

Leadership Crisis in Region I / Wilaya I, 1955-1957: A Historical Study

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Abstract

This study examines the crisis of military leadership in Region I, later Wilaya I, between 1955 and 1957 through Algerian and foreign writings. It also considers the role of the Soummam Conference in intensifying internal conflicts. Appointments made by the institutions created by the Conference sidelined some of the Wilaya's cadres from positions of authority. The leadership crisis produced divisions, protests, and competition for power. These conflicts may have been driven by particular factions or by personal ambitions. They eventually led to a cycle of physical eliminations in which several leaders were killed, while others surrendered to the French authorities. The French administration exploited this situation to advance its own interests.

Keywords: Wilaya I; crisis; military leadership.

Introduction:

The Aures had long served as a historical center of revolutionary action. This led the leadership to rely on the region for the success of the armed struggle during its first phase. Ben Boulaid accepted responsibility after confirming the readiness of the Aures militants. However, the rapid increase in volunteers, French military pressure, and shortages of funding and weapons created favorable conditions for disputes within the region's leadership structures. These disputes affected the course of the Revolution and greatly complicated coordination with the other regions, especially after Ben Boulaid's arrest and death.

Ben Boulaid's absence was, in fact, the first sign of this crisis. Strong competition emerged within the Wilaya's leadership. It was followed by protests and military insubordination that went as far as death sentences. The central leadership did not sufficiently consider the particular character and sensitivity of the region at the Soummam Conference. This contributed to fragmentation and to challenges against the Conference's decisions. The mission of the delegation sent by the Coordination and Execution Committee also failed after becoming involved in the conflict. This raises a central question: what were the forms and nature of the crisis that confronted the revolutionary leadership in the Aures between 1955 and 1957? This question is addressed through the following sub-questions:

- What were the underlying causes of the leadership crisis in the Aures during the first phase of the Revolution?

- To what extent did the absence of the Aures from the Soummam Conference intensify conflict in the region?

- Did the institutions of the Revolution later succeed in resolving the crisis in Region I?

The purpose of this study is not to diminish the importance of the Revolution or to discredit its leading figures. Rather, it seeks to clarify some historical facts concerning the background and forms

of the struggle for leadership in Wilaya I. It also examines the serious consequences of the struggle for power, which reached the level of physical elimination. This represented a dark episode in the course of the sacrifices made by the National Liberation Army and the National Liberation Front, since the victims were themselves cadres of the region.

2. Leadership Crisis in Region I before the Soummam Conference:

2.1. The Leadership Vacuum after Ben Boulaid's Arrest

The policy of confrontation and siege imposed by the colonial forces on the Aures, the first stronghold of the Revolution, created serious problems in the supply of weapons. Its leader, Ben Boulaid, therefore took responsibility for finding every possible solution and alternative to overcome these difficulties. His aim was to ensure the continuity of the armed struggle, especially as recruitment into the National Liberation Army increased (Mellah, 2012, p. 20).

Ben Boulaid subsequently met the region's cadres and informed them of his decision to travel to the Arab East. The fighters tried to persuade him to reconsider, but he maintained his decision. He appointed Bachir Chihani as acting leader, with Adjoul Adjoul and Abbes Laghrour as his deputies. Omar Mestiri and Ammar Brik accompanied him, while a military patrol led by Othmani Wahab escorted the group toward the Tunisian border (Le Mire, 1982, p. 186).

This sensitive and difficult mission ultimately failed. The French authorities discovered the group's presence and arrested them. After a trial in Tunisia, Ben Boulaid was sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor. He was then transferred to Koudiat Prison in Constantine, where a military court sentenced him to death on 24 September 1955 (Qarram, 2016, p. 93).

After Ben Boulaid's absence, the acting leadership initially showed a degree of cohesion. Attacks and ambushes against the French army increased. Fighting also spread to areas that had previously received no weapons. This produced positive results, as the enemy withdrew from some positions in the central Aures out of fear of another defeat comparable to Indochina (Helaili, 2012, pp. 208-209).

This spirit of discipline and struggle did not last. Omar Ben Boulaid wanted to assume the leadership, and Chihani responded by reorganizing the command while retaining real authority in his own hands. Omar Ben Boulaid became honorary leader of the Aures-Nemencha; Bachir Chihani served as his deputy; Abbes Laghrour was responsible for military affairs; Adjoul Adjoul was responsible for political affairs; Messaoud Belagoun served as secretary to the leadership; and Messaoud Ben Aissa became general supply officer, assisted by Azzoui. This arrangement displeased several figures, especially Adjoul and Laghrour. They opposed hereditary succession to power and also recalled Mostefa Ben Boulaid's recommendation that no responsibility be assigned to his brother Omar (Madaci, 2001, pp. 64-65).

