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# The illusion of the Oracle: Tragedy in the Colonial Wars. Algiers 1961, Kabul, 2021

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**ABSTRACT**

**The familiar face of empires is external intervention as opposed to local culture. We follow Michel Onfray's thesis about the oracular illusion when one more individual or country tries to avoid the fulfillment of a nefarious prediction, which materializes as a catastrophe. Algeria conquered in 1830 was incorporated into French territory. In 1954 the FLN rebelled, and in 1961, General Charles de Gaulle negotiated the independence of Algeria, causing the disastrous exodus of 750,000 French settlers and the death of French supporters. From 1962 to 2021, the withdrawals of imperial powers from their colonies, France from Algeria, the United States in Afghanistan, resulted in catastrophes and uncertainties. The imperial power of the United States aimed to defeat its bipolar antagonist, the USSR, when it invaded Afghanistan. They conducted an inconsequential policy to defeat their rival, arming and financing the Taliban's victorious resistance, the freedom fighters. The oracular illusion led the United States to support the future antagonist, Islamic fundamentalism, destined for the world caliphate. After the departure of the USSR, American power despised the Taliban, who harbored al Qaeda, leading to 9/11. In 2001 the United States invaded Afghanistan and, after 20 years of war, abandoned it without the precaution of obtaining plans or safeguards for the government in Kabul. After the disastrous retreat, the victorious Taliban demonstrated, like the FLN in Algeria, the fulfillment of the oracular illusion.**

**Key words:** France, United States, Insurrectional war, Taliban, FLN, Colons, Harkis, colonialism, Empire.

## INTRODUCTION: PRESENTING THE PROBLEM

The colonialist withdrawal from Algeria during the 20th century's decolonization compared to Afghanistan's in the 21st century. The imperial leaders planned good and orderly exits, but reality made them messy, bloody, and humanly disastrous. We compare that carried out by France in leaving Algeria in 1962 after a painful conflict aggravated by racial hatred between Christians versus Muslims. The withdrawal of the United States troops from Afghanistan in August 2021, ending a prolonged war waged against an stubborn insurgency. In the essay, we will not answer all the interposed questions, and we will raise new ones because the comparative process maps an obscure and incomplete territory.

## THE STATE OF THE PROBLEM: TWO EMPIRES, TWO COLONIALISMS

### France: classic empire and colonialism

The two countries analyzed held colonial empires practicing different forms of colonization that, in the case of the USA, raise new concepts. France owned a colonial empire of a classical type. In the 15th century begun added in the 18th, its heyday occurred in the 19th century, annexing Algeria in 1830 and Indochina in 1878. Algeria, conquered between 1830 and 1847, was incorporated into French territory legally. In 1848 it was administratively divided into departments such as the Metropolis. The colony housed the French population surplus, called colons or pied noirs, which in 1960 totaled one million individuals. The majority indigenous population of the Muslim faith, divided into Arabs, Berbers, and Kabyles, was not granted citizenship, progressively dispossessed of their best lands. The French considered their colonization a civilizing mission. Only France, a civilized country endowed with high culture, could civilize others. As Alain Touraine stated, the colonial nations, which in our study are France and the USA, make *tabula rasa* of their possessions. [i]Disdaining their past and through an insistent present, it transforms them into a mirror. They suited colonial purposes detached from the local reality. Finally, after the humiliating defeat of 1958 in the 1940s, France saw in the Indochina war a form of redemption. After the defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the war to be fought in Algeria allowed France to think about its downfall.[ii]

The United States, at the end of WW2, emerged as the most potent nuclear, military and economic power in the world. [iii] In Europe and the world, the USSR also became a clay-footed superpower recovering from the Nazi destruction aggravated by the military rush in the 1970s that accelerated its collapse. The bipolar world was the scene of a new conflict employing localized wars to maintain power to secure its strategic interests and avoid nuclear catastrophe. The Truman administration was maintaining its doctrine of containment of communism pragmatically allowed and supported the return of the European colonial empires contrary to the policy of F. D. Roosevelt, hostile to the colonial empires. [iv]President Truman supported France's return to Indochina to contain Ho Chi Minh and the Chinese presence and in Indonesia the Muslim President Ahmed Sukarno against the Netherlands for his anti-communism. For France under the tutelage of General De Gaulle, to recover the colony of Indochina was to restore France's greatness.[v]

