

HISTORY

Tunisia's written history dates from the arrival in the 12th century B.C. of Phoenician traders who established permanent settlements, the most famous of which was the city of Carthage. After being occupied by the Romans, Tunisia was conquered in the seventh century A.D. by the Arabs and became a major center of western Islamic culture and political power. The Turks invaded Tunisia in 1574. A French protectorate was established over Tunisia in 1883. The outward forms of the Tunisian monarchy which had been established in 1705 continued in force, but all the power was in French hands.

Following World War I the Destour (Constitution) Party asked unsuccessfully for moderate reforms, including a legislative assembly. But the founding in 1934 of the Neo-Destour (New Constitution) Party of which Habib Bourguiba soon became President, marks the real beginning of Tunisia's drive for independence.

In March 1952, following the breakdown of negotiations with France, Tunisian guerrilla fighters (fallagha) took to the hills, and in 1954 France found herself using about 70,000 troops in an effort to restore order and security. In July 1954 France promised the Tunisians full internal autonomy. In December the fallagha were persuaded to accept a French amnesty, turning in some of their arms.

After 9 months of negotiation the Franco-Tunisian conventions on internal autonomy were signed on June 3, 1955, but from the moment the conventions were put into effect it became apparent that the Tunisians would demand their early revision and review. Events in Morocco, Algeria, and throughout the Afro-Asian world hastened this process, and Bourguiba began to press France for independence. On March 20, 1956, a protocol was drawn up in which France recognized Tunisian independence.

The March 20 protocol also specified that Tunisia and France would negotiate new "interdependence" relations, particularly in the fields of foreign affairs and defense. Considerable progress has been made on some important issues in Franco-Tunisian relations, but intense feelings over Algeria and Bizerte (see below) have slowed progress toward definitive arrangements on other matters.

France and Tunisia reached an agreement in June 1958 which provided for the evacuation of French forces, except for those at Bizerte, and for further negotiation of provisional arrangements concerning the status of Bizerte. Negotiations over the ensuing years failed to produce agreement. In July 1961, bloody clashes between French and Tunisian forces took place in the town and environs of Bizerte. A period of extreme tenseness in Tunisian-French relations followed. Direct contacts were maintained, however, and diplomatic relations were resumed in September 1962. Relations have since improved steadily. In 1963 French economic aid to Tunisia was resumed, and in October of that year the last of French military forces left Bizerte.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Tunisia believes that it cannot formally align itself with the West but should maintain such relations with both West and East as best serve Tunisian interests. Most Tunisians consider, however, that particular emphasis should be placed on Tunisia's relations with the West and with Tunisia's African neighbors. In addition to being a member of the United Nations and many of its specialized agencies, Tunisia is also a member of the Arab League and the Organization of African Unity.

ECONOMY

Agriculture, although handicapped by inadequate water supplies in many parts of the country, is the backbone of the Tunisian economy. The principal crops are wheat, olives, citrus fruit, grapes, truck crops, and esparto grass. Agricultural exports include grains, olive oil, wine, esparto grass, and citrus fruit.

Although no extensive mineral deposits have been found in Tunisia, there are commercially exploited deposits of phosphates, iron ore, lead, and zinc that are the source of substantial foreign exchange earnings. Extensive exploratory searches for oil have been undertaken since the recent oil discoveries in neighboring Algeria and Libya.

Tunisian foreign trade is largely oriented toward the franc zone, which since 1958 has taken about 60 percent of Tunisian exports and supplied about 60 percent of imports. The United States generally supplies less than 5 percent of Tunisia's imports and takes about 3 percent of her exports, though as a result of the U.S.