

EMIR ABDELKADER `Abd al-Qādir al-Jazīrī (6 September 1808 – 26 May 1883) was an Algerian military leader who led a struggle against the French invasion in the mid-nineteenth century, for which he is seen as a Algerian national hero. (He is frequently known only by his first name, `Abd al-Qādir, which is variously spelled Abd al-Kadir, Abdel Kader, Abdelkader, etc.) He was born in the town of MUASKAR in the area of ORAN. His father was a shaykh in the Qadiri sufi order. In his childhood he learned to memorize the Quran and was well trained in theological and linguistic studies, having an education far better than that of his peers. In 1825 he set out for hajj with his father. While in Mecca he encountered Imam Shamil; the two spoke at length on different topics. He also traveled to Damascus and Baghdad, and visited the graves of famous Muslims. This experience cemented his religious enthusiasm. On his way back to Algeria, he was impressed by the reforms carried out by Mehmet Ali in Egypt. He returned to his homeland a few months before the arrival of the French. In 1830, Algeria was invaded by France; French dominion over Algeria supplanted that of the Ottoman Empire. Within two years, `Abd al-Qādir was made an amir and with the loyalty of a number of tribes began a rebellion against the French. He was effective at using guerrilla warfare and for a decade, up until 1842, he had many victories. He often signed tactical truces with the French, but these did not last. His power base was in the western part of Algeria, where he was successful in uniting the tribes against the French. He was noted for his chivalry; once he released his French captives simply because he had insufficient food to feed them. However, `Abd al-Qādir was eventually forced to surrender. The French armies grew large, and brutally suppressed the native population and practiced a scorched-earth policy. `Abd al-Qādir's failure to get support from eastern tribes, apart from the Berbers of western Kabylie also contributed to the quelling of the rebellion. On December 21, 1847, after being denied refuge in Morocco (strangely paralleling Jugurtha's career two thousand years earlier), `Abd al-Qādir was forced to surrender. Two days later, his surrender was made official to the French Governor-General of Algeria, Henri d'Orléans, duc d'Aumale. `Abd al-Qādir was exiled to France, in violation of the promise that he would be allowed to go to Alexandria or St Jean d'Acre, on the faith of which he surrendered. `Abd al-Qādir and his family were detained in France, first at Toulon, then at Pau, being in November 1848 transferred to the château of Amboise. There he remained until October 1852, when he was released by Napoleon III on taking an oath never again to disturb Algeria. The emir then took up his residence in Brusa, removing in 1855 to Damascus. In July 1860, when the Muslims of that city, taking advantage of disturbances among the Druzes of Lebanon, attacked the Christian quarter and killed over 3,000 persons, `Abd al-Qādir helped to repress the outbreak and saved large numbers of Christians. For this action the French government, which granted the emir a pension of L. 4000, bestowed on him the grand cross of the Legion of Honour. He thereafter devoted himself to writing and philosophy until his death in Damascus in 1883. There is a Mosque in Constantine, Algeria dedicated to him. His remains were returned to Algeria in the 1970's. AMIR ABD-AL-QADER'S STRUGGLE FOR TRUTH "If I have accepted leadership, this is to have the right to be the first to march in the battles, and I am ready to step behind any other chief whom you judge more worthy and more capable than me to lead you, provided that he pledges to take in hand the cause of our faith." Amir Abd-al-Qader to this day is the living symbol of the struggle of the Muslim people of Algeria, in the name of Islam, and for the sake of Islam,

against the French invasion of their land in the early nineteenth century. Unfortunately his purely Islamic struggle has been misrepresented as only a nationalistic and anti-colonial one by the "socialist" Algerian government of Benjeddid. Abd-al-Qader was born in 1808 in Moascar, a town in the western Algerian region of Oran. He received his primary education at Al Qotna and followed it up in Arzew and Oran. His education included the learning of the Quran by heart in his teens as well as theological and linguistic studies, which gave him a keen ideological sense and, accordingly, prepared him to assume the military and political leadership of the country. He used to study tasawwuf with his father, a sheikh of the Qadiri Order and with