

The Algerian Islamist Movement between Autonomy and Manipulation

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Summary

Following the October 1988 rebellions, some political opening is granted by the government. A law on the creation of 'associations of a political nature' is passed on July 5, 1989. The FIS (Front islamique du salut, Islamic Salvation Front) is formally authorized in September of the same year. Many 'independent' imams, i.e. not remunerated by the State and preaching in hundreds of 'free' mosques created in the '80s, join the FIS. Abassi Madani is President of the FIS, and Ali Benhadj, Vice-President. The FIS very rapidly develops into a party of the masses with hegemonic ambitions, which, at the time, gathers hundreds of thousands of young people in search of action and recognition. However, the party is not at all prepared for such a role and rapidly faces considerable organisational and structural problems – all the more so that from the start diverging internal opinions emerge as regards the strategy to adopt and political appetites of the different leaders push them to outmatch each other. Such a situation also benefits the Military Security forces, which infiltrate the FIS, well into its hierarchy.

In the meantime, a multitude of Islamist radicals revolves around the FIS, now joining it (e.g. in street demonstrations), now denouncing its policy statements and most of all its involvement in the democratic interplay, considered as compromising with the government. Beside the groups of youths seeking to fight the regime with criminal methods and without any particular reference to religion, there exists an entirely different sort of group, such as those called the 'Afghans' - a few hundred Algerian veterans from Afghanistan, who return as heroes, with a very rigorous understanding of the way the Islamic law is to be implemented and who very often volunteer for armed combat. There is also a minority of Islamists, not particularly extremists, but who fight the regime in which they have no confidence: they reckon that the democratic process is deceptive, that the military will never accept it and that one should prepare for armed conflict in view of a change in power. As a matter of fact, they consider that events have proved they are right, justifying their choice of armed confrontation with the government as from January 1992.

With the first pluralistic elections in Algeria, in June 1990, the FIS wins the majority of the communes and prefectures (wilaya). It comes as a shock to everybody. The FIS itself was not prepared for it and gets entangled in administrative problems. Along with the euphoria of victory, divergences within the hierarchy start to develop and increase. It is on the occasion of the FIS general strike in June 1991 that the opinions within the consultative council are the strongest and the secret services take advantage of this situation by exacerbating them. This episode ends with the eviction of the 'reformer' ministers from the government, the takeover of political decisions by the future putschist generals and a severe repression of FIS partisans. Most of the FIS heads are imprisoned, among whom two of its main leaders – who will only be released in 2003.

However the military hope to 'domesticate' the FIS (while preparing to crush it in case of failure) and do everything to make them participate in the legislative elections of December 1991. Abdelkader Hachani takes over the FIS and leads it to the elections. The day after the first ballot, when it appears that once again the FIS will win, taking over up to two-thirds of the seats in Parliament, the military interrupt the process and almost directly lay hold of power. The FIS is not prepared for this situation and does not appear, at a first stage, to want to engage in armed conflict. Brutal repression breaks up the party, while political leaders are sent to jail or forced into exile, leaving the rank-and-file activists to themselves. However, as from June 1991 and January 1992, some FIS members join existing underground groups, ready for action if it appeared that armed combat was necessary. So, as from January-

February 1992, Islamist armed groups appear, opposing the FIS strategy and methods, and attacking police forces and barracks. At the same time, the government multiplies provocations and infiltrations, using all means to push Islamist opponents into armed struggle. But where some FIS executives do indeed join existing armed groups, the leaders of the party and most of those in charge oppose this move, at least until mid-1993. Those who fled abroad try to alert international public opinion of the situation of non-law existing in Algeria.

In the spring of 1992, after the banning of the FIS and the dissolution of the communal assemblies that it dominates, FIS executives and an increasing number of members, still free, go underground to escape repression. Simultaneously, armed groups of Islamists form in certain suburbs, especially around greater Algiers. In 1993, several regions appear to be under their control or at least the army does not venture into the area. Thus, between 1992 and 1994, different armed factions are set up among which the GIA (Armed Islamic Group). In fact, it would be more appropriate to refer to the 'Armed Islamic Groups', as under the initials GIA, there is a multitude of groups marked by their extremism, some of which – this is now clearly established – are pure creations of the army secret service, the Intelligence and Security Department (Département de renseignement et de sécurité, DRS), while others are seriously infiltrated by the latter. Of course, there are among them also independent groups who are persuaded of the accuracy of their choice.

However, as from spring 1994, the situation changes entirely. Unknown 'Islamist' fighters appear in several regions (mainly around Algiers), imposing terror while, at the same time, the army takes the regions in hand again. And paradoxically, while the DRS gradually and secretly takes control of the entire GIA leadership, an important section of the genuine underground opposition, armed or not, - and in particular the most politicised branch, *jaz'ara*, that gathers many intellectuals – joins it, obviously ignoring the importance of the GIA manipulation by the Intelligence and Security Department (DRS). With the takeover of power by Djamel Zitouni (manipulated by the DRS), in October 1994, the GIA becomes an actual instrument of the anti-insurrectional fight in the hands of DRS leaders.