Conditions in Region I deteriorated further after Omar Ben Boulaid rebelled, Messaoud Ben Aissa took control of the Inoughissen sector, and Ali Kerbadou took personal revenge on Messaoud Maache without referring to the higher leadership. Omar Ben Boulaid and Messaoud Ben Aissa then attempted to assassinate Chihani and his two deputies, accusing them of committing abuses in the name of authority. Ammar Maache and Mohamed Ghabrouri were assigned to carry out the operation (Madaci, 2001, pp. 100-105).

To escape the pressure placed on him, Chihani moved his headquarters from Kimel to El Kalaa. During this period, he focused on organizing the eastern region through discipline, rules, and

sanctions. He presented a general code that prohibited crime, rape, illicit relations, disobedience of orders, looting, embezzlement, loss of weapons, and waste. These offenses were punishable by death.

Chihani also banned smoking among the fighters as a way to harm the French economy. He issued instructions to eliminate caids who collaborated with the French authorities. Adjoul objected to this decision and argued that it required collective approval. Chihani's reputation nevertheless grew after the notable victory at the Battle of El Djorf in September 1955 (Nadjahi, 2020, p. 180).

His leadership of the region did not continue for long, and opposition to him intensified. He executed Mohamed Ghabrouri, who was accused of trying to assassinate him at Omar Ben Boulaid's instigation. He also removed Messaoud Ben Aissa and appointed Farhi Sai in his place, while giving command of the Arris sector to his secretary, Hocine Maarfi. As tensions increased, Chihani convened a meeting at headquarters attended by regional and sector commanders. The meeting decided to strip Omar of his military rank and instructed Hocine Maarfi to arrest him and bring him to trial (Madaci, 2001, p. 107).

These sensitive decisions provoked strong reactions against Chihani. Omar formally broke away and began moving through the western sector with his troops. Chihani tried to force him into submission by surrounding him, cutting his supplies, and depriving his group of provisions. The situation continued until Chihani himself was arrested, tried, and executed (Madaci, 2001, pp. 110-111).

2.2. The Elimination of Bachir Chihani:

Accounts and testimonies differ regarding Chihani's execution. The first account links it to a plan by Adjoul Adjoul and Abbes Laghrour to remove him. They accused him of moral misconduct, described as "homosexual conduct," during the Battle of El Djorf. In his account of Chihani, Adjoul stated that on the night of 9 April 1955, at the command headquarters in El Kalaa, he saw Chihani and a young man from Khenchela lying beside each other and joking. He added that Laghrour and others had also seen them, but that only he understood what he believed was taking place between Chihani and Chami (Farale, 2016, p. 86).

This account overlaps with some French writings that described Abbes Laghrour as the principal organizer of the act, assisted by Adjoul. These sources attributed the motive to strong jealousy of Chihani, who had reached the leadership of the Aures at a young age (Pallait, 1961, p. 12). The account also corresponds with French archival documents and with documents published by Abdelhamid Zouzou in his book *Archival Documents on the Algerian War of Liberation*. These materials present Chihani's execution as a conspiracy by Laghrour and Adjoul to obtain leadership and authority (Zouzou, 2019, p. 60; FR A.N.O.M93/150). The available evidence suggests that Chihani had become unacceptable to his two deputies, who were openly seeking power.

Salah Laib, who attended the trial in the mountains of Ali al-Nas, states that more than one hundred fighters and officials were present. They included Babana Sai, Adjoul Adjoul, Abbes Laghrour, and Lakhdar Ben Messaoud. Chihani answered only Adjoul's questions and turned his back on Laghrour. His hands were tied, and those present tried several times to loosen his restraints. Chami reportedly stated: "You used to do such and such to me and claimed that it was a prophetic command" (Farale, 2016, p. 86).

According to a statement given to us by the fighter Ali Mazouz, Laghrour personally carried out the sentence by shooting Chihani in the presence of about one hundred fighters. The judgment

was not written down because they feared that it might reach the French authorities and be used as propaganda against the Revolution. As Mazouz put it, this was done "so that France would not laugh at us" (Mazouz, 2021).

Despite these accusations, we consider it unlikely that the real motive was moral misconduct. It is difficult to assume that he would have engaged in such behavior under conditions of siege. It is also difficult, in the author's view, to reconcile the accusation with the life of a graduate of the Badisian school who had received extensive Quranic education.

