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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN
FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

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THE CURRENT ^{INFO} SITUATION IN FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

1. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF FRENCH NORTH AFRICA.

French North Africa is important to the security of the US. Its geographical position, because of the increased potential of modern air warfare, now lies within a logical expansion of the zones of minimum security previously maintained by this country. In hostile hands, its air and naval bases could possibly neutralize potential US Atlantic bases in the Azores and Cape Verde Islands. Such hostile possession could, moreover, interdict the Atlantic approaches to the Mediterranean and sever the most direct line of access to the petroleum of the Near East.

In friendly hands French North Africa could afford corresponding advantages to the US as a valuable base for the launching of air attacks, naval operations, or amphibious landings against Europe or the Near East. Its utilization by the US or a friendly power would also maintain the previous value of US bases in the Atlantic islands. The climate of the area is such that aerial operations can be conducted the year round.

As long as Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia remain under French control and as long as France maintains its independence and remains friendly to the US, US security is enhanced both defensively and offensively. France's present domestic political situation, the drain caused by her colonial wars in Indochina and Madagascar, and the rising demand of Nationalists among the native populations of North Africa, are all dangers which threaten the status quo in this vital area and which could lead to eventual Soviet control.

Of long-range strategic importance are two economic factors: Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia are relatively rich in mineral deposits (particularly phosphates and iron ore); and they possess an agricultural potential sufficient to assist eventually in alleviating critical food shortages of Western Europe.

2. PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS.

While there is no immediate danger of a successful revolt in French North Africa, increasing nationalist intransigence and continuing French failure to institute a sincere program of reforms may turn what is now a political problem into a situation dangerous to peace and to the security of the US.

In Tunisia and Morocco, nationalist leaders have generally concentrated on the restoration of national sovereignty under the reigning dynasty. In Algeria, the emphasis has been on equal status for Moslems and Frenchmen. Since the establishment of the Maghreb* Bureau at Cairo, however, the nationalist movements of the three territories have developed a degree of coordination hitherto lacking, and almost all groups are now demanding complete independence. The UDMA (Democratic Union of

* Collective Arab name for Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

Note: This report has the concurrence of the intelligence organizations of the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. A statement of dissent by the Department of State is set forth as Enclosure "A."

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the Algerian Manifesto) still favors inclusion of Algeria within the French Union. These aspirations are receiving encouragement and moral support from the Arab League and, to a certain extent, from the Soviet Government through the instrumentality of local Communist Parties in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. At present the Communists in French North Africa have little political weight. Currently the Communists in French North Africa are demanding only autonomy within the French Union. Their future tactics in North Africa, however, will depend upon the internal political situation in France, the position of the French Communist Party, and, ultimately, upon orders from Moscow. A possible unified Nationalist-Communist independence movement, therefore, must not be overlooked in spite of the antagonism existing at present between Communists and Nationalists.

France's vote in the UNGA in favor of partition in Palestine will increase the North African Arabs' bitterness toward France and will give impetus to the demands for independence, but it is not expected alone to cause either revolts or revolution. General unrest through the Arab world, anti-American demonstrations, isolated and local disorders, murder of Jews, and looting of Jewish shops are likely to be reflected in North Africa by similar unrest, but to a lesser degree.

In spite of the desire of responsible native leaders to refrain from violence, at least until the "problem" of French North Africa has been considered by the UN, a single outbreak accompanied by severe repressive measures could result in a widespread rebellion that both the nationalist leaders and the French Government would find difficult to control.

3. POLITICAL SITUATION.

The political situation in French North Africa is complicated by the fact that Algeria has been incorporated into Metropolitan France while Morocco and Tunisia are protectorates, each possessing its own native government. The French directly control the economic and political life of Algeria, where the European landowners constitute 14% of the population and where no native holds a key position in the government. In the two protectorates—where Europeans comprise but 4% of the population and where France is obligated by treaty to protect the native governments—the French have superimposed their own administrative systems which assure them absolute, if indirect, control. Until very recently the French have pursued, with scant success, a policy of assimilating the natives into French culture, at the same time recognizing the right of North Africans to retain their native institutions.

