



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on February 5, 2012

Fifty Years After the Algerian War of Independence

Algeria became part of the Islamic conquests of the 8th Century and these particular Muslims were a major component of the Islamic attempt to conquer Western Europe which was thwarted by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours. The Algerian Muslims were later conquered by the Seljuk Turk Muslims and formed the western periphery of that Ottoman Empire. The Barbary Pirates operated around Algeria and Tunisia, and European nations infamously preferred giving them tribute rather than defending themselves. About a century after America's war against the Barbary Pirates, the Second Republic of France added military bases in Algeria to its overseas empire.



France had long looked at the lands around the Arab coast of the Mediterranean differently from how England and other major European nations did. During the Crusades, French nobles were the principal establishers of Crusaders' kingdoms, counties, and principalities. France long after that took a parochial interest in the Christian community in Lebanon. Napoleon, in one of his earliest campaigns, sought to conquer Egypt. So when Algeria, Tunis, and Morocco were made part of the French Empire, there was a historic pattern of interest and settlement which made it fundamentally different from, for instance, the Italian Empire in Abyssinia or the British Empire in Burma.

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The French and the natives of Algeria had thousands of years of history shared, with one trying to conquer and rule the other and then a few hundred years later the roles reversed. Those who imagine that the Ottoman threat to Christendom is old hat might recall that in 1699, a few decades before the American Revolutionary War, Turkish armies were at the gates of Vienna and only the bold action of a Polish king (many say divine intervention) saved the core of Europe from Turkish conquest.

It seems it is the nature of nations, at least nations which expand, to face four different paths over time in relationship with their lands which are, at first, colonies. The American colonies and the Irish, for instance, rejected their association with the British — violently.

The second path is for the Mother Country to incorporate fully and completely a people willing to be made part of the nation. The Scottish people and the Welsh, despite robust national movements, elected to become an integral part of the predominately English United Kingdom. Scotland has its own court system and its own money, but it has steadfastly rejected real independence.

The third path is the one taken by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other Dominion governments. These have retained a notional connection with the United Kingdom but have practical independence.

The fourth path is for a colony to voluntarily subordinate its sovereignty in the interests of greater



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prosperity, security, and welfare through connection with the mother country. Perhaps the best example of this status today is the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory whose citizens routinely vote against independence and who yet retain a great measure of self-government.

History has shown that forcing people in a region to remain involuntarily associated with a greater land has proven ill-advised. The region of Algeria was considered part of metropolitan France and not a colony. Most Algerians — who were Muslim Arabs, not French-speaking Christian Europeans, could never seriously have been considered to be part of France. The horror that followed in the Algerian War of Independence which began 51 years ago was the predictable result of France attempting to hold a land which had no desire to be part of it.

One particularly noxious result of this war was that communists, as they had 30 years earlier in Spain, were able to insinuate themselves into this messy war, following in practice their maxim of misery: “The worse, the better.” The bitter conflict can be said to have ended on [February 5, 1962](#), 50 years ago, when Charles de Gaulle, who had invented the Fifth Republic of France a few years earlier, pronounced that Algerians would decide whether they would be independent or part of France.

The wounds from a conflict in which both sides routinely used torture and terrorism remain raw 50 years later. Algeria is still a mess, although many analysts say it is less because of colonialism and more because the Islamic world does not work. The problems of France, the largest country in the European Union, are multiplying every day. Coupled with the general financial meltdown of the EU, the French are seeing more and more North African immigrants surging into their country and refusing to assimilate.

History has shown that empires never work, by whatever name they may be called. A lesson for the world and a lesson for America as well.

Photo: Algerian flag



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