



**Matthew Connelly.** *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. xiv + 400 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-514513-7.

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## A Little Post-Modern War

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The Algerian War has long been a marginalized event in the history of Franco-American relations. Although recognized as one of the premier episodes in the long-story of decolonization, it has not been well integrated into the Cold War saga. From the inception of American foreign policy in that region, Operation Torch in World War II and the subsequent backing of Darlan, through the return of the French Republic to its colonies, to the opening shots of 1954, the observer is left with a sense of inherently unfinished policy. This perception is heightened by the very longevity and depth of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the other colonial struggle affecting Franco-American policy in these years. As a result, historians have depicted the French as slow and backward in their attachment to colonial rule, but have made less of the hesitancy, discontinuity, and confusion inherent in the U.S. response. Hesitant, as when Franklin D. Roosevelt's offered his well known advice to Churchill to free India, yet offered no such recommendation to French leaders. Discontinuous, in that FDR, and less forthrightly Truman, indicated that France's mandates in Vietnam and Algeria lacked moral leadership; and confused, since the U.S. felt obliged to intervene in Vietnam, monetarily by 1952, and covertly by 1954, yet did not see a need for U.S. intervention in Algeria in 1954. Few contemporary histories have integrated Algeria into the overall narrative of U.S. foreign policy. Matthew Connelly's recent book, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* fills this gap.

Connelly's achievement is to imbed the Algerian conflict and the challenge of Third World nationalism within the shifting dynamics of the Cold War. Just as he defines a hierarchy of interests, he also

demonstrates the ways in which the successful Algerian struggle presages the conditions of the new post-Cold War order. He argues that the Algerian Revolution's primary offensive was diplomatic, and that the war was won on the stage of international opinion rather than in the military realm. This public debate transformed the definition of national sovereignty as foreign powers and institutions grew to scrutinize and secure their interests in what were once the private domestic issues of a sovereign imperial country. This confrontation over the rights of colonialist states undermined the very nature of sovereignty as it had evolved since Westphalia, and created ideological tension between two of the Great Powers of the postwar world, weakening the links of the Western alliance in the Cold War. Algeria became the "epicenter of the North-South conflict" and (to continue with Connelly's metaphor) was the origin of the seismic waves that, in the long-run, destroyed the diplomatic edifice of the nation-state as it had been known for two hundred years.

Connelly sequences his chapters along three main themes. First is the desire by both the Algerians and the French to internationalize the war, obviously each for their own goals. Second, change occurs through the political reactions to these positions, and it involves a catalogue of issues: the French desire to leverage international might in their own interests yet limit interference from the Americans, the Egyptians, and sundry others; the desire of the Bandung leaders to support non-aligned countries, the Algerians, and Third World nationalism; the American desire to contain the USSR, defend Europe, strengthen NATO, insure access to the petroleum resources of the Middle East, and keep their ideological position as the exemplar of the free world. The fracturing nature of all these imperatives gives rise to Connelly's third point,

that Algeria could not be kept within the East-West struggle but was, instead, the frontier of the emerging North-South division. The narrative deals with each of these themes in turn.

The organization itself deserves a note. Connelly's periodization encompasses a transnational perspective. It is neither American, French nor Algerian, nor does it use any familiar organizational tools such as the American electoral calendar, national or regional policies, or economic needs. Instead he consistently shifts the reader's center of attention to an imagined international community which can consist of, but is not limited to, any one of the agencies or actors involved in the events of that particular moment. This includes a very broad range: political centers (Paris, Algiers, London, Washington) military agencies (NATO, the French military, the FLN), political alliances (the Bandung nations, the Arab League, Third World countries in the UN), political leaders (Eisenhower, De Gaulle, Macmillan, Dulles, Bourguiba) and the reading public. This last group is crucial to Connelly's interpretation, which recognizes the rise of internationalism in international policy making, and the primacy of the discursive public in the modernist project. The book's organization creates a new time line embedded in the post world war order, but tied to changes in the Franco-Algerian policies.

The introduction accomplishes two aims: it offers a wide overview of the Algerian-French-American-UN struggle, setting before the reader the broad global picture, and it presents a more detailed narrative of each player's diplomatic and military initiatives. The sum of the introduction is an analysis of the dilemmas of post-World War II colonization: for the mother country and the colony as well as for the foreign policy problems and benefits created by their connection to the Cold War framework. French colonial policy, *la mission civilisatrice*, was caught in a trap of its own political ideology. It upheld science, technology and reason as the signifiers of national development, but could not break the nationalist belief that only modern peoples (i.e. a thoroughly French people) could reach it. Algerian nationalists used this polarized thinking to discredit the French *mission civilisatrice*. The Algerian accusations, made in the new forum of the United Nations, drew criticism upon the often brutal and chauvinistic French technique of "modernization". British, Europeans and Americans all held to the superiority of their own methodologies and in so doing, became a part of the Algerian critique. In the eyes of developed nations, progress was the gift

the imperializers could give to the colonized, but if the modernizing struggle were to be lost it was possible the colonies could bring decline and backward ideologies upon the modern world. This biased viewpoint was enlivened by images of religious chauvinism (*jihad*), race wars, poverty, and the decline of freedom.

