

AHMED GAID SALAH: THE ALGERIAN LINCOLN

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Abstract: Just as Abraham Lincoln is placed as the greatest American president ever, Algeria's former chief of staff, Ahmed Gaid Salah who died in 2019, is seen by many Algerians as a paragon of patriotism. This article, however, strips away the mask of grandeur to reveal the profound truths of the controversial men underneath. It also suggests that they share striking similarities in dealing with themes of power, war, and death. Despite their poor backgrounds, they saw themselves as grander and loftier. Truly, they were not cultivated, yet they understood the world of self-interest and ambition. As America plunged into Civil War, Lincoln pragmatically emancipated slaves to restore the Union. Similarly, Gaid seized the opportunity of *Hirak* to turf out president Bouteflika and become the most powerful man in Algeria. Most importantly, both take part of the blame for the astounding numbers of dead people in the American and Algerian Civil Wars. Finally, the timing of their death was perfect. While Lincoln died triumphant only a few days after winning the Civil War, Gaid too died in a moment of victory, barely a week after a presidential election that he strongly pushed for. Undoubtedly, it is the timing of their death that led to the creation of two legends that still obscure their true personalities. This article aims to show that Lincoln's and Gaid Salah's place in history is intentionally elevated to a mythical position despite the fact that they were rife with contradictions.

Keywords: Abraham Lincoln, Ahmed Gaid Salah, Civil War, *Hirak*, Similarities

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Résumé : Tout comme les Américains considèrent Abraham Lincoln le plus grand président de tous les temps, de nombreux Algériens croient que l'ancien chef de cabinet algérien, Ahmed Gaid Salah, décédé en 2019, est un parangon de patriotisme. Cet article tente d'enlever le masque de la grandeur pour révéler les vérités profondes des hommes controversés en dessous. Cela suggère également qu'ils partagent des similitudes frappantes dans le traitement des thèmes du pouvoir, de la guerre et de la mort. Sans tenir compte de leurs origines pauvres, ils se considéraient comme plus grands et plus nobles. Malgré qu'ils ne fussent pas cultivés, ils comprenaient le monde de l'intérêt personnel et de l'ambition. Alors que l'Amérique plongeait dans la guerre civile, Lincoln émancipa pragmatiquement les esclaves pour restaurer l'Union. De même, Gaid Salah a saisi l'opportunité du *Hirak* pour chasser le président Bouteflika et devenir l'homme le plus puissant d'Algérie. Ce qui est plus important encore, c'est que les deux sont responsables du nombre incroyable de morts dans les guerres civiles américaine et algérienne. Enfin, le moment de leur mort était parfait. Alors que Lincoln est mort triomphant quelques jours seulement après avoir remporté la guerre civile, Gaid Salah est également mort dans un moment de victoire, à peine une semaine après une élection présidentielle pour laquelle il avait fortement insisté. Sans aucun doute, c'est le moment de leur mort qui a conduit à la création de deux légendes qui obscurcissent encore leurs véritables personnalités. Cet article vise à montrer que la place de Lincoln et de Gaid Salah dans l'histoire est intentionnellement élevée à une position mythique malgré le fait qu'ils étaient en proie à des contradictions.

Mots-clés: Abraham Lincoln, Ahmed Gaid Salah, Guerre Civile, *Hirak*, Similitudes

Introduction

To most Americans, Abraham Lincoln is the most celebrated figure in American history. He was a political genius who won the American Civil War and ended slavery. Undoubtedly, as American President Barack Obama delivered the final State of the Union address of his presidency, he recalled the words of Abraham Lincoln: “[Americans] did not adhere to “the dogmas of the quiet past.” Instead, [they] thought anew and acted anew” (qtd in Rhodan, 2016). As the great emancipator, Lincoln became America’s symbol of freedom and its most revered saint. Likewise, Algeria’s former chief of staff, Ahmed Gaid Salah who died in 2019, made the public swoon with admiration and adoration. He is seen as the brave general who struggled fiercely to keep Algeria united. Accordingly, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune decreed a three-day national mourning following the death of Lieutenant General Ahmed Gaid Salah. In his message to the nation, Tebboune said that “Algeria mourn[ed] one of its great men and devoted sons” (“Death of Gaid Salah,” 2019). Gaid Salah is seen as the military leader who guided the nation in times of uncertainty. However, as both Lincoln and Gaid Salah lived through critical periods in their nations’ history, their role in shaping the events did certainly change forever the lives of millions of people. Undoubtedly, their actions were a heterogeneous compound of right and wrong. Therefore, this article aims to answer two paramount questions: what are the parallels between Abraham Lincoln and Ahmed Gaid Salah that show that they are both more fallible and more controversial than their mythical reputation? And based on their striking similarities, can Gaid Salah be regarded as an Algerian Lincoln?

