

Tempered Sympathy: Canada's Reaction to the Independence Movement in Algeria, 1954-1962

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Article abstract

This article examines the reaction of the Canadian government to the Algerian war for independence from France from 1954 to 1962. It reveals that, while sympathetic to the ambitions of colonial peoples to determine their own national destinies, the Canadian government often judged colonial issues after the Second World War by the impact they had on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Canadian security interests and the Cold War. Given that the Algerian war threatened France's ability and willingness to contribute to NATO during this period the Canadian government felt compelled to support France's efforts to retain its North African colony both politically and militarily. Canadian officials wanted France's participation in NATO and were unwilling to antagonise France by opposing its Algerian policies. In this instance national security interests were of a higher priority for the Canadian government than support for the principle of national self-determination for colonial peoples.

Tempered Sympathy: Canada's Reaction to the Independence Movement in Algeria, 1954-1962

ROBIN S. GENDRON

In recent decades, American scholars have engaged in a vigorous debate about American foreign policy towards the Third World and the nature of the leadership of the United States during the 1950s. "Eisenhower revisionists" like Charles Alexander, Stephen Ambrose, and Robert Divine dispute the contention of a previous generation of scholars that the Eisenhower administration was blinded by anti-communism and that its accomplishments were slight in the 1950s.¹ Eisenhower revisionists also deny that the Eisenhower administration habitually mistook nationalism for communism as the Third World moved towards independence from Europe's empires in the 1950s. H.W. Brands argues that Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles did not blame the Soviet Union for instigating global unrest in the form of decolonisation but rather showed "insight and flexibility in its relationships with the Third World and a pragmatic ability to deal with neutralism on its merits."² Stephen Rabe, on the contrary, argues that most case studies have not supported this revisionist depiction of American policy towards the Third World and that American policy remained founded upon an overwhelming fear of communism and its manifestation in anti-colonial conflicts.³ The disagreement remains unresolved, yet at least American scholars debate the subject.

A corresponding debate has not yet taken place among scholars of Canadian foreign policy in the early Cold War period. The argument that Canada, its government, and its citizens were more tolerant of Soviet communism than the United States has been challenged.⁴ So too has the belief that the

I would like to thank David Bercuson, Don Barry, Pat Brennan, and Greg Donaghy for their suggestions during the preparation of this article.

- 1 Charles Alexander, *Holding the Line: The Eisenhower Era, 1952-1961* (Bloomington, 1975). Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower; Vol.2, The President* (New York, 1984); Robert Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York, 1981).
- 2 H.W. Brands, *The Specter of Neutralism: the United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947-1960* (New York, 1989), 5 and 308.
- 3 Stephen Rabe, "Eisenhower Revisionism," *Diplomatic History* 17 (Winter 1993): 97-115.
- 4 See, for example, David Bercuson, "'A People so Ruthless as the Soviets': Canadian Images of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, 1946-1950," in *Canada and the Soviet Experiment*. David Davies, ed. (Toronto, 1994).

United States forced security arrangements for North America upon a reluctant Canadian government and thereby undermined Canada's sovereignty in the 1950s.⁵ Yet the perception that Canada was perhaps the Third World's best friend among Western countries during the 1950s and 1960s continues unchecked. Robert Bothwell's recently published book on Canada and the Cold War is just the latest to repeat the belief that Canada was more friendly to the emerging Third World and its interests than the United States, Britain, or France.⁶ Lester B. Pearson's efforts during the Suez Crisis and the Nobel Peace Prize he won as a result seem to have conditioned students of Canadian foreign policy to think of Canada's dealings with developing countries in the most favourable light. Thus, the Suez Crisis, Canada's effort to keep India within the Commonwealth, and its opposition to apartheid in South Africa in the early 1960s are highlighted. Such examples, however, do not represent the totality of Canada's experiences with Third World issues during the first decades of the Cold War, the so-called "Golden Era" of Canadian foreign policy.

An examination of Canadian policy towards France and Algeria during the latter's protracted struggle for independence from 1954 to 1962 demonstrates that the Canadian government was often severely limited in its ability to pursue policies friendly to the interests of the emerging Third World. Such a study reveals, in fact, that, when confronted with conflicting policy interests, Canada placed greater importance on maintaining close ties with and between its principal Western partners than it did on securing the friendship of some newly independent states. In a recent article, Martin Thomas showed that Canada and the United States deferred to Vichy France over the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon in 1940-41 because neither wished to antagonise the Vichy government while it had the potential to contribute to the Allied war effort.⁷ For Canada, such deference to the sensibilities of the government of France continued to be shown into the early years of the Cold War. Following its creation in 1949, Canada relied upon the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to guarantee Canada's own national security. Because Canada needed and wanted France's partnership in NATO's struggle against communism and the Soviet Union, Canada adopted a cautious and circumspect approach to Algeria's bid for independence. As long as France remained intent upon maintaining its position in Algeria, the government of Canada felt compelled to support its NATO ally both politically and militarily.

There have been no previous studies of Canadian policy towards the Algerian independence movement. In fact, studies of Canadian policy towards

5 See Joseph Jockel, *No Boundaries Upstairs* (Vancouver, 1987).

6 Robert Bothwell, *The Big Chill: Canada and the Cold War* (Concord, Ont., 1998), 49.

7 Martin Thomas, "Deferring to Vichy in the Western Hemisphere: The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair of 1941," *The International History Review* 19 (November 1997): 808-35.

