conflict with the Palestinians more intractable through building settlements on occupied land. In both cases the Cold War was an essential part of the self-identification of the two states, even when their Superpower sponsor was less influential than before (or later).⁴

These aspects of the Cold War as a hegemonic practice inside the states of the Middle East and North Africa are in much need of further exploration. Such ventures will undoubtedly be undertaken by young scholars who specialize in the contemporary international history of the region and who have the necessary language and cultural skills to make use of sources from the region itself. The chapters in this volume are thus a good starting point for endeavours to come.

O.A. Westad
18, February 2012

⁴ I wrote about the need to look more closely at these relationships more than twenty years ago; OA Westad, "Rethinking Revolutions: The Cold War in the Third World," *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 4 (1992): 455-464.

INTRODUCTION

MASSIMILIANO TRENTIN
AND MATTEO GERLINI

The Cold War was a multidimensional conflict whose main area of contention was post-WWII Europe but whose goals and scope reached far beyond the so-called “old continent”. As a matter of fact, the Cold War was a struggle for hegemony in the “rest” of the world as well, whose beginning may be traced back to Vladimir I. Lenin’s manifesto of 1917 calling for the people of the world to rise up against colonialism and capitalism, and to Woodrow W. Wilson’s 14 points of 1919. However, European powers and their colonial empires were still there and proving durable, and in fact they enlarged quite considerably after the end of WWI. It was only after Europe crashed into ruins as a result of the World War that the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the leading world powers, though Moscow never really gained the “power and plenty” enjoyed by Washington. The struggle for hegemony first and foremost concerned industrial Europe, but soon spread into other countries and regions: first, in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, with the Greek civil war and Soviet pressures on Turkey and Iran in 1946 and 1947. In its first movements after WWII Moscow seemed to re-trace again the southern routes of Tsarist Russia, without much success, while Washington quickly deployed the vast surpluses of capitals and weaponry inherited during WWII to defend or replace European positions in the area: the Truman Doctrine of 1947 set a precedent for the whole Mediterranean and the Middle East. Indeed, the Cold War entered the Mediterranean and the Middle East from its outset.

Nevertheless, the main political dynamic affecting the Middle East at that time was decolonization. The compromise set out with the system of the Mandates did not outlive WWII. In 1946, Syria and Lebanon gained independence, and in this case London and Washington placed considerable pressure on Paris to relinquish its dominion in the Levant. Decolonization then gradually spread to all other territories and finally ended in the 1970s with the full independence of the Arabian Peninsula. No different from any

other regions, the political elites of the postcolonial Middle East faced two basic challenges: defending political independence and engaging with economic development. As a matter of fact, both issues were closely related to each other and stand together as reverse sides of the same coin. Political independence basically meant shielding the domestic decision-making process from foreign interventions by centralizing and strengthening the institutions of the sovereign nation state; for the time being, economic development mainly equated with industrialization, and the implementation, of modern science and technology to the production and consumption processes.

Both camps of the Cold War had their own solutions for the postcolonial world. Security concerns and aid to development soon merged with each other, as portrayed by the famous Four Points programme set-up by US President Harry Truman in 1949: an exit from “underdevelopment” was a necessity in order to preserve allies and newly-established countries from the dangers of disorder and the risks of communist take over. The USA was ready to provide aid and security. The conflation of development with anti-communism was thus set among Western states and international organizations. Conversely, the USSR under Stalin supported those states where the Communist Party aligned with Moscow had already grasped power or, at least, had a real stake in national politics. Factors like scarce resources, reconstruction in Europe and conflicts in East Asia all converged in the rigid interpretation of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. However, these positions were soon challenged by the rise of countries like India or Egypt whose elites rejected the political conditionality of the Cold War. The stage was set for the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 and a whole range of meetings and groups of postcolonial states within, or without the framework of the United Nations.

For the Middle East the period between the 1950s to the 1960s was crucial in this perspective: it marked the overlapping of three major dynamics, namely the passing over of French and British colonialism, the heterogeneous development of postcolonial politics and the full deployment of competition between the USA and the USSR. As a matter of fact, the 1950s saw a decline, in military and economic terms, of European entrenchment in the Middle East in favour of the USA, while the Soviet Union made its first steps by default, that is to say, as a partial alternative to the West, for aid, security and markets. By the late 1950s, the radicalization of regional politics led to the division of the Middle East into two competing camps: the conservative, pro-Western monarchies and states, and the radical republics supported by the Socialist states. This

process mainly concerned the Arab World; as Malcom Kerr once defined it, the *Arab Cold War*, while the non-Arab states, like Israel, Turkey and Iran remained aligned with Western powers for the time being. In their quest for influence and hegemony in the postcolonial world, the USA and the USSR projected the fundamental features of their own, domestic social development: this was the case for the US-sponsored modernization programmes during the Eisenhower, and especially the Kennedy/Johnson administrations, as well as the Non-Capitalist Road to Development of the USSR in the early 1960s. They both shared the horizon of an industrial society where modernization could be initially enforced by a top-down approach, and development was an evolutionary process along the pathways experienced in the West and the Soviet Union. However, they differed for the respective ruling elites they supported, and partly for the beneficiaries of the reforms they advocated for. As demonstrated by economic history, institutions have played a major role in either fostering or preventing modern industrial development, and the partnership of the two camps also influenced the kind of economic institutions adopted by the postcolonial elites.