1. The rise to power

Abraham Lincoln, son of a farming couple, grew up in a log cabin in Kentucky. Unfortunately, his poor illiterate farming family could not afford to pay for his education. Consequently, his sporadic learning was subservient to his family’s harsh economic situation. Self-taught, Lincoln acquired most of his knowledge by reading while taking part in the work of the fields and the breeding. He later wrote: “I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two” (qtd in Good, 2009: 67). It is estimated that, based on the content of his lessons, Lincoln’s education was equivalent to a sixth-grade (Prokopowicz, 2008: 18). Though Lincoln’s education was very limited, he was a ruthless person driven by a strong determination. Likewise, Ahmed Gaid Salah did not come from a privileged background. According to the Algerian Press Service (2019), he was born in 1940 in the province of Batna, eastern Algeria. Unfortunately, nothing is revealed about Gaid Salah’s early education, yet it is for sure that he neither received higher education nor got a university diploma. It is worth mentioning that the family name ‘Gaid Salah’ means the ‘good leader.’ This family name had immensely influenced Ahmed Gaid Salah’s personality. Throughout the course of his life, Ahmed’s family name had an incredible radiation on his view of himself, his choices, and even his behavior.

Unlike his father, Lincoln did not desire to be a farmer. To overcome his underprivileged childhood, he set out on an intellectual journey for learning and self-improvement. He received legal training and became an avid reader of books. Aspiring to a political career, Lincoln moved to Illinois, a frontier state, where he joined the legislature

at the age of 25 after fleeing the farming community (Foner, 2002, p. 11). Ambition was the secret of Lincoln's success. Similarly, Gaid Salah was not meant to sit in the shade of life. At the age of 17, he was conscripted as a soldier in the National Liberation Army fighting against the French presence in Algeria. When the French discovered his commitment to Algeria's cause, Gaid Salah's family was forced to move to Annaba, another province in eastern Algeria ("Décès d'Ahmed Gaid Salah," 2019). As politics was a mode of social advancement for Lincoln, Gaid Salah's commitment to the Algerian cause of independence from its French colonizer elevated him to the status of patriotism. Both men of modest backgrounds had their way up the social scale.

Politics transformed Lincoln's life. By the early 1950s, the poor Lincoln was long gone. Astonishingly, Lincoln became a wealthy man who held office four times being a Congressman in Washington DC. Between terms in office, Lincoln trained as a lawyer (Burlingame, n.d). Just as politics became Lincoln's métier, so was the army to Gaid Salah. The army, the true ruling power behind the scenes in Algeria, became Gaid Salah's obsession and his ultimate passion. After Algeria won independence in 1962, Gaid Salah pursued his career in the Algerian army. Journalist Farid Alilat (2019) observes that as Algeria had an excellent relationship with the Soviet Union, Gaid Salah received training at the Vystrel Military Academy, near Moscow from 1969 to 1971. He rose through military ranks due to his long years of service in the military. His objective was plain: to reach the top of military power.

In politics, Lincoln's horizons had spread, and so had those of his nation as America's great drive westwards had begun. Westward expansion brought the issue of slavery to the fore. Slaves in the South were the greatest economic asset. They were the engine of wealth. The Northern states were worried that slavery would spread into the new Western states of Kansas and Nebraska. The Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854 opened the heartland of the trans-Mississippi West to the expansion of slavery (Foner, 2002, p.11), yet it also swept Lincoln back to the public life after retiring from political activity. Lincoln's long years of self-education materialized in his powerful speeches that condemned slavery's "monstrous injustice" (qtd in Basler, 1953, p. 355). He became a very powerful spokesman for the anti-slavery cause. However, his opposition of slavery was not for altruistic reasons. It was rather based on his early rural upbringing. Lincoln's miserable childhood in the slave-state of Kentucky convinced him that poor Southern whites were compelled to compete with slaves for cheap labor (Fladhammer, n.d., p. 2). As it was the case with his family, Southern whites were destined to a life of poverty due to the institution of slavery. It is remarkable that a man who was not originally an abolitionist would become the most prominent anti-slavery orator.