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the phenomenon of decolonisation as a whole are conspicuous by their absence from the literature on Canadian foreign policy. This subject is usually only referred to briefly and in the most general of terms. Yet for more than two decades following the end of the Second World War, the issue of decolonisation preoccupied the people of the developing world. The issue gained in importance as more and more former colonies achieved their independence and used their seats at the United Nations to focus international attention on the plight of the territories remaining under European colonial rule. By the 1960s, colonial issues dominated various forums at the United Nations. Algeria was by no means the scene of the only anti-colonial conflict in this period. Violence also accompanied movements for national liberation in Indo-China, Indonesia, Malaya, Angola, and many other parts of Africa and Asia. But the Algerian War was one of the most bitterly contested of the anti-colonial wars. It cost tens of tens of thousands of lives, hundreds of millions of dollars in expenses and damages, and occupied a principal place on the agenda of the international community for close to eight years. The Canadian government's response to it thus sheds light on Canadian policy towards decolonisation as a whole in the context of conflicting policy interests and Canada's relations with its principal Western powers who were also the principal colonial powers.

The United States has a long history of self-proclaimed ideological anti-colonialism. Irwin Wall argues that this anti-colonialism surfaced during the Algerian war for independence and shaped American perceptions of a "revolution that Washington was convinced had the capability of becoming democratic and non-Communist."⁸ He argues that the United States opposed French policy in Algeria at several key stages in the conflict in the hope of convincing France to grant self-determination to the Algerian people. The United States was not alone among the Western states, however, in its desire for an independent Algeria. The government of Canada also sympathised with the efforts of the world's colonial peoples to achieve their independence. In 1952, Paul Martin Sr., then Minister of National Health and Welfare, explained to the United Nations during a debate on independence for Tunisia that Canadians knew "the irresistible strength – because we have felt it ourselves – of the urge for freedom which develops in all national groups subject to external control."⁹ Canada had been a colony that had only gradually achieved autonomy over both its domestic and external policies; it was only natural therefore that many Canadians and their government sympathised with the national ambitions of colonial peoples in Africa and Asia.

8 Irwin M. Wall, "The United States, Algeria and the Fall of the Fourth Republic," *Diplomatic History* 18 (Fall 1994): 490.

9 Paul Martin Sr., "Tunisia," Speech No. 56, 9 December 1952, in *Statements and Speeches*, 1952. Canada. Department of External Affairs, 1952.

Several scholars have already referred to the sympathy felt in Canada for the plight of colonial peoples.¹⁰ This sympathy induced the Canadian government to advocate the gradual assumption of self-government for Morocco and Tunisia in the early 1950s, similar to the way Canada had achieved independence from Britain.¹¹ This sympathy had also been evident in Canada's opposition to the protection of Algeria's coastal lands under the NATO umbrella in 1948 and 1949. The Canadian government was the last of the original members during the negotiations to create the alliance to acquiesce to France's insistence that its Algerian territories be included in the alliance. That acquiescence was reluctant, however, because the Canadian government and Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, in particular, had not wanted to be accused of supporting colonial regimes through NATO.¹² In the early 1950s, Canadian officials had advocated gradual independence for Tunisia and Morocco; they could do no less than recognise that the principle of self-determination also applied to the people of Algeria, France's other colony in North Africa. Throughout the years of the conflict, expressions of sympathy for the plight of the Algerian people remained a fixture in the documents and communications of the Canadian government and the Department of External Affairs.

Algeria, however, was neither Morocco nor Tunisia. France had reluctantly agreed to grant full self-determination to the two latter protectorates, yet it vehemently opposed the notion that Algeria could ever be anything other than French. By 1954, over one million French nationals lived in Algeria together with the largest economic investment in any of France's colonies. Furthermore, the coastal lands of Algeria had been organised as departments of Metropolitan France and, as such, French men and women there enjoyed the same rights, privileges, and protection as anyone in Lyons or Paris. It was for these reasons that France had insisted on the inclusion of its Algerian departments in NATO.¹³ When Algerian nationalists, inspired by the surge in Arab national-

10 John English writes of Lester B. Pearson's feelings on this subject in *The Worldly Years: the Life of Lester Pearson, vol. II, 1949-1972* (Toronto, 1992), 108. Dale C. Thompson refers to Louis St. Laurent's similar feelings in *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian* (New York, 1986), 203-205. John Holmes writes of the more general sympathy felt for colonial peoples in the Canadian government in *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*. Vol. 2 (Toronto, 1982), 117-18. There have been, however, no systematic studies of Canadian attitudes towards decolonisation.

11 For descriptions of Canada's policy towards the issue of independence for Morocco and Tunisia, see Canada. Department of External Affairs, *Canada and the United Nations, 1950-52* (Ottawa, 1953).

12 Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 14 (Ottawa, 1990), 480, 489. For a discussion of Canada's objections to including Algeria in NATO protection see Escott Reid, *Time of Fear and Hope: the Making of the North Atlantic Treaty, 1947-1949* (Toronto, 1977), 213-18.

