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Near East & South Asia

ALGERIA

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International Affairs

SONATRACH Obtains $485 Million Loan in Washington

LD3009205592 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in French 1800 GMT 30 Sep 92

[Text] Three loan agreements worth $485 million have been signed today in Washington between SONATRACH [National Company for the Transport and Marketing of Hydrocarbons] and two U.S. banks, Eximbank and Citibank. The financial aid will serve for the financing of gains and services of the U.S. regime [servicing of past loans] and later for the renovation and modernization of the [gas] liquefaction complexes of Arzew and Skikda. The U.S. company Bechtel and the French company Sofregaz are charged with the implemention of these renovation projects whose contracts are in the process of elaboration. With this agreement, the total of loans granted by Citibank to SONATRACH since 1991 has reached $1,280,000,000, either in the form of direct credit or guarantees.

Ethnic Cultural Groups Organize in Canada

92AF1271C Algiers EL WATAN in French 25 Aug 92 p 2

[Article by Boussetta Allouche: "Canada: When the Algerians Organize Themselves"]

[Text] Quebec (Canada)—A reaction common to all of the ethnic and cultural groups that are visible and live in a place that is "foreign" to them is generally a tendency to organize around associations that reflect the concerns of their members. Members of these associations meet to exchange views, to communicate with each other, and to defend their mutual interests. It is through this kind of organizational structure that an ethnic and cultural community tries to preserve its distinct identity against the risks of alienation and acculturation, which continuously lie in wait for them.

The case of the Algerians living in Canada is no exception to this general, sociological phenomenon. Perhaps this tendency does not reflect the national tradition in terms of "modern," free, and democratic associations, which have not yet gone beyond the initial stage. Problems and difficulties of all kinds are numerous and neutralize the effort and desire to develop a coherent and effective, associative structure. Research so far carried out has reflected the existence of several associations of Algerians. Their names are as follows:

- The Algeria-Canada Association
- The Averroes Cultural Association
- The Aures Association
- The Berber Association
- The Scientific and Cultural Association of Algerians at Laval University (ASCAUL)
- and the Group of Algerians of Quebec (RAQ).

Nevertheless, despite their different names these associations share a certain number of points in common. First, they all seek to offer their members opportunities for exchanges of views, communication, and, if there is a need for it, mutual assistance. Implicitly, the objective sought by all of these associations is to reduce the feeling of nostalgia resulting from exile, to which every person living outside his or her own country is naturally subject. Then these associations are known for their efforts to propagate Algerian culture by means of cultural activities, artistic events, expositions of handicraft work, etc. Some of these organizations include in their programs classes for teaching the Arab (or Berber) language for the benefit of Algerian children or other persons.

Finally, these associations are able, in a more or less regular way, to distribute information bulletins for the benefit of their members and persons who subscribe to them. Generally, membership in these associations is open to all Algerians and their friends and involves the payment of membership dues varying between 20 and 40 Canadian dollars. The average membership of each association varies between 200 and 300 persons.

These associations are legally registered with the authorities concerned. Consequently, they can apply for modest financial assistance in accordance with the regulations in force.

Beyond the extreme splintering that characterizes the Algerian association movement in Canada, recalling to some extent the partisan, political landscape of Algeria during the years from 1989 to 1991, the effectiveness and the utility of these associations are sometimes affected by sparks of humor and, often, the whims of their founding members. In the same way the intensity and the frequency of their activities also depend on subjective factors.

This is not the case with the dynamic underlying the effectiveness of Islamic associations in Canada, in which Algerians participate. While deemphasizing nationalist feelings in favor of religious fervor, the fundamentalist Islamic associations in Canada have a reputation for their intense activism.

Some of the Islamic associations have succeeded in increasing their membership by including Canadian men and women in their ranks.

This is the case with the Islamic Association of the City of Quebec, which has succeeded in collecting all of the funds required for the construction of an Islamic center (including a mosque and related services).

The problems and difficulties that slow the development of Algerian associations in Canada are explained by the fact that the majority of them have not yet succeeded in overcoming the internal obstacles that paralyze individual efforts and sow confusion and discord within an established group.

In the view of some Algerians, personal interests cannot be dissociated from the initial motivation that gave birth to a given association. In the view of other Algerians such considerations are only sources of friction between groups, which are likely to generate interpersonal problems stirred up by conflicts of interest, struggles between various points of view, interference in the private affairs of other persons, etc.

In addition to this chronic distrust, which affects an Algerian immigrant in his or her view of associations of fellow countrymen, benevolent persons and voluntary commitments are more and more rare these days.

Gradually, the active members become less and less inclined to invest their time in activities for which they are not paid and, very often, are unsatisfactory from the point of view of moral satisfaction.

Taking into account these uncertainties and in the absence of financial resources, it is easy to understand why the majority of these associations at best have only a modest record in contrast to the nobility and the grandeur of the objectives theoretically contained in the regulations under which they were established.

Humanitarian Aid Sent to Yugoslavia

92AF1274B Algiers EL WATAN in French 31 Aug 92 p 5

[Article by M.L.: "Yugoslavia: Algerian Aid"]

[Text] Although debate over the enfeeblement of the Algerian state continues unabated, Algeria's image in international affairs seems not to have waned. Its diplomacy is still active, which is why when the Mali peace agreement was concluded last March, some spoke of a "glorious feat" and others said Algeria "still has its moments"—referring, of course, to all it has done over the past two decades.

In that context, one might point out that Algeria has always met what it considers to be its international obligations, but most often it has done so very discreetly, unlike some countries that try to grab headlines for even the most insignificant gestures.

The fact it was announced humanitarian aid was being sent to the Muslim populations of Bosnia being victimized by the Serbian "ethnic purification" campaign seems almost an exception to the rule.

Such assistance is not novel in itself, informed sources tell us, since Algeria has always taken part in humanitarian operations. It did so during the conflict between Mauritania and Senegal, when thousands of Mauritanian nationals in Senegal were forcibly repatriated, as were Senegalese living in Mauritania. Algeria helped not only with its diplomacy but also by sending airplanes to shuttle between the two countries.

Another arena is peacekeeping, as in Cambodia where Algeria has sent a military detachment to participate in the UN plan. The United Nations has even asked it to augment the contingent it has deployed to that country. The same policy is pursued in the case of natural disasters, such as the earthquake that ravaged the city of Yerevan in Armenia. We are also informed that another operation is being considered for Somalia.

In the Yugoslav case, Algerian participation has been really significant—17 tons of food products and clothing—while certain other countries, despite all the publicity they have generated about their aid operation and their claim to be in the forefront of the Bosnia-Hercegovina mission, have not shown themselves to be as "generous" as they claim. One of them has sent a total of just 24 tons on four aircraft, while Algeria has fielded only one.

It has always been said that this apparently hidden side of our foreign policy reflects the characteristically Algerian feeling that there is no need to publicize such strictly humanitarian actions. But some nations ought to take note of it.

Regional Affairs

Ali Kafi Receives Mauritanian Foreign Minister

LD1309103592 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic 1600 GMT 12 Sep 92

[Text] Higher State Council Chairman Ali Kafi today received Abderrahmane Ould Moine, the Mauritanian minister for foreign affairs and cooperation. Following their meeting, the Mauritanian foreign minister stated that he was honored to meet Mr. Ali Kafi, to whom he conveyed a special message from Mauritanian President Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya relating to the excellent bilateral relations, their consolidation, and matters of common interest, including Maghreban issues.

Higher State Council Receives Hamas Delegation

LD2409153192 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic 2200 GMT 23 Sep 92

[Text] Within the context of the consultations it is conducting with political organizations, associations, and individuals, the Higher State Council today received at the presidential palace a Hamas movement delegation led by Cheikh Mahfoud Nahnah. A statement issued by the presidency said that views on the general state of the country were exchanged at the meeting. It added that the discussion had been positive and was dominated by a spirit of understanding and sense of responsibility, which confirms the importance of such meetings that will undoubtedly contribute to taking the country out of the difficult situation it is experiencing.

It is to be recalled that the Higher State Council had begun consultations with political organizations the day before yesterday when it received the National Liberation Front secretary general, Abdelhamid Mehri.

Foreign Ministry Denies Report on Rejection of Ambassador

LD2209093392 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic 1200 GMT 20 Sep 92

[Text] The Foreign Ministry spokesman today denied a report published by MAROC-HEBDO that stated that the Algerian Government would have rejected the accreditation request submitted by the Moroccan Government regarding Mr. Abderrahman Ben Amour as Morocco's ambassador to Algeria.

The spokesman stressed that the Algerian Government expressed its agreement over the appointment of Mr Ben Amour whom it expected to arrive in Algeria. However, the Moroccan government submitted a new accreditation request for a new ambassador, while pointing out that Ben Amour had asked to be replaced for personal reasons.

Internal Affairs

Details on Kebir's Disappearance Noted

93AF0013B Algiers ALGER REPUBLICAIN in French 4 Sep 92 pp 1, 3

[Article by Said Tazrou: "Strategic Change?"]

[Text] A persistent rumor has been circulating for 48 hours in so-called well-informed circles: the formation of a fundamentalist government abroad.

The "disappearance" of Rabah Kebir, former head of the political, information, and international relations department of the dissolved FIS [Islamic Front of Salvation], tends to lend credit to the rumor in question.

Kebir's flight to the United States, new focal point of the Islamic International, conditionally reported by EL WATAN last Thursday, might indicate the establishment of a new strategy of the fundamentalist movement. The latter's terrorist thrust has been sorely affected by the response of security forces, on the one hand, and its isolation from the people, on the other.

Whatever the case and in the absence of official confirmation, Kebir's flight puzzles public opinion, which has increasing difficulty understanding the "ease" with which individuals "under surveillance" of his "stature" simply vanish. Is it a question of naivete on security matters or complicity? All these factors reveal the extent of the disaster of government schemes planned during the "black decade," to use the terms of the minister of interior and local communities.

The crosschecking of our information, confirmed by the National Gendarmerie command, shows that it was on 18 August 1992 that the man under house arrest in Collo disappeared. Actually, Kebir was to appear twice a day at the Collo National Gendarmerie post for the purpose of signing in at his place of residence.

The last time he appeared was on the morning of 18 August. When the gendarmes realized that the fundamentalist leader would not appear in the afternoon (at 1800), they went to his residence the following morning (19 August) to inquire about his absence. To their surprise, there was no sign of the character.

According to evidence gathered in Collo and confirmed by the National Gendarmerie, he vanished at about "1330 after the *dohr* prayer. An automobile stopped at the entrance to the mosque, Kebir got in, and disappeared."

We have no information about what kind of a car it was. As for the individual's family, it reportedly knows nothing.

Was it an "escape," as witnesses hint? This is a plausible explanation, insofar as the FIS official was scheduled for a court appearance on 29 August. Nevertheless, the possibility of a "kidnapping" cannot be ruled out.

It is indeed highly possible that members of the former FIS who are now fugitives may have tried "to get back" one of their main leaders for the purpose of a political, "diplomatic" and financial redeployment. When one realizes that, in order to keep the underground organization of the smugglers' party and its armed subsidiaries alive, the question of sources of financing (whether *trabendo* or foreign) assumes cardinal importance. One can imagine the role that can be played here by a Rabah Kebir, whether it be somewhere abroad alongside accomplices already in place there or within the national territory, ready to regain control of the organization of the former FIS, now seriously handicapped by its lack of leaders.

Whatever the case, the judicial investigation seems to revolve around this problem. The fact remains, as many troubling signs indicate, that we are moving toward the "official" establishment abroad of part of the political-financial mafia that continues to hope to make religion its war horse for the overall destabilization of Algeria. Sudan is reportedly one of the drop points of the subversives.

Brahimi States Position on Major World Events

92AF1271A Algiers LE SOIR D'ALGERIE in French 24 Aug 92 p 2

[Article: "Lakhdar Brahimi on TV: 'Algeria Has an Unchanging Position'"; first paragraph is editorial introduction]

[Text] Lakhdar Brahimi, minister of foreign affairs, reaffirmed on 22 August the great interest that Algeria has in what is currently happening in the world, emphasizing his support for the settlement of the principal international problems, particularly the question of the Middle East and that of the Western Sahara.

Brahimi was interviewed on the evening television program on 22 August. He expressed the position of Algeria regarding certain international problems. Regarding the forthcoming round of negotiations scheduled for 24 August in Washington, he emphasized that Algeria has expressed to the parties concerned with peace in the Middle East, and particularly the United States, the great interest and the deep concern of the Palestinian leadership. He emphasized the need for Washington to become seriously involved in making the principle of "peace for land" accepted and to recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Brahimi added that the participation of the Arabs in these negotiations, following the last meeting in Damascus, has confirmed that they are working to recover their land and their legitimate rights.

Regarding the Western Sahara question, the Algerian foreign minister recalled the full support of Algeria for the implementation of the proposals made by the United Nations. He said: "The position of Algeria is firm, clear, and unchanged. We want peace on the bases accepted by our Moroccan and Western Saharan brothers."

The Algerian minister also expressed the wish that "the two parties would return to the agreement that they had accepted and Algeria fully supports."

Brahimi referred to the non-aligned movement, which is a matter of particular importance for Algeria and the rest of the countries that are members of this movement, particularly in the context of the new international order, which has considerably changed the basic situation. Brahimi emphasized the importance of this movement in "the defense of the independence of its members and their right to development and to self determination in view of the extensive changes created by this new world order."

Concerning the official position of Algeria regarding what is happening in Iraq, the Algerian foreign minister emphasized Algerian support for "the unity of Iraq," which is "an important question for the peoples of the region in general and for the Iraqi people in particular."

Finally, he denounced "any action harmful to this unity and likely to constitute a danger for the region."

Regarding the situation in Lebanon on the eve of legislative elections boycotted by the Christians, Lakhdar Brahimi expressed his regret about this dispute which, in his view, could lead again to "a split" after the Taef Agreement had succeeded "in settling all questions and reestablishing peace in the country," shaken by 17 years of civil war. This conflict has divided Lebanon and is a burden for the Lebanese people.

Moreover, he expressed the wish that all of the parties would reach "a satisfactory solution," because the maintenance of peace is the only way of bringing reconciliation to Lebanon, which is "important" and of the first importance for all of the Lebanese people.

Regarding the pending question of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the minister of foreign affairs stated that he regretted the situation facing the people living in this republic, particularly the sufferings of the Muslim community. He indicated that Algeria has provided aid while awaiting the convocation of the special session of the UN General Assembly on this situation, which has resulted in the deaths of nearly 8,000 people and caused 1.5 million people to become refugees, despite appeals from the international community.

Ahmad Talib Labrahimi Discusses Prospects for Change

92AF1252A London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic 20 Aug 92 pp 1,6,7

[Interview with Ahmad Talib Labrahimi, Algerian political notable and former foreign minister, by Qusay Salih Darwish; place and date not given: "I Call for Algerian Truce, and I Fear Dialogue Middlemen; Normalization of Political Situation Goes Through Rehabilitation of FIS"]

[Text] Algeria—Ahmad Talib Labrahimi, nominated by numerous circles to play an important role in Algeria in the near future, has urged all of the influential parties in the Algerian arena to establish a truce that would give them the opportunity for review and for making mutual concessions aimed at developing a compromise to overcome the crisis being experienced by the country.

In a comprehensive interview with AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT, Labrahimi added that he will never tire of urging the government to hold talks with the influential political forces in the arena, primarily the National Front [FLN], the National Forces Front, and the Socialist Forces Front, provided that it is a responsible dialogue organized with the encouragement of the People's National Army, that it observes the rules of dialogue, and that all of the groups involved abide by the rules of democracy and individual liberties and by the dictates of national concord and coexistence so that a historic accord can be developed.

Labrahimi noted that a beneficial dialogue capable of producing results would be a dialogue with the legitimate leaders of these parties, i.e. with Abbasi Madani and Ali Belhadj on behalf of the Islamic Salvation Front [FIS].