Equivalently, Gaid Salah rose through the ranks of the hierarchy when Bouteflika became president of Algeria. In 2004, Gaid Salah was appointed the army's chief of staff by former president Abdel Aziz Bouteflika, following the resignation of major general Mohamed Lamari ("How Algeria's Army Sacrificed a President to Keep Power," 2019). At the helm of the military, Gaid Salah has been a staunch supporter of Bouteflika. After the stroke that Bouteflika suffered in early 2013, Gaid Salah used his influence to allow him to run for a fourth term despite his failing health. Bouteflika, in return, appointed Gaid Salah

Deputy Minister of National Defense (Qui était le Général Algérien Ahmed Gaid Salah?” 2019). He was increasingly identified as a central figure in the system. Yet, he preferred to maneuver in the shadows, sheltering behind a façade of civilian power. Never since former president Houari Boumediene, who reigned from 1965 to 1978, has a single man concentrated so much power.

Despite Bouteflika’s failing health that made him completely paralyzed, Gaid Salah spoke out in favor of a fifth term (Ayad, 2019). Critics were increasingly worried about his meddling in the Algerian politics. Accordingly, demonstrators went to the streets in February 2019 to express their anger and demand no “fifth mandate.” Peaceful protests against Bouteflika’s candidacy for a fifth term came to be known as *Hirak* or “movement.” Suddenly, the once faithful Gaid Salah turned into an adversary, pushing for the president’s resignation (“Ahmed Gaid Salah Tire sa Reverence,” 2019). Politics, in Algeria, became the art of the strongest. The potent general demanded the immediate application of article 102 of the Constitution which stipulates the resignation or the dismissal of the President of the Republic for health reasons (Algerian Constitution, n.d., p. 15). It was a shrewd move not to align with Bouteflika, yet it was truly surprising that it was Gaid Salah who declared the former president Bouteflika to be too ill to rule. This meant that the real power in Algeria lied in the hands of the army. It is very astonishing that Lincoln, though not an abolitionist, condemned slavery for political reasons. Likewise, Gaid Salah, though a fervent Bouteflika supporter for many years, became his most vicious enemy for political reasons too.

2. The way to anarchy

As pragmatism enabled Lincoln to attain the highest office in the U.S. in 1860, so it did make Gaid Salah the most powerful figure in Algeria in 2019. Similarly, while the United States of America was coming apart, so was Algeria. As his support came from the North, Lincoln’s plan was to halt the spread of slavery. Though not an abolitionist, the election of Lincoln was a lethal threat to the South. It was a referendum on its way of life. In the U.S. federal system, it was the states not the national government that had the power to determine the future of slavery (“States’ Rights: The Rallying Cry of Secession,” n.d). In other words, the Civil War was about the states’ rights. They refused Lincoln’s plan, and his election prompted surprise secession from the union. South Carolina led the way on December 20, 1860. Other states like Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and even Virginia followed. Their aim was to dissolve their connection to the union. Likewise, as Bouteflika swiftly quit power, Gaid Salah successfully vanquished his enemies and became the true leader behind the scenes in Algeria. Yet, Bouteflika’s resignation did not mean that his regime also came to its end. Despite being without formal leaders, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators continued their peaceful *Hirak* every Friday. For them, the real central figures of the regime were still in power. Pragmatically, Gaid Salah seized the opportunity and waged a ruthless war against the men of the Bouteflika regime on the grounds of corruption and abuse of power. At the top of those arrested were Said, the young brother of president Bouteflika; General Toufik, ex-boss of the Intelligence and Security Department; and Louisa Hanoune, leader of the Workers’ Party (Meddi, 2021). Just as the

U.S. southern states doubted Lincoln's real motives toward their rights, so some Algerians doubted the purity of Gaid Salah's incentives. Though Algerians did not fault the way Gaid Salah dealt with Bouteflika's clan, they became bitterly divided. While Gaid Salah's actions against the Bouteflika regime were welcomed by some Algerians, sceptics believed that it was not a war against corruption but rather an attempt to get rid of his rivals within Bouteflika's system ("Algerian Army Chief Ahmed Gaid Salah Dies," 2019). In other words, the imprisonment of the giant figures of the system was spurred by personal revenge and a strong desire to seize power. Though a military, Gaid Salah monopolized the political scene more than any other politician.