13 Reid, *Time of Fear and Hope*, 213-14.

ism taking place throughout the Arab world and in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt in particular, rebelled against French rule in November 1954, France was determined to crush the uprising. This determination presented Canada with a dilemma for, as it was well recognised at the time, NATO had interests in Algeria through France's membership in that alliance. M.N. Bow of the European Division of the Department of External Affairs wrote, in 1955, that Canada's sympathy for the aspirations of the Algerian people must be tempered by "the basic fact that the outcome of events in French North Africa directly affects European and North Atlantic Security."¹⁴

The Canadian government was not forced to take a position on the Algerian conflict until almost one year after it began. For most of 1955, Canadian officials seemed content to let France try to suppress the rebellion. Strategically, French-controlled Algeria contributed to NATO's interests in the Mediterranean area. It helped secure Western lines of communication through the Mediterranean Sea; it contributed to the operations of the Strategic Air Command; and it augmented France's capacity to meet its military obligations to NATO and the Supreme Allied Commander-Europe [SACEUR]. Jules Léger, then the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, worried that a serious disturbance of French authority in Algeria could have an adverse effect on NATO's position in the Mediterranean and even Western Europe.¹⁵ The beliefs that France's international power depended on a favourable solution to its Algerian difficulties and that French authority in the region appeared to be the only alternative to anarchy also helped shape Canada's perception of events in North Africa in the first months of the Algerian rebellion.¹⁶ French rule ensured that Algeria remained Western-oriented rather than succumb to anti-Western forces such as communism or the Egypt-led Arab League. The West thus had much at stake, at least in the short term, in France maintaining its position in Algeria. Had France succeeded in pacifying the Algerians quickly, Canada would have had no great cause for complaint.

Initially, this was also the attitude of both the American and British governments. Prior to mid-1955, the United States had also been prepared to tolerate France's colonial aims in North Africa so long as the nationalist troubles

14 National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 25, Records of the Department of External Affairs (DEA), Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, European Division to Undersecretary of State for External Affairs (USSEA), 21 July 1955.

15 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, USSEA to European Division, 6 September 1955.

16 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, European Division to USSEA, 21 July 1955. NAC RG 25, DEA Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, *European Division to USSEA*, 23 August 1955. These latter points were articulated by M.N. Bow, one of those in the Department of External Affairs who took a strong realist view of the Algerian conflict.

there were disposed of quickly and quietly.¹⁷ Britain, for its part, was also a colonial power. Its government recognised the danger to its own freedom of manoeuvre on colonial issues if France's right to resolve its Algerian difficulties was not respected. Accordingly, British officials pledged their complete political and moral support for France's position in Algeria and North Africa more generally.¹⁸ Both the American and British policies would change, the latter somewhat reluctantly, but for the initial stages of the Algerian conflict all of France's principal allies were prepared to give the French government free rein to eradicate the nationalist movement in Algeria.

As France increasingly appeared incapable of putting down the revolt either quickly or easily Canadian, and American, officials' perceptions of where Western interests lay in the outcome began to change. Jules Léger, for one, began to argue by September 1955 that France's policy aimed at maintaining its rule in Algeria was erratic and at times unrealistic. He felt that "in the long run, [that policy] could have disastrous effects" including prolonged bloodshed, chaos, and the creation of weak states in North Africa controlled by the Arab League. "It is in our interests," wrote Léger, "that such developments be avoided."¹⁹ Léger went on to express the belief that while France should preferably maintain some control over Algeria's foreign and defence policies, Algerian self-government was virtually assured along with that of the rest of the African continent within a generation. The large number of new states created from the wreckage of Europe's empires would then be in a position to affect Western interests adversely if NATO could not maintain the friendship or at least the benign neutrality of the new states. Given this, Léger thought that NATO's long-term interests would perhaps better be served by encouraging France to deal liberally with the demands of the Algerian nationalists. This argument became even more persuasive as Canadian officials realised that France's position in Algeria could only be maintained by force and only at the expense of France's commitments to NATO.

Two events in early 1955 helped convince the Canadian government to take a long-term view of the situation in Algeria. The first was the inauguration of the non-aligned movement in world affairs. At a conference in April, 29 African and Asian states in Bandung, Indonesia, including India, Pakistan and Egypt, adopted a position of strident opposition to colonialism.²⁰ It was a stance that

17 Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the United States* (Chicago, 1978), 204.

18 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, United Kingdom Commonwealth Relations Office to DEA, 8 October 1955. This telegram from the British government informed the Department of External Affairs of the approach to the Algerian question the British would adopt at the United Nations in the fall of 1955.

19 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, USSEA to European Division, 6 September 1955.

