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# French-Egyptian Relations before the Suez Crisis (1954-1956)

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In 1954, a shift in France's relations with Egypt, where it held mainly considerable economic and cultural positions,<sup>1</sup> began to be designed, as the government of Pierre Mendès France was about to lay the foundations of a readjustment of the country's policy for the Middle East. After the Second World War France was no longer a Middle East power. But from 1950 on it could appear as one, at least in relative terms, thanks to its association with its American and British allies in the tripartite declaration of 1950 and in the projects of organization of collective defence in the region being put forward by the British (Middle East Committee/Middle East Defence Organization). By 1954 these projects had already been shelved, because of Egyptian opposition and lack of essential American support.<sup>2</sup> American policy on Middle East defence, as put forward by the Eisenhower administration, was one of favouring bilateral regional pacts between the countries of the Northern Tier area—Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan—without direct participation of the Western powers. Contrary

**1** French economic interests in Egypt included French funds and technical assistance, activity of French banks, insurance companies (three fifths of the corresponding market) and various enterprises (cotton and tissue markets, industry), as well as extended commercial exchanges, France being the first buyer of Egyptian cotton in 1953. The French also hoped to participate in the various agricultural and industrial projects that the Egyptian government was planning to initiate. As far as French cultural interests are concerned, these mainly included French schools (58,659 pupils in 1954), the Institut français d'archéologie orientale, French staff in Egyptian schools, and hospitals. See Ministère des Affaires étrangères [hereafter: MAE], *Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, s/direction du Levant, note pour le service du Protocole, 1<sup>er</sup> avril 1954; 848 AL, Gillet à P. Mendès France: Mission bancaire française 5-9 juin a/s du haut-barrage d'Assouan, 25 juin 1954; Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 505, note de M. André Thoreau, délégué supérieur des Français de l'étranger (Égypte, Soudan, Libye, Arabie Saoudite et Éthiopie). 9,000 French were living mainly in Cairo, Alexandria and Heliopolis, see A. Ntalachanis, *Les Grecs d'Égypte et la crise de Suez : une étape décisive vers l'exode*, mémoire de DEA dirigé par Georges B. Dertilis, EHESS, 2004, p. 84. France's interests included equally these of the French shareholders who had part in the Suez Canal Company, see Hubert Bonin, *Suez, du canal à la finance (1858-1987)*, Paris, Economica, 1987.*

**2** David R. Devereux, *The Formulation of British Defence Policy in the Middle East, 1948-1956* (London, Macmillan, 1990).

to the United States and Great Britain, this new concept left France no place for an indirect participation in defence arrangements, since her—very much declining—military influence on Syria was not sufficient a position and, moreover, France was not associated in Anglo-American talks concerning Middle East defence. Thus France saw its needing to reinforce its position.

In the summer of 1954, the newly formed Mendès France government thought that this was possible by leaning on Israel and on Egypt. Israel was worried about the American policy, fearing extensive rearmament by Arab states. Egypt, for its part, was showing signs of good will to approach France, as negotiations with Great Britain about the Suez base were drawing to an end, and the French estimated that the Egyptian overtures could be encouraged by arms sales and credit cessions.<sup>3</sup> However, Egyptian encouragement of North African nationalism and active radio propaganda to this purpose through Radio Cairo's transmission of *The Voice of the Arabs* were not welcomed by France and were likely instead to poison relations between the two countries. The Algerian revolt broke out on 1 November and negotiations about autonomy were going on in the protectorates. In December, with a message from Nasser to Mendès France and with an aide-mémoire, the Egyptians tried mainly to obtain some kind of participation in French-Moroccan negotiations. The French were neither likely to accept an Egyptian intrusion into North African affairs, nor to permit development of an official Egyptian presence through consulates or cultural institutes, as proposed. Mendès France refused the Egyptian demands on their entirety.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of that, Mendès France was a realist. He favoured a general approach where possible towards Egypt and restrained the tough tendency represented by the ministry of Defence. The military establishment sought a general embargo on arms sales to the Near East countries, especially to Egypt, because of its anti-French propaganda on North African questions. Mendès France clearly defined his policy at the beginning of 1955, just before the fall of his government and immediately after the announcement of the imminent conclusion of the Turco-Iraqi Treaty

**3** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Israël 50, note de dossier sur le réajustement de la politique française au Moyen-Orient après la visite du général Dayan, confidentiel, 11 août 1954.

**4** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, 827 AL, le ministre des Affaires étrangères au chargé d'affaires a.i. au Caire, a/s memorandum remis par l'ambassadeur d'Égypte, 11 décembre 1954; *ibid.*, Égypte 484, ambassade de la République d'Égypte à Paris, aide-mémoire, 16 décembre 1954; Présidence du Conseil, le président, note pour M. Parodi, 17 décembre 1954.

in mid-January. Arms sales to all Middle East countries offered a major political interest for France. This was, first, because of the importance of maintaining good relations with military circles in countries such as Egypt and Syria, where their significance in decision-making was decisive, and second, because this could mark France's importance of collaboration in the organization of Middle East defence. In particular for Egypt, France should try and seize every possibility to participate in the armament and instruction of its army, at a moment when the Americans and the British maintained a keen interest in these same domains.<sup>5</sup>

The Turco-Iraqi Treaty, prelude to the Baghdad Pact, offered common ground of a precise kind for an approach between France and Egypt, since neither country desired it. For France, there were two main reasons to oppose it. First, the treaty was giving concrete form to a certain policy of its allies in which Paris had no part. Second, France was reserved as to any Iraqi initiative, as this country was seen as a threat over Syria, because of its unionist plans for a Fertile Crescent scheme.<sup>6</sup> Egypt's grounds for opposition had to do with the fact that the Turco-Iraqi Treaty left it in a secondary position in relation to Middle East defence plans. This was therefore a threat to the Egyptian hegemonic policy in the Arab world, and to the international kudos it was seeking by aligning the other Arab countries with its policy.