This view is reflected in the testimony of one of his soldiers: "He was a leader committed to the Islamic religion and its teachings. He performed his prayers on time. He liked to perform the Friday prayer collectively with the fighters and would address us, using the occasion for advice, guidance, and instruction. Before us, he appeared as an imam and preacher rather than a military commander." The witness added that during the entire period of Chihani's presence in National Liberation Army centers in Tebessa, no conduct was recorded that would discredit his morals or damage his reputation. He argued that such practices were inconsistent with the life of a man who had devoted himself to study, organization of the Special Organization, preparation for the Revolution, and resistance to French plans (Hassan, 2020, pp. 152-153).

Other accounts argue that Chihani's execution resulted from mistaken organizational decisions. These included transferring Adjoul toward the Nemencha and moving Lazhar Cheriet to the Kimel sector (Zbiri, 2008, p. 128). They also cite tactical errors, such as attracting enemy attention through open-door gatherings and losing some of the best National Liberation Army fighters in the Battle of El Djorf. A third account links the affair to regional factors and to political and ideological considerations. It argues that his position in the region required strong tribal solidarity (Ould Kablia, 2022, p. 364). This interpretation also points to a motive of revenge following Chihani's killing of the unit of Messaoud Maache and Maamar Lemaafi, members of the Khenchela group to which Laghrour belonged and which had rebelled after Ben Boulaid's capture (Bouakaz, 2019, p. 93). Personal ambitions were another factor, especially Adjoul's desire to remove Chihani and lead the Aures, even if this meant involvement in an attempt against Ben Boulaid himself, as some accounts also alleged in relation to Mostefa Ben Boulaid's death.

The preceding evidence suggests that Chihani's execution was, in reality, a planned operation. Interrogations of victims and fighters were conducted by force (Hassan, 2020, p. 224). The proceedings took place before a popular tribunal for which no documentary record is available. Military decisions were issued without defense counsel on Mount Meqid. Once the accusation was considered established, the sentence was carried out (Bouakaz, 2019, pp. 93-94), without consulting the leaders in Tebessa or the representatives of the Revolution in Tunisia (Hassan, 2020, p. 225). This drew the region into a cycle of conflict that continued until the end of the Revolution.

2.3. The Dual Leadership of Adjoul and Laghrour:

Chihani's death created disorder within the leadership structures of Region I and resentment among his followers. Leadership then passed to Abbes Laghrour and Adjoul Adjoul. They relied on the legitimacy of their earlier appointment as deputies by Mostefa Ben Boulaid and later by Bachir Chihani. Even after Ben Boulaid's release from prison, he did not remove them. Adjoul remained at the headquarters of Wilaya I and was responsible for the central Aures and the Saharan area as far as

Oued Souf. Laghrour was responsible for the Nemencha area as far as the Tunisian border. Representatives from the central and western sectors assisted them (Helaili, 2012, pp. 181-182).

Mostefa Ben Boulaid's escape from prison generated considerable debate within the Revolution and among the leaders of Region I. Adjoul commented: "Koudiat Prison is not a stable that we can enter and leave whenever we wish." The acting leadership therefore decided to apply the revolutionary rules established by Ben Boulaid himself. These rules provided for a probationary period of up to six months (Helaili, 2012, p. 229). Adjoul suspected that France might have facilitated the escape in the hope of turning Ben Boulaid into a future negotiator, as had occurred in Tunisia (Madaci, 2001, p. 143).

Some observers considered Adjoul's behavior inappropriate and argued that he was not pleased by Ben Boulaid's return. However, the secrecy surrounding the Revolution, the conditions under which it operated, and the need for vigilance in all procedures may help explain his doubts and suspicions.

During the period of surveillance, Ben Boulaid formed his own group with the help of Ali Ben Chaiba. He made inspection tours to assess the state of the Revolution, beginning from Mount Oustili near Tazoult. Among the issues he examined were the decision to assign leadership to his brother Omar despite his earlier instructions to exclude him from responsibility, the organizational condition of the Revolution, and his brother's claims concerning the transfer of headquarters. The only unresolved issue was Chihani's fate. Ben Chaiba told him that Chihani was away on a mission to the east (Madaci, 2001, p. 146). Other accounts state that Ben Boulaid had already learned in prison of Chihani's death and of the disagreements within the leadership. This appears more plausible because, after his release, he contacted Adjoul rather than Chihani. This suggests that he already knew what had happened and that his questions may have concerned doubts about the circumstances of Chihani's trial.