20 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7720, File 12173-40 Pt 2.1, USSEA to Prime Minister.

almost guaranteed conflict with the Western nations and that threatened to undermine Canada's relations with the Afro-Asian states because of Canada's alliance through NATO with the colonial powers.²¹ The second incident occurred in May 1955 when France notified SACEUR that it was moving one of its Divisions from Germany to reinforce the 100,000 French troops already in Algeria.²² The removal of the seasoned French troops to North Africa weakened NATO along the all-important front in Western Europe and exposed Canadian troops stationed in Germany to greater risks. It also convinced Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, Jules Léger, and others in Ottawa that France's position in Algeria could only be maintained at the expense of its commitments to the defence of Europe.²³

In mid-1955 Canada had two potential courses on which to base its Algerian policy. It could back France in its bid to eradicate nationalism in Algeria or, alternatively, it could encourage a solution that satisfied Algerian aspirations and preserved France's and NATO's interests in North Africa and the Afro-Asian world while returning French troops to their duties in Europe. The anti-colonial stance of the Bandung states and the removal of French troops from NATO to Algeria persuaded the Canadian government to adopt the second course as Canada's policy vis-à-vis Algeria. Crushing the rebels might reinforce France's position in North Africa temporarily but would not provide a permanent solution to the problem of nascent nationalism in the region. As Pearson asked in March 1956, "if we hold colonial territories against the wishes of their inhabitants are we going to be stronger or weaker in the long run?"²⁴

A broad view of Canadian and Western interests thus convinced Canada to adopt a policy towards the Algerian war for independence that corresponded with Canadian sympathy for the ideal of self-government for colonial peoples. This policy was not universally endorsed within the Department of External Affairs²⁵ yet Canada, like the United States, decided to try to pressure France away from its repressive Algerian policies in the months following the Bandung

21 In his book on Canada and the Cold War, Robert Bothwell writes of Canada's desire to maintain friendly relations with the growing number of Third World countries as one of the principal objectives of Canadian foreign policy during this period in the Cold War. Bothwell, *The Big Chill*, 49.

22 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, RAD Ford to Defence Liaison 1 & 2 Divisions, 25 May 1955.

23 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, European Division to USSEA, 23 August 1955. NA, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 6846, File 3618-C-40 Pt 2.1, USSEA to Secretary of State for External Affairs (SSEA), 15 February 1956.

24 Lester B. Pearson, "CBC. Press Conference, 21 March 1956," in *Statements and Speeches, 1948-1962* Canada: Department of External Affairs.

25 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, European Division to USSEA, 21 July 1955. M.N. Bow, for one, suggested that Canada follow the British example and pledge complete political and moral support for France's position in Algeria and North Africa.

Conference.²⁶ Though neither country planned to oppose France publicly, intending instead to counsel France behind the closed doors of NATO meetings, for example, neither Canada nor the United States anticipated the difficulties they would have implementing their new policies. Neither anticipated the vehemence with which France opposed any outside interference from friends or foes in what it considered its domestic affairs. From 1955 to 1959, France's opposition to outside interference in its affairs dictated Canada's policy towards the Algerian question.

The first real indication of the intensity of French sensitivity over Algeria came during the meeting of the tenth session of the United Nations in the fall of 1955. Earlier, 13 Afro-Asian states had requested that a discussion of the situation in Algeria be included on the UN's agenda. France, Britain, and the United States all opposed this measure on the grounds that such a discussion would violate Article 2(7) of the Charter of the United Nations, the clause preventing the UN from interfering in a member's domestic affairs. Canada had previously adopted a flexible interpretation of Article 2(7),²⁷ yet for political reasons the Canadian government also decided to vote against inscription. Principally, Canadian officials worried that France would greatly resent a vote by Canada in favour of putting the Algerian issue on the UN's agenda. Events in New York proved the accuracy of this fear.

When the resolution placing Algeria on the UN's agenda passed by the slimmest of margins the embittered French delegation withdrew from the General Assembly of the United Nations.²⁸ Only a compromise, partly orchestrated with Canadian help, whereby the UN decided not to proceed with the debate on Algeria, persuaded France to rejoin the General Assembly. The episode revealed the depths of France's feelings about Algeria and determined the basic limits of Canada's approach to the Algerian issue for the next several years. Neither support for the principal of self-government for dependent peoples nor Canada's interest in maintaining amiable relations with non-aligned

26 The Bandung Conference and the intensity of the anti-colonialism of the Afro-Asian states it revealed was also instrumental in changing American perceptions of the proper attitude to take towards France's Algerian problems. Duroselle, *France and the United States*, 204. After mid-1955, the American policy towards Algeria became increasingly geared towards urging France to grant self-determination to the Algerian people. American policy was also, however, greatly conditioned by French opposition to intrusion into what the French government considered its own internal affairs. Wall, "The United States, Algeria and the Fall of the Fourth Republic," 498.

27 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4421, File 12177-40 Pt 1, V.C. Moore to John Holmes, 9 September 1955. In 1946, Louis St. Laurent, then Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, expressed the view that the "United Nations should review any situation, no matter the origin, which it deems likely to impair the general welfare or friendly relations among nations."

28 Canada. Department of External Affairs, *Canada and the United Nations 1954-55* (Ottawa, 1956), 19. By a vote of 28 for to 27 opposed (including Canada) with 5 abstentions the motion to place the Algerian question on the agenda of the tenth session was adopted.

countries would thereafter take precedence over mollifying France over Algeria. The Canadian government did not abandon its hope of encouraging France to adopt more liberal policies in Algeria yet it realised that France's intransigence over the issue severely limited the opportunities it would have to do so. In the meantime, Article 2(7) allowed Canada to cloak support for France in terms of respect for its domestic jurisdiction and expressions of sympathy for the plight of colonial peoples.

