

# Algeria: The Limits to Democracy

by Emad Eldin Shahin

The dramatic assassination of President Mohamed Boudiaf in June 1992 marked a new phase in Algeria's already escalating political crisis. It highlighted the intralite conflicts that have set the country on a treacherous and uncertain path. On January 11, 1992, the Algerian military staged a coup to block the freely elected Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) from coming to power and to "safeguard democracy." Ironically, and perhaps predictably, it was the army generals and their alliance of the so-called prodemocracy forces, not the FIS, that violated the constitution, ousted President Chadli Benjedid, suppressed human rights, and ended Algeria's democratic process. The same forces that bankrupted Algeria for 30 years are now back to rule the country again.

## Benjedid's political reforms

Upon coming to power, Benjedid tried to break the hegemony of the ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), and introduce gradual political and economic changes to the system. His efforts, however, were met by opposition from the party's old guard, a stagnant bureaucracy, and conservative military officers who felt a threat to their privileges and patronage.

The October 1988 riots represented a clear protest against the mandate of the ruling party and the monopoly of power by a circle of government, party, and military elite. Thousands of predominantly young demonstrators in major cities protested the harsh economic conditions and the deterioration of the standard of living resulting from failing socialist economic policies, mismanagement, and widespread corruption. The rioters attacked the symbols of authority—governments offices, state-owned stores, and the headquarters of the ruling party. It became clear that



P. Robert/Sygma

**Former President Chadli Benjedid**

the FLN's vague ideology of social egalitarianism only benefitted the few and failed to attract the country's youth, the majority of the population.

Benjedid called in the People's National Army (ANP) to put down the unrest and maintain public order. A state of emergency was declared and the country was placed under harsh and repressive military rule. In seven days, army forces killed 500 demonstrators and arrested thousands. Although the crisis led to harsh criticism of the army for its brutal tactics, it restored the military to the center of authority, and reestablished its status as guarantor of regime continuity and protector of stability and public order.

Benjedid seized the opportunity to introduce more ambitious and tangible reforms. He fired his FLN deputy, the head of internal security, and the prime minister, and reshuffled some army commanders. He gradually began to dissociate himself from the party, relinquishing his post as the party's secretary general. The February 1989 constitution represented a break from past ideology and policies, codifying the separation of the party from the state, allowing the formation of political associations, and dropping the state's commitment to socialism. A month later, senior army officers, in an effort to separate themselves from party policies, resigned from the central committee of the

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FLN. However, they preserved their right to defend “the higher interests of the nation and the free choice of the people.” and consequently maintained their status as the major arbiter in the system.

The constitutional reforms reshaped the political landscape of Algeria. Following the July 2, 1989, approval of a new law on the formation of parties, new opposition parties mushroomed, challenging the FLN’s monopoly on power. To advance the political and economic program of his government, Prime Minister Mouloud Hamrouche attempted to change the party from within by placing his supporters in its central committee and politburo. But the party’s old guard secured election to the central committee. They harshly criticized the government’s programs, portraying them as betrayals of the martyrs and the values of the Algerian revolution. Hamrouche, with the support of Benjedid, was now determined to disgrace and discredit the FLN and its old veterans by unleashing a powerful rival to their continuing domination.

#### **The FIS’s growing influence**

Deliberately overlooking a clause banning party formation on exclusively regional, ethnic, or religious bases, the government approved the establishment of Berber and Islamic parties. Among the opposition parties, the FIS appeared as the most organized, popular, and ready-to-compete in the country’s first multiparty municipal elections of June 1990. Hamrouche’s justification for the government’s approval of the FIS was that this “was the best way to control this phenomenon, understand it, manage it, and hold discussions with it.”<sup>1</sup>

Eleven parties and 1,365 candidates on independent lists competed for control over 1,539 local councils and 48 provincial councils. The elections were boycotted by the Front of Socialist Forces (FFS), a secular Berber party headed by Hussein Ait Ahmed, the Populist Movement for Democracy, and other secular parties that were not sure of their chances for success in the process.