At two points in our short review, American foreign policy demonstrates short-sightedness and a lack of long-range strategic objectives. The first was the support given by the US Government through the OSS to Ho Chi Minh, Giap, and his movement.[vi] The OSS teams and technicians, immature and unaware of the complexity of Asian politics, supported Viet-minh as being anti-French. [vii] Second, the unwavering support for defeating the USSR during its disastrous intervention in Afghanistan in 1980. The doctrine of the Reagan administration supported economically and militarily any group or country fighting the USSR. [viii]

This strategic decision was shortsighted, placing the United States as the United States to defeat an enemy fed a fleeting ally that would be its future enemy like Ho Chi Minh. US support for the Taliban as an enemy of the USSR made them allies and freedom fighters. [ix] They created a beast destined to devour their antagonists without imagining that it would kill their children. The issue is controversial. American government agents, ignorant of Afghan history and the militant character of its Islam after the Soviet withdrawal, disdained contacts with the Mujahedin leaders to exert some control over the future of the Taliban-dominated country.

The leaders in question were anti-Western, Muslim, and xenophobic. It was a sacred mission for the Afghan leadership to defend the country and its faith against foreign and Christian threats or atheists. Factions such as Hekmatyar and Massoud ended their fierce struggle to fight a Christian invader. This shortsighted and inconsequential policy of the American power project made the Taliban, fighters from the remote country of Afghanistan, the roots of September 11 and a 20-year war. At the time, Kaplan referred to the Taliban as a movement that won the war but built a state. His despotism aroused the hostility of compatriots freed from Soviet rule.[x]

**USA: A Reluctant Empire Embracing Practical Colonialism**

The US has built an empire by acquiring territories, seizing indigenous and Mexican lands, stretching from coast to coast. In the late nineteenth century, fierce competition for international prestige led powerful countries to conquer lands from militarily weak peoples. By acquiring colonies, they declare themselves empires. American political culture was not unaware that an empire put freedom at risk even though some, like President Lincoln, saw a blessing in Manifest Destiny, in the Monroe Doctrine that would make expansionism a friend of humanity.[xi] The desire to conquer land was not a selfish desire but an altruistic one intended to propagate freedom.

In the Spanish-American War, the United States incorporated strategic islands into its communications and trade empire in the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific. [xii] Ambiguously, opposite sentiments between empire and anti-imperialism coexisted in the country. Entry into WW1 allowed the country to present its entire military, political, industrial, and financial power. In WW2, the United States of America emerged as a superpower capable of dictating the fate of the bipolar world. In the Korean War and the reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan, there was a convergence between practicality and idealism because, as statesman John Foster Dulles wrote, there are no friendly countries but common interests.[xiii]

The US exercised colonialism that clashed with the old classics as in the Suez Canal issue. On the issue of Iranian PM Mossadegh, former colonial interests were revitalized by the energetic action of President Eisenhower and the CIA. The issue of Indochina since 1954 led to a confrontation against the Popular Republic of Vietnam dominant in the north. The communists in the South Vietnam won a significant part of the population. In that Asian country, *hubris* overthrew the best projects and technologies employed by the USA, destined to replace France with enormous success. Vietnam was instrumental in defending American interests in the Asia-Pacific region, a bulwark against communism, and a showcase for the success of the American way of life. Saudi Arabia, a hidden partner in the 9/11 attack on America and al Qaeda. For Roosevelt administration in 1943 Saudi Arabia was essential for the US because of its oil. [xiv]

In 1973 the US ended its participation in the Vietnam War. After withdrawing their troops, the South Vietnamese army resisted until its annihilation and flight while a botched retreat took place from Saigon and the intrusive foreign intervention ended. The images of helicopters landing on the embassy's roof in Saigon will be repeated in Kabul in August 2021, taking US embassy personnel to the airport.

## CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Whether through “mission civilizatrice de la France” or free trade of United States, for Mark Brown, all colonial state is coercive and "despotic" because since Hobbes and his social contract, the state practices acts of power that can define as criminal. [xv] Force and coercion are present in all empires, and, for Michel Chartier, no empire did not result from military conquest. [xvi] Imperialism defines the territory for exercising its authority by associating the conqueror's history with the state's history, whether French or American. Furthermore, the social classes and groups interested in colonialism, that is, in the tactics of the process, follow the definitions of their technological processes and their high cultures. [xvii]