By the end of 1954, Egypt had excluded its participation in a Northern Tier pact by turning down the American offer of military aid, to which strings were attached concerning an Arab-Israeli arrangement and participation in a Northern Tier pact. Egypt had made clear to the British that its priority was Israel and probably a settlement. In both cases, however, Arab-Israeli arrangements and defence organization, the underlying objective of the Egyptian regime was clearly to retain Egypt's leadership of the Arab countries and assure itself the lion's share of Western aid. In late December, Egypt seemed to have imposed its views on the other Arab countries, after the voting of a resolution in the Arab League. This vote made the Arab pact the base for arrangements in Arab

**5** SHAT, 9 Q 5 9/3, s/direction du Levant 64 CM, le ministre des Affaires étrangères [hereafter: ministre AE] au ministre de la Défense nationale [hereafter: ministre DN], a/s exportation d'armes aux États du Proche-Orient, 19 janvier 1955; MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 545, état-major des forces armées [hereafter: EMFA], 2<sup>e</sup> division, rapports de la France et des pays du Moyen-Orient, très secret, 17 avril 1956, annexe 1, tableau chronologique des principales fournitures d'armes françaises aux pays du Moyen-Orient.

**6** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 542, télégrammes 202/11 de la s/direction du Levant (signés Massigli) à ambassade de France à Ankara, réservé/extrême urgence, 25 janvier 1955.

countries' foreign policy and, hence, the base for a defence organization in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

The Turco-Iraqi Treaty was now upsetting Egyptian policy. Fearing isolation, Egypt tried instead to isolate Iraq. This failed. In fact, the Cairo Conference (22 January–3 February), held between members of the Arab pact, did not condemn Iraqi policy. Inter-Arab competition accentuated instead over the “countries of the middle”—Syria, Lebanon and Jordan—and their future orientation. Turkey and Iraq promoted enlargement of their axis, whereas Egypt, two days after the signing of the Turco-Iraqi Treaty (24 February 1955), denounced the Arab pact and declared that it intended to create a unified Egypto-Syrian command as a basis for a new Arab pact.<sup>8</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the conclusion of the Turco-Iraqi Treaty, the two objectives of Egyptian policy would be, first, the blocking of further Arab adhesions to the treaty and, second, an Egyptian military reinforcement. The former objective coincided with French views, because of the fear that Iraq would find this a means to absorb Syria.<sup>9</sup> The latter opened the door to a development of Franco-Egyptian military relations.

While the Egyptians were also discussing the possibility of obtaining heavy weapons in exchange for cotton with the Czech commercial delegation that arrived in Cairo on 10 February,<sup>10</sup> the French Embassy reported an Egyptian request to send twenty to thirty Egyptian air force officers to be instructed in France.<sup>11</sup> This was quite an important

**7** On these aspects of Egyptian policy see Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain and Egypt, 1945-1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 184–6; Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World: The Struggle over the Baghdad Pact* (Leiden, Brill, 1995), p. 97–9; William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Policy towards Egypt, 1955-1981* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 23; R. Stephen Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001), p. 93; Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East, 1952-1967* (London/Portland, Frank Cass, 2003), p. 41.

**8** E. Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 112–15, 126. See also Nasser M. Kalawoun, *The Struggle for Lebanon: A Modern History of Lebanese-Egyptian Relations* (London/New York, I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. 10–14.

**9** See note 6.

**10** Rami Ginat, “Origins of the Czech-Egyptian Arms Deal: A Reappraisal”, in David Tal (ed.), *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London/Portland, Frank Cass, 2001), p. 155 and 159.

**11** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, 178 AL, Gillet à Edgar Faure, a/s stagiaires égyptiens dans l’armée française, 11 février 1955.

overture, given the attenuated relations between the two countries in this crucial domain.<sup>12</sup>

Nasser knew the USSR was ready in principle, since July 1954, to discuss an arms deal with Egypt.<sup>13</sup> But what is equally important is that he continued to view the fulfilment of his needs for weapons by a Western power either as an alternative, or as a means to obtain a keener American interest. The Egyptian request was quickly accepted clearly on the grounds that the existing situation was offering France a chance to take advantage of Egyptian disillusionment with American and British policy, and improve French-Egyptian relations by a positive gesture of this sort.<sup>14</sup>

The Gaza raid of 28 February 1955 sealed Egyptian efforts of rearmament undertaken after the Turco-Iraqi Treaty by giving them an urgent character. Immediately after the raid, the Egyptian chiefs of staff asked the French urgently for 30 AMX tanks on condition that they could be delivered within a month.<sup>15</sup> An Egyptian mission came to France in mid-March to visit military establishments and examine several projects about AMX tanks, artillery material, aviation (mainly concerning the

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**12** One also has to keep in mind that in the summer of 1954 Mendès France justified the decision to sell Israel modern jet aircraft (Mystère II) by the need to mark France's presence in the Near East and to guarantee its being taken into account in the efforts of its allies for the organization of the defence of this region. In this context, the French had been particularly annoyed at losing the Syrian air forces market, where Great Britain was selling its Gloster Meteor jet aircraft since 1952. The French were keen on making the British adhere strictly to the non-substitution agreement of 1945 and their sales to Israel also aimed at compensating the British sales made to Syria. The decision to sell modern jet aircraft was particularly annoying to London, as the Mystère II was more advanced than the Gloster Meteor. As such, the French decision presented the risk not only to start an arms race between the Near East states, but also to create the need to reequip the British air forces stationed in the area. In their turn, the Egyptians had also shown interest in obtaining the Mystères II. See note 3; National Archives [hereafter: PRO], Foreign Office [hereafter: FO] 371/110813, V1192/326, 536, Paris to FO, 7 August 1954; PRO, FO 371/115818, VR 10317/1, Tel Aviv to FO, 22 February 1955; MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, 262, s/direction du Levant, le ministre AE au ministre DN (signé Fernand-Laurent), a/s exportation d'avions à réaction au Moyen-Orient, 13 août 1954; PRO, FO 371/110813, V1192/344, 4173, FO to Washington, secret, 19 August 1954; PRO, FO 371/110813, V1192/382, Paris to FO, secret, 10 August 1954; PRO, FO 371/110813, V1192/832A, Paris to FO, secret, 11 August 1954.