In July 1994, the AIS (Armée islamique du salut, Islamic Salvation Army) is set up, its leaders presenting it as the 'armed wing' of the FIS. From then on, it becomes one of GIA's favourite targets, committing an increasing number of assassinations, bomb attacks and massacres. As from late 1995, more and more GIA grass-root 'phalanxes' (*katibas*) distance themselves from the organisation and its leadership, denouncing a downhill drift that they can only explain by DRS manipulation. A few years later, this will be confirmed by various army deserters, who give very concrete examples of DRS organized operations.

Thus, as from late 1994, the GIA, controlled by the DRS (whose services themselves draft the ultra-radical communiqués claiming 'to legitimise' GIA activities 'in the name of Islam'), plays several roles. Inside the country, it wages a genuine war, with several objectives: terrorizing and 'controlling' civilians suspected of having sympathised with the FIS; discrediting the FIS among the Algerian population and the international community; installing terror within the armed groups themselves and eliminating any group inside the GIA that refuses to submit; fighting all those who refuse to join the GIA. And its outward aims seek to impose the support of the international community – and more particularly of France, that plays a leading role in the 'Algerian issue' – for the 'eradicating' line of the military command which presents itself as the guarantor of democracy and aims at stifling any conflicting voices, in particular those denouncing the severe human rights violations. With this in mind, DRS leaders do not hesitate to manipulate GIA 'infantrymen' (without them knowing it) to carry out attacks in France during the summer of 1995.

In Algeria, the height of the violence is reached with the great massacres in the summer of 1997 and winter of 1998, claimed by the GIA. Today, the analysis of the amount of information available allows forming the hypothesis that these killings, happening under the eyes of passive army units, were cold-bloodedly planned by the leaders of the army's 'eradicating clan', so as to weaken President Liamine Zéroual's clan, together with his adviser Mohamed Betchine. They had managed to reinforce their power and were preparing to find an arrangement with FIS political leaders. It is also to torpedo this initiative that the head of the counter-espionage, Smaïl Lamari (called 'Smaïn'), directly negotiated a 'ceasefire' with the AIS leaders – ceasefire that started on October 1st, 1997, with other groups joining later on. Due to the manipulation of the Islamist violence, this 'war of the clans' leads to the President's resignation in September 1998. Abdelaziz Bouteflika is appointed by the military and fraudulently elected President of the Republic in April 1999.

He ratifies the agreement passed between the DRS and the AIS by promulgating the law on 'civil concord'. This law is strongly opposed for various reasons: some see it as an amnesty for 'terrorists', others as the rehabilitation of DRS agents infiltrated in the armed groups. It is certain however that the implementation of the law took place in absolute obscure circumstances. Once more, the authorities put up a masquerade as a manner of appeasement, promising peace and reconciliation, although these have not been reached since. Indeed, since 2000, violence officially attributed to Islamist armed groups – entirely controlled by the DRS since 1995 – has decreased considerably, but the authorities choose to maintain it at a 'residual' level in order to prevent genuine return to civil peace.

History of the FIS

The 1989 political reforms and legalization of the FIS

Following the October 1988 rebellions, some political opening was granted by the government. However, President Chadli is the only candidate at the presidential elections of December of that year and is re-elected. On February 23, 1989, a referendum agrees on a new Constitution which recognizes – art. 40 – the right to create 'associations of a political nature'. A few days before this historical date, on February 18, leaders of the Islamic movement get together and announce their will to set up a political party. On March 10, the creation of the FIS (Front islamique du salut - Islamic Salvation Front) is publicly proclaimed. Request for approval is deposited on August 22 and granted on September 6, 1989.

One should note that the idea of creating a party did not receive unanimous support in the *Ligue de la da'wa islamique*, which up to then federated the various existing currents. While Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, who will become the two main FIS leaders, support the initiative together with the very popular old imam Al-Hachmi Sahnouni and some of the 'independent' imams, Mahfoud Nahnah, who represents the Muslim Brothers in Algeria, categorically refuses to become associated with this new body. Islamists in eastern Algeria led by Abdallah Djaballah also refuse to join the FIS. As for Mohamed Saïd, leader of the *jaz'ara*, an Islamic nationalist movement rooted in universities, he also turns down the invitation, reckoning that the project is not sufficiently mature and needs a more step by step approach together with work in the social and pedagogical fields. His reluctance stems also from the Islamic movement experience with the October 1988 rebellions when – according to him – some of the leaders had acted in great haste, with heavy consequences. This reserve does not prevent the movement to entirely invest the FIS a little later, and, after that, to engage in armed battle. As for Mahfoud Nahnah (who died in 2003) and Abdallah Djaballah, each of them creates his own political party, after having refused the single party formula. Abdelkader Hachani also distances himself, whereas the majority of future FIS dissidents (Zebda, Ghechi, Amouri, Sahnouni) are in favour of setting up a political party.

The FIS is founded on March 10, 1989 and gathers the most important Islamist currents, with the exception of the Muslim Brothers and a few radical factions which are then beginning to emerge. Many 'independent' imams, i.e. not remunerated by the State and who preach in hundreds of 'free' mosques created in the '80s, join the FIS. Abassi Madani is President/Secretary general of the FIS, Ali Benhadj is his spokesman. The latter and Sahnouni are very popular preachers, who draw thousands of supporters. The FIS very rapidly develops into a party of the masses with hegemonic ambitions, which, at the time, suits hundreds of thousands of young people in search of action and recognition.

