

Independence for Morocco and Tunisia

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Morocco

When the Treaty of Fez was signed in 1912, Morocco became a French protectorate. But after the Second World War, calls for independence grew stronger. As early as 1943, US President Franklin Roosevelt had encouraged the Sultan of Morocco, Mohammed Ben Youssef, in his quest for independence. From 1947 onwards, Mohammed Ben Youssef began to distance himself from the protectorate, championing the Arab League and supporting Istiqlal, the Independence Party.

However, the appointment of General Alphonse Juin (1947), Chief of Staff of National Defence, then General Augustin Guillaume (1951) as residents-general in Morocco (official representatives of the French Government in Rabat) showed that France was not yet ready to abandon the country. From 1951, General Juin, supported by conservative French colonists, threatened to depose Mohammed Ben Youssef if he refused to dissociate himself from Istiqlal. The Sultan was forced to yield and agreed to distance himself from the nationalists.

But this did not curb their efforts, and they decided to form the Moroccan National Front. Tensions continued to rise over the ensuing months. In 1952 and 1953, several anti-French demonstrations were repressed with bloodshed. In December 1952, the Arab states managed to place the Moroccan question on the UN agenda. But in 1953, El Glaoui, Pasha of Marrakech, a loyal supporter of the French, conspired to have Mohammed Ben Youssef removed from the palace and exiled in Madagascar. The following day, he was replaced by El Glaoui's choice for successor, Ben Arafa. From that point on, the nationalists stepped up their action and the attacks increased.

Given the rapid deterioration of the situation, the French Government came under strong international pressure to reinstate the Sultan. Events then began to escalate. On 6 November 1955, French Foreign Minister Antoine Pinay and Mohammed Ben Youssef signed the La Celle-St-Cloud agreements, which led to the independence of Morocco and to the Sultan's return to the throne as Mohammed V. Ten days later, Mohammed V made his triumphal return to Rabat. Morocco officially gained independence on 2 March 1956 after the signing of a joint declaration in Paris to replace the Treaty of Fez that had established the protectorate in 1912. Tunisia's turn would come just a few weeks later.

Tunisia

During the Second World War, Tunisia became a theatre of confrontation between the Allies and the Axis powers. After several months of fighting, the Allied forces successfully repelled the enemy troops, and the capitulation of Germany on 12 May 1943 confirmed the withdrawal of the Axis powers from North Africa. On 15 May, authority in Tunisia was transferred to Free France. Tunisian monarch Muhammad VII al-Munsif (known by the French as Moncef Bey) was immediately deposed on the ground that he had collaborated with the Germans. He was replaced by Muhammad VIII al-Amin (or Lamine Bey).

The Neo Destour Party took advantage of the post-war climate of discontent and demanded reforms, spurred on by the accession to independence of neighbouring Libya in October 1951. The party's leader, Habib Bourguiba, supported by the Arab League, and the Bey (the country's

monarch) called for the formation of a responsible government.

While the French Government advocated a system of joint sovereignty within the French Union, Bourguiba stepped up his campaign for Tunisian independence, supported by the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT). In 1952, France launched a crackdown on political leaders and Bourguiba was arrested. But a series of terrorist attacks in Tunisia forced France to react. On 31 July 1954, Pierre Mendès France granted Tunisia internal autonomy.

On 17 September 1955, a government composed entirely of Tunisians was finally formed.

On 20 March 1956, negotiations between France and Tunisia resulted in full independence for Tunisia. The first parliamentary elections in Tunisia's history resulted in a sweeping victory for Neo Destour and Habib Bourguiba, who became President of the Tunisian Republic. On 12 November 1956, Tunisia was admitted to the United Nations.