AGENDA ITEM 71

Question of Algeria (A/4418 and Add. 1) (continued)

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. FERKIN (Libya) said that in a year which was so decisive for African independence, it was sad that the General Assembly should once again be discussing the tragic question of Algeria, which was a typical example of colonialism in Africa. In addition to the heavy toll of military casualties it was exacting, the murderous war of reconquest now being waged by France against the Algerian people was bringing indescribable sufferings to the civilian population. More than 2 million Algerians—almost one-fifth of the country's total population—had been herded into concentration camps of various kinds, where they died a lingering death. The vile indignities inflicted on the Algerians, the scandalous methods of interrogation practised and the tortures used to extract confessions from prisoners, had shocked the whole world, and had aroused great indignation in France itself.

2. Hundreds of thousands of Algerians had escaped to neighbouring countries, leaving their possessions behind them; but the Algerian people, having reached the limits of its patience, had now taken its fate into its own hands and was determined to overcome all obstacles standing in the way of its national aspirations. Nothing could stop its triumphant march towards dignity and freedom. The just struggle of the Algerian people to defend its legitimate rights and the principle of self-determination enshrined in the United Nations Charter had met with growing sympathy throughout the world, and even in France. Moreover, the Algerian war was a grave threat to peace and security not only in North Africa but in the entire African continent and the rest of the world, and was an obstacle to the peaceful and constructive development of neighbouring countries, including Libya.

3. For all those reasons, the Algerian war had for the past six years been a matter of special concern to the United Nations. The discussion at the current session was of particular urgency, for there was a danger that the conflict might spread. Moreover, the competence and the duty of the United Nations to seek a peaceful solution could no longer be in doubt, for as Mr. Gabriel Marcel, a distinguished member of the Institut de France, had pointed out in Le Monde of 27 September 1960, the contention that the Algerian question was a French domestic matter was quite irreconcilable with France's recognition of the Algerian people's right of self-determination. The French delegation's refusal to participate in the discussion was therefore most regrettable. If they had attended the discussion, the French representatives might have been able to convince their Government of the very real concern felt by the Members of the United Nations over the Algerian tragedy; and they might also have been able to give the Committee valuable assistance in clarifying France's intentions.

4. At the fourteenth session of the General Assembly, Libya had made clear its view that the Algerian revolt was the outcome of the Algerian people’s irrevocable decision, and that the United Nations should intervene resolutely to help France and Algeria to reach a peaceful and negotiated solution, under its auspices, which would permit the conflict to be brought to an end. Such a solution would have been in the interests of peace as well as of France itself, and would have safeguarded the principles of the United Nations Charter. Libya had felt that there was the more reason for decisive action in that favourable conditions had been created by the agreement of both parties that the basis for a peaceful and negotiated settlement should be the right of self-determination. That agreement gave the United Nations the opportunity and the responsibility to use its authority to ensure that the Algerians were permitted to express in entire freedom their true wishes for their future. Unfortunately, the obstinacy and the intrigues of those who maintained that any form of United Nations intervention would be untimely, and might even temper France in its efforts to find a peaceful solution, had succeeded in influencing many well-intentioned but ill-informed delegations, so that at the fourteenth session no decision had been taken on the Algerian question. That had been a triumph for the diplomacy of France, which desired only to gain time, in the hope of suppressing the nationalist rebellion and breaking the spirit of the Algerian people by a combination of force and deceit. But while the President of the French Republic, General de Gaulle, had thus been given the benefit of the doubt, and the peoples of the world had expectantly awaited the promised negotiations between France and the Provisional Government of Algeria on the means of guaranteeing the application of the principle of self-determination, the war had in fact been continued, and even intensified. Then, just when it had seemed that negotiations were about to take place, the French Government's communiqué of 29 June 1960 following the Meknes talks had dispelled all hope, and had revealed the true nature of France's position. France had thereby assumed full responsibility for refusing to engage in the serious discussions which alone could have put an end to the conflict. The events of 1960 had thus clearly shown
the futility and the dangers of the ostensibly prudent counsels of those who had advocated a United Nations policy of non-intervention.