Enormous expectations are voiced among the strata of society, which are quite attached to the religious values and principles of equity and dignity. The party very rapidly faces considerable organisational and structural problems – all the more so that from the start diverging opinions emerge as regards the strategy to adopt and that the political appetites of the different leaders push them to outmatch each other. Besides, this is not typical of the FIS during this frantic period when dozens of parties and associations emerge and claim the right to participation. Indeed, the entire Algerian population invests the streets and recovers the freedom of speech they had been denied for thirty years.

In such an atmosphere of intense excitement, all uncontrolled developments are possible, and in the current period of State and single party disintegration, along with their gradual restructuring, Army Security has no difficulty in introducing its elements into the new groups, when it does not create them from scratch. The dissident ex-colonel Mohammed Samraoui, former leader of Army Security, explains that already among the founding members of the FIS, some have tight links with AS: Saïd Guechi and Ahmed Merani, who indeed later joined the government, but Zebda Benazzouz, Bachir Lefkih or El Hachmi Sahnouni also have more or less strong links with the secret services¹, without mentioning those who hover around leaders and are there to influence them and to incite them to take violent positions and actions. For these, their time will come on the eve of the general strike declared by the FIS in May 1991.

The Islamist 'nebula'

In the meantime, a multitude of Islamist radicals revolves around the FIS, now joining it (e.g. in street demonstrations), now denouncing its policy statements and most of all its involvement in the democratic interplay, considered as compromising with the government. As part of this nebula, there is a multitude of small groups of pals, neighbours, with no allegiance whatsoever, taking advantage of the presence of FIS to commit acts of a criminal nature, even if they claim to act for religious reasons. Moreover, through senselessness or opportunism, most FIS leaders carefully avoided condemning them.

But there exists an entirely different sort of group, such as those called the 'Afghans', Algerian veterans from Afghanistan, who have in fact not always fought against the Soviet army, but who return as heroes, with a very rigorous understanding of the way the Islamic law is to be implemented and who very often volunteer for armed combat. They act in informal, unstructured and unorganised networks. They will however try to set up some organised structures and some will later join the GIA. Among these, there are followers of the *Al-hijra wa At-takfir* (Exile and Redemption) group, which is not specifically Algerian and does not only gather 'Afghans' in Algeria. They consider that all societies in Muslim countries are impious and that therefore after an exile that reinforces one's faith, they can return and fight to make God's word prevail. During the following years, such an ideology will result in monstrous excesses, going as far as legitimising the massacres of civilians, on the grounds that they are 'infidels'.

There are also Islamists who do not at all follow this extremist and ultra-minority ideology, directly inspired by wahhabism of Saudi origin, but who contest the regime to which they afford no credibility. They reckon that the democratic process is deceptive, that the military will never accept it and that one should prepare for armed conflict in view of a change in power. As a matter of fact, they consider that events have proved they are right, justifying their choice of armed confrontation with the authorities as from January 1992. And finally, there are those who consider that a political system founded on elections, a Parliament, etc. is not relevant to the Islamic tradition. In the eyes of the most radical among them, Ali Benhadj is regarded as a moderate, Abbassi Madani spineless and Mahfoud Nahnah a traitor. On various occasions, all these groups and all these different understandings - as well as others not mentioned here - intermix and rub shoulders with FIS activists and leaders. Some of the

¹ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang. Algérie: comment les services secrets ont manipulé les groupes islamistes*, (*Chronicle of the sanguinary years: how secret services manipulated the Islamist groups*), Denoël, Paris, 2003, p. 96.

former 'Bouyalists' (those who had engaged in armed conflict in 1982, were made prisoners and then pardoned in 1989) were part of those who remained in contact with the FIS while preparing for going underground.

But according to accounts by ex-Military Security agents (in particular by ex-Colonel Samraoui, who was specifically in charge of their surveillance), these radical and extremist groups were known and under control. Yet the MS did not arrest them when they had broken the law. On the contrary, its leaders utilised some of them to act upon the Islamic movement, to direct it towards more radical positions and to encourage the followers to prepare for armed conflict.

As soon as the new Constitution was adopted in February 1989, it was foreseen that local, legislative and presidential elections would take place, during the mandate of Chadli Bendjedid due to finish at the end of 1993. The first deadline is on June 12, 1990. That day, the FIS beats all records and obtains more than 4 million votes. It controls 853 local assemblies (54.25% of voters) out of the 1540 and 32 wilaya assemblies (57.44% of voters) out of the 48 existing in the country. This crushing victory of the FIS took everybody by surprise, first and foremost the FIS leaders themselves.

Legislative elections are to be held on June 27, 1991. Heartened by the FIS victory at the municipal elections, its leaders already picture themselves coming to power. Yet the party is unprepared. Indeed, a preliminary draft programme was mapped out in March 1989, but how does one address the political disparities existing in a 'front' that has become a party of the masses with only two years experience? On top of this lack of experience and competence of the officers set to administrate municipal daily life, there is the pressure of part of the rank-and-file who require a radical and rapid change in power and demand anticipated presidential elections, as they are persuaded that an Islamist President respecting religious precepts will establish Justice.