**13** Guy Laron, *Cutting the Gordian Knot: The Post-WWII Egyptian Quest for Arms and the 1955 Czechoslovak Arms Deal* (Washington, D.C., CWIHP, Working Paper 55, 2007), p. 21

**14** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, 49/CAB/AIR/I/SC, le ministre DN au ministre AE, 5 mars 1955; 432, le ministre AE au ministre DN, 15 mars 1955.

**15** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, SOFMA, note sur la vente de chars à l'Égypte, la Syrie et Israël, 10 mars 1955. The AMXs were under study since December by the Egyptian army, which had asked for the possibility of certain modifications. After the Gaza raid however the Egyptians declared ready to take the AMXs as they were, if the delivery could take place in a one-month period.

Mystère II aircraft), and naval vessels.<sup>16</sup> The new French government of Edgar Faure, continuing the policy line established by Mendès France, soon authorized the export of 30 AMXs, 10 Mystères II, and 9 motor torpedo boats. These projects were not submitted to the Near East Arms Coordinating Committee (NEACC) but the British government was kept informed by an aide-mémoire.<sup>17</sup> However, no immediate delivery of the equipment occurred. As will be shown later, these deliveries provoked an internal reaction within the French government. Exports in March and April consisted mainly of light armaments, ammunition, radio and radar equipment. As far as heavy weapons were concerned, the contracts, of a total value of £ 4,128,021, were not signed until late May and early June. This was quite a delay given the Egyptian urgency. The contracts included the 30 AMX tanks, 33,500 rounds of AMX ammunition, 54 AMX turrets, 34 155mm howitzers, and 330 Brandt mortar shells (contract of April).<sup>18</sup>

On the diplomatic level, the French attitude was of a kind that suited Egyptian interests. Not only did France adopt a reserved attitude upon the announcement of the Turco-Iraqi Treaty,<sup>19</sup> but she also disclosed it confidentially to Egypt before the opening of the Cairo Conference,<sup>20</sup> thus reinforcing this country's opposition by showing lack of solidarity to its American and British allies.<sup>21</sup> The effects of the French lack of cooperation were felt by Americans and the British. Washington proposed to keep the French informed of defensive arrangements in the

**16** Service historique de la Défense, département armée de Terre [hereafter: SHD-DAT], Égypte 10 T 792, 5913/EMA/2/EG, secret, fiche à l'attention du général d'armée, chef d'état-major de l'armée, objet: livraison de matériel militaire aux forces armées égyptiennes (matériel de marine), 18 avril 1955; 2860/SCE, 15 mars 1955; 2890/SCE, 16 mars 1955.

**17** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, télégramme 479/486 de la s/direction du Levant (Massigli) à Amman et à toutes les capitales du Proche-Orient, communiqué à Londres, Washington et New York, secret, 2 avril 1955.

**18** SHD-DAT, 20 R 152, Section des cessions à l'étranger, bilan des affaires en cours, 29 août 1955; MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 545, EMFA, 2<sup>e</sup> division, rapports de la France et des pays du Moyen-Orient, très secret, 17 avril 1956, annexe 1, tableau chronologique des principales fournitures d'armes françaises aux pays du Moyen-Orient.

**19** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 537, Présidence du Conseil, le président, note pour R. Massigli, 17 janvier 1955.

**20** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 537, télégramme 196/97, s/direction du Levant (de Margerie) à ambassade de France au Caire, 26 janvier 1955.

**21** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 542, télégramme de l'attaché militaire à Damas, 7 mars 1955. According to the Syrians, the agreement between Syria and Egypt was owing much to French attitude, Anglo-American pressure exercised on Syria in favour of its joining the Turco-Iraqi treaty, and the Gaza raid.

Middle East through the American Embassy in Paris, expressing at the same time its unhappiness about French disapproval as expressed to Cairo and Damascus.<sup>22</sup> London, for its part, gave assurances on behalf of Iraq that Syrian independence would be respected, though this guarantee was conditioned by Syrian adherence to the treaty.<sup>23</sup> In any case, polarization on behalf of Egypt was not welcome to Paris either, as the agreement of 2 March between Syria and Egypt confirmed the forging of two opposite blocs—and France actually found itself supporting the one that was opposed to the organization of defence in the Middle East according to Western interests.<sup>24</sup> France therefore adopted a more moderate position without, however, exercising a positive action in favour of the Turco-Iraqi treaty, in order to preserve its relations with Egypt and Syria.<sup>25</sup> The French attitude was, as a result, characterized by a major ambivalence which made its British allies talk about a double game.<sup>26</sup>

What actually determined Franco-Egyptian relations, however, was the perceived role of Egypt in North African issues and its alleged assistance to Algerian rebels, in combination with the important division that arose within the French government over the question of whether to preserve military relations with Egypt and Israel. This division was highly relevant to the evolution of the Algerian affair itself and the pressure it placed on the fragile and unstable political system of the Fourth Republic. At the end of 1954, Mendès France had been able to overcome the views of the Defence Ministry, which had objected to developing military relations between France and Egypt, because he had found no essential opposition to his views in the cabinet (Mendès France being prime minister as well as minister of foreign affairs). Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior, which had the responsibility for Algerian affairs, was following, under François Mitterrand, a policy focused on reforms. In this light, the

**22** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 537, le directeur adjoint des Affaires politiques, note pour M. le président Edgar Faure, 22 février 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, vol. XIII, p. 516, n. 2.

**23** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 542, télégramme 430/35, s/direction du Levant à ambassade de France à Damas, 5 mars 1955.

**24** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 537, télégramme 465/73, Direction générale des Affaires politiques, Afrique-Levant (Massigli) à ambassade de France à Damas, priorité absolue/réservé, 6 mars 1955.

**25** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 542, télégramme 190, Paris (Damas), 15 mars 1955 ; 610 AL, Clarac au ministre AE, a/s mission Gorse à Damas, 14 avril 1955.