It was French dependence on American security, finances, and support that offered Washington an opportunity to redefine its attitude towards colonialism. As the international public questioned France's behavior in Algeria, Washington pressured Paris. French rationales to American queries grew in stridency in defining the Arab threat as likely to counter their own civilizing impulses with a backward Islamic influence. Paris expected that given this threat to progress, Washington would continue to support its Cold War ally, allowing France to tend to its domestic matters. Unfortunately for the French, this strategy of holding American money, policy and prestige hostage to French domestic needs had already been used in Indochina. The Americans would not employ this tactic again, and refused to recognize Algeria within the confessional and civilizational framework described by the French, instead placing it within their own framework of self-determination and nation-building. For the sake of progress, the United States had to separate itself from French policies (even if this meant rejecting French sovereignty) and to find ways to support nascent Third World Nationalism including regional or even religious solidarity.

Connelly develops the context and arguments of the French and Algerian positions through the military in Algeria and ideology in the United Nations. In the forum of public opinion, military success against Algerian nationals was interpreted in the context of the asymmetries of power between the two protagonists. Clearly the use of French airpower provided by the United States); the systematic use of torture; collective reprisals against villages; and, the shelling and imprisonment of civilians were reported and decried in the international press as exceeding military necessity. Every success raised doubts about the very nature of French civilization. The Algerians, on the other hand, had few military victories to their claim, but could speak instead of persistence, martyrdom, continued guerrilla warfare, and many symbolic victories in foreign countries and forums. The contest was uneven and contradictory. The Algerians conquered no real territory, but claimed the sympathy of

the world. The French were militarily successful but their methods held them up to international opprobrium.

In Connelly's interpretation, the strategy of the Algerian nationalists puts progress and colonization on trial. The very sinews of Enlightenment thought were exposed to public debate, in the United Nations and in the media. Theories of civilization, modernization, and development were placed before global audiences. Although we now know that the antagonists of the East-West conflict struggled over the powers of the state and the merits of the redistribution of wealth, these issues were not salient in the North-South confrontation. Here, values of race, culture, and history were paramount. But the impulse of the East-West players to acquire political commitments from the colonized regions served to layer capitalist and socialist values and ideologies upon the anti-colonial struggle. The accretion of ideologies has concealed the nature of the emerging contest between North and South, and has left historians trying to interpret post-colonialism in terms of the irrelevant ideologies that overlay it along with the atavisms that preceded it.

The pivot point of *Diplomatic Revolution* is the Habermasian precept that public discourse is the essence of democratic capitalism and modernity. The concluding chapter reaffirms the centrality of the problem within the context of De Gaulle's successful domestication of the Algerian question. France and Algeria must confront the identity issue, specifically as regards French settlers: who is Algerian and who is French, and how does one define the categories? Interestingly, here Connelly raises an issue that is rarely traced in the last fifty years of European history. Race, culture, and volkish identities, concepts that rode through Europe during the early portion of the century, reappeared in the struggle for Algeria. The French defined Algeria as a country created by French occupation and colonizing activities. It was the French mission that had given the Algerians ideas, identity, science, development and culture, therefore the French settlers must have special status. The Algerians argued that they already had a culture, a history, a language, and they were willing to offer the French settlers a chance to integrate themselves to this state, but they refused to even dignify the argument of cultural hierarchy in an Algerian state.

Identity remained at the center of the long East-West rivalry. It both confirmed old assumptions and obscured significant shifts within the structure and

nature of the Western alliance. Some of the most obvious changes included the undermining of the idea of national sovereignty, a loosening of the French connection to the alliance, a shift towards Eastern Europe through Germany, and a greater separation between the Anglo powers and the Europeans. A structural change occurred in the role of media and the growth of international public discourse. This change involved a lessening of the central power of the state, and a growth in the peripheral power of interest groups and public opinion, both informed and popular. What was created under the umbrella of the Cold War was a new transnational order. It is less clear what ideology animated that order. Progress, as defined by Third World Nationalism is tarnished, market ideology is remarkably devoid of humanism, and many of the values depicted by enlightenment philosophers are rejected by conservative politicians who promote religion, western culture and nationalism as the glue for future generations.

A *Diplomatic Revolution* offers a fascinating argument based on a variety of multi-lingual and multi-archival sources that reflect the national discourse of the nations involved. The addition of oral interviews from personages in North Africa adds to the context and texture of the story. The movement away from a national perspective creates new insights as to how the overall puzzle fits together. This is, however, a big-picture view of the world and subject to some of its problems. As Connelly himself notes, one must do the detail work as well as the "big picture" and that requires a great deal of smaller studies to support this larger view. There is the risk that what is apparent from the global view, and is indeed occurring on the local level, is not seen by the leaders of the large nations. Although I am not clear that a diplomatic revolution actually occurred in the political capitals, the evidence for an ideological shift in the public discourse is clear and strong. How quickly, thoroughly or easily that shift reaches the leaders of the people is the test for democracy in the post-Cold War era.

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