He added that the desired dialogue should seek to achieve a consensus that settles the identity crisis, entrenches political pluralism based on the rotation of power, establishes mutual tolerance as a mainstay of the political activity, and leads to normalizing the political situation, to ending the state of emergency, and to resuming the election process.

Algeria's former foreign minister also expressed fear about the outcome of a dialogue proposed by middlemen, who have multiplied recently. In a related area, Labrahimi asserted that a change in the individuals at

the top of the country's authority or a change of government remains, in his opinion, a subsidiary issue unless the adopted policy is changed by resorting to the method of calm democratic dialogue.

It is worth noting that, by virtue of Labrahimi's special relations with most forces inside and outside the government, his name has resurfaced with the increased talk about a dialogue between the conflicting parties.

A week before President Mohamed Boudiaf was assassinated, I had met Dr. Ahmad Talib Labrahimi at a popular cafe in the 10th Precinct of Paris, near the small hotel where he stays with his son. During the meeting, he assented to a previous request from AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT to conduct a comprehensive interview with him on developments in Algeria on the condition that the interview be held after his return from Algeria. We agreed on a date that was set for 10 days later. But before the agreed date, President Mohamed Boudiaf was assassinated. The pace of the developments accelerated, and the facts of Algeria's political map changed. Ahmad Talib Labrahimi found himself confronted with the developments and with statements, especially in wake of the meeting he had with Defense Minister Khaled Nezzar the day after Boudiaf's funeral. In addition to the leaders of the FLN, the Socialist Forces Front, the Democratic Movement for Algeria, and the Islamic Society Movement [Hamas], Labrahimi was the only notable with whom the defense minister met.

Ahmad Talib Labrahimi emerged from the meeting pleased and optimistic about the possibility of leading Algeria out of the critical condition it has been experiencing for months and about promptly opening the door of comprehensive national dialogue. This is what Labrahimi had been advocating since the June 1991 confrontation.

This meeting, distinguished by its length, and perhaps by its frankness, has strengthened the belief among many people that Dr. Ahmad Talib Labrahimi could be the man of the next phase because he is a man of dialogue around whom contradictions meet, crisscross, and coexist. Ahmed is the son of Shaykh Mohamed Bechir Labrahimi, head of the Association of Algerian Ulema and a friend of Abdelhamid Ben Badis, the great reformer. In addition to this lineage, Ahmad Talib Labrahimi is known for his approach, which combines purity of origin with modernism, even though he has been considered representative of the conservative tendency vis-a-vis the leftist technocratic tendency in the Algerian regime. This tendency was represented by the late Mohamed Seddik Ben Yehia, a former foreign minister.

Ahmad Talib Labrahimi is a politician who has experienced political life and who graduated from the school of struggle during the liberation revolution. He was jailed under former President Ahmed Ben Bella's administration before he became one of the constant figures in the Algerian regime.

Ahmad Talib Labrahimi is distinguished by being one of the few Algerian politicians to master an elevated literary level of both Arabic and French. He has also succeeded in developing an independent political and cultural identity without getting involved in the struggle of the blocs and wings within the regime. He was also able to maintain his distinguished presence during President Chadli Bendjedid's administration, as he had done during the late President Houari Boumediene's administration.

While maintaining good relations with the military establishment, Labrahimi has also established firm relations with the FIS leadership. He surprised many people when he, along with others, signed an appeal demanding the release of Abbasi Madani and his colleagues. It is well known that Abbasi Madani had proposed that Labrahimi be appointed head of the government that supervised the legislative elections. These characteristics have motivated many to view Ahmad Talib Labrahimi as the ideal candidate for any presidential election in an atmosphere of eased tensions and national reconciliation. This is in addition to the support that Labrahimi could gain within the FLN in his capacity as one of its prominent figures and as a member of its Central Committee, especially if the current FLN leadership is replaced and if another leadership that agrees with Labrahimi and that strategically allies itself with him emerges.

If the appointment of Abdessalam Belaid as prime minister has diminished Talib Labrahimi's chances, considering that Belaid represented the antithesis of Labrahimi's line during the previous eras, the refrainment of five members of the Supreme State Council from running as candidates in the presidential election has left the door wide open for Talib Labrahimi, whose chances could be redoubled if Belaid's government fails to accomplish the desired results and if it survives long enough to permit an alternative dialogue plan to be proposed.

Because of all of this, an interview with Talib Labrahimi has special significance, not because he is an important politician, but because he is insightful and perceptive in his analysis of the Algerian condition. It can be said that this is the first comprehensive interview given by Labrahimi. It was supposed to cover foreign policy, but narrow space and the accumulating developments compelled us to postpone this aspect for a later time.

In case Ahmad Talib Labrahimi becomes president of the Republic, he will be the first Algerian president who has well-known opinions and positions before he becomes president. The following is the text of the interview:

[Darwish] Since your address to the FLN special conference (1989) that was received with great satisfaction and with a storm of repeated applause, you have maintained almost total silence. What is the reason for this silence, and have its motives been subjective or nonsubjective?

[Labrahimi] I have not maintained total silence, unless you mean [my not] making statements to the foreign press. Perhaps you are aware that I took part in popular rallies from Tilimsen to Stif and delivered several lectures in the country, in addition to meetings with strugglers in several wilayas. Regrettably, this activity was blacked out, and some people thought that I had abandoned political action.

If you mean by your question my position immediately after I left the government in October 1988, then that was a personal choice to which I clung for more than a year and a half for two reasons: first, to give myself a pause for evaluation and contemplation far from the influences of daily responsibilities and, second, eagerness not to express publicly any opinions that could be construed as opposed to the citizens' satisfaction with the application of democracy and of political pluralism or that could give policymakers, in case of their failure, the justification to depict me to the public as an instigator.

In any case, I never stopped expressing my opinion within the FLN's organized frameworks on all developments or projecting my view on how to overcome the crisis. This is what I did, for example, at the FLN special conference to which you have referred in your question, when I demanded the restoration of the social justice policy in the distribution of national wealth and when I warned against the perils of economic catastrophes whose price would be paid by the dispossessed classes. This is also what I did directly last year by urging the government to back down on the use of force and to embrace responsible dialogue with the demands of the Islamic scene. On the occasion and at a time when the country was under a state of emergency, I demanded the release of the FIS leaders in their capacity as a recognized political party that cannot be ignored in any effort to seek an acceptable and lasting solution to the crisis. I also urged this because of my deep belief that these leaders' free presence could pacify the situation and establish security. Regrettably, my proposals fell on deaf ears at the time, both in the FLN and in other parties. But now that one full year has elapsed, the talk about dialogue with the FIS has become ordinary, even by those who previously had considered it to be some sort of madness. I thank God for this change, and I hope that it is a reflection of sincere convictions and not of temporary calculations.

As for your question regarding subjective and nonsubjective motives, perhaps it refers to the campaign concerning my presence abroad and my health condition. I wish to reassure the friends that I have not left my home in Algiers since October 1988 and that my health is good, thanks be to God.

[Darwish] Why have you then chosen this path, agreeing to make statements to the press whereas you had avoided this approach throughout the period of your exclusion from power?

[Labrahimi] In view of the serious condition prevailing in my country, the previous attempt to communicate with the public seemed inadequate to me. Thus, I decided to respond to the press's request. The first press statement I made was to AL-JAZA'IR AL-YAWM on 25 June 1992, and here I am giving your paper the first comprehensive interview abroad. It is unreasonable for one to stand with arms folded while his house burns and while his country knows no stability. How can one remain silent when death has become ordinary, when no day goes by without fatalities and victims, and when no night ends without nightmares? How can one remain silent when Algeria has known three presidents in six months, whereas it had known only three presidents in the preceding 30 years?

[Darwish] Many believe that the FLN began a new upsurge with the 1989 special conference, at which you were a speaker. What point has this upsurge reached?

[Labrahimi] Frankly, I have felt the effects of this upsurge only in few endeavors. Otherwise, nothing has changed because the starting points of this upsurge were not clear. Perhaps it is only fair to acknowledge that since that conference, the FLN has been subjected to internal blows on the hands of some of its members, who have renounced it, and it has been subjected to external blows because it will continue to be the symbol of liberation and independence. These difficulties could act as the motive to push the FLN toward a new upsurge if it learns how to adapt to the developments, if its followers become convinced now that they have no connection with the regime and that their party, like any other party, should seek to bolster its ranks and to develop awareness of the citizens' concerns so that it can mold them into a political program that ensures stability for the country. In this manner, there is no doubt that the FLN can contribute to restoring confidence to the hearts after it regains its soul and purges its ranks of the opportunistic and tarnished elements that have offended the FLN and distorted its image among the youth. As long as I hold this hope, I will stay side by side with the honorable strugglers.

[Darwish] Were you surprised by the results the FLN scored in the latest elections, and do you think that it is destined to play subsidiary roles in the arena?

[Labrahimi] There is no doubt that the FLN triumphed in the minor struggle when it led the Algerian people to victory and independence, that it undertook the burdens of the greater struggle when it assumed the responsibility of building the Algerian state after 130 years of military occupation, and that it shouldered the burdens of leading the country out of backwardness. It is fair to say that those who are censuring the FLN now for monopolizing the government prior to 1988 forget that a certain phase of our history dictated the single-party system.

Yes, there were mistakes committed under the FLN. Yes, I say that there were deviations at times, so that we

can correct the liberation image. But with the same objectivity, I say that we must not forget the positives of the building phase.

The fact is that I was not surprised by the FLN defeat in the local and legislative elections. I was not surprised because of the mistakes and deviations generated by the FLN march, some acceptable and resulting from lack of experience in management and some unacceptable and resulting from putting private interest ahead of the public interest. These mistakes were exploited by the government, though ruling in the FLN's name, which launched an organized and large-scale campaign against the FLN as of October 1988. Everybody who had been lying in wait for the FLN took part in this campaign.

It is certain that the 1992 Algeria is not the 1962 Algeria. In this positive change, we forget to mention the FLN's role. As I have said, I believe that if the FLN learns lessons from past mistakes, it will have its place alongside the other parties as a force for social progress, for defending the mainstays of our Islamic Arab peoples, and for fulfilling the people's aspirations. I am confident that if it had not been for some acts, the FLN and the FIS would have formed the National Council's backbone, because the credit for liberation will always continue to be an asset for the FLN.

[Darwish] The question of eliminating the FLN Political Bureau was raised in the latest FLN Central Committee session, from which you were absent. Was your wish not to take a position on this issue behind your absence from the session? Why didn't you accept to enter the Political Bureau when the offer was made to you, especially since some people consider you the Islamic wing representative in the FLN?

[Labrahimi] I defined my position on the FLN leadership immediately after the outcome of the June 1990 local elections. At the time, I emphasized the need to elect a new leadership as an initial and logical lesson from that pluralistic election experience. The outcome of the legislative elections did not change my opinion. This is why I saw no reason to enter the Political Bureau, considering that we had not learned from the defeats in the municipal and legislative elections.

But now, and in wake of the developments encountered by the country since the resignation of former President Chadli Bendjedid and because the FLN is being subjected to efforts to contain it, I prefer, out of decorum, to express my opinion on the future before my colleagues in the Central Committee. As for my being considered a representative of the Islamic wing in the FLN, I am proud of this view, and I will spare no effort to employ it to contribute other good ideas for rescuing the country.

[Darwish] Algeria is experiencing a severe political and economic crisis, the effects of which have intensified in recent months and weeks. One sharp aspect of this crisis is the confidence lost at various levels, whether between the regime and the ordinary citizen or between the ordinary citizen and politicians. How do you view the possibility of overcoming this compound crisis?

[Labrahimi] It is a truly many-sided crisis. It is a political, economic, cultural, and social crisis. But I consider it to be primarily a moral crisis. One of its prominent causes is our swerving from the spiritual values with which we armed ourselves during the war for liberation and to which the credit goes in our regaining our national independence. It is a political crisis caused by the inability to secure the proper climate that allows the democratic experience to grow naturally in our society, by the disappearance of the ruler's credibility among the ruled, and by a lack of trust in the ruler. It is a social crisis caused by our straying far from the principle of social justice in the distribution of national income. Today, we see the consequences of this deviation with our own eyes in the impoverishment of people with limited income and the aggrandizement of the wealthy.

What is the ideal solution? There may be several solutions. But it is certain that an economic solution alone is not enough. Rather, an economic solution is tied to solving the political crisis and restoring confidence in the hearts of the people. This means accelerating the return of power to the people through free and impartial elections, in the fullest sense of free and impartial. This also means settling the national identity crisis by emerging with a finally detailed consensus on the nation's constants, including religion, language, heritage, social justice, and national unity. This is the solution that I see under the current circumstances. By accelerating a return to the voting polls to earn popular legitimacy, we will abridge the path to ending the crisis.

[Darwish] It is noticed from your words and from your public exhortations that you focus more on the moral, political, and social crisis being experienced by Algeria, whereas the majority of observers believe that the economic crisis is more severe and more urgent and that, to a large degree, it explains the difficult position in which Algeria is floundering today. What is your opinion of the serious economic condition and of its consequences to managing state affairs in the coming years?

[Labrahimi] Can we believe that there is a single Algerian who is not aware of the urgency of this economic condition, if for no other reason than the fact that he suffers from its bitter effects in his daily life?

Because I am extremely worried about the country's economic life, you will find that I give the priority at present to dealing with the political, moral, and social aspects.

I am certain that the best intentions and, technically, the best-prepared and most-successful economic and fiscal programs will have only a limited or marginal impact at best under the current circumstances because of the increased absence of security, the instability of the state institutions, and the citizens' concern for the future.

Are you aware, for example, that the number of fatalities among civilians and the military has greatly exceeded 100 since the start of the current year? Are you aware, for example, that I am now facing the fifth government since October 1988, i.e. a rate of one government every 10 months, and that sensitive sectors, such as the Ministry of Health, for example, have seen eight ministers come and go in the same period, i.e. a rate of one minister every five months?

So how can one talk of economic and social revival under these conditions?

In light of these observations, it seems to me that any serious effort to revive the economy has to go primarily through restored security, through the return of stability to the institutions, and through the creation of a true climate of trust and hope. For these reasons, it has seemed to some observers as if I am neglecting the economic aspect of the crisis and giving priority to dealing with the political and moral aspect, especially because I have ceaselessly advocated a responsible and comprehensive dialogue among all of the influential parties in the political arena. Such a dialogue is the only means capable of developing a political solution that would constitute a starting point toward overcoming the economic crisis and mobilizing the human and material resources with which the country abounds, and these resources are rich, God be thanked.

I am confident that if a political solution to the crisis precedes an economic revival, then this solution is likely to bolster the process of transforming the economy into an economy that promotes individual and collective initiative in order to establish the bases of a real market economy, provided that we avoid any form of brutal liberalism, whose fruits are reaped by the minority business and finance community and whose yield to the broad masses is greater poverty and greater despair and rebellion among the youth.

This issue requires the government to perform its full role as an economic and social officer while seeking tax justice by adopting measures that are fairer socially and more successful economically.

The second condition for a successful market economy that does not create tremors in society is to determine the strategic importance of the public sector in Algeria. One of this sector's distinguishing features is that, by itself, it employs nearly 1.5 million workers, if we disregard the civil service (government jobs). Here too, one must look for all of the practical methods that take the real situation into account, and one must not neglect consulting with the people concerned so that one can rehabilitate industrious work and effort, the feeling of responsibility, reliance on intrinsic resources, and the fair distribution of the mandatory austerity measures that are dictated by the need to confront the foreign debt. This should be done in a manner that reconciles Algeria's respect for its international obligations with eagerness to revive the economic activity.

To sum up, economic revival is tied to the adoption of courageous and fundamental measures relying on popular consensus.

[Darwish] There are those who say that the disappearance of President Boumediene left a vacuum that disturbed the regime balances and caused the accumulation of the problems that have led to the current condition. Do you agree with those who say that overcoming the existing crisis requires another Boumediene?