**26** PRO, FO 371/115468, 1053/2/55, Cairo to FO, 15 March 1955.

military repression of the rebellion was a means to an end—and important means, but still only a means.<sup>27</sup>

Under the Faure government, this changed. The new government was based on a precarious balance, whose maintenance required constant political gymnastics.<sup>28</sup> The new boss in the Interior was Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury and he buried Mitterrand's experiment of far-reaching reforms, these having failed in the face of the opposition of the French settlers in Algeria. Military repression of the revolt, instead, now became the priority.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the North African questions, especially Algeria, were taking on a special importance: they were the main issues discussed in the French cabinet between March and November 1955.<sup>30</sup>

In this context, Egypt was coming to be seen as a principal enemy in North Africa, whereas Israel was assuming the aspect of an ally. According to the views of the French military high command, "the Egyptian defeat in the 1948 war [...] had healed the wounds of North Africa for ten years".<sup>31</sup> In military documents, the possibility of a policy of military action against Egypt as a solution is reported as early as 1955, although this view was then rejected as unrealistic—first, on grounds of certain international reactions coming from France's allies and the United Nations, and secondly as being contrary to the French interests in the Arab world.<sup>32</sup> The same is recognised for the scenario of a war against Egypt through Israel, which, for this reason, made a spectacular Israeli rearmament by French arms sales to this country meaningless.<sup>33</sup>

**27** For the harmonious cooperation of François Mitterrand and Pierre Mendès France (PMF) in the application of a policy that was going to the sense of PMF's views of modernization, see Irwin Wall, "Pierre Mendès France face au problème algérien : une attitude moderne ?", *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 63–64, July–December 2001, p. 14–15.

**28** Georgette Elgey, *Histoire de la IV<sup>e</sup> République*, t. 1, *La République des tourmentes (1954-1959)* (Paris, Fayard, 1992), p. 343–4. Edgar Faure formed a government after Antoine Pinay, Pierre Pflimlin and Christian Pineau had failed to do so.

**29** Martin Thomas, *The French North African Crisis: Colonial Breakdown and Anglo-French Relations, 1945-1962* (London, Macmillan, 2000), p. 80.

**30** G. Elgey, *La République des tourmentes*, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

**31** Jacob Tsur, *Prélude à Suez. Journal d'une ambassade 1953-1956* (Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1968), p. 182. The views are expressed by the General Guillaume, general chief of staff of the French army.

**32** SHD-DAT, Égypte 10 T 792, ventes d'armes à l'Égypte et la propagande radio de La voix des Arabes, 17 juin 1955.

**33** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 545, EMFA, 2<sup>e</sup> division, rapports de la France et des pays du Moyen-Orient, très secret, 17 avril 1956; SHAT, 9 Q 5 9/3, EMFA, 2<sup>e</sup> division/section D, réunion de la commission interministérielle d'exportation des armements en date du 16 juillet, 17 juillet 1956.

As military relations between France and Egypt continued to develop during the spring of 1955, the Defence Ministry saw in it a means to stop Egyptian assistance to North African nationalism in all three Francophone Maghreb countries through press and radio propaganda and by supplies of light armaments.<sup>34</sup> A harder line, though, which was to be supported in the Council of ministers by the defence minister as well, was represented by the Ministry of the Interior which was opposed to arms sales to Egypt and favoured, instead, arms sales to Israel. Already in May 1955, Louis Mangin and Abel Thomas, close collaborators of Bourguès-Maunoury, approached the Israeli Embassy in Paris and asked for contacts in order to exchange information, declaring their worry about Egyptian rearmament in France.<sup>35</sup> Contacts between Mangin and Thomas, on the one hand, and Josef Nachmias, head of the Israeli mission charged with arms purchases in Paris, on the other hand, had already been established in 1954. Shimon Peres, director of the Israeli Defence Ministry, was the principal architect of the Franco-Israeli special relationship between the defence ministries of the two countries.<sup>36</sup> In May the Israelis asked France to sell them more heavy weapons and Mystère II aircraft. However, the Quai d'Orsay resisted, on the grounds that previous contracts already concluded with Israel were sufficient to keep a balance of forces between it and the Arab countries.<sup>37</sup>

It was with this background that the contracts concerning heavy armaments—though not the Mystère II aircraft<sup>38</sup>—were signed with Egypt between the end of May and the beginning of June. This came about despite an intense radio propaganda against the recent Franco-Tunisian

**34** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 537, le conseiller diplomatique, note à l'attention du général Kœnig sur ce qui pourrait être l'attitude française devant le pacte turco-irakien, 14 mars 1955; SHAT, Égypte 10 T 92, 5913/EMA/2/EG, secret, fiche à l'attention du général d'armée, chef d'état-major de l'armée, objet : livraison de matériel militaire aux forces armées égyptiennes (matériel de marine), 18 avril 1955.

**35** J. Tsur, *Prélude à Suez*, op. cit., p. 210.

**36** Sylvia K. Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel from Suez to the Six Day War* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 57.

**37** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 722, s/direction du Levant, note pour le président, a/s livraisons d'armes aux États du Proche-Orient, 16 mai 1955. For Tsur's démarches, see J. Tsur, *Prélude à Suez*, op. cit., p. 209.

**38** The affair disappears from the diplomatic documents after the export authorization given in April 1955. According to the first secretary of the French Embassy in Cairo, such a delivery took place, see Bernard Destremau, *Quai d'Orsay. Derrière la façade* (Paris, Plon, 1994), p. 158. However, no delivery of any Mystère II aircraft at all is reported in French archives for the ME countries in 1955. The very first delivery of jet aircraft to a ME country concerned the Mystère IV aircraft sent to Israel in April 1956.

treaties and unaffected by the declaration made by Nasser in favour of Algerian independence at the Bandung Conference in April 1955.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, at the end of April Egypt had suspended the use of its army camps for training North African commandos.<sup>40</sup> By mid-June, however, the continued propaganda of the Egyptian radio was cited as the main reason to interrupt arms deliveries towards Egypt. Various diplomatic démarches of protest by the French Embassy in Cairo had been fruitless and Nasser gave no answer to requests for a meeting.<sup>41</sup> This time, the French Council of ministers decided to interrupt arms supplies to Arab countries, approving at the same time arms supplies for Israel.<sup>42</sup> The decision was accepted by the Comité de la Défense nationale. This was despite objections raised by the French military attaché in Cairo, for the sake of preserving military influence in the country and so as better serve French interests in North Africa better by insisting on the method of diplomatic démarches.<sup>43</sup> On 20 June 1955 General Pierre Kœnig, the French defence minister, announced to Colonel Saroite Okacha, the Egyptian military attaché in Paris, that the delivery of four 155mm howitzers, due to take place that day, was suspended. The next day, the French military attaché in Cairo sought an audience between the French ambassador and Nasser. A day later, it seems that Nasser agreed to send a telegram to the Tunisian nationalist leader, Habib Bourguiba, expressing his approval of the Franco-Tunisian agreements.<sup>44</sup> Normally, as requested by the ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the military attaché in Cairo, the deliveries to Egypt should go on as scheduled. This, however, was not what occurred.