3. Ben Boulaid's Death and the Fragmentation of Leadership

3.1. Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Mostefa Ben Boulaid:

Ben Boulaid did not have enough time to correct the situation. He was killed on 23 March 1956 when a booby-trapped radio set, dropped by parachute by the French authorities, exploded (Ould Kablia, 2022, p. 365). He had been very careful not to touch suspicious objects, which gave rise to suspicions of a plot against him. The incident opened the way to doubts and accusations, with each side interpreting it according to its own perspective. Because the affair remains unclear, because accounts differ to the point of contradiction, and because the responsible party is difficult to identify, all major possibilities must be considered.

First possibility: Supporters of this view argue that the assassination was an internal operation organized by Adjoul Adjoul. In his memoirs, Eastern Base officer Tahar Saidani supported this position. He stated that a deserter from the French Foreign Legion known as Ali the German told him that Adjoul had brought him the device to be booby-trapped. Ali believed that it would be sent to a traitor and not to Ben Boulaid (Saidani, 2001, p. 125).

Ben Boulaid's companion Mohamed El Aifa supports this interpretation on the same basis. He cites the testimony of the German soldier, who swore that Adjoul had asked him to place explosives in the radio and that he did not know the bomb would cause Ben Boulaid's death (El Aifa, 1987, p. 515). Supporters of this view also point to Ben Boulaid's choice of Bachir Chihani to lead Region I.

They argue that Adjoul and several other officials with leadership ambitions did not accept this choice (Ould Kablia, 2022, p. 364).

The claim that Adjoul was responsible remains open to doubt for several reasons. Tahar Saidani, who asserted Adjoul's responsibility, was not present at the meeting. Yet he related detailed dialogue, stating that Ben Boulaid was speaking to his fighters when a soldier entered carrying the radio, and that Adjoul left as soon as Ben Boulaid received it (Saidani, 2001, pp. 126-127). According to those who attended the meeting and according to the list of participants, however, Adjoul remained in Kimel and did not attend the gathering. This account also conflicts with the testimonies of those directly involved in the event.

All accounts agree that the device originally came from the French enemy. If Adjoul is held responsible, this would amount to accusing him of treason, a serious charge that the author considers unlikely in the case of a man such as Adjoul. Even if the account that he ordered a radio to be booby-trapped is accepted, there is no proof that the radio prepared by Ali the German was the same device that killed Ben Boulaid.

It is therefore possible that Ben Boulaid's death occurred by accident. The device that Ali the German allegedly booby-trapped at Adjoul's request may have been intended for use against the enemy. The fighters may then have taken it to Ben Boulaid, where it exploded as soon as he examined it (Belkherchouche, 2016, p. 378).

Mostefa Merarda, who was present at the gathering, addressed this question directly. He stated that Adjoul was not present and that the accusations against him were unfounded. In his view, the group that was in conflict with Adjoul fabricated the charge (Merarda, 2014, p. 72).

Second possibility: The French colonial power was the main beneficiary of Ben Boulaid's absence. This interpretation, however, suffers from a shortage of sources and documents, apart from some references that attribute responsibility to French intelligence. Colonial-era writings state that French intelligence booby-trapped the device in an operation planned and carried out by the 11th Shock Parachute Unit. The unit identified Ben Boulaid's location and then prepared and executed the operation (Nart, 1985, p. 138).

French historian Yves Courrière also attributed the assassination to French intelligence and described it as retaliation for their commander, Kroutov. According to this account, a DC-3 aircraft dropped supplies on 15 March 1956, including a booby-trapped device designed to explode when connected to an electrical source. After the fighters seized the supplies, the GLI unit announced that the operation had succeeded (Courrière, 1990, p. 928).

This interpretation also raises several doubts. If the French authorities had known that Ben Boulaid was present at Jebel El Azraq, they could have taken other measures rather than rely on a plan that might fail. The fighters did not mention any possibility that information had leaked to the Specialized Administrative Sections. The argument therefore requires assuming that infiltrators were operating within the revolutionary ranks with precision and caution.

Furthermore, if the French authorities had organized the operation and known that it had succeeded, they might have launched a major propaganda campaign in one of Algeria's most rebellious regions. They could have distributed leaflets and used media messages to separate the population from the Revolution. According to the author, an examination of France's colonial record

does not provide evidence of similar operations used to eliminate senior leaders (Meziani, n.d., pp. 48-49).

Despite the research devoted to the issue, the case remains complex and obscure. One conclusion can nevertheless be drawn: Ben Boulaid's death served the interests of several parties, including national figures seeking leadership and French commanders.