It would be absurd and historically false to determine the political history of the post-WWII Middle East only along the dynamics and time-frame of the Cold War: the Arab-Israeli conflict outlived the fall of the Berlin Wall, the “socialist” republics of Syria and Iraq, for example, survived their major allies of the Eastern bloc, and the Islamic Republic of Iran also shuffled all cards of Cold War alignments and theories. However, evidence from fresh research and recent historiography has shown how the Cold War conditioned the conflicts and dynamics of the Middle East, whose origins were not of its making but whose outcomes were able to affect the strategic balance of power between the two camps, and thus legitimated their interventions.

As such, the patterns of relations between the superpower “patrons” and their regional “clients” were never totally set once and for all, quite to the contrary: the influence of the “major” over the “minor” depended heavily on the numbers of actors involved in the process and the material and symbolic resources put at their disposal. For the nationalist elites then in power in the Middle East, exploiting the Cold War meant, explicitly or not, to participate in and support the existence of superpower rivalry, namely the division of the industrial North into two competing economic and political systems. This was particularly true for those regimes which found themselves in conflict with Western powers for political or economic reasons: the existence of the Socialist states as a group of industrial countries to whom they might address their needs in case of

Western refusal was a major reason for them to enjoy the Cold War. Hence, more than fighting the Cold War, Non-Alignment and Active Neutrality often translated into infighting, and in some cases even causing it to endure. As the North smoothed its rivalry in Europe, temporary and partial as it was and while the Six-Day-War and the economic infitah reshuffled the balance of power in the Middle East in favour of conservative forces, the Cold War lost its relevance as a major axis for regional politics.

This volume gathers the contributions of young scholars involved with the international history of the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s. Recent historiography on the impact of the Cold War in the region has mainly focused on military and security issues. The volume edited by Nigel J. Ashton (2007) is one of the most valuable, as it integrated and even challenged some of the results outlined in the previous volume edited by Avi Shlaim and Yezid Sayyigh (1997). These are only some examples of a vast literature whose findings contribute to the wider debate set by O. A. Westad's *The Global Cold War* (2006): here, he argued, the bipolar competition found its main battleground in the so- called Third World and heavily contributed to shaping the features of North-South relations even after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Building on the literature concerning strategic issues, this volume focuses on the linkages between security and development: more precisely, between Cold War interventions and the political and economic dynamics of the postcolonial Middle East.

As usual, those wishing to weigh-up both sides of a given relationship have to face the problem of sources, especially access to archives. And still there is no easy solution to this, despite hopes for a more liberal policy following the so-called "Arab Spring" of early 2011. Nevertheless, most of the contributors have struggled their way into the primary and secondary sources of the Middle East: declassified documents, official publications, oral interviews and memoirs have all integrated the Western and Eastern sources. This variety and the use of different languages have opened the possibility for a more comprehensive account of the events under scrutiny.

The organisation of this volume follows a chronological criterion. The first three chapters deal with the 1950s and analyse the impact of the Cold War on the transition from colonialism to independence. Jeffrey J. Byrne shows the Algerian FLN exploiting the differences among Western powers over the issue of decolonization and whole-heartedly endorsing the principles of Bandung and also the Non-Aligned Movement to legitimize their engagement with the socialist camp. Of course, this did not mean

dissolving contacts with Western powers: it was an act of balance under the given conditions of that time. Byrne gives evidence of the practice of a new pattern of international relations for the postcolonial elites in the context of the Cold War. What International Relations has defined as “bandwagoning”, in this case translated into the practice of Active Neutrality.

Alden Young, Jamie Allison and Massimiliano Trentin focus their attention on the international dimensions of the foundations of an independent Sudan, King Hussein’s Jordan and Ba’thist Syria, respectively. First, Young links the survival and final demise of parliamentary democracy in Sudan to its integration into the global market of cotton production: more precisely, to the political consequences of its integration into the modern, industrial production of the raw material. A strong central government was widely conceived as being the best option, and the only solution to implement those programmes required by the standards of modern development theories. The fragmented nature of a young and vibrant polity was deemed incompatible with the kind of major decisions to be taken. In this case, the Cold War, namely the threat of a Soviet entry into the country, was nothing but a pretext to put an end to the institutional representation of political pluralism: more than an external intervention, domestic politics and a fear that the process of modernization might ignite political instability in favour of Communist or radical forces supported the idea of a military coup. Here is an example of the impact of modernization theories and practice on a postcolonial state.

