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## Demilitarizing Algeria

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## Introduction

The Algerian state constituted at the end of the eight-year war of independence by the victorious *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) exhibited an impressive degree of continuity and stability during its first 26 years, from 1962 to 1988. In February 1989, however, the regime of President Chadli Bendjedid abruptly introduced a pluralist constitution and legalized parties which, based on rival Islamist and Berberist conceptions of identity, polarized public opinion by advocating mutually exclusive Islamist and secularist conceptions of the state. In doing so, the regime set in motion a process that profoundly destabilized the state. Instead of restoring order, however, the army's eventual intervention in January 1992 precipitated a descent into armed conflict which, while greatly reduced since 1998, has still not entirely ended.

The violence that has ravaged Algeria since 1992 has expressed and confirmed the ascendancy of the military in Algerian political life and the weakness of all civilian forms of politics, both on the pro-government side and among those opposed to the regime. The civilian leaders of the Islamist movement were almost entirely outflanked by the Islamist armed movements and, within the regime, the army's General Staff and intelligence chiefs became the main source of decision making. In particular, successive presidents proved entirely unable to impose their authority. The deposing of President Chadli Bendjedid in January 1992 was followed by the assassination of President Mohammed Boudiaf six months later, the brief and ineffectual interim of Ali Kafi (July 1992 to January 1994), and the eventual failure also of Liamine Zeroual (1994-1999), who, despite his impressive electoral endorsement in 1995, was unable to secure a consensus within the regime in support of his efforts to resolve the crisis.

Since becoming president in April 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika has achieved substantial success in several key areas where his predecessors had failed. The main armed Islamist organizations that dominated the insurgency during the 1990s—the *Armée Islamique du Salut* (AIS) and the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA)—either disbanded or were largely eliminated, and security was restored to most of the country. The virtual quarantine in which Algeria had been confined since 1994 was broken as Bouteflika spearheaded the country's return to the international stage, renewing relations with Paris and Washington while also recovering some of Algeria's former influence in broader African affairs. Bouteflika has also

enjoyed that indispensable quality—luck. Since the events of September 11, 2001, Algeria has been seen as an especially useful and welcome ally by the U.S. government in its “global war on terrorism.” As for the state’s financial position, this has been transformed as a result of high oil prices; in desperate straits in the early 1990s, Algeria has recently been able to pay off its once-crippling debts and accumulate unprecedentedly ample reserves.

In terms of internal reform, however, the balance sheet is, at best, ambiguous and controversial. The system of formal political pluralism introduced in 1989 was preserved by the military-dominated regime throughout the 1990s, and remains in being today. Formally contested elections have been held at regular intervals, in 1995, 1999, and 2004 for the presidency of the republic and in 1997 and 2002 for the national, regional, and municipal assemblies. Fresh assembly elections are scheduled this summer. Widely perceived as authoritarian in his personal outlook, Bouteflika has chosen to live with this pluralist system while working around it. A variety of parties, some of them Islamist, remain legal and are represented in parliament, but their capacity to offer an alternative to the regime has been reduced to zero. At the same time, Bouteflika’s determination to restore the authority of the presidency has entailed the curbing of press freedom—a number of outspoken journalists have been jailed as a lesson to others—and of other freedoms (notably of trade unions), while the state of emergency introduced in February 1992 has been routinely renewed and is still in force.

It would be one-sided, however, to consider these developments as a simple regression. Bouteflika’s principal purpose has been to restore coherence to the executive branch of the state by reestablishing the presidency—in place of the army high command—as the supreme arbiter of policy debates and conflicts of interest. In doing this he has been taking on the vested interests of the coterie of senior generals who became a law unto themselves during the 1990s, and he has been steadily maneuvering them off the political stage.

The central issue is whether his success in this endeavor will prove permanent—and thereby open up the possibility of a progressive and eventually definitive demilitarization of the state—or whether it will be merely temporary. With Bouteflika’s health now in question, his chances of securing a third term in 2009 are in doubt and arguments over the succession have already begun to preoccupy and divide the political-military elite. Moreover, the onset of a factional dispute over this since the summer of 2006 has coincided with a striking—and quite unexpected—recrudescence of terrorist activity. The main armed movement still active, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*, or GSPC) was previously noted for confining

its attacks to the security forces and sparing civilians. Under new leaders, it has recently reverted to the indiscriminate terrorism formerly associated with the GIA while re-branding itself as a branch of Al Qaeda. With the unprecedented attack by a suicide bomber on the principal government building in central Algiers on April 11, Algerian politics has once more entered a period of uncertainty and anxiety.

## The Failure of Premature Reform, 1989-1999

The generally uncritical welcome given to President Chadli's liberalizing reform by Western governments and observers at the time was predicated, among other things, on a misconception of the problems of authoritarianism and arbitrary rule in the Algerian context. It was assumed that these problems were rooted in the formal political monopoly of the Party of the FLN (PFLN)<sup>1</sup> and that ending this monopoly through the introduction of political pluralism was the indispensable point of departure for political reform in the direction of democracy and the rule of law. That assessment ignored the fact that the Party of the FLN was not the source of power in the Algerian state and that the problem of authoritarianism was not a function of its formal monopoly, but rather of the preponderance of the executive branch of the state over the legislative branch and the judiciary and the fact that the executive branch as a whole has been subject throughout to the hegemony of the military.

Instead of strengthening the civilian wing of the political class as the indispensable precondition of a sustainable process of political liberalization, the premature introduction of formal pluralism gravely weakened it. Prior to 1989, the PFLN had functioned as a constraint on the power of the military commanders; by licensing and even encouraging challengers to it, the regime disabled its own civilian wing and freed the army's commanders from all institutional constraints. By legalizing parties based on rival conceptions of identity, the regime simultaneously disabled public opinion, by arranging for it to be polarized between mutually exclusive and above all bitterly intolerant cultural and ideological outlooks, and ensured that political debate was fixated on alternative—and largely utopian—conceptions of the proper constitution of the state instead of alternative programs for government. And by allowing the Islamist party, the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS), to contest and win local elections in June 1990 and legislative elections in December 1991 on a platform calling for an Islamic state, the government provided the army commanders, fearful for their own prerogatives, with the pretext for finally intervening in January 1992 to depose President Chadli, abort the electoral process, violate the constitution, and suppress the FIS in the name of ... democracy.

