

Civil war destroys Algeria, while the world looks on

by Muriel Mirak Weissbach

The Algerian civil war has reached a point of no return. Escalating in waves since January 1992, when a military junta took power in a coup, to prevent the predictable electoral victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the civil war has now gone utterly out of control, and threatens to dismantle what is left of the social fabric. This is the stark reality which policymakers in Bonn, Paris, and Washington, have been refusing to face, keeping their heads firmly buried in the sand, since the dramatic events of five years ago. It is to be hoped that, although the hour is late, an international initiative can still be shaped, to intervene in Algeria, stop the bloodshed, and steer the country toward a political solution. If not, the repercussions will be felt immediately throughout North Africa, and across the Mediterranean, in southern Europe.

The recent escalation was timed to coincide with Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month, which is usually characterized by a spirit of brotherliness and charity. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA), who have been presented as "Islamist fundamentalist terrorists," declared open season on all citizens during the holy month, which began Jan. 10, and proceeded to slaughter women, children, and elderly, in ritual fashion. Striking in the heart of the country's capital, Algiers, the GIA set car-bombs which exploded in crowded streets, particularly just after sundown, when citizens, breaking their day-long fast, would leave their homes to socialize with friends in cafés. At the same time, the GIA organized sweeps through rural villages, slaughtering entire families. They slit throats and beheaded people.

According to reports carried in the French press, the GIA

circulated a communiqué, announcing that "the war will continue and will intensify during the month of Ramadan. We have the means and the men to punish all those who are not on our side." A poster, "signed" by GIA chief Antar Zouabri, was pasted up on the walls of some mosques in the capital, with the grim message: "With the exception of those who are with us, all the others are apostates and deserve death." Yet another GIA "chief," Farid Hamami, alias Abou Semane, claimed that he had 50 bombs in his possession, "ready to be used." The gruesome toll, at the end of the first two weeks of Ramadan, was 250 dead, and hundreds wounded.

The official position of the government, nominally run by President Liamine Zeroual, was to ignore the killings, and indeed, prevent any coverage of them from creeping into the media. The military junta has maintained, that its hard-line tactics have met with success, and that there is only "residual terrorism" left. The press was muzzled in order to protect the fraud. For obvious reasons, such a cover-up could not be maintained while bombs kept exploding daily in the center of the city, and, after a few Algerian papers raised questions about the junta's ability to preserve law and order, the President addressed the nation. In his nationwide television broadcast on Jan. 24, Zeroual could do no more than to repeat his commitment to "exterminate" or "eradicate" the terrorists, and attribute the country's troubles to "foreign forces" plotting against Algeria, with the participation of "Algerian personalities" linked to the FIS. The foreign conspirators, he charged, were "bands of criminals, traitors, and mercenaries manipulated by external circles who are exploiting their savagery to serve foreign interests."

More questions raised

Zeroual's tough talk made no impression whatsoever, neither on the opposition parties, which had hoped for some sign of dialogue, nor on the junta's supporters, who expected new measures against terror. Instead, the regime's behavior served only to multiply the questions being raised, especially abroad, about what really is going on in the country.

For months, the French press, in particular, has insinuated that the regime has had a hand in the terrorism all along. The use of sophisticated remote control devices to explode car-bombs in late January, pointed to capabilities which the terrorist group had not appeared to possess over the last three years. Furthermore, the apparent impunity with which the GIA succeeded in putting up posters on mosque walls, and distributing communiqués, spoke volumes about the complicity which must exist with the military security apparatus. More fundamentally, the whole *raison d'être* of the group bears scrutiny. As the Paris daily *Libération* wrote on Jan. 8, many experts "believe that maintaining a certain wave of violence, through the manipulation of armed groups by the security services, serves the interests of a discredited regime to the extent that it allows it to appear as the 'lesser of two evils.' "

The GIA is run by intelligence networks

The nature of the GIA reveals it to be a textbook example of an operation run by intelligence networks. The group was formed by veterans of the British-sponsored Afghansi network, sent into Algeria after the 1992 coup (see *EIR*, Oct. 13, 1995, "New Terror International Targets South Asia"). Soon, its main targets began to be members of the FIS, the legitimate Islamist opposition party, which was poised to win parliamentary seats.