3.2. The Leadership Crisis after His Death:

After the tragic incident that claimed the lives of leading officials in the Aures, above all the regional leader Mostefa Ben Boulaid, delegates who had taken part in the Nara meeting moved to Mount Taghda to examine the region's situation and appoint a new leader. Those present included Omar Ben Boulaid, Messaoud Ben Aissa, Tahar Nouichi, Ahmed Azzoui, Hocine Abdessalam, Mostefa Raaili, Mohamed Cherif Ben Akcha, Abdelhafid Tourche, Ahmed Naouara, and El Hadj Lakhdar. El Hadj Lakhdar opened the meeting and stressed the need to appoint a regional leader. He nominated Adjoul Adjoul, but the proposal was rejected. Omar Ben Boulaid was also proposed as a successor to his brother Mostefa. Omar tried to impose himself, but no consensus formed around his candidacy (Merarda, 2014, p. 77).

The meeting failed to agree on a new leader because of disagreements and divergent views among those present. Revolutionary responsibility therefore required an alternative solution. A committee of twelve members was formed, including El Hadj Lakhdar, Omar Ben Boulaid, Madour, Ahmed Azzoui, Tahar Nouichi, Mostefa Raaili, Ahmed Naouara, Ammar Belagoun, Cherif Ben Akcha, Hocine Abdessalam, and Messaoud Ben Aissa (Madaci, 2001, p. 180). The agreement itself, however, reflected continuing disagreement.

As the conflict between Adjoul and Omar intensified and the committee failed to appoint a new leader, it limited itself to moving the headquarters to Mount Oustili, southeast of Batna. Madour Azzoui was appointed secretary-general. His task was to inform the other members of the leadership of the change in administrative headquarters and to ask them to establish contact (Obeidi, n.d., p. 162).

Mostefa Merarda attributes the failure to find a solution to the absence of the principal leaders of the Aures. He argues that the conflict might not have escalated if contact had been established with the Nemencha group represented by Lazhar Cheriet, the Khenchela group represented by Abbes Laghrour, the Oued Souf group represented by Taleb Larbi Qemoudi, the El Bayadh group represented by El Hadj Ali Harkati, and the Oum El Bouaghi group represented by Ammar Radji. Their participation could have made it possible to appoint a regional leader, since such an appointment could not reasonably be made without the sector commanders (Merarda, 2014, p. 77).

A number of researchers also attribute the failure to tribal affiliation. Mostefa Merarda argues that some leaders viewed the Revolution through a regional or tribal lens. As a result, they could not agree on a leader from the Touaba, Beni Melloul, or Beni Slimane groups because each side rejected the others (Merarda, 2014, p. 85). Mohamed Harbi reached a similar conclusion when discussing the fragmentation of Region I. He traced it to tribal rivalries that re-emerged after the deaths of Mostefa Ben Boulaid and his deputy Bachir Chihani. The situation became extremely complex as each group sought to carve out its own sphere of influence (Harbi, 1983, pp. 159-160).

4. The Soummam Conference and Leadership Crisis in Wilaya I

4.1. Crisis of Leadership Representation at the Conference:

According to the testimonies of participants, whether in their personal memoirs or at regional meetings devoted to writing the history of the Revolution, the leaders of Region I received invitations to attend the Conference. Those named included Abbes Laghrour, Omar Ben Boulaid, El Hadj Lakhdar, Messaoud Belagoun, and Adjoul Adjoul. Adjoul stated that he and Messaoud Belagoun received an invitation to attend a conference of revolutionary leaders. The invitation contained two dates: 20 July, which had been crossed out, and 20 August. This made him suspicious of the document (Mazouz, 2021).

Adjoul sent two liaison soldiers to determine the time and place of the meeting, but he received no reply because Messaoud Ben Aissa arrested the messengers near Chellia. Tahar Zbiri, however, rejects the claim that suspicion was the reason for the absence. He states that Laghrour and Adjoul declined to attend because they did not want to reveal Ben Boulaid's secret until Region I had been reorganized, or because they had other motives of their own (Zbiri, 2008, p. 163).

Other accounts claim that Region I was present and represented by Omar Ben Boulaid. This is doubtful because no one had formally authorized him to represent the region. Some accounts even state that when Laghrour and Adjoul learned that Ben Boulaid was leading the delegation, they wrote to the Conference organizers denying that he represented Region I (Zbiri, 2008, p. 163). Mohamed Arar, known as Bouazza, also wrote on behalf of several leaders that Omar was going only as head of the delegation (Lembarkia, n.d., p. 153). At the same time, archival documents indicate that Omar Ben Boulaid wrote to Krim Belkacem on 2 July 1956 requesting the insignia and ranks designated for Region I (FR.A.N.O.M93/149).