The definitions of imperialism by Lenin and Schumpeter no longer seem to fit the new post-colonial and post War on Terror forms. The flexibility observed in the definition of colonialism, as stated by Horvat, accommodates new findings to order the analysis of historical reality. We observe the domain or the exercise of control relative by one country or a unit by another. [xviii] As Nancy Schumaker defines it, a new version of colonialism serves to define the American presence: "colonialism as Foreign intrusive or domination." Allegation Taliban made concerning the foreign presence and the Vietminh, and after that, the Viet-Cong did concerning the same problem. [xix] Furthermore, forms of business exploitation of the metropolises and damage to the colonized. And colonialism as the elaboration of systems of dominion and government and the adoption of cultural and political practices. [xx]

### Mirror, Oracle, Aesop

The construction of colonialism and its future impasses and disastrous retreats repeat the fable of Aesop, the son, and the painted lion. A loving father, to prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled that his only son, who loves to hunt, will be killed by a lion, locks his son up in a magnificent house. On the wall, he has a portrait of the lion painted. The young man locked up for years on end, one day rebels and offends the painting of the animal on the wall. When he pierces the lion's eye with his finger, wounded by a sharp object, and the young man dies of infection. According to Michel Onfray, the lesson is: one should not avoid the real, the set of events called existence. It is called upon to fulfill itself, going beyond all efforts to prevent it from happening, which accelerated its realization. Onfray calls this paradox the oracular illusion and is inherent in every event. [xxi]Everyone finds the destination they want to avoid. Colonialism seems to be affected by this illusion. Fighting wars to prevent an event they do not want, be it Algerian independence or the destruction of al Qaeda or the Taliban. There is, says Onfray, a subtle difference between the announced event – Algerie Française or destroying the Terror and the Taliban, and the event realized – a subtle difference that forsakes the one who waits for the mistake it produces.

### Terror and intelligence

For FLN, the asymmetric war waged by France used modern and powerful means to solve the Algerian problem by military aim. [xxii]While the Algerian population waited to see who won the clash, the ALN decided to use terrorism hard against dissident or passive Algerians, as immobility should be punished by degradation or death. "While France was massacring, passivity could not be tolerated."

Terror was a revolutionary way, and the engendered struggle was a revolution, and terror was the most effective weapon to impose this point of view.[xxiii] In Afghanistan and the Taliban, al

Qaeda asserted that radical Islamists should win the nation and expand the area under Muslim rule. Furthermore, terrorist actions should have symbolism highlighting the methods intelligible to their adherents. Just as in Algeria, the ALN and its cells erupted unexpected actions, so the strategy of multiple attacks undertaken by al Quaeda worked effectively because the US did not know when the attacks would occur and where.

### Global terrorism goes beyond national independence

Unlike the one employed by the Algerian FNL, Modern Terror aimed to achieve independence and does not aim to achieve a world caliphate. He wants to create a permanent sense of crisis for the West by making Terror an effective action designed to support the spread of faith worldwide. At the same time, the French army was getting more and more operational intelligence to the point of creating fake terrorist cells and sowing discord among adversaries. On the contrary, the Bush-Cheney and Rumsfeld administration, after the first attacks on Afghanistan, fueled by poor intelligence, could not be clear about the antagonists, al Qaeda and the Taliban, whose troops were intact despite the American aerial bombardment. For *Anonimous*, therefore, in the year 2003, the war in Afghanistan was beginning. [xxiv]

## RESULTS

### The American Empire

The USA exercised colonialism in the mercantile practices of local exploitation of commodities, gaining domestic and international prestige, raising the banner of the spread of evangelical religion and the American way of life and the democratic political process. [xxv] The American Empire expanded territorially, initially in the form of a settler imperialism, various wars were fought to conquer territories and build the nation-state. The United States at the beginning of the 20th century grew to developa global market for agriculture, manufacturing, industry, and financial investment.[xxvi] Its contemporary version developed a peculiar capitalist and consumer goods colonialism. [xxvii] Initially, it was exercised in Vietnam as a *raison d'etat* supporting Washington's doctrines to contain communism in the Cold War period. The Asian country served as a stronghold and advanced defense of the United States and its interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

The US presence in South Vietnam had a different face. It represented a civilizing, cultural, and political work. As the character Colonel Poge said in Stanley Kubrick's movie *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), an American tried to get out inside every Vietnamese. It was up to the American marines as the Joker character to help them.

