

**The evolution of Maghreb nationalist movements through Swiss diplomatic correspondence (1945-1958) via DODIS- diplomatic documents of Switzerland.**

**L'évolution des mouvements nationalistes Maghrébins à travers les correspondances diplomatiques Suisses (1945-1958) via DODIS- documents diplomatiques Suisses.**

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**Abstract:**

This research paper examines the Swiss diplomatic archives as a crucial foreign source for studying the history of Maghreb nationalist movements. Alongside reports and diplomatic correspondence, it also incorporates other available sources and previous studies to trace the evolution of nationalist liberation movements in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. The study explores colonial policies and strategies designed to suppress these movements, aiming to reveal how Swiss diplomatic correspondences described and interpreted their trajectory. By systematically analyzing reports and correspondence from Swiss diplomatic missions available on the DODIS platform, the study follows the chronological development of these movements, focusing on pivotal historical events that influenced Switzerland's fluctuating stance- sometimes supportive, sometimes oppositional-toward the Maghreb's independence efforts. This study seeks to uncover the reasons behind these shifts in Swiss policy, offering a foundation for further inquiries into Swiss-Maghreb relations during the colonial period. In doing so, the study also highlights the valuable potential of Switzerland's digital diplomatic archives as a resource for future research.

**Keywords:** Maghreb nationalist movements, French colonialism, Swiss diplomacy, colonial policy.

**Résumé :**

Cette étude scrute les archives diplomatiques suisses en tant que ressource primordiale pour l'analyse historique des mouvements nationalistes maghrébins. Outre les rapports et correspondances diplomatiques, elle s'appuie sur d'autres sources disponibles et travaux antérieures pour retracer l'évolution des mouvements de libération nationale en Tunisie, au Maroc et en Algérie. L'étude explore les politiques et stratégies coloniales mises en œuvre pour contrer ces mouvements, afin de mettre en lumière comment les correspondances diplomatiques suisses ont décrit et interprété leur parcours. En analysant systématiquement les documents des missions diplomatiques suisses, disponibles sur la plateforme DODIS, l'étude suit le développement chronologique de ces mouvements, se concentrant sur des événements historiques clés ayant influencé la position changeante de la Suisse -parfois favorable, parfois défavorable -vis-à-vis des luttes pour l'indépendance au Maghreb. Cette recherche vise à élucider les facteurs motivant ces fluctuations de la politique suisse, jetant les bases pour de futures recherches sur les relations helvético-maghrébines durant l'ère coloniale. En outre, elle souligne l'utilité exceptionnelle des archives diplomatiques numériques suisses, véritables mines d'informations pour de futures recherches.

**Mots-clés :** mouvements nationalistes maghrébins, colonialisme français, diplomatie suisse, la politique coloniale.

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**Introduction:**

Given the pivotal role of archival documents in historical inquiry and the importance of exploring the evolution of Maghreb nationalist movements, this paper engages with documents from the Swiss diplomatic archives. These materials, encompassing reports, memoranda, and diplomatic correspondence, chronicle the trajectory of the liberation struggle in the Maghreb from the end of World War II to 1958. This era marked significant advancements in the resistance movements across Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, prompting the colonial authorities to reassess their suppression strategies to stifle the burgeoning pan-Maghreb unity efforts.

A selection of previous studies that engage with various aspects of the current research topic is outlined below: One foundational work is *Studies in Nationalist Movements and Unification Trends in the Maghreb* by Mohamed Ali Dahech. The study dedicates its first three chapters to mapping the trajectories of nationalist movements in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. The seventh chapter examines the organizational frameworks and unification strategies of the Maghreb's liberation struggle. Dahech's research draws extensively from Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian studies, supplemented by key primary sources, including Allal El Fassi's historical writings and issues of *Al-Mujahid* newspaper. However, a significant critique of this study is its failure to exploit archival records.

In contrast, some studies have effectively integrated archival sources, notably the Swiss diplomatic archives, to provide fresh insights into Algerian nationalism. Among these is Mohamed kaddour's *The Activities of the National Liberation Front in Switzerland, 1954–1960*. This study investigates the FLN's efforts in Switzerland, detailing their success in garnering local support and forming logistical networks. It highlights instances of Swiss public solidarity with the Algerian revolution. However, kaddour's analysis could have been strengthened by addressing the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the activism of Algerian students in Switzerland. This dimension could be explored further through French archival materials, particularly documents housed in the *Château de Vincennes* (e.g., Box: 1H1586), which detail the French colonial administration's surveillance of international organizations and the ICRC's contributions to assisting prisoners and refugees. Another significant contribution is Amina Chaabouni's doctoral dissertation, *Switzerland's Positions on the Algerian Liberation Revolution (1954–1962)*. This study leverages 24 documents from the Swiss diplomatic archives' digital repository, as well as a range of local sources, to examine the complex interplay between Swiss neutrality and its reactions to the Algerian revolution. It provides a nuanced account of how the FLN navigated Swiss apprehensions—often influenced by French diplomatic pressure—while fostering solidarity within Swiss civil society. This societal support exerted indirect pressure on the Swiss government, which, despite its neutral stance, expressed solidarity with Algeria's independence movement on multiple occasions.

Given these developments, Swiss diplomats displayed an interest in monitoring these liberation efforts through their reports and communications. Consequently, the central problematic of this study is articulated thus:

In what manner did the Swiss diplomatic missions record and engage with the issues surrounding the Maghreb's struggle and liberation? Moreover, this study raises critical questions about the motivations behind Swiss diplomatic missions' close monitoring of Maghreb nationalist movements. Did their official correspondences and archival documents reflect tacit support for French colonialism, or did they align with the principle of self-determination? How did they describe the evolution of nationalist resistance and the colonial responses to these movements? what degree were these missions at liberty to characterize the unfolding of these events in their correspondences, or were they instead subject to direction and oversight?