Foreseeing another FIS landslide, Mouloud Hamrouche's government decides to promulgate a new electoral law ruling that votes are to be cast for a single member and in two ballots. This caused a general outcry among the opposition parties who criticized the new law, some demanding presidential elections².

Three months before the elections, eight small parties launch the idea of a general strike in protest against the voting terms established by the government. Mohammed Salah Mohammedi, Minister of the Interior, appears to dread manipulation when he declares: "A serious crime against democracy is in preparation"; and he warns against a "Chilean solution³". These words hint at the fact that the small parties obey orders coming from military circles opposing the democratic process.

Such a threat will not materialize, as in fact nothing unites these parties, whereas the FIS is not part of the coalition but takes up the idea of a general strike, although it does not gather unanimity within the party. The leaders do not seem to anticipate the 'sound of boots' in preparation. On the contrary, the FIS engages in a confrontation with the government and the FLN although it has not yet officially announced its participation in the elections.

The FIS wants to maintain the electoral roll system in one ballot and protests against the limitations brought on proxy voting. Finally, Abbassi Madani demands anticipated

² For further details see William BOURDON and Antoine COMTE, *Réponse au "Mémoire à Monsieur le procureur de la République du tribunal de grande instance de Paris"* (Response to the 'Memoir addressed to the public prosecutor of the Paris High Court'), www.algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf_fr/nezzar_reponse.pdf, June 2002, p.32.

³ Abed CHAREF, *Algérie, le grand dérapage* (Algeria, the big drift), L'Aube, La Tour d'Aigues, 1994, p. 127.

presidential elections and increasingly threatens to resort to a general strike. Various political stakeholders advise him not to have recourse to a strike, as this would only reinforce the conspiracy being prepared by the heads of the DRS. But Abbassi doesn't listen to them as he is convinced being in a position of power and capable of imposing his claims.

The "Sound of Boots"

After the overwhelming victory of the FIS at the local elections, the army's staff sounded the alarm bell. There is no letting the FIS dictate the course of events, because if they come to power, the domination of the military will be threatened. And the latter have never surrendered their power. Besides, the future putschists started placing their men in key positions and implementing a plan drafted under the impetus of General Nezzar as from December 1990.

A handful of generals gradually take control of the country, handling the carrot and the stick: while they negotiate with the FIS for the sharing of power, they simultaneously organize a campaign diabolising it in the press that they control. However, much more dangerously, they activate DRS elements infiltrated in the Islamist party in order to intensify disputes and push the FIS or at least a fringe of it into armed confrontation with the military. These infiltrated agents exacerbate internal divisions, which get even worse with the strike that the FIS leaders launch on May 25.

Whereas, at the beginning, the strike is only loosely followed and takes place in a more or less serene atmosphere, as from the fifth day, FIS leaders negotiate with the government (in the presence of the deputy head of DRS, Smaïl Lamari) and enter into an arrangement authorizing their activists to occupy four squares of the capital city. Indeed, although the movement has amplified, it has not at all become general. While some FIS officials dissociate themselves, others publicly express their denial, and the tension grows. The first serious skirmishes with security forces take place on May 29. For FIS leaders, the government is the main enemy, while since a few days the army is closing in on the towns.

In the eyes of the army and DRS leaders, the 'democratic recreation' is coming to an end. Army command wastes no time and undertakes quite a Machiavellian strategy. Indeed, they're killing two birds with one stone: on the one hand, they use the FIS and its strike to get rid of the 'reformer' government, which has become too dangerous for the interests of the military barons and their clients, and, on the other hand, they utilize the government making it endorse the responsibility of a repression that will seriously weaken the Islamist party.

Many observers report that, as from June 2, maybe even before, the military command implements its plot. On June 2, General Nezzar, Minister of Defence, insists that politicians establish a state of siege. During the night from June 3 to 4, the squares occupied by the demonstrators are assaulted with gas, bullets and water canons. Dozens of people are killed, hundreds wounded. State of siege is declared as from June 5 midnight, general elections are postponed and the army is back in town.

After Hamrouche's resignation, the military command appoints Foreign Affairs Minister, Sid Ahmed Ghozali, head of a government that he officially sets up on June 18, 1991. On June 7, Ghozali has talks with Abbassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, during which, according to the two FIS leaders, they agreed to officially call the strike to an end and, in return, they are guaranteed that anticipated presidential elections will take place, general elections are

postponed but would indeed be held in good conditions, that the strikers who were dismissed will be reinstated in their posts, etc.⁴

While these promises are made to the FIS (and to other parties) and the latter announces the end of the strike, repression falls on the party, on its structures and supporters. And while everyone expected some easing off, the military command toughens the tone and, on June 12 and 14, publishes communiqués announcing an offensive. Between June 15 and 18, the whole FIS machinery is dismantled and 469 officials and activists arrested. On July 10, security centres are opened in which administratively arrested persons are confined.

The FIS was hunted down, mosques and premises searched; the police forces do indeed find a few weapons and some Molotov cocktails, but nothing that could truly threaten State security.