As the conflict in Algeria dragged on into 1956, however, France experienced greater and greater difficulties convincing its allies that Algeria remained a problem for France alone to solve. Communist-bloc support for Algerian nationalism meant that Algeria was increasingly becoming a symbol of the Cold War struggle between East and West.²⁹ Egypt's financial and material support of the Algerian nationalists also worried Western officials.³⁰ Together, communist and Egyptian influences raised the spectre of the loss, one way or another, of Algeria to anti-Western forces. Even more damaging for Canada were Egypt's and India's accusations that NATO provided military support for France's campaign against Algerian nationalism.³¹ The longer the war in Algeria lasted the more NATO's prestige in Africa and Asia suffered by association with France. This situation worsened after 22 October 1956, when the French military forced a plane carrying five leaders of the Algerian *Front de libération nationale* from Morocco to Tunisia to land in Algiers. The arrest of the Algerian leaders caused anti-France riots throughout the Arab world that quickly expanded in scope and became anti-Western in general.³² For arguably little benefit, the French had only succeeded in antagonising numerous Arab and Afro-Asian states. As a result, Canadian officials began to consider plans to resolve the Algerian conflict multilaterally before the area was lost to communists or the Arab League.³³ France, however, pre-empted any discussion of

29 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4887, File 50115-J-40 pt 8, Message S-437, SSEA to Canadian Ambassador in Paris, 24 April 1956. According to Pearson, "Arab nationalism is clearly one of the key battlegrounds in the new competition which is emerging between the Soviet bloc and NATO."

30 Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962* (New York, 1977), 158. In October 1956, the French navy intercepted a shipment of arms bound for the Algerian rebels that had originated in Alexandria, Egypt.

31 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 6846, File 3618-C-40 Pt 2.1, Draft Background Paper, "North Africa," M.A. Macpherson, 23 April 1956.

32 See, for example, the coverage of these riots in *The Globe and Mail*, 23 October to 2 November 1956.

33 One proposal that reached the Canadian cabinet advocated the creation of an independent but Western-oriented Maghreb state in North Africa encompassing Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Canada, NA, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 6847, File 3618-C-40 Pt 2.2, Cabinet Documentary Note (Supplementary), "North Africa," 23 May 1956. In November 1956, a Canadian mission to Tunisia and Morocco reported that the West should "plan with a view to relieving France of some of her burdens [in North Africa] and thus checking any communist initiative to take over France's role in this area." NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 6116, File 50378-40 Pt 1.2, Report, "Canadian Mission to Morocco and Tunisia," P. Beaulieu.

multilateral solutions to its Algerian problem.³⁴ Yet despite French intransigence, pressure for a solution to the Algerian problem continued to mount throughout 1956.

Before the consequences of inactivity could outweigh the risk of offending France over Algeria, the Suez Crisis focussed the world's attention away from France's difficulties in its North African territories. The Suez Crisis itself, and Canada's role therein, has been extensively studied elsewhere. It is only necessary to note that Britain and France did not receive the support for their attempt to punish Egypt for nationalising the Suez Canal that they had expected from their allies. Canadian Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, in particular, condemned the fading "Supermen of Europe" for trying to reassert their authority in the Middle East.³⁵ The Suez Crisis opened the biggest rift between Britain, France, and the United States to that point in the Cold War. The bitterness lasted for months and the French never completely lost their sense that the United States had betrayed them and that Britain had deserted them at the first sign of disapproval in Washington.³⁶ Thereafter, French officials became increasingly convinced that France could no longer rely on the United States and NATO and that it might have to explore other options to satisfy French national security requirements.

By the mid to late 1950s, the threat of direct invasion of Western Europe by the Soviet Union had for the most part receded. The Cold War had entered its symbolic phase. In the propaganda campaign that the West waged with the Soviet bloc for the hearts and minds of the non-committed people of the world, NATO could not afford the weakness associated with disunity. France's willing and active adherence to NATO was therefore important for symbolic reasons of Western solidarity as well as for the military capability it contributed to the alliance. The Suez Crisis threatened NATO solidarity and thus the alliance's ability to confront the Soviet bloc. Though it also disapproved of the British and French role in Suez, the Canadian government devoted much of its energy over the next year to trying to repair the damaged relations between its principal NATO partners. NATO strength, and by extension Canadian national security, depended on it.

34 At the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in March 1956, France asked its allies to declare NATO's unqualified support for French aims in Algeria and North Africa while leaving France alone to solve its problems in the area. The Canadian government had intended to raise the Algerian issue with the hope of encouraging France to accept eventual self-government for the Algerian people, yet the Canadian delegation was forced instead to try to prevent the Council from issuing France's declaration because it gave the impression that NATO supported the armed suppression of colonial nationalism. NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7722, File 12177-40 Pt 2, Message S-252, SSEA to Canadian Delegation North Atlantic Council, Paris, 20 March 1956.

35 Thompson, *Louis St. Laurent*, 485-86.

36 John Newhouse, *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons*. (New York, 1970), 8.

The French sense of betrayal after Suez magnified their sensitivity over Algeria. General Gruenther, the retiring NATO Supreme Allied Commander – Europe, told the Canadian cabinet in November 1956 that the feeling in France was such that “if the United Nations were to condemn France over her policies in Algeria, he thought it quite possible that she would withdraw from NATO. It was illogical for the French to feel this way, but they did and the fact had to be recognised.”³⁷ The thought that France might leave NATO worried Canadian officials so, in addition to everything else, the Suez Crisis forced Canada to continue supporting France’s Algerian policies in order to help ensure France’s continued commitment to NATO. In January 1957, Jules Léger again proposed that Canada try to persuade the government of France to declare itself in favour of the eventual independence of Algeria as the basis for a ceasefire and a negotiated end to the war.³⁸ Lester Pearson, however, overruled his undersecretary. Pearson believed that no country could exert enough pressure to change France’s Algerian policy and that any attempt to do so underestimated both the strength of French national feeling over Algeria and the bitterness that remained from the Suez Crisis.³⁹ Pearson did not want to jeopardise France’s willingness to contribute to NATO by an ill-considered attempt at peace brokering in Algeria.