The American presence in South Vietnam based on the English language, hinting Vietnamese people to adopt the American way of life and its system of consumption of goods, were to have is to be. In religion, he insisted on evangelism, a modern belief, superior and open to its affiliates' financial and material success. These practices would unseat traditional, Buddhist, and Confucian ones, overthrowing the French colonial tradition, pushing Roman Catholicism, the French language, and other cultural practices such as sports and fashion away.

Twenty years of American presence in Afghanistan have led a portion of the population to acquire this mirror image. American troops were a daily presence in big cities. Many Afghans adopted Western, or American habits and reflected themselves in traditional society or proposed by the Taliban in the unrecognizable how colonists fulfilled their military and

geopolitical role. As the cost of staying was high and unplanned, they dismantled their device in the field and left. Kabul's corrupt government and its fake army without these props crumble. However, for the part of the population that believed in the mirage of a new life full of meaning, disillusionment and despair lead them to flee.

**The longest war**

When the Bush-Cheney administration waged war on Terror in Afghanistan, the American strategy it adopted ran counter to the opinion of an expert, French General André Beaufré. It should politically and militarily be a global strategy as a pyramid of flexible strategies. [xxviii] Beaufré, matured by the French war in Indochina and Algeria, knew that it was not enough to win in the military field. Political victory had to be secured as well. Otherwise, all efforts would be in vain. As Anonimous wrote, the gaps in American intelligence the stubbornness and hubris that took his lead that, by remaining firm in his misconceptions, demonstrated that the US "has not yet begun to fight the kind of war needed to defeat the force he leads and inspires."[xxix]

The War on Terror in Afghanistan is based on a fundamental misconception. It was possible to destroy al-Quaeda, suspected of ordering the 9/11 attacks sheltered in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The American strategy of cheap warfare employed aviation bombing and used special troops and the military workforce of the warlords. Seeing itself in inferiority, the Taliban retreated to their havens, survived, and slowly prospered. Meanwhile, banditry has expanded in Afghanistan, opium production has supplanted food agriculture, and widened the power vacuum. The country's economic reconstruction proceeded at a slow pace in the main cities. Afghanistan remained mired in economic crisis and corruption. Meanwhile, NATO marked its presence with troops, equipment, and military expertise fighting alongside US troops, and they do not win the war.

**The exit at any price**

After 20 years of conflict, the Trump administration instructed by inexperienced advisors has contradicted the predictions of political and military experts.[xxx]

In an article published in 2019, Dobbins, Campbell, Mann, and Miller did not recommend that the US government leave Afghanistan without cautiously considering the effects of an early exit. Alternatively, a complete departure without previously negotiating a peace agreement. The consequences of unilateral withdrawal without safeguards would cause NATO forces to withdraw completely, the presence of foreign civilians would cease, foreign aid would be reduced or eliminated, and, finally, the Kabul government would lose support and legitimacy. Power would shift from the center to the periphery appropriated by the Taliban and local warlords. If there is no victory in sight, the war need not be lost. Retreating without a peace agreement will be a heavy blow to American credibility and weaken its deterrence capacity.[xxxi] President Trump's resolve a unilateral withdrawal from Afghanistan, a "looser war" without obtaining effective countermeasures from the Taliban and that President John Biden will fulfill his calling for the oracular tragedy. In August 2021, Afghanistan's central government, whose authority was precarious, saw its US-equipped army dissolve into thin air. The prediction that he would last six months fighting was reduced to a few days as the president fled to Qatar. A bathed Taliban, clad in new clothes and weaponry, took over the main military bases, large cities, and provincial capitals entering Kabul.

The withdrawal, which ended on August 31, became a desperate race against the clock. It involves withdrawing more American troops from the Coalition thousands of people who served the US and believed in the mirror image. Lists of service providers such as interpreters fell into the Taliban's hands. Contradictory news about banning circulation and studies for women in the streets circulated in the news. The small surge of order and progress of new construction and infrastructure experienced by Afghanistan has seduced thousands of men and women who saw meaning in "Western colonization," attracting an enlightened portion of the Afghan population to its ways and ways of life. With the impossibility of withdrawing all those wishing to leave the country, a human tragedy foresaw. Disbelief is widespread in the Taliban's promises of tolerance and moderation trampled by the emergence of new groups like the ISI-K. In addition to the impending civil war, welcoming these refugees is a crucial problem in societies overcrowded with refugees because of the crises in Africa and the Middle East.