[Labrahimi] There is no doubt that President Boumediene, may God have mercy upon his soul, loved his country profoundly and wanted dignity and prosperity for its citizens. There is also no doubt that in search of this objective, Boumediene put all his hope in establishing social justice, building a firm economic base, separating wealth from the revolution, and restoring to Arabic its status as a national and official language. There is no doubt that President Boumediene did not exploit power for the benefit of his relatives and friends. It is needless to say that the Boumediene era, like all eras of Algeria's modern history, has its positives and negatives. But its positives are greater than its negatives.

As for comparing 1965 with 1992, you know that history does not repeat itself and that every age has its men. Boumediene's regime helped improve the conditions of the middle class, which numbers 10 million people and represents the majority of the Algerian people. The 1992 Algeria is characterized by the impoverishing of the middle classes, by the rise of a segment of wealthy who have aggrandized themselves legally and illegally, and by a weak tax policy that has not performed its role in maintaining the social balance among 25 million Algerians.

Add to this the difference in the international climate between the two eras. In 1965, the confrontation between the Eastern and Western camps permitted the Third World to play a role that accomplished some gains. Today, the bipolar world has ended, and we have entered the unipolar world and its subsequent confrontation between the North and the South, with the new conditions of this confrontation.

[Darwish] What I mean is: Does Algeria need a strongman?

[Labrahimi] Yes, Algerian needs a strong government behind which the people can rally.

[Darwish] Do you think that normalizing the political situation requires a decision to dissolve the FIS or the formation of a new political party under a new name, as happened with the Algerian People's Party when it turned into the the Movement Supporting Democratic Liberties, prior to the 1954 revolution?

[Labrahimi] It is a foregone conclusion that this is a fundamental matter that concerns the FIS leadership. It is my opinion that dissolving this front by a court order will not abolish the reality of the Islamic tendency in

Algerian society. The name is not important, but what it signifies and means is important. What is important is to acknowledge that the essential normalization of the political situation will certainly have require the political rehabilitation of the FIS in one way or another because the Islamic tendency is embodied fundamentally in this front and this tendency cannot be disregarded, no matter what the considerations.

[Darwish] Do you think that the confrontation between the government and the FIS—a confrontation that has caused the march toward democracy to falter—could have been avoided?

[Labrahimi] Yes, this could have been done in two ways, at least:

First, if the ruling political faction had backed down on the unfair election law that has been drafted on a very narrow, partisan basis that makes it difficult even for its supporters to defend. You recall that when the government fell in June 1991 and a state of emergency was declared, the new government acknowledged this mistake and amended the law in a way that made it less unfair, thus allowing the legislative elections to be held on 21 December 1991 with the participation of most of the parties.

The second condition that led to the confrontation is failure of the ruling faction to respect the steps it had determined unilaterally, such as the scheduled election date; redivision of the electoral districts; the voter lists; supervision of the polling centers; organization and supervision of the election campaign; exhortation of the citizens to exercise their right to vote; the concern expressed repeatedly, daily, and tiresomely for clean and honest elections; and the pledge before national and international public opinion to respect the election outcome, whatever it may be.

So what happened? The results did not tally with the calculations of the ruling political faction, which had wagered in a way that showed how ignorant it was of the reality of a parliament in which two-thirds of the seats would be shared equally between the FIS and the FLN, with the remaining third going to democrats and independent candidates. But things were upturned suddenly. The advocates of cleanliness and honesty donned a different robe, and then the incidents developed.

What was done was a truly irresponsible action that evokes great concern for the country's future. This action has created a deep rift in society, and it has generated a severe crisis that has led the country to the brink of the abyss. Thousands of FIS members have been jailed without trial. The main winners among the political parties, namely the FLN and the FIS, have been dismissed. The election procession has been suspended, and the new situation has been recognized. This political crisis has generated a security crisis that our citizens are paying for daily. It is a foregone conclusion that such a situation helps create a state of violence that paves the way for acts of violence. I strongly condemn acts of violence, regardless of their source, because the state of violence I am talking about has been created by the cancellation of the elections, by the opening of detention camps, and by the suspension of democratic life.

[Darwish] And who, in your opinion, was primarily responsible for the confrontation?

[Labrahimi] I have no evidence to help me offer a specific answer to your question. But it is well known from what is published in the press that the testimony made by top-level officials before the court that tried the FIS leaders has left two questions unanswered, namely:

1. What authority ordered the use of force and surprise attacks at dawn to clear the capital's public squares of the FIS supporters who were staging their sit-ins in those squares with a written agreement with the government?

2. What is the identity of the unidentified vehicles that opened fire on pedestrians to incite them and that then disappeared without any trace?

I should note that the eviction of public squares by force and the use of unidentified vehicles to spread terror among the citizens were the immediate sparks that touched off the fire and detonated the acts of violence that have not stopped. This is why I cannot answer your question until I find an accurate and convincing answer to these two questions.

[Darwish] Observers are unanimous that the sentences issued by the military court against FIS leaders have been light and that they clearly reflect the wish to pacify the conditions in order to embark on national dialogue. What chances, in your opinion, does this dialogue have, and how can it be conducted on the real ground, and with whom?

[Labrahimi] My position on this issue is well known. I declared it less than three weeks after the FIS leaders, headed by Shaykh Abbasi Madani and Shaykh Ali Belhadj, were arrested in June last year. This position is that they are the leaders of a recognized political party and must be released because the expression of a counter opinion is not a crime punishable by the law. I reiterated this position two days before the trial in a statement to AL-JAZA'IR AL-YAWM. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, the investigation I have mentioned concerns those few voices who called for the death sentence, or at least life sentences. But these voices were disappointed, and it seemed to them that what was behind the sentences was a wish to pacify the situation, perhaps as a prelude for dialogue with the FIS and its tendency—a dialogue that these voices reject. It is natural that those most concerned with the dialogue are the three main parties, namely: the Socialist Forces Front, the FLN, and the FIS. But there is no objection to adding other leaders and influential political forces. I wish to note that a fruitful dialogue capable of producing results is a dialogue conducted with these parties' legitimate leaders, not with others. The decision-makers have to learn their lessons from the failure of the previous

endeavors to establish alternative leaderships or to use elements that have broken away from their parties.

[Darwish] So, you mean that the dialogue has to be held with Abbas Madani and Ali Belhadj?

[Labrahimi] Certainly. As for the dialogue objectives, I see three, at least:

1. A consensus on the nation's constants that settles the identity crisis.

2. Entrenching a political pluralism founded on the rotation of power, establishing conditions for the exercise of individual and collective freedom, and making mutual tolerance a mainstay in our political activities.

3. Normalizing the situation by ending the state of emergency and resuming the election march.

I realize that conducting a responsible and organized dialogue is not, as I have already noted, an easy thing to do in wake of the blood that has been spilled and the rancor that has accumulated. The process requires a great degree of courage and self-restraint, but it is possible. To overcome the crisis, there is no alternative to dialogue. The more we accelerate the dialogue process, the shorter we will make the path toward normalization and the more blood and more tears we will spare.

[Darwish] Abdelaziz Belkhadem, speaker of the dissolved People's National Assembly, said in his testimony before the military court in Blida that the FIS proposed that you be appointed prime minister in mid-1991. Were you consulted on this matter? Had you been asked to be prime minister at the time? Would you have agreed, and what kind of government would you have been able to form?

[Labrahimi] When this issue was raised, certain circumstances made it impossible to contact me in order to get my opinion. When I received the news directly after the appointment of the new prime minister (Sid Ahmed Ghozali), I was touched by this confidence, and I felt that this position on the part of the FIS, which was aware of my FLN membership, sought to reflect its attachment, through my person, to the principles and values of the November revolution, in which I continue to believe. Frankly, this means that the FIS makes a distinction between those in the FLN who are loyal to these principles and values and those who have renounced them and have intruded on them.

The fact is that this is one of the reasons that encourages me to again raise the idea of a meeting, especially between the original FLN and the FIS, to serve the country's present and future.

[Darwish] Your signing of a statement demanding release of the FIS leaders a year ago evoked conflicting reactions in political circles. Whereas FIS supporters were pleased with it, it evoked questions and criticism in other circles. What motivated you to sign it?

[Labrahimi] I did not feel that I committed an offense when a year ago I signed, along with a number of national notables, a statement demanding the release of the FIS leaders in their capacity as political detainees. This is a principled position derived from personal experience. During the colonial era, I spent several years in jail as one of tens of thousands of Algerians who were demanding independence. I also had experience with jails because of my opinions in the first three years following independence. From this personal experience, I have developed a political conviction, and when I was in positions of responsibility, I tried to apply this conviction far from the limelight whenever I found it possible to do so. This conviction is embodied in rejecting the incarceration of a citizen, regardless of his political affiliation, just because his opinion differs from that of the ruler.

Frankly, I am surprised by the criticism from the circles to which you have referred. Perhaps this criticism emanates from hasty judgment or from misunderstanding. If the problem concerns the FIS today, who knows that it will not affect the leaders and strugglers of another party or parties tomorrow? If we do not take explicit stances that reject detention and arrest because of opinion, then what meaning would free expression have and how will we be able to move the newborn democratic experiment forward?

[Darwish] Do you think that Algeria's domestic conditions and its regional conditions were ripe for establishment of an alternative regime that embraces the FIS concepts and system?

[Labrahimi] The issue of an alternative regime is one of the issues on which political thinking is focused at present. It is presented to intellectuals, ulema, and jurists in all parts of the Islamic world.

Islam is worship rites and relations. It is church and state. The venerable Koran and the prophet's Sunna have defined the general principles of the state, such as consultation, justice, equality, and liberties, leaving it up to the judgment of Muslims to select the constitutional systems and the legal rules that fit each age. The greater apostle, may God's peace and prayers be upon him, said, "You are better aware of your worldly affairs."

This fundamental point about judgment explains the controversial relationship between opinion and government—between ulema and caliphs—which the Islamic society experienced and which compelled the state to adapt to the age at the various stages.

I have explained this opinion from the angle of ulema, jurists, and intellectuals, who measured men by the yardstick of right and did not measure right by the yardstick of men and who always tried to side with the people, even if this led to confronting the ruler.

It can be said that the Islamic state survived for centuries in different forms and that its most distinguishing features were its promotion of scientific research and of the

use of the intellect to confront life's problems and to maintain social balance. It was also distinguished by its acceptance of religious pluralism as a form of free expression and its adoption of tolerant coexistence through recognition of the citizenship of the non-Muslim. Advocates of the alternative state must take this aspect into consideration, must plow the society to which they belong and plant it with Islamic morals. They must then tend the plant, which is the youth, and must not forget that the greater apostle, may God's peace and prayers be upon him, spent 13 years preaching his call before he built the state. They must also take into account the political particulars of each society and its historical background.

They must not put distance between the new issues that emerge from the people as a result of development, whether political, economic, or social, and Islamic thinking that employs reason and rejects blind emulation. This responsibility of managing the worldly affairs in a manner compatible with the Islamic Shari'ah is a major responsibility, and one must be careful with it so that we will not be disappointed. It is here that the role of judgment and of men of opinion emerges. Our ulema, intellectuals, and jurists must steer clear of emotional enthusiasm and the offhandedness and haste it brings with it and must rely on the reality and consider what is possible, taking into account the international developments, because the Islamic nation does not live on an island. Rather, I fear that the current developments in the international arena will move, by the end of the century, in a direction that opposes our nation's will.

This alone is not enough. The objectives for the creation of the Islamic state in the 21st century must also be defined. The most important of these objectives are, in my opinion, the creation of a society in which justice and freedom abound, in which the manifestations of poverty, destitution, opulence, and violence are absent, and in which the head of state feels that he is the nation's servant and not a despot who allows himself everything. This is how we will rehabilitate the Islamic nation as an influential force that contributes to civilization and masters the means of progress.

[Darwish] You said in your interview with AL-JAZA'IR AL-YAWM that the Army has marched onto the scene to protect the regime three times since 1988. It is said now that the Army wishes to return to the barracks. Do you think that this is possible at a time when certain political factions demand that the Army stay where it is to safeguard public security and balance within the political arena?

[Labrahimi] My position on the People's National Army is based on two principles:

First, I refuse to see the Army as an instrument in the hands of an individual, a faction, or a party, because it is the army of all Algerians and because it is comprised of our comrades and our sons from various circles. In other words, the Army must stay above partisan disputes and must not align itself with this or that tendency in order to preserve its solidarity and the unity of its ranks and to defend the country's supreme interest.

Second, politicians must secure the proper climate and the conditions necessary to establish lasting stability so that the People's National Army can devote itself to its constitutional duties, thus preserving its role of protecting the borders and the Constitution and removing the gap some people have created between the Army and a large section of society, so that harmony and trust can be restored between the people and their army. With bitterness, I notice that the military establishment, which constitutes the backbone for the country's stability, has been targeted now. There is a scheme, and the first link of this scheme was launched by embroiling this establishment in a serious conflict with the FIS. Now, we see the second link going through its phases with our own eyes.

[Darwish] A lot was said about your meeting with the defense minister in wake of the assassination of President Boudiaf, before the void in the Higher State Council was filled, before a chairman was appointed for this council, and before a new prime minister was assigned.

[Labrahimi] The meeting with the defense minister was my first contact with the authority since I left the government in 1988. It was held under circumstances in which resentment had prevailed in wake of the shock caused by assassination of the late Mohamed Boudiaf. We discussed the difficult situation the country had encountered and how to overcome it without creating a rift in society. I do not think that I surprised the defense minister with my ideas because he must have read them in the national press a week before the meeting.

The question of replacing individuals in the country's top authority or of replacing the government is, in my opinion, a subsidiary issue, unless the adopted policy is changed by embracing the approach of calm democratic dialogue instead of resorting to force. I support every effort that seeks to restore confidence to the perplexed souls and to mobilize sincere efforts in order to overcome the problems of development and to confront the burdens of an unknown population growth. With the same conviction, we reject the policy of muzzling and persecuting a certain segment of the population whose offense is that their opinions differ from those of others. I reject seeing our sons, whether in military uniform or civilian attire, fighting each other in the streets and the forests. I believe that one of our simplest duties is to help both sides overcome this crisis into which they have been pushed.

No matter how long I live, I will never tire of urging the government to engage in dialogue with the influential political forces in the arena, which are well-known forces, provided that it is a responsible dialogue organized with the Army's support—a dialogue in which everybody observes the rules of dialogue and adheres to

the rules of democracy and individual liberties and to the dictates of national harmony and coexistence in order to develop a historic accord. We will thus turn over the leaf of the past and open a page of harmony and hope.

I have one more observation to make, namely that whereas talks were was conducted last year in a language prohibited by the dictionary of Algeria's political class, many are defending that language now, and I greatly fear for the outcome of dialogue by middlemen.

[Darwish] Do you have a specific proposal?

[Labrahimi] Algeria is in danger, and I appeal to all factions to seek a truce that would give them the chance to reexamine and to offer mutual concessions in order to develop a compromise that overcomes the crisis. I am confident that whoever works for Algeria's stability also works for the region's stability.

[Darwish] Some civilian notables say that Algerian society is divided into two parts, one modern and one conservative, that dialogue between them is impossible, and that, consequently, a comprehensive national reconciliation is impossible because, as the saying goes, the two parts are like "oil and water" and do not mix. Within this context, how do you view the civil society's present and future role in the Algerian arena?

[Labrahimi] In principle, I reject division of the Algerian society into civilian and noncivilian society. Under occupation, we suffered greatly from these divisions that weaken the nation's unity and expose its ranks to splits. This does not mean that what you have called the civilian society is nonexistent. I suppose that what those who use this designation have in mind is the presence of a social faction that adopts certain issues, such as adherence to democracy, pluralism, pride in the national identity, the demand for equality between men and women, openness to the outside world, and the adoption of Islam as a religion that promotes forward movement, not inactivity.