**39** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, télégramme 1323/26, s/direction du Levant (Massigli) à ambassade de France au Caire, 2 juin 1955; télégramme 1092, s/direction du Levant à ambassade de France au Caire, 26 avril 1955.

**40** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 485, télégramme 559/60, Le Caire, 20 mai 1955.

**41** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, télégramme 1323/26, s/direction du Levant (Massigli) à ambassade de France au Caire, 2 juin 1955.

**42** J. Tsur, *Prélude à Suez*, op. cit., p. 226.

**43** SHD-DAT, Égypte 10 T 792, ventes d'armes à l'Égypte et la propagande radio de La voix des Arabes, 17 juin 1955.

**44** SHD-DAT, Égypte 10 T 792, 7255/EMFA, Secrétariat d'État aux Forces armées (Guerre), EM, 2<sup>e</sup> bureau, 8 juillet 1955 : Copie du télégramme 72-73 du 23 juin 1955 a/s de la récente crise franco-égyptienne relative à la vente d'armes par la France à l'Égypte. Origine : Attaché militaire Le Caire. For the telegram of Nasser to Bourguiba, see MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 545, EMFA, 2<sup>e</sup> division, rapports de la France et des pays du Moyen-Orient, très secret, 17 avril 1956, annexe 1, tableau chronologique des principales fournitures d'armes françaises aux pays du Moyen-Orient.

At stake, in reality, was the very same execution of deliveries to Egypt and, by that, the general question of Egypt's rearmament by France. The total of the Egyptian orders were ready to be shipped by June, when the interruption occurred.<sup>45</sup> That was the case also at the end of the summer. Then, following intervention by the Minister of the Interior Bourgès-Maunoury, a shipment of the AMX tanks was blocked in the port of Marseille and the French cabinet decided on a new interruption of deliveries to Egypt, notified on 5 September. In the cabinet, Bourgès-Maunoury and Koenig made arms deliveries to Egypt conditional on arms deliveries to Israel, and this was approved by the Prime Minister Faure.<sup>46</sup> In this case too, the interruption had been preceded by effective opposition from the ministry of Foreign Affairs about the contracts to be signed with Israel. The cabinet had accepted the view that a comprehensive transaction was not to take place and that, instead, each category of arms was to be treated separately.<sup>47</sup> What the Quai d'Orsay was essentially after was to avoid the cession of Mystère jet aircraft to Israel. However, the pressure exercised in the Council of ministers was now making the Quai consider the option of a general embargo on arms sales towards the Middle East countries, as an alibi towards Egypt at a moment that arms deliveries were met by "certain difficulties", and as a means of stopping arms deliveries towards Israel "which had been, since some time, dangerously accelerated".<sup>48</sup>

In fact, the line followed by Bourgès-Maunoury and his success to block the fulfilment of the Egyptian contracts needs to be interpreted as a success of Israeli policy. Since 1953, Tel Aviv's aim was not only to acquire arms for Israel in the West but also to block arms deliveries to Arab countries.<sup>49</sup> Such efforts were unsuccessful in Britain and the USA, but apparently bore fruit in France, thanks to the complicity of a part of the Council of ministers, even before the war in Algeria had grown more violent with the massacre of Europeans in Philippeville in August 1955. It is of particular importance, furthermore, that it was common knowledge

**45** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, 1432, le ministre AE au ministre de la Défense nationale et des Forces armées [hereafter: DNFA], a/s état de livraison d'armes aux pays du Proche-Orient (mai-juin 1955), secret, 18 août 1955.

**46** S. K. Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance*, op. cit., p. 57.

**47** J. Tsur, *Prélude à Suez*, op. cit., p. 217, 231 and 236-7.

**48** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 722, s/direction du Levant, note pour le directeur général des Affaires politiques, 12 septembre 1955.

**49** David Tal, "The American-Israeli Security Treaty: Sequel or Means to the Relief of Israeli-Arab Tensions, 1954-55", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31/4, October 1995, p. 832.

in France that selling certain types of heavy weaponry to Israel was giving that country an overwhelming superiority over the Arab countries.<sup>50</sup>

On 27 September the Czech-Egyptian arms agreement became known. Yet Nasser still seemed interested in pursuing Egypt's military relations with France. He thus gave instructions in the end of October to moderate Radio Cairo's propaganda. He also offered assurances that no training of commandos had been or would be undertaken in Egyptian camps. Nasser expressed his hope that the French government would continue its arms deliveries to Egypt. This was in fact the case, by a decision of 9 November, on condition that no arms would be sent to North Africa from Egypt, no opposition would be made to North African personalities who wanted to come to terms with France, and also a favourable examination of French offers on adjudications opened in Egypt.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, France accorded certain economic facilities to Egypt.<sup>52</sup>

According to French views, Nasser probably wanted to be prudent to a certain extent in his liaison with the Soviet camp,<sup>53</sup> and also retain a role of interlocutor for North African affairs.<sup>54</sup> Actually, by dint of attributing responsibilities to Nasser and placing extreme importance upon Egyptian propaganda in North African affairs, the French were already recognizing that the Egyptian leader had an important role. However, Nasser also had other reasons for wanting to keep on good terms with France, whose general policy in the Middle East, in particular over the Baghdad Pact, accorded with his own interests. Nasser was far from indifferent to the scope for playing off antagonisms between the Western powers. He insisted that France should sell arms to Saudi Arabia, which was actually contrary to what the British wanted, and he nourished French hopes of

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**50** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, SOFMA, note sur la vente de chars à l'Égypte, la Syrie et Israël, 10 mars 1955. This concerned in particular the sale of the AMX tank and its barrel (75 Vo 1,000). Once adapted to the old tanks already in possession of the Israeli army, such as the Shermans and the M10s, this barrel was allowing Israel to have an overwhelming superiority of fire.