**Algeria and France: "man are suffering hunger and demanding justice". A. Camus**

Algeria, conquered by France in 1830, became a colony of French settlement incorporating waves of poor citizens in search of a better life. With profitable agriculture and industry, the standard of living of its *colon* inhabitants soon became higher than that of metropolitan France. Meanwhile, the Algerian population of Berber Arabs and Kabyles dispossessed their lands. Except small segments of privileged people the overwhelming majority of Algerians lived in infinite poverty. Despised by many colons, the Algerians are profoundly Muslim, and its culture was traditional. The French government has set up an excellent administrative structure, a modern road network, and hospitals and public services. It divided Algeria into *departments*, administrative divisions such as the French metropolitan ones, and an electoral college favoring the Europeans *colons*.

Legally Algeria was part of French territory, and when the rebellion broke out, French military actions were masked by euphemisms. To admit the war as a real fact, was to admit the rebels as enemy. Rigged elections, a status evaded by the European colons, led the Algerian population to bitterness and disillusionment. The FNL leadership, realizing that the revolt was fading, decided in a bold gesture to create terror to provoke the blind revenge of the French repression. It would draw the Algerian population into its arms, creating a spiral of violence that would separate the two communities. The FLN offensive exploded November 1, 1954, All Saints Day.

Soon the war was violent and atrocious, with endless massacres carried out by both sides. The Front of National Liberation (FNL) proved to be a stuborn, determined and clever adversary. Undeterred, after another defeat, he resurfaced even more ferocious and tireless. Its weakness lay in its internal division, a reflection of traditional Algerian society itself. ALN, or Armée de Liberation Nationale, fighting in the country with his *katibas*, or units in the size to company, and terrorist cells spread throughout the cities like Oran, Phillipeville and mainly in the capital, Algiers.

**Winning on the battlefield, losing the war on politics**

The French army, defeated in Indochina, developed new knowledge to face the insurrectionary struggle and deceive the oracle. [xxxii] Their efforts effectively defeated the adversary on the battlefield, interdicting their movement, impeding the circulation of reinforcements, and destroying terrorist cells. Its efficient intelligence services used torture as a weapon of war to

frame the population the same way its adversary did. It successfully used the air weapon and the helicopter as a weapon of the intervention forces.

General Challe's offensive operations were decisive and the employment of special troops such as *Les Commands de Chasse* (small unity, framed by French but composed by Algerian deserters with knowledge of the terrain and the enemy) and like American special forces, though fighters as paratroopers, les *paras*, and *legionnaires* win a war on the ground. As General Challe stated, deluded by the oracle: "The military phase of the rebellion is terminated in the interior, " The war is over and win. [xxxiii]

As in Afghanistan, military operations in Algeria have confined the people to internment camps, drastically reduced agricultural production, exposed masses of poor peasants to hunger, extreme poverty to the cold, causing high mortality and hordes of refugees. [xxxiv]

The European colons, in turn, despised and humiliated the Algerian population. For its part, the ALN regularly slaughtered French civilians by practicing Terror. However, they did not win wars with battles alone, and victory depends on complex political factors. France, meanwhile, isolated worldwide, saw hostility against to the war grow in France. The nationalist FLN had European support for attacks on French territory. With an eye on political dividends, the Algerian nationalists have political support from the French Communist Party and left-wing intellectuals such as J.P. Sartre. French youth grew tired of this brutal war. All this engulfed France in one of the most severe political crises of national history.

**A country divided: if Algeria is France, what is France?**

On May 13, civil war almost broke out in Algeria. The colons opposed to the exit from France, supported by military leaders, seized the seat of power in the capital, Algiers. After several political maneuvers approved by popular referendums, the anarchic and unstable IV Republic started the V Republic (for Colonel Trinquier was a *coup d'etat*), electing General Charles De Gaulle, hero of the Second World War, as Head of State. When General Salan, who led the uprising, acclaimed General de Gaulle's name, the crowd applauded enthusiastic applause. The general shrewdly masked his goals and increased military pressure leading the army to victory against the FLN. De Gaulle on his visits to Algeria heard many Algerians who were sincere in their love for France but who said: "Everyone wants independence!" Another official with tears in his eyes said that the Algerians wanted: "is to be responsible for ourselves instead of others being responsible for us." [xxxv]

Engaging in secret negotiations with the FLN in the spa town of Evian, he brutally stifled a military coup d'état and defeated the army's resistance. Backed by enthusiastic national support for ending the war, it concluded the Evian agreements. When regulating the withdrawal of France, they were ambiguous in granting guarantees of safety to the Europeans who remained. It did not guarantee the life of the Harkis, Algerians who collaborated with France by accepting capitalism, western consumerism, and the French way of life, whose death toll was around 220,000.