other great sheikhs in his region. In 1825, aged 17, he accompanied his father, Sheikh Muhiyeddin, to Makkah for Hajj, and on the way visited the Islamic universities of Az Zaituna and Al-Azhar. After Hajj they went to Damascus and Baghdad where they visited the grave of Sayid Abd-el-Qader al-Jilani, the spiritual leader of the Qadiri Sufi Order to which he and his family belonged. This trip greatly increased Amir Abd-al-Qader's Islamic awareness, which played an essential part in his fight against the French invaders. In the forty days he spent at the Mosque of Sayyid Abd-el-Qader al-Jilani, he experienced many spiritual visitations from the shaykh in his dreams. Shortly before his departure to return home, he saw the shaykh come to him in a vision at night. He handed him a black robe and a sword saying, "Now I entrust to you the secrets of jihad fi sabeelillah. Your trust from me is to take this knowledge, and to lead your people against the non-believers who are preventing Islam from being followed and are preventing implementing Shariah and Tariqah. Go my son, and with this sword repel those with enmity to God, and enmity to the Sunnah of the Prophet (s)." Knowledgeable in fiqh, in tazkiyya and an astute measurer of men, he soon asserted himself as a military and political leader, while leading an austere life in compliance with the Prophet's hadith: "Be tough with yourselves, civilisation does not last." Strangely enough, in independent Algeria he has been presented as a nationalist hero. Only a some time ago the Algerian press insinuated that he was the first Algerian to have applied socialism, although there has been no open claim to this effect yet. "The Amir had the merit to have placed education under the 'control' of the state," said a state-run weekly, specifying that before him "education was left to 'private' initiative, in particular the religious brotherhoods." Such a statement implies that Abd-al-Qader "nationalised" Algeria's great 19th century leader, Amir Abd-al-Qader Ben Muhiyeddin, fought long and hard against the French for the sake of Islam. Salah Noor recalls the life of this honourable man. Education. The authorities of independent Algeria closed all madrasas from 1963 to banish Islamic education from Algeria. Such an act would have been treasonable to the Amir who received his entire education in the schools of the brotherhoods (tariqas). What can better illustrate his courage, wisdom, tolerance, and humanity, his sense of responsibility and self-effacement, and above all his total dedication to Islam than his statement, delivered in November 1832 after his inauguration as Amir, at the age of 24, to fight the French? He said: "If I have accepted leadership, this is to have the right to be the first to march in the battles, and I am ready to step behind any other chief whom you judge more worthy and more capable than me to lead you, provided that he pledges to take in hand the cause of our faith." What a contrast this makes with the lust for power displayed by the secular elite of the Muslim world! Amir Abd-al-Qader established himself as a military leader in a very short time. After the Bay'ah (pledge) given to him by the Moascar and Oran tribes on November 28, 1832 - two years

after the French invasion of Algeria--he was given a collective bay'ah (allegiance): on February 4, 1833, in the face of the spreading colonisation. In particular the scholars ('ulama) pledged to obey, support and protect him. His struggle can be divided into two stages. The first period from 1832 to 1839 was marked by a series of successful armed struggles, interrupted by tactical treaties with the enemy who violated them one by one. But the Amir used these ceasefires to unify the various tribes and reinforce his military capability. The second period, from 1839 to 1847 was one of a total war against a merciless enemy. Alongside engaging in the war, Abdal-Qader set up a strong state apparatus, levying taxes, minting money - with Quranic verses on the coins - and organising a unique centralised mobile administration, called the Smala, which was constantly on the move to avoid the French weakening the resistance. From the defence point of view the Amir set up an army of 8,000 infantry and 2,000 horsemen, composed of volunteers only. By 1837 it acquired 240 artillery guns made in arsenals created by the Mujahid leader, where gun powder, shells and rifles were then being produced. However, despite important and numerous victories, Abd-al-Qader could not continue the struggle against a 100,000-strong French army, which practised a scorched-earth policy and indiscriminately killed children, old