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This study employs a multi-faceted methodological approach: the historico-descriptive method provides a general overview of the archival records that document the activities of Maghreb nationalist movements. Moreover, the historico-analytical method is employed to examine the narratives, symbolism, and terminology embedded within these documents, paying close attention to the socio-political contexts that shaped them. Additionally, the comparative historical method is applied to cross-reference information derived from Maghreb sources, French colonial archives, and the Swiss diplomatic archives, ensuring a comprehensive and balanced analysis.

Our investigation draws extensively from the Dodis archives (<https://www.dodis.ch/en>), which reveals the varied interests of Swiss missions in monitoring the Maghreb liberation struggles. We also incorporate French colonial documents, including intelligence reports on FLN activities. These materials, often seized during operations against the National Liberation Army (ALN), were accessed through fieldwork at the Château de Vincennes. Complementing these archival sources is Allal El Fassi's seminal work, *The Maghreb Independence Movements*, which contextualizes the ideological and strategic underpinnings of nationalist resistance across the region.

This research paper is organized as follows:

### **1. The development of Maghreb nationalist movements post-world war II (After 1945):**

The shared colonial history under French dominion shaped the nationalist trajectories of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Post-1830, after establishing direct control over Algeria in 1834, France expanded its influence to Tunisia in 1881 through a protectorate and later to Morocco in 1912, establishing a joint protectorate with Spain. By the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, France had consolidated its control over much of North Africa.

However, this colonial expansion faced fierce resistance from nationalist movements, which developed in response to evolving colonial policies and global events. This section highlights the crucial post-World War II period, marked by the growing momentum of liberation movements in colonized nations. After 1945, the North African liberation struggle gained traction, with Algeria witnessing a shift in political discourse across various movements (Tahar, 2015:141). The integrationist movement, which had previously called for equality and assimilation, began to evolve, marking a break with earlier demands. Meanwhile, the independence movement intensified its preparations for armed struggle. Despite internal crises and conflicts within the Algerian nationalist movement, the liberation revolution that began on November 1, 1954, garnered widespread support, eventually attracting leaders from across the political spectrum<sup>1</sup>.

In Tunisia, the nationalist movement was spearheaded by the Old and New Constitution parties (*Neo-Destour Party*). The New Constitution party transitioned from demanding reforms to seeking full independence. By the early 1950s, armed resistance had spread from rural areas to cities. In examining the Tunisian nationalist movement post-World War II, it becomes evident that the movement was characterized by a dichotomy of strategic approaches. On one hand, there existed a current that advocated for diplomatic engagement and negotiation, prominently represented by Habib Bourguiba. On the other hand, a more radical faction believed in the necessity of armed struggle, which was embodied by the Tunisian Liberation Army. This segment of the nationalist movement gained considerable momentum in 1953, marking a significant escalation in its activities (Dahech, 2004: 51–51).

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<sup>1</sup> A.N.O.M, cartons : ORAN 370, Dossier ; police judiciaire d'Oran : activité du FLN en Oranie, juin 1955, p01.

In the aftermath of World War II, Morocco experienced a pronounced intensification in nationalist activities, notably spearheaded by the Independence party (*Istiqlāl party*), which enjoyed the endorsement of King Mohammed V. This period also witnessed the engagement of the *Shūrā* Party and the Moroccan labor movement, both of which adhered to peaceful political methods (Al-Fassi, 2003: 331).

However, the exile imposed on King Mohammed V in France precipitated a shift among some *Istiqlāl* members towards armed resistance. This culminated in the formation of the Moroccan National Front on April 9, 1951, aimed at confronting the dual colonial mandate of France and Spain. Following the king's exile and escalating colonial oppression, the Moroccan Liberation Army was established, initially executing isolated operations which evolved into more organized collective actions by 1953, there by intertwining armed and political resistance until independence was declared (Dahech, 2004: 139–141).

It presents a considerable challenge to succinctly recount the reorganization of nationalist movements across the three Maghreb countries; however, this overview highlights the significant evolution in political consciousness among the political elites in response to French colonial policies. Their steadfast commitment to various national leaders' demands, especially the pursuit of independence, is evident. Notably, a majority of activists leaned towards armed engagement in the early 1950s, despite a contingent maintaining a commitment to political avenues (Al-Fassi, 2003: 379).

These nations share a plethora of geographical, historical, and civilizational characteristics within North Africa and confronted a common colonial adversary, which encountered similar resistance in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. This prompts a critical inquiry into the extent to which initiatives for coordinated and unified Maghreb resistance were operational. An extrapolation of the trajectory of Maghreb nationalist resistance reveals elements of unified struggle prior to 1945, propelled by the concerted efforts of numerous activists across the three countries. Post-World War II, formal unity was manifest with the office of the Arab Maghreb in 1947, orchestrating collaborative efforts among the Algerian People's Party, the Independence Party, and the Tunisian Constitution Parties, both old and new (Al-Fassi, 2003: 380).

This cooperative endeavor was further advanced with the creation of the Maghreb Liberation Committee in 1948. The escalation of armed activities in 1953 in Tunisia and Morocco, and subsequently the Algerian revolution in 1954, underscored the imperative of unified action across the three countries to achieve full independence for North Africa, as articulated in a 1955 booklet Issued by FLN detailing the history and activities of the Algerian National Liberation Front and Army: «The National Liberation Front views the unification of the struggle in North Africa as necessitating the practice of fraternal cooperation and unity of action with the national organizations in Morocco and Tunisia, both internally and externally»<sup>2</sup>.

France's apprehension regarding the success of this unified revolutionary project prompted it to cede its control and influence in Tunisia and Morocco by granting them self-governance in March 1956. This development fractured the unified Maghreb struggle. Despite a decline in formal manifestations of support and solidarity among the three Maghreb countries, support for the Algerian cause persisted, exemplified by the establishment of logistical rear bases in Tunisia and Morocco, which served as vital lifelines for the Algerian liberation revolution. Nonetheless, inter-country conflicts persisted between Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco even post-independence, underscoring the persistent legacy of colonial policies designed to foment division and dismantlement.