The result was a conflagration that has proved extremely difficult to bring to an end. Algeria since 1992 has been a battlefield disputed not by two clear-cut sides but by a welter of distinct Islamist groups on the one hand, as inclined to fight each other and to terrorize the population as to pose a real threat to the state, and, on the other, a military-dominated regime whose internal divisions have at least partially mirrored those of the Islamists notionally opposed to it. It was only when the factional conflict within the Algerian army was provisionally resolved with the resignation of President Liamine Zeroual in September 1998 and the accession of Abdelaziz Bouteflika to the presidency the following April that the necessary minimum of consensus was reached and the regime at last exhibited, at least for a time, a unified approach to curbing the violence and restoring order.

This approach has involved inducing the main armed Islamist organizations to end their campaigns and dissolve themselves in return for a qualified amnesty, while at the same time refusing any rehabilitation of the banned FIS and, equally if not more controversially, any investigation into the army's conduct of its counterinsurgency campaign (notably, the resort to torture and extrajudicial executions). These measures, presented by the regime as necessary to promote "national reconciliation," seem to have enjoyed general popular approval even though they have been vigorously criticized by both human rights groups and associations representing the families of the "disappeared" (people arrested by the security forces and never seen since) as well as by the families of victims of Islamist terrorism. But they have clearly been insufficient to end the violence completely.

The most important armed movement in recent years has been the GSPC, which broke away from the GIA in 1998 in protest at the GIA's targeting of civilians. (The GIA, although now reduced to a small rump, has never disbanded.) Under its original leader, Hassan Hattab, the GSPC confined itself to attacking the security forces throughout the 1998 to 2002 period and even expressed interest in negotiating an end to its campaign. Bouteflika appears to have considered extending the amnesty formula to the GSPC in return for its dissolution, but the majority of the army commanders were opposed and Hattab's loss of control of the group to rival leaders in 2003 put paid to that possibility. While current Western attention has focused on the GSPC's decision to rename itself "Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghrib," the most striking aspects of its recent mutation are: its reversion to the indiscriminate terrorism that was the hallmark of the GIA and its increasing targeting of the police, that is, the civilian rather than military wing of the security forces.

The failure to end the violence completely has thus been closely connected to the persistence and resurgence of factional conflicts within the

regime. This factionalism—the motor of change in the informal sector of the Algerian polity—also profoundly vitiated the introduction of formal party-political pluralism from 1989 onwards. It is in fact the heart of the problem of Algerian politics, and it has dominated the country's political life to a degree that has always distinguished independent Algeria from the other states of the region.

## The Peculiarities of the Algerian State

Algeria between 1962 and 1988 has almost invariably been described as a one-party state and accordingly placed in the same category as other authoritarian regimes based on single-party rule. Unlike the Baath parties in Iraq and Syria and the Néo-Destour in Tunisia,<sup>2</sup> however, the Party of the FLN was not created on the basis of a particular program or ideology by freely acting political entrepreneurs but, rather, was established by government fiat. It was, from the outset, a state apparatus rather than a genuine political party. It performed legitimating functions for the regime—whatever programs and policies the latter adopted—and supervised the so-called “mass organizations” (trade union, peasants’ union, women’s union, youth union, etc.) to ensure their loyalty. It was not itself a source of decision making and, in fact, during the presidency of Houari Boumediène (1965-1978), it possessed neither a central committee nor a political bureau and not a single congress of the party was held.

On Boumediène's death in December 1978, a concerted attempt was made by senior figures in the regime to establish the PFLN as a serious institution in its own right. This attempt met with impressive initial success. A party congress was, at last, held in January 1979, and approved Chadli Bendjedid's candidacy to become president. The same congress at long last endowed the party with a large and representative Central Committee, a 17-man Political Bureau containing genuine heavyweights, and a number of policy commissions. The purpose was to equip the PFLN with the formal organizational structures, powers, and capacities that would enable it to supplant the informal coterie of army commanders as the principle locus of strategic decision making in the state. In short, it was a major effort to promote the badly needed institutionalization and demilitarization of the Algerian power structure.

But its success was short-lived. In May 1980, in a climate of turmoil bordering on panic in the wake of sensational unrest in Kabylia,<sup>3</sup> a resolution inspired by senior army commanders was railroaded through the Central Committee giving President Chadli, as general secretary of the party, full powers to appoint members of the Political Bureau. The Central Committee, in other words, was induced to emasculate itself and the Political Bureau, from which several major figures were immediately

dropped. The result was that, from that point on, President Chadli was formally accountable to nobody but informally accountable to the army commanders. The capacity of the army commanders to abuse their power was limited by their own membership of—and consequent obligation to respect the procedural rules governing—the party’s leading instances. But this curb on the arbitrary power of the military was itself limited. In line with this change of direction, Chadli dissolved most of the PFLN’s new policy commissions; established a disciplinary commission to intimidate dissenting voices; reduced the size, representativeness, and role of the Political Bureau; and organized a purge of independent-minded personalities from the Central Committee. The attempt to endow the party with real functions and powers and a real inner life had clearly been defeated, to the benefit of the military, the informal sector of the polity, and the syndrome of arbitrary rule.

The Algerian state has thus more closely resembled Egypt. In both cases, the revolution that constituted the state was military in character and the nominally ruling party has in reality been little more than a façade for the executive branch of the state dominated by the officer corps of the armed forces. In both cases, the development of substantive political pluralism requires a prior reform to empower the legislative branch so as to curb the executive branch and replace military primacy with civilian control. To introduce formal pluralism in breach of the party’s monopoly was in itself, therefore, merely to replace a monolithic façade with a fragmented one. But the fact that the premature introduction of formal pluralism in Algeria had disastrous consequences owes much to the way in which the Algerian case has differed from the Egyptian prototype.