5. The encouragement which had been felt when President de Gaulle, on 16 September 1959, had finally recognized the right of the Algerian people to self-determination, would be recalled. The evaporation of the "French Algeria" myth had seemed to herald a bright future for the Algerian people. But the picture had its darker side, for France's recognition of the principle of self-determination had been hedged about with a number of restrictions, reservations and conditions which seriously distorted its meaning. As was known, President de Gaulle had later pleaded himself to call upon the Algerians to make their choice and upon the French people to ratify that choice. It was hard to understand the value of a right of self-determination which was to be subject to the approval of all the French. Libya had pointed out at the time that if the principle of self-determination was to retain any meaning, it could only imply the complete freedom of the Algerians to make their final choice.

6. When President de Gaulle, commenting on the three possible alternatives for Algeria of independence, Francization or autonomy, had suggested that the choice of independence would be disastrous, Libya had stressed that a free referendum held under United Nations auspices was essential not only to ensure the free choice of the Algerians but to protect France against its own temptations and prejudices. President de Gaulle had further stated that the choice would be put to the Algerians as individuals, and that Algerians who so wished would be able to remain French citizens. But in any democratic referendum, the decision must be that of the majority of the people consulted, regarded as a whole; otherwise, utter confusion would result. If the French Government had not in mind the destinies of those Algerians who wished to remain French, it need only be pointed out that the Algerian Provisional Government had repeatedly undertaken to respect the legitimate interests and rights of foreign minorities residing in Algeria.

In a statement made on 17 February 1960, Mr. Ferhat Abbas, the head of the Provisional Government, had said that in the new Algerian Republic there would be room for everyone, and there would be no racial barriers or religious hatred. If, however, the French Government's idea was to partition the country and lay down a dividing line between an independent Algeria and a French Algeria, then Libya felt it its duty to point out that such a plan would not only further complicate an already dangerous situation but might seriously jeopardize world peace and security. Libya would regard it as a violation of the integrity of Algeria in particular, and of the Maghrib in general, with all the grave consequences that that would entail. The harmful effects of partition could be seen in Germany, Palestine, Korea and South-East Asia, to mention only a few instances. And the same warning applied to the French Government's plans regarding the Algerian Sahara, which was an integral part of Algeria.

7. In his statement of 16 September 1959, President de Gaulle had referred to Algeria's lack of historical and ethnic unity. Contrary to his remarks, however, an Algerian State had existed in the past, and even at the height of the colonial period, a deliberate policy of division had failed to shake the fundamental sociological unity of the Algerian people. The persistence and success of the Algerian revolution demonstrated the truth of that fact.

8. President de Gaulle had said that the date for the proposed referendum would be decided in due time, and would be not later than four years after the restoration of peace. That was an extremely long waiting period; moreover, the peace to which President de Gaulle had referred was really conceived of in terms of war.

9. The misgivings aroused by the many qualifications which had accompanied France's recognition of the principle of self-determination had unfortunately been justified by the events which had taken place, both in France and in Algeria, since President de Gaulle's statement of 16 September 1959. Both by their actions and by their statements, the French authorities had robbed the principle of self-determination of all democratic content, thereby still further reducing it to absurdity. In the course of the year, the French military authorities had sunk deeper and deeper into their war psychosis, which had been rendered even more acute by their interpretation of the declaration of September 1959 as a challenge to make a last supreme effort to stamp out the Algerian rebellion. Only one week after President de Gaulle's statement, General Challe, at the time Commander of the French armed forces in Algeria, had said that the struggle would continue until complete pacification had been achieved. The year 1960 had seen a further intensification of the war, which had been rendered even more inhumane by the execution of Algerian prisoners of war in defiance of the Geneva Conventions, of which France was a signatory.