French political control of the area is potentially threatened by native nationalist movements in the three territories. Although these movements (which are supported by the Arab League and, when convenient, by the Communists) are not new, they have gained momentum since the end of the war through the world-wide growth of nationalist sentiment on the part of dependent peoples, Communist propaganda and agitation, French loss of military power and prestige, bad economic conditions in North Africa, and the reappearance of influential Moslem leaders identified with Arab nationalism.

Conscious of their own weakness, the French have attempted to meet the nationalist threat to their empire by announcing that the French Union, a projected

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overseas federation, has replaced the concept of the French Empire. In this Union, Algeria forms a part of the French Republic, while Tunisia and Morocco are considered "associated states." According to the new Constitution, any one of these has the right to modify its status either in the direction of assimilation to France or toward a looser federalism, subject to the approval of the French National Assembly. The French Union, however, has appeared to the natives as a cloak for more colonialism.

Meanwhile, the UN, the Arab League (which considers North Africa as part of the Arab world), and the US seem to the Nationalists to offer better opportunities for assistance in gaining independence than continued negotiations with France. Whereas before the war, nationalist leaders had agitated unsuccessfully for equal civic rights and social reforms, they now denounce as snares or stalling all French reform proposals, and publicly proclaim that they will be satisfied with nothing less than independence. The UDMA, however, is an exception, favoring inclusion of Algeria within the French Union. In Cairo, center of the Pan-Arab movement, the Maghreb Bureau furnishes French North African native leaders a meeting place at which to coordinate their moves. Close liaison is maintained with the Arab League, which has indicated that it will turn its attention to the Maghreb in 1948.

The small Communist Parties of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have thus far been unsuccessful in their appeals to the Nationalists to join them in a unified independence front. The native leaders and most of North Africa's 18,000,000 Moslems, regard the Communists as another group of infidels opposed to Islam. Of equal importance, the Communists' independence program at present includes "association within the French Union." Should the Nationalists, nevertheless, succeed in achieving independence, the small, well-organized, and apparently well-financed Communist Parties, during the unsettled conditions that would follow freedom from France, might gain control of the areas' nationalist movements, paving the way for eventual Communist control of the whole region. Such control could be most easily obtained in Algeria where no native economic, social, or political structure exists and where a rapidly multiplying landless proletariat has developed and is faced with an increasingly desperate economic situation. In spite of the widespread allegiance to the Sultan in Morocco, the Nationalist Party, whose strength is largely in the towns, could probably not prevent the Communists from making serious inroads among the politically naive populace and eventually gaining control of the government. In Tunisia, where a greater degree of political sophistication and a greater sense of national unity exist, the Nationalists could probably successfully contain the Communists.

The French Government would appear at present to be making an effort to prepare Tunisia and Morocco for a considerable degree of autonomy and has voted a statute for Algeria which accords further civic rights to Moslem Algerians. The reforms, however, appear to the native leaders in all cases to be designed to preserve the status quo while paying lip service to their aspirations. Their lack of faith in French sincerity with regard to a reform program is increased by the failure of the French to establish a "timetable" for the implementation of these reforms. In some cases the reforms tend to extend French control to domains formerly reserved for natives. Although for reasons of "face" and prestige the French prefer not to negotiate directly with nationalist groups, which are technically outlawed, informal conversations take place. Moslem

elements formerly friendly to France are now reluctant to come forward in view of the growing strength of the Nationalists.

4. ECONOMIC SITUATION.

The economy of French North Africa is chiefly that of a primary producer exporting raw and semiprocessed materials to France and importing in return the bulk of its manufactured goods. Although the wartime economic dislocation of the area has now been largely overcome (cereal and mineral production is almost at prewar levels) the economic situation remains unsatisfactory because of an over-all population increase of 23% since 1936, two bad crop years since VE-day, and France's inability to provide sufficient consumer goods.

