The practice and the ideology of the razzia was by no means static, with at least four forms evolving over the period 1837–47. First there were those motivated by fairly strict military strategic motives, including razzias determined to avenge French losses (which were the successors to earlier ‘punitive expeditions’); second, those which were chiefly driven by economic goals; third, those which had as their aim the complete destruction of the habitats and lifeworlds of portions of the Algerian population; and, finally, those which had an additional exterminatory purpose. In rough terms, there was a gradual shift towards the last of these forms.

The perception that the razzia certainly needed to become a more revolutionary form of warfare, which stood some chance of more forcefully resolving the Algerian Question, was quite apparent in the thinking of French soldiers in the late 1830s. To take one example, in 1837 Lieutenant General Baudrand wrote of the situation in the colony:

While it is true to say that we have nearly always played the role of assailants here, it is also true to say that in our attacks we have almost always found ourselves on the defensive. If the Arabs have only rarely been able to stop the march of our columns, for our part we have only been able to push back their assaults, without being able to adequately pursue them so as to impose considerable losses which might enable them to more fully feel the horrors of war and to understand the logic of our actions on them.¹

French violence up until this point had, therefore, failed on a strategic and, more importantly, a communicative level. It was quite plain in the military mind that only when Algerians were able to reflect upon

the ‘horrors of war’, which ought to be visited upon by them in more planned and premeditated ways, would there be any chance of making real progress. Behind such rhetoric lay that counterintuitive defence of increasingly brutal forms of French violence which insisted that such atrocities were inherently humanitarian in the manner in which they hastened a lasting peace between peoples.

Under Bugeaud such views gained the status of an uncontested orthodoxy, yet we have seen that responsibility for the razzia ‘système’ lay as much with Soult and the government in Paris as it did with the office of the Governor General. Just as it was easy for the idea of all resistance in Algeria to be loaded onto the personality of Abd el-Kader, it has proved equally simple for Bugeaud to play the role of the great architect of the increased violence of the late 1830s and the ’40s. As we will see in detailed considerations of the correspondence of field commanders, the Governor General and the Ministry, there was a confluence of interest between all three groups and the idea that responsibility ought to lie solely with Bugeaud is hard to sustain. While Soult was apt to play the legalist card in denouncing what were claimed to be exceptional instances of French barbarity, he was equally likely to praise such activity, while there is no evidence that the careers of those who perpetrated such violence were marred in any way. As Frémeaux noted of the similar relationship between field commanders and their men, ‘superior officers disapproved of such excesses only very rarely’ 2, quite clearly because a convergence of interests and strategy was shared across the chain of command from ordinary soldiers to ministers in Paris.

Military razzias

The simplest form of military razzias appeared to be those raids which were launched against enemy tribes, such as those initiated by the garrisons at Sétif and Philippeville against ‘hostile tribes’ in April 1841. Slightly more complex were those razzias which had as one of their chief goals the communication of information or the sending of messages, the most common of which was the idea that the tribes would ultimately be better off under French rule than they would under the protection of Abd el-Kader. There was a strand of legalist thought in Bugeaud’s account of such razzias, for he insisted on the importance of capturing prisoners, ‘especially women for that will engender despair amongst local populations and anger which will make it harder for the khalifas to govern such people’. Thus on Christmas Day of 1841 we read that La Moricière captured 70 prisoners in the course of a razzia. The