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<sup>2</sup>A.N.O.M, cartons : ORAN 370, op.cit, p04.

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**2. Activities of Maghreb nationalist movements (1945-1955) through Swiss diplomatic missions:**

This section scrutinizes Switzerland's diplomatic engagement concerning the Maghreb nationalist movements and French colonialism, emphasizing the Swiss fluctuation between alliance with France and professed neutrality. The central question is: Did Switzerland maintain this neutrality post-World War II amidst the burgeoning activities of the Maghreb nationalist movements?

Exploiting archival documents accessed through the DODIS website, this section aims to delineate how Swiss diplomatic missions documented the liberation resistance activities in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria.

An extensive examination of the DODIS repository revealed a substantial volume of diplomatic correspondences tracking North African developments. This analysis focuses on documents specifically related to the Maghreb resistance and counter-colonial strategies, predominantly classified under themes of colonization and decolonization, Tunisia (Politics), Algeria (Politics), Morocco (Politics), France (Politics) (<https://www.dodis.ch/en>). A selection of pertinent documents from 1945 to 1955 is presented chronologically below:

**Table 01: A table show examples of archival documents related to Maghreb Nationalist Movements:**

Author	Subject	Date
<b>Arber, Jules</b> (1891–1970)	Political report: Riots in Kabylie (Sétif) and repression by France. Perspectives of Americans and British in North Africa.	June 12, 1945 (Tuesday)
<b>Criblez, Georges</b> (1891–1966)	Political report: The global conflict's impact on French prestige and the strengthening of the Moroccan autonomy movement.	April 10, 1945 (Tuesday)
<b>Arber, Jules</b> (1891–1970)	Confidential report by the Swiss consul in Algiers on "terrorist" events.	November 12, 1954 (Friday)
<b>Feldmann, Markus</b> (1897–1958)	Proposal: Expulsion, based on article 70 of the federal constitution, of BEN YOUSSEF.	5.1.1955 (Wednesday)

The table was prepared by the researcher with the following sources: [dodis.ch/1720-dodis.ch/48014-dodis.ch/9399-dodis.ch/9736](https://www.dodis.ch/1720-dodis.ch/48014-dodis.ch/9399-dodis.ch/9736)

This tabulation elucidates significant documents relating to the monitoring of Maghreb liberation activities by Swiss diplomatic missions. For instance, the 1945 political report attributes the motivations behind the Sétif riots and subsequent Algerian demonstrations to adverse living conditions, deficient education, organizational lapses, and perceived indolence: «...it must be

emphasized – the traditional passivity and indolence of the majority of the native population, who do little to ameliorate their conditions and are scarcely prepared for change... »<sup>3</sup>.

Within the same missive, the diplomatic representative delineated the events of May 8, 1945, as grievous encounters, persistently emphasizing the safeguarding and security of Swiss settlers within the Kabylie region. He stressed that the Swiss settlement, home to over 2,000 settlers, remained untouched by the upheavals in Kabylie. Nonetheless, isolated settler families, particularly numerous Swiss colonists, were engulfed in profound apprehension. He cited excerpts from a communication from Mr. Gustave de Portal, Deputy Director of the Geneva Company for Swiss Colonies in Sétif, based in the village of L'orichia:

«If I am to remain in this world, I must attribute it to a singular divine providence that restrained all firearms directed at me. My wife, daughter, and I were encircled—our village besieged and overrun. We found ourselves under gunpoint for nearly two hours, without any indication as to why the command to fire was aborted. Father Navarro, chaplain to the garrison at Sétif, was shot and fatally bludgeoned with sabres and batons not far from where we stood. We were convinced that the gunshot that wounded him would precipitate a widespread slaughter. Instead, a brief and momentary retreat ensued, followed by a resumption of hostilities when the assailants, alerted by the approach of armored vehicles, retreated into the mountains»<sup>4</sup>.

Reflection on this correspondence invites a series of inquiries. Considering the heinous massacres enacted by colonial powers against the Algerian populace, should Algerians be depicted as instigators of violence, or were these manifestations indicative of the nascent stages of armed resistance, precipitated by French colonial brutalities and settlement policies? Such a framework compels a reevaluation of the genesis of armed resistance. Analysis of archival documents seized by French judicial security forces from the National Liberation Front (FLN) uncovered a pamphlet that traced the origins of armed resistance back to the May 8, 1945, massacres. This militant activity was later institutionalized at the Congress of the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD). According to the archival dossier, this assembly ratified a historical resolution endorsing diverse resistance methods encapsulated in the declaration: «The fight against colonialism in all its forms, by all means». This strategic determination led to the inception of the Special Organization (OS)<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, this correspondence carries significant research investigations, necessitating further exploration to ascertain whether authentic endeavors towards armed resistance were evident during or before the May 8 demonstrations, or if these were merely reactive measures to the egregious violations committed against Algerians.

The second document scrutinizes the evolution of Moroccan resistance spearheaded by the *Istiqlāl* Party, highlighting fears of escalating self-governance movements that could undermine French colonial dominance<sup>6</sup>. As for, the third document the Swiss diplomatic envoy in Algeria expressed apprehensions about the burgeoning Algerian revolution in a 1954 secret report, labeling the activities of the National Liberation Army as terrorist acts and advocating for the protection of Swiss settlers' interests in Algeria<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>Dodis, ch/1720, Emeutes indigènes en Kabylie algérienne, 12.6.1945 (mardi).

<sup>4</sup>Dodis, ch/1720, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup>A.N.O.M, Dossier, Police judiciaire d'Oran: Activité du FLN en Oranie, juin 1955, p6, cartons: ORAN 370.

<sup>6</sup>Dodis, ch/48014, Rapport politique, Le déroulement du conflit mondial a affaibli le prestige de la France et renforcé le mouvement autonomiste marocain. 10.4.1945 (mardi).