Pearson’s cautious approach to France governed Canadian policy on Algeria even after the Diefenbaker-led Progressive Conservative Party defeated the Liberal Party and became Canada’s government in June 1957. Diefenbaker’s stated commitment to Canada’s traditional alliances, friendships, and associations coupled with the Conservatives’ inexperience in international affairs guaranteed that Canada would continue to skirt the edges of France’s delicate relationship with both Algeria and NATO.⁴⁰ Even if the new government had been willing to confront France directly, however, events in that country again prevented any such action. For the first half of 1958, a political crisis paralysed France as government after government fell, largely because of their inability to resolve the situation in Algeria. When the dust from this crisis finally settled in June 1958, Charles de Gaulle had returned to power in France.

37 Canada. NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4796, File 50102-P-40 Pt 1, “Cabinet Discussion with General Gruenther,” 22 November 1956.

38 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7722, File 12177-40 Pt 4, Telegram S48, USSEA to SSEA at Canadian Delegation to the United Nations, 28 January 1957.

39 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7722, File 12177-40 Pt 4, Telegram 402, SSEA to USSEA, 29 January 1957.

40 John G. Diefenbaker, “Statement by the Prime Minister in the General Assembly of the United Nations, New York, 23 September 1957,” in Canada. Department of External Affairs, *Statements and Speeches, 1948-1962* and H. Basil Robinson, *Diefenbaker’s World* (Toronto, 1989), 6.

De Gaulle was well known to the international community in 1958. During the Second World War his goal of restoring France to Great Power status frequently irritated Allied officials and Franklin D. Roosevelt in particular.⁴¹ His suspicions that Britain and the United States were conspiring to deny France its rightful position in the world only increased after 1945. Consequently, by 1958 members of the diplomatic community in general considered de Gaulle anti-American, anti-German, anti-British, anti-European, and anti-NATO.⁴² Yet despite some misgivings about de Gaulle's return to power, G.G. Crean, Chargé d'Affaires at the Canadian Embassy in Paris, advised Ottawa that the General offered the best hope for a return to political stability in France and for an end to the difficulties in Algeria.⁴³

Canadian officials were thus prepared to give de Gaulle the opportunity to resolve the problems in Algeria his own way. Unfortunately, de Gaulle did not announce what his policy vis-à-vis Algeria would be until approximately 15 months after he returned to power. During this period, the Afro-Asian states continued to demand complete independence for Algeria. The delay in announcing an Algerian policy again led Canadian officials to begin questioning France's ability or willingness to deal with Algeria. A sequence of events in 1958 and 1959, however, demonstrated that France's patience with NATO was wearing thin and that Canada could ill-afford to antagonise it further. The rejection of de Gaulle's idea for a three-power NATO steering committee consisting of France, the United States, and Britain; the refusal by the United States to furnish a nuclear reactor for a French submarine; French resentment of the abstention by the US on a vote on Algeria at the UN in 1957; NATO opposition to the development of an independent French nuclear arsenal; and a vote by Canada at the UN against conducting nuclear tests in the Sahara Desert early in 1959 all signalled to France that its interests differed from those of the rest of NATO in many significant respects. With France's commitment to NATO waning, therefore, the Canadian government again felt compelled to continue deferring to France over Algeria.⁴⁴

Fortunately, by 1959 the days of Canadian support for France's Algerian policy for reasons of NATO solidarity alone were numbered. In September of

41 Newhouse, *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons*, Ch. 1.

42 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7724, File 12177-40 Pt 7.2, Despatch 238, Embassy in Madrid to DEA, 28 May 1958. This view was expressed by officials in Canada's Embassy in Madrid following a discussion with Ramon Sedo, the Political Director in Spain's Foreign Ministry.

43 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7724, File 12177-40 Pt 8.1, Despatch 561, G.G. Crean to USSEA, 9 July 1958.

44 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7725, File 12177-40 Pt 12.1, Final Report – 14th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, "Algeria," 18 December 1959. To compensate for voting against France over the issue of nuclear testing in the Sahara Desert, Canada had been prepared to support France in the UN debate on Algeria in the fall of 1959.

that year, de Gaulle promised to hold a referendum on Algeria's future within four years. In it, Algerians would be able to choose for themselves between complete independence for Algeria, the integration of Algeria into a greater France, and internal autonomy for Algeria while it remained associated with France in matters of economic development, defence, and foreign policy. France's allies greeted this new policy with a sense of relief. At a stroke, de Gaulle had removed one of the sources of tension within NATO by bringing French policy in Algeria in line with the views held by its allies, especially Canada and the United States. After almost five years of being pressured to support policies in Algeria it did not fully agree with, Canada could now openly and whole-heartedly endorse France's plan to apply the principle of self-determination to Algeria.⁴⁵ From the fall of 1959 to the completion of negotiations between France and the Algerian nationalists in 1962, Canada began to support France, not reluctantly, but to prevent the Afro-Asian states or any other outside influences from endangering the still precarious Algerian settlement.⁴⁶