10. The French Prime Minister himself had plainly stated his view that the choice of independence by the Algerians should not only be prevented but would actually be a negation of law. In a speech to the National Assembly late in 1959, the Prime Minister, after declaring that the attempt at pacification would continue and that the 1960 budget would provide for the maintenance of such forces in Algeria in their present numbers, had said that it was France's mission to remain in Algeria. In a statement made on 30 October 1959, Mr. Delouvrier, the French Delegate General in Algeria, had suggested that Algeria's choice of union with France was a foregone conclusion, and that only the administrative details needed to be settled. In evidence given by a defendant at the "barricades trial" currently being held in Paris, the same Delegate General had been reported to have said in conversation with him that self-determination was mainly a device for winning France votes in the United Nations. Mr. Morin, the new Delegate General, had recently reaffirmed after a brief visit to Algeria that France's main task was to preserve its ties with Algeria. That, then, was France's "new look" in Algeria.

11. Since the early months of 1956, the National Liberation Front (FLN) had made persistent efforts to arrive at a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Algeria. On two occasions in that year, representatives of the FLN had met with representatives of the then French Government with a view to arranging a conference to explore the possibilities of a peaceful settlement. On the second of those occasions, the French envoy had been informed of the FLN's intention to send a delegation to a meeting to be held at
Tunis between the King of Morocco and the President of Tunis. Unfortunately, the aircraft bearing the emissaries of the FLN had been intercepted by the French military authorities in Algiers and diverted from its course. That act of piracy could only be interpreted as evidence of the French Government's refusal to enter into serious negotiations for the restoration of peace in Algeria.

12. In 1957, contacts had taken place between the FLN and the French Government's envoy in Tunis with a view to a resumption of "pourparlers". However, the French envoy had not returned to Tunis as arranged, and a Tunisian lawyer bearing a message for the Algerian leaders held prisoner in Paris, and travelling on the same aircraft as the French envoy, had been arrested on arrival in Paris and thrown into prison. A few months after that incident, the King of Morocco and the President of Tunis had offered their good offices to both parties to facilitate the initiation of negotiations. That offer had been accepted by the FLN, but categorically rejected by the French Government.

13. In 1958, new hopes for a peaceful settlement had been awakened by General de Gaulle's advent to power and the establishment of the Algerian Provisional Government. Those hopes had seemed to be justified by the fact that General de Gaulle had himself led a provisional government in exile which had successfully contributed to France's liberation from the Germans and the restoration of its sovereign independence. Moreover, Algerians had played a part in the Allied victory in the Second World War; many of those who were now in the army of national liberation had distinguished themselves in the struggle to free France and Europe from the grip of the Nazi invaders. They had been sustained by the hope that their own country would also one day enjoy the benefits of democracy, freedom and dignity.

14. The establishment of the Algerian Provisional Government had been greeted throughout the world as a positive step towards a peaceful settlement of the Algerian war. Libya had recognized the new Government immediately, on the grounds that it represented the genuine will of the Algerian people for self-determination and exercised de facto control over vast areas of Algerian territory where it manifested all the attributes of national sovereignty. Libya regarded the Provisional Government as the Algerian people's legitimate spokesman, with which France could enter into negotiations for a settlement such as would serve the interests of both parties and restore peace to North Africa. Both Moslem and French Algerians acknowledged that no solution could be reached without the FLN, which represented a cross-section of very different trends in Algerian opinion, all of which rejected any facile identification of Mr. Ferhat Abbas, the head of the Algerian Provisional Government, with communism.

15. Shortly after its formation, the Algerian Provisional Government had declared itself ready to negotiate with the representatives of the French Government. General de Gaulle had responded on 23 October 1958 by offering the rebels the "peace of the brave", which was tantamount to demanding their surrender. The Algerian Provisional Government, for its part, had reiterated its readiness to negotiate, not, however, on the basis of unconditional surrender, but with a view to working out an effective solution of the whole Algerian problem. On the French Government's refusal to negotiate, the Provisional Government had appealed to the United Nations to make a further effort to persuade France to adopt the course of reason. That further effort, made at the Assembly's thirteenth session, had failed to produce any results, France having redoubled its efforts to "pacify" Algeria militarily. Yet on 12 June 1959 the Provisional Government had made another appeal for negotiations, again to no avail.