**51** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, interventions françaises auprès du gouvernement égyptien en 1955 et 1956.

**52** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, 1535 AL, Armand du Chayla à Antoine Pinay, a/s entretien avec le colonel Nasser, 19 novembre 1955 ; télégramme 27, s/direction du Levant, le ministre AE à l'ambassadeur de France au Caire (signé René Massigli), a/s attitude de l'Égypte à l'égard de la France, 7 janvier 1956.

**53** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 545, EMFA, 2<sup>e</sup> division, rapports de la France et des pays du Moyen-Orient, très secret, 17 avril 1956.

**54** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 542, 1285 AL, du Chayla à Pinay, 12 octobre 1955.

participating in the works of the Aswan Dam. Last but not least, Nasser was worried about the escalation of French arms sales towards Israel.<sup>55</sup>

What was confirmed in the aftermath of the Czech-Egyptian arms deal, however, was the duality of French policy that was resulting from internal division on Middle Eastern matters. The deal came at a moment when war in Algeria was escalating after the Philippeville massacres.<sup>56</sup> Henceforth the war in Algeria was taken more seriously. A two-pronged strategy was implemented to confine the Algerian front by military repression in the interior and by depriving the Algerian rebels of their external aid. This not only signified the importance of Israel as an ally (close collaboration with the Israeli secret services being valuable for the French in order to control arms traffic towards the Algerians),<sup>57</sup> where Egypt participated as well.<sup>58</sup> After the Czech-Egyptian arms deal—and one has to keep in mind that two days later Egypt and the USSR were among the countries asking for the tabling of the Algerian affair on the UN agenda<sup>59</sup>—Faure promised the Israelis satisfaction of their requests for weapons.<sup>60</sup> On 10 November, a general protocol was signed by the French Defence Ministry, concerning heavy armament, without prior knowledge of the Quai d'Orsay.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, deliveries of the contracts already concluded with Israel accelerated until the end of the

**55** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, 1535 AL, du Chayla à Pinay, a/s entretien avec le colonel Nasser, 19 novembre 1955 ; télégramme 27, s/direction du Levant, le ministre AE à l'ambassadeur de France au Caire (signé Massigli), a/s attitude de l'Égypte à l'égard de la France, 7 janvier 1956.

**56** Alistair Horne, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1980), p. 127-8.

**57** Douglas Porch, *Histoire des services secrets français*, t. 2, *De la guerre d'Indochine au Rainbow Warrior* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1997), p. 126-7.

**58** See, for exemple, FNSP-CHEVS, Fonds Alain Savary, SV 43, télégramme 1156/66, Affaires marocaines et tunisiennes à Haut-Commissaire Tunis, 1<sup>er</sup> juin 1956 : communication du télégramme 50192 daté du même jour, Repan Paris (Alexandre Parodi) à Diplomatie Paris. And see also: Fathi Al Dib, *Abdel Nasser et la révolution algérienne* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1985).

**59** *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1955* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 65-9; *Le Monde*, 2-3 October 1955.

**60** J. Tsur, *Prélude à Suez*, *op. cit.*, p. 259-60.

**61** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, s/direction du Levant, note pour le ministre a/s problèmes relatifs aux exportations d'armes vers le Proche-Orient, annexe I, 20 mars 1956. France was engaged to deliver in the beginning of 1956, instead of the period between April and June 1956, 30 AMX tanks, which were indeed sent on 3 February to Israel. The contracts signed in accordance with this protocol concerned 850 SS 10 engines (over a total of 1,000, which actually left place for the signature of a new contract concerning the 250 left out), 500 rocket-launchers, 1,000 rockets. The contracts not yet signed concerned 60 AMXs, 40 Shermans, 8,000 strikes of 75 and 8,000 shell ammunitions.

year, though Ouragans instead of Mystères IV were delivered.<sup>62</sup> The Quai managed to block the signature of a part of the contracts, these on Mystères IV included, by presenting the argument that this model could not be ceded to Israel because of American opposition, as this aircraft was the object of off-shore contracts.<sup>63</sup> The Israeli Kinneret (Lake Tiberias) Operation in early December assisted the Quai's position because of the general embargo imposed on Israel.

During 1956, the two sides remained stuck to their respective positions: the defence officials, at the head of whom now stood Bourgès-Maunoury, the new minister under the Mollet government, would do their best to block deliveries towards Egypt. In February ten AMX tanks were the first and also the last to be delivered to Egypt, and at the beginning of April it was decided to conclude no further contracts with Nasser.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the ministry of Defence was pressing for the conclusion of contracts with Israel and finally circumvented the obstacle of the Quai d'Orsay in June by a clandestine agreement reached in Vermars between the Franco-Israeli secret services. The agreement provided extended sales of heavy weapons and Mystère IV aircraft to Israel in exchange for cooperation in intelligence and in combined operations.<sup>65</sup> The agreement was known to the Prime Minister Guy Mollet and to the Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, although not to the rest of the government.<sup>66</sup> The Quai d'Orsay, on the other hand, continued to delay the signature of contracts with Israel, first by evoking American opposition concerning the Mystère IV aircraft. When this was no longer

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**62** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 727, 10753, ministère DNFA, section des cessions à l'étranger, au ministère AE, direction générale des Affaires politiques, exemplaire 1/5, état des livraisons d'armes aux pays du Moyen-Orient au cours des mois de septembre et octobre 1955, secret, 12 novembre 1955; 345, ministère DNFA, section des cessions à l'étranger au ministère AE, direction générale des Affaires politiques/Afrique-Levant, exemplaire 1/5, état des livraisons d'armes aux pays du Moyen-Orient au cours des mois de novembre et décembre 1955, secret, 13 janvier 1956; 412, le ministre AE à l'ambassadeur de France à Washington, a/s état périodique de nos livraisons de matériel de guerre au Proche-Orient, 21 janvier 1956. These releases concerned 12 Ouragans, 12 Ouragans MD 450, 6 jet engines for Ouragan, 18 AMX tanks, 2 Nord 2501 airplanes, rocket-launchers, shells, parachutes, SS 10 engines and other types of armaments.