I wish to say that these demands are not monopolized by one certain faction but are shared by all factions of Algerian society and constitute one of their main concerns. The difference between one faction and another lies, in my estimate, in the priority given to these demands and in agreement on the details. There are those who favor one aspect of these demands to another or those who give this aspect a meaning that differs from that given by others. This difference has caused the arena to be swarmed by such contrasting and conflicting ideas and views that one almost despairs of the possibility of reconciling them. As you have already noted in your question, some people have gone as far as asserting that a national reconciliation is impossible and that dialogue is futile.

Even though I realize that dialogue is not easy and that national reconciliation requires that great efforts be made and that one rise above rancor, especially in light of the bloodshed, I still say that there is no alternative to dialogue, whether sooner or later. There is no alternative to a dialogue that takes into account the main concerns of all of society's lively factions, without exception and without prejudice, and that establishes moral controls for settling intellectual and political disputes.

I reject the creation of a social division whose primary victim will be this or that segment. Moreover, I am one of those who believe that dialogue is essential for all of society's segments and that it is a wager we are destined to make and win, so that society, with all its citizens and all its factions, can proceed to confront the economic challenge and build a modern state. But beware, advocates of modernization should not understand that their call means breaking away from our Islamic Arab roots. Modernization and genuineness go, in my opinion, hand in hand in developing society. Inasmuch as we believe in an open modern state, we believe that this state's survival is tied to its loyalty to its Islamic Arab roots.

So I support a modernization that means tying the modern to the original. I am opposed to modernization if it will be used as a cover to pass a plan of Westernization imposed by force on the Algerian people.

[Darwish] Do you agree with the opinions that are critical of the 1989 Constitution? Do you think that it was drafted hastily, and do you hold it responsible for the failure to apply the democratic chain of steps that would transform the country into a true pluralistic system?

[Labrahimi] It is true that the 1989 Constitution was drafted hastily, in less than three months in response to narrow, immediate objectives, under pressure from developments, and at a time when the government had weakened. I believe that the people's aspiration to exercise democracy and free expression through party pluralism was the main reason behind their voting for this Constitution. I may not be wrong if I said that broad segments of the people would not have voted for this document with the same enthusiasm if Article 40, which establishes political pluralism, had been omitted from it.

As for irregularity of the democratic process, it has nothing to do, in my opinion, with the Constitution, which determines the general principles. Political application falls on the government's shoulders.

[Darwish] Some people demand amendment of the Constitution. Do you see a necessity for such amendment, and what is the amendment you deem to be appropriate?

[Labrahimi] Whatever the demands of those advocating amendment of the Constitution, and some aspects of these demands are acceptable, we must observe two principles: First, amendments must be made in accordance with the procedures stipulated by the Constitution and in enactment of a choice made by the influential political forces in the implementation of a historic accord, which results, as I have already noted, from an organized and responsible national dialogue. Second, the proposed amendments must under no circumstance

touch the nation's constants, unless to reassert them further. Personally, I see no benefit in opening a new front under the current circumstances. Meanwhile, I acknowledge that the issue has been raised and must be tackled one day. There are more immediate and urgent priorities now, such as settling the identity issue and the legitimacy of the government. This is an issue on which one cannot keep silent in a pluralistic democratic system. There is the economic crisis, and there is the issue of removing the Army from partisan conflicts and maintaining it as a harmonious and united establishment.

I wish to add that the minority must not consider itself the custodian of the majority. Democracy is an indivisible whole, and it is unreasonable to accept one part of democracy and to reject the other.

[Darwish] The 1976 National Charter, to whose drafting and amendment you contributed, as you did in 1985, constituted the common ground on which all stood. But since 1989, the National Charter has lost its authority. Do you think that it is necessary to restore it or to draft a new Charter that defines Algeria's constants?

[Labrahimi] Human creations, regardless of how precise and genius, are subject to becoming outdated if they fail to keep up with developments, and they are destined to disappear if they are not in harmony with popular aspirations. I believe that the revolutionary charters throughout the various phases contain principles that are still appropriate, such as the principle of social justice and equality between men and women. They also contain other principles that have become outdated, such as the socialist development system, keeping in mind that I have never believed in socialism as an atheistic ideology, but only as a means to achieve social justice.

We can embrace whatever is good in these charters and add to it, by way of a responsible and organized dialogue between the influential forces in the arena, whatever has developed since 1988 with regard to political pluralism and democracy. Or we may need to reassert adherence to the nation's constants: Islam, the Arabic language, the Berber legacy, social justice, and national unity.

[Darwish] And democracy?

[Labrahimi] Yes, and democracy as a new gain.

[Darwish] The National Grouping idea has been tied to the name of the late President Mohamed Boudiaf. Do you think that the idea, as projected by the late Boudiaf, was buried with him, or is it possible that it will survive after him, as some parties advocate?

[Labrahimi] The idea is still alive, and there is no doubt that it has benefited from the historical weight and long struggle of the late Mohamed Boudiaf. It seems to me that the National Grouping's chances of succeeding as a new force, added to the other political forces that have preceded the grouping, are tied to how well the citizens respond to the grouping. In any case, the experiment is still taking its initial steps, and it is wise to wait before we judge it.

[Darwish] The cultural issue occupies an important and sensitive place in the political arena between the supporters of full Arabization on the one hand and the supporters of Franconianism and those entrenched in it on the other hand. How do you think that this conflict will be settled in the future?

[Labrahimi] It is well known that Algeria lived under the umbrella of total cultural harmony for 14 centuries and that the cultural issue was never raised then as it has been raised now, namely as an element of partition and division. Prior to the French occupation in 1830, our ancestors spoke several dialects in their homes. When the issue concerned cultural contribution, Arabic became the language of expression. Attachment to this language was coupled with such pride in belonging to Islam that no distinction was made between Arabism and Islam. Our ancestors loved Arabic because it is first and foremost the language with which the venerable Koran was revealed to the Arab prophet.

The most damaging steps taken by colonialism after it occupied our country was to pursue Arabic and to prevent its teaching, so as to make it easy to fuse an Algerian society deprived of its mainstays and its soul with the intruding Western entity. We can say that these endeavors were not totally successful, because they aroused a national reaction that was embodied in a popular resistance, which was crowned with the establishment of free Koran education schools by the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema. Those schools were financed by donations from the people, and they were persecuted by the colonialist forces.

When Algeria regained its independence, it was natural that Arabic would regain its position as an instrument of strengthening the national unity and as a means of contributing to the international civilization. The conflict has never been between Arabic and the local dialects but between Arabic and French.

As for the conflict you have mentioned between supporters of Arabization and supporters of the so-called Franconianism, it will vanish when a national consensus is developed on the nation's constants. In any case, this conflict should not divert Algerians from the true battle, namely the battle to fight backwardness and to catch up with the bandwagon of the advanced countries.

My position on our Berber legacy has not changed since independence. It must be researched and examined as a means of expression and as a culture that has to be developed because it is a vital part of our national identity and because it is not at all in conflict with the Arab and Islamic dimensions.

Adherence to Arabic and to the Berber legacy does not mean rejecting foreign languages. Rather, we must

encourage the learning of these languages as essential windows to science and technology.

[Darwish] A few days ago, the government issued a decree suspending the publication of three private dailies, namely the Arabic-language AL-JAZA'IR AL-YAWM and the French-language LE MATIN and LA NATION. What is your comment on this decision?

[Labrahimi] It is no secret to you that for nearly a year, the national press has been subjected to harassment in the form of preventing the publication of some papers, impounding some editions, arresting some journalists, and interrogating other journalists from time to time. The decision to suspend three dailies at once falls undoubtedly within this framework, thus arousing concern for the future of free expression as a mainstay of democracy.

It is true that some journalists at times do not observe the simplest rules and ethics of the profession. This could be due to lack of experience and to the fact that the independent press is a newborn press. But regardless of the validity of the justifications on which the suspending decree relies, it seems to me that if we are in a state that wants to be a strong state by law then it is extremely important in these cases to observe the law and to leave it up to the courts to determine the issue, in accordance with well-known procedures and in a manner that guarantees respect for the rights of every party concerned.

Letting this principle be the judge is sure to guarantee the constitutional rights concerning individual liberties and to strengthen the democratic practice.

[Darwish] A final question: For some time, many people have believed that the qualities for the right candidate for the position of president of the Republic are found in Dr. Ahmad Talib Labrahimi, in whose personality meet elements that seem contradictory, such as modern thinking and religious thinking, historical lineage, mastery of Arabic and French at a high literary level, and even mastery of the Berber culture, considering that you wrote on this issue a few years ago. What is your opinion?

[Labrahimi] Even though I appreciate the people you have mentioned and feel proud of their opinions, permit me not to comment on this question. I will content myself with saying that the Algerian people have always proved that they have a high degree of awareness and have the political sense to guide them soundly when they are given the opportunity to elect their president freely.

My sole aspiration is to see Algeria regain its stability and strength. To accomplish this objective, I believe not in the miracle man but in a leadership that emanates from the people's will, unites their ranks, elevates them, assures them of their livelihood and their security, and leads them to the modern age under the umbrella of the nation's constants—"and who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to God, works righteousness, and says 'I am of those who bow in Islam?'" [Koran 41:33]

[Box, p 7]

Ahmad Talib Labrahimi

- Born on 5 January 1932.
- Son of Shaykh Mohamed Bechir Labrahimi, head of the Association of Muslim Algerian Ulema.
- Doctor of medicine.
- Head of the General Federation of Muslim Algerian Students, 1955-56, and member of the Liberation Front Union in France, 1956-57.
- Detained in French jails from 1957-62 in his capacity as an Algerian liberation struggler.
- Jailed under Ben Bella's administration for seven months for his opposition to Ben Bella's policies.
- Minister of national education from 1965-70.
- Minister of education and culture from 1970-77.
- Minister and adviser to the president of the Republic from 1977-82.
- Founder of the Accountability Council.
- Political Bureau member and foreign minister from 1982-88.
- FLN Central Committee member since November 1988.
- Member of the National Council of Strugglers since November 1990.

Pattern of Escalating Violence Traced

92AF1228B Algiers ALGERIE ACTUALITE in French 13-19 Aug 92 pp 7-8

[Article by Abdelkrim Debbih: "Guns Everywhere"—first paragraph is ALGERIE ACTUALITE introduction]

[Text] Several months ago the MIA (Armed Islamic Movement) created quite a stir. It issued a veritable declaration of war, threatening to execute no less than a thousand police and security force agents! The same week General Khaled Nezzar declared "the war will be implacable." Since then, the death count in Algeria has risen steadily. Herewith a preliminary assessment.

With mass agitation subsiding in wake of the ban on the FIS [Islamic Salvation Front] and thousands of Front sympathizers deported to camps in the south, political dissent is taking on a more radical and sometimes violent form. Terrorism, and armed actions in general, are now a new reality in the political landscape. Even before the sudden cancellation of legislative elections, some Islamic groups were already attracted to the idea of military operations. The Bouyali episode gave proof, if any were needed, that at least one admittedly minority wing of the Islamist Movement had already yielded to the lure of direct action. Doubtless the experiences of the war of liberation and the war in Afghanistan also had some impact. Paradoxically, however, the relative calm that prevailed in the aftermath of October—with the promise of a political opening and respect for pluralism,

thus respect for Islamism too—was exploited to strategically reinforce the armed struggle for change: As Ali Benhadj said, "The Islamic republic cannot come without shocks."

Increased Dangers

The regime's juridical and political recognition of the FIS and the latter's spectacular rise—due mainly to excessive media attention—served first of all to widen its recruitment base, extend its influence and facilitate the consolidation of organizational networks over a large part of the national territory; second, through political pressure, to mobilize international support for Algerian Islamism and, by encouraging the efforts by some in the regime to restore the latter's popular legitimacy, to bring about the release of certain military leaders—Bouyali's lieutenants—who had been sentenced to very harsh prison terms for acts committed prior to October 1988. Hundreds of Algerians made the pilgrimage from Algiers to Peshawar and back. Rhetoric became increasingly violent, and the formation of a large, nationwide logistic network supported by Front-occupied communities (the FIS enthusiastically helped itself to commune and wilaya resources, ORSEC [Emergency Preparedness] plans, local and external financing) provided the Islamist Movement—including the FIS, by then a virtual state within the state—the means to pursue a significant military strategy. "The partisans of armed action," Abassi Madani would say, "may not be with the FIS, but they are doing God's work." Later, while the FIS was pursuing power via the ballot box, he and Ali Benhadj would co-sign a draft directive urging their followers to armed general insurrection. The Gulf war, finally, gave supporters of armed action an opportunity to further test the will of a government in total disarray by demanding authorization to open military training camps "to defend the nation in the hour of danger!" The army, jealous of its prerogatives and sensing peril and subterfuge, rejected any accommodation. Thus began that episode of destabilization that led to the armed strike of June 1991 with all its unanswered questions.

Ballots, Bullets

In June 1991, for the first time since October 1988, shots were fired against military, gendarmerie and police vehicles, and—another first—automatic weapons were employed. Finally there was the reappearance of those mysterious unmarked vehicles that disappeared into the countryside after opening fire on their victims. The first gendarmes were gunned down in May Day Place, in the heart of Algiers. But these first actions, despite the confusion that reigned during the dramatic days of June, were nonetheless marginal. The only more or less sophisticated weapon used by armed groups up to that time was the Mat-49 of French manufacture, probably recovered from small caches dating from the war of liberation. Mustapha Bouyali used a weapon of similar type, the same kind he had used while an officer in the ALN [National Liberation Army] during the war of liberation. Despite their logistic support and the political freedom of movement purchased by the numerical strength of the mostly working-class Islamist Movement, gaining access to weapons stockpiles was not—and still is not—as easy as it might have seemed. The most recent attack against a gendarmerie vehicle, in the Hammam-Melouane region, was perpetrated using a crude, home-made weapon: a kind of rocket launcher made up of a round metal pipe welded to a firing mechanism and mounted on two auto engine connecting rods.

Short on arms and munitions, the partisans of armed confrontation have maintained a certain level of destabilizing tension by mounting attacks against institutions representing the authority of the state, such as the Blida tribunal or ENTV, and assassinating police officers. But their principal military objective is still to capture as much desperately needed military materiel as they can. To date there are no indications of an external supply line. For the moment, conjectures about the existence of networks providing weapons are pure fantasy, dispensed for political aims. Quite obviously, such external support might be provided at some juncture for purposes of manipulation, but up to now there is no evidence it is happening, despite the upsurge of attacks since May. All the major attacks—like those on Beni-Mered, Guemmar and the Algiers admiralty—as well as the attacks against isolated police and gendarmes have been for the purpose of capturing arms. Until last January, the police and gendarmerie forces in the field seemed clearly held back by political constraints.

From June 1990, when the FIS won control of more than 800 communities in Algeria's local elections, until June 1991, the scheduled date for legislative elections, it was evident that a faction within the government was exploiting the deteriorating situation, whipping up public fears of the Islamist threat that would be worth their weight in gold in the restructuring of the political landscape and the eventual formation of a new presidential majority. The idea that the regime was "lax" gained a fair amount of currency. The gendarmes and the DGSN [Directorate General of National Security] were on the defensive, their reputations for effectiveness considerably tarnished by the time the real showdown began. With Chadli's departure and the declaration of a state of emergency, the political authorities—brandishing a new, tougher policy that was nonetheless just as dubious as the "soft" approach—took steps that further escalated the confrontation. Deaths, many deaths, have been counted in both camps. It is said that 120 members of the security forces have been killed. The gendarmerie have carried out some thirty operations, in which a total of 13 gendarmes and 33 terrorists have died. Contrary to what one might gather from the phony media debate on "eradication" and "the security approach"—words without any real political meaning in a society profoundly traumatized by the illegitimate exercise of power since 1962—Algerians who have opted for terrorism have acquired an autonomy of (bad) thought and (bad) action that enables them to defy the state without much further reliance on an underlying

organizational structure. The best police in the world are powerless against autonomous terrorists.