16. On 28 September 1959, the Provisional Government had officially taken note of President de Gaulle's recognition of Algeria's right to self-determination, and had announced its readiness to enter into "pourparlers" with the French Government regarding the conditions and guarantees for the implementation of that right, i.e., regarding the guarantees for a consultation of the Algerian people in conditions of absolute freedom, and the arrangements for a cease-fire. However, the hopeful prospects held out by President de Gaulle's initiative were to be frustrated by the intransigence of the French Government. Not until 10 November 1959 had any positive reaction been forthcoming from the French Government. The Provisional Government had responded ten days later by appointing a five-member delegation to initiate talks with the French Government on the guarantees for the proper implementation of the right of self-determination in Algeria within the context of the discussions on a cease-fire. The members appointed to that delegation had been fully representative: not only were they leaders of the rebellion, but they were authorized spokesmen for the Provisional Government outside Algeria. The fact that they had at the time been in prison in France did not detract from their competence, and would have made it more convenient for the French Government to open talks without delay. In the circumstances, the French Government's refusal to enter into discussions with them on the ground that they were "hors de combat" had been highly disappointing. Another opportunity had been lost to end the Algerian war; and it had been lost even though both sides recognized the applicability of the principle of self-determination. The Provisional Government, it should be noted, had repeatedly said that it did not intend to negotiate the future political status of Algeria, that being a matter which could be settled only by the Algerian people.

17. The Provisional Government had been forced to insist on guarantees that any consultation of the Algerian people would be held in conditions of complete freedom because President de Gaulle had attached a number of qualifications to his recognition of the principle of self-determination; moreover, the question had been further complicated by the statements of French officials who would have been responsible for implementing that principle. The French administration and the powerful interests based in Algeria had resisted any change in the colonial structure. Moreover, the French administrative machinery had on previous occasions consistently been guilty of encouraging or condoning electoral irregularities and falsifications. The presence in Algeria of French forces numbering nearly a million could hardly contribute to an atmosphere of freedom of expression. The French army in Algeria had been politically indoctrinated, and had played a decisive role in the 1958 referendum on the new French Constitution; seeing that Algerians had been led to
the polls under threat, it was no wonder that the referendum had resulted in an overwhelming vote in favour of the new Constitution. Moreover, France would have shown greater foresight if it had given the Algerians the opportunity in the 1958 referendum to decide their political future, as the other French territories in Africa had been able to do.

18. The guarantees for a proper consultation of the Algerian people would have to be agreed upon between the parties; any decision taken unilaterally by the French Government would be unacceptable. Unfortunately, the French Government had clearly demonstrated that it intended the referendum on self-determination to be organized by the French army. But no people could express its will in conditions of genuine freedom and democracy under a régime of military terror. Even the Moslem deputies in the French Parliament, who had been elected under the French military occupation in Algeria, had become convinced of the need for proper guarantees of the exercise of self-determination. With the country in the throes of a merciless war waged by a politically indoctrinated army, any free consultation of the Algerian people was impossible.