As far as Jordan is concerned, Allison detects in the British military and economic aid the basic channel that linked the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan to capitalist development during the 1950s. He endorses and re-elaborates the theory of Uneven and Combined Development to explore the relationship between the former colonial master and the local elite of Jordan: a country whose fragility but strategic location in the heart of the postcolonial Middle East allowed the Hashemite Monarchy to successfully bargain for its survival through the opportunities provided first by decolonization, and later by the Cold War. Quite similar to the case of Sudan, the main Cold War concern in Jordan was not a direct intervention from Moscow or its allies, which still did not have the capacity for such a move. London, Washington and the Hashemite monarchy feared a shift of the domestic balance of forces in favour of those nationalists who might ally themselves with local Communists and thus open the doors to the Soviets. King Hussein proved quite skilful in exploiting the intra-Western differences to grant his regime the revenues necessary to appease his constituencies and face off opposition.

Continually focusing on the political economy of modernization and the Cold War in the Middle East, Trentin turns his attention toward the reasons of how the socialist camp found receptive ears in Ba'thist-ruled Syria. The case of East German advisors in the Arab state highlights the unique combination of projects for modern development, set by the Ba'thist elite, and the solutions offered by the socialist state. Hence, he reinforces the arguments along which the partnership between the radical postcolonial Ba'thists did not depend only on strategic calculations based on the conflict with Israel or access to military bases in the Mediterranean; rather, the partnership banked also on convergence between patterns of development and the related forms of government the Ba'thists and the socialists wished to enforce: the centralization of decision-making procedures and the industrialization of the economy were the overall goals of the Syrian reform project. Similarly to independent Algeria, all this did not curb Syrian-Western relations, since trade, investments and the exchange of students kept on flowing, albeit at a slower and different pace. The differentiation of Syrian domestic politics thus converged with the differentiation of Damascus' international relations. The Cold War provided an excellent framework for the "Corrective Movement" of Hafiz al Asad and his economic policies.

Shifting from the Arab world to Iran and Israel, the chapters by Claudia Castiglioni and Matteo Gerlini offer a fresh insight into the US partnership with the two key regional allies. The patron-client standard was often used to describe the relationship between Washington, Teheran and Tel Aviv, respectively. However, evidence has shown otherwise, since Iran and Israel enjoyed vast freedom of action and did not hesitate to assert their stand in front of the resistance, or at least scepticism, of their major ally.

As for Iran, Castiglioni makes highlights the dynamic nature of the partnership between Washington and Teheran throughout the 1960s: once the Shah was able to enjoy the economic fruits the oil-rent and the process of capital accumulation enforced by the White Revolution, he felt strong enough to assert a more independent role vis-à-vis Washington, thus setting the foundations to later become the so-called "gendarme" of the Gulf during the Nixon administration. In turn, Iran represented an excellent case for US modernization theorists: fast industrialization, strong central power and a fierce anti-communist regime. The repression of liberal democracy in favour of an authoritarian but "modernizing" monarchy was clear to all observers, but the benefits offered by the Shah as a strategic partner offset concerns for the political consequences of such a pattern of development.

Gerlini analyses the US approach to the development of the Israeli nuclear capability during the first public debate of the topic. He focuses on the December 1960 diplomatic crisis between the USA and Israel, the concerns of the Western powers about the possibility of a pre-emptive attack by the Arab States motivated by the further development of Israel's nuclear program. In the framework of the Cold War, it is interesting to note how in those years the Soviet Union did not encourage any Arab state to wage war against Israel over such an issue. Hence, the USA and USSR averted a nuclear escalation in the Middle East, even though the final result proved unfavourable to the Soviets: in fact, the Israel nuclear option was to be a strategic asset for the West in the struggle for the Middle East.

Nowadays we are witnessing major transformations in the political landscape of the Middle East and North Africa: a process of change whose depth and implications are yet to be proven. However, up until now it has disrupted the long-established beliefs and stereotypes over the region, and the Arab world in particular. The recent wave of revolts, be they or not successful in toppling the various regimes, are evidence of the complexity and "modernity" of Middle Eastern societies, whose aspirations and dynamics are certainly unusual but not exceptional in relation to the rest of the world. The impact of the global economic crisis, and the difficulties the current elites in the Middle East, in Europe, and in the USA and elsewhere have to find effective and sustainable answers, may be evidence of it.

