After independence (1962-1995)

The Evian Accords which were signed in 1962 gave Algeria immediate independence and French aid to help reconstruct the country. The French Sahara with its oil resources was also handed over to Algeria. In return the FLN guaranteed protection and civil rights for the French Algerians choosing to remain in the country, and the option of choosing either French or Algerian nationality after three years.

Eight years of war had shattered Algeria. There had been more than one million Algerian casualties and nearly two million Algerians had lost their homes. For over a century the French had deprived the Algerians of any but the most minimal opportunity to become involved in its infrastructure and institutions. Algerians had been made a subclass of servants, unskilled labourers and peasants. The departure of the French left the country without the skilled labour to keep the country running.

At the same time, internal conflicts within the FLN that had been set aside during the war emerged and a power struggle between various factions of the FLN flared up. Ahmed Ben Bella, with the support of Colonel Houari Boumedienne, the National Liberation Army chief of staff, emerged as the winner and was elected the first president of Algeria in 1962. The country he presided over had been established as an Arab-Islamic socialist state with a single party political system, the FLN being the only legal party. The FLN was to exercise collective leadership and rule the country from a central political bureau. All the fashionable accoutrements of post-colonial socialist government were activated, including centralization, nationalization of private industry and land reform. A constitution was passed by popular referendum in 1963 which gave the president wide-ranging powers and few restraints.

During his three years as President of Algeria, Ben Bella made some attempts to revive Algeria, but eventually succumbed to the vanity of international politics and domestic autocracy. He never really grappled with the country's hard-core problems of unemployment and the deficit of technical and administrative skills that prevented the country becoming a modern nation.

In 1965 Defence Minister Houari Boumedienne staged a bloodless coup which removed Ben Bella from power. He formed a 26-member Council of Revolution which became the country's highest government body, with the army displacing the FLN as the overriding
political influence.

Although Boumedienne held the reins of power tightly until his death in 1978, he also established a more authentically collective form of leadership which finally began to come to grips with building a modern Algeria. The country's oil resources were developed and an industrial sector was established. Education and literacy became a focus of concentration and agricultural land reform continued. In the process the Boumedienne government developed a socialist political system which was codified in a constitution in 1976. Under the new constitution Boumedienne was elected president of Algeria and ruled until his death. However, for all Algeria's accomplishments during this period, imposing authoritarian one-party socialism on a traditional Islamic country was considered a mistake.

When Boumedienne's chosen successor, Colonel Chadli Benjedid, was elected president of Algeria he began to relax the government's authoritarian practices and made a genuine attempt to solve some of the country's problems. Benjedid also pardoned Ahmed Ben Bella in 1980 and released him from house arrest. However, for all his liberal tendencies, Benjedid was a product of the FLN-military elite and was re-elected in 1984 because he ran unopposed.

With the fall of oil prices and the resurgence of Islam, the government's credibility fell dramatically. The manifest failure of world socialism and the government's failure to solve the country's increasing social and economic problems, encouraged more and more Algerians to seek solutions in their Islamic traditions.

The socialist government's repressive secularism and one party rule fed a fundamentalist backlash which gave rise to widespread rioting in 1985. Islamic leaders branded the government as 'a band of atheists' and called for a return to an Islamic government.

Benjedid responded by initiating a programme of reforms, removing many old-guard Boumedienne partisans from government and making moves toward privatization and reduction of socialist centralization. But his moves were too little and too late. In October 1988 Algeria exploded in riots once again.

In response, a new constitution reducing the role of the FLN, allowing limited political opposition for the first time since independence, confining the role of the army to defence matters and giving public sector employees the right to strike was passed in February 1989. Though apparently liberal, the constitution was still rigged in favour of the FLN, severely limiting the activities of opposition parties. Nevertheless, the rising tide of Islamic activism swept the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to an overwhelming victory over the FLN in municipal and provincial elections in 1990.

The goal of the FIS was nothing less than transforming Algeria into an Islamic state. After decades of socialist incompetence and social and religious repression, the vast majority of Algerians embraced FIS doctrines and led the party to a stunning first round victory over the FLN in the December 1991 general elections.

With the prospect of the FIS in control of the parliament after the second round of elections, the secular and military elite forced Benjedid's resignation, halted the electoral process and suspended parliament.
A High Committee was established with Mohammed Boudiaff named as president. The world community had applauded Algeria's move toward multi-party democracy, but the possibility of an Islamic government taking control had made many western nations think again.

The new regime calculated, and calculated correctly, that the repression of the FIS would ignite a wave of extremist fundamentalist violence which would alienate many Algerians and divide the Islamic movement. FIS and other Muslim extremists played right into the government hands and launched a campaign of terrorism which shocked the world and polarized the country.

Internal terrorism affected secularists of all types including journalists, academicians, intellectuals, military and government figures, artists and Islamic scholars out of sympathy with the fundamentalists' views. This, together with government reprisals which have taken an estimated 30,000 lives, tore Algeria apart. Terrorism against foreigners further isolated Algeria from the world community.

When Boudiaff was assassinated in June 1992 he was replaced by Ali Kafi who in turn was replaced by a 5-member presidential High Council. In 1994 the Council named Algeria's defence minister Liamine Zeroual as interim president of Algeria for a 3-year term, allowing him to negotiate with the FIS. In 1994 the government met with five opposition groups to negotiate a peace settlement. Negotiations continued in Italy, and led to elections in 1995.
The French army shifted its tactics at the end of 1958 from dependence on quadrillage to the use of mobile forces deployed on massive search-and-destroy missions against ALN strongholds. Within the next year, Salan's successor, General Maurice Challe, appeared to have suppressed major rebel resistance. But political developments had already overtaken the French army's successes.

Data as of December 1993