19. However, the efforts of the Algerian Provisional Government to bring about a negotiated solution had not flagged. By February 1960, it had written President de Gaulle to receive an emissary bearing a personal message from Mr. Ferhat Abbas; that initiative had not borne fruit. What was even more serious, President de Gaulle, in a number of public statements, had rejected the whole idea of negotiation, and had insisted that no settlement could be reached until the French army had been victorious. On the one hand he had conceded that the Algerians should be allowed freely to decide their future, while on the other he had reiterated France's determination to remain in Algeria. He had given the clear impression that a solution such as France could accept could be obtained only through the total surrender of the Algerian people. Yet Mr. Guy Mollet, a former French Prime Minister, had recently conceded that France would not win a guerrilla war, and that in any event a solution imposed by force of arms would not be lasting. When it had become clear, in the course of the year 1960, that a French military victory was not in sight, President de Gaulle, on 14 June, had reaffirmed the Algerian people's right of self-determination. Shortly thereafter, the Algerian Provisional Government had announced its decision to send a delegation headed by Mr. Ferhat Abbas to meet with President de Gaulle, and had dispatched two envoys to make the necessary arrangements. Thus, it had not been until 22 June 1960 that the accredited representatives of the parties to the Algerian conflict had met for the first time, at Melun. On 29 June, the French Government had published a communiqué stating that its representatives had informed the emissaries of the Algerian Provisional Government of the conditions for "pourparlers". All the proposals and suggestions put forward by the emissaries of the Algerian Provisional Government had been categorically rejected. Indeed, the Algerian representatives had been confronted with conditions wholly incompatible with honour, freedom, dignity and the status of negotiators, and had been treated like prisoners.

20. In explaining the reasons for the failure of its initiative, the Algerian Provisional Government had rightly emphasized France's responsibility. France had insisted that the meeting between Mr. Abbas and President de Gaulle must be held only after an agreement had been reached on a cease-fire, and that its only purpose could be to make the surcease official. Nevertheless, the Provisional Government had left the door open for a resumption of negotiations. President de Gaulle had reacted by insisting that the conditions unilaterally decided by him and set forth by his representatives at Melun were final. At the same time, the French Government had started to organize, through its local administrative authorities, committees of elected representatives ("commissions d'élus") throughout Algeria. The purpose was to foist an imposed status upon the Algerian people in place of freely chosen institutions; that was in open contradiction to the principle of self-determination. The Algerian Provisional Government, drawing the logical conclusion, had announced on 22 August 1960 that French policy aimed at the balkanization of Algeria by force. In the circumstances, it had gone on to state, the Algerian people's wishes for its future should be determined by means of a referendum organized and supervised by the United Nations.

21. President de Gaulle's radio broadcast of 4 November 1960 had clearly been addressed to the United Nations, but there had been nothing in it to denote any willingness on the part of the French Government to make progress towards a solution based on the principle of self-determination. It had contained no suggestion of the steps to be taken to provide guarantees of the proper application of the right of self-determination—for surely the presence of foreign news personnel could not be regarded as a sufficient guarantee that the proposed referendum would be carried out in conditions of genuine freedom. Moreover, the territorial integrity of Algeria was still being threatened, and the very principle of self-determination was likely to be jeopardized by the referendum which was to be held in France in January 1961 and by the imposed status towards which France appeared to be working in Algeria.

22. Since France had closed the door to a bilateral solution of the Algerian problem, the United Nations inevitably became the only agency through which the Algerian people could be consulted regarding their future political status. Consequently, it was the Organization's duty to accept responsibility for organizing and supervising the referendum in Algeria. Any extension of the Algerian war to the rest of the awakening African continent would have serious consequences for the Western world. The time had therefore come for the allies and friends of France to bring to bear the weight of their authority and to use every means available to them to persuade France to accept United Nations' intervention in Algeria. If they failed, they would have missed the opportunity to win the friendship of the African peoples; their failure would be regarded by those peoples as evidence of the complicity of the leaders of the West in maintaining French colonialism in Africa. In the United States, both President Eisenhower and President-elect Kennedy, it should be noted, had advocated peaceful progress in Africa towards the political independence of the entire continent. The United Nations alone could effectively settle the question of Algeria and thus pave the way for friendly relations between the new Algeria and France.
23. Mr. VAKIL (Iran) said that his delegation had from the outset supported the cause of Algerian self-determination in the United Nations and would continue to do so. However, the application of the principle of self-determination raised complex practical problems, which must be solved in the light of the facts involved and in the historical context of each individual case.

24. At the time of the fourteenth session of the General Assembly, the Algerian situation had apparently taken a new turn which could have paved the way for a mutually acceptable solution. France had announced its intention of transforming its former colonial empire into a community of independent peoples, and President de Gaulle had proclaimed his recognition of the Algerian people's legitimate aspirations and its right to self-determination. France had therefore urged that the General Assembly should take no action which would hamper its efforts to reach a solution.