The GIA's publication, *Al Ansar*, is issued in Sweden and circulates in London, where several GIA operatives and apologists enjoy political asylum. The publication, which regularly takes credit for terrorist atrocities, has also carried articles denoting the GIA as a death cult. In one instance, sheiks who support the GIA offer justification for the ritual satanic murder of women and children, using Islamic rhetoric and the wholly Qur'an as an ideological base. For example, *Al Ansar* wrote about the "Death Brigades" and the "Signers-with-Blood Brigades," and promoted slogans such as, "Hang the last infidel ruler from the intestines of the last (Christian) priest!" It ranted that "this spirit is enriched with the love of death," and glorified the kinds of decapitations and bodily mutilations which have become the group's gruesome trademark: "my dear brothers . . . mutilated corpses . . . skulls . . . terrorism, how beautiful these words are!" "no doubt that the crack of bullets and the glistening of knives are the best cure for chest pain"; "the greatest nations in history have been the nations that mastered the *death industry*"; "blood and corpses create glory . . . and death creates life."

Recent press coverage has documented the strong ties that exist between the GIA satanic killer cult and the British. In the Paris daily *Le Figaro* on Jan. 27 and 28, Thierry Oberle showed how GIA supporters, such as Qamareddine Kherbane, roamed freely around London, distributing leaflets, or video cassettes, issued by the GIA, showing scenes of murders. Because of its extraordinary "tolerance" for radical opponents of various Arab governments, London is running the risk of becoming "the Mecca of terrorism," Oberle said.

Classic gang-countergang operations

What has been created on Algerian terrain, through the joint efforts of British intelligence and the Algerian military secret services, is a classic gang-countergang situation, in which proxies are set up to conduct warfare, to terrorize and control an entire population. In the initial phases of the war, it was the Algerian military which directly engaged in combat against the GIA. Over the last year, the regime has given the dirty work to popular militias. With the argument that the population needs to defend itself, the regime has distributed weapons to an estimated 300,000 civilians. Thus, the confrontation is established between them and the terrorists. If a family or a village refuses the regime's offer of weapons for their self-protection, they are suspected of harboring sympathies for the Islamists, and are killed by the regime's own forces. If the civilians accept the arms, they are targeted by the GIA. If, when approached by the GIA, they refuse to collaborate, they are massacred.

Such is the correlation of forces in the populous north of the country, where, by now, there are areas controlled by the GIA, areas controlled by militias, and areas which are no-man's-land. In the south, where the strategic sectors of industrial activity are located, the gas and oil and respective pipelines, the military has established outright occupation. Algerian citizens are not allowed to circulate freely in the south, but must carry an identification card and submit it for inspection at checkpoints. It is said that sheer military presence has protected these installations thus far, but it is more likely the case that a *modus vivendi* has been worked out between the eradicators and those they would eradicate, to thus partition the country. The oil and gas export revenues constitute the base of subsistence for the regime, so the warlords of the junta, who may fight among themselves over the percentage of the "take" each receives from exports, manage to maintain a fragile unity around the need to protect the hydrocarbons. Their calculation is that these hydrocarbon export revenues will provide them what they require to maintain stability, a claim which former Prime Minister Abdelhamid Brahimi, an economist, has shown to be absurd (see interview, p. 63).

Thus, Algeria is no longer a normal nation. According to FIS estimates, 120,000 citizens have been killed since

1992, thousands are missing, tens of thousands jailed, and 60,000 have emigrated. Algeria is rapidly being turned into a zone of chaos and anarchy, in which the population is being exterminated, while the raw materials are being exported. In this sense, Algeria is beginning to look like the Great Lakes region of Africa, where British neo-imperialist interests are committing genocide, to loot the rich minerals.