It was after the mid-2000s that the wave of economic growth triggered the calls of the younger generation and the new bourgeoisie for a reappraisal of the recent history of the Middle East: and, not by chance, of the momentous decade of the 1950s in particular. At that time, newly acquired political independence opened spaces for political self-organization, public debates and militancy: patterns of development, social justice, revenue distribution and foreign policy were all objects of discussion and political struggle because those social forces which had long been at the margin of power then claimed their stake in the present and future of their societies. *Mutatis mutandis*, the politically marginalized and impoverished sectors of Arab societies, and the educated middle class among others, are now asking for a major say in their countries. The 1950s and early 1960s were not a peaceful period, quite to the contrary: the structures of authoritarian regimes were yet to emerge or consolidate, patterns of economic development were yet to be set, and relations with foreign powers were soon reshuffled under the rhetoric and practice of national sovereignty. In short, it was a period of change and thus one of

opportunity. Similar considerations applied to the international relations of the Middle East, and particularly to the patterns of intervention of foreign states, be it the two superpowers or their allies. For all these reasons, this momentous period of contemporary history is now interrogated as a suitable historical reference for current events: with all the limitations and risks connected to the analysis and interpretations of history along the lines of present-day politics.

If current events lead to focus attention on the 1950s because of their “liberal” features, we cannot obliterate what followed, namely the “radical” 1960s. Despite much rhetoric on socialism and nationalism, that decade experienced the fully-fledged deployment of modernization programmes in the region: agrarian reforms, capital-intensive industrialization, mass education, the enhancement of the powers of central governments, the instruments of coercion being the first, were all ingredients of attempts by postcolonial elites to set their countries in tune with the requirements of the “modern” world. With all its contradictions, the “radical” decade also recorded the major impact of the Cold War: one might speak of the “domestication” of the global rivalry both in terms of the clash between different elites and the patterns of development they advocated for, as well as in terms of the exploitation of the constraints and opportunities set out by the Cold War framework. World politics were far from being exclusively bipolar, nor were they genuinely multipolar, since Asia, Africa and South America were still in a subaltern position. However, given the previous predominance of the European colonial powers, the division of the industrial world into two competing camps provided enough opportunities for nationalist elites to try to assert their own projects and priorities. Such a dangerous game was worth playing as long as the industrial North was divided and the Middle Eastern - South split into opposing camps.

With all their peculiarities, the decades of the 1950s and 1960s stand out as a period of change and opportunity for the postcolonial societies of the Middle East and their foreign partners. Given the current wave of revolts, counter-revolts and external interventions a deeper knowledge of those momentous years still deserve the attention of scholars and the wider public. History never repeats itself. However, we still believe that history can actually contribute to shape the consciousness of today. This volume has the humility but also the ambition to deepen the mutual knowledge which is necessary for the construction of new patterns of relations between the Middle East, Europe and the US: mutual knowledge intended as the basic ingredient for an understanding of the present and, for those who so wish, in the building of a sustainable future as well.

The volume is the product of a series of seminars and conferences held within the annual meetings of SESAMO (Italian Society for the Study of the Middle East) in Turin, 2008, of SISSCO (Italian Society for the Study of Contemporary History) in Trieste, 2009, and at WOCMES (World Conference on Middle East Studies) in Barcelona, 2010. Last but not least, ideas and suggestions for this work have been nurtured within the several workshops in which all of the contributors participated. For these reasons, we would like to thank all those scholars who contributed to our work but all of whom, unfortunately, we could not include in this volume.

CHAPTER ONE

ALGIERS BETWEEN BANDUNG
AND BELGRADE:
GUERRILLA DIPLOMACY AND THE EVOLUTION
OF THE THIRD WORLD MOVEMENT,
1954-1962

JEFFREY J. BYRNE

When Ahmed Ben Bella, the first prime minister of newly independent Algeria, addressed the United Nations General Assembly in October 1962, he emphatically situated the world's newest country within the context of a globe-spanning movement for change. "In the structure of the contemporary world," he explained, "Algeria is allied with an ensemble of spiritual families who, for the first time at Bandung, recognized the shared destiny that unites them". He was referring, of course, to the conference of an Asian-African heads of state that occurred in Indonesia in April 1955, a meeting that had already come to acquire almost mythic status in the intervening years. Ben Bella went on to state in no uncertain terms that the "shared destiny" of the Bandung family was nothing less than the transformation and democratization of international life—beginning with the elimination of colonialism "in its classic or disguised form" which continued to be the main impediment to "genuine cooperation for the construction of an international community". True to the Algerian nationalists' battling reputation, their head of government asserted that his country was willing to render any necessary assistance to the liberation struggles of Palestine and Southern Africa – up to and including the dispatch of its veteran *mujahideen* to the front lines.¹

¹ "Le Discours a l'assemblee generale des nation-unies" 9 October 1962, *Discours du Président Ben Bella du 28 Septembre 1962 au 12 décembre 1962* (Algiers, 1963), 31-36