### **The Problem of Factionalism**

The contrasts between the Algerian and Egyptian revolutions are at least as important as the formal parallels. The Egyptian revolution of 1952 was in essence a military coup largely planned and led by one man, Gamal Abdel Nasser, such that revolutionary legitimacy was the preserve of a tiny coterie of co-conspirators (the “Free Officers”) and the leadership of Nasser was unchallenged. But the Algerian revolution was a protracted war, conducted in a highly decentralized manner all over the country and even outside it, and mobilized the support of the Muslim population as a whole and the active participation of scores of thousands. Thus revolutionary legitimacy has been widely diffused, with many thousands of Algerians able to claim some share in it and a corresponding share in political power for themselves and the coteries or clienteles they represent. The result has been an exceptionally intense factionalism within the power structure of the independent state.

Three developments have served to perpetuate and, if anything, aggravate the problem of factionalism since independence. The first was the emergence of hydrocarbons as the principal source of foreign earnings and state revenue. The Algerian state assumed the character of a “distributive state,” and its role in allocating these resources guaranteed that the stakes in the factional competition remained high and even expanded. The second was the onset of identity conflicts and ideological divisions, a development that started in the 1980s and was in turn exacerbated by the advent of formal pluralism. The third was the belated decision in 1993-1994 to bow to external pressure to reschedule Algeria’s debt and accept its corollary, structural adjustment and the concomitant policy of privatization of state enterprises. Because all decisions concerning these matters continued to be taken within the executive branch, controversies over these issues constantly galvanized factional mobilization and the rough-and-tumble of factional conflict remained the principal medium of policy making.

This factionalism has been ambiguous in its implications. On the one hand, it has contributed to the state’s capacity, inherited from the wartime FLN, to co-opt a wide range of interests, viewpoints, and personalities, since it is through informal factional recruitment and alliance-building that the co-optation process primarily occurs. Thus the activity of the factions<sup>4</sup> has enabled the state to get and keep a grip on the diverse social interests and ideological trends in the country and so has contributed to the state’s own stability and capacity to survive. It has also contributed to another important way in which Algeria differs from the Egyptian case: the relative weakness—or at any rate porousness—of the elite-mass dichotomy. But, at the same time, the role of the factions and the salience of factional allegiances have persistently prevented coherence in government policy making and the functioning of the administration. More generally, they have tended to preclude political accountability, viciate political debate, and inhibit political institutionalization. The factions have thus been the chief guardians, as well as the chief beneficiaries, of the primacy of the informal sector of the Algerian polity over the formal sector, the corresponding backwardness of Algerian political culture, and the inadequacy of the current state framework to the requirements of a dynamic society and a modern economy.

### **The Problem of Presidential Authority**

This exceptionally complex and intense factionalism has been all the more difficult to control because the revolution had no undisputed leader. There was no Algerian Nasser (or Ho Chi Minh or Castro or Mandela, let alone Mao Zedong). And the revolutionary elite—composed of the senior echelons of the historic FLN and above all the *Armée de Libération*

*Nationale* (ALN)—has consisted of individuals who have been generally disinclined to recognize the claims to preeminent leadership of any one of their own number.

As a result, the position of president, at the apex of the pyramid of power, has usually been a relatively powerless one. The most powerful men in the FLN-ALN during the war neutralized each other's presidential ambitions and accordingly agreed on relatively weak figures (Ferhat Abbas, Benyoucef Ben Khedda) to act as civilian presidents of the *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne* (GPRA) from 1958 onward. These civilians were essentially figureheads or front men for the real power holders and they performed little more than ceremonial and public relations functions. Both of the strong-willed historic revolutionaries who briefly became president—Ahmed Ben Bella (1962-1965) and Mohamed Boudiaf (January-June 1992)—came to grief for lack of solid military support. Only Houari Boumediène was able to exercise the full powers and prerogatives of the president of the republic as defined in the constitution. But his success in establishing his authority as president was due to his unique position as the architect of the unification of the scattered forces of the ALN in his capacity as its chief of staff and as the organizer of the ALN's transformation into a modern regular army, the *Armée Nationale Populaire* (ANP), in his capacity as minister of defense after 1962. He thus brought his unrivaled authority over the armed forces with him into the presidency and made a point of retaining the defense portfolio and preserving his control over the army thereafter. While he never wore military uniform after becoming president in 1965, his political power was in reality a function of his military power.

None of his successors has been able to emulate him in this respect. And the prospect that any one of them might eventually accumulate decisive political authority over the executive branch as a whole was profoundly damaged by Chadli Bendjedid's decision in 1984 to reestablish the ANP's General Staff.

### **The Problem of the General Staff**

The creation of a unified General Staff of the ALN under Colonel Boumediène in 1960 was a victory for the most political wing of the ALN over the centrifugal tendencies inherent in a liberation army that had been extremely decentralized from its inception in 1954. The accumulation of authority that Boumediène's General Staff achieved through its unification of the ALN enabled it to arbitrate the power struggle within the FLN at independence in 1962 and equipped Boumediène to transform the ALN into a regular army from 1962 onwards. As defense minister, Boumediène continued to act as chief of staff as well until Ben Bella appointed Colonel Tahar Zbiri to the position behind Boumediène's

back—a move that spelled the end of the Ben Bella-Boumediène alliance and led to Ben Bella’s eventual overthrow in 1965. As president, Boumediène retained the defense portfolio but was able to consolidate his position fully only after getting rid of Zbiri following the latter’s abortive putsch in December 1967, at which point the General Staff was abolished. In other words, from 1968 onward, Boumediène’s presidential authority rested not only on the fact that he was his own defense minister, but also the fact that, in the absence of a General Staff, the defense ministry was the sole, unrivaled apex of the military power structure.

The reestablishment of the General Staff in 1984 changed all that. Its immediate effect was to qualify the defense ministry’s control over the ANP officer corps and so dilute President Chadli’s personal authority over the armed forces. That in turn diminished Chadli’s ability to arbitrate and limit factional disputes within the military, especially the conflict between the coterie of former officers of the French army (the so-called “*Déserteurs de l’Armée Française*,” or DAF) and the rival coterie of officers who had emerged from the ALN’s guerrilla units and then graduated from various Arab military academies (in Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan). As a result, this conflict became more intense and uninhibited. But the longer-term significance of the institutional change was to establish an autonomous center of political power and decision making within the army. The implications of this became apparent only under the dramatic stresses and strains of the 1989-1992 period.

