

# French President Emmanuel Macron insults Algeria, provoking diplomatic crisis

Anthony Torres  
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French President Emmanuel Macron's recent restriction of visa access from the Maghreb, combined with his insulting of the anti-colonial struggle of the Algerian people, are aimed at legitimizing French colonialism and inciting neo-fascist chauvinism. His actions have provoked a major diplomatic crisis with Algeria and the recall by Algiers of the Algerian ambassador to France.

A statement from the Algerian presidency in response to Macron's comments said: "Following the undeniable remarks that several French sources have attributed by name to the President of the French Republic, Algeria expresses its categorical rejection of the inadmissible interference in its internal affairs that constitute the said remarks." This is the second time Algiers has recalled its ambassador to Paris since May 2020, after the broadcast on the France5 television station of a documentary on the "Hirak," the mass protest movement against the Algerian military regime that began in February 2019.

This diplomatic crisis began on September 29. French government spokesman Gabriel Attal announced on Europe1 that the granting of visas by France would be "tightened within a few weeks for nationals of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, who 'refuse' to issue the consular passes required for the return of immigrants turned away from France." The visa restriction, which blocks the movement of people wanting to travel to France to see their families, affects millions of people of North African origin in France itself.

In 2018, the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies reported that there were 1.9 million immigrants from the Maghreb in the country, as well as 2.4 million direct descendants born in France to at least one parent from the Maghreb, in addition to the

grandchildren of immigrants from the Maghreb, estimated at 821,000 in 2011. This makes a total of 5.1 million people of North African origin in France.

The French ambassador to Algeria, François Gouyette, was summoned to the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and notified of "a formal protest by the Algerian government following a unilateral decision by the French government affecting the quality and fluidity of the movement of Algerian nationals to France," according to a statement from the ministry.

On September 30, receiving a delegation of 18 young French people of North African origin, dual nationals and some Algerians, French President Emmanuel Macron stated that the "the post-1962 Algerian nation was built on a memory rent." This was a reference to the heroic and bloody struggle of the Algerian people against the French colonial regime during the Algerian war (1954-1962).

Calling Algeria "a politico-military system that was built on this memory rent," Macron attacked "an official history" that had been "totally rewritten," and which according to him "is not based on truths" but on "a discourse based on a hatred of France." He questioned the historic legitimacy of Algeria: "Was there an Algerian nation before the French colonization? That's the question... I am fascinated at the ability of Turkey to completely forget the role it played in Algeria and the domination it exercised."

Four days later, Algiers recalled its ambassador to France for "consultation" and closed its airspace to French military aircraft. In 2013, French airplanes had permission to fly over Algerian territory to fight the war in the Sahel launched with the French intervention in Mali, with which Algeria shares a 1,300-kilometre desert border.

Cynically, Macron reacted to this Franco-Algerian

crisis by claiming that he wished there could be an “appeasement.”

But he then defended his earlier statements, saying: “I have the utmost respect for the Algerian people, and I have really cordial relations with President Tebboune. But we have started a work, with the report that we asked [historian] Benjamin Stora to do ... with the French and Franco-Algerian youth, and I will continue this work. There will inevitably be other tensions. These are only stories of wounds. The problem is that many people are irreconcilable toward one another. But we are all together in the same country, and therefore we must have a national project that embraces us.”

Stora had been personally commissioned by Macron in July 2020 to prepare a report on the “memories of colonization and the Algerian people.”

The provocations of Macron and his government against Algeria are a warning to workers both in France and the southern shore of the Mediterranean. In fact, it is Macron who is “totally rewriting history” through his statements, seeking to cover up the crimes committed by French imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the crimes already committed or in preparation in France’s neocolonial wars in the 21st century.

Contrary to Macron’s arrogant assertions about Algerian society before French colonization and even before Ottoman rule, there were various forms of “statehood in this territory of the central Maghreb,” according to historian Gilles Manceron. Manceron adds: “The fact that Algerian national sentiment only became generalized at the time of the war is a reality. But this is like the feeling of belonging to the French nation, which only really took hold after the Revolution.”

French domination of Algeria was reactionary and criminal. France colonized Algeria and the whole of the Maghreb, making its inhabitants second-class citizens, repressed under the discriminatory provisions of the Indigenous Code. During the war for independence, French imperialism tortured and killed en masse, crimes reminiscent of those committed in occupied France a decade earlier by the Vichy collaborationist regime.

Out of 10 million Algerians, France detained 3 million in internment camps and killed half a million. Twenty-five thousand French soldiers died during the

war and over 60,000 were wounded. In addition, the French special forces and police assassinated political leaders and pro-independence demonstrators in mainland France. Paris nevertheless suffered a humiliating defeat in the war, in the face of the courage of the Algerian workers and oppressed.

Macron’s statements underscore the nature of the political forces that Macron is nurturing as he pursues a policy of spreading the coronavirus, waging neo-colonial war in the Sahel, and violently repressing strikes inside France.

They underscore his alignment with the extreme right-wing circles who are openly nostalgic for French Algeria. The same forces played a central role in the 1958 putsch that brought General Charles De Gaulle to power and established the Fifth Republic. These pro-“French Algeria” forces sought to change French policy through attacks and an attempted coup d’état after De Gaulle decided to negotiate Algerian independence with the Algerian National Liberation Front.

Now, against the backdrop of rising working class anger at the criminal management of the coronavirus pandemic by the state, the political descendants of this milieu are openly waving the threat of a coup d’état, in the form of a letter written by retired generals close to the family of retired General Pierre de Villiers. Macron’s calculations of their electoral influence in the 2022 presidential elections are no doubt connected to his decision to provoke a crisis with Algiers.

This crisis underlines that the struggle against the establishment of a police regime in France oppressing workers in France as well as in Africa requires the international unification of the working class on both sides of the Mediterranean in a struggle for socialism.



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