FIS leaders realize that the situation is escaping them: in fact, they had fallen into the trap set by the military command via Sid Ahmed Ghozali. Unidentified groups attack police forces during the night. The heads of the FIS distance themselves from them, but they also threaten: "If the army does not return to its barracks, the FIS will have the right to proclaim the *jihad*⁵."

Then on June 30, 1991, the two leaders and all the members of the strike committee are arrested. Officially, the motive was that armed groups were disturbing public order and committing bomb attacks – while, according to all observers at the time, the FIS has no armed groups under its orders. Those, very few in numbers for all that, who operate are either 'autonomous' Islamist groups or groups manipulated by the DRS.

As from July 1991 and up to the December elections, the military set up a system allowing to handle the situation. Changes take place within the police command, but the most important is the nomination on October 18, 1991 of General Larbi Belkheir as Minister of the Interior, which is a key position for managing the elections and the crackdowns that follow the interruption of the electoral process.

With most of its leaders arrested and in prison, the FIS ends up without leadership. It becomes difficult for it to stand out on the public scene, except when it condemns the repression. One must wait until the state of siege is lifted, late September, and the prisoners set free before the FIS resumes some of its activities. Legislative elections are postponed until late December 1991. At the time, one does not know whether FIS will participate, nor even if it will be allowed to do so. As the government appears to want to check Islamist activities and significantly reduce all forms of expression, the FIS is authorized to restructure. For all that, however, the wrestling match between the party and the authorities does not die away.

Abdelkader Hachani, who, at a congress on June 25-26, 1991, was given the responsibility to restructure the party, was arrested on September 27, 1991, two days before the state of siege was lifted, while the other party officials are gradually released.

Only on December 14 does the FIS announce its participation in the elections. A large meeting and a press conference mark this decision. At these, Hachani who, in the meantime, has been released, clearly condemns the army's intervention during the May-June events, the party's difficulties due to the arrests, but also the obstructions raised by the authorities among which the non-delivery of about one million voting cards to their addressees. The most surprising though is that when the FIS is at its weakest, the military do all they can to revive

⁴ *Le FIS du peuple. Politique, droit et prison en Algérie (The people's FIS, policy, law and prison in Algeria)*, www.fisweb.org, 2003, p. 88.

⁵ Abed CHAREF, *Algérie, le grand dérapage (Algeria, the big drift)*, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

it, encouraging it to participate in the elections and organizing its victory. Abed Charef, columnist during this crucial period of Algeria's history, concludes:

"With all these events, it seems beyond doubt that the victory of FIS has been deliberately planned and organised to put the country before the terrible alternative: to choose between the system in place and the FIS. This was the ultimate, perfect bipolarisation⁶."

What happens with FIS after the interruption of the elections?

Despite the enormous difficulties encountered by the FIS with the repression after the strike and the hesitation on its participation in the legislative elections, at the first ballot, which took place on December 26, 1991, it wins 188 seats out of 430 in the Parliament. The second ballot was foreseen on January 16, 1992. It never took place. The President of the Republic, Chadli Bendjedid, is forced by the military leaders to dissolve the assembly and, on January 11, 1992, to resign from his position. Almost immediately, the army takes over power as the High Security Council, composed of 6 members among which three military, dictates the course of action to take. These are Larbi Belkheir, Minister of the Interior, Khaled Nazzar, Minister of Defence, and Abdelmalek Guenaïzia, Head of Staff, all three major generals. The numerous civil institutions set up after the coup d'Etat are in fact illegal and anti-constitutional.

The FIS is indeed not prepared for this situation and protests are still relatively weak during the month of January. On the contrary, FIS leaders do all to avoid the situation getting out of hand and multiply appeals to restore order. "The FIS is determined to seek all means to save the country from getting out of hands due to the confrontations between the police forces and the sons of the nation, and this, despite the bad intentions of the junta in power, dissimulated behind the 'Regency Council' called High State Council⁷ which has humiliated citizens through practices similar to those of the colonial parachutists⁸."

However, instead of using all means to appease the discontent on the streets due to the putsch that does not want to say its name, authorities take measures that cause even more virulent protests. On January 20, the military promulgate a law prohibiting all gatherings around mosques. This is a provocation as one knows that every Friday, pavements around the places of prayer are blocked by faithful who cannot enter the buildings.

Kamil Tawil, journalist at the Arab daily newspaper *Al Hayat* in London, who has followed the Algerian issue for years, asserts that, at the interruption of the elections, a majority of FIS leaders did not want to engage in armed conflict. According to him, it is only mid-1993 that the FIS called upon armed resistance⁹. FIS leaders plead for pacific methods: communiqués, meetings with other opponents, marches, letters, etc. However, such a strategy rapidly appears to be doomed to failure, when the crackdowns on gatherings after Friday prayers are the occasion to arrest thousands of people who are sent to internment camps.

The whole FIS organisation is *de facto* banned and its officers, local civil servants and future MPs prosecuted. On January 22, FIS leader Abdelkader Hachani is arrested for having published in the *El-Khabar* newspaper a call to soldiers to refrain from obeying orders if these

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230-231.

⁷ Collegial directorate named by the High Security Council to simulate civil authority. Major general Khaled Nazzar becomes member of the High State Council as Minister of Defence.