Following the ratification by referendum of the pluralist constitution in February 1989, the ANP withdrew its representatives from the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the PFLN. The move was declared—and naïvely believed—to signify the army’s total withdrawal from the political stage. In fact, however, having ended its involvement with the PFLN, the army command began to engage in relations with all parties in the new pluralist dispensation. A special office to handle formal liaison with the various political parties was established under the aegis of the General Staff, and the intelligence services discreetly infiltrated all the main parties as a matter of course. Thus the army commanders—acting independently of the defense ministry—were equipping themselves to negotiate their own, autonomous, relations with the various factions of the civilian political class. The consequences for the authority of the presidency were enormous.

Immediately after the FIS’s first victory in the municipal and regional elections in June 1990, Chadli was induced to surrender the defense portfolio to the then Chief of Staff, Major General Khaled Nezzar. In June 1991, Nezzar and the General Staff forced Chadli to agree to the brutal repression of FIS demonstrations in Algiers and the eviction of the head of the government, the reformer Mouloud Hamrouche and,

in addition, to give up the presidency of the PFLN. By this point, then, the army commanders had become an independent force in the political arena, dictating terms to the president and progressively stripping him of his prerogatives. Chadli's abdication of presidential authority and responsibility can thus be seen to have taken place in several stages, beginning as early as 1984, and to have been largely completed seven months before Nezzar and his colleagues finally applied the coup de grâce in January 1992.

Each of Algeria's successive presidents since 1992 has been confronted with an army commanded by officers he did not himself appoint and whom he cannot easily replace. Neither of the two presidents of the *Haut Comité d'État* (HCE)<sup>5</sup>—Mohamed Boudiaf and Ali Kafi—was even nominally his own defense minister; both were cramped from the start by Khaled Nezzar's occupancy of the position. When Nezzar was finally obliged to stand down in favor of Liamine Zeroual in July 1993, Zeroual's ability to choose his own military staff was fatally constrained, even after he assumed the presidency in January 1994 in addition to the defense portfolio. In his last act as defense minister, Nezzar had appointed as chief of staff the ambitious and forceful General Mohammed Lamari, previously commander of the "Special Forces" spearheading the counterinsurgency campaign and known for his preference for "eradicating" the rebellion rather than seeking a negotiated end to it. The result was a situation of dual power, with Lamari's General Staff contesting and neutralizing Zeroual's authority over the armed forces, security policy, and, indeed, the political situation as a whole. Instead of the defense ministry tending, as under Boumediène, to enable the presidency to control the military, the army's top echelon, organized in the General Staff, was now tending to control the defense ministry. From this position, it was able to box in and hamstring the presidency, sabotage its peace initiatives, and dominate the political arena, where it possessed important civilian relays in the shape of secularist political parties enthusiastically committed to the "eradicator" policy<sup>6</sup> and influential daily newspapers.<sup>7</sup>

The power of the General Staff was such that Zeroual was even unable to dispose of the defense portfolio as he wished. When he sought to appoint his ally, General Mohamed Betchine, to the position, Lamari and the General Staff successfully blocked the move. And when, as a second-best ploy, he tried to win control of the newly formed—and state-sponsored—*Rassemblement National Démocratique* (RND)<sup>8</sup> as a reliable party-political relay by promoting Betchine and Betchine's nominees within the RND leadership, the General Staff and the intelligence services went onto the offensive, mobilized their civilian relays, and organized a virulent press campaign against Betchine in the summer of 1998.

Zeroual accordingly decided that it had become impossible for him to exercise his constitutional prerogatives as president of the republic and announced his intention to call an early election so that a successor could be found.

This move apparently surprised the army power brokers, who were obliged, with audible reluctance, to agree to retired Major General Larbi Belkheir's proposal that former foreign minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika be invited to run for president with the army's tacit backing. This backing was far from total, however. Only Belkheir and his protégé, the head of counterintelligence, General Smail Lamari (no relation to the chief of staff), were positively committed to Bouteflika. The General Staff advertised its own lack of enthusiasm by publicly insisting that the regular armed forces were strictly neutral, and the decision makers authorized no fewer than six plausible candidates<sup>9</sup> to run against Bouteflika. The prospect of a genuinely contested election was destroyed at the eleventh hour, however, by the sensational collective decision of the six other candidates to withdraw from the race in protest at what they claimed was evidence of election rigging. The result was that Bouteflika became president by default through a procedure that fell far short of being an election. From the army commanders' point of view, this was, of course, the ideal result. They had the man they preferred in the presidency, but so *mal élu* (badly elected) that he possessed no electoral legitimacy or popular mandate and so could be presumed to pose no threat to their domination of the political scene.

It was to take Bouteflika five years to bring the General Staff, at least provisionally and conditionally, under control. He finally achieved this when Mohamed Lamari and his supporters in the army command were forced into retirement in the summer of 2004 following Bouteflika's triumphant reelection the previous April. Lamari himself was replaced as chief of staff by the self-effacing Major General Ahmed Gaïd Salah. With the General Staff provisionally tamed, Bouteflika was able to restore the authority of the defense ministry over the armed forces as a whole by his appointment of retired Major General Abdelmalek Guennaïzia to the newly created post of minister-delegate of defense. Guennaïzia, Lamari's predecessor as chief of staff and a close associate of both former president Chadli Bendjedid and former defense minister Khaled Nezzar, carried influence with the army commanders but, having retired, was technically a civilian as well as (in principle) answerable to Bouteflika in the latter's capacity as titular minister of defense. But there is reason to doubt that this fully secured Bouteflika's authority over the defense establishment, since this authority still did not extend in practice to the intelligence services.

### The Problem of the Intelligence Services

The enormous power of the intelligence services has long been the open secret of Algerian political life. Created by Colonel Abdelhafid Boussouf, the commander of *wilaya* V (Oranie) in the wartime FLN-ALN and subsequently minister of armaments and general liaisons in the GPRA, they were renamed *la Sécurité Militaire* (SM) after independence and, while officially called the *Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité* (DRS) since 1990, they are still widely referred to as “la SM.”