<sup>7</sup>Dodis.ch/9399, Rapport du consul de Suisse à Alger au sujet des événements "terroristes". Il met la situation de l'Algérie en parallèle avec celle de la Tunisie et du Maroc. Pour Arber, le problème général algérien et nord-africain est

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Moreover, the archives reveal several documents related to the issue of Swiss settlers being conscripted alongside French forces, a topic that markedly agitated Swiss governmental circles. Prominent among the correspondences is a document detailing the protection protocols for Swiss nationals who deserted the French army (dodis.ch/11517), and another providing an exhaustive overview of Swiss conscription patterns from 1953 through 1959, coupled with recorded instances of French military violence (dodis.ch/ 10698). Throughout this period, Switzerland remained steadfast in its efforts to ameliorate the conditions of its nationals and secure the repatriation of deserters trapped in the crossfire of the French-Algerian hostilities. Thus, the Swiss focus on the solving the army issue during the revolution was marked by a previously unparalleled intensity and determination, signaling a shift from the relatively subdued stance held between 1920 and 1954 (Kaddour, 2020: 250–353).

The fourth document concerning Tunisian affairs discusses the expulsion of activist Saleh Ben Youssef from Swiss territory, illustrating the Swiss Federal Government's opposition to political activities on its soil that might jeopardize external security<sup>8</sup>. Salah Ben Youssef's endeavors for political mobilization in Switzerland were likely an extension of his efforts to bolster the Tunisian nationalist cause both within the national confines and on the international stage. This period of activism germinated in the early 1940s, a quieter phase before Habib Bourguiba's strategic exit from Tunisia. The reinvigoration of the nationalist agenda under Ben Youssef's aegis exacerbated Bourguiba's concerns, as Bourguiba himself favored a method marked by diplomatic engagement and peaceful negotiation with the colonial regime. In contrast, Ben Youssef's advocacy for revolutionary tactics widened the ideological chasm between them. Bourguiba's attempts to reconcile with Ben Youssef included several planned meetings in Switzerland, which never materialized as Ben Youssef chose instead to send a representative (Moussam, 2015-2016:43). This rift was starkly manifested following Bourguiba's endorsement of the 1955 Internal Autonomy Agreement, a treaty that ostensibly marked the genesis of the Youssefist movement. Ben Youssef sharply critiqued this development, articulating that contrary to Bourguiba's optimistic representations, "the near-unanimous ratification of the agreements by the French Parliament did not dilute but rather intensified the colonial stranglehold over our nation."<sup>9</sup>

So, by 1955, Switzerland had ostensibly adopted a position antagonistic to various forms of Maghreb nationalist resistance, likely motivated by the desire to sustain amicable relations with France and protect Swiss interests and nationals. Nonetheless, Swiss interest in Maghreb liberation efforts persisted, as evidenced by a diplomatic communication dated September 26, 1955, titled: «Concerns of France in Monitoring Diplomatic Reports Sent to Switzerland on North African Affairs»<sup>10</sup>. This correspondence illustrates Switzerland's diplomatic efforts to maintain favorable Franco-Swiss relations while discreetly supporting Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan liberation initiatives. The proposal for weekly postal services between Bern and the consulates in Tunisia,

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plus économique et social que politique. La situation des Suisses et de leur protection constituent un autre thème important. 12.11.1954 (vendredi).

<sup>8</sup>Dodis, ch/9736, La décision d'expulsion de Ben Yousef est basée sur la conviction des autorités suisses que, déployant « une grande activité politique » en Suisse, Ben Yousef "abuse de l'hospitalité helvétique" et que "ses menées sont de nature à mettre en danger la sécurité extérieure de la Confédération", 5.1.1955.

<sup>9</sup>Statement by Mr. Salah Ben Youssef, Secretary-General of the Tunisian Liberal Constitutional Party, regarding the ratification of the Tunisian-French agreements, Document: 118, dated July 18, 1955, Box: 61/Folder: 05, cited in Moussam Abdelhafid, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup>Dodis, ch/11515, Craintes du Chef de la Division des Affaires politiques du Département politique, A. Zehnder, que les rapports politiques des postes diplomatiques d'Afrique du Nord soient censurés par la France, 26.9.1955 (lundi), Refer to Appendix 01.

Algeria, and Morocco—particularly during a period marked by escalating Maghreb resistance and efforts to unify combat fronts—underscores Switzerland's covert commitment to supporting Maghreb liberation efforts, as discussed earlier in this research paper.

### **3 - The evolution of Swiss diplomatic interest in Maghreb nationalist movements (1956-1958<sup>11</sup>):**

This analysis delves into the intensification of Swiss diplomatic in follow-up to the Maghreb nationalist movements from 1956 to 1958. During this period, leaders across Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco actively sought to internationalize their cause for national liberation. Swiss diplomacy, while officially neutral, displayed a nuanced engagement that varied significantly across different instances and issues.

In the specific contexts of Tunisia and Morocco, Swiss diplomatic correspondences from May 1956 predominantly revolved around the issue of recognizing the independence of these nations. Despite their nominal independence, which did not fully extricate them from French colonial influence, Swiss consular communications proposed recognizing Tunisian and Moroccan sovereignty; this initiative aimed to align Swiss foreign policy with international trends, particularly following the recognition of these states by major world powers, thereby safeguarding Swiss interests given the substantial Swiss expatriate communities in these regions. The Swiss diplomatic envoy emphasized this demographic aspect, noting: «The number of Swiss in North Africa is considerably higher than that of nationals from these countries (2,512 Swiss registered in Morocco, including 384 dual-nationals; 470 Swiss registered in Tunisia, including 154 dual-nationals) »<sup>12</sup>.

Subsequently, Switzerland formally acknowledged the sovereignty of Morocco and Tunisia based on a resolution by the Swiss Federal Council. Nevertheless, Swiss diplomatic vigilance persisted, driven by the incomplete nature of Tunisian and Moroccan independence. Notably, this period saw an intensification of the Algerian liberation movement, especially following its strategic reorganization post-Soummam Conference in August, 20th 1956, which broadened its support both domestically and internationally.