Lincoln is accused of pushing the nation into a disastrous and unavoidable conflict. While the southern states thought they were defending what was rightfully theirs, Lincoln did not try to defuse the tension. Even if he did not cause the Civil War, he created a situation where war was possible. To prevent Baltimore from seceding, he put its mayor and some legislators into jail without trial. He even arrested the chief justice in a clear violation of the states' rights (Toobin, 2006). He, certainly, did not avoid the escalation of hostilities with the South. Therefore, it was Lincoln who pressed the seceding states to fire the first shot. The states' rash action merited a rash response from Lincoln. He waged war without Congress approval. Later, he justified his measure by claiming that it was a matter of "popular demand, and a public necessity" (Lincoln's "Message to Congress," 1861). In times of war, laws are always violated. For Lincoln, holding out an olive branch to the Confederate states was a measure of gross imbecility. Lincoln then exploded the possibility of peace, and the country headed to anarchy. Unfortunately, he did not foresee the calamity he was about to unleash. As the North and the South were taken into the maelstrom of war, even the image of Lincoln as the savior of the nation was hard to accept. He prosecuted the Civil War ferociously. In his message to Congress in July 1861, Lincoln threatened the seceding states that he would teach them "the folly of being the beginners of a war." In some Southern states, the Civil War is remembered as a war of aggression and Lincoln as a war criminal. Southerners fought to preserve their way of life and protect their families. Yet, their choice made Lincoln wage war on them.

Back in the 1990s, the Algerian army was likewise accused of igniting a Civil War by repelling the democratic election results. Gaid Salah was appointed Commander of the Ground Forces at the height of the bloody Civil War that broke out between the military establishment and the Islamist groups ("Qui était le général algérien Ahmed Gaid Salah?," 2019). The struggle began when the Islamist Salvation Front (FIS) democratically won the first round of legislative elections with nearly 48% of the vote in December 1991. To the army generals, the elections' results were frightening. They feared the Islamists would sink the country in backwardness. The army's role then was to purge the country from extremists. Consequently, president Chadli was pushed to resign, and the second round of the elections was immediately cancelled ("Algérie: Six ans de Guerre Civile," 1998). This was strong evidence that the Algerian army played a vital role in making and unmaking presidents. It was freely intruding into political affairs, and it launched an assault on the people's right to choose. The measures, taken by the army, goaded the demonstrators into more protests, and the country quickly basked in chaos. The Civil War that gripped the

whole nation for nearly a decade was galvanized by the army's cancellation of the elections' results. The Algerian population became a stake in the struggle for power between the Algerian army and the Islamist groups who fought to preserve their right of ruling the country because of their election right.

3. Pragmatism prevails

Unable to defeat the South, Lincoln began to think the unthinkable. As the union was about to lose the war, Lincoln considered the emancipation of slaves. He admitted that "the colored population [was] the greatest available and yet unavailed of force for restoring the union. The bare sight of fifty thousand armed and drilled black soldiers upon the banks of the Mississippi would end the rebellion at once" (qtd in McPherson, 2009). Stated differently, the use of colored power was the surest and most infallible measure to win the war against the South. The paramount objective was to save the union and not to free the slaves. Lincoln's words and speeches are used to condemn him. On August 22, 1862, Lincoln wrote:

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union. (358)

To win the war, emancipation was the only solution left to Lincoln. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. The modern reputation of Lincoln rests on his status as the Great Emancipator. However, the Emancipation Proclamation was an act of war rather than an act of mercy. It was largely motivated by Lincoln's failure to defeat the Confederate States. In this regard, Lincoln was very pragmatic. The South was outraged. The president of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis, called it "the most execrable measure recorded in the history of guilty man" (qtd in Hahn, 2014). To keep America united, Lincoln became a potent symbol of pragmatism and deviousness. In the same manner, Gaid Salah's well-calculated pragmatism served to keep Algeria united under a military ruthless man. As his omni-presence on the political spectrum worried the demonstrators that have never forgotten his unwavering support of Bouteflika, he intentionally declared that the "modern and professional" army "aligned" with the aspirations of the *Hirak* ("How Algeria's Army Sacrificed a President to Keep Power, 2019"). Gaid Salah's promises, nonetheless, were not enough to appease some Algerians. Though his ostensible goal was to save the country, critics believed that Algeria was gobbled up by the general's personal appetite for power. Consequently, Gaid Salah became the target of some protesters who demanded his departure. They even accused him of trying to establish a military dictatorship. One famous slogan of the *Hirak* was for a "civilian, not military, state" ("A Civilian, not Military State," 2019). Disappointedly, demonstrators did not have a precise candidate capable of ending the uncertainties after Bouteflika's resignation.