Essentially an agricultural area, North Africa, nevertheless, possesses many of the natural resources necessary for industrialization, including considerable potential hydroelectric power which the French have been unable fully to develop. Coal deposits exist and some petroleum has been discovered. The coal, however, is of poor quality, and the limited petroleum resources thus far discovered have not been extensively exploited, so that a lack of sufficient fuel and power is the chief natural obstacle to industrialization. French policy, which in general continues to envisage the economic role of North Africa as a supplier of raw materials and a purchaser of French consumer and capital goods, has contributed greatly to the shortage of fuel supplies and skilled labor, and it will probably continue to delay any industrialization. However, according to the Monnet Plan, there is some provision for limited industrialization in French North Africa, based on the processing of locally produced raw materials.

Outright US assistance to the North African economy, such as food allocation and dollar credits, is handled by France through secondary allocations from grants to France and the French Union.

While both Tunisia and Morocco could conceivably manage to exist economically independent of France in the foreseeable future, the economy of Algeria has been so geared to that of France that chaos and famine would probably result if the French were to withdraw. Almost the entire production of food crops (including the wine industry), which provides Algeria its major means of payment in international trade, is in the hands of European Algerians. In Morocco and Tunisia, while public utilities and virtually all large-scale private business enterprises are French monopolies, traditional native economic life has been fostered rather than hindered, and French penetration is highly localized and concentrated. In Algeria, on the other hand, native agriculture and other means of livelihood, never very productive, have been dislocated; and the sharply increased native population cannot obtain its food or derive its living from its own lands.

Although the finances of the protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia, and of Algeria are not managed directly from Paris, in the last analysis they are under French control, so that problems of budget, international trade, dollar credits, and the seemingly uncontrollable inflation are almost the same as those of the mother country.

5. THE MILITARY SITUATION.

The French have been gradually increasing their troop strength in North Africa despite the drain on their effectives resulting from the current campaigns in Indochina

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and Madagascar. In September 1947, military strength in the area, including Navy and Air Force, was estimated at 125,840 men. The total ground force strength is approximately 112,000, of which 50,000 are in Morocco, 50,000 in Algeria, and 12,000 in Tunisia. These, however, include garrison troops and trainees whose effectiveness would be limited by currently inadequate transportation facilities. In case of serious trouble, they could be supplemented from the 45,000 troops at present in the French zone of Germany. Such drafts would depend, of course, on the internal situation in France, as there are only 120,000 French operational troops in all Europe and North Africa.

The French could suppress a local riot or revolt but would have difficulty in suppressing a widespread rebellion. Even a series of sporadic uprisings would seriously endanger the French position because France has no Army general reserve to deal with new colonial troubles.

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APPENDIX "A"

The Intelligence Organization of the Department of State dissents from ORE-63 because it believes that the cumulative effect of that paper is:

(a) to present the French and the nationalists as hopelessly deadlocked with regard to the future political development of North Africa, and to suggest that the deadlock can only be broken by nationalist rebellion followed by French repression. While OIR admits this is a possibility and that it would have serious consequences for the US, OIR's evaluation of the present situation indicates that there is a distinct possibility that the French and the nationalists will reach peaceably an agreement on the political evolution of the area;

(b) to overemphasize the possibility that Communist strength and influence will increase. Such a development is possible, but no more probable than an opposite trend. The Communists in North Africa have made no appreciable gains during the past year in the formation of a united political front with the nationalists, and their general position has been weakened by the recent isolation of and set-back to the Communists in France;

(c) to overstress the possibility that the Communists would gain control of North Africa in the event that the nationalists succeed in "achieving independence." If this transition were achieved peacefully, the likelihood of the Communists' seizing control is slight. If independence were won through revolution, it is just as likely that the nationalists would contain the Communists (who are almost entirely European) as that the Communists would assume control of the new regimes.

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