Although government officials expected the FIS to accumulate no more than 30 percent of the total vote, the Islamic party scored a decisive victory, capturing a majority of 55.42 percent of the electoral votes and gaining control over 853 local councils and 32 provinces. The FIS achieved a sweeping victory in the four major Algerian cities—the capital Algiers, as well as Oran, Constantine, and Annaba. Its candidates won Benjedid’s home province of El Tarf and well-to-do

districts in the capital, such as Hudre and El Biar, where FLN leaders reside. The FLN won 31.64 percent of the vote and took 487 local councils and 14 provinces. Independents won 6.87 percent of the vote and control over 106 municipalities. The Rally for Culture and Democracy, a Berber secular party, won 87 local councils with 5.56 percent of the vote. Overtaken by the FIS’s remarkable performance, the FLN announced that it “reject[ed] all attempts to bring Islam back to an area of charlatanism and myth and to make it an instrument of demagoguery and political opportunism.” The FIS’s victory exacerbated the conflicts within the party and its relations with the regime. Party and government officials blamed one another for the poor performance of the FLN. Hamrouche and members of his cabinet criticized the party for failing to reform itself and act as an independent opposition party. Party leaders accused the regime of deliberately attempting to weaken the FLN.

The FLN was indeed falling apart. Many FLN members deserted the party and joined the FIS. Some members with Islamic tendencies had already run on FIS lists during the local elections. Hamrouche and four members of his cabinet resigned from the party’s politburo. Rabah Bitat, one of Algeria’s historic chiefs and a cofounder of the party, relinquished his post as the president of the National People’s Assembly in protest of Hamrouche’s economic policies. Former prime ministers Abdel Hamid Brahimi and Kasdi Merbah resigned from the FLN, citing a lack of democracy within the party and a wish to establish another party, respectively.

The FIS has demonstrated in only a few short years a remarkable ability to attract large segments of the Algerian population and has shown impressive organizational skills. Using an appealing language for mobilizing followers, the FIS evolved as an opposition force and an alternative to the FLN. The youth in particular (70 percent of the population is under the age of 30) lost hope in the future and in the FLN’s leadership of the country.

The FIS, by contrast, perceived itself as capable of reinvigorating the potentials of the population. FIS leader Abbasi Madani summarized the main objective of his movement: “For a long time now the Algerian people have been on strike. ... Our main task is to lead the people out of this confidence crisis.”<sup>2</sup> The FIS demonstrated genuine interest in daily concerns and in the people’s living conditions. It proposed a national

1. FBIS, January 29, 1990.

2. *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 7, 1990.

discourse, rather than a purely religious one. It was the first opposition party to relentlessly criticize the widespread corruption in the system and to insist on equal opportunity, justice, honesty, and accountability. The Party's detailed program both addressed and proposed solutions to the issues of housing shortages, unemployment, and reinvigorating the stagnant economy. The FIS opposed a state owned economy and proposed instead a free-market approach, where private initiative and equal opportunity are encouraged. It advocated lower taxes and substantial cuts in military spending, and expressed a willingness to cooperate with international companies in exploring the country's natural resources.

Through an extensive network of mosques, the FIS provided religious and socialization programs as well as welfare and social services rarely extended by the government. After an earthquake hit Algeria in 1989, trucks bearing the FIS logo were the first to reach the disaster scene and distribute food and medical supplies. The party involved its more than three million members in volunteer activities including garbage collecting, tutoring high school students, and offering medical care to needy patients.

The FIS's leadership and hard core represent a new generation of Muslim activists. The majority of party officials are well-educated professionals. The FIS's leader, Abbasi Madani, is a university professor with a British doctorate degree. His deputy, Ali Belhaj, is a high school teacher. The provisional leader of the FIS, Abdel Qader Hachani, is a petrochemical engineer and a Ph.D. candidate at a French university. Both Madani and Hachani are fluent in three languages and have been exposed to other cultures.

In both local and legislative elections, the FIS has presented well-educated candidates of high caliber. Seventy-six percent of FIS's parliament candidates have postgraduate degrees. In one district in Algiers, the FIS included 17 candidates for local councils on its list. All but one were between the ages of 25 and 35. The list included four engineers, two with doctorate degrees, three teachers, four accountants, one Ph.D. in physics, and three administrators and other professionals.

The municipal and provincial councils have limited powers and restricted authority in addressing the country's major economic problems. They depend entirely upon government funding. Despite the financial and administrative constraints imposed by the FLN central governors, who in many cases have restrained some of the efforts and initiatives of FIS officials at the local councils, the FIS representatives managed to build an impressive legacy of tolerance and honest

administration and government. For example, the FIS gained a majority in the city of Blida; yet, incompetent FLN employees hired for their party affiliation were not fired but reshuffled. In addition, they were trained by FIS cadres to use computers, build roads, open a shelter for the homeless, and plan housing for senior citizens.