Cheap Kills

And that is the whole problem. Nowadays anyone can kill anyone else. The fellow who bombed ENTV is a peaceful worker who looks like any other John Doe. In Bab-El-Oued, a 26-year-old man can get 4,000 Algerian dinars towards his marriage trousseau for killing a policeman. But the terrorist is not just the person who wields a gun. He is the person who suddenly becomes a nihilist. He might run a traffic light or destroy a telephone exchange. He might stab the girl next door or smash in his niece's skull for no apparent reason, set fire to a gas station, assassinate a president whom he is paid to protect, or set a bomb in a police station or hospital. He feels himself a stranger to everything that surrounds him. He lives in an environment of violence, the subtle violence that is exuded, paradoxically, by the very institutions responsible for maintaining the equilibrium necessary for social harmony: the state, the judicial system, the schools, the mosques, the press.... The terrorist may be the fellow who joins the underground, but equally he may be someone who writes an article in an independent or government-controlled newspaper trashing the reputation of another Algerian—with total impunity. Terrorism is a culture that quite naturally dictates a violent and independent mind-set, freed from any moral, legal or social constraints. What good can a counterterrorism brigade do? None. Except to take an eye for an eye in reprisal, and that serves only to make violence more widespread and commonplace in the society. Thus the strategy of violence is at a critical turning point which—however it turns out—will be decisive and will sooner or later force a political solution. Meanwhile, what is happening on the ground? The assassination of Boudiaf was preceded by a wave of terrorist attacks and sabotage, on a scale unprecedented in our country and with some novel features: the simultaneous timing of assassinations and armed actions in various parts of the country. Terrorists are reported simultaneously in Sidi Bel-Abbes, Lakhdaria, El-Oued, and Djemila, in the Setif region, and the vicinity of Algiers. Some of the targets for attack are being chosen with increasing precision, both in Algiers and in the interior. At the same time as indiscriminate assaults continue against ordinary lone policemen (to appropriate their weapons for use in still other attacks), officers involved in anti-terrorist operations are specifically targeted—like the gendarme group captain in Lakhdaria who rid the "underground" of 18 deserters from Zbarbar in less than 48 hours. In the Zbarbar affair, in the Lakhdaria region, the "underground" group consisted of parachutists (including a corporal) whose military training set them apart from "civilian" terrorists.

Except, perhaps, for the notorious 22-point directive that Abassi and Ali Benhadj planned to send out to their followers, and improved coordination of operations and strategy, there is no trace of a national command behind the terrorist groups. Inasmuch as no tract or manifesto has surfaced to clarify the demands of the terrorist groups, the general public perhaps assumes the perpetrators are avenging themselves for the arrested Islamists and protesting cancellation of the elections. There is nothing to prove the existence of a unified command. Owing in part to mistrust and the need for secrecy, no group has agreed to take orders from any other. Indeed, there is talk of a total break between Chebouti and Miliani, who was captured while waiting for Chebouti to visit him. Acting with complete autonomy and following a policy of total compartmentalization, they are now trying to involve networks of supporters and sympathizers in actions that can get the maximum number of people in trouble with the law and thus force them into the "diehard" camp. Apart from known leaders, all the most recently arrested terrorists admitted being paid before they went into action. The resort to sabotage of power lines and communications networks, while in part an effort to expand recruitment and get as many people as possible irrevocably committed, is primarily explained by two factors: First, most of the groups have to a very large extent been neutralized; second, with the failure of the retreat to the "bush" we are now seeing a return to the cities, especially to the capital, where nearly all the attacks are perpetrated. Last spring, when they were being hunted down in the big cities, armed groups took to the bush, where they thought they would be safer and impossible to find without the deployment of more substantial human and material resources. The armed groups also thought they could reoccupy the guerrilla pillboxes of the ALN. But they failed to take into account the ability of the gendarmes to pre-empt their strategy by blowing up all the trenches the mujahidin had left behind. Cut off from a peasantry that no longer exists (like the Latin American "focos" [central points]), the cells have all been neutralized. The 20-man Mitidja group was totally annihilated. Of the group in the forest of Zengla in Sidi Bel-Abbes, only the leader, Aissaoui, remains. The Djemila group headed by Abu Seif (Bourahli Yazid), Mansouri Miliani's deputy, has been eliminated; four of its members are reportedly still in hiding. There may still be one important group in the Khemis El-Khechna region, led by the notorious Chebouti, who contrary to the information made public, has never been arrested. Indeed, he will doubtless soon carry out some spectacular operation to prove he is still at liberty. In Algiers, a few autonomous armed groups are still operating, unconcerned by all the phony debates agitating the national political scene these days.

The real question is whether these activist minorities, isolated and with no central command, can provoke repression so severe that a large part of the Algerian population will fall into their camp. There is nothing to indicate such a qualitative escalation of opposition is in the cards, even if a few armed men continue on their present course because they have run out of other options. They will follow their suicidal path to its inevitable conclusion.

The very simplistic political debates being waged nowadays pit the advocates of the antiterrorism struggle

against the supporters of "national reconciliation"—as if "reconciliation" were intended to embrace the killers, whose aim is nothing but the further destabilization of a state they already view as quite fragile in hopes of posing as the force that has brought the change Algerians want. At the same time, though, the logic of terrorism obeys other considerations and factors that have nothing to do with recent changes in the political landscape. It is a suicidal logic, symptomatic of an enormous lack of legitimacy, a lack that police-state reactions only exacerbate. The resort to arms is a tragedy, to be sure, but all too commonplace in the annals of history.

Members of Armed Group Identified

92AF1271B Algiers EL WATAN in French 23 Aug 92 p 3

[Article: "The Struggle Against Terrorism: a Turning Point"; first paragraph is EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] According to a Ministry of the Interior communique made public on 22 August, the struggle against terrorism has passed an important turning point. Among the 10 terrorists who have been killed, some of them, according to the authorities, are well-known for the bloody acts, which they have carried out over the past several months. They reportedly were implicated in all of the large-scale terrorist acts, particularly in the killings in the Casbah and in Boudouaou.

The communique stated: "The majority of the terrorists were known in judicial police records for often being in trouble with the courts (various acts of larceny, receiving stolen goods, deliberately causing bodily harm to other persons, public drunkenness, and deportation from foreign countries)."

The communique also pointed out that the participation of these persons in the murder of members of the security forces, in holdups, and in various armed attacks has also been established. The communique adds that intelligence work led to the location of the band in Baba Hassen. However, their refusal to surrender and their opening fire on the security forces cost the lives of their members. The communique continued: "Unfortunately, the exchange of fire with the criminals led to the accidental death of a 13-year-old young girl, while her grandfather and her sister were slightly wounded. By misfortune these victims were present in a place toward which some of the individuals being sought had run in the course of their flight."

Numerous crimes against members of the security forces were committed by members of this band of criminals, who were all killed.

We may recall that the National Gendarmerie reported a few days ago that the most important of the terrorist groups is the one operating in the central part of the country (Algiers and Mitdja). This group was reportedly behind almost all of the crimes committed against members of the security forces.

The gendarmerie also announced that this group had been largely broken up and that there remained about 20 activists, "who have a great deal of blood on their hands but who have no chance of surviving very long."

Everything leads one to believe that the 10 activists shot down in Baba Hassen were part of this terrorist group from the central part of Algeria. The same source also reported that the terrorist groups in Djemila and Sidi Bel-Abbes had been about 80 percent broken up.

With the operation in Baba Hassen, a serious blow has been dealt to terrorism.

The Identity of Members of the Group

The communique of the Ministry Delegate of Public Security revealed the identity of the members of the group and the actions for which they had been sought.

Bentebiche Djemaa, also known as "Toufik," 29 years old, was responsible for the murders of Madani Mohamed in the casbah of Algiers in February; two soldiers from Haras-El-Djoumhouri in Dar El-Beida in March; the commander and the second lieutenant of the DRS [Regional Security Directorate] during the operation at Telemly in May; and of Gendarme Hamrouche Mourad on 9 August in Saoula. He was one of those responsible for the murder of Laurent Xavier Bernard, a French citizen, in March, near the tunnel of Oued Ouchaieh, and police officer Djerboub Salah, also known as "Friend Salah," in Sidi Moussa in April.

Furthermore, he was implicated with Drif Kamel, also known as "Kamel Brimer" (27 years old); Mekideche Azzeddine, also known as "Zourourou Said" (27 years old); and Douakh Mohamed (21 years old) in the murder of six police officers in the Rue Bouzrine in the casbah in February.

Bentebiche Djemaa was also involved with Mokhtar, also known as "Abdenasser" (26 years old), in the murder of three police officers at the guard post at Rais-Hamidou cemetery in Algiers in June. He also participated, with Drif Kamel; Fortas Mokhtar; Meznane Abdelmoumene; also known as "Moumene" (27 years old); and Silemlyes, also known as "Boubegra," also known as "Djouzi" (28 years old); in the murder of five other police officers of the security service of the Wilaya of Boumerdes on 9 August 1992 at the crossroads leading to Boudouaou El-Bahri.

Furthermore, Bentebiche Djemaa took part in attacks against a barricade manned by members of the Gendarmerie Nationale and the ANP [People's National Army] at Sidi Moussa in January. Together with Douakh, Mekideche, and Drif, he was involved in the attack on the urban security post of Debbih Cherif in Algiers in February and was responsible for the murder of Mokri Djamel, a principal police investigator, from the same urban security post.

In addition, Bentebiche participated with Mekideche and Douakh in the attack on a National Gendarmerie patrol in Oued Djer (wilaya of Oued El Alleug).

Bentebiche and Fortas were also reponsible for the holdup of the PMU [Urban Modernization Program] agency in Hussein-Dey and the CNEP [Algerian National Savings and Insurance Bank] agency in Cheraga. They also attacked an armored car containing funds from the postal and telegraphic service in Ouled Yaich (wilaya of Blida). Bentebiche took part in the attack on an armored car containing funds belonging to the ENERIC [National Enterprise for the Study and Establishment of Commercial Infrastructures] office in Bouzareah.

Meznane and Drif took part in the murder of a gendarme on 9 August in Saoula, although the actual murderer was Bentebiche.

Meznane was responsible for the murder of police officer Hamdani Sid Ahmed in May in Belcourt, together with Farid Lyazid (shot down in Annassers) and Settah Mohamed, as well as Acid Kamel, also known as "Moudjahed," who was shot down in Belcourt. He was also the murderer of an ANP officer killed in "La Citadelle" restaurant in March.

For his part Fortas was the murderer of public security agent Benhamou Seddik in April in Kouba.

Drif was responsible for the attempted murder of Benmeziane Smail, a motorcyclist, in Larbas, in April.

Zagoub Riadh (28 years old), a second lieutenant of the ANP and a deserter from the barracks of the CFTI (Technical Training and Instruction Center) at Tenes, took away with him a Kalashnikov rifle and joined the terrorist group.

Attalah Ferhid, also known as "El Hadj Farid," 42 years old, was the owner of the villa in Baba-Hassen where the terrorists who were shot by the security forces had been hiding.

Finally, Abdelouahab d'Appreval (not otherwise identified) was the liaison and intelligence agent who participated in all of the actions carried out by the terrorist group.

Security in Public Places Tightened

92AF1274A Algiers EL WATAN in French 30 Aug 92 p 2

[Article by F. Metaoui: "Security in Public Places Tightened"—first paragraph is EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] The horrible attack at Houari Boumediene airport suggests all public places are now potential targets for terrorists. What is the situation on the ground?

A small crowd gathers around the Ben-Aknoun bus stop. The idea of a terrorist attack here gives no one pause. "You must be joking. A bomb, here? All I want is to take my bus. I'm already very late," said one young lady.

A sentiment not shared at the TVC [Central Passenger Transport] terminal, where security measures have been taken. In front of the main entrance to the station hall, six security agents (employees of the company) wearing badges and seated behind tables painstakingly check each passenger. All "cabas" [shopping bags], sachets, and bags are searched. Two other agents tell passengers to keep moving and not to stand near the bus doors, which seems to irk some people.

At the Tafoura station, where buses are taken to various destinations, mainly to the wilayas of Tipaza and Boumerdes, government security types move around from bus stop to bus stop.

At the Agha railroad terminal, at 1350, two trains arrive—one from Blida, the other from Thenia. Passengers, anxious to get a comfortable seat, move along faster after buying their ticket. Their rush is quickly stopped by three policemen who systematically frisk everyone. Children, women, and oldsters are searched. Some of them balk, but "orders are orders. There's no choice about it," the policemen respond. Not appreciating the clarification, one middle-aged woman retorts: "You think I am capable of planting a bomb, when I tremble at the sound of an ambulance siren?" The policeman maintains a stony silence before that remark.

At the main Algiers post office, security is provided by employees of Posts and Telecommunications. Ordinarily, two doors are open, but only one is in use now. An eagle-eyed young man accosts everyone who enters. "We let no one in unless searched," he informs us.

The same atmosphere prevails at the postal check center [CCP]: Security is strict. These premises are frequented by citizens coming to withdraw money from their CCP accounts. But security seems not to be a concern at the Meissonier postal agency. People are allowed to enter and leave without being hassled. Hence the question: Are smaller agencies not affected by the stepped-up security?

In certain public leisure areas, such as cinema halls, management does not seem unduly alarmed about the possibility of terrorist actions.

Next to the "Afrique" cinema, an enticing poster draws in the young people. Apparently a daring film is to be shown. Despite the crush at the ticket window, the cinemagoers are allowed in without being searched.

Air-Algeria Office Attacked

LD2409150392 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic 1400 GMT 24 Sep 92

[Text] The Air-Algerie office in Sidi Bel Abbes was attacked by unknown individuals last evening. The governorate's security service said the aggressors burned several documents in the office. The security service has started an investigation into the matter.

Security Concerns Following Airport Attack

Gaps in Security Noted

92AF1289A Algiers EL WATAN in French 2 Sep 92 p 3

[Article by Abderrahmane Hayane: "Public Areas: Security in Question"]

[Text] The horrible attack on the Algiers international airport clearly revealed huge gaps in the area of protecting public buildings and areas in Algeria. Having been confronted for the first time in its existence with that most extreme stage of violence, blind terrorism, a frightened country discovers that it has neither the logistics nor the technology (since the subject really has one) nor the qualified staff nor the desirable experience to cope with this type of situation.

In defense of the security services, it is true that among the most developed countries, some, after having counted hundreds of victims, have spent years providing themselves with enough men and systems.

Despite this, the police forces of the world admit that protective techniques are not always infallible and can absolutely not be so.

Indeed, the more the number of victims decreases, the more the security services are pleased with their work. Complete eradication of the terrorist phenomenon is impossible and what is at question is sharply cutting down its actions. Thus in those countries prevention remains the major element in the struggle against terrorism. Nothing is left to chance in public areas and buildings.

Airports do not escape protective systems. Faced with air piracy and attacks on airports, some countries have developed real security techniques.

Some airports, such as Orly in Paris, Heathrow in London, or Frankfurt's, can be evacuated in several minutes with the slightest warning, regardless of the number of people present!

In addition, the memory of deadly attacks has had the salutary effect of promoting a deep sense of civic duty among people.

No one balks at observing security requirements and everyone takes part in obeying them.

For their part, Algerians, who for a long time faced "targeted" terrorism, which only affected security force agents whose murders became more and more of an everyday occurrence, are discovering to their horror that there is neither a limit nor a complacency to terrorism.

Blind urban terrorism, which is a new, modern fact of life, implies a new approach with regard to security of property and persons. Several days before the catastrophe, there had been several bomb alerts at the Algiers airport! And on the very day of the catastrophe.

Other public buildings, such as the wilaya's headquarters or the Central Post Office, had to cope with these alerts that were often not taken seriously. Algeria can not allow herself to neglect this state of affairs.