**63** J. Tsur, *Prélude à Suez*, op. cit., p. 270-4.

**64** SHD-DAT, 9 Q 5 9/3, ministère DFNA, 939 DN/CAB/ARM/SC, décision du ministre, objet : cession de matériels de guerre aux pays du Proche-Orient, 6 avril 1956.

**65** Motti Golani, *La guerre du Sinaï 1955-1956* (Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 2000), p. 49-52 and 55.

**66** J. Tsur, *Prélude à Suez*, op. cit., p. 376-8.

possible, after the shift in the American position,<sup>67</sup> the Quai searched keenly for some arrangement with the British and the Americans in order to share the burden of the Israeli armament. This effort failed because neither Washington nor London had any such intention.<sup>68</sup> When this option was excluded, the Quai regularly used the absence of an answer from the NEACC as a stalling tactic.<sup>69</sup>

At the beginning of July 1956—probably after having learned about the secret Vermars agreement of the previous month—the Quai openly asked the Americans and British, via the French embassy in Washington, for aid through some form of declaration. This, Quai officials hoped, could be used by Paris so as to downscale the Israeli orders. According to the message, “the government was under strong pressure of pro-Israeli elements” and actually help was asked “for the minority of the cabinet”, which was apparently the ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, since the Quai had begun to lose control of French arms sales to Israel, turning towards allied solidarity appeared the means to contain this evolution and to avoid France being presented as the main supplier of the Hebrew state. Otherwise, the alternative of a general embargo on arms sales towards Middle East states appeared once again.<sup>71</sup>

This absolute polarization that came about during 1956 was closely related to the rapid escalation of the war in Algeria during that year, and was not without its contradictions. At the beginning of 1956, information about Egyptian interference in arms traffic towards Algeria and

**67** Informally the Americans had no objections since the end of January 1956, after the end of the embargo on Israel, and definitely since their definitive refusal to sell arms to Israel, in the end of March. They were then clearly in favour of French and Canadian cessions of *Mystères IV* and *Sabres F 86*: see télégramme 329/52, Couve de Murville (Washington) à Pinay, 21 janvier 1956, in *Documents diplomatiques français* [hereafter: *DDF*], 1956, t. I (Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1988), p. 61-2; and télégramme 2366/74, Couve de Murville (Washington) à Pineau, 12 avril 1956, *ibid.*, p. 571-3.

**68** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, s/direction du Levant, note pour le président, a/s livraisons d'armes aux pays du Proche-Orient, 4 juin 1956 ; note de la direction d'Afrique-Levant, a/s fournitures d'armes à Israël, 13 juin 1956, in *DDF*, 1956, t. I, p. 985-6; PRO, FO 371/121348, V1192/761, minute by E. M. Rose, arms for Israel, secret, July 9, 1956.

**69** SHD-DAT, 9 Q 5 9/3, EMFA, 2<sup>e</sup> division/section D, réunion de la commission interministérielle d'exportation des armements en date du 16 juillet, 17 juillet 1956.

**70** Levey, *op. cit.*, p. 71. See also Jean-Yves Bernard, *La genèse de l'expédition franco-britannique de 1956 en Égypte* (Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003), p. 279: for the personal demand of the French ambassador to London, Jean Chauvel, to Selwyn Lloyd. Chauvel asked Lloyd, in July, to advise Pineau against the dangers of a policy of a strong support towards Israel.

**71** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, s/direction du Levant, note pour le président, a/s livraisons d'armes aux pays du Proche-Orient, 4 juin 1956.

commando training was divulged to the press.<sup>72</sup> The alleged role of Egypt and Nasser progressively assumed serious dimensions in public discourse and pressure on the government increased, not so much because of the public but more from parliamentary opinion applied by the *ultras* of French Algeria. This further damaged Franco-Egyptian relations. From the very start, Mollet's new coalition government formed at the start of February 1956 found itself under strong pressures, after the Premier's visit in Algiers had turned to disaster because of French settlers' reaction.<sup>73</sup> Despite previous liberal declarations on the Algerian question, Mollet's declared priority became military suppression and by summer French military forces in Algeria had been doubled.<sup>74</sup>

Behind the scenes, however, Mollet sought to reach terms with Algerian rebels and negotiate on the basis of autonomy. Because of this objective, the Quai d'Orsay in March arranged a meeting between the new foreign minister, Pineau, and Nasser in Cairo.<sup>75</sup> Relations with Egypt, despite public tension, were in fact quite satisfactory and those French who wanted to negotiate with the Algerians counted on an Egyptian moderating influence. All the same, they knew that Egyptian help could only be gained by maintaining a relative calm in French-Egyptian relations.<sup>76</sup> Nasser provided assurances that he had no aggressive intentions against Israel and that no more North African nationalists were to be trained in Egyptian camps.<sup>77</sup> Pineau, for his part, assured Nasser that France had no intention of delivering more *Mystère IV* aircraft to Israel.<sup>78</sup>

Soon after, in April, negotiations between French emissaries and Algerian nationalists took place in Cairo. These, however, leaked to the

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**72** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 485, 79, le ministre AE au ministre de l'Intérieur, secret/très urgent, 7 janvier 1956; s/direction du Levant, secret/urgent, le ministre AE (signé Christian Pineau) au Secrétaire d'État chargé des affaires algériennes, 1<sup>er</sup> mars 1956.

**73** *Le journal d'Alger*, 7 February 1956; A. Horne, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie*, op. cit., p. 152-6.

**74** Jean Doise, Maurice Vaïsse, *Diplomatie et outil militaire 1871-1991* (Paris, Seuil, Points Histoire, 1992), p. 570-1.

**75** MAE, PAAP, René Massigli 95, lettre de Massigli à Jean Chauvel, 7 mars 1956; Levant 1953-1959, Généralités 543, Secrétariat général (Massigli) de la part du président du Conseil à Karachi (Pineau), télégramme 81/83, réservé, 8 mars 1956.

