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# The Islamic Fundamentalist Movement in Algeria

Lieutenant Colonel  
Clarence T. Hunter, Jr.  
U.S. Army

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## ABSTRACT

For the first time in the twentieth century, it has become possible that an Islamic Fundamentalist party will be elected by popular vote to lead a sovereign nation. The nation is Algeria, and the party is the National Liberation Front (FIS). In the municipal elections held in June of 1990, the FIS gained control of more than half of the cities and towns. This was a shock to the National Liberation Front (FLN) which had, and continues to, dominate local and national politics since Algerian independence, which occurred in 1962.

The ruling FLN party quickly stepped in after the elections and insured that the FIS would not assume control of the government. Still, given the state of the Algerian economy, it is not unrealistic to anticipate that it is only a matter of time before the FIS becomes the ruling party and heads the nation.

In viewing the stated interests of the United States in Algeria, and then comparing those to the stated and demonstrated intentions of the FIS, it is easy to see that they are not compatible. In fact, democracy, the vehicle through which they stand to come to power, is not an option under an Islamic Fundamentalist government.

Still, if it is the will of the populace to choose an Islamic government, then the United States must be prepared to accept that fact, and welcome that government into the family of nations, no

matter how unpalatable it may be. Then, it must be left up to the people of that nation so see whether that is the form of government that they chose to have over the long term. In the following pages we will explore in detail how the situation in Algeria came to be as it is and what impact that will have on the strategic view of the United States in the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Muslims are coming, the Muslims are coming! Though the Cold War has ended, it was apparent as we went through the decade of the 80's that our fear of Islam was rapidly overtaking our fear of Communism. The fear of the "Evil Empire" was rapidly being overtaken by the real fear arising from the events occurring in the Middle East: kidnappings, bombings, hijackings, and assassinations. The taking of American hostages in Iran dominated the news for months during the late 70's and the taking of hostages in Lebanon by Islamic radicals in the late 80's still shapes the perception of many Americans about what Islam is all about. Dan Quayle, the former vice president of the United States, spoke of the danger of radical Islamic fundamentalism, grouping it with Nazism and communism.<sup>1</sup> Islamic Fundamentalism, to many is synonymous with terror, extremism, and fanaticism.

Syndicated columnist, Patrick Buchanan wrote:

For a millennium, the struggle for mankind's destiny was between Christianity and Islam; in the 21st century, it may be so again. For, as the Shiites humiliate us, their co-religionists are filling up the countries of the West.<sup>2</sup>

Yet few Americans realize that the United States recently fought a war to defend the independence of the most fundamentalist



Islamic nation on earth, Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the one Muslim country that has always been a classic fundamentalist Islamic state. The Koran is its constitution and the sharia its criminal and civic law. King Fahd has said publicly, that Western-style democracy is inappropriate.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of trying to overthrow governments, Muslims are now seeking to participate in the political process. To what end, we are not prepared to say because the objectives vary; not only by party but intra-party. Some political movements are providing alternatives to inadequate or inefficient government. Once in power whether that party will continue to participate in a liberal democracy or become an Islamic State will vary according to how the leadership of the party evolves. If moderates hold power then the party will be more liberal. If more fundamentalist leaders emerge then the party will aim for an Islamic State. The point is that Muslims are more than the scowling, bearded, turbaned fanatics, burning and condemning everything American. Such moderation was unthinkable just a few years ago.

In 1992 Algeria, a country in North Africa, was on the verge of having a fundamentalist Islamic party obtain a parliamentary majority through popular election and gain effective control of the country. A fear, expressed by many, was that the Islamic party, once in power, would suppress democracy. Does this mean that Islam is in fact incompatible with democracy? Further, are we, the United States of America, ready to deal with a popularly elected Islamic government?

Algeria serves as a good case study of Islam because in 1992, the National Liberation Front (FIS), a fundamentalist Islamic Party, verged on gaining control of Algeria through popular elections. We will examine this case and look at the issues that have emerged. Specifically, what was the impact on Algeria? What is the strategic significance of these events?