Genuine prevention must be put in place and consciousness raising campaigns be undertaken with the people. The training of public order agents as well as the specialization of certain units is more than desirable.

"Why weren't the steps being taken today at the Algiers airport taken earlier, given the country's situation? And why isn't the same thing being done in train and bus stations and at ports?" we are asked.

In the two or three days following the attack, citizens could observe the tightening up in access conditions in some buildings. But that did not last very long.

Whether it be in hospitals or at the wilaya, at the train station, the port or in hotels, people move about, enter and leave, often carrying bundles, and without any checks being carried out. We observed this ourselves as we walked through the capital.

It is thus evident that an entire security "culture" must be learned by everyone, and this must happen quickly, because time in running out on us.

Airport Security

92AF1289B Algiers EL WATAN in French 2 Sep 92 p 3

[Article by Kamel Benelkadi: "Algiers Airport: the Rebuilding Continues"]

[Excerpts] In the wake of the terrible tragedy, the rebuilding of the Houari Boumediene Airport continues at a brisk pace. According to Mr. Rahni, the director general of the EGSA [expansion not given], the first phase, which basically consisted of clearing the central terminal of the debris caused by the explosion of the bomb, has been completed. "We began the work on our own. No time was to be lost because each day counts.... Now we have moved to another phase, reconstruction."

To move quickly and win the speed battle, there were working meetings between the Transport Ministry and the main players concerned (EGSA, ENNA [expansion not given], and businesses). Also involved is the selection of the major nationalized industries that have demonstrated their flexibility in decisionmaking and taking action.

"The bureaucracy must be put aside. We have found it more sensible to go to solid businesses that have fewer management problems. We are aiming at two criteria in our selection: speed and efficiency," Mr. Rahni said. [passage omitted]

The objective is a return to a normal situation and an improvement in passenger security.

The tragedy that occurred last Wednesday gave new urgency to a project that germinated several months ago

in people's minds: remodeling the airport's service areas. In the future, shops and other service areas will be located outside the central terminal. Only passengers with "o.k. tickets" will be able to gain access there after their luggage has been inspected. No exceptions will be permitted, particularly at this time. The goal of these drastic measures is to see to it that citizens do not have to pay the price for a lapse of oversight (which up until then had been carried out sporadically), which could result in other catastrophes.

Mr. Rahni insisted repeatedly on the need to make rapid progress with the work even if the country is experiencing a difficult period. As the head of a company (EGSA), which he has been running for four months, he remains determined to deal with difficulties and successfully complete his mission.

Security measures will certainly be extended to other airports soon.

We remind readers that the EGSA sees to the upkeep of 17 airports. Its central service headquarters has a staff of 1,200 concentrated at "Houari Boumediene."

Government Initiates Aid for 'Terrorist' Victims

92AF1284B Algiers EL WATAN in French 9 Sep 92 p 2

[Text] The government has approved the decisions to grant compensation for injuries and property damage caused by terrorist acts.

To implement them, the minister-delegate to the Treasury has sent a circular to all the agencies concerned, establishing the practical measures involved in carrying out the decisions.

The Algerian Insurance Company (SAA) has been named to see the compensation cases to conclusion.

The measures are effective on 7 September 1992. Victims or eligible parties should apply to the special compensation fund at the SAA's headquarters, located at 5 Boulevard Che Guevara in Algiers.

Two events in particular have made such measures necessary: the airport attack and the operation in Khazrouna (Blida).

In the latter case, the government took action even before the latest decisions were finalized.

Mr. Farouk Tebbal, minister of housing, traveled to the wilayah of Blida yesterday where he told the victimized families of the suburb of Khazrouna that they could count on the government's "complete solidarity." He also took stock of the measures taken to help them.

Before visiting the site where an apartment building was damaged in the serious events of last week, the housing minister met with local authorities, representatives of governmental agencies, and public organizations active in the housing sector. The meeting, which took place at the wilayah offices, was also attended by three representatives of the victimized families.

On Monday, the wali [governor] formed an ad hoc committee made up of representatives of the local authorities, social affairs departments, and victimized families. Its task is to monitor the activities authorized by the decisions. A detailed damage assessment made by Structural Engineering Control (CTC) has found, according to one of its representatives, that "there is no major structural damage, although some rehabilitative work, thought to be minor, is necessary." On the basis of that assessment, the minister of housing has instructed the building's manager, the OPGI [expansion not given], to proceed with rehabilitating the apartment house, and has asked the Public Construction Company (ESCB) to "begin work immediately."

The ESCB's general manager pledged "to see to it that his crews are able to deliver rehabilitated housing units within the next 15 to 20 days."

Some 10 civil servants of the wilayah have volunteered, "out of solidarity," to make apartments that they were about to occupy available to the families whose relatives are unable to house them.

The ad hoc monitoring committee under the wali's direct authority has already begun preparing the documents that must be submitted to the government in order for victims to obtain compensation for personal effects and belongings that were destroyed.

Meanwhile, the wali has approved emergency assistance funds of a substantial amount, from the wilayah budget, to enable the five poorest families to celebrate the Mouloud Ennabawi holidays and meet the expenses of the approaching back-to-school period. The action program of the ad hoc committee, implemented in conjunction with the Algerian Red Crescent, includes assistance in the form of blankets, bedding, and food.

The representatives of the victimized families expressed appreciation for the "sense of solidarity" demonstrated by "their neighbors as well as the local authorities." One of the representatives present at the meeting addressed the minister, stating that "my neighbors and the 500 residents of the Khazrouna district have asked me to inform you of their great confidence in our government."

Government Waste, Corruption Alleged

92AF1287B Algiers L'OBSERVATEUR in French 9-15 Sep 92 p 12

[Article by Ghania Khelifi: "Other People's Money"]

[Text] *The spending of state money, endless "beylik" money, has become a genuine institution. Without flinching, an Algerian wastes resources he believes belong to others. It may be time to understand that the "beylik" money is ours, taxpayers' salaries.*

In a recent interview with a national daily newspaper, the minister of the interior informed us that his files on corruption were empty. Put another way, that meant that the case of the 26 billion [dinars] had disappeared into thin air. When you take a closer look, you realize that you needed a massive dollop of naivete to believe that some day they were going to give us the names and the bank account numbers involved in the corruption. There is something basically odd about the practice of corruption, involving the covering up of tracks, no names given for the two parties involved, the corrupter and the corruptee, and the destruction of any evidence which could lead one back to the initial transaction.

As it unfolds behind the appearance of legality and adherence to the rules, corruption appears on no ledger sheet and is given a chapter in no budget. It does, on the other hand, find a reliable ally that allows it to spread in the shadow of the wheels of government and business; we are talking about underhanded dealings or quite simply about waste. Without waste, the thoughtless use of resources, corruption would have been if not on the verge of suffocation or at least reduced to several high-flying specialists [as published]. In Algeria, widespread waste has drowned development projects of several sectors and served the nebulous ideas and plans of the heads of different hierarchies. During the era of petro-dollars, spending them as if there had been no tomorrow created devastation, which we are still paying for today. We will not refer again to the aberrations of a socialist and populist policy that gave birth to plethoric staffs, social services that were more costly to the business than they were profitable to workers, turnkey factories that were inoperable the day they opened, equipment that was obsolete the day it was received, agricultural products without storage areas, and university graduates without professional jobs...the list is too long. But we can still console ourselves by saying that that was the price to be paid for the peace and social justice to which Algerians aspired in the 1970's. Just as we can attribute the various and multiple forms of aid given to friendly and fraternal countries to that era's economic climate and the prestige earned by Algeria. We had a lot in those days and we spent a great deal on rural hospitals, training centers, transmission stations, and other signs of friendship in the four corners of the world. But times have gotten tough, and to persist in wasting resources that are growing scarcer is akin to suicide. However bad habits linger long. What do we see in our neighborhoods? The same, endlessly repeated spectacle of roads that are eternally under construction. We see the same things going on: they dig for water mains, they repair and they dig up again for the gas or some other reason and they repair again only to decide immediately afterwards to put in asphalt in place of paving stones or vice versa. As for sidewalks, they go from flagstones to paving stones, then to mosaic, only to return to flagstones. No matter, the bill adds up. A visit to Algerian ports provides an edifying idea of the waste which, on top of everything else, is of precious hard currency: products are stored as they wait to be picked up by their importer. When the latter, a publicly owned business, comes around to remembering, a hefty product loss rate will get added to the invoice. There is another source of waste: the health sector. From importing out-of-date medicine to equipment that slumbers in its packaging, everything has been said about the losses and the bad management of several health sectors. Some have crossed the line into embezzlement, as our colleagues at EL WATAN revealed. Each hospital on its own is a monument to waste even if practitioners complain of shortages of everything, whereas the budgets allocated to this sector have always been large. There is another area in which hard currency has taken the useless, superfluous route: sports. We will mention only the latest gem in this area. At the Pan-Arab Games in Damascus, our delegation consisted of 224 members, including 87 accompanying persons. Of these 87 people, 13 are administrators! This bloody administration that pushes sacrifice to the extent of traveling abroad to deal with possible red tape. The bureaucracy by itself is a bottomless pit of waste. Local communities and ministries have swallowed up huge sums of money to fit out offices for successive directors, on meetings and get-togethers, and on printed matter and forms, which change at the whim of moods and new procedures. However, millions in hard currency have been invested to acquire computers with the precise view of reducing the omnivorous use of paper and simplify administrative formalities. Alas! Computing centers, which often had state of the art technology when they were purchased, are underutilized and sometimes abandoned. Computer frenzy gripped authorities in the early 1980's and each one wanted to have his little keyboard on his desk next to the battery of telephones of different colors because he thought he could solve management issues with a microcomputer! But you cannot computerize disorder. Fads have cost Algeria dearly. So the many restructurings, reforms and minireforms and reshapings and revisions of activity sectors have heavily encumbered the national pocketbook. We can remember the general managements of publicly owned businesses scattered across the country hundreds of kilometers away from their units under the guise of decentralization. The most insignificant management council meeting, a weekly one at that, required executives, airplane tickets, and travel expenses!

The setting up of agencies with very ambitious goals also marked what is now called the black decade. One sector gained particular distinction for itself in this area: commerce. From international commerce centers, to the observation process with the same goal of quality control, and including the permissions process, commerce has vainly searched for a way to open itself up to the rest of the world though overlooking one detail. Foreign markets are penetrated by exports and not by a horde of officials "observing" them from their all-leather armchairs. International fairs are in the same vein. Ah, the fairs! Who will tell us about the waste of money on these high-level international economic shows where our businesses exhibit everything and nothing and come back

without so much as the hint of a contract. What difference does the armada of electricians, carpenters, decorators, and administrators make...who will have had a nice visit at the princess's expense. And that princess is us, the taxpayers. If the wasted money had been generated by all this top brass, the frustration would have been less, but it is the public treasury, the government or, in other words, taxpayers who have paid the bill. They could have thought twice before plunging into interminable feasibility or socio-economic studies and other fancy names. Find us the business that has not had a reorganization study done only to bury it in bottomless drawers. Foreign consultants' offices and international organizations have grown rich on the expert advice market in Algeria while national research and laboratories were dying slowly but surely.

The late Mohamed Boudiaf had begun to clean house in Algeria's foreign delegations. He had hoped to put real diplomats in the embassies and to reorganize these agencies. He had to study our ambassadors' accounts closely, which were things we would never have had the luxury of knowing about, and he must certainly have been flabbergasted by the hemorrhaging of hard currency. Waste has become a genuine institution in Algeria.

From housewives who hoard until products spoil, to bread thrown in trash cans, to the nonexistence of units to recycle paper and metal, to hideous buildings and monuments: everything is an excuse to squander increasingly scarce resources. The anticorruption fight, reforms, and recovering from the [current] situation are possible only if we halt the destruction from underhanded dealings and waste. Let us finally understand that spending "beylik" money and resources is the same as emptying our own pockets.

Summary of Brush Fires Due to Negligence, Malice

93AF0014B Algiers EL WATAN in French 4 Sep 92 p 12

[Article from ALGERIE PRESSE SERVICE: "Forest and Brush Fires: Criminal Hands"]

[Text] This summer in Algeria, 805 fires destroyed some 8,328 hectares, 4,403 of which were pure forests, 2,339 hectares of brush, 1,556 of scrub, and 30 hectares of alfa-grass, according to a provisional accounting drawn up last 30 August by the general directorate of forests and nature areas at the Agriculture Ministry.

The wilayas most affected are the Center and West wilayas, especially Tizi-Ouzou, which as of 30 August had recorded 95 fire areas that had destroyed 1,722 hectares of "forest growths" (pure forests, brush, and scrub); next are the wilayas of Oran (15 fires, 1,229 hectares destroyed), Bejaia (49 fires, 836 hectares), Tiaret (12 fires, 795 hectares destroyed), Constantine (7 fires, 581 hectares destroyed) and Chlef (36 fires, 453 hectares destroyed).

The Central and Western regions recorded a total of 519 fires with 7,651 hectares of burned forest growths, or 92 percent of the area overrun by fire, according to the same sources, which added that this was a provisional accounting and that the month of September could be dangerous, as it is each year, "because it is predicted to be a dry month and because at this time of the year there is cleaning to help young shoots," said Mr. Ghebalou, the director of forests.

During the same period in 1991, 916 fire areas had been reported, which destroyed some 8,161 hectares of forest growths (as compared with 805 areas and 8,328 hectares destroyed this year), whereas the annual reforestation rate is 25,000 hectares.

The forest fires began mainly in mid-July because of the late rains and "in almost all cases, the causes were human ones, either through negligence or malice," Mr. Ghebalou stated. Some particularly bad fires broke out between 2000 and 0500 hours, i.e., when natural risks are zero, he added. In the case of Murdjadjo in Oran, "the investigation is under way but according to early evidence, an arsonist was responsible," Mr. Ghebalou said. Regarding the damage caused by this huge fire, Mr. Ghebalou estimated that the 2,000 hectares mentioned "is an exaggerated figure" and that the actual losses where forests are concerned are a lot less. According to him, losses in a forest of full-grown trees cannot be estimated visually when the fire has barely been brought under control.

The estimate of burned areas is made by photogrametric methods after demarcating on a 1:2500 topographic map and, in the case of fires of less than 100 hectares, by means of a topographic survey conducted from land.

Furthermore, he added, there is a tendency to confuse damage to crops (hay stacks, fruit trees) and damage to forests, i.e., the pure forest and its ecosystem (brush, scrub, and alfa-grass).

As far as the investigatory process is concerned, Mr. Ghebalou stated, resources are "very thin" and the investigations, which have been carried out, are "difficult" because "you don't check a forest the way you control a governmental or any other type of infrastructure; the forest is exposed and subject to citizens' conscience," this official said.

Political Parties Comment on Meeting With State Council

LD1009112192 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic 0600 GMT 10 Sep 92

[Text] The date of the discussions which the Higher State Council intends to begin with political associations and patriotic figures is drawing nearer. Consequently, the political parties have started their moves to position themselves and to maneuver.

The Political Bureau of the National Liberation Front [FLN] has issued a statement condemning the recent acts of violence and everything which might undermine the safety of Algerian society. The statement adds that the FLN deplores the excesses which took place during the state of emergency and which caused the situation to get seriously out of hand.

The Rally for Culture and Democracy [RCD], for its part, has described the initiative of the Higher State Council to begin discussions with the political parties as a positive step. However, the RCD notes in its statement the ambiguity surrounding this initiative and calls for the need to define the rules of this dialogue and to identify the parties which will take part in it.