But as scholars have recently reminded us, the Algerian National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*, FLN) defeated the might of France as much through the efforts of its diplomats as its fighters in the mountains. One recent seminal work of Matthew J. Connelly dubbed the Algerian War of Independence, 1954 – 1962, a “diplomatic revolution”, and the importance of the FLN’s international campaign to the movement’s eventual victory is now generally recognized today.² It was appropriate therefore than Ben Bella, standing before the General Assembly in October 1962, promised to harness that legacy, too. Having already cited the importance of Bandung, he now oriented Algerian diplomacy around another, more recent Third World event – the Non-Aligned Summit that took place in Belgrade, September 1961. “In the same spirit,” Ben Bella continued,

Even before Algeria’s proclamation of independence, we confirmed our policy of non-alignment by participating in the Belgrade conference. This choice does not equal passivity. For every concrete decision concerning major international problems, peace and global security, we are ready to play the role of a responsible country.³

In short, no one in the audience that day could be left with any doubts about the scale of Algerian ambitions in the international arena, or of their faith in the twin spirits of Bandung and Belgrade.

Of course, with its invocations of such rhetorical staples as Bandung, neo-imperialism, and non-alignment, it would be easy to dismiss Ben Bella’s speech as so much vacuous Third Worldist bluster. Certainly many of the Western diplomats in attendance or observing from afar gave the impression of rolling their eyes in their written reports. The British ambassador attributed the Algerian premier’s ambitious presentation to independence’s “first flush of enthusiasm”, and surmised that he and his compatriots feel obliged to “live up to their reputation as fighters for freedom and to be that much more extreme in order to impress their Afro-Asian colleagues”.⁴ Robert W. Komer, who was in the National Security

² Matthew James Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ “Le Discours a l’assemblee generale des nation-unies” 9 October 1962, *Discours du Président Ben Bella du 28 Septembre 1962 au 12 décembre 1962* (Algiers, 1963), 31-36

⁴ “Campbell to Scrivener”, note 8 November 1962, Foreign Office Records (FO) 371/165654, UK National Archives (UKNA).

Council in these years, perhaps the single most important advisor on Third World matters in the Kennedy White House, warned the American president that Ben Bella “still clings to a lot of naive ideas and thinks in terms of a melange of revolutionary clichés from Marx, Mao, Nasser and Che Guevara”, but Washington still hoped that, with the benefit of Franco-American counsel, the Algerians would soon become more “realistic”, and set aside globalist fancies.⁵ Countries like Algeria, it seemed, ought to focus on their own domestic issues and not get embroiled in the contentions of the international system.

To be fair, the surprisingly sparse scholarly literature on the Third World movement seems to have somewhat vindicated such attitudes.⁶ After all, while the terrible failures and tribulations of so many postcolonial states – Algeria included – are well established, the much-ballyhooed ideals of internationalist solidarity and Non-Alignment seem to have yielded little concrete accomplishments. Despite the regularity with which the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) convened the developing countries’ heads of state or other senior officials, it stopped neither nuclear proliferation nor the Cold War, while Bandung’s supposedly momentous declaration of Afro-Asian solidarity is belied by a half-century’s worth of frequent conflict between many of its professed adherents. Perhaps the scarcity of scholarship on Afro-Asianism and Non-Alignment reflects the widely-held view that Third Worldism amounted to little more than an obscure sequence of hollow gasbagging occasions for petty despots with delusions of grandeur. Thus, Robert Komer’s preference in 1962 to see Algeria devote itself to its glaring problems at home may appear justified in light of the ensuing story of persistent underdevelopment, authoritarianism, and civil strife. Indeed, several political scientists, historians, and journalists have explicitly pointed to Algeria’s Third

⁵ “Memorandum from Komer to Kennedy”, 13 October 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1961-1963, vol.11, 102-4.

⁶ There are few scholarly examinations of Third Worldism, Afro-Asianism, or Non-Alignment. Among the more notable and successful are G.H. Jansen, *Nonalignment and the Afro-Asian States* (New York: Praeger, 1966); Robert A. Mortimer, *The Third World Coalition in International Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1980) and more recently Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007). A valuable comparative analysis of revolutionary ideas in the Third World can be found in Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994). A thoughtful recent collection of essays on Bandung can be found in Christopher Lee ed., *Making A World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

Worldist excesses of the 1960s and 1970s in order to account for the Islamist insurgency that consumed the country in the 1990s and the widespread discontent prevalent today.⁷

In that light, the purpose of this brief essay is not to comprehensively rehabilitate Third Worldism, but to use the Algerian story to suggest at least that there was real substance to it, and that its proponents' voluminous public pronouncements and multitudinous official publications have helped to bury the salient geopolitical dynamics at its core. Indeed, Algeria offers a particularly useful perspective because its leaders and diplomats were themselves fully conscious of the Third World's weaknesses, and of the need to translate lofty rhetoric into a practicable foreign policy. Before travelling to New York in late 1962, Ben Bella warned the newly-constituted Algerian National Assembly that

For it to be effective and positive, neutralism must not be limited simply to statements of principle. The non-aligned countries must establish and develop a real solidarity between them, as much in the political domain as in the economic domain.⁸

In that light, this essay focuses on the pre-history of Algerian diplomacy by examining the archives of the wartime FLN, 1954-1962, to show how the Algerian nationalists' attitudes towards international politics markedly evolved in sync with the changing internal dynamics of the Third Worldist movement. Between Bandung in 1955 and Belgrade 1961, Third Worldism's centre of gravity shifted in a markedly more subversive and aggressive direction—a process welcomed and encouraged by the Algerians, among other radical anticolonial elements.