Cautiously, another chant of the *Hirak* was “the army and the people are brothers” (Explained Desk, 2019). This slogan can be understood as a vote of confidence in Gaid Salah’s intentions as the situation was perilous. The army’s authority was the only protection against disorder. However, a prominent veteran of Algeria’s war of independence, Lakhdar Bouregaa, argued that Algerians’ rights were not to be granted by the army (“Algeria Releases 76 Protest Detainees,” 2020). The 1990s Civil War taught them that the history of Gaid Salah was a history of repeated injury. He was unfit to be the leader of the new period. In Post-Bouteflika Algeria, it was beyond dispute that the country was in chaos, yet Algeria was meant to be a country of laws, not men.

4. Saviors or murderers?

By the early 1864, victory was within Lincoln’s grasp. Spurred by military victory, Lincoln looked forward to a second presidential term. He was re-elected by an enormous majority. He carried 55% of the popular vote. His presidential rival George B. McClellan was easily defeated. However, none of the eleven Confederate states voted in the election (Glass, 2016). It is quite bizarre that Lincoln would be considered president of the whole United States while being in a state of a grisly war with the seceding states. Soldiers were under an immense power to vote for Lincoln while Blacks were too gullible to believe in his lavished promises of freedom (White, 2017). The army’s authority secured Lincoln’s victory as soldiers were trampled of their right of choosing the president. Assistant Secretary of War, Charles A. Dana, wrote that “all the power and influence of the War Department... was employed to secure the re-election of Mr. Lincoln” (qtd in Van der Linden, 2007, p. 247). Preventing soldiers from their right of choosing their president is a perfidious attack on the nation’s will.

Identically, Gaid Salah’s military authority secured a presidential victory for Abdelmadjid Tebboune. While the demonstrators thought that Algeria was not ready for a presidential election until a substantial change is made in the country’s political structure, Gaid Salah adamantly rejected the *Hirak*’s demands. Instead, he suggested the way forward to the government pushing with all his weight for a presidential election in December 2019. He further argued that the “objective of the Algerian people, supported by its army, [was] to lay the foundations of a new national state which [would] be led by the president elect” (“Gaid Salah: l’Election Présidentielle aura lieu à la Date Prevue,” 2019). Clearly, Gaid Salah was to bind the whole country to his will and judgements. For his staunch supporters, the election was essential to the continuity of the country; otherwise, Algeria would bask in chaos. Therefore, it was better to put a speedy end to any possible disorders. Demonstrators, however, argued that voting in the election would mean hastening Algeria’s ruin. Besides, an election supervised by the army would neither save nor strengthen the country (“Manifestation Massive à Alger,” 2019). Instead, it would surely expose Algeria to additional bureaucracy that could affect the lives of millions of people.

The election, held on December 12, 2019, was won by the army-backed candidate, Abdelmadjid Tebboune. Ironically, all five candidates who vied for the highest office in the country belonged to Bouteflika’s regime (Akef, 2019). Gaid Salah’s support of Tebboune earned him a reputation of partiality. Logically, the election was massively boycotted by the

Hirak that considered it an outrageous slander. Tebboune was elected with nearly an overall participation rate of 39.88% (“Les Résultats Définitifs de l’Election Présidentielle Publiés au Journal Officiel,” 2019). Attempts to convince Algerians of the necessity of elections ran into the sand. Gaid Salah’s promises did not dispose Algerian people toward the election. To them, the election of a military-backed president was a threat to the real democratic process. Again, hopes for a better future began to dim as Algerians did not have the opportunity to choose their president for themselves. To his obstinate opponents, Gaid Salah was the chief killer of the hopes of Algerians.

In April 1965, the Confederate army finally surrendered. Slavery was swept away, yet Lincoln’s ruthless leadership devastated the South. The Civil War caused utter destruction in many parts of the country, and the death toll was of great magnitude. Historian J David Hacker found that “an estimated 750,000 soldiers [perished] in the war” (“Who, What, Why: How Many Soldiers Died in the US Civil War?,” 2012). People from both sides of the conflict died still persuaded of the justice of their cause. For Lincoln, the country had to suffer martyrdom for the noble cause of reunification. The terrible cost of the Civil War was the staggering price that the nation paid in order to save the union. Analogously, Algerians too suffered from frustration, torture, and killing: hundreds of thousands were killed while thousands disappeared during the Algerian Civil War (Hussey, 2013). As commander of the ground forces during the 1990s, Gaid Salah’s commitment to the army was fanatical though many Algerians suffered from the army’s incendiary fury. His reputation is tainted by the appalling numbers of dead people. Therefore, the army as the killer is the image that its supporters still find uncomfortable. Nonetheless, its role is brushed under the historical carpet of national security.