The FIS has not enforced sex segregation at schools, restricted women's dress, or banned alcohol. When assuming control over the city council, FIS officials discovered that FLN officials had sold 70 plots around the town that the municipality did not own. The FIS returned the land to its owners. The FIS officials established recreational programs for the young people and provided low-interest loans to skilled workers who

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wanted to open private businesses. Since coming to power the FIS party has fed more than 120 walk-ins and 90 poor families daily in their shelter for the homeless and soup kitchen for the poor. Before the center opened, many of these people were beggars in the streets.<sup>3</sup>

Madani admitted some excesses were committed in some local councils, but he attributed this to inexperience rather than to a national FIS policy to enforce Islamic law instantaneously. It is FIS's commitment and the image of honest government that made even non-FIS voters cast their votes for the Islamic party. When a Western-dressed student who opposed FIS's platform was asked why she voted for the party's candidates, she replied because its leaders are “loyal and honest. ...Who but the FIS was strong enough to

3. Carol Morello, “City and Resort Show Two Sides of Algeria,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 20, 1992.

clean out the corruption and get the country moving again?" For many young Algerians, who most likely would have stayed unemployed or gone to France to sweep Parisian streets and become targets of racial prejudices, the FIS offered hope and an opportunity for self-fulfillment.



P. Parrot/Syigma

### **Cutting the FIS down to size**

### **FIS leader Abbasi Madani casts his ballot**

After his party's strong showing, Madani tried to appeal to other political forces in the country. While promising to eliminate official corruption, he adopted a moderate discourse, assuring the Algerian public of the FIS's commitment to multiparty democracy, freedom of expression, individual and public liberties, and a continued cooperation with France and the West. He also promised that the FIS would respect the free choice of the Algerian people in any future election.

In light of the FIS's massive victory, Abbasi Madani was convinced that the FLN, of which he was once a member during the liberation struggle against the French, had become too corrupt and incapable of leading the country. Calling the FLN the "party of failure," the FIS positioned itself as the only possible heir to the FLN and its secular elites. Madani demanded the dissolution of the Parliament, which had been dominated by FLN deputies, and advocated new legislative elections in which all political parties would compete.

Political tension began to escalate when the FLN-dominated Parliament approved an electoral law that clearly favored the FLN. In an attempt to avoid a future defeat in the legislative elections, the party tried to redraw the electoral boundaries by disproportionately increasing the number of seats in rural and lightly populated areas where the FLN enjoyed influence. The FIS accused the FLN of constituency gerrymandering, a complaint also voiced by other opposition parties. In a BBC interview, Abdel Hamid Mehri, the secretary general of the FLN, admitted that the election conditions were not fair. On May 25, 1991, Madani called for a general strike and peaceful marches—a right granted by the Algerian constitution—to pressure the government to review this law.

On June 4, security forces opened fire at the demonstrators in one of the capital's main squares. With seven dead, Madani urged FIS followers to stop the demonstrations to avoid further bloodshed and a major confrontation with the army. The following day, Benjedid announced a four-month state of siege, fired his prime minister, and postponed the elec-

tions indefinitely. Following a meeting between Madani and the new prime minister, Sid Ahmed Ghazali, on June 7, the FIS leaders called off the strike after announcing that an agreement had been reached between the regime and the FIS. The regime agreed to review the controversial electoral law and to schedule presidential and legislative elections within six months.

The June elections brought the army back to the center of power. Concerned about the growing influence of the FIS, military generals were determined to cut it down to size. Tension had already been growing between the army and the FIS before the June 1991 crisis. Before the local elections, the secretary general of the Ministry of Defense, Moustapha Challoufi, had announced that the army was "ready to intervene to protect the reforms" initiated by the government. *Majaleat al-Jaysh*, an Army publication, was critical of the Islamists and their participation in the democratic process, considering them a menace to the modern and developed democratic systems. To neutralize the army, FIS followers raised slogans indicating the support of the army for the Islamic party's leader. When the army leadership issued a decree banning Muslim doctors and nurses from wearing the veil in military hospitals, the FIS harshly criticized the secular orientation of some army leaders, particularly General Challoufi, who was married to a French woman. To restrict the participation of army officers and soldiers who might vote for the FIS in the local elections, the military leadership abruptly transferred the casting of votes from the military barracks to the districts in which the soldiers were registered.