25. Now that another year had passed and the war in Algeria was continuing, a re-examination of the situation was called for. So far as its general policy of emancipating its former colonies was concerned, France had justified all the hopes placed in it and deserved the highest praise. However, despite the many encouraging statements made by President de Gaulle and other French leaders, and despite the French Government's courageous restoration of its authority over the extremist elements in Algeria, certain interests were apparently blocking the fulfilment of France's praiseworthy intentions in Algeria. Mr. Ferhat Abbas, the head of the Algerian Provisional Government, had agreed that the Algerian problem should be solved by permitting the Algerian people to exercise its right of self-determination. However, the negotiations initiated at Melun on the practical means whereby that right could be exercised had failed at the very outset.

26. His delegation remained convinced that a mutually acceptable solution was possible, and that it was the duty of all to assist France and Algeria in achieving it. But the primary responsibility in that regard rested with France, which had so often shown itself capable not only of overcoming difficult crises but of setting examples for the rest of the world. His delegation fully understood the difficulties which France faced in seeking a solution of the Algerian problem. It was understandably difficult for the Algerians to dissociate the material benefits brought by France from the humiliation and economic exploitation which they had suffered under colonial rule. On the other hand, many Frenchmen tended to ignore the colonial aspects of French rule and to emphasize how many highways, schools and hospitals France had built in Algeria. There were also considerations of prestige involved, and sentimental ties which had grown up in the years of "French presence" in Algeria. Those were the factors which had prevented France from solving the Algerian problem under its general policy of decolonization, and which made it extremely sensitive to all attempts by other countries to deal with the Algerian question.

27. Nevertheless, his Government had once again requested the inclusion of the Algerian question in the General Assembly's agenda because it felt that just as a further effort should be made by outside parties to understand the difficulties which France faced, France must not disregard the misgivings which many countries felt with respect to its Algerian policy. First of all, whatever contributions France might have made in Algeria, the current conflict was clearly an expression of the Algerian people's desire to exercise its right of self-determination. Furthermore, it must be recognized that the Algerian nationalist leaders exercised effective leadership in their country and were the only ones in a position to conduct peace negotiations. If, then, France had in fact decided to bring the war to an end on the basis of the Algerian people's right to self-determination, it must negotiate with the nationalist leaders not only on a cease-fire but also on conditions and guarantees for the exercise of that right. Fortunately, French opinion with regard to the constitutional aspects of the Algerian question had matured in the past few years, and the legal fiction that Algeria was an integral part of France had been cast aside. Only a small minority, although a determined one, continued to take a short-sighted view of French prestige in Algeria. France must recognize that what would best serve to strengthen its prestige was not a policy of intransigence but a demonstration of France's willingness to solve the Algerian problem in a democratic, generous spirit, in conformity with the noble values of French civilization and with the aspirations and real interest of the Algerian and French peoples.

28. Most of the world no longer regarded the Algerian problem as one which concerned France alone. His delegation had requested its inclusion in the Assembly's agenda not with the intention of causing France embarrassment but in the hope that the rest of the world would be able to assist France in finding a solution to a problem which threatened France's international position as well as the prospects for fruitful co-operation with the former dependent peoples. The peoples of Africa had suffered too much from tyranny in the past to be willing to accept it today in new forms, and its natural allies were those who were genuinely dedicated to the cause of freedom. It would therefore be most unfortunate if a stubborn, unrealistic minority should drive the Algerian people to desperate extremes in its struggle for freedom.

29. The path leading to a solution of the Algerian problem was already marked out. France had recognized Algeria's right to decide its own future, and according to press reports, detailed plans for a cease-fire had already been agreed upon. What remained was to bring the two sides together in negotiations designed to give the Algerian leaders—and, indeed, the European minority as well—assurances of the practical implementation of the principle of self-determination.

The meeting rose at 1.45 p.m.