## ISLAM

Islam was founded in AD 622 by the Prophet Mohammad, in Medina. His teachings were based on revelations given to him by the Angel Gabriel. As Jews have the Torah, and Christians the Bible, the Muslim sacred scripture is called the Koran. The Koran is viewed by Muslims as the perfect, complete, and literal word of God.<sup>4</sup>

Mohammad was born in Mecca, between A.D. 570 and 580. The Mecca of his birth was economically depressed and socially dissatisfied. His teachings appealed to the Arabs of the area and made comprehensible and acceptable a variety of beliefs and practices whose powerful attractions the local people found irresistible. These teachings served to bring peace to settlements torn by feuds, and emphasized traditional Arab treatment of friends, family, guests, and enemies. The new faith sparked the first unity the Arabs had known, and thus enabled them to overcome their divisiveness and form an effective society. They were able to unite and formed a fighting force superior to any in the region. By 656, the Arabs had conquered nearly all of the Middle East, including the area from the Egyptian frontier to the borders of present day Pakistan.

Central to the Islamic faith is faith in God (Allah). There

is no other god but Allah. Further, the messenger of God was Muhammad (Most Highly Praised). For Muslims there are five principal obligations or "pillars of faith:"<sup>5</sup>

Profession of faith (shahada)

Prayer (salat)

Alms (zakat)

Fasting (sawm)

Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj)

Common articles of faith include belief in the last judgment, predestination, and in a hierarchy of evil. The basic principles of Islam are recorded in the Koran (meaning "recitations") and are the revelations of the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad. The Koran, records the Prophet's views on God, religion, and life. Its 114 chapters (suras), were collected after Muhammad's death, for he made no written record of his teachings. The Koran is based on the memories of his followers who in the later years of his life transcribed these teachings on parchment, or carved them on camels' shoulder blades, or simply memorized them. It was not until the tenth century that the present text was adopted from a number of different versions. Many of the parables and stories of the Koran are taken from the New and Old Testaments. To true believers, the Koran is the final authority on all matters that it treats.<sup>6</sup>

After the Prophet's death, religious questions arose that were not answered in the Koran. These were answered in the Hadith, or

collected traditions of Mohammad. The Hadith are the sayings or hearsay statements attributed to the Prophet by his contemporary and later followers and compiled in six collections. They form the common law of Islam or the Sunna.<sup>7</sup>

Even these were not adequate to answer all to the needs of the growing Arab society. Therefore, jurists were appointed to interpret the law. These individual interpretations were deemed too subjective or fallible to be left in the hands of individuals. Therefore, it was decided that the collective judgment of the greatest of the jurists would provide less chance for error. The collective wisdom of jurists representing the Islamic community, emerged as a manifestation of God's will and were recorded as such. Thus the Koran; the Sunna, recorded in the Hadith; and the consensus of the jurists; all build the Sharia, or straight path of sacred law. The Sharia covers all aspects of life; from religion, to politics, to family life. Those who observe the tradition of the Sunna are Sunnis, and comprise 90% of all Muslims today.<sup>8</sup>

A major division within Islam developed as a result of the political struggle for succession to the Prophet. Initially, Abu Bakr, a companion of the Prophet, was selected as the first of the line of successors or caliphs. This supported the majority view that Muhammad's successor should be chosen from the faithful, by Muhammad's senior companions. The caliph was to be the political leader of the community with no claims to the prophetic mantle of the Prophet. The followers of the caliphs were called Sunni

Muslims.<sup>9</sup> The caliphate was abolished in 1924. After the caliphate was abolished, secular governments in Muslim states were legitimized as long as they remained true to Islamic law.

The minority view to the succession to the Prophet was that the successor should come from the Prophet's family. Since Muhammad had no sons, his cousin and son-in-law, the senior male in the family, was selected. This division of Muslims was called Shi'at Ali (the followers of Ali). For those followers of Ali, leadership of the Islamic community was to stay within the house of the Prophet. Ali and his descendents were to be the religiopolitical leaders (Imams) of the community. The Imam, in contrast to the office of caliph, enjoyed a very special religious status as a religiously inspired and sinless leader.<sup>10</sup>

The important point in Islam is that there is no difference between religion and state. Muhammad was a warrior, legislator, judge, and civil administrator. The laws of Islam cover all aspects of life. There is no separation of Church and state as is known in liberal democratic societies. Islam is the only monotheistic religion that contains a set of rules by which to govern a state as well as a set of rules and instructions to take care of the spiritual needs and beliefs of the people.<sup>11</sup>

