

November 1

Algeria's future is not yet totally compromised. As I wrote in a previous article, if each party to the conflict makes an effort to examine the reasons of its adversary, an entente may at last become possible. As a step toward that inevitable agreement, I would like to set forth its conditions and limits.

On this anniversary, however, let me first say that there would be no point to making the effort if an intensification of the hatred and killing were to place the desired result beyond the realm of possibility.

If the two Algerian populations were to seek to massacre each other in a paroxysm of xenophobic hatred, nothing anyone could say would be able to bring peace to Algeria, and no reform would be able to resurrect the country from its ruins. Those who call for such massacres, no matter which camp they come from and no matter what argument or folly drives them, are in fact calling for their own destruction.

The blind souls who are demanding widespread repression are in fact condemning innocent French people to death. And by the same token, those who courageously avail themselves of microphones far from the scene to call for murder are laying the groundwork for the massacre of Arab populations.

On this point at least, Franco-Arab solidarity is complete, and the time has come to recognize this. This solidarity can lead to either a dreadful fraternity of pointless deaths or an alliance of the living in a common task. But no one, dead or alive, will be able to escape the choice.

It therefore seems to me that no one, French or Arab, can possibly want to embrace the blood-soaked logic of total war. No one on either side should refuse to limit the conflict in ways that will prevent it from degenerating.

I therefore propose that both camps commit themselves publicly and simultaneously to a policy of not harming civilian populations, no matter what the circumstances. For the time being, such a commitment would not change the situation. Its purpose would simply be to make the conflict less implacable and to save innocent lives.

What can be done to make this simultaneous declaration a reality? For obvious reasons, it would be desirable if the initiative came from France. The governor general of Algeria or the French government itself could take this step without making any fundamental concessions.

But it is also possible that for purely political reasons, both parties might prefer a less politicized intervention. In that case, the initiative might be taken by the religious leaders of the three major denominations in Algeria.

They would not need to obtain or negotiate an agreement, which would lie outside their competence, and could simply issue an unambiguous call for a simultaneous declaration on this one specific issue, which would then bind the parties in the future without inciting a pointless quarrel about the past.

It is not enough to say that such a commitment would facilitate the search for a solution. Without it, no solution is possible. There is an important difference between a war of destruction and a simple armed

divorce: the former leads to nothing but further destruction, whereas the latter can end in reconciliation.

If there is to be reconciliation, the public commitment for which we are calling is a necessary but not sufficient first step. To reject it out of hand would be tantamount to admitting publicly that one places little value on one's own people and, furthermore, that the only goal is pointless and unlimited destruction.

I do not see how either party to the conflict can refuse to make a pure and simple humanitarian statement that would be clear in its terms and significant in its consequences. Each party can do so, moreover, without giving up any of its legitimate grievances. Yet no one can shirk this obligation without revealing his true designs, which can then be taken into account.

The End