Other sources argue that Omar deliberately slowed preparations for the journey so that the delegation would arrive late. They attribute this to fear that he might be tried over events in Region I (Meynier, 2003, p. 392). In contrast, Ali Mazouz states that the delegation encountered colonial forces, which prevented it from arriving on time (Mazouz, 2021).

Against this background of controversy, the Conference took place without Region I. Internal problems and Ben Boulaid's death contributed to the absence. Participants themselves differed over whether the leaders of Region I had known about the Conference. In his memoirs, Hocine Benmaalem states that everyone was surprised by the absence of the leader of Wilaya I, even though his brother Omar had reached Kabylia and received the invitation. The participants therefore sent three committees to determine the reason for the absence (Benmaalem, 2014, pp. 59-60).

Some interpretations attribute the absence to the role of Abane Ramdane. They argue that he sought to keep Region I away because he was looking for a political solution, which could not be achieved in the presence of its military leadership (Mazouz, 2021). This interpretation is linked to a statement by Ferhat Abbas that Omar Oumrane and Abane Ramdane contacted him to seek a political solution instead of war and asked him to contact French politicians to discuss the matter. Such an approach conflicted with the military current, which regarded armed struggle as the primary means of achieving the Revolution's objectives (Abbas, 2012).

The absence of Region I concerned the Conference participants. The Coordination and Execution Committee therefore appointed five officials to study the situation in the Aures. Zighoud Youcef and Ibrahim Mezhoudi were assigned to enter from the eastern Nemencha side. Omar Oumrane and Ali Mellah were tasked with entering from the south, while Amirouche was to enter from the west (Benmaalem, 2014, pp. 59-60). Zighoud was killed on 23 September 1956 after a clash

in northern Constantine, and his companion continued toward Tunisia. Omar Oumrane was also sent to Tunisia to organize the eastern area (Gilbert, 1962, p. 241). Ali Mellah returned to Wilaya VI to reorganize it, leaving Amirouche alone with the mission in Wilaya I (Madaci, 2001, p. 184).

4.2. The Strategy of the Coordination and Execution Committee to Reorganize the Aures:

The absence of Wilaya I preoccupied the Conference leaders, especially given the disorder that followed Ben Boulaid's death. In an effort to contain the situation, they appointed several leaders to communicate the Conference decisions and try to end internal tensions. Amirouche was received by leaders of the western sectors. He began his mission at a meeting on 10 September 1956, where he presented the Conference directives. He also called for a committee to accompany him to the Aures. This committee included figures who were opposed to Adjoul and Laghrour.

Over the course of one month, Amirouche traveled through the region, met several leaders, and examined reports from Chellia and Yabous. He also reviewed soldiers' reports against Messaoud Ben Aissa and the issue of prisoners held by him. Amirouche concluded that Ben Aissa should be suspended from responsibility, that his prisoners should be released, and that the reports should be submitted to the accompanying committee for investigation (Ammar Germane, 2009, pp. 128-129).

During a series of meetings, Amirouche announced that the Coordination and Execution Committee had authorized him to create new zones according to the conditions of war. He also stressed the need to use the military ranks agreed at the Conference. From the time of his arrival, he tried to resolve the existing dispute between Adjoul and Omar. This effort itself contributed to a division in the region between supporters and opponents (FR.A.N.O.M93/1116).

Amirouche also began an investigation into Ben Boulaid's death. He received sufficient cooperation and convened an initial meeting attended by El Hadj Lakhdar, Tahar Nouichi, Ben Michich, Amirouche, and Adjoul Adjoul. The questioning lasted three days. Adjoul stated that he had learned of the incident only more than a month later. He also denied any connection with Omar Ben Boulaid, who had chosen to break away from what Adjoul described as the legitimate leadership represented by himself and Laghrour (Adjoul, recorded testimony).

At the next meeting, held on 20 October 1956, a serious incident occurred (FR.A.N.O.M93/146). A group surrounded the location and opened fire toward the place where Adjoul was sleeping with his guards and secretary. Two of Adjoul's guards were killed and Adjoul was wounded. Ahmed Azroual was killed on the attacking side (Helaili, 2012, pp. 283-284). Salah Goudjil gives a different account. He states that the objective was to arrest Adjoul and that Adjoul opened fire first (Salah Goudjil, 2016). One explanation links the incident to Adjoul's refusal to give up the leadership position (Nart, 1985, p. 158). Other accounts claim that Adjoul had been planning to execute Amirouche. What can be inferred is that a plot directed against Adjoul led to armed violence and loss of life.