Already a pervasive presence in Algerian political life under Presidents Boumediène and Chadli Bendjedid, the intelligence services acquired even greater influence during the 1990s. The exigencies of the counter-insurgency campaign led, in particular, to the expansion of the activities and personnel of the *Direction du Contre-Espionnage et de la Sécurité Interne* (DCE) within the DRS. The conduct of the DCE in combating the Islamist insurgency has long been a matter of the greatest controversy. That it actively infiltrated the Islamic armed movements is common knowledge and not, in itself, surprising. What has been at issue in the controversy is whether this infiltration has sought to bring the insurgency to an end or, rather, on the contrary, manipulate it for unavowed and unavowable ends.

What is certain, however, is that the political power of the services since the onset of the violence in 1992 has been greater than at any previous point in the history of independent Algeria. Since 1990, Algeria has had five heads of state (Chadli, Boudiaf, Kafi, Zeroual, and Bouteflika), eleven heads of government<sup>10</sup> and four defense ministers,<sup>11</sup> but throughout this entire period the DRS has been commanded by General Mohamed Mediène and the DCE has been commanded by General Smaïl Lamari. During the protracted “dual power” impasse of 1993-1998, when the Zeroual presidency was engaged in a continuous trial of strength with the General Staff, it was Mediène who was the effective arbiter of the conflict. That the DRS eventually arbitrated in favor of Bouteflika against Chief of Staff Mohamed Lamari in 2004 is clear. But it is by no means certain that the provisional taming of the General Staff signified a reduction in General Mediène’s influence to the presidency’s benefit or that any real progress has been made toward holding the intelligence services accountable to anyone other than their own commanders.

### The Restoration of the Presidency and the Reining In of Pluralism

The consensus that existed among the decision makers at Bouteflika’s accession in April 1999 concerned two main points. The first was the pressing need to break out of the debilitating “quarantine” that Algeria

had been confined in by the attitudes of its main Western partners, France above all, since January 1992 and especially since the hijacking of the French Airbus at Algiers airport in December 1994. In this respect, Bouteflika's accession to the presidency fitted precisely the tradition of the military using civilian *chargés de mission* to front for them. As a former and most effective foreign minister, Bouteflika was the ideal choice. He scored early successes with the Organization of African Unity summit held in Algiers in July 1999 and with his flamboyant state visit to Paris in May 2000. But the public relations problem was of enormous dimensions. For the Algerian state to be perceived once again as a legitimate partner, it was essential to reduce the violence very appreciably.

This was the second point of consensus. It meant providing a political and juridical framework for the deal that had already been tentatively struck by the ANP with the *Armée Islamique du Salut*, and a number of smaller armed groupings that had associated themselves with the AIS's cease-fire since October 1997. Thus Bouteflika was authorized by the army commanders to do the honors at home as well as abroad, by securing the passage of the Law on Civil Concord in July 1999, which encouraged members of armed groups to give themselves up in return for certain guarantees, and by promulgating a decree in January 2000 providing for a qualified amnesty for the AIS and associated armed groups in return for their dissolution.

The controversial nature of these measures worked to Bouteflika's advantage, since he was able to argue that the Algerian people as a whole should be consulted. He was accordingly able to call a referendum in September 1999 in which the electorate was invited to say whether it approved the president's "approach" or not. The resounding "yes" vote both secured approval for the Law on Civil Concord and for the subsequent amnesty decree and, by endorsing Bouteflika's policy, compensated him for his "bad election" the previous April.

While this strengthened Bouteflika's hand, he was unable to get his own way on the composition of the new government, which was formed only in December 1999, after months of haggling. The army commanders vetoed his choice of Noureddine Zerhouni for defense minister (obliging Bouteflika to retain the portfolio himself while making Zerhouni minister of the interior) and insisted that the new government should reflect the party-political composition of the National Assembly. Since the army commanders effectively controlled the leaderships of the main parties (not only the PFLN and RND but also the Berberist RCD and the Islamist MSP), they were in effect using the system of formal political pluralism to constrain the president and buttress their own power. The truth of the matter was clearly stated by Bouteflika when he declared, apropos the new cabinet: "I am forced to accept a mosaic that does not suit me."

This framework of political maneuvering endured throughout Bouteflika's first term. On the one hand, Bouteflika sought continuously to milk the "national reconciliation" agenda to bolster domestic popular support while seeking external endorsement and legitimation (especially from Paris and Washington) through his orchestration of Algeria's return to the world stage and his support for the neo-liberal agenda of economic reform.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, he presented himself to the army as its champion and defender, the main, if not sole, guarantor that its commanders would not be held to account for the "dirty war" they had conducted against the Islamist insurgency. The persistence of international pressure on this point, fueled by a series of sensational revelations,<sup>13</sup> enabled Bouteflika to bargain with the army commanders. In return for shielding the army, he sought to get it to withdraw from the political stage and also to reshuffle the high command and push into retirement the generals responsible for the 1992 coup and its bloody aftermath. On the other hand, the generals in question had no intention of going quietly and maneuvered constantly against the president, blocking the extension of the "national reconciliation" amnesty measures to those armed groups still active (especially the GSPC),<sup>14</sup> exploiting the U.S.-led "global war on terrorism" to develop their own relations with external partners and sources of support and legitimation in the Pentagon and NATO, provoking lethal riots in Kabylia in the spring and summer of 2001 and then seeking to channel the massive Kabyle protest movement that resulted into attacking the presidency,<sup>15</sup> quietly encouraging extraordinarily vitriolic attacks on Bouteflika in the secularist press (notably *le Matin*) and, finally, encouraging the new general secretary of the PFLN, Ali Benflis, to run against Bouteflika in the presidential election of April 2004.

In behaving in this way, the army commanders, and Lamari and the General Staff in particular, were acting to preserve the commanding political power they had acquired since deposing Chadli in 1992. Seeing the power rivalry with the presidency as a zero-sum game, they were determined to prevent Bouteflika from securing a second term and consolidating his position at their expense. The fact that they failed was of historic significance. Bouteflika's success in getting reelected in April 2004—the first Algerian president to complete his first term and get a second since Chadli Bendjedid achieved this in December 1983—was a crucial moment in the restoration of the presidency as the substantive and not merely formal apex of the Algerian power structure. It led directly to the retirement of Lamari and his closest supporters in the army, and thus the taming of the ANP General Staff, at least for the time being. But the coalition of factions and other interests that Bouteflika put together to support his reelection bid was an extremely heteroclitic one, and that, too, has had implications and repercussions.

