

The Passing of Algerian Independence Leader Hocine Ait Ahmed

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Co-founder of the National Liberation Front (FLN) had lived in exile for decades

Thousands attended the funeral of Hocine Ait Ahmed in his home village named after him in Berber-dominated region of Algeria. Although he was in opposition for well over five decades, the FLN government of Abdelaziz Bouteflika paid respects to the fallen leader who had fought gallantly and suffered immensely in the struggle against French imperialism.

Hocine Ait Ahmed was imprisoned by the French colonialists in 1956 and was not released until the ceasefire of 1962 leading to the independence of the North African state under the leadership of Ahmed Ben Bella. He was known as a founding member of what was described as the “Sons of Toussaint”, a group of nationalist leaders who initiated the armed struggle on November 1, 1954.

The North African state of Algeria was colonized by Paris beginning in 1830. A system of national oppression and economic exploitation was instituted and lasted up until the early 1960s.

Algerian Nationalists Waged Eight-Year Armed and Mass Campaigns for Independence

During the course of the liberation movement at least one million Algerians died through massacres, mass detentions and tactics aimed at starving out freedom fighters that fought tirelessly utilizing popular demonstrations, general strikes and armed resistance.

On the night of November 1, 1954 a series of attacks by the FLN launched the guerrilla war for independence from France. All the operations took place within an hour or two from one end of Algeria to the other, revealing to Paris that the attacks had been well organized.

The Governor-General for colonial Paris immediately asked for reinforcements from Europe and these were deployed immediately. Three units of Public Security Guards including 600 troops arrived shortly in the country signaling an escalation of efforts to repress the uprising.

Despite the widespread killings of Algerians and the system of detention, torture and attempted isolation of the revolutionary forces, the FLN prevailed after France could no longer justify to its population the tremendous cost of the war in money and lives.

Ait Ahmed broke with other leaders of the FLN and the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic to form an opposition party, the Socialist Front Forces (FFS), in 1963. He

had serious differences with other leaders within the FLN over the type of political system instituted during the post-colonial period of the 1960s.

He was imprisoned by the Algerian government in 1964 under threat of death. He escaped from prison and went into exile in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1966.

Nonetheless, he had returned to the country on numerous occasions but never came to terms with the FLN government which is backed by the military.

Ait Ahmed re-located to Algeria in 1989 after the FFS was legalized and stood as a candidate in presidential elections in 1999, but pulled out in the middle of the campaign arguing that the election process was structured in favor of Bouteflika. After the nullification of the election results of 1992 which seemed to have been in favor of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Ait Ahmed went back into exile in Switzerland due to the serious security situation inside the country.

A civil war erupted after the 1992 political crisis which lasted for nearly a decade. A number of smaller Islamic-oriented opposition forces remain in conflict with the largely secular government in Algiers.

According to an overview of the history of the FFS published by medea.be, it says "Participating for the first time in parliamentary elections, the FFS became the third most important political party during the December 1991 elections - after the FIS and the FLN, the former single party - and the leading party in the Berber regions. Its relative success is partially explained by its demands for a multilingual Algerian society where Berber and French would be recognized alongside Arabic."

This same report continues noting how the party "Strongly condemned the interruption of the electoral process in January 1992 and the setting up of institutions controlled by the army, the FFS has always called for the re-establishment of the democratic process (it supports the principle of a proportional representation voting system which would bring the FIS back to its true electoral proportions)."

Ait-Ahmed's health began to fail in 2012 and he soon stepped down in 2013 as the leader of the FFS. He died in Lausanne on December 23.

Recognition by Algiers of His Contributions

His death prompted the government in Algiers to declare him a national hero and designate his memorial as a state funeral.

Ait Ahmed did not want to be buried alongside other FLN veterans in Algiers and was interned in his hometown named after him in the Berber dominated region of Kabyle. However, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, also a veteran of the struggle for independence, declared eight days of mourning after Ait Ahmed's death.

Covered in Algeria's national flag, the coffin was transported in an ambulance through the village, where tens of thousands filled the streets. "Today and tomorrow, Hocine lives!" they chanted. "Algeria, Free and Democratic!"

During the procession the crowd moved towards the coffin as it was brought out of the ambulance in preparation for the burial, which took place in the early afternoon. The state

funeral was broadcast live on television and a wake was later held at the headquarters of the FFS. The funeral cortege had traveled 100 miles (160km) south-east from Algiers to his village.

Algeria despite its contentious post-colonial political history remains a secular state that refrained from participation in the imperialist destruction of Libya in 2011 led by the United States and NATO. The Algerian government along with Syria voted against the Arab League endorsement of a so-called “no-fly zone” being implemented over Libya by the Pentagon-NATO forces and their allies in March 2011.

The war against Libya resulting in the toppling of the Jamahiriya system under the late Col. Muammar Gaddafi, killed in October 2011, has resulted in Africa’s once most prosperous state being turned into a source of instability, human trafficking and mass poverty. Imperialist states are attempting to deploy ground troops in Libya under the guise of fighting the so-called Islamic State which has established a base in Sirte and other sections of the oil-rich nation.

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