Afro-Asianism and Non-Alignment in the FLN's Struggle for Independence

The diplomatic component of the FLN's struggle against French colonialism has only recently received the recognition it deserves in recent years – most notably in Connelly's aforementioned work, but also through

⁷ Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); John Phillips and Martin Evans, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁸ “Déclaration ministérielle à l'assemblée nationale constituante”, 28 September 1962, *Discours du Président Ben Bella du 28 Septembre 1962 au 12 décembre 1962* (Algiers, 1963), 16.

the contributions of Irwin M. Wall and Thomas Martin, among others.⁹ It is fair to say that the long-overlooked importance of the FLN's international campaign, especially as represented by the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (*Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne*, GPRA), has achieved the status of accepted wisdom with regards to the history of the war of independence.¹⁰ Even more Franco-centric narratives that largely accept Charles de Gaulle's claim to have masterfully managed Algeria's decolonization now at least allow that the French president had to grapple with significant international pressures.¹¹

Nevertheless, the evolution of the Algerian nationalists' perspective on global affairs remains underappreciated, particularly with regards to the FLN's attitude towards the Cold War and its enthusiastic championing of the principle of Non-Alignment. For example, although Connelly rightly argues that the Algerians pursued a strategy of "blackmailing" Washington to intervene on their behalf by raising the spectre of communist involvement, new evidence from the archives of the FLN and GPRA indicates that their strategy subsequently became steadily more aggressive in response to (from their perspective) perennial American indifference.¹² That is, they eventually set aside blackmail for a more direct and dangerous engagement with the Cold War. As a result, by the end of the war in 1962, Algeria's new leaders had come to hold a decidedly more pugnacious vision of Non-Alignment than that suggested by the pacific language of Bandung, an appreciation of which is vital to understanding their controversial foreign policy post-independence.

From the outset, the relatively young generation of Algerian nationalists who founded the FLN believed that international dynamics – especially the ascendancy of the United States with respect to France –

⁹ Connelly, cit.; Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Thomas Martin, "France's North African Crisis, 1945–1955: Cold War and Colonial Imperatives", *History*, vol. 92, n. 306 (April 2007): 207–234.

¹⁰ For insiders' accounts of FLN diplomacy, see Benyoucef Ben Khedda, *Alger, Capitale de la Résistance, 1956-1957* (Algiers: Houma, 2002); Saad Dahlab, *Mission Accomplie* (Alger: Editions Dahlab, 1990) and Rédha Malek, *L'Algérie à Evian: Histoire Des Négociations Secrètes, 1956-1962. L'épreuve des faits* (Algeria: ANEP, 2002), among others.

¹¹ Possibly the best-sourced and argued Gaullist scholarly interpretation can be found in Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur: Politique Étrangère Du Général De Gaulle, 1958-1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).

¹² Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 183

would play a key role in the success of their cause. Perhaps the single most important international strategist in the early days was Hocine Aït Ahmed, who penned a strategic report as early as 1947 arguing that a purely military campaign could not succeed, and that Washington would have to be induced to persuade France to relinquish the Maghrib.¹³ Accordingly, when the FLN began its revolution on 1 November 1954, its leaders were inspired as much by the Geneva Conference of April-July 1954 as by the Vietnamese nationalists' great victory at Dien Bien Phu. The lesson of Vietnam was that sufficient instability would eventually compel America to intervene, and the Front's political commissars motivated the *mujahideen* to fight against the odds in the name of an "Algerian Geneva".¹⁴ The famous Battle of Algiers, when the FLN took the fight from Algeria's outback to the streets of its capital in late 1956 and early 1957, was undertaken in the knowledge that urban warfare might prove militarily disastrous for the insurgents (as was indeed the case), but that their losses in the field would be more than compensated for by the political gains expected from greater international attention.¹⁵

Seeing Washington and New York as their primary diplomatic battlegrounds, the Front's leaders strove diligently to win over American public and elite opinion during the early years of the war, and responded angrily to Paris' efforts to portray them as communist stooges or Soviet pawns. The FLN's Soummam Platform of August 1956 insisted that:

Contrary to the slanders of colonialist propaganda, the Algerian revolution is a patriotic struggle, of an inarguably nationalist basis...It [the revolution] is subservient neither to Cairo, nor London, nor Washington... [and] our contacts with fraternal countries have never been anything other than the communications of allies, not pawns [*instruments*].¹⁶

¹³ See "Rapport d'Aït Ahmed, membre du bureau politique du PPA, au Comité central élargi (décembre 1948)", Mohammed Harbi ed., *Archives de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: Editions Jeune Afrique, 1981), 15-49. This document is not the original, but recreated from it by memory.