**Escape and withdrawal**

The FLN did not uphold the ambiguous guarantees of the Evian agreements towards the Europeans. [xxxvi]Algerians were angered by the brutal intransigence of the terrorist movement

of the colons, the OAS (Secret Army Organization), whose blind terrorism opened an unbridgeable gap between the populations, preventing Europeans from remaining in independent Algeria. In Oran as disciplined ALN troops enter the town, while medical personnel, technical teams for sewage, water and electricity took over their services.

A fanatical OAS colon opened fire and the angry Muslim mob beheaded the entire remaining French population. [xxxvii] The French army was ordered to remain quartered and did not intervene in the massacres following the chaotic and desperate exodus of European colons to France. [xxxviii] The departure in terrible conditions recalling the tragic scenes of the airport in Kabul, 900.00 French, or *pied noirs*, led to choose between "the coffin and the suitcase." [xxxix]

Figure 4. French CRS, french police shock troops, fiercely faced the fanatical resistance of the french *pied-noirs* in their strongholds such as the night-time neighborhood of Bab el Uad in Algiers.Alamy

They employed ships (the distance from France is small) and planes fleeing to an unknown and unprepared country to absorb many refugees. According to the Evian agreements, thousands of Harkis who were to remain in Algeria were taken to France by many French officers who risked their careers for their Muslim comrades. The harkis who remained are slaughtered with their families. Gaulle's strategy proved effective For him, Algerians would never be French. Prolific, they would soon supplant the metropolitan population. France, in turn, freed from the costly colony and the costly and traumatic war, looked to its future by investing in modern industry, infrastructure and technology, and quality of life. As General De Gaulle wrote in 1962, "France's revival was in full flower. She was threatened by civil war; bankruptcy had stared her in the face, the world had forgotten her voice. Now she was out of danger." [xl]

## CONCLUSION

The French withdrawal from Algeria and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan are related. As Patrick Buisson wrote, the French found this similarity when they read the preface written by General David Petraeus to the French Colonel David Galula (1919-1968), a veteran of the battles in Algeria: *Contre-Insurrection, théorie et pratique*. For Petraeus, this work is situated on the same level as Clausewitz's, being essential to understand the role of the American armies in the struggle in Iraq and Afghanistan. Galula claims that in military counterinsurgency operations, only 20 percent of the time is devoted to fighting, the rest devoted to politics. [xli] What has been seen in decolonization since the United Kingdom's struggle to conserve Ireland in 1937 is to see debates over statutes succeed, strategic attempts alternating between repression and accession. Nothing will be done. Moreover, the tragedy will come to an end. "Independence will always be at the end of the path of the people who want it." [xlii]

The 20th century was marked by classical decolonization. In the 21st century, new forms of political struggle were taking shape on the battlefields of the Middle East. The lessons of colonial empires that faced bloody struggles like those in France need to be better studied by the remaining empires like the United States. For better or for worse, this reluctant empire embodies our best and worst values. At least he is a blurry mirror where we see a figure that looks like us. When the French withdrew, an Algerian historian, reporting the popular enthusiasm, wrote: “the people preferred only independence, nothing more than independence.”[xliii]

Meanwhile, the beautiful words of doctrines, speeches, and projects are efforts to deceive the real. Colonialist withdrawals in the first half of the 21st century can be compared to those carried out during the decolonization of the 20th century. Empires planned them orderly, but reality made them messy, bloody, and humanly disastrous. So it was with the abandonment of Algeria by France in 1962 after a painful conflict, aggravated by racial violence between Algerians and colons. The colons and harkis and innocent Algerians who were massacred by the ALN, the OAS, or out of pure hatred, fell into the void like the unfortunate Afghans who fell from the planes that took off from Kabul.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, ending a protracted war waged against an obstinate military and political insurgency, repeats the process. As in all analyzed conflicts, the colonialist withdraws, leaving behind the damage done. The Roman legions are gone, and Britannia sinks into the mists of the distant sea, awaiting new invaders. Ancient and modern empires loom on the horizon of Afghanistan, such as the People's Republic of China, with its 92-kilometer border and its millions of Muslim and rebel Uighurs.

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