Growth of RPN Committees Analyzed

92AF1158B Algiers ALGER REPUBLICAIN in French 4 Aug 92 p 4

[Article signed H.M.: "You Can Liberate Yourself Only Once"]

[Text] A people as a whole can liberate itself only once. It makes a clean break that fits in with the logic of history. Algeria was colonized. It liberated itself from the chains of colonialism. It was not the only one to engage in such a struggle. Our people's struggle was part of the very broad context of liberation of other Third World peoples and of the vast decolonization process. These are brief reminders meant to answer those who believe that history repeats itself, that our people are liberating themselves a second time. As in a giant flashback Algeria, they believe, is going back in history to find itself once again organizing its struggle in the towns and setting up underground groups. The people, they say, will again recover their independence, their territorial indivisibility, their sovereignty. In such a trip back in time, Algeria could at most falter. What is new, is that they want our people and international public opinion to see this faltering as a liberation movement originating deep down in the Nation. Such scrawling and blurting out of history are intolerable and inadmissible. We say so because the fundamentalists came with a project of society that promised to destroy our historical reference points and to mark out the republican configuration with the most archaic projects. Of course, many things have happened in 30 years. The good people have nothing to do with the mistakes and waste that occurred. They had their own way of punishing them. They nearly fell into the huge fundamentalist trap that does not even have the merit of being fully and solely inspired by the facts of Algerian life. It is the same project that was proposed in Afghanistan, in Indonesia, or in Pakistan, with little difference.

Algeria's problem was a different one. As long as plundering, misappropriation, and theft were a common occurrence under God's sun, the State kept losing its authority. It took the HCE [Higher State Council] and Boudiaf to restore it. Meanwhile, the web was being spun; the most unlikely, the most unnatural alliances were concluded.

With some disgust, our people discovered the connections between the mafia, interest groups, and the fundamentalists.

They then watched the country drifting in another direction. The jihad was not at all a project promising another liberation of the country; actually it amounted to a scorched-earth and assassination policy, which our people rejected. They also increasingly said so. New developments occurred. Four days ago, after the assassination of a young police inspector, one of the killers was nearly lynched by the people. In Zeralda, the people helped arrest a fundamentalist group. The day before yesterday, in the El-Oued region—which is known for its fundamentalist links—the people massively participated in the arrest of over 30 fundamentalists. What do reactions of this type mean? Are they a setting in order of the house? Are they a form of liberation from the fundamentalist snare and from a certain way of reasoning they have? Indications of their defeat are widespread. Throughout the country, RPN's [National Patriotic Rally] continue to be set up.

What does the multiplication of RPN's throughout the country mean? It means two things: security forces are no longer the only ones to fight fundamentalists, and the civil society is emerging; the balance is restored. Citizens find themselves again. They are freeing themselves from the fundamentalist ideology. For the rest, as far as history is concerned, they know that their country cannot liberate itself twice.

Algiers Radio Launches International Programs

LD0210154292 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in French 1800 GMT 1 Oct 92

[Excerpt] [passage omitted] A newcomer on the media scene is Channel 4, the international channel, which starts operating today on 211 meters medium wave. The National Radio and Television Entreprise director, Lamine Bechichi, explains:

[Begin Bechichi recording] Those listening to Algeria Radio today will be able to enjoy the efforts made by Channel 4's editorial team. I believe that this is a good thing for the hard-working people who deserve to see their efforts noted and also for our listeners who will value the efforts made since last December on Channel 4, Radio Algeria's international programs channel.

I would like the voice carried by our airwaves to be that of friendship and of fraternity—friendship with all neighboring countries, of the north, south, east and west. I would like the message carried by that radio, as will certainly be the case, to be a message of brotherhood and of common work for a radiant future for the young, for coming generations.

Risk Factors for Investors Discussed

93AF0013A Algiers ALGER REPUBLICAIN in French 6 Sep 92 pp 1, 3

[Article by K. Nasri: "'The Algerian Risk' in Question"]

[Text] The most recent annual ranking by the French firm North-South Export notes a heightened "Algerian risk."

North-South Export is a consulting firm that classifies countries in order of the amount of risk they represent for any investor. Many such consulting firms are found in Europe and the United States and their respective classifications are based on commercial, financial, and political criteria.

Financial backers, investors, and other foreign businessmen generally refer to such rankings before drafting the policy they will follow vis-a-vis the "classified" countries.

According to the North-South Export classification, Algeria, which has dropped from 25th to 30th place among the some 60 countries studied, apparently poses a certain risk for any future investor.

One economist whom we consulted maintains the absolute opposite. Nothing that "such classifications have frequently been wrong," he does not believe "they should enjoy any credibility." The same economist adds that no foreign businessman would rely on the results of a single study. Investors often request the services of several companies at once in order to have a more accurate view, he said.

Our economist further noted that foreign investors are also concerned about safeguards protecting them from possible economic sabotage or nationalizations or even changing regulations.

On this point, our interlocutor said, Algeria represents no risk. To back the claim, he observed that the assets of no foreign company have declined in value since independence despite explosive social situations and the unrest experienced by the country.

Moreover, one general director in the Ministry of Economy maintains that even if the means used to evaluate the risk are the same, the conclusion varies from one company to another. However, he notes that such studies do generally discern trends.

Among the reasons implying increased risk, the general director cited any delay in paying debts.

Final payment of debts is one very important element of analysis for our creditors, he continued, an element all the more important for financial backers because our debt amounts to $27 billion, while our income totals only $11 billion ($9 billion of which go directly to service on the debt). As a result, our ability to repay the debt remains very limited, for which reason the Algerian risk is high for creditors.

Actually, he added, the requirements that must be met in order to receive loans are increasingly stringent and lenders are ever rarer.

Loans for which Algeria is eligible are more and more expensive (they must be granted at high prices) and their uses restricted.

Finally, the general director of the Ministry of Economy said, the risk is not as high as one is led to believe, noting that the background studies are not an exact science. Rather, they merely indicate trends and political sensitivity is often decisive, as proved by the fact that evaluations differ from one company to another.

Finally, for our economist, the North-South Export ranking cannot have any impact on the behavior of foreign investors. He maintains that Algeria remains solvent due to its oil, industrial infrastructure (plants), and labor. For our economist, Algeria is still attractive to foreign investors.

Conditions at Port Agadir 'Scandalous'

92AF1239A Rabat L'OPINION in French 19 Aug 92 p 1

[Article by Mohamed Jhioui: "Coastal Fishing: An Economic Sector in Distress"]

[Text] Gloom and decline hover over the ancient port of Agadir, which is vegetating in an atmosphere of indifference.

There are neither drinking water nor lavatories, whereas the headquarters of ODEP [Port Authority] are adorned with a fountain that probably cost 160 million centimes.

The boatowners who fish with trawl nets and trawl lines are out of patience. They are fed up, and are considering a work stoppage to attract the attention of the authorities to the litany of problems of all kinds that afflict them and are even undermining their morale.

If you read the report on last year's fishing traffic in the port of Agadir that was prepared by the directorate in charge of the development of the port (which is a dependency of the ODEP, you begin to reflect on the colossal achievements and the constant improvements made to benefit this sector, and equally of the great consideration shown to the owners of our coastal fishing fleet and their colleagues, the deep-sea fishermen. And you lose yourself in the figures that are presented—figures that present a completely favorable picture of the sector.

For example, you will read excerpts such as: "Extraordinary progress has been recorded in the past several years with respect to the catch of the trawler fleet...the importance of the port installations designed to improve conditions for unloading and processing the fish.... Five electronic scales, including two with (imprimantes)...one

desalination plant for treating sea water...a towing dock with an area of 8,000 square meters and a capacity of 40 vessels, etc., etc.

It is completely dishonest for those in charge of coastal fishing activity in this port to doctor the truth and present nonexistent data. Because I visited these places immediately after reading this report and observed the real situation with my own eyes, I had to ask to reread the document in order to see whether it was talking about some other port or perhaps only about future projects.

Imagine my consternation when I saw that it was indeed the port of Agadir the report was talking about.

Let this comedy cease! There is no desalination plant, nor any electronic scales with imprimantes, nor a towing port covering an area of 8,000 square meters. Worse still, there is not even a single bathroom, nor even any drinking water. What you have are, quite simply, port installations dating back to the post-World War II era.

But that is not the real problem.

The biggest scandal occurs when the local authorities—who are required to guarantee respect for the rights of the citizens—also turn their back on you. Most scandalous of all is when you are the victim of injustices and cannot find anyone who if not actually rectifying the injustices will at least mitigate your suffering and your distress. But to allow some 600 human beings to languish in an atmosphere of total indifference—600 human beings who every morning that God creates set out to conquer the open sea at their own risk and peril in order to contribute to the development of our economy—is truly inhumane and displays weakness, to quote a young boat owner who was caught up in the same wretched life after the death of his father, who had also been a trawl fisherman.

For this is indeed a profession that is handed down from father to son and that you contract for a lifetime—like a virus—and from which you cannot escape, no matter how much you might wish to. This is why these people do not deserve such a fate. And if they are now forced to strike, it is because they have no alternative, given the fact that all doors are closed to them.

They are not asking for the moon, however, but merely to be treated fairly. Is it not an aberration, for example, that they have to pay 2,240 dirhams per ton for lubricants whereas their counterparts of the high-seas fishing fleet only pay 1,400 dirhams? The reverse should normally be the case, when you realize that fishing boat owners who use trawl nets and trawl lines—unlike their colleagues of the high-seas fishing fleet—are 100 percent Moroccan and supply the domestic market exclusively. Moreover, you will be spared the thousand and one taxes that mount up to 47 percent and—in addition to the daily charges—are levied on a catch that is already meager and also unpredictable. The meeting that these unappreciated people have just held to discuss their problems is an alarm bell that must be heard, before it is too late.

International Transit of Goods Frozen Pending New Controls

LD2409133292 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic 1200 GMT 24 Sep 92

[Text] As of the zero hour, [as heard] today, Thursday, the 24th of September 1992, the international transit of goods through Algeria shall come to a standstill pending the drawing up of a new system providing better guarantees regarding the flow of transit goods.

The Directorate of Customs said that in accordance with the ban on the international transit of goods on the basis of the document D15, the sectors concerned will have to return all goods that entered Algeria before today, the 24th of September, by next Sunday, the 27th of September.

The famous D15 document is an official customs document permitting Algerians and foreigners to transport goods across the Algerian territory without control by customs or security authorities.

The document became even more renown following the discovery of a 15 billion centimes forgery operation at Boumerdes involving a truck supposed to have been passing in transit. This incident became a hot national issue.

Since then, press investigations and reports have been speaking of the disappearance of some commodities. Furthermore, a number of customs officers were charged with collusion and criminal and disciplinary measures were taken against them.

Lower Birthrate Coincides With Poor Economy

92AF1228A Algiers L'OBSERVATEUR in French 12-18 Aug 92 p 15

[Article by Mohamed Badaoui: "Birthrate Down, Frustration Rising"—first paragraph is L'OBSERVATEUR introduction]

[Text] Late marriage is the main reason for Algeria's declining birthrate in recent years. It is also responsible for many frustrations...

"Aiieee! One kid is enough. I'm not planning to have any more, at least for a long time," vows Hamid, a young 26-year-old worker. His parents, of Setif extraction—"clinging to their old-fashioned ideas," as he says—arranged a marriage for him a year after he was demobilized from national service. "As they saw it, I was already an old man," he says. His two older brothers had wives, and a total of seven children, even before they went into the army.

Hamid, his small family, his parents, his younger brothers, his married brothers and their families all live in the same house in an Algiers slum. Hamid is tempted to chuck everything and go live in Australia. "Hadi m'icha dial klab", agrees Zakia, after having crossed "the scary milestone" of her 30th birthday. She has no husband, fiance, or mate and sees no prospects coming her way. She must be at home after 1800. Her parents are the strict sort. "They were reluctant even to let me study and keep working," she says. She could have done without the advanced studies and the supervisory position she holds and contented herself with the life of a housewife. "If I had it to do over again, I would have studied just enough to be a good wife and mother."

These two cases vividly illustrate the fact that the demographic behavior of Algerians is changing. Change is being forced upon them.

Late Marriage

According to figures from the National Office of Statistics (ONS), the crude birthrate [CBR] is declining. It currently stands at about 30 per 1,000 inhabitants. In 1991, 773,000 births were recorded, compared to 864,000 in 1985. But the decline in CBR is connected to the age distribution of the population. CBR is calculated by dividing the number of births in a year by the average population during the same year. The following comparison will make things clearer: In 1970, after the postindependence baby boom that turned Algeria into one of the world's most demographically dynamic countries, the CBR rose to 50 per 1,000. But the population at the time was about 12 million. Even with such a high CBR, total births for the year numbered only about 600,000. In 1991, the CBR was just 30 per 1,000, but since the population had grown to 26 million, total births were up to 773,000, 170,000 more than in 1970. Declining CBR does not always mean fewer births.

Even so, total births did begin to decline in absolute terms beginning in 1985 and 1986, when the number of newborns suddenly fell by 80,000. The birthrate charted a "zigzag" course over the following five years.

That period followed the launching of the policy of "birth spacing" but mainly coincides with the deepening of the economic and political crisis that has racked the country.

In sum, the decline in Algeria's birthrate is not "natural." In large part it is the result of a very harsh crisis whose salient effects have been unemployment and a shortage of housing.... Algerians are having fewer children because objective conditions force them to do so. They are not marrying young, they don't have enough living space, their incomes are low, etc.

Demographically, a cynical decisionmaker might argue that everything is going well in this best of all possible worlds. The equation is simple: People marry later and later in life, so they have fewer children, and there are fewer demands to be satisfied. There is no need for strict family planning in such a case, no need to subsidize the price of contraceptives: The population is "self-castrated."

According to Mr. Rabah Brahimi, head of the department of statistics and demographic studies at ONS, the principal cause of the birth-rate decline of recent years is the fact that people are older when they first get married. According to his figures, over the last few years the average age at which Algerian women wed for the first time has increased from 20 to 24, while the corresponding age for men has increased from 24 to 28. These are nationwide averages. In urban areas, in the big cities, the average age of first marriage is close to 30 for both sexes. In rural areas, the average Algerian man is 25 when he gets married, the average woman about 21.

Similarly, the child-bearing years for women—which normally extend from age 15 to 49—have narrowed quite a bit: Most children are born to mothers in the 24 to 40 age bracket. The trend toward later first marriage is caused by several factors, including increased schooling and employment for women, gradual breakdown of the extended family (which condoned arranged marriages), the housing shortage, etc.

Castrated Population

The trend toward later marriage has a direct impact on birthrates and fertility, but it also affects the morale of the young. Kamel, 30, says "I went to school, I'm working, I want to marry, but I can't. I want to make it with a woman and it's impossible. I've never kissed a girl or even touched one. I'm in rut all the time, you know? Even animals need sex. My life is a nightmare. I'm a complete wreck. For now, there's only my hand.... I don't want anything to do with whores."

More decorously, 33-year-old Hayet talks about the need to establish a household and the joy of having children: "I know it's too late for me; it's impossible."

What misery, what a sexual tragedy, when an entire population is subjected to strict social controls, with no escape valves tolerated.

Expert Advice

Mr. Mohamed Khelladi, population director at ONS: "Population policy is concerned with quality of life. We cannot improve the conditions of our existence without confronting the demographic problems head-on. Jobs, education and health are directly linked to demographics, so family planning is a political necessity."

"The question is, What do we want to become? [A nation of] 30 million living in comfort, or 50 million living like Bangladesh?"

One citizen sums up the issue this way: "I feel penalized. While I myself have practiced birth control in my household, my neighbor has fathered eight children. Because of his irresponsibility, my children will go into a class with 50 pupils."

Mr. Brahimi of ONS is very uneasy, even disturbed, by the fact that the prime determinant of the birthrate is belated marriage. "This is going to exacerbate the crisis and aggravate social problems. You can't castrate an entire population. The equilibrium of society as a whole is at stake," he believes. Algeria's population is currently going through a demographic transition. The birthrate is declining while the death rate is almost stationary, with a crude rate that has remained constant at 6 per 1,000 for the last three years. Infant mortality, still very high (56 per 1,000), is declining, but only by about 1 point per year.