¹⁴ See Mohammed Harbi, *Le F.L.N.: Mirage et Réalité* (Paris: Éditions J.A, 1980), 196.

¹⁵ Connolly, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 119-25; Yacef Saadi, *La Bataille d'Alger* (Alger: Entreprise nationale du livre, 1984).

¹⁶ See text of the Soummam Platform, 20 August 1956, *Textes Fondamentaux du Front de Libération Nationale, 1954-1962* (Algiers: Ministère de l'Information et de la Culture, 1976), 26.

Both sides believed that the taint of communism would damn the FLN in Washington's eyes, and the movement accordingly insisted on the purely nationalist and anti-colonial nature of their struggle.

In other words, at this stage Algerian professions of "non-alignment" or neutrality vis-à-vis the Cold War accorded directly with the American conception of neutrality – that is, non-involvement with the communist bloc. Moreover, in addition to this diplomatic consideration, the FLN's internal politics also dictated that the movement follow an emphatically non-communist line. In the first few years of the war, the Front's primary achievement was to successfully integrate a broad spectrum of Algerian political tendencies, including sizable socially conservative and religious factions that abhorred communism every bit as much as Washington policymakers did. Therefore, from 1954-1958 the FLN's political strategy on both the national and international level dictated that the movement keep the communist world at arm's length.¹⁷

By 1958, however, that calculus was changing. At that point, after nearly four years of war, the Algerian nationalists were frustrated by what they saw as a barely noticeable progression in US policy: Washington continued to supply armaments and financial support to France, its NATO ally, without doing much for the Algerian cause in concrete terms.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the return of Charles de Gaulle seemed to reinvigorate France's war effort, and a massive counter-insurgency campaign had driven the *mujahideen* close to the point of extinction. It was the dire situation on the ground that really compelled a revision in the nationalists' strategy. The military campaign may have subordinate to their political objectives, but as one of the Front's senior figures observed, if the armed struggle collapsed "there would hardly be any need for a wider policy and to waste time in chancelleries and international events. All will be lost, irredeemably lost".¹⁹

Yet communist China had long been making overtures, and given Beijing's potential as a source of both military and diplomatic support, a growing number of influential voices within the FLN argued that it was folly to keep rebuffing the communist bloc in order to placate an

¹⁷ On the FLN's relations with the Soviet Union, see Obichkina, Evgeniia, "Sovetskoe rukovodstvo i voina v Alzhire, 1954-1962 gg. po materialam arkhiva MID RF" (The Soviet Leadership and the War in Algeria, 1954-1962, as seen in material from the archive of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation) *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 2000, n.1, 19-30.

¹⁸ Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire Intérieure Du F.L.N., 1954-1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 590.

¹⁹ Harbi, *FLN*, 218-23.

indifferent America. Finally, therefore, the Front decided to dispatch a delegation to Beijing to be received with full ceremonial pomp, in 1958. Among themselves, the nationalist leaders spoke of having adopted a “blackmail” strategy, hoping that the appearance of their delegation in Mao’s capital would stun the West and shock Washington into revising its policies in their favour.²⁰

This overture to China was already a significant modification of the FLN’s original position vis-à-vis the Cold War, but the evidence from the Front’s internal records now reveals that an even more consequential shift in strategy took place in the last years of the war. When veteran guerrilla leader Belkacem Krim took up the duties of foreign minister of the provisional government in January 1960, he criticized the FLN’s reliance on “childish blackmail” vis-à-vis the West and faith in the “parliamentary cretinism” of the United Nations. These policies were useful, he said, but no longer sufficient in themselves. He told his colleagues:

Nearly six years of war have demonstrated sufficiently that Western solidarity plays in France’s favour. It is necessary to determine to what extent the East is susceptible, at the present time, to making an important contribution to the process of our liberation.²¹

Thus, having first attempted to blackmail Washington with the threat of an alliance with the communist countries, the Front then proceeded to make good on that threat. First of all, the fact that the GPRA delegation’s appearance in Beijing did indeed provoke consternation among US officials only encouraged the Algerian nationalists to go further; the American reaction was taken as proof that “playing the China card” was working to the revolutionaries’ benefit. Secondly, once Mao’s government offered to provide the Algerians with massive quantities of armaments and other supplies, the commanders of the Front’s hard-pressed military wing would not be denied. With the *mujahideen*’s losses in the 1958-1960 period being so great that De Gaulle and the French military brass could later cherish the myth of having achieved a military victory in the Algerian War, the very survival of the armed revolution required that the FLN embrace wholeheartedly its alliance with China. The third factor, and perhaps the least recognized one, was the continued ideological radicalization