Solidarity among the Maghreb countries continued to strengthen. The Tunisian response, led by the Youssefist movement, outright rejected the autonomy agreement, critiquing it as a reinforcement of colonial hegemony and a betrayal of Algerian solidarity<sup>13</sup>. Concurrently, the Moroccan monarchy asserted that Morocco's independence remained incomplete as long as Algeria suffered under colonial subjugation. This commitment to the Algerian cause was evidenced through numerous actions, a pivotal example being the detailed surveillance reports and dossiers within the French archives. These documents meticulously tracked the movements and placements of the National Liberation Army across Tunisia's eastern rear bases and Morocco's western frontiers<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> During this timeframe, the DODIS documentation becomes particularly dense with The Algerian issue post-1958, which necessitates a delimitation of the scope of this study to ensure a focused and thorough analysis. Hence, the review concludes in 1958, as the abundance of documents post this year presents challenges for comprehensive coverage within a single academic paper.

<sup>12</sup> Dodis.ch/11024, Documents diplomatiques suisses: Proposition du Département politique au Conseil fédéral de reconnaître l'indépendance et la souveraineté du Maroc et de la Tunisie ainsi que le droit de ces pays à une diplomatie et à une armée, 14.5.1956 (lundi).

<sup>13</sup> Statement by Mr. Šāliḥ bin Youssef, Secretary-General of the Tunisian Neo-Destour Party, regarding the ratification of the Tunisian-French agreements (Ibid).

<sup>14</sup> (SHD), cartons 3103 (Dossier 2), Organisation de l'armée de libération nationale et du front de libération nationale au Maroc (implantation, activités, centres d'instruction, armement, photographies) (1957-1960).



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Swiss diplomacy maintained a keen interest in the evolving Maghrebian liberation movements, as illustrated by a key report titled "*Le drame de l'Afrique du Nord*"<sup>15</sup> (The Drama of North Africa), which offered a critical assessment of French pacification policies in the region. The report meticulously detailed the infamous kidnapping of five members of the FLN (National Liberation Front) and exposed France's attempts to undermine the growing solidarity among Maghreb nationalist movements. Additionally, the Swiss envoy strongly criticized French strategies in Algeria, referring to them as "manipulative tactics". This characterization emerged from the colonial administration's request for intervention from the Moroccan King and the Tunisian President, aiming to influence the National Liberation Front as part of a broader strategy to resolve the Algerian conflict. This diplomatic overture was prominently featured during the Tunis Conference on October 23, 1956, convened to deliberate on the Algerian question. However, the conference's proceedings were dramatically disrupted by the hijacking of an aircraft carrying Algerian leaders—a pivotal event that led the conference delegates to declare their unwavering solidarity with the Algerian populace<sup>16</sup>.

The report underscored Swiss diplomatic disapproval of French colonial strategies, with the Swiss envoy explicitly stating, «I have little faith in the pacification policies implemented by the French government in Algeria.»<sup>17</sup> The use of varied nomenclature by the author to describe the National Liberation Front—from "uprising leaders" to "National Liberation Army" members, occasionally referred to as «Fellaga or rebels»<sup>18</sup>.

This lexical variability reflects a perceptible shift in the Swiss envoy's approach to the broader Maghrebian issue, following his critique of the colonial policies in the three Maghreb countries. The differences in the descriptors used for FLN militants underscore a significant development in the Swiss articulation of the Algerian liberation narrative. This progression likely mirrors the influence of both international and Swiss public opinion, which increasingly aligned with the FLN as the Algerian revolution garnered global support. Public solidarity with the Algerian cause was manifested in tangible actions within Switzerland, including the printing and circulation of FLN pamphlets and key documents. Of particular note was the reproduction of the Soummam Conference Charter, which was clandestinely printed at a small press in Yverdon, near Lausanne (Kaddour, 2019: 60–61). Notably, Swiss press activity played a critical role in galvanizing public solidarity with the Algerian cause. Swiss media outlets advocating for the Algerian revolution emphasized that the events unfolding in Algeria constituted a war, countering French claims that they were merely operations to restore order. This shift in framing contributed significantly to fostering public alignment with the FLN's cause (Sha 'būnī, 2022, p. 136).

Amid escalating global pressure concerning the Algerian, and by extension, the broader Maghreb issue, coupled with the harshness of French colonial policies, Swiss diplomacy adopted increasingly humanitarian stances. This was exemplified by the Swiss response to the French attack on the Tunisian village of Sakiet Sidi Yousef on February 8, 1958, which had become a crucial support point for the Algerian revolution. The Swiss envoy in Tunisia directly condemned the French assault targeting civilians, stating: «... In Algeria, they have reached the point of deliberately

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<sup>15</sup>Dodis.ch/12594, Rapport critique envers la politique de "pacification" de la France en Afrique du Nord, 25.10.1956 (jeudi).

<sup>16</sup>Al-'Amal Newspaper: The Tunisian-Moroccan Communiqué, Issue 311, October 24, 1956.

<sup>17</sup>Dodis, Ch/12594, op.cit, P 01.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid,p2-3.

and coldly contemplating an attack on a village in foreign territory, where the civilian population would inevitably be the primary target»<sup>19</sup>.

These documents demonstrate a progressive enhancement in the portrayal by Swiss diplomatic observers of the general situation in the Maghreb, possibly influencing the Swiss government to intermittently adopt a favorable stance towards the Algerian cause. This is substantiated by archival documents from the French Army Historical Service at Château de Vincennes in Paris, revealing significant Swiss support for the Algerian national cause. A file containing intelligence documents detailing the diplomatic activities of the National Liberation Front (FLN) with major international organizations sheds light on this support. These records reveal a series of meetings between the Algerian Red Crescent and the International Red Cross, aimed at expressing solidarity with Algerians and resolving issues related to prisoners. Notably, the documents also highlight Switzerland's engagement with both Tunisia and Morocco, underscoring the continuity of the unified Maghreb struggle led by the FLN. Switzerland further provided educational opportunities for Algerian students at Swiss universities and offered material assistance to the National Liberation Army (ALN). A particularly telling example is the 1959 shipment of arms, which was clandestinely delivered under the guise of food aid. According to the archival records, these shipments were officially declared as food supplies for Algerian refugees<sup>20</sup>.