folk and cattle. The capture of the Smala in November 1842 dealt a deadly blow to the Muslim resistance, and the Amir's personal library with priceless documents was destroyed. Deprived of refuge in Morocco by King Abderrahman - who first entered the war on Abd-al-Qader's side against the French but lost and gave in to the French conditions - and to avoid a total massacre of the civilians and destruction of their properties, the Mujahid proposed in 1847 to the French his surrender under the condition that he would be allowed to go to one of the Mashreq countries along with his kith and kin and those among the Mujahideen who wished to accompany him. The son of the then King of France and the top military officers pledged to except Abd-al-Qader's conditions, but jailed the Amir and his companions in Toulon and then in the Chateau of Amboise in the Loire valley for five years. When, at his arrival in Toulon, the King of France sent him a message asking him to renounce his departure to the Mashreq against good reward, Abd-al-Qader replied: "If on behalf of your king you were to offer me all the riches of France and you were able to place all of them here on my burnous (raw wool garment), I would prefer to be thrown in this sea, the waves of which break against the walls of my prison, rather than give up the commitments made towards me publicly and officially. I shall take these commitments with me to my grave. I am here as your guest. Make me prisoner if you want. But shame and dishonor will reach you, not me." After their release in September 1852, Amir Abd-al-Qader and his companions lived in Istanbul as the guests of Sultan Abdulmajid until 1856 when they went to Damascus. Abd al-Qader died there on May 24, 1883, after performing two Hajj and paying several visits to the other Mashreq countries, as well as to Europe. Abd-al-Qader's 15-year struggle aroused great admiration. Its echo could be heard for a long time in the article published in The Times in 1851 reads: "From his French prison, Abd al-Qader brings about as much work in the world as he did when he was heading his cavalry." According to Michel Habart, a French writer, the refusal of the French to honor their pledge towards the Abd al-Qader "spurred in England a profound reprobation," and Lord Londonderry led a consistent campaign for his liberation. Furthermore an extensive biographical work called The Life of Emir Abd-el-Qader was written by the British Colonel Charles Henry Churchill who came to know him during his captivity. In

France Count Horace de Viel Castel, who was reportedly one of the worst gossips in Paris, said about the Amir: "I saw Abd-al-Qader yesterday . . . He has the ways of acting and speaking of a man used to authority and of a great Lord . . . Africa is no longer a theatre for him, the contact with Europe, what he has learnt on world politics and the Turkish Empire during his long captivity, the scant esteem he must grant a Commander of the believers who takes part in no sacred war led by the Arabs against the Christians, make him dream – I feel it, to have the role of a regenerator of the sons of the Prophet . . . General Dumas regards this Arab as a superior man to whom history will grant a great place . . ." Even his fierce enemy, General – and later Marshal Bugeaud, who caused Abd-al-Qader's misfortune and reduced the Muslim civilians to poverty and desolation as he had promised to do, testified to the following: "He is a quick, intelligent and active enemy, who exercised on the Arab populations the prestige given to him by his genius and the grandeur of the cause he defends. He is more than an ordinary pretender. He is a sort of prophet, the hope of all the fervent Muslims." The letters this Mujahid sent to Generals Bugeaud, Desmichel and others are full of quotations from the Quran and the Hadith. No wonder that Bugeaud and others made such remarks as the one above. Abd-alQader would have set up the first modern islamic state if he had the means. But "it is destiny," he commented about his failure, when he was forced to give up. This simple man, who was also a thinker and a poet, forced the admiration of his enemies and the Western elite of his time by his greatness. This greatness was not the result of orientalist ideas, socialist theories or state capitalism. It stemmed from a pure Islamic background. It was the consequence of a thorough Islamic upbringing through education in the Shariah, the Tariqat and in the practical implementation of Islamic leadership: it owes itself to Islam and Islamic culture. It is therefore an example for the Muslims throughout the world to ponder and take to heart