Today, Muslims (the followers of Islam) number some 925 million people and make up roughly one-fifth of the world's population. They constitute a majority of the population in 40 nations and constitute significant portions of the population of

91 other nations. They control most of the oil available for export in the world.<sup>12</sup>

One of the consequences of the spread of Islam, is that as it spread it encountered other cultures and religions. Within one hundred years of the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the successors of Muhammad had established an empire greater than Rome at its zenith. Conquered non-Muslims were offered three choices:<sup>13</sup>

- o convert to Islam
- o retain one's region and pay a poll tax
- o warfare until Islamic rule was accepted

As the conquered people absorbed in varying degrees the faith, culture, and language of the Arabs, the Arabs absorbed many of the social and cultural characteristics of the conquered. Thus, as time passed, and more people became Muslim, Islam became less Arabic, developing philosophies, sects, and subsects that reflected the character of the differing localities. Byzantine Christian Hellenism, Turkish elements from Central Asia, Zoroastrian philosophy from Iran, Hindu concepts from India, and Mongol influences from China all left their mark on the faith. When Muslims from these societies were exposed to the traditional practices of Islam, a movement to return to Islam's origins arose.<sup>14</sup>

This, then, is the basis for the fundamentalist movement. The need to return to Islam as it existed from the start, some 1300 years ago. Fundamentalism, simply is the act of Muslims

calling for a return to their roots. For our purposes there is no difference between Islam and Muslim Fundamentalism.

Another useful term for us to define here is the term radical. It is a term that is often used interchangeably with fundamentalism but is in fact quite different. Radical Muslims or Muslim groups are those who would obtain their goals at any cost, regardless of the consequences. Their goal is to return to the roots or basics of Islam. These groups or individuals may or may not operate within Islamic law to obtain their goals. They operate on what Westerners would call the "lunatic fringe" and are many times willing to sacrifice their own lives to obtain their goals. Fundamentalists, on the other hand believe in the basic tenants of Islam.



## ALGERIA

Algeria is a former French colony that was under French occupation for 132 years. During that time, the French aim was to colonize Algeria through French settlements and to develop the natural resources of the country for France. The Muslim population was left with the poorest holdings and were granted no political rights. French rule was direct and at times violent. As early as 1833, a French parliamentary commission reported, "we have exceeded in barbarity the barbarians whom we came to civilize." By the early 1900's, the first signs of French-educated Algerians grouping to make political demands appeared. These demands were turned down by the French, with much of the pressure to turn the demands down coming from the French settlers in Algeria.<sup>15</sup>

World War II, forced separation of the French economy from the Algerian economy, due to the German occupation of France. Following the war, pressure continued to build for the French to grant greater rights to the people of Algeria, to grant French citizenship to certain classes of Algerians, and the election of Algerians to the Algerian assembly. In May 1945, 10,000 Algerians were killed in rioting put down by the French.<sup>16</sup>

The riots, discontent among the people, and a growing nationalism among the Algerians led to the movement that would end

in independence in 1962. The umbrella organization that accomplished this fight for independence was the National Liberation Front (FLN). A constitution was adopted in September of 1962 which established Algeria as a one party state under a President and the National Liberation Front.<sup>17</sup>

Algeria initially set out on a course of socialism with the intent of the FLN leadership to turn Algeria into an industrial society. This entailed moving much of the population from the countryside into the cities. To support this influx of people, huge public works projects were enacted. These projects in turn created a large public sector and a bureaucracy to support it arose as well.<sup>18</sup> As in many third world nations, it did not take long for corruption and mismanagement to bog the system down, particularly, given the one party system.

Oil had been discovered in Algeria in 1954 and major discoveries of oil continued until 1962. By the mid-sixties, crude oil production accounted for two-thirds of exports. In 1985, the price of oil fell from \$30 a barrel to \$8 a barrel. This was a major blow to a government that was already under intense pressure to take care of its people. High unemployment (the government admits to 30 percent), failed or non-existent services (uncollected garbage littering the streets), and housing shortages characterized Algeria from the mid to late 80's. With public unrest and the bottom having fallen out of its main export, oil, the government plunged into short term borrowing to generate operating funds, so that it could survive.<sup>19</sup>

This produced an Algeria that, today, has a foreign debt of \$26 billion, which costs upward of \$8 billion a year to service. Seventy percent of oil revenues are spent paying off the debt instead of funding local development. Though it has had a strong agricultural base in the past, it now imports 75 percent of its food. Inflation stands at 40 percent. Since 1962 the population has tripled to 25 million people, with 75 percent of them under the age of 25. Unemployment remains high, with 30 percent of the work force unemployed.<sup>20</sup>

Algeria's post-independence problems have been accompanied by civil strife. The economic hardship, political failure, and social turmoil led to strikes and riots. In 1988, food rioting led to between 250-400 people being killed by the Army.