A fundamental handicap for Bouteflika throughout this relentless trial of strength was his lack of a reliable party-political relay for his position. The two state-sponsored façade parties, the PFLN and the RND, were coalitions in which all the main factions in the power structure were represented, but they were ultimately controlled by the army commanders through Major General Mohamed Mediène's DRS. Of the notionally "opposition" parties, the docile Islamists of Mahfoud Nahnah's *Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix* (MSP) and the Berber-secularists of Saïd Sadi's RCD were, as a matter of public notoriety, inclined to take their bearings from the military *décideurs*. The more independent parties, Hocine Aït Ahmed's *Front des Forces Socialistes* (FFS), Abdallah Djaballah's *Mouvement de la Réforme Nationale* (MRN), and Louiza Hanoune's *Parti des Travailleurs* (PT), were generally supportive of Bouteflika's national reconciliation agenda. But they were among his sharpest critics on other issues and neither disposed nor able to support him in his duel with the army commanders.

To drum up electoral support, Bouteflika has accordingly been inclined to rely on organized forces outside the party system—the administration, the state-controlled television and radio, various voluntary associations, and the Sufi orders (which Bouteflika openly courted during his reelection campaign)—and to rein in rather than encourage pluralism in the formal political sphere. His national reconciliation agenda, which is popular and which he has been intent on monopolizing, has entailed a strategy of co-optation on the regime's Islamist and Berberist flanks, with the docile Islamists of the MSP kept inside successive coalition governments throughout and *Thamazighth* (the Berber language) at last recognized as a national language in the constitutional revision of April 2002. This strategy has been consistent with the tacit promotion of the recovery of the PFLN, which regained its old status as the country's principal party in the legislative elections of 2002. A corollary of this has been the regime's hostility to the principled opposition parties such as Aït Ahmed's FFS and Djaballah's MRN. The regime's concern to regain lost ground in Kabylia has led it to promote the PFLN there at the expense of the FFS, which is now in possibly terminal crisis. And, as part of Bouteflika's drive to co-opt the "Islamic-nationalist" trend in opinion—an ambition symbolized by the appointment of Abdelaziz Belkhadem to replace Ali Benflis as the PFLN's general secretary<sup>16</sup>—the interior ministry has recently been facilitating the takeover of the MRN by an anti-Djaballah faction willing to accept co-optation by the regime.

This draining of vigor and combative dissent out of the party-political sphere has had its counterpart in the press. With the end of the General Staff vs. Presidency duel, journalists can no longer insult the president of the republic with impunity. That was made brutally clear in June 2004

when *le Matin* editor Mohamed Benchicou, who had been especially virulent in his attacks on Bouteflika in the run-up to the 2004 election,<sup>17</sup> was jailed for two years and the newspaper was forced to close. Numerous other journalists were subsequently either jailed or subject to other forms of harassment (notably lawsuits), especially those with the temerity to publish articles—or even cartoons—critical of officeholders.<sup>18</sup> And measures taken under the “national reconciliation agenda” have gone so far as to criminalize critical discussion of the army’s behavior during the “dirty war.”<sup>19</sup>

### The Uncertain Prospect

The central thrust of Bouteflika’s project and impact has been the reconstruction and rationalization of authoritarian government on the basis of presidential power. A secondary, but very important, aspect has been the curbing of the ferocious identity politics of the period from 1989 to 1999 by means of the effective assertion of a more inclusive conception of the Algerian national identity. In both respects, Bouteflika has been continuing aspects of the course charted by Liamine Zeroual, although with more success than his predecessor. In addition, with the recovery of the state’s financial position, the regime has been able to resume in some degree its old developmental role, notably in the renovation and extension of the national infrastructure, a fact that has contributed to its partial recovery of popular legitimacy.

The restoration of the power of the presidency has been premised on a new balance between the military and civilian wings of the Algerian oligarchy. The excessive power of the regular army commanders has been curbed; the influence of the interior ministry has increased; the role and size of the police force have grown; and the president’s personal authority over the government has been reasserted. In sum, the main trend has been for the form of government in Bouteflika’s Algeria to approximate (notwithstanding certain differences) that of Hosni Mubarak’s Egypt, as Boumediène’s regime at least formally approximated Nasser’s.

The trend may well continue if Bouteflika secures a third five-year term in 2009. But that would require a revision of the 1996 constitution, which limits presidents to two terms and is accordingly controversial. In addition, the president’s health has been giving cause for concern since his 19-day stay in a Paris clinic for treatment of an undisclosed ailment in late 2005. Given the absence of an obvious alternative, however, a consensus within the military and administrative elites could crystallize in support of Bouteflika’s continuation in power, at any rate for as long as his health permits.

Reasons for doubting that the “Egyptianization” trend will continue for long are furnished by the two most significant ways in which Algeria’s social structures and political traditions have differed historically from the society of the Nile valley. The first is the size and political importance of the country’s mountain-dwelling populations, who furnished the human bedrock of the national liberation struggle. The second is the comparative weakness of the central power and, in particular, the absence of anything resembling the pharaonic tradition of commanding personal rule.

The continuing vitality of the rebellious political traditions of the countryside has been evident in recent years in the propensity of ordinary Algerians to riot in protest at misgovernment and abuses of power (as in October 1988 but also, if on a smaller scale, since then).<sup>20</sup> It has been particularly evident in the remobilization of the tradition of the *maquis*<sup>21</sup> by the Islamist revolt of the 1990s and in the remarkable protest movement, rooted in the mountain villages, in Kabylia from 2001 to 2004.<sup>22</sup> But the vigor of insurgency and protest movement alike was matched in both cases by their political incoherence and ultimate failure, and the trend of social change, above all the relentless dynamic of urbanization, is steadily eroding the traditional political weight of the countryside. This trend is reflected in the composition of successive governments over the last fifteen years as well as in the military high command, where members of both old and new urban elites now predominate, in sharp contrast to the patterns of the 1960s and 1970s.

More important is the absence of a tradition of strong personal power. The accumulation of power that Boumediène brought to the presidency was quickly dissipated under his successors. The arduous accumulation of power that Bouteflika has been able to achieve has owed a great deal to two very specific factors: his own remarkable talent for political maneuvering and the fact that circumstances—the bad odor in which the army commanders found themselves and the interest of Paris and Washington in providing external endorsement to his position—favored his enterprise. There is little reason to expect Bouteflika to be able to bequeath to his successor the authority he has built up, and cause to fear that the succession would be the occasion for a fresh intensification of factional conflict within the political-military elite, which only the army commanders would be able to arbitrate.