Swiss cooperation with the Algerian cause is further corroborated by prior studies that examine Switzerland's covert support for the FLN, particularly in financial transfers. The National Liberation Front (FLN) exploited Swiss federal banking laws, which ensured the confidentiality of financial transactions, to channel substantial funds in support of the Algerian independence movement. Archival records disclose that in 1958, approximately 11 billion francs were funneled to the FLN via prominent Swiss banks, including: *Volksbank Crédit Suisse, L' Union du Banques Suisse, Banque de Commerce de Genève, Handels Bank du Zurich* (Kaddour, 2019: 60–61).

This illustrates Switzerland's dual approach: while offering humanitarian aid publicly, it covertly supported the Algerian independence movement, balancing its external relations with France. The documents referenced here represent only a selection of the extensive diplomatic records related to Maghreb issues in general and the Algerian case in particular. Given the vast volume of information available—especially regarding post-1957 negotiations between Algeria and France—it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore all related documents. However, it is clear that Swiss diplomatic attitudes towards the Maghreb struggle, especially after 1956, evolved towards a more supportive stance. Switzerland's recognition of Tunisian and Moroccan independence, its material aid to the Algerian National Liberation Army, and its involvement in facilitating negotiations between the FLN and France on Swiss soil underscore the strategic role it played. Simultaneously, Switzerland maintained neutrality in specific instances to safeguard the interests of its citizens residing in North Africa and to protect its external security.

The archival research conducted through late 1958 elucidates pivotal transformations in the Maghreb liberation movements as perceived by Swiss observers. The diplomatic correspondences and missions during this year reveal a noticeable shift in Switzerland's stance, particularly in relation to humanitarian aid. The archival research identified a report from the Swiss Federal Council that provided statistical data on financial aid extended to Algerians. Of particular importance in this report is the 250,000 Swiss francs in financial assistance provided in early 1958

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<sup>19</sup>Dodis, ch/12044, Rapport sur la situation franco-tunisienne deux semaines après le bombardement du village tunisien de Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef par l'aviation française, 22.2.1958 (samedi).

<sup>20</sup> (SHD), 1H1586, D:07, Fiches de renseignements sur les grands organismes internationaux, croissant-rouge international : aide aux prisonniers et réfugiés algériens, Fiche N: B.5(1-2), 1958, Fonds Algérie.

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to Algerian refugees arriving between 1956 and 1957, as well as an additional 100,000 Swiss francs allocated to Algerian refugees residing in Morocco<sup>21</sup>.

The visibility of Swiss support for the Algerian cause raises questions about its alignment with French colonial policy. Despite the colonial powers' vigilance, the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) intensified its diplomatic efforts in 1958, coinciding with developments in its leadership structures and the formation of the Algerian Provisional Government. Following the Tangier Conference-which united the leading Maghreb liberation movements: the *Istiqlāl* Party, the *Neo-Destour* Party, and the Algerian National Liberation Front- encouraged by the Moroccan and Tunisian delegations, a provisional Algerian government was proclaimed on September 19, 1958. This government was simultaneously recognized in Cairo, Tunis, and Morocco and was promptly recognized by several states, including Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, and Yemen(Saidouni, 2014: 344).

In a countermove, French diplomacy urged Switzerland to withhold recognition of the Algerian Provisional Government. French Consul Dennery-Etienne Roland (1903–1979) met with Swiss Federal Councillor Petitpierre-Max (1899–1994), advocating against recognition and condemning the political activities of Algerian nationalists in Switzerland, particularly those engaged in the media, such as Ferhat Abbas, who hosted many influential figures at his Montreux residence. Dennery pressed for an immediate cessation of FLN political activities. In response, Councillor Petitpierre assured that Swiss security had monitored all Algerian activities within Switzerland and found no evidence of operations linked to the FLN or the Provisional Government, asserting that surveillance of political activities would be intensified<sup>22</sup>.

These developments underscore the colonial authorities' attempts to influence Switzerland's position, with France clearly requesting that Switzerland refrain from supporting the Algerian cause. However, as the Swiss councilor indicated, there was no evidence of Algerian political activity within Switzerland, which possibly reflects Switzerland's discreet yet sustained support for the Algerian liberation cause. This hypothesis is reinforced by a report documenting a conversation between Ferhat Abbas and the Swiss consul in Cairo, during which Abbas requested visas for himself and three members of the Provisional Government to hold secret talks with the French delegation. To ensure secrecy, Abbas even proposed the use of false identities, as reflected in an excerpt from the meeting minutes: «Ferhat Abbas went so far as to suggest that, to strengthen confidentiality, they could present passports under assumed identities, with the agreement of Swiss authorities...»<sup>23</sup>. The choice of Switzerland by Ferhat Abbas was no coincidence. He was confident in Switzerland's positive stance and the security it could provide for the Algerian diplomatic delegation, as well as the amicable relationship between France and Switzerland. Abbas thus set the stage for successful negotiations between the Algerian and French parties, which would later evolve. This decision reflects Ferhat Abbas's astute political savvy, which marked his extensive career in the struggle for liberation.

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<sup>21</sup>Dodis, ch/11310, Procès-verbal du Conseil fédéral (PVCF), Approbation des contributions à la disposition de la division de police pour couvrir des frais d'entretien des réfugiés accueillis en Suisse à titre de "cas difficile", à l'aide suisse à l'étranger en faveur des réfugiés algériens au Maroc et à la section suisse du service social international. 10.1.1958 (vendredi).