That France eventually adopted a policy vis-à-vis Algeria that mirrored the policy Canada had wanted it to as early as 1955 should not disguise the public support that Canada had offered France between 1955 and 1959 when the Canadian government had disagreed with the basic nature of French policy. From 1955 to 1961 Canada voted with France against nine resolutions seeking complete and speedy independence for Algeria introduced into both the First Committee and the General Assembly of the United Nations by members of the Afro-Asian bloc. Canada abstained on two similar resolutions in 1961 after the basic nature of the settlement between France and the Algerians was already clear. The only occasions upon which Canada voted for resolutions dealing with Algeria occurred in 1957 and 1960 when the resolutions were so watered down as to render them harmless to France. In 1957, Canada, with Ireland and Norway, proposed and negotiated the acceptance of the amendments that watered down the resolution calling for the application of the principle of self-determination to Algeria and for negotiations to be held to that effect under the auspices of the United Nations.⁴⁷ From 1955 to 1962, when the Algerian question was finally dropped from the UN's agenda following the completion of the

45 *Ibid.* and NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 7725, File 12177-11.2, Yvon Beaulne to H.F. Davis, 25 September 1959.

46 Canada. Department of External Affairs, *Canada and the United Nations – 1959* (Ottawa, 1960), 9. Canada opposed interference by the United Nations in the Algerian situation in the fall of 1959 because efforts by the international community to bring a prompt end to the war might jeopardise the prospects for its solution. This would be Canada's position on the Algerian question for the remaining three years that it was debated at the United Nations.

47 Canada. Department of External Affairs, *Canada and the United Nations – 1954/55 to 1962* (Ottawa, 1955 to 1963).

Evian Agreements, Canada took great care to ensure that its public position on Algeria gave France no cause for offence.

Canada had not only supported France politically over Algeria in these years, however. It also supported France's military activities in the rebellious colony, though it did so much less overtly and publicly. Direct Canadian military intervention in Algeria through NATO had been ruled out as soon as the conflict had erupted. Under NATO's Mutual Aid programme, however, both Canada and the United States supplied France with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of military equipment in the years of the Algerian war for independence.⁴⁸ The *Defence Appropriation Act* of 1950 authorised the gift of military supplies from Canada to help NATO members rearm and defend Western Europe from the threat of a Soviet invasion. Yet France had always expected more from NATO than simply protection from communism and help in rearming its military. It also wanted "some assistance in holding on to France's shaky colonial empire."⁴⁹ As early as 1952, France had asked for Canada's help to combat nationalism in its colonies when it requested Canada's permission to divert Canadian Mutual Aid equipment to Southeast Asia where the Vietnamese were rebelling against French rule.⁵⁰

The *Defence Appropriation Act*, however, specified that Canada's military aid could only be sent to Western Europe. France's desire to ship Canadian anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns and ammunition to Indo-China violated the intent of the Act. The Canadian government at the time was divided over how to respond to France's request. Lester Pearson wanted the transfer approved on the grounds that France's struggle against communism in Indo-China deserved Canada's support. Louis St. Laurent and Brooke Claxton, on the contrary, worried that Canada would be implicated in the use of force against a rebel colony.⁵¹ Ultimately, the cabinet agreed only to send the Mutual Aid to France. The government then informed the French that what happened to the equipment thereafter, or where it was sent, was none of Canada's concern. If France simply transferred the equipment without telling Canada of its intentions, the Canadian government could then deny any responsibility for France's use of Canadian equipment to fight nationalists in its colonies. France's need for the equipment left the Canadian government with few options other than to find some way to meet France's request.

48 The actual figure in Mutual Aid for France was \$4,158,000,000 from the United States and a further \$128,500,000 from Canada from 1950 to 1962. Michael Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security* (Baltimore, 1981), 33, and Canada. NA, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4486, File 50030-40 Pt 9, Reply to Question re NATO in Senate, C.J. Marshall, 29 May 1963.

49 Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally*, 14.

50 James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada, Vol. 4: Growing Up Allied* (Toronto, 1980), 150.

51 *Ibid.*, 150-51.

The Canadian government later followed this same example during the years of the Algerian conflict. From 1955 to 1958, Canada gave France Mutual Aid that included ammunition, trucks, dynamite, sub-machine guns, artillery shells and training aircraft. From 1 January 1957 to 31 March 1958 alone, \$14.6 million in Canadian military equipment found its way to France.⁵² Given that a majority of the French military was in Algeria by 1956, the Canadian government had to have known the true destination of much if not all of its equipment.⁵³ Order-in-Council 1956-507, passed in March 1956, however, allowed the government to provide France with the arms it needed while denying complicity in the suppression of independence movements in France's colonies. This Order was not directed towards shipment of arms to France alone but its terms certainly facilitated the shipment of Canadian armaments to Algeria. The Order stated that, once a recipient nation accepted Mutual Aid from Canada, it also accepted the responsibility to use it to strengthen NATO's capacity to deter aggression.⁵⁴ Given this condition, the recipient nation could then use the arms wherever and for whatever purpose it wanted without having to ask Canada's permission to defy the limitations of the *Defence Appropriation Act*. The Canadian government simply chose not to be informed of the purpose for which its equipment would be used.