After the incident, Adjoul fled to the Gassdis area, where a doctor from Wilaya VI treated his wounds. He tried to resolve the matter by writing to the envoy of the Coordination and Execution Committee and proposing a peaceful settlement, but the proposal was rejected. Amirouche also ordered that Adjoul be pursued or eliminated, while Adjoul's own soldiers abandoned him under the influence of the Ben Boulaid affair (Nart, 1985, p. 158). This suggests that the episode was not a simple mistake that could be overlooked, but a planned attempt to remove him. Adjoul ultimately surrendered under pressure in order to avoid further divisions within the revolutionary ranks.

Said Belkherchouche gives another account. He states that Adjoul fled toward his father's house seeking protection from his opponents. Because Adjoul's wounds were still bleeding, his father handed him over to the French army in November 1956, specifically at the Zribet El Oued center of the Fifth Bureau (Belkherchouche, 2016, p. 403).

The sources generally agree that Amirouche failed in his mission in the Aures and left the region after the incident. This coincided with the aircraft hijacking incident of 22 October 1956. The Aures leaders returned to their areas. Mohamed Lamouri, El Hadj Lakhdar, Hihi Mekki, Madour Azzoui, and Tahar Nouichi then met at Mount Oustili in an effort to prevent the Wilaya from sinking further into internal conflict. El Hadj Lakhdar proposed appointing Lamouri as leader of Wilaya I, with himself as deputy. Tahar Nouichi was assigned responsibility for Region II, but the Touaba tribe rejected him. Ahmed Azzoui was appointed instead, but his appointment was also rejected. The region therefore remained without a leader until Ahmed Naouara was appointed (Madaci, 2001, pp. 205-206).

4.3. Consequences of the Soummam Conference for Leadership in Wilaya I:

Amirouche's withdrawal to Wilaya III did not mean that he had abandoned his assigned mission. He submitted a report to the Coordination and Execution Committee and delivered summonses to the leaders of Wilaya I, asking them to join him and discuss unresolved issues. Most leaders met in December 1956 to consider the summonses. They concluded that the invitation should be accepted, except for Messaoud Ben Aissa and Omar Ben Boulaid. Their position was linked to the refusal to entrust Omar with leadership of the Aures. From this point, the conflict took another direction because Omar and his supporters rejected Lamouri's proposal that relations with Wilaya III should be maintained.

Several leaders of Wilaya I consequently traveled to Wilaya III. They included Mohamed Lamouri, Abdelhafid Tourche, Hihi Mekki, El Hadj Lakhdar, Tahar Nouichi, Madour Azzoui, Mostefa Raaili, Mohamed Cherif Ben Akcha, and Ibrahim Kabouia. They were received by Oumrane, Amirouche, and Said Mohammedi, who was then commander of the Wilaya (Madaci, 2001, p. 205).

Several meetings were held between the Aures delegation and the Kabylia leadership. The most important was the meeting of 4-5 January 1957. Said Mohammedi chaired it, but Amirouche was the principal figure supervising the discussions because he knew the Aures problem better than the others. The meeting addressed several issues, including the case of Adjoul Adjoul, the Nemencha, the Messalist movement, and the boundaries between Wilayas. The discussions led to the decision to hold another meeting in Tunisia (Meynier, 2003, pp. 365-394).

In response to the invitations received by the Aures leaders, they traveled to Tunisia for a meeting scheduled for 2 April 1957 under the chairmanship of Omar Oumrane, representative of the Coordination and Execution Committee. They expected to participate collectively in choosing a new leadership for Wilaya I (Salah Goudjil, 2016). They were surprised, however, to find that the National Liberation Army leadership had already made the appointments. The Wilaya was unified under Mahmoud Cherif, who was appointed commander with the rank of colonel (FR.A.N.O.M93/146). Abdallah Belhouchet and Mohamed Lamouri were given responsibility for military and political affairs respectively, both with the rank of major. Ahmed Naouara was placed in charge of information and communications, while Ali Harkati was responsible for supplies (Mellah, 2012, pp. 51-52).

These appointments created internal conflict among the leaders. Abbes Laghrour found himself marginalized for a second time after being excluded from both the Coordination and Execution Committee and the National Council of the Algerian Revolution, whose creation had surprised many participants (Salah Goudjil, 2016).

The decision by the Coordination and Execution Committee to appoint Mahmoud Cherif to lead Wilaya I was rejected by regional commanders. They objected because of his experience and previous service in the French army (Courierre, 1990, p. 1343). Others considered the appointment an error against the Aures. In their view, the problems were internal rather than external and should not have been addressed by appointing the Wilaya's leadership in Tunisia (Mazouz, 2021).