On June 25, after more than two weeks of calm, military forces broke into FIS-controlled municipal

buildings to replace the party's symbols with those of the republic. Eight more FIS members died. The army led a massive crackdown to weaken the FIS and break its structural organization: thousands of middle-level cadres and adherents were arrested throughout the country. On June 30, the party's leaders, Madani and Belhaj, were arrested on charges of "fomenting, organizing, triggering, and leading an armed conspiracy against state security." Two days earlier Madani had announced that his party would be obliged to call a *jihad* if the curfew did not end and if the army did not withdraw its troops from the streets. The Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights announced on July 7 that since the state of siege was declared and the military assumed control on June 4, 8,000 FIS followers had been arrested and 300 killed. In a televised statement to the Algerian people on June 28, Prime Minister Ghazali strongly defended the army and the tactics it used to "defend the citizens' security, which was threatened; to protect the institutions whose normal functioning was endangered; and to safeguard the future of democracy that some wanted to harm."

### The legislative elections

In the intervening period between the June 1991 crisis and the December 26 legislative elections, the military continued its crackdown on the FIS. It occupied the party's headquarters on July 1, raided its offices in the capital, banned its newspapers, arrested its provisional leader Abdel Qader Hachani for a month, and harassed its members, particularly at Friday prayers. Armed Islamic groups, with no evident links to the FIS, clashed with the army in several incidents. On October 13, a new electoral law was approved. Like the preceding one, it favored the FLN and was designed to improve its chances for winning a majority in the parliament. With its leaders in jail, thousands of its members arrested, its headquarters seized, and publications banned, the FIS decided to participate in the legislative elections only ten days before the elections were held. A massive rally on the final day of campaigning in Algiers demonstrated that the FIS had retained its mobilizational abilities and appeal. Despite the repressive measures taken against its followers, the FIS placed candidates in all electoral districts.

In the first round of elections, the FIS captured 47 percent of the total valid votes, winning 188 out of the parliament's 430 seats. This number represented 81 percent of the 231 seats already decided in the first round. Its candidates were contesting in 187 out of the 199 seats to be decided in the second round. The FFS

won 25 seats (10.8 percent), and the FLN seized control of 15 seats (6.5 percent). It became clear that the FIS, which needed only 28 seats to win a simple majority, was on the way to forming an Islamic government in Algeria.

### Setting the stage for army intervention

Since the democratic process began in Algeria, the possibility of a growing Islamic influence in the North African country has raised concerns among Algeria's secular elite, its neighbors, and among several Western countries. The Western and Algerian national press were rampant with doomsday visions of an Islamic takeover. On the eve of the local elections of June 1990, Italy, Spain, and France, where four million Muslims reside, adopted restricted immigration measures. Following the FIS's victory in the elections, which was very minor given the limited authority of the local councils, France's youth and sports minister, Roger Bambunck declared, "It is with great sadness that I see the rise of fundamentalism in Algeria." Treating Algeria as a southern province of France, he added that the results of the municipal elections "will be a source of worry for Algerians and will create difficulty for our Algerian friends in France."<sup>4</sup> Michael Vauzelle, the chairman of the French Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, urged a partnership with North Africa, warning that "Fundamentalism's threat can create a zone of instability, insecurity, and even hostility at our southern borders."<sup>5</sup>

Before and after the first round of the legislative elections, the Algerian and Western press launched a vigorous press campaign against the FIS. On election day, the newspaper *Quotidien d'Algerie* proposed a scenario of the final collapse in case the Islamic front achieved victory, predicting a cancellation of the second round and army intervention. *Le Figaro* considered Algeria to be moving from "a military to a religious dictatorship." The campaign, which aggravated the already precarious condition in Algeria, reflected anxiety and fear of the results and their consequences on the country and its secular elite, and its relations with its neighbors, France, and the West. Some reports related that France began to receive families or "boat people" of Algerians escaping a future Muslim rule. A report that Iraq was working on a nuclear program with Algeria to produce an atomic bomb further destabilized the situation.<sup>6</sup> On a less serious level, it was lamented that "the FIS will in the

4. *The New York Times*, June 14, 1990.

5. *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1990.