With this Order-in-Council the Canadian government tacitly accepted the use of Canadian military supplies against Algerian nationalists rather than risk offending France by insisting that its Mutual Aid be restricted to use only in Europe. Canada was not alone in its duplicity, however. The United States also gave France defence assistance in amounts the equivalent of up to one quarter of France's defence budget in the mid-1950s, even though it knew that some of it would be sent to North Africa.⁵⁵ Both Canada and the United States contrived to support France while maintaining a public position that looked with disfavour on the use of force to suppress nationalism in Europe's colonies.

The government's hands-off policy regarding the use of its Mutual Aid prevented it from knowing exactly how much of the \$128 million in military equipment Canada sent to France between 1950 and 1960 had ended up in Algeria.⁵⁶ In 1952 and again in 1956, Canada made it clear to France that it did

52 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4849, File 50105-G-40 Pt 4, Department of National Defence Report, "Deliveries of Materials and Supplies."

53 By late 1956, between 400,000 and 500,000 French troops were fighting in Algeria leaving only two understrength French Divisions in Germany and no regular troops in France. NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 6846, File 3618-C-40 Pt 2.1, "Background Paper on North Africa," April 1956.

54 NAC, RG 2, Records of the Privy Council, Series A-5-a, Cabinet Minutes, 15 March 1956.

55 Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally*, 35.

56 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 4508, File 50030-L-5-40 Pt 3, Memorandum, L.P. Tardif, Defence Liaison I Division, 28 November 1960. To March 1960, Canada sent France \$26,698,000 in armaments; \$27,813,000 in ammunition; \$8,151,000 in mechanical equipment; \$13,516,000 in communications equipment; \$20,080,000 in aircraft and engines; \$26,421,000 in ships.

not want to know the true destination and use of its Mutual Aid. For its part, France quickly learned not to ask or tell Canada anything that might embarrass the Canadian government. By 1960, Canada could neither confirm nor deny the presence and use of Canadian arms on Algerian soil.⁵⁷ In the end, however, the point is moot. Whether Canadian supplies went directly to Algeria or went to replace supplies in Europe that France had sent to its forces fighting in Algeria makes little difference. The government refused to acknowledge its actions publicly but Canada did contribute to France's military activities against nationalists in Algeria.

In 1961, a Radio Tunis reporter asked Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, Howard Green, if Canada had a double standard on anti-colonialism because it opposed the repression of the Hungarian people by the Soviet Union but it refused to support the Algerian people in their struggle for independence. Green denied that Canada had such a double standard.⁵⁸ He did not explain, however, that Canada judged colonial issues in the 1950s by their impact on NATO and the Cold War rather than with an eye to promoting freedom for all dependent peoples. Canada supported the Hungarian cause because the Soviet use of force to suppress Hungarian nationalism in 1956 rallied international opinion against the Soviet Union and thus strengthened the West against the communist bloc. In Algeria, however, anti-colonialism threatened NATO unity and its ability to defend the West from communism so Canada was compelled to support France in its opposition to Algerian independence prior to 1959.

The Algerian war for independence threatened NATO's strength and its integrity. The war drained France's economic, political, and human resources and kept the majority of the French military away from their NATO posts from 1954 to the early 1960s. More importantly, the Algerian conflict threatened to alienate France itself from NATO to the extent that its allies failed to support its policies. France expected complete support from its allies for its position in Algeria. Any indication that that support was lacking diminished France's enthusiasm for NATO and made relations within the alliance more difficult. The ties, as represented by NATO, binding the Atlantic community together were of paramount importance for Canada. It was essential that France remain closely tied to NATO. This was the motivating factor behind Canada's position on Algeria from 1954 to 1962. The Canadian government did defy France over the

57 NAC, RG 25, DEA, Vol. 5492, File 12177-40 Pt 15, "Algerian War and NATO," F. Houde, Defence Liaison I Division to Middle East Division, 20 October 1960. This memorandum was prepared in response to a question put to the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs by a professor of Political Science at Carleton University who wanted to know if France used Canadian equipment in "repressing" the Algerian rebellion.

58 Howard Green, "Review of Canadian Foreign Policy – Transcript of the C.B.C. programme *Inquiry*, 14 November 1961," in *Statements and Speeches, 1948-1962*. Canada. Department of External Affairs.

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latter's testing of nuclear weapons in the Sahara Desert in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but this simply underlines the relative importance of various foreign-policy issues to Canadian officials. The Canadian government was sympathetic to the aspirations of the Algerian people. Yet sympathy alone was not enough to convince the government to ignore the other vital interests that were at stake during the Algerian war for independence. Cold War realities tempered Canadian sympathy for colonial and other Third World issues. The Cold War dominated Canada's foreign policy in the 1950s and Canada's relations with NATO and its principal Western partners like the United States, Britain, and France were the highest priority in Canada's foreign policy. Support for the principle of self-determination for colonial peoples was of a lower priority compared to the Canadian government's interest in national security encompassing the strength of NATO, the partnership of the principal Western allies, and security from domination by the communist powers.