In this context, two features of the present conjuncture are especially disturbing.

The first is Bouteflika’s reported intention to use the planned revision of the constitution not only to authorize a third presidential term but also to reduce the already severely limited role and prerogatives of the national parliament. The danger is that his drive to consolidate his personal position as president will be at the expense of, among other things, the

much-needed institutionalization of Algerian political life and the development of the civilian component of the political class. Such a turn of events could only favor the continued primacy of the informal sector of Algerian politics over the formal sector and the preeminence of factionalism and thus the absence of any serious possibility of progress toward the rule of law for the foreseeable future.

The second is the recrudescence over the last nine months of the terrorist activity of the GSPC coupled with its recent change of name. The danger in this is not only that it rules out any question of a negotiated end to the GSPC's campaign but also that it may turn out to imply the effective end of Bouteflika's "peace and national reconciliation" agenda and the crisis of his political project as a whole. For it could furnish a pretext for the army commanders to try to reassert their general hegemony over the Algerian state in the name of the global war on terrorism and at the expense of presidential authority, the improved military-civilian balance, and the relative order that Bouteflika had provisionally secured.

This point is of special salience in regard to the intelligence services. The extraordinary importance and power they have acquired over the last fifteen years has been in large part a function of their role in combating the Islamist insurgency. A clear implication of the definitive ending of the violence is the reduction of their influence to its previous, more limited, proportions. Equally clearly, the resurgence of terrorism, if it continues, will have the effect of sustaining and buttressing the political power of the intelligence services indefinitely. That can only work to postpone or subvert the possibility of real political reform in the medium and longer term, insofar as it hinges for the time being on the restoration of the presidency. For the complete recovery of presidential authority unquestionably requires the president of the republic to be able to exercise to the full his constitutional prerogatives as commander in chief of the armed forces, including the power to appoint the heads of the intelligence services—a power he still does not possess in practice.

## Conclusion

In view of the terrible damage done to the Algerian polity by the events of the 1990s, the relative restoration of peace and order that has taken place under President Bouteflika was arguably as much as could realistically be hoped for. Given the weakness of the democratic current in Algerian political life and especially the salience of mutually antipathetic forms of identity politics, it was inevitable that this restoration would exhibit an authoritarian aspect. Insofar as this has involved at least partial curbing of the power of the military, it has opened up the possibility of interesting political reform in the medium to longer term.

There can be no doubt that the demilitarization of the Algerian polity is a fundamental precondition of the advent of law-bound government, let alone democracy. That is something Western governments and media appear to have overlooked in the period of 1989 to 1991, when the precipitate introduction of formal pluralism was greeted with a degree of enthusiasm in Western capitals that it most certainly did not warrant. The pluralism in question was above all that of competing forms of identity politics, which fell far short of offering plausible programs for government but succeeded very well in splitting public opinion into sharply opposed camps and thus sowing the seeds of the subsequent violence. While it made possible an unprecedented degree of public debate and press freedom for a while, it had no other democratic implications and throughout was subject to manipulation by the military decision makers.

At present, it would be extremely unrealistic for Western governments to suppose that they are in a position to promote progressive political reform in Algeria. The simplistic recipe of formal party-political pluralism plus free elections was tried in 1989-1991 with catastrophic consequences. The extreme crisis of the state's finances, which gave Paris great leverage over the regime from 1988 to 1998, is a thing of the past. Algeria's buoyant revenue from hydrocarbons and consequent financial independence are enabling the regime to re-negotiate its relations with its foreign partners and enlarge its ability to maneuver once more. That is likely to rule out Western intervention in Algeria's internal politics for the time being.

In the longer term, the necessary condition for democratization is that the Algerian legislature acquire important decision-making powers. Only if this happens will the legislature be able to hold the executive to account (and thereby curb corruption) and, by so doing, guarantee the independence of the judiciary. Only if the national parliament becomes a real locus of decision making, in which the major interests in society need to be effectively represented, can social pressure ensure that elections are wholly free and fair and political parties—the kind necessary to a democratic system of alternating governments—develop. And only if the elected representatives of the people become the source of government mandates can the demilitarization of the Algerian political system be definitive.

For the moment, none of this is in prospect. The high oil price and resulting buoyant revenue have given the “distributive state” in Algeria a new lease on life. As a result, the regime's capacity to co-opt opposition and buy social peace is high and the effective pressure for fundamental institutional reform is low. The most that can be expected in the short term is that Bouteflika's provisional success in restoring order is preserved and that the Algerian political class and intelligentsia are able to use the

continued breathing space this offers them to reflect on and draw the right lessons from the dramatic experience of the period since 1988.

It is in the light of these considerations that the U.S. government in particular should review its own policy toward Algeria. While it should recognize that it cannot promote rapid positive reform, it can and should at least abstain from jeopardizing the qualified progress that has been made in recent years. The danger of a reversal of the recent trend to civilian government and a remilitarization of the Algerian political system is intimately linked to the global war on terrorism. It is important that Washington not encourage Algeria's generals to reassert themselves in the political sphere. To this end, the U.S. government should review its own approach to the issue of countering terrorism in general and the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership in particular, and recognize the need to relativize the purely military aspect of the partnership by enhancing its developmental dimensions and thus the role of civilian leadership in its conception and implementation.