6. *Sunday Times*, January 6, 1992.

future forbid the 'Buche de Noel'—a Christmas chocolate log—and other sweets."<sup>7</sup>

FIS members were described as extremists, uneducated, and undemocratic. Criticism was often extended to include Islam through inviting and perpetuating misperceptions in order to portray the FIS as anti-democratic and anti-modern. To prove his point that democracy is incompatible with Islam, Henrick Bering-Jensen writes: "The mere notion that God and his representatives could be thrown out of office is sacrilegious."<sup>8</sup> In the same vein of suppressing any moderate image of Islam, when the track and field coach of Algeria's Olympic team stated on television that Islam is not incompatible with sports, he was detained by the army, tortured, and threatened with the rape of his wife. The FIS leadership's commitment to democracy, freedom of expression, and individual and public liberties were frequently deemphasized. Instead, statements by some FIS members, who do not represent FIS national policy or a significant trend within the party, were frequently overemphasized.

As the legislative elections approached, the FIS leaders and adherents were exposed to a relentless war of words by the government. Ghozali, who was presumed to head a caretaker government to ensure neutrality in the elections, called Madani "a liar who lived wholly on deceit." He expressed his conviction that "the FIS could not win a majority in a free election." He also declared that the FIS posed "a very serious threat to safety, stability and national unity."<sup>9</sup> After the results of the first round, Ghozali considered the FIS's victory a defeat for democracy. In an interview with French television, he mentioned that the fundamentalists could still be denied power. In a pre-election statement, Benjedid seemed in favor of a vote against the FIS.

On January 2, 1992, 135,000 people protesting the Islamic party's victory attended an anti-FIS demonstration organized by secular, leftist, and feminist forces. Said Saadi, the head of the Rally for Culture and Democracy, called for the cancellation of the elections, the banning of the FIS, and the intervention of the army. To cast doubts on the FIS's triumph, the government announced the day after the demonstration that there were irregularities in the election process, which it had described earlier as being conducted in freedom and

"total transparency," and that the FIS won one-third of the parliament's seats through terrorist tactics.

As a result of this precarious and unstable atmosphere, the stage now was set for the intervention of the army. The military never hid its concern about legalizing an Islamic party and its opposition to Islamist rule. It vowed that it would never allow the democratic process to bring the FIS to the helm of power. During the election campaigns, army generals had been giving statements to the foreign press warning of the FIS threat and blaming the government for "tolerating fundamentalist excesses." Defense Minister Khaled Nizar announced that if the elections were not conducted in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility, the army was ready for all possibilities. On January 11, the army generals forced the resignation of President Benjedid, who in his resignation letter described the democratic process as "riddled with irregularities...and characterized by numerous excesses and tendencies clashing with one another." Benjedid's resignation was intended to provide grounds for the intervention of the army in the government and to block the FIS from taking control. Following Benjedid's resignation, Ghozali, in order to give a civilian facade to the coup, appeared on TV to assure the Algerian public that he was in charge and invited the army "to take the necessary measures in order to contribute to the public security and the safety of the citizens."<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, the coup was mistimed. Had it occurred before the legislative elections, it would have deprived the FIS of the legitimacy granted by its sweeping victory. The army generals could have moved after the FIS had spent some time in power, or attempted to change the constitution or the institutions of the country, or showed some kind of intolerance, or proved incapable of solving the country's staggering economic and social problems, as had always been alleged. In either case, the military coup could have enjoyed some "legitimacy" and support.

The military generals ousted Benjedid on the same day the Constitutional Council was supposed to announce its ruling regarding the complaints about election irregularities that, if proven, would have deprived the FIS of some seats. To this date, the council ruling has never been announced. This suggests that it probably would not have affected the FIS's triumph.

Contrary to the claims of the military-backed regime, there was no immediate threat to the normal functioning of the institutions of the state. Despite reactions to

7. *The Washington Times*, January 1, 1992.

8. *Insight*, July 29, 1992.

9. *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1992.

10. FBIS, January 13, 1992.



its victory, the FIS remained calm and avoided provoking other political forces. Following the results of the first round, Abdel Qader Hachani, the moderate leader of the FIS, dropped the party's demand for early presidential elections and announced the FIS's willingness to coexist with Benjedid. In several press conferences, he also assured the Algerian public of the FIS's intentions, vowing that "there will be no bloodbath or boat people in Algeria." He asserted, "It must be clear that we are coming to government to solve the problems of the Algerian people. ...We guarantee freedom of opinion in Algeria. ...Our purpose is to persuade not to oblige people to do what we say. I challenge anyone to prove that so far we have repressed any other political tendencies. You must remember that we have won control of some 800 municipalities in elections more than a year ago. We have a record of tolerance that no one can deny."<sup>11</sup>

A few days before the military seized control, and amidst reports of massive army deployments throughout the country, there was a heated debate among government and military officials concerning the measures to be taken against the FIS. Despite differences on tactics, they all agreed to prevent permanent Islamic rule. Ghozali's entourage and the army generals urged President Benjedid to interrupt the democratic process, cancel the first round of elections, and resign in order to provide the army with the grounds for intervention. Benjedid, concerned about a popular upheaval, sought to use his broad constitutional powers to circumvent the FIS. In fact, the Algerian Constitution grants the president extensive powers: he appoints the prime minister; controls defense and foreign affairs; can dissolve the parliament; can veto any laws passed by the assembly, even with a two-thirds majority; issues decrees that have the effect of law; amends the Constitution, whereas the assembly cannot; and can declare a state of emergency and call in the army.