<sup>22</sup>Dodis, ch/15037, Compte rendu; Entretien avec l'Ambassadeur de France, M. Dennery. Demande du gouvernement français que le gouvernement suisse ne reconnaisse pas le GPRA, ainsi reproches quant aux activités politiques de ressortissants algériens en Suisse. 24.9.1958 (mercredi).

<sup>23</sup>Dodis, ch/15145, Télégramme très confidentiel; F. Abbas désigne la Suisse comme point de rencontre faisant suite à la proposition du Général de Gaulle d'entamer les pourparlers, 1.4.1959 (mercredi).

**Conclusion:**

This study yields several significant findings and recommendations:

The importance of the Maghreb nationalist movements prompted Swiss diplomatic missions across Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco to closely monitor the evolving resistance. Swiss diplomacy maintained the confidentiality of its reports and correspondence to preserve its relationship with France and protect the interests of Swiss settlers in the region.

The systematic tracing and analysis of these documents in accordance with the chronological development of the Maghrebian nationalist movements reveals a discernible shift in Switzerland's stance toward the activities of these movements across the region. Despite its avowed neutrality, Switzerland initially employed descriptors in its diplomatic correspondences that echoed the language of colonial administration. Over time, this position evolved into a more critical stance against colonial policies, a change largely attributable to the pressures of global public opinion and the active engagement of Swiss civil society. This societal influence ultimately prompted the Swiss government to break its customary silence and extend its solidarity to the Maghrebian liberation causes on numerous occasions.

The reliance on this archival corpus is crucial for understanding the dynamics of the Maghrebian nationalist movements from an unbiased standpoint. Switzerland's role as an observer, which meticulously documented numerous events during the struggle for freedom, provides a unique and invaluable perspective. This archival foundation is further enriched by an array of diverse sources from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, France, and beyond, enabling a holistic study of these historical events. By applying a rigorous and objective historical methodology, striving to reconstruct the historical events with scientific accuracy and credibility.

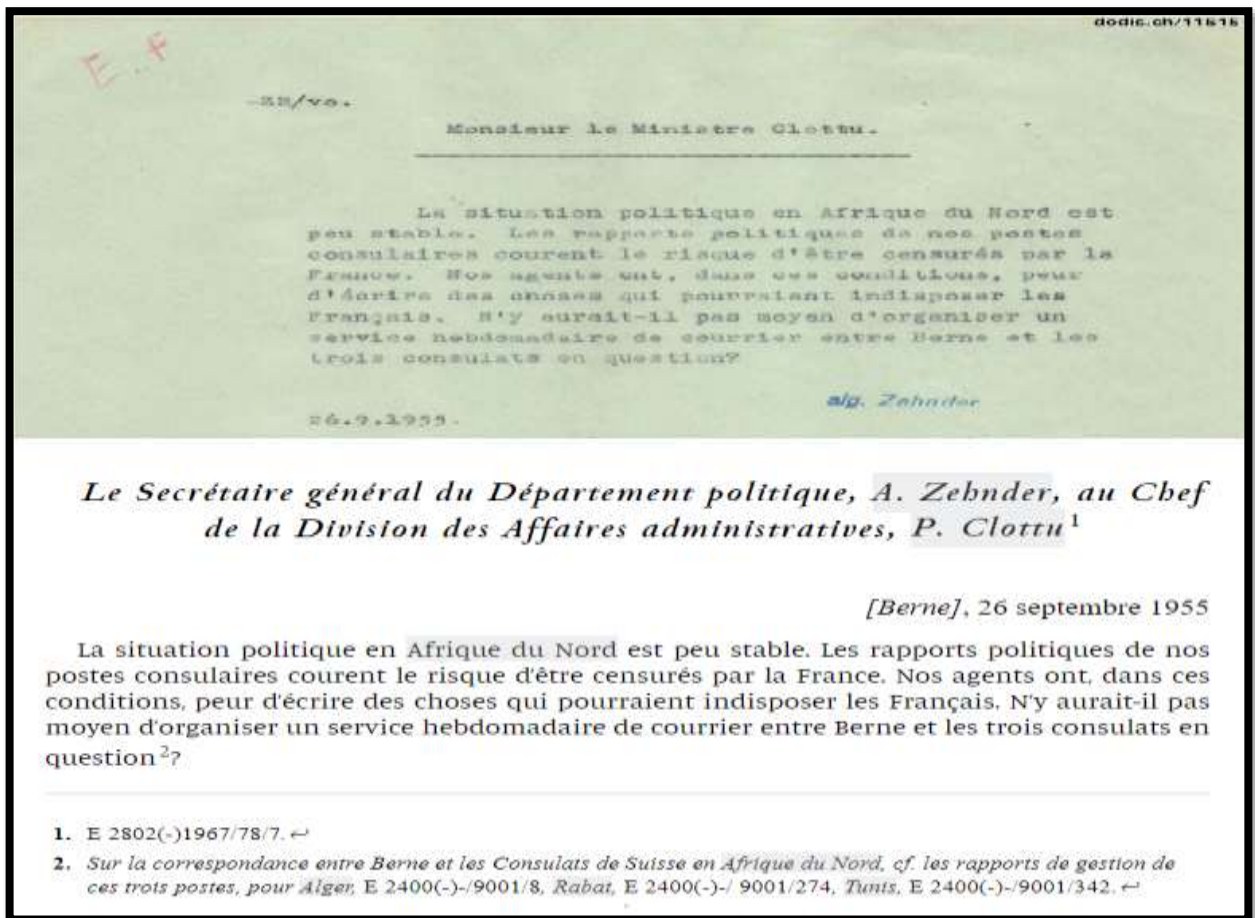
The DODIS database presents invaluable resources for scholars aiming to study the colonial history of the Maghreb. The wealth of archival information invites thorough examination and cross-referencing with local and French sources, allowing researchers to reconstruct historical facts and situate them in contemporary contexts.