**76** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 485, note without date (probably of the end of February 1956).

**77** MAE, Secrétariat général, entretiens et messages, 1956-1966, vol. 1, télégrammes 2727/29 et 2857/59, direction Afrique-Levant (signés Massigli) à ambassades de France à Londres et à Washington, 20 mars 1956.

**78** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 484, 832 AL, A. du Chayla à C. Pineau, a/s entretien avec le directeur du cabinet du président du Conseil, 23 mai 1956.

Egyptian press in May.<sup>79</sup> At that moment a new tension between France and Egypt had occurred. The cause was not only new French cessions of Mystères IV to Israel and escalation of military operations in Algeria but also—and mostly—because of a more “quiet” French policy towards the Baghdad Pact, adopted by Paris in exchange for public British support of the French government’s policy on Algeria.<sup>80</sup>

Publicity, however, was the last thing the French government needed. Further negotiations with the FLN were conducted later in Italy and Yugoslavia and no other contacts seem to have been taken through the Egyptians. Pineau’s journey was much criticized in the French Parliament and the beginning of the summer saw the zenith of Nasser’s demonization in the public speech of the *ultras* of French Algeria (Bourgès-Maunoury, Jacques Soustelle, Robert Lacoste).<sup>81</sup> The nationalization of the Suez Company in July was certainly not to help the image of the Egyptian leader in the eyes of French public opinion.<sup>82</sup>

By the time Nasser announced the canal nationalization and Soviet financing for the Aswan Dam project at the end of July, polarization in France was a fact. The minority, preaching for a moderate attitude towards Egypt, mainly the Quai d’Orsay, had no hope of making its views prevail. French foreign policy in the Middle East was slipping out of its control. Franco-Egyptian relations also suffered from the double game played by Nasser who was indeed offering his aid to Algerian rebels, especially after Morocco and Tunisia had gained independence and the orientation of the regimes of these states were leaving those Algerian rebels attached to Cairo the only sphere of Nasserist influence in French North Africa. However, Nasser was far from controlling the extremely divided Algerian nationalist movement.<sup>83</sup>

**79** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte 485, 999 AL, A. du Chayla à C. Pineau, 15 juin 1956; 1000 AL, A. du Chayla à C. Pineau, 15 juin 1956.

**80** S. Papastamkou, *La France au Proche-Orient, 1950-1958 : un intrus ou une puissance exclue ?*, thèse de doctorat dirigée par Robert Frank, université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2007, p. 551-6. The British were in fact very worried about the possibility that the French come to terms with Nasser, as this meant that they would continue their public disapproval of the Baghdad Pact, whereas Guy Mollet had promised Eden the contrary in March 1956, see *ibid.*, p. 382-91.

**81** MAE, Levant 1953-1959, Égypte, 485, télégramme 207/8, cabinet du Secrétaire d’État à ambassade de France à New Delhi, 10 mars 1956; J.-Y. Bernard, *La genèse de l’expédition franco-britannique...*, *op. cit.*, p. 325-6; Guy Pervillé, *Pour une histoire de la guerre d’Algérie, 1954-1962* (Paris, Picard, 2002), p. 130.

**82** *Le monde*, 29-30 July 1956 (article of Maurice Schumann); *Le monde*, 4 August 1956; PRO, PREM 11/1352, discours prononcé par G. Mollet, président du Conseil, à l’occasion de l’inauguration du monument d’Émile Basly, Lens, 23 septembre 1956.

**83** A. Horne, *Histoire de la guerre d’Algérie*, *op. cit.*, p. 149-51.

His aid towards the Algerians indeed increased immediately after the nationalization of the Suez Company,<sup>84</sup> a move probably aimed at keeping French forces busy in Algeria. Nasser feared a war against him in the immediate aftermath of the nationalization initiated by Great Britain and, if that were the case, also by France.<sup>85</sup> Nasser's aid, however, was largely exaggerated in France by activists in the French government.

In the summer of 1956, Franco-Egyptian relations clearly entered a war of logic. The Franco-Israeli secret alliance, agreed upon in June sealed the cooperation between the two sides on intelligence matters and provided arms for Israel in exchange for cooperation in operations against Egyptian targets as well. Nasser's radicalization through the nationalization of the Suez Company provided a tangible reason for war probably tolerated by the international community, especially as it was giving British support to the French.

In the autumn, the Suez operation can clearly be interpreted as the second prong of a strategy to isolate the Algerian front. The kidnapping of the Algerian leader Ben Bella was destined to decapitate the nationalist movement in the interior, while the operation against Egypt was to cut off external aid to the nationalists, soon after the capture of the vessel *Athos* provided tangible evidence of Egyptian interference in arms traffic.<sup>86</sup> However, by its radio propaganda, by the arms traffic, by the training of some two hundred nationalists in Egyptian camps out of twenty thousand rebels in Algeria,<sup>87</sup> by its diplomatic aid in the UN, Egypt certainly had a role in Algeria. Yet it was far from large enough that it could justify a war. By chasing nationalist phantoms in Egypt, French hard-liners chose to put aside what other Frenchmen saw clearly, as one of them reported from Algiers: "The Egyptian propaganda did a lot for the realisation of national awareness [in Algeria] but those mainly responsible are the French and their policy of repression."<sup>88</sup>

**84** F. Al Dib, *Abdel Nasser et la révolution algérienne*, *op. cit.*, p. 166-7 and 169; MAE, cabinet du ministre, Christian Pineau 1956-1958, 19, note sur les ingérences égyptiennes en Afrique du Nord, 20 octobre 1956.

**85** Muhammad H. Haykal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (New York, Arbor House, 1987), p. 122.

**86** Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States and the Algerian War* (Berkeley/London, University of California Press, 2001), p. 50-1.

**87** MAE, cabinet du ministre, Christian Pineau 1956-1958, 19, note sur les ingérences égyptiennes en Afrique du Nord, 20 octobre 1956; note a/s de la situation en Algérie, 19 octobre 1956.

**88** FNSP-CHEVS, Fonds Alain Savary, SV 56, lettre de R. Perié à A. Savary, Alger, 30 avril 1956.