Following this growing strife, the government undertook reforms in 1988. In addition to some economic and agricultural reforms, the government decided on a gradual shift to democracy. It established a new constitution in 1989, and planned to hold parliamentary elections in the early 90's.

With high unemployment, the failure of public services, the high foreign debt and the general failure of the government to meet the needs of the people, the shift toward democracy took place more rapidly than had been expected. A combination of factors was probably responsible for this rapid shift toward democracy. First, a thriving Black Market was in operation, with

many of the goods coming from France. There were still close ties to France by the people and this allowed opposition to the government to flourish outside of the reach of the Algerian government. Islam within the country, offered a network for communication through the mosques and Islamic societies. So the discontent was there and the governments lifting of constraints allowed them to become public. By 1991, some 58 political parties had been established. Further, upward of 30 independent newspapers began to fan the flames of a flourishing national debate about how the country should be run.<sup>21</sup>

One of the parties that started during this period of time was the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The FIS was a political party set up by Fundamentalist Muslims in September of 1989. It consisted of a coalition of fundamentalist groups which included al-Djazaara, the moderate wing which has led the movement to participate in the political process; diminue or Salafi, a wing of the party consisting of the unemployed, the impoverished, and many radicals, a wing of the party that is openly anti-democratic; and Hijra Wa al-Takfir (HWT) a militant arm of the party.<sup>22</sup> Though religious parties were banned by the new constitution, the government of Algerian President Chadli Benjedid formally recognized the FIS as a political party. The government also tolerated the FIS's use of the country's more than 10,000 mosques for political organizing and other party purposes.<sup>23</sup>

By June of 1990, the FIS had established itself as a force in the politics of Algeria. It won 55 percent of the 1,541 municipal

and gubernatorial votes, and gained control of 800 local government offices in the national municipal elections. On 26 December 1991, the FIS won 188 of 206 parliamentary seats. This meant that the FIS would almost certainly gain a two-thirds majority in the parliamentary elections scheduled for January of 1992. The fear was that FIS control of parliament would enable them to overturn Presidential vetoes and alter the country's constitution.

This caused a panic, not only in Algeria, but in neighboring states such as Tunisia, Jordan, and Egypt, which contained large groups of militant Muslims. It was obvious to the Algerian Government, and the military in particular, that the people were going to vote for the FIS and establish the first popularly elected Islamic government. Exactly what this would mean to Algeria was not known, but as one official said, "It's fine for others to talk about conducting a grand political experiment in Algeria. But what do we look like - white rats?"<sup>24</sup> The decision was made not to allow Algeria to become the first Arab country in which an Islamic government came to power through the ballot box. In January of 1992, the country's first multiparty national elections were cancelled. At the same time, under pressure from the military, President Benjedid resigned and the military swore in Mohammed Boudiaf, a hero of the fight for independence, as head of the government. On 4 March 1992, the Algerian Court dissolved the FIS.

After cancellation of the elections, violence followed in

Algeria, though not on the scale that might have been expected. The militant arms of the FIS staged hit and run attacks all over the country resulting in the deaths of at least 45 soldiers and a like number of the party. Algeria's military took extreme measures to repress the FIS. The leadership was arrested and thousands of members and suspected members of the FIS were arrested and detained. Some place the number arrested at 10,000, and the number detained as high as 6,500. So ended the experiment in Algeria with an Islamic government.

The question is why was this done? How did the rest of the world react to this move? What is the significance of this for the Western world and the United States in particular?