It is essential to foster linguistic proficiency among students and researchers, particularly in English, French, and German, to effectively engage with historical research. Accessing the rich archival material in the DODIS database, which contains vital information on international relations, will enable deeper inquiry into Switzerland's diplomatic history, especially regarding its foreign policy initiatives in relation to Maghreb nationalist movements.

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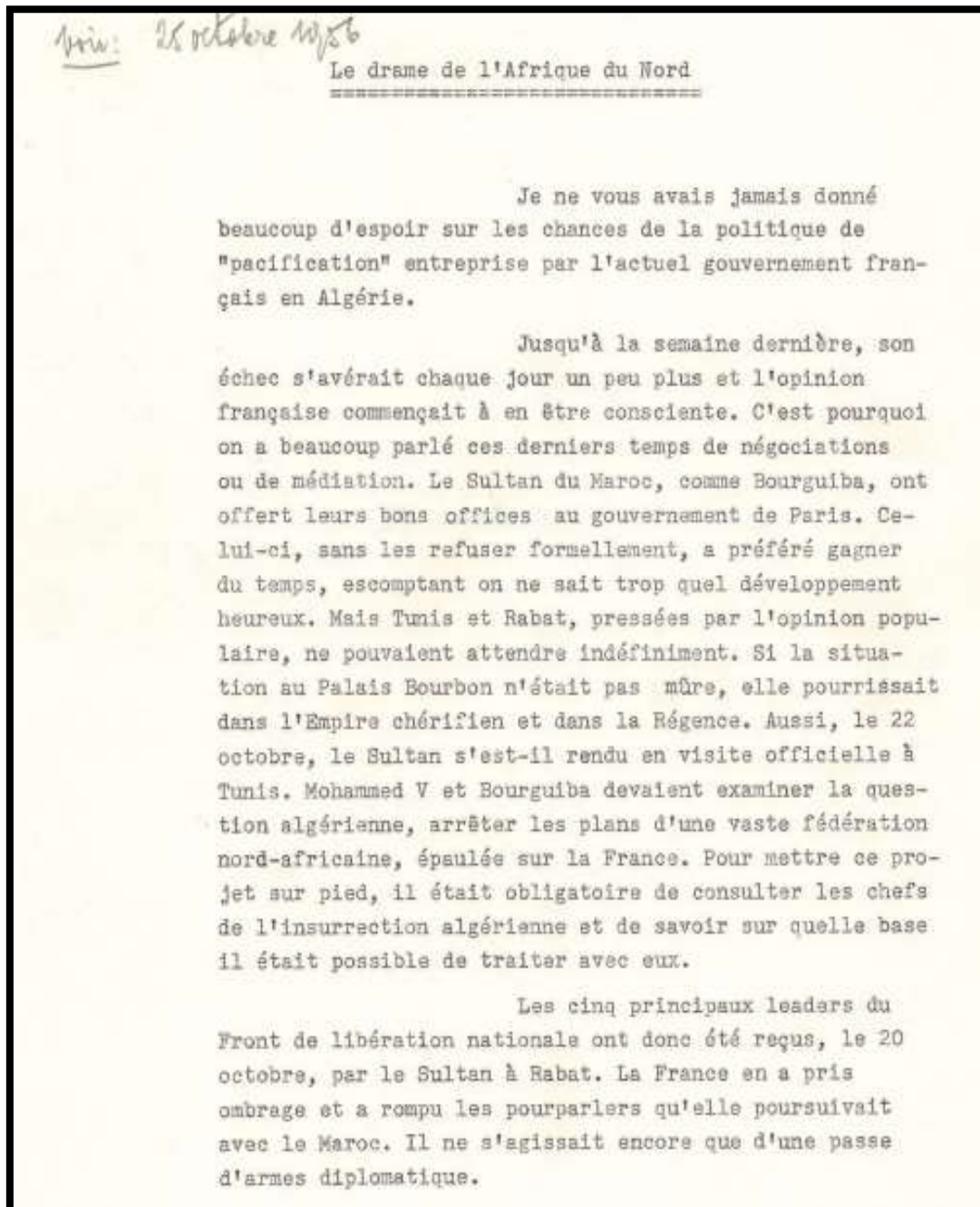
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**Appendix 01:** Notice concerning the fears of the Head of the Political Affairs Division of the Political Department, A. Zehnder; those political reports from diplomatic posts in North Africa are being censored by France.



**Source:**(Dodis),ch/11515, Craintes du Chef de la Division des Affaires politiques du Département politique, A. Zehnder, que les rapports politiques des postes diplomatiques d'Afrique du Nord soient censurés par la France, 26.9.1955 (lundi).

## Appendix 02: Extract from a report critical of France's "pacification" policy in North Africa.



**Source:**(Dodis), ch/12594, Rapport critique envers la politique de "pacification" de la France en Afrique du Nord, 25.10.1956 (jeudi);p1.

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3. (Dodis):Rapport Emeutes indigènes en Kabylie algérienne,12.6.1945(mardi);dodis.ch/1720.
4. (Dodis):Rapport du consul de Suisse à Alger au sujet des événements "terroristes". Il met la situation de l'Algérie en parallèle avec celle de la Tunisie et du Maroc. Pour Arber, le problème général algérien et nord-africain est plus économique et social que politique. La situation des Suisses et de leur protection constituent un autre thème important.12.11.1954 (vendredi); dodis.ch/9399.
5. (Dodis):La décision d'expulsion de Ben Yousef est basée sur la conviction des autorités suisses que, déployant « une grande activité politique » en Suisse, Ben Yousef "abuse de l'hospitalité helvétique" et que "ses menées sont de nature à mettre en danger la sécurité extérieure de la Confédération",5.1.1955 (mercredi) ; dodis.ch/9736
6. (Dodis):Notice ; Craintes du Chef de la Division des Affaires politiques du Département politique, A. Zehnder, que les rapports politiques des postes diplomatiques d'Afrique du Nord soient censurés par la France, 26.9.1955 (lundi); dodis.ch/11515.
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