It would have been almost impossible for an FIS-controlled government to introduce major legal, institutional, or structural changes to the Algerian system without the approval of the president, the military, and the Constitutional Council, whose task it is to protect the Constitution.

#### **The quest for legitimacy**

The military coup was a clumsy one that, despite its attempts to clothe itself in legitimacy, lacked constitutional basis and failed to generate the support of

significant political forces in the country. The army generals and their alliance of government officials were confused in the first days of the coup. Within two days, three governing bodies were announced: the Constitutional Council, the High Security Council (HSC), and the High Council of State (HCS). Before his resignation, Benjedid discreetly dissolved the Parliament, thus creating a constitutional vacuum. Since the chairman of the disbanded assembly could not assume the presidency, the chairman of the Constitutional Council, Abdel Malek Benhabyles, was designated as the interim president. When Benhabyles rejected this role, the High Security Council was announced. It was

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dominated by military generals and included Defense Minister General Khaled Nizar, Interior Minister General Larbi Belkhair, Army Chief-of-Staff General Abdel Malek Guenaizia, Prime Minister Ghozali, Minister of Justice Hamdani Benkhalil, and Foreign Minister Lakhdar Ibrahim. The council's first decision was to cancel the second round of parliamentary elections. This act was denounced by the leaders of the FIS and the FFS, who both considered the coup and the ruling High Security Council as unconstitutional. Constitutionally, the HSC is an advisory body to the president of the country and cannot assume executive or legislative powers.

In the face of such criticism, the military-controlled government announced the establishment of a five-member High State Council on January 14, which

11. *The New York Times*, January 7, 1992.

would assume presidential powers until Benjedid's term ended in December 1993. The High State Council consisted of one army general, Khaled Nizar, as opposed to three in the HSC; Ali Kafi, head of the National Organization of War Veterans; Tijani Haddam, director of the Paris mosque; and Ali Haroun, former Human Rights Minister. To lend an air of legitimacy to this council, the leaders of the new regime brought Mohamed Boudiaf, a historic chief and an independence-war hero, back from his 28-year self-imposed exile in Morocco. Due to his long absence and opposition to the previous regimes, Boudiaf was vaguely known to the majority of Algerians.

#### **Boudiaf's term: Promises only**

Boudiaf was expected to act as a conciliator, but he did little to heal the country's wounds. His main objectives were to reinstitute the authority of the state and build a support and legitimacy base. This entailed continuing a massive clamp down on the FIS, building new political institutions, and waging a campaign against corruption. Boudiaf approved and supported the military's repressive measures to destroy the FIS as a political force. In his first statement to the Algerian people, he sent a clear warning to the Islamic Front stating that "We will not permit any individuals or group to claim a monopoly on Islam and use it to threaten the country," and "All those who cause trouble to public order will be put in the [detention] camps."

To dismantle the FIS, the military-backed authorities adopted a strategy aimed at provoking violent reaction from the FIS's angry and frustrated followers (thus creating the reasons for the dissolution of the party); and decapitating its moderate leadership to break its control over party adherents, invoke splits within its ranks, and give radical elements a free hand in carrying out violent operations against the regime that would justify the harsh military measures against



Antoine Gyori/Syigma

**Algerians rallying for the FIS**

the party. After the coup, the FIS maintained a two-day silence, during which the party leadership debated its strategy vis-à-vis the new regime. Hard liners urged resorting to civil disobedience against the authorities. Concerned about the survival of his party and preserving its electoral gains, Hachani advocated working through legal channels. Hachani managed to get his views adopted and was counting on the legitimacy his party achieved after the first round of the elections, possible splits within the army, and cooperation and alliance with other political forces. While denouncing the coup as un-

constitutional, Hachani urged FIS followers to remain calm, "exercise caution and not respond to any provocation from whatever source." He vowed that the "FIS will remain within the legal framework without renouncing its plan for an Islamic state," and announced that the FIS intended to file a suit contesting the legality of the newly formed High Council of State.