⁸ *La Matin*, January 20, 1992.

⁹ Kamil TAWIL, *Al haraka alislamiya al-moussalaha fil-al-Djazair, mina al-inqadh ila al-djama'a* (The armed Islamic movement in Algeria, from the FIS to the GIA), Beirut, 1998, p. 91-92.

are contrary to the preference of the people (he spent more than five years on remand before being set free after an iniquitous trial; he was murdered in November 1999).

The *Al Hayat* journalist states that the government used all means to push the FIS into an armed battle; however, although officers did join existing armed groups, FIS leaders and most of its officers seem to have opposed this move. This was confirmed by Abdelhamid Mehri, former FLN secretary general¹⁰. When the latter contacted a high State official to inform him of the FIS intentions, he learns that: "We have another plan and are doing our utmost to implement it"¹¹.

While the FIS expands its activities outside the country (parliamentary delegation and afterwards party representation), as in France, to alert world public opinion of the state of non-law that exists in Algeria, and attempts to settle the internal conflicts inherent to this kind of situation, various Islamist armed groups start to operate. According to Kamil Tawil, the FIS had a catalogue of political claims and explicitly used the word "political *jihad*", without recommending violence, but without denouncing it either. These hesitations last until mid-1993, which may have pushed many young people into the ranks of the armed groups in formation, who what's more will oppose the FIS. He mentions a FIS officer, Kamereddine Kherbane, who believes that it was a mistake not to have rapidly reconstituted the armed wing of the FIS. According to him, there would have been no GIA, no other groups or infiltrations and massacres¹².

1992-1994: the organization of armed groups

The January 1992 coup d'Etat, followed, on February 9, by the declaration of the state of emergency, the establishment of concentration camps, and in general the repression that descends on the country, drives many FIS officers and sympathizers underground.

Indeed, there are a few scattered armed groups who organize attacks and kill politicians, often in working-class areas where targets are easy as there is no protection, but no true underground grouping whether derived from or outside the FIS is ready to face the army. In fact, neither the most sceptical, nor the most convinced within the FIS were prepared for such a situation.

Manipulation, from the start

Back in the eighties, Algerian secret services had already sent agents to Afghanistan to keep a close eye on the Algerians who had enrolled in the war against the Soviet Union. On their return to Algeria after 1989, the DRS had no difficulty in supervising their movements and in manipulating them, as there were still agents among them. Since the start, therefore, the latter were engaged in the new groupings that were to gather the 'Afghans'.

¹⁰ In an interview given to the journalist, Mehri explained the commitments that the FIS leaders had taken towards the FLN and the FFS (the three parties representing more than 80% of the electorate): no recourse to violence, solutions through dialogue, protection of the country's unity (Kamil TAWIL, p. 95).

¹¹ Kamil TAWIL, p. 96.

¹² Kamil TAWIL, p. 100-103.

Former Colonel Mohamed Samraoui, right-hand man of the head of the Directorate for Counter Espionage (Direction du contre-espionnage, DCE), Smail Lamari, confirms that as from June 1991, the DRS had already in its possession a list of about 700 names (increasing in January 1992 to about 1200 for Algiers and its region) of persons considered as dangerous activists who were liable to be arrested. But the DRS preferred to use them for diabolical purposes. In 1990, their attempts to revive the MIA (Armed Islamic Movement) - former group operating during the eighties and whose members had been pardoned in 1989 – and to use them to radicalise and discredit the political movement failed under the leadership of Abdelkader Chebouti. The launching of an armed struggle via a MEI (Movement for an Islamic State) did not meet with more success, as its leader, Said Makhoulfi, was holding back, not wanting to take any decision which may prove in contradiction with FIS policy.

It is therefore on the youth groups in Algiers and its suburbs, that have no organic links with the FIS, that infiltration and manipulation efforts concentrate. Some of them have already related to Meliani Mansouri, a former MIA member of the eighties who was going it alone, and consider him as their 'emir'. They are identified as fierce opponents to the legalistic approach of the FIS, which had not only played the election game, but had also refused to call for armed battle.

Apart from Meliani Mansouri, the main stakeholders active in early 1992 are Mohamed Allal, known as Moh Leveilley, and Abdelhak Layada. Moh Leveilley is in the news since the beginning of 1992 for an operation against policemen (Bouzrina Street) causing 6 dead and above all for the attack against the Admiralty, seat of the navy, which causes 10 dead of which 7 military. Samraoui, Habib Souaïdia and other deserters put these two dubious operations down to the DRS¹³. Moh Leveilley is killed in late August 1992 at a meeting with the MIA and MEI leaders, where the reunification of the groups was planned. His deputy Abdelhak Layada takes over his post as emir. Sheet-metal worker in the suburbs of Algiers, he has never distinguished himself in the Islamist movement. Samraoui presents him as a DRS agent, who was opposed to the idea of a reunion between the groups. The GIA (Armed Islamic Group), which started to become known during summer 1992, is born. This event means the exclusion of practically all politicians.