## Notes

1. The full name of the party is “Le Parti du Front de Libération Nationale” (*Hizb Jebbat al-Tahrir al-Wataniyya*); thus both French and Arabic versions of the official discourse—unlike most media and academic commentary—distinguish the *party*, which was created only after independence in 1962, from the wartime FLN, which was a *front*, not a party. I propose to do the same by referring to the party as the PFLN.
2. The Néo-Destour became the Destourian Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste Destourien*) in 1964; the PSD became the Democratic Constitutional Rally (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*) in 1987.
3. That is the so-called “Berber Spring” (*Tafsut Imazighen*), the movement of protest against the official repression of the Berber language in March-April 1980.
4. The French term used for the factions in Algerian politics is *clan* (derived ultimately, via English, from the Gaelic *clann*, meaning an extended family), and the factional struggle is routinely called *la lutte des clans*. “Clan” is a misnomer; the factions are not constituted on the basis of kinship ties at all. The Arabic word used for faction, *jama’a* (literally “group”), does not carry this misleading connotation of kinship.
5. The HCE was the five-member directorate set up, without any constitutional warrant, by the army commanders in January 1992 to function as a collective leadership filling the vacant presidency for the rest of Chadli’s term in office, that is, to the end of 1993. (Its term was actually extended to end January 1994 to give the army commanders time to agree on the succession.) Its members were Boudiaf (chairman), Nezzar, Ali Kafi, Ali Haroun, and Tedjini Haddam. After Boudiaf’s death, Kafi succeeded him and Redha Malek was co-opted to make up the numbers.
6. Notably the Berberist *Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie* (RCD), the ex-Communist *Ettahaddi* (Defiance) party, subsequently renamed the *Mouvement Démocratique et Social* (MDS), and Redha Malek’s *Alliance Nationale Républicaine* (ANR), a secular-modernist splinter from the PFLN.
7. Namely *Liberté* (close to the RCD) and *le Matin* (close to *Ettahaddi*-MDS), in addition to the generally pro-army *El Watan*.
8. The RND was established in early 1997 to function as an alternative pro-regime façade party to the PFLN, at that time regarded as discredited. The RND duly won a plurality of seats in the legislative elections of June 1997 and absolute majorities in the local and regional elections the following October. For a discussion of the amount of rigging this involved, see Hugh Roberts, “Algeria’s Contested Elections,” *Middle East Report* 209 (Winter 1998), pp. 21-24.

9. Namely two former heads of government: Mouloud Hamrouche and Mokdad Sifi, former foreign minister Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahim, the FFS leader Hocine Ait Ahmed, the prominent Islamist Abdallah Djaballah, and Colonel Youcef Khatib, the commander of ALN *wilaya* IV (Algérois) in 1961-1962.
10. Mouloud Hamrouche (1989-1991), Sid Ahmed Ghazali (1991-1992), Belaïd Abdeslam (1992-1993), Redha Malek (1993-1994), Mokdad Sifi (1994-1996), Ahmed Ouyahia (1996-1998), Smaïl Hamdani (1998-1999), Ahmed Benbitour (1999-2000), Ali Benflis (2000-2003), Ahmed Ouyahia (2003-2006), Abdelaziz Belkhadem (2006 to present).
11. Chadli Bendjedid (1979-1990), Khaled Nezzar (1990-1993), Liamine Zeroual (1993-1999), Abdelaziz Bouteflika (1999 to present).
12. Bouteflika's chief success in the composition of the December 1999 government, apart from getting Zerhouni into the interior ministry, was the appointment of three supporters, Abdellatif Benachou, Hamid Temmar, and Chakib Khelil, noted for their espousal of the "Washington consensus" in economic policy, to the ministries of Finance, Participation (i.e., privatization), and Energy, respectively.
13. Notably books by ex-officers of the ANP: Habib Souaïdia, *La Sale Guerre* (Paris, La Découverte, 2001); Hichem Aboud, *La Mafia des Généraux* (Éditions J.C. Lattès, 2002); Mohammed Samraoui, *Chronique des Années de Sang* (Paris, Denoël, 2003). A Web site launched by the *Mouvement Algérien des Officiers Libres* (MAOL), a group of officers who had deserted from the intelligence services, was the source of numerous dramatic allegations concerning the real strategy and tactics of the DAF coterie commanding the ANP during the 1990s. The allegations, which concerned the assassinations of President Boudiaf and others, the use of death squads and torture, the manipulation of the Islamist armed movements, and the implication of senior generals in massive corruption, etc., although never properly documented, were sufficiently detailed and plausible to be taken seriously by the Western media, in France in particular.
14. The leader of the GSPC, Hassan Hattab, was undoubtedly interested in negotiating an end to his campaign as the AIS had done earlier. He lost control of the GSPC in the summer of 2003 and his successors began stressing their links to Al Qaeda, which tended to rule out any question of a negotiation.
15. That the riots, in which gendarmes killed over 100 Kabyle youths (an unprecedented and traumatic event), were deliberately provoked is clear from the evidence documented by the report of the Independent Commission of Enquiry chaired by distinguished lawyer Mohand Issad. For an analysis of the Kabyle protest movement and the manipulations that were involved, see International Crisis Group, *Algeria: Unrest and Impasse in Kabylia*, Middle East/North Africa Report No. 15, Cairo/Brussels, June 10, 2003.
16. Belkhadem emerged as the leader of the Islamic current—the so-called *Barbèfèlenes* ("the Bearded FLN")—within the party at its congress in November 1989.
17. It should be noted that, in the view of many Algerian commentators who have strong democratic credentials, some of the attacks on Bouteflika went far beyond the limits of fair comment and represented an abuse of freedom of speech.
18. See the report "Nouvelles peines de prison pour la presse: un autre mardi noir," *El Watan*, June 15, 2005.

19. Article 46 of the decree of February 27, 2006, on the implementation of the Charter of Peace and National Reconciliation states: “Anyone who, by speech, writing, or any other act, uses or exploits the wounds of the National Tragedy to harm the institutions of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, to weaken the state, or to undermine the good reputation of its agents who honorably served it, or to tarnish the image of Algeria internationally, shall be punished by three to five years in prison and a fine of 250,000 to 500,000 dinars.” See the Joint Statement by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Center for Transitional Justice and the International Federation for Human Rights. *Algeria: New Amnesty Law Will Ensure Atrocities Go Unpunished, Muzzles Discussion of Civil Conflict* (Paris, March 1, 2006).
20. Ordinary Algerians regularly complain about *la hogra*, meaning the contempt with which they are treated by office holders at every level, and local level riots against instances of this still occur with great frequency. This refusal of *la hogra* is rooted in the egalitarian code of honor characteristic of the independent tribes of the Atlas mountains.
21. That is, the tradition of guerrilla warfare. The Algerian term that translates the French word *maquis* is *jebel*, “mountain.”
22. See ICG, *op. cit.*







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