²⁰ Jeffrey James Byrne, *Pilot Nation: Revolutionary Algeria in the Third World’s Vanguard, 1958-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

²¹ “Rapport de politique Générale”, in Résultats de la session de Tripoli 59-60, microfiche 17, dossier 4.1, Algerian National Archives (ANA), archives of the Conseil National de la Révolution Algérienne (CNRA).

of the FLN's intellectual and leadership cadres as they immersed themselves in the more radical Third Worldist trend pioneered by the likes of Fidel Castro, Ahmed Sékou Touré, and Kwame Nkrumah, which is discussed further below.²²

By 1960, therefore, the FLN's attitude to the Cold War had greatly changed from the cautious disengagement that characterized its early diplomatic strategy. On the one hand, most of the revolutionaries had come to see the United States as their objective foe, keeping France in the fight with its economic and military assistance while offering little more than platitudes to the anti-colonial cause. Visiting Pyongyang, North Korea, in spring 1960, Krim paid tribute to the vision of "Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Africans and Algerians, all united, on the same front, brothers in arms in the same battle against the same enemy".²³ While he was clearly hoping to ingratiate himself with his hosts, the same sentiment was widely expressed within the FLN, in public and privately. Concomitantly, the communist countries had proven to be Algeria's objective allies by offering all the diplomatic and material assistance that the FLN had once sought from the West.²⁴

Crucially though, apart from their changing opinions of each of the two blocs, the Algerian rebels had grown far more willing to engage with the Cold War itself, and to risk exploiting its tensions to their own ends. As one GPRA figure argued:

As long as Western leaders are not absolutely convinced that Algeria's political orientation threatens the current equilibrium in North Africa...they will not apply decisive pressure on France.²⁵

For the same reason, Hocine Aït Ahmed applauded when the Congolese nationalist leader, Patrice Lumumba, asked for Soviet assistance in reintegrating the separatist Katanga province in August 1960, and the FLN dispatched a trusted friend to serve as his public relations assistant.²⁶ Of

²² Jeffrey James Byrne, "Our Own Special Brand of Socialism: Algeria and the Contest of Modernities in the 1960s," *Diplomatic History*, Vol.3 n.3 (June 2009): 427-447.

²³ "Text of Krim's speech in Pyongyang", 10 May 1960, dossier 133.4, in ANA, Archives of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA-MAE).

²⁴ Byrne, *Pilot Nation*.

²⁵ Report by Ghany, 'La Question Algérienne dans le Monde Occidental', 27 March 1960, dossier 48.3.3, in ANA, GPRA-MAE.

²⁶ Byrne, *Pilot Nation*.

course, Lumumba's assassination the following January served ample warning of the dangers of playing the Cold War game—but the principle was still valid. The Front had come a long way from their cautious non-alignment of 1955 and 1956, and this evolution mirrored and contributed to a comparable radicalization of the Third Worldist movement more broadly.

The Evolution of Non-Alignment from Bandung to Belgrade

The FLN's progression from disengaged neutralism to a more pugnacious form of Non-Alignment was symptomatic of developments within the Third World movement as a whole, to whom its leaders were early and passionate converts. Naturally, the Algerian revolutionaries had celebrated their participation in the 1955 Bandung Conference, sharing in the general consensus of those present that this was a momentous event in global history that heralded the emergence of a powerful new moral force in international politics. Moreover, the participating countries' statement of support for the Algerian cause had exceeded their most optimistic prior expectations for the event.²⁷ Consequently, they became fully invested in the success of the Third World project, deeming it vital to the success of their own nationalist goals.

Just as the Algerians would subsequently find numerous occasions to complain that the countries of the Third World were failing to live up to that commitment, following Bandung all of the Third World's leaders faced the challenge of transforming their various exuberant sentiments and lofty principles into substantial foreign policy goals. Indeed, differences and divergences quickly started to emerge between their interpretations of these principles, one of the most significant of which was the meaning of "neutralism". Eventually, the September 1961 Non-Aligned Summit in Belgrade would mark the ascendance of a more aggressive conception of neutrality (or Non-Alignment) over that initially posited at Bandung and championed by India's Jawaharlal Nehru. Indeed India's diminishing influence, in practice even if not publicly acknowledged, was a central aspect in the changing nature of the Third Worldist trend.

Clearly, one of the Bandung Conference's most significant legacies was to disseminate and popularize the basic idea of Non-Alignment throughout the developing world. It is significant, however, that the

²⁷ "L'action internationale du FLN par M'hammed Yazid", August 1957, in Harbi, *Archives*, 172-4.