Samraoui writes:

The first GIA claims appear in October 1992 with the circulation of *El-Ansar*, the propaganda mouthpiece of this small group. *El-Ansar* was published in London on the basis of information communicated and controlled by the DRS. In general, the communiqués drafted by the psychological action service officers were transmitted by fax from DRS headquarters. The Islamists who changed sides also contributed to facilitate the information dissemination¹⁴.

Under Layada's authority and a few months after the public appearance of the GIA, some rather atypical positions arise for an armed organisation concerned with its impact on the population and which above all is supposed to materially depend on it. It is striking to note that as from its 'officialization', the GIA concentrates on differentiating itself from the other groups and more particularly from the FIS leadership, while making head-on attacks on the latter. In the second GIA communiqué dated January 12, 1993, the group's strategy becomes apparent as it is to be implemented during the following years, particularly under the emirate

¹³ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, op. cit., p. 143 sq; Habib SOUAÏDIA, *La sale guerre (The dirty war)*, Paris, La Découverte, 2001, p. 57; Kamed B., Algeria-Watch, www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/aw/awterkamel.htm.

¹⁴ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, op.cit., note, p. 167. B. Izel, J.S. Wafa and W. Isaac, authors of the study "What is the GIA" state that the GIA ideologists – Abou Mouss'ab as-souri, Abu Koutada al-falastini and Abou Hamza al-misri "are largely considered as having acquaintances with Arab secret services". ("What is the GIA", in *Inquiry into the Algerian massacres*, Hoggar, 1999, p. 432).

of Djamel Zitouni as from 1994. In this communiqué and in different interviews, Layada strongly criticizes the FIS on its decision to participate in the elections and on its refusal to conduct armed combat. He utters threats against the leaders of the FIS *salafi* tendency and against those in Europe whom he forbids to speak on behalf of the *mujaheddin*. He pronounces death threats against the leaders of the other armed groups, Saïd Makhloufi and Abdelkader Chebouti. Moreover, he sends out warnings to France, which may be seen as the implicit announcement of the attacks that will take place as from 1995 in this country. However, the wives of the security force members are also attacked, as well as the journalists who are all considered as laymen¹⁵.

There are two items missing in this draft programme: the rejection of the two captive FIS leaders and the allegation that the entire Algerian population is *kafir* (impious). The programme excludes any political solution to be negotiated with the authorities or with other opposition parties, while FIS leaders are to be increasingly denounced as 'traitors'. As such, the GIA position links up with that of the harshest army eradicators or the republicans, who also refuse all dialogue or reconciliation.

It is particularly noteworthy that, via the GIA, a genuine destruction plan is being set up directed, on the one hand, towards the inside of the Islamist opposition movement, whether armed or not, consisting of denying all legitimacy to the activists known by the population, while, on the other hand, setting oneself up as the sole guarantor of the 'right way' and excluding other Islamists, not hesitating on their physical elimination. In parallel, the GIA murders also hit journalists, security force members, intellectuals and foreigners. Via the GIA, the authorities therefore kill several birds with one stone: getting rid of those who report on what is happening in Algeria, rallying the 'secular' fringes of society to the radical 'total war' option of the military power, and, while plunging them in such irrationality, precluding any criticism on the latter's manipulations and violence.

Between 1993 and 1995, the regions where the GIA sets itself up witness many bloody upheavals. Areas which in their majority voted for FIS gradually fall into the clutches of the groups, armed or not, composed of FIS members or not, but coming from areas where they operate and are known by the population, who organize both passive and offensive resistance.

During 1993, the rebels declared several regions as 'liberated'. They hit the army and the police very hard by attacking barracks and brigades and by killing agents, but at the price of sanctions against civilians, who are breaking their laws, even up to death penalties. It is during 1994 that the first noteworthy changes appear within the armed movement controlling the regions near the capital city (Blida, Medea, Aïn-Defla). Police combings become more frequent, great numbers of men are killed or kidnapped and disappear. The armed groups do not disappear, but they change:

The political scene changed entirely during the years 1994-95. Men who had taken up arms were less and less familiar to us. We did not know what had become of the FIS members of our region who were active underground. Some took to the bush, others were declared killed, arrested or disappeared. More and more people were found dead without us knowing the motives. Assassinations were increasingly arbitrary¹⁶.

¹⁵ Audio cassette extracts of interviews and communiqués mentioned by Kamil TAWIL, *op.cit.*, p. 74-84.

¹⁶ MILOUD, *Un quartier sombre dans la terreur (An area sinks into terror)*, evidence gathered by Algeria-Watch in 1997, www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/aw/awtermiloud.htm.

The GIA establishes itself and supplants all other groups

At the time, the DRS seems to control the GIA leadership and some of the regional groups that revolve around it. The 'loss' of Layada, arrested in Morocco in June 1993 and extradited to Algeria in August 1993, is therefore a blow for his masters, all the more so that his lieutenant Mourad Si Ahmed, alias Ja'far Al-Afghani, is not a DRS agent, although he is highly manipulated by infiltrated agents. He is appointed as GIA emir in August 1993, while Layada is in jail.