First, from the view point of the Algerian people the FIS presented an interesting dilemma. Much of the support initially garnered by the FIS was in protest of the policies of the FLN. The FLN, which just thirty years prior had successfully battled the French Army for independence, had proven itself incapable of efficient government. Even with the constitutional reforms of 1989, the population did not see the FLN as being capable of carrying out the policies necessary to satisfy the peoples' demands for change.

The Algerian people saw the FIS as an alternative to the FLN. The Algerian government saw a chance to include Muslims in government rather than confront them, and further, to allow them to share in the burdens of government. The FIS, however, had a

different objective. Though they were willing to gain power through the democratic process, their stated aim was to make Algeria an Islamic Republic.

However, there was some question as to what the FIS meant by "Islamic" republic. For clues, we must look at other Islamic Republics. Saudi Arabia and Iran are good examples. "A Saudi leader recently stated categorically that 'democracy is foreign to the principles of Islam.'"<sup>25</sup>

Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution, spoke of democracy and reform while in exile in Paris, but sung a far different tune once in power. "Jean Daniel, editor-in-chief of the French weekly, Le Nouvel Ovservateur, stated that in the fundamentalist view there can be no separation of religion and state...Nothing can be done in ... the social life that could question... Allah or his representatives. Power comes from Allah. Democracy on the other hand means power by the people."<sup>26</sup>

The FIS, prior to the cancelled national elections, inspired their supporters with slogans such as, "Democracy is blasphemy," "No democracy in Islam," and "Islam is light, democracy is darkness."<sup>27</sup> Further, the actions of local FIS officials elected to local office during the local elections gave evidence of what was to come. Lists of people to be executed were found. Promises to separate the sexes in schools were made (this would mean inferior education for women). Western music was banned. There was open boasting by FIS spokesmen that their coming to power would mean

the end for the Westernized secularist society. <sup>28</sup>

In early January of 1992, prior to the cancellation of the elections, the FIS held an exhibit in downtown Algiers to show how an Islamic government would resolve the country's economic, social, and political problems. Among other things, it detailed how the law would function (establishment of the sharia); how financial systems would operate (establishment of an Islamic Bank); and detailed the basic obligations of Muslims; which included moral purity, prayer, the yearly fast, and Zakat, the equivalent of a voluntary tax system for charity. <sup>29</sup> Further, in talks with the leadership of the FIS, it was evident that the FIS, planned to return to a society ruled by the laws of Islam. It is evident that the FIS fully intended to turn Algeria into an Islamic society.

Given the evidence, presented above, the Algerian government decided not to risk allowing a fundamentalist Muslim government to take power. Allowing the FIS to become a legitimate political party, was a risk that had been tried before in countries such as Jordan and Egypt. The theory was to co-opt the movement by forcing the leadership of the movement to share the burden of solving the staggering economic and social problems of the country. <sup>30</sup> Though the FIS campaigned against the FLN and promised to address the economic and social ills of the people, it in fact intended to establish an Islamic state. Given all of the signs and past experiences with Islamic groups, the government made the decision that it was not going to become the first nation ruled by



a popularly elected Islamic government.

Though there is no question as to the legitimacy of the FIS victories in the early elections, voting statistics suggest that the FIS did not enjoy total popular support, and it can even be argued that their margin of victory in a national election, if it had been held, would have been smaller than projected. The number of people who voted in the 1991 election was much smaller than the number who had voted in the local elections of 1990. In fact, it is estimated that about 5 million of the 13.3 million eligible voters did not vote.<sup>31</sup> Further, in January of 1992, prior to cancellation of the election, some 300,000 people held antifundamentalist demonstrations.<sup>32</sup> The zealotry of FIS locally elected officials cut down on popular support. Many of their actions raised doubts in the minds of the middle class as to their true intentions. Still, given that the FIS draws most of its popular support from the young, poor, and jobless (three-quarters of the population is under 30), there can be little doubt that the FIS would have won the national elections.

The question now becomes, what would have happened if the election had been held and the FIS had won? Some say that this would have led to civil war. Guardia Ider, an Assistant Professor of urban studies in Algiers says,

"These were not democrats interested in dialogue. They were little fascists just waiting for their moment. Believe me, had the army not acted, there would have been civil war.