Salah Goudjil protested against the appointment of Mahmoud Cherif instead of Mohamed Lamouri, arguing that Cherif was not qualified to lead Wilaya I. When Abderrazak Hawas intervened, Goudjil replied that Hawas had no right to do so because he had belonged to the Messalist current (Salah Goudjil, 2016). At the same time, some leaders regarded the appointment of a former French army officer as a provocation. They became increasingly convinced that the Coordination and Execution Committee intended to impose its control over Wilaya I and marginalize military figures who might obstruct implementation of the Soummam resolutions, which had established the primacy of political leadership.

The reaction of the Aures leaders did not stop at protests against these appointments. It extended to rejection of the Soummam Conference decisions and of the institutions created by the Conference. The revolutionary leadership, represented in the Wilaya by Mahmoud Cherif, could not silence opposition without resorting to force and bloodshed. The Aures leaders and their men eventually fell into the hands of Tunisian security services after Habib Bourguiba placed his police at Abane Ramdane's disposal. According to this account, measures were then taken to eliminate leaders of Wilaya I who had been drawn to Tunisia by the promise that they would participate in selecting their Wilaya leadership (Helaili, 2020, pp. 316-317). The Tunisian base consequently became a scene of conflict between the internal and external groups (FR.A.N.O.M93/146).

The new leadership succeeded in arresting several major leaders. Some of those who escaped returned to the Aures, where instructions were issued to fight them. These included Messaoud Ben Aissa and Madour Azzoui. Omar Ben Boulaid, Houha Belaid, Soufi Abdelhafid, and others were arrested. A second group surrendered to the Tunisian authorities. This group included Abbes Laghrour, Lazhar Cheriet, Said Abdelhay, and Taleb Larbi Qemoudi. They were executed along with about thirty militants who had tried to gather their men to confront the Coordination and Execution Committee in what became known as the "Villa Lacania incident" (Helaili, 2020, p. 317).

In this situation, Mahmoud Cherif was unable to resolve the problem of the dissidents. The revolutionary leadership used force to silence opponents in the Aures and in the Souk Ahras area, known as the Eastern Base. This deepened the crisis to the point that some local leaders no longer recognized the National Liberation Army or the National Liberation Front. One of the best-known examples was Messaoud Ben Aissa, who openly declared his rebellion before his men by saying: "I am against all fronts, even my own Front." He was also linked to several eliminations in the Chellia area of Batna (Meynier, 2003, p. 395).

Leadership in Wilaya I consequently became extremely difficult. Most officials were unable to impose their authority in the field and turned to leadership from a distance because they feared becoming victims of the same eliminations that had affected earlier leaders.

5. Conclusion:

It would be methodologically unsound to claim a near-final conclusion or a fully certain truth on this subject because important facts and precise details remain unavailable. The main findings of this study can nevertheless be summarized as follows:

- The leadership breakdown in Region I / Wilaya I between 1955 and 1957 was largely circumstantial and resulted from the absence of a field leader who enjoyed broad consensus, namely Mostefa Ben Boulaid. Several factors contributed to the crisis. Tribal structures, the desire of some revolutionary figures to assume leadership, and a tendency to rebel against existing authority, driven mainly by personal ambition, divided the region. Competing blocs became one of its most visible features.
- Under these conditions, the situation escalated. This is reflected in the decision by Laghrour and Adjoul to eliminate the legitimate leadership represented by Chihani. Competition for power and individual ambitions among some regional officials increased disorder and tension. The result was a series of splits within the leadership structure of the National Liberation Army in the Wilaya.
- One consequence was the absence of the Aures from the Soummam Conference and the failure to resolve the crisis internally. This led to intervention by the Coordination and Execution Committee. The Committee also failed to find a solution and, according to the study, intensified the crisis because its decisions were external and coercive rather than consensual and locally agreed. The existing Wilaya leadership was marginalized and excluded.
- Claims that the Aures leaders opposed the Soummam Conference itself do not appear in most statements made by the leaders who headed the region at the time, especially Adjoul Adjoul. Nor do they appear clearly in the archival documents, whether French military reports or revolutionary records. The rebellion and rejection were instead directed at the practices of members of the Coordination and Execution Committee, especially the appointment of a new leadership, the marginalization of the previous leadership, and the fabrication of accusations against it.
- Finally, the leaders of the Aures can be seen as victims of an intellectual and political shift within the Revolution that they did not follow at the time. They later became victims of personal ambitions for leadership, which led to the elimination of many of them. Assassination became a means of removing opposition or criticism and left an obscure chapter in the history of the Revolution because many details surrounding these events remain unknown.

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