The search for a political solution

It is no wonder that some political figures have raised the alarm, and urged that action be taken, from outside the hermetically sealed country. Hocine Ait-Ahmed, leader of the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), told *Le Monde* in an interview on Jan. 11, that a political solution to the Algerian tragedy could still be found, if one were to revive the Sant'Egidio (Community of St. Egidius) platform for peace talks drawn up in Rome in January 1995. The Sant'Egidio initiative, named after the Catholic lay organization which sponsored it, had succeeded in drawing together all responsible opposition forces, including the majority force of the FIS, around a principled approach to peace through negotiations (see *EIR*, Jan. 20, 1995, "Algerian War Could Be Brought to a Rapid Close").

The initiative was rejected out of hand by the junta, as a "foreign conspiracy," and, lacking adequate international support, it fell apart.

On Jan. 23, Ait-Ahmed issued a call during a Rome press conference, for U.S. President William Clinton to name a mediator, to intervene with a peace initiative in Algeria. "Why doesn't he appoint a mediator on Algeria?" he asked. "We believe that such an initiative in favor of a peace process will be likely to unblock the situation." The FFS leader condemned public opinion for ignoring the daily massacres in Algeria, saying, "A civil war is unfolding two hours from Paris by plane, and no one budges."

Ait-Ahmed criticized the policy of the French government in particular, saying that without the financial, logistical, and political support from Paris, the Zeroual regime could not survive. He reported that in discussion with representatives of the European Union and the United States, he and his colleagues had been told that France did not accept any initiatives from the outside, for Algeria. Regardless, Ait-Ahmed demanded that a public debate be opened in France, in the media, as well as in the National Assembly.

Annulling the elections was a great error

On Jan. 27, Lionel Jospin, the first secretary of the French Socialist Party, appeared to respond to the Algerian's call. In an interview with *Libération*, Jospin explained the "embarrassing silence" on the part of French intellectuals and politicians, by saying that the violence was so horrible, that they were afraid they might be accused of justifying terrorism, if they called for a political solution. But, he acknowledged, "nothing will budge if the regime does not budge." Jospin

rejected the idea that France had no right to speak up on matters concerning its former colony. He himself had gone on the record, criticizing the Algerian junta's annulment of elections in 1992, and had later endorsed the Sant'Egidio initiative.

Jospin argued, that annulling the elections, on grounds that an FIS victory would have destroyed democracy, had proven to be a great error, especially considering what had transpired in the interim.

As for terrorism, Jospin said, "A democratic regime should also repress terrorism, but in other conditions and in another relationship to the people. For, what is essential in the Algerian question, is not so much the relationship between the government and terrorism—even if, in its actions, it adopts a brutality and ambiguity that create problems—but the relation to the Algerian people."

The Socialist leader then proposed, "The French government and politicians should say that they are for peace, that there is no way out of the crisis through exclusively repressive means, that a political solution is required, and that we are on the side of the democratic forces." He added that France should send out "signals" by welcoming Algerians who are threatened. "Terrorism must be fought," he reiterated. "It is not a matter of capitulating in the face of forces that one can barely identify, but we must say, that we are not ready to support the Algerian government regardless of what it may do, that we are not at its side in any and every circumstance."

Both the Ait-Ahmed proposal and the intervention by Jospin, are useful, important moves, but it will require immense political pressure, for them to yield any concrete results. The White House, in the meantime, announced that it would not name a mediator, because the "government of Algeria" had not made such a request. Jospin's view of the proposal for a mediator, was the following: "I believe in the need to wake up the international community. It would be useful for the French government to launch consultations on the European level."

Jacques Cheminade, a former candidate for the Presidency in France, and close associate of Lyndon LaRouche, commented that he thought the best approach would involve a joint French-American initiative.

Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has reportedly announced that the foreign policy commission of the National Assembly would be convoked to discuss the Algerian war, which could open serious discussion.

It will be crucial to see to what extent the leaks and innuendoes in the French press, regarding the real name of the game in Algeria, and, particularly, the role of the British in harboring the terrorists of the GIA, prompt serious investigations into the networks. As *Le Figaro's* Oberle noted, French intelligence circles suspect very strongly that the GIA networks tolerated in London are relays for terrorists planting bombs, not only in Algeria, but also in France.