Middle-aged people like me who fought for our independence

would never have accepted having our freedom denied by bearded, sexually frustrated men. I would have picked up a machine gun." <sup>15</sup>

Certainly, there would have been resistance if the FIS had tried to turn Algeria into an Islamic state. The military certainly would have resisted having been the power behind the government since independence. Earlier, it was mentioned that some 58 parties were formed in Algeria by 1991, and certainly these parties would have resisted any attempt by the FIS to turn the country into an Islamic state. So, it is safe to say that had the FIS won, with its intent to turn Algeria into an Islamic state, there would have been violence; more violence than resulted from the dissolving of the FIS.

What were the possibilities that the FIS having won the election would have simply continued the democratic process? It was through the democratic process that the FIS would have come to power. Further, it would be a participant in a constitutional government that included a parliament, an executive branch and a military. In other words, the FIS controlled parliament, but there were other elements of power in the government. It must be remembered that though we have referred to the FIS as a political party, it in fact is a coalition of groups and individuals ranging from al-Djazaara (the moderate wing) to HWT (the militant wing). The FIS's course of action after the election would have depended on which wing of the party dominated.

Still, we must go back to the demonstrated actions of the

FIS, after winning the municipal elections in 1990, and the first round of parliamentary elections in 1991. Even moderate leaders of the FIS began to emphasize the party's earlier slogan, "No law. No constitution. Only the laws of God and the Koran."<sup>34</sup> Regardless of how long it took, it is our opinion that the FIS would have done its best to turn Algeria into an Islamic state and in so doing would have sparked a civil war. There was no possibility that the FIS would have kept Algeria a democratic country. Ali Benhadj, one of the top FIS leaders has stated on occasion that democracy is an un-Islamic concept.

How did the Algerian situation affect its neighbors, for no matter what happened, there was going to be an effect felt not only by neighboring states, but by countries around the world. Our discussion will be limited to Algeria's immediate neighbors and later to the United States.

Algeria's neighbors gave a collective sigh of relief when the FIS was banned. Tunisia banned the Islamic Renaissance party and six other opposition groups in 1990, after they won 12 percent of the vote in local elections that year. Since that time, Tunisia has actively repressed Islamic movements.<sup>35</sup> A victory by the FIS in Algeria, without question would have invigorated Islamic sentiment in Tunisia. Tunisia was so concerned about the activities in Algeria, that it temporarily closed its borders to Algeria.

Morocco had two areas of concern with Algeria. The first and most important issue was that an FIS victory in Algeria would

strengthen the hand of the Islamic movement in Morocco; much the same as it would have strengthened the Islamic movement in Tunisia. The second, less pressing issue was Algeria's presence in the Western Sahara. Morocco, saw the crushing of the FIS by the Algerian Army as strengthening the hand of Algeria in the Western Sahara. So though Morocco wanted a weakened Algeria in terms of its disputes with Algeria over the Western Sahara, it was relieved that the FIS was suppressed, thus adding stability to its own political situation.

There are other countries, such as Egypt and Jordan, where the effect of a FIS victory also would have been felt. Any victory by Islam, strengthens Islamic movements elsewhere. In general, the rulers of Egypt and Jordan, as well as almost any other nation having a significant population of Muslims, have adopted varying strategies for containing Islam. When those strategies seemed about to fail, they have resorted to some sort of repression. A victory in a popular election by the FIS would have given new hope to the suppressed Islamic movements in those nations, and would have sparked a renewed spirit to succeed. In other words, Algeria would have been a model for other Islamic groups and parties to follow.

So the effect of the FIS being suppressed by the Algerian government probably has had a net stabilizing effect in North Africa and in the Middle East, in the short term. In the long term, for countries such as Tunisia, it may simply postpone the inevitable. The popular support of Islamic parties in Algeria and

in 1990 in Tunisia, indicates there will be continued pressure for Islam to have its day. At that point it is up to Islam to prove whether it is worthy of the support of the people. The tactics of violence that characterized many of the early Islamic movements in the 60's and 70's, have been replaced by attempts to gain support and power through legitimate means. This makes it inevitable that Islam will eventually have its day, and its future successes will depend on how it does when that happens. Algeria, with its instability could some day still be the first popularly elected Islamic government.

## STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

What does all of this mean to the United States? In fact why should the United States be interested in what happens in Algeria? What are United States interests in Algeria?