In addition to the previous analogies, Both Lincoln and Gaid Salah share similar death timings. They both died in a moment of victory that marked them out for greatness. Immediately, after the end of the American Civil War, Lincoln’s enemies plotted their revenge. Among them was John Wilkes Booth who considered Lincoln to be responsible for all the country’s troubles. On April 15, 1865, Lincoln died when Booth fired at him. John Wilkes Booth said: “the South shall be free!” (qtd in Loux, 2014, p.198). Booth mirrored the collective rage of those who thought that Lincoln had dishonored their heritage and traditions. He later said: “I can never repent it... Our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment (“Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives,” 1867: 286).” There was no middle way. While Lincoln strongly believed that victory would save the union, his opponents vehemently believed that his death was the logical punishment for the destruction of their South. Equally, attending the presidential inauguration was Gaid Salah’s last public appearance. Barely a week after the election, Gaid Salah’s efforts were amply rewarded by the newly elected president. At the inauguration ceremony, Tebboune idyllically embraced Gaid Salah and presented him with a medal of order of merit. It was a recognition of the army’s indispensable role during the post-Bouteflika period when the country was about to go astray. For his diehard supporters, Gaid Salah cemented his reputation as the most honorable general in contemporary Algerian history. Yet, it was also an admission of the army’s upper hand over politicians. With no formal representative, the *Hirak* was too infirm to stand against Gaid Salah’s will.

Only four days later, the strong military chief of staff died of a heart attack in an Algiers military hospital, according to official media (“Algeria’s Powerful Military Chief Ahmed Gaid Salah Dies, 2019”). Only death defeated the invincible general.

The timing of Lincoln’s death helped launch the legend that has only grown with time. He died at a perfect moment, only a few days after the surrender of the Confederate army. His assassination transformed him from a mere politician into America’s national hero. From the moment of his death, the real Lincoln was obscured. In contemporary history, most Americans believe that Lincoln is the best president in U.S. history (Fieldstadt, 2022). To most of them, he is a paragon of patriotism. They have become infatuated with him. To African Americans, he is the great emancipator who freed the slaves. No other single president had so dramatically and permanently affected the course of American history. In short, he was elevated to a position of a saint. Gaid Salah’s death, too, came at a very critical moment. He died triumphant, and his death elevated him to a mythical position. Peculiarly, Gaid Salah has always been at the heart of a system that operates opaquely, and his death was too ambiguous and its narrative was unconvincing. Nevertheless, he is now seen as a national treasure whose failures and frustrations are quickly forgotten and easily forgiven.

Conclusion

As Abraham Lincoln is undeniably one of the most debatable and contradictory figures in American history, so is Ahmed Gaid Salah. Both had an inviolable sense of grandeur that elevated them, despite their rudimentary education, to be the true leaders of their countries. Truly, their lives were a brutal scramble for power. As the American Civil War changed the lives of Americans who lived through it, the *Hirak* changed the direction of Algeria. Unable to defeat the Confederate States, Lincoln pragmatically issued the Emancipation Proclamation to win the war. Similarly, Gaid Salah, who once swore loyalty to Bouteflika, deviously sacrificed his president to appease demonstrators and lead the country. Once influenced by the delusions of power, both were able to impose their will on the nation. Additionally, criticized for the harsh measures that led to the death of hundreds of thousands of their people, and praised for their cruel leadership that kept their countries united, their names are synonymous with invincibility and glory. It was only death that forced their departure. The tragic nature of Lincoln’s death and its timing at the very end of America’s Civil War created a myth which has placed him almost beyond rational debate. Likewise, Gaid Salah’s death immediately after the presidential election that he strongly pushed for convinced many Algerians that he sincerely prevented the nation from plunging into chaos. Though they were full of contradictions, the power of myth has exaggerated their real history. Therefore, drawing upon the striking similarities between Lincoln’s and Gaid Salah’s treatments of events, the latter can be seen as an Algerian Lincoln who is also elevated to a position of grandeur and hero worship.

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