Until the end of January, FIS leaders kept appealing for calm, despite mass arrests of FIS members and outright provocations to its followers gathering for Friday prayers. Throughout January, the military arrested hundreds of FIS leaders, banned gathering around mosques and political activities inside them, and suspended the FIS's two newspapers. As a result of the army's harsh measures, Hachani complained, "If the junta goes far, it will be impossible for us to keep the people under control. ... They are doing everything so that it explodes. We are doing everything so that it does not." On January 22, Hachani, who had a moderating influence on the FIS members, was arrested for inciting army mutiny, a charge later dismissed by a civilian court. On January 27, Rabah Kabir, FIS foreign affairs spokesman, called for a dialogue with the government. He was arrested the following day (later to be acquitted by a civilian court).

Throughout February and March, the army escalated its crackdown on the FIS. It clashed with



demonstrators throughout the country protesting the arrest of FIS leaders and the military's continued seizure of power. It also battled radical Islamic groups that engaged in armed resistance and attacked police and military posts and personnel. Armed forces seized the FIS headquarters and detained more than 10,000 FIS members, including 200 mayors, 28 regional assembly leaders, 109 parliament deputies, and 34 women in desert camps in the south. On March 3, a court ruling banned the FIS.

Boudiaf was critical of the established political parties. He rejected their repeated offers for national reconciliation and sought to create an independent base of support by building new political institutions. In April, Boudiaf announced the establishment of the Consultative Council to fill the legislative vacuum created by the dissolution of the Parliament. The main objective of the council was to offer advice on laws proposed by the High State Council. The 60-member council consisted of individuals outside the established political parties, and was dominated by leftist, feminist, and anti-Arabization elements, some historical figures, independents, and former ministers who served under former President Houari Boumedienne. Boudiaf's attempt to pass laws through the council met with little success as most of its members refused the role of rubber stamps and insisted on maintaining the council's advisory nature. Leaders of major political parties, who questioned its legitimacy and accused it of being a front for a military rule, also rejected the council.

Boudiaf proposed the establishment of a National Democratic Rally (DRN) to replace the collapsed FLN and the banned FIS and "lead the democratic change in the country." In fact, the DRN was created to support Boudiaf's candidacy for the presidential elections in 1994, and to nominate and back the High Council of State's candidates when the legislative elections were held. Major political parties opposed the creation of the DRN, which they perceived as an attempt to return to monolithic politics. Twelve small parties with no influence or popularity agreed to join the new party. In the face of strong opposition, it is doubtful that the DRN could generate consensus among the different forces in society.

In his pursuit for legitimacy, Boudiaf considered the issues of economic reform and fighting official corruption as major objectives of his regime. Boudiaf promised the Algerian public economic reform, housing, and creation of new jobs. Prime Minister Ghazali proposed an economic reform program based on foreign aid and loan credits, devaluing the Algerian dinar, cutting

subsidies on basic commodities, and selling shares in the country's oil sector to foreign investors. But throughout Boudiaf's term, Algerians were struck by skyrocketing prices of basic commodities, a continuing shortage in housing, and increasing unemployment.

Corruption has been a continual problem in Algeria since independence and was sometimes used to discredit and eliminate political rivals. One year after coming to power, Benjedid established the Accountability Council to look into corruption cases. The council's investigations involved former officials who served under Boumedienne, such as Boutaflika, Yahyaoui, Belaid Abdel Salam, and Sid Ahmed Ghazali, who was removed from his position as chairman of SONATRACH after being accused of embezzlement. In the summer of 1988, former prime minister Abdel Hamid Brahimi revealed that Algerian officials charged 10 percent commission on every economic or trade transaction, which resulted in the embezzlement of \$26 billion over 20 years.

Promising to punish the corrupt "whatever their social position or hierarchical rank," Boudiaf requested the study of legislation providing criminal punishment for fiscal fraud and a special tax on those who failed to justify the source of their wealth. He approved the indictment of the former secretary general of the Ministry of Defense, General Mustapha Beloucif, for misuse of public funds, and promised to pursue cases with other senior officials who served under Benjedid. This angered army and government officials, who became concerned about the possibility of an extended anticorruption campaign. On June 29, Boudiaf was assassinated in the city of Annaba, the hometown of the indicted General Beloucif. With no evidence to accuse the FIS or militant Islamic groups, the commission investigating the assassination charged the government in its preliminary report with "blameworthy and criminal instances of negligence" in failing to protect the president. It considered the assassination a result of "complicity at the highest level of decision making."