Ordinarily, declines in birthrate, overall death rate and especially infant mortality—the death rate for children less than a year old—tend to go hand in hand with higher living standards. In Algeria today we see the opposite. It is yet another source of frustration. What happens if conditions get so wretched that most Algerians decide "one more child will make no difference"—and act on their belief?

Deterioration of Neighborhoods Described

92AF1287A Algiers L'OBSERVATEUR in French 9-15 Sep 92 p 11

[Article by Samia Khorsi: "Dingy Algiers: City Rats"]

[Text] *Zohra tells of the infestation of rats in her home as if it were the failure of a fierce struggle against the deterioration of a neighborhood that she most certainly knew had seen better days.*

Beset by rodents, the "two-room apartment," which she occupies with her six children and her husband, looks out on one side on an inside courtyard whose filthy state no description can render. Suffice it to say that the household wastes of the tenants of the two apartment buildings who prefer not to know about using plastic trash bags land up in this courtyard. Here, Zohra relates, cats and rats, in defiance of the laws of nature, comprise two peaceful communities, which, of course, share some interests!

The history of Zohra's "two-room apartment" could easily be entitled: "The Rise and Fall of a Neighborhood," in this case Meissonier, now Ferhat Boussaad. In so doing we would bring too much solace to this trend of talking about this city, indeed of this country, in the past tense. But no matter, one can't help stopping for a moment and locating the urban and cultural settings in which Rue Elie Beaumont No. 7, where Zohra's [apartment] No. F2 is dug in despite itself, wallows.

Bounded at one end by Rue Didouche Mourad and at the other by Rue Rabah Noel, which became part of the story surreptitiously in the spring of 1992 owing to a denaming/renaming whose final word has not yet been said, Meissonier could be the equivalent of Rue de Tanger in relation to the main artery of Ben M'Hidi. But it is not that simple. If it is true that the two sites have in common their share of a series of greasy spoons and restaurants, first, in Ferhat Boussaad these latter tend to disappear in favor of other businesses, the current trend being in the direction of every type of used clothing and cosmetics store.

Second, with its post office, its small branch town hall, its multitude of elementary and secondary schools, its covered market, and its secondhand merchants, there are villages in the country that would envy its liveliness and vitality.

Fear not, this neighborhood, which was famous for having the best merguez [sausage] makers on the Place d'Alger, has still not lost its pride, first by swapping its blue paving stones for some sort of pink flagstones, which persist in breaking despite repair work done to them.

Never mind that, at the beginning of the 1980's, Ferhat Boussaad's main street achieved the privileged status of a pedestrian mall.

However the area has deteriorated. Unavoidably so. Water mains leak continuously, sewers burst, the sidewalks of adjacent streets, especially Rabah Noel, are regularly torn up by endless construction, neither the utility nor the end of which no riverside resident has been able to guess or predict. Like the mark left behind by a cataclysm as sudden as it is violent, the holes are left there, desolate, awaiting the prospect of some future repair. All bets are open on this subject on a pedestrian mall where every morning in the past few months, people come to sell absolutely anything at all. This goes from used clothing to sales of falcons—from the look of it, dealing in these predators is fairly successful—and including monkeys, turtles, chickens, and, incidentally, vegetables and fruit in such exceptional covered market stalls that they seem accidental. They are the last holdouts against the current madness.

In the afternoon, it is not difficult to imagine the state of the place. The deserted terrain resembles a battlefield. Detritus is strewn across the streets. At night an army of rats walks through conquered territory. These rodents elect their domicile, if possible, in every building in the neighborhood. Their favorite area, though, is located in the most ramshackle apartment buildings, those which are the dirtiest, and preferably have no superintendant, concierge or door. There are many such in these parts where, as in other neighborhoods, multistory apartment buildings coexist with buildings, which are practically in ruins.

Rue Beaumont No. 7 is one of the latter. Originally it was probably a hotel or a pension and is made up of a set of studio apartments that now house large families. It is one of those apartment buildings, which does not invite the visitor to cross the stoop of the dark, smelly main entrance from which wobbly staircases may be glimpsed. The Zohra family hangs out on the second floor, where it lives in two studio apartments. Its requests for public housing have fallen on deaf ears even if hope was once revived by the visit of representatives from the president's office run by Mr. Chadli Bendjedid. Inspectors arrived in the nick of time, at the very moment a rat had succeeded in gnawing through a red floor tile and was exhibiting its snout in the room. The horrified representatives promised that new housing would be found, housing which, by a stroke of bad luck, will never materialize, given the unfolding of "events."

The room that looks out onto the courtyard side is the one that is most exposed to rodents. You look down onto tons of refuse, which result from the total absence of civic pride on the part of the tenants in the two apartment buildings surrounding the courtyard. During the last clean-up campaign, which occurred more than six years ago, this earned them a stiff fine handed out by hygiene inspectors. Because in this country the problem with good intentions is that they never last, the situation has been deteriorating. Currently rats run along clotheslines to get into houses. The last rat to date to have elected its domicile with the Zohras arrived 10 days ago. In fact the neighborhood has been invaded by these

creatures. "From the sixth floor, on the terrace of the apartment building opposite us, you can see dozens of rats that have taken the place over," Zohra says. There are dozens of such colonies throughout the area. With no other recourse open, Zohra, whose home, located on the second floor, is the most affected, no longer knows which way to turn. Assailed by all sorts of insects and ever more penetrating odors, she admits to eating more fly spray than bread.

Rue Beaumont No. 7 is certainly but one case among so many others in a city, which in only three years has become one of the country's dirtiest. The dirtiest, we dare conclude. With a housing stock, of which half is seriously deteriorated, a system of pipes and sewers that needs to be repaired, and a flagrant lack of responsibility in road work, added to a growing lack of civic pride on the part of Algerians, all the ingredients needed to reduce one of the most beautiful Mediterranean cities to beggary have been brought together. After all the neglect, when will the big cleanup come?

Demography: Housing, Unemployment Factors

92AF1284A Algiers EL WATAN in French 30 Aug 92 p 19

[Article by Okba Khiar: "Demographic Pressures Still Strong"—first paragraph is EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] Speaking about Algeria's demographic problem at his first press conference, the head of government resorted to irony: "If Algerians do not have fewer children, they will have to die sooner." The remark conveys the complexity of the problem that the government must urgently address or lose all hope of an economic recovery. By contrast, our task here is simply to present several demographic parameters and to note trends and their impact on development.

If Algeria is said to be "overpopulated," it is primarily because of shortages in housing, facilities, and—above all—food. In 1990, the population is estimated to have grown by 624,000, with an average of 1,710 births a day—a rate of natural increase of 2.5 percent in relation to 1989.

As of 1 January 1990, more than one Algerian in two was less than 20 years old, and one Algerian in five was less than 7 years old. The fertility rate, although steadily declining since 1980, remains very high. The completed fertility rate [the average number of children born to women during their childbearing years] is 5.21. In other words, by the age of 50, an Algerian woman will have given birth to more than five children.

It is obvious why these figures, when fully weighed, are seen by many as alarming, particularly in the present context of multiple economic and social problems.

As of 1 January 1991, Algeria had a population of 25,324,000. The most realistic forecast indicates that the number will double in the next 30 to 35 years. Will we be able to meet the basic needs of that future population? As it is, the currently population level has led to major problems in nearly every area (housing, nutrition, employment, etc.). Large segments of the populations of underdeveloped countries (many of them African) are under nourished. Although we have not yet reached that stage in Algeria, it cannot be ruled out given the fact that 14 million Algerians (more than half the population) have been officially recognized as needy.

Twice as Many Cities

Today, the gap between the nation's food output (which has fallen steadily since independence) and demand continues to grow. Algeria's production now meets only 25 percent of needs, enough to feed only 7 million people. Algeria must import 2 billion dollars worth of food to meet the needs of the rest of the population.

Unemployment has reached an untenable level. The official number of unemployed Algerians is 1,500,000 and that number is growing by 200,000 a year. What can be done to solve this problem? How can we provide jobs for all? Do we have the means? Isn't it true that unemployment is a ticking time bomb, the cause of the many uprisings in Algeria since 1988?

At the current capacity levels of its economy, Algeria will not be able—at least in the medium term—to supply enough jobs for the large number of young people who enter the job market every year, with or without diplomas. Nor will it be able provide jobs for all those who are now unemployed—one quarter of the work force. Another aspect of the problem is the low rate of active employment. Even if all those employed (between the ages of 18 and 59) had full-time positions, each worker would have to support five dependents, a fact that underscores the youthfulness of Algeria's population.

Population growth has seriously affected housing needs. The enormous time lag between needs and runaway demographic growth has only worsened the housing crisis already in existence for some time. Mr. Benmaati writes that Algeria needed to build 2,730,000 new units between 1984 and 1990 just to match the conditions that existed in 1966.

The Government and Families

The average number of occupants to a housing unit is very high: 7.54 (RGPH [expansion not given] 1987) as compared with 6.1 in 1966.

These figures reveal that the housing situation has deteriorated and give an idea of the overcrowded conditions in which people live. Today, most of the population lacks the decent living conditions that housing standards are supposed to ensure. This has negative effects on personal health and, to a greater degree, on behavior (aggressiveness, despair, etc.).

With regard to urban planning, the impact of demographic growth has made itself very abruptly felt because of the higher population density in urban centers. The rapid rise in the urban population is the result of a high birthrate and immigration from the countryside. It has caused the number of metropolitan areas to double, from 211 in 1977 to 447 in 1987. At present, one Algerian in two lives in an urban area. In 40 or 50 years, according to some forecasts, the number of urban residents could exceed the total population of Algeria today, if current trends continue. How will the already saturated cities be able to stand up to such pressure? What will the urban landscape look like and how will cities undergoing a population explosion be able to ensure necessary services and maintain standards of sanitation?

In education, because of the high rate of demographic growth and Algeria's present stage of development, the country is finding it difficult to enroll all school-age children (more than 600,000 6-year-old children in 1990). In recent years, the rate of enrollment has remained unchanged or even declined (see EL WATAN, 6 April 1992). Moreover, there is dissatisfaction with the educational system, which is seen as behind the times and even detrimental.

Last, the health care situation is far from satisfactory. In addition to geographic disparities (in personnel and facilities) and the high cost and frequent shortages of medications, patients are now being asked to supply surgical thread for sutures! These various observations make it clear that Algeria's high rate of population growth will not in any way help the country to speed up the pace of development. On the contrary, it is a hindrance and a danger, given Algeria's dependence on outside sources for most of its food, if ever we were to suffer the same fate as Iraq and be placed under an economic embargo. The images that we see of Somalia nearly every day on our television screens are extremely frightening to us.

Today, it is imperative at the social, economic, and family levels that demographic growth be brought under control, and the rate of population growth must be kept in step with the pace of economic development. There must be support and understanding for the scope and purpose of the spacing and limiting of births. All preconceived notions and taboos concerning contraception will have to be dispelled because ignorance and a lack of information, more often than outright opposition, are obstacles to the use of contraceptives. A policy of demographic control should involve not only the government but also the families of Algeria. It "should be designed as an integral part of development, not a separate effort to modify a certain demographic trend." Its effectiveness will determine the Algerian population's prospects for the future. While we wait for the government's program, the stakes are extremely high.

Plan To Address Social Problems Initiated

92AF1271D Algiers EL WATAN in French 25 Aug 92 p 3

[Article by K. Benelkadi: "Emergency Social Plan for Algiers: Establishment of a Study Group"; first paragraph is EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] In Algiers, as, in fact, in all of the cities in the country, unemployment, the lack of opportunities for leisure activities, and the shortage of housing have worsened the social distress affecting young people in particular. This is a serious situation that the authorities are now considering.

The minister of youth and sports, with the participation of the presidents of the Communal Executive Delegations (DEC), held an initial meeting on 17 August at the office of the wilaya of Algiers. At the end of this meeting a decision was made to prepare an emergency plan to set priorities and determine the action to be taken over the short term. The discussion brought out all of the difficulty involved in considering in concrete terms the concerns of youth due to a lack of resources.

A study group charged with preparing the details of the emergency plan for the wilaya of Algiers was officially installed in office on 24 August by Khamri Abdelkader, minister of youth and sports, and Meziane Cherif, mayor of Algiers.

The minister undertook "to do the maximum to help youth to organize themselves and to handle this matter by making sure that it is within the scope of their ambitions. We will fight against demagogy and will assume responsibility for telling the truth without regard for divisions between the various groups."

Specifically, he first plans to establish a healthy working climate, based essentially and in particular on access to playing fields in the least favored residential areas, clearing the fields and making a list of existing resources.

To do this, the role of the communes is more than necessary, because the executive delegations are in continuing contact with the citizens.

Beginning on 29 August, committees will be set up to determine more clearly and in detail the various needs and to propose emergency solutions.

Minister Khamri ended his speech by promising that: "This program will be made public and expanded to include the various associations and responsible leaders at all levels, who provide major support for our efforts."

Teaching French, English in Elementary Schools

93AF0014A Algiers ALGER REPUBLICAIN in French 7 Sep 92 p 5

[Article by Chafika H.: "Foreign Language Instruction: What Policy?"]

[Text] Foreign language instruction and in particular instruction in French has always caused passions to rise in our country. Between adherents of a frantic Arabization (who have made themselves into the champions of a "massification" of the use of English in Algeria) and partisans favoring the retention of the "privileged status" of the teaching of French, the debate has often been a violent one.

The ministerial decision (17 August 1992 circular) to continue, as in previous years, to teach French beginning with the fourth year of elementary school received a mixed welcome in various education departments.

An official of the ministry immediately explained to us that the May 1992 circular, which was not implemented and noted the introduction of French beginning in the fifth year of elementary school, did not result from a "decision to fight that language."

According to a ministry official, "the only difference between the two circulars is the availability of French teachers for the 1992-93 school year as compared with last year, when there was a more or less major shortage. So," he added, "it's a problem of human resources."

Besides, the point that has intrigued a goodly number of teachers is the one concerning the introduction of English as the first foreign language, in parallel with French, beginning with the fourth grade of elementary school, according to parental choice.

On this subject, an official in charge of elementary education told us that this decision is part of the definition of a national policy for foreign languages and that based on this principle the existing resources had to be taken into account.

In any event, he explained, if the student decides to study English in the fourth grade as his first foreign language, he will have to study French in the eighth grade; that way, he concluded, the student will not be completely "illiterate" in French.

At the ministry, an official pointed out to us that if between now and 1993 we do not train enough English teachers, French will then be the only first foreign language. But, maintained an official in charge of elementary education, to enrich our culture, it is necessary to introduce English, all the more so because it is an international language.

One former teacher who is currently in charge of school inspections stated that "we cannot do without the French language as long as most of the textbooks, documents, and other [materials] are in French, and it is really difficult to want to train students worthy of that label and at the same time deprive them of their working tool."

Another official at the ministry explained that: "it is the only way to be independent of France. All the more so if we want to have documents translated, we have to think about training translators, and it is these students (who are going to learn English in the fourth grade) who will translate these documents in the future," he added.

[Further] discussing these matters, he cited the case of the communications sector saying "it is in the United States that [this sector] is very developed, so for us to be able to understand the documents they have, we have to translate from English to French and from French to Arabic. Why not English to Arabic?" he asked.

As an argument, an official at the ministry told us that since independence, Algerian schools have gone through three phases. At the beginning, teaching was done strictly in French, then there was bilingual schooling, and finally there was complete Arabization, from elementary school to senior high (basic education), this being the case since 1980 when the 16 April 1976 governmental order was implemented. The same official added that "since 1988, we have seen two generations, one French-speaking and the other Arabic-speaking, and we cannot allow ourselves to have French as the only foreign language. That's why," he added, "in addition to introducing English as a first foreign language, we plan to teach another Mediterranean language at the third level (lycee) to diversify our culture."

Although the arguments over this circular are many, a goodly number of teachers who are aware of the current status of our educational system, are very uneasy and wonder if today's students can become tomorrow's scholars.

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