From an economic point of view, United States interests in Algeria are summed up in \$130 million in private gas and oil investments, \$2.6 billion in loans, and another \$400 million in private bank loans. Between 1200 and 1300 United States citizens reside in Algeria.<sup>36</sup>

Stated United States interests in Algeria are:<sup>37</sup>

- o Support for key U.S. foreign policy initiatives
- o Preservation of political, economic, and social stability
- o expansion of democracy and market-oriented economics
- o curb on sources of terrorism, chemical weapons, and destabilization of other governments.

The most significant diplomatic contacts between the United States and Algeria probably occurred when Iran chose Algeria to be its go between in 1980, when they no longer desired to hold the American

hostages. Still, the United States has enjoyed business like relations with Algeria in the past.

Based upon this assessment of United States interests in Algeria, the following observations can be made:

o Support for United States foreign policy initiatives will continue to the extent that they have in the past as long as the present government is in control. It should be noted that Algeria did not support the United States led coalition during Dessert Storm. On the other hand, Algeria has agreed to sign a treaty against the spread of nuclear weapons. So under the best of circumstances, Algeria cannot be considered an ally or enemy of the United States.

Under the FIS, the United States could look for Algeria to not support our foreign policy initiatives and to possibly escalate the present energy directed nuclear program into a weapons program. With Algeria's size and status in North Africa, this would have a destabilizing affect on United States foreign policy.

o The preservation of political, economic, and social stability is questionable no matter what happens. The present government still has to contend with all of the problems that led to the FIS gaining popularity to begin with. Still, the present government has credibility and can continue to function in the international community. This allows for continued foreign investment and participation of Algeria in the world economy. This would also

protect the interests of the foreign governments holding Algeria's huge foreign debt. Under the FIS, most likely Algeria would become an Islamic society, which would dry up foreign investment, tighten foreign credit, and probably create a brain drain to Europe. So the political, economic, and social stability of the country would be shattered.

o Expansion of democracy and market-oriented economics are all anti-Islamic. Democracy and a market-oriented economy are not compatible with Islam. A good example of this is banking. Islam considers the charging of interest an injustice. Instead, there is a system of partnership agreements that allow lending without interest. Banks receive a contractual share of the profits generated by borrowing firms. The bank's depositors, in turn, receive a share of the bank's profits. This makes it difficult for a government to finance its deficit if it cannot pay a fixed rate of interest on its bonds. Further, without interest rates, the monetary authorities have no control over monetary policy.<sup>38</sup> This combined with the non compatibility of Islam with democracy, discussed earlier, make this policy impractical with an Islamic government in place.

o The last policy, which talks to curbing terrorism, chemical weapons, and destabilization, can not be met with an Islamic government in power. We have already discussed how an FIS victory would have destabilizing effects on Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and possibly Jordan. This would occur even if the FIS made no overt or covert efforts to aid movements in those countries. Just the



symbolism of victory would be enough to cause trouble. The factionalization of the FIS party, would make it very difficult for the FIS to control the various arms of the party, and thus control of terrorism, weapons, and subversive activity would be difficult, even with moderate leadership in the FIS.

So, just by looking at the United States interests in Algeria, we can see that they were, and are, best served by the FIS not gaining power.

The United States, nevertheless, is in the awkward position of supporting a government guilty of suppressing the stated will of the populace. The United States had publicly supported the efforts toward democracy in Algeria in the past and really faced quite a dilemma in deciding how to respond to the events that transpired. Eventually, there is going to be a popularly elected Islamic government, and the United States will be required to accept it among the family of nations.

We know that there will be intense pressures on any government that is Muslim to return to the original ways of Islam, which means rejecting democracy and the ways of the West. On the other hand we have seen Islamic parties adapting as times change. Eventually, if it is the will of the people we are going to have to let an Islamic government run its course and let the people who elect it decide if that is what they want. The success or failure of that government will then set the tone for other Muslim movements.

Support of repressive governments has gotten the United States in trouble in the past. Many key allies of the United States in the Middle East are guilty of repressing their Muslim populations and it only makes the United States lose credibility in its foreign policy.

In conclusion, the strategic goals of the United States in Algeria, all have to do with stability. It is in our interests for the people of Algeria to work out their problems internally and peacefully. Though, we are supporters of freedom and democracy, the nature of Islam in its fundamental form, do not support stability in Algeria, or in the Middle East.

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