#### **Dashed hopes**

The assassination of Boudiaf renewed hopes for ending the political crisis in Algeria and for reconciling the political forces in the country. These hopes were quickly dashed as the newly appointed president Ali Kafi and his prime minister Belaid Abdel Salam maintained a hard line approach towards the opposition and insisted on excluding the FIS, the country's most popular force, from any future discussions. The HCS choice of Kafi disappointed many Algerians. Kafi

headed the National Organization of War Veterans, whose members are accused of feeding off Algeria's wealth for 30 years. The newly appointed prime minister is an adamant opponent to the free-market economy and was extremely critical of Benjedid's policies of economic liberalization. He is known as the father of heavy industry in Algeria and headed its oil nationalization. Upon coming to power, Abdel Salam declared a "war economy" that will implement austere economic measures, reduce imports, and revive the country's failing public sector. He dismissed any attempts to privatize the economy stating, "I am not here to provide opportunities for vultures." The orientation of the new cabinet and the proposed economic policy represent a break from Benjedid's regime that could give rise to a new phase of "neo-Boumediénism."

### **Conclusion**

The current Algerian regime has reached a political dead end. While raising slogans for achieving national consensus and unity among the Algerian people, the military-backed regime continues to implement harsh measures against the Islamists and to ignore other opposition parties. The country is plunging into more chaos and turmoil. Government authority seems to be breaking down as discontented groups continue to challenge the authority of the state. Attacks on army and police officials, sabotage, and arrests of Muslim militants are reported almost daily. The new regime has increasingly restricted political freedoms and, in August, began a crackdown on the press as it suspended three independent newspapers. Some state-owned factories are closing down or drastically reducing production because of shortages of spare parts and cash to pay the workers.

As the situation changes rapidly in Algeria, three scenarios are possible. The first and most likely is the combination of economic reform and political repression. Algeria's staggering economic problems are a result of its acute political crisis. However, under the new cabinet of Abdel Salam, the economy will take precedence over politics as the government will emphasize the economic aspect of the crisis and de-emphasize its political dimensions. It will try to make structural changes to ensure more state control over the economy, and allocate the huge amounts of Western aid promised since the beginning of the crisis to introduce tangible economic improvements (increasing housing and job opportunities, reducing the country's debts, and launching a limited anticorruption

campaign). The army will withdraw from the forefront of politics only after it makes sure that any future legislative or presidential elections will not bring the FIS to power. The regime seeks to build a base of support granting it legitimacy and allowing it to legally change the constitution and enforce new electoral laws that would ensure the nontransfer of power to opposition parties. To achieve this objective, it will try to reinvigorate and expand the political institutions created by Boudiaf and might attempt to attract FLN hard liners in order to pass necessary laws and secure support for its candidates in future elections. This will accompany repressive measures against the FIS and militant Islamic groups, and possibly against other secular opposition parties. It is doubtful that this policy will succeed given Algeria's severe economic crisis, the lack of legitimacy and confidence in the military-backed authorities, and the need to immediately tackle the political crisis and achieve national consensus.

A less likely scenario is national reconciliation. Soon enough the regime will realize that its economic policies cannot achieve success in the immediate future and that repressive tactics will not silence the opposition and generate legitimacy. Under the pressure of popular opposition and possible turmoil, it will invite opposition parties to form a national conciliation government headed by an acceptable political figure. The new government, which will include non-FIS Islamic elements, will oversee a clean electoral process. A new national council comprised of the major political parties and professional associations will be formed to approve a new national charter that will provide new rules for the democratic process and supervise the political transition of the country.

A long-term scenario is an FIS-led popular uprising. Despite the systematic repression of the FIS, the party seems far from crushed. Some of its leaders has gone underground, and the party is still capable of issuing a newsletter and official communiques and making its presence felt in the country. The FIS has at least three million followers, a legitimate leadership and duly elected representatives, who will not remain in jail or detention camps forever, and formidable organizational skills. There are at least ten legal Islamic parties that, despite their differences with FIS, are still sympathetic to its causes. Continued repression of FIS members might in the long run create splits with the army if a future bloody confrontation takes place. In light of the confused and alienating performance of the coup leaders so far, time, numbers of supporters, and legitimacy might prove to be on the FIS's side. □