Ja'far Al-Afghani occupies this position until February 1994 and guarantees the pursuit of the attacks and the abductions, in particular that of the French consular agents end October 1993. Liberated after a few days, they transmit an ultimatum from the abductors summoning all foreigners to leave the country by December 1st. Secret service specialists consider that this abduction, which is a DRS move, aims at pressing the French government to give increased support to the Algerian regime¹⁷. The message got through, because a wave of arrests among the Islamist circles in France was launched early November 1993. However, FIS representatives abroad categorically condemn the assassination of foreigners and distance themselves from these operations¹⁸.

Ja'far Al-Afghani is killed during a clash with the security forces in Algiers on February 26, 1994. Tawil notes a striking fact: Ja'far Al-Afghani might have discovered that one of his close collaborators was an agent of the authorities. After an internal trial, the latter had been executed. However, a few days later, police forces locate Ja'far Al-Afghani and several members of his group, who are all killed. For many Islamists opposed to the GIA, this event confirms that the group was infiltrated by Military Security¹⁹. This also reflects the opinion of Samraoui, according to whom, after Layada and before Zitouni, the successive GIA 'national emirs' were not direct DRS agents, but were manipulated by infiltrated agents.

Uniting within the GIA

After the death of Ja'far Al-Afghani, his deputy Cherif Gousmi, called Abou Abdellah Ahmed, an Afghanistan war veteran, becomes national emir of the GIA in March 1994.

At that time, underground forces were active over almost the entire Algerian national territory: southeast of Algiers down to Sidi-Bel-Abbes, in the central mountains, to the east between Bejaia and Jijel, etc. The greatest part was supervised by the 'armed Islamic groups' that El-Afghani had begun to federate and that his successor, Cherif Gousmi, will gather under his authority²⁰.

These existing groups saw their ranks swell with the arrival of many young men not only convinced of the just cause and running away from security force repression or forced into them by the GIA, but also with the coming of common law prisoners set free by the authorities and controlled by DRS agents. Even more seriously, the existing groups are joined

¹⁷ At the time of the hostage-taking, "two French emissaries are sent to the Algerian Ministry of the Interior [...]. They do not believe their ears when the DRS leaders tell them not to worry, that the three officials will be set free. But why not set them free immediately and maintain this make-believe detention by the Islamists? In substance, the Algerians say that they are expecting a gesture from them: that Charles Pasqua kicks the Islamist ants' nest in France..." (Pascal KROP and Roger FALIGOT, *DST, police secrète*, Flammarion, Paris, 1999, p. 451 sq). See also the report by Jean-Baptiste Rivoire broadcasted on Canal Plus on December 1st, 2003, *Le "vrai-faux" enlèvement des époux Thévenot (The 'true-false' abduction of the Thévenot couple)*.

¹⁸ Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹⁹ Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, note 27, p. 129.

²⁰ Lyess BOUKRAA, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

by Military Security agents. We recall the spectacular escape of 1200 prisoners from Tazoult penitentiary on March 10, 1994. Many observers and ex-service men believe the evasion was a secret service operation aiming at, on the one hand, 'exfiltrating' agents out of prison and having them integrate existing resistance groups – and more particularly the future AIS (Islamic Salvation Army) – and, on the other hand, seeking to direct genuine Islamists who have escaped towards false underground groups controlled by the DRS. Samraoui specifies:

I learnt later from colonel Ali Benguedda, called 'little Smaïn', that among the fugitives, there were many 'moles' infiltrated by the DRS and that the operation was aiming at several objectives: first to get rid of refractory Islamist prisoners (taken to false DRS resistance groups, they were then simply eliminated); next, to populate the GIA resistance with ex-convicts and delinquents capable of foul deeds, so as to besmirch somewhat more the image of these groups and to urge the population to mobilize behind the regime; finally, to use these individuals in order to exacerbate the fratricidal war between Islamist groups²¹.

Another military confirms these facts:

Colonel B. Ali also reveals the ins and outs of the Tazoult prison operation (ex-Lambeze, in the Aures) in March 1994. What the authorities present as the escape of more than a thousand Islamist prisoners, appears in fact to be a large-scale manipulation exercise. The MAOL maintains that, among the fugitives, there are many Military Security officers, who had infiltrated the prison. By joining the Aures hideouts as Islamists, these agents were on active service and their mission was to overturn any attempts of reconciliation between GIA authorities and former FIS leaders. They set off what is called the 'inter-resistance war' between the GIAs, the AIS and the MEI. "This is how the underground groups were destabilized and how from then on infiltrated officers took the lead of many katibates (sections). Since then, Military Security controlled most of the GIAs", B. Ali concludes. The MAOL accusation can be summarized as follows: when the GIAs hit, one should see the hand of an army decided to disconnect the Islamists from the people, while dividing up society²².

As mentioned, several local groups joined the GIA. On May 13, 1994, a meeting was held aiming at sealing a union between the different currents under the GIA initials²³. These were members of the *jaz'ara* lead by Lounis Belkacem, called Mohamed Saïd, well-known imam to whom several FIS leaders and officials were very close, there were members of the FIDA (Armed jihad Islamic front), an armed group close to the *jaz'ara*, the MEI leaders headed by Saïd Makhloufi and finally Abderrazak Redjam joining in the name of the FIS (without its leaders being informed), plus of course the existing GIA. The *majless ech-choura* (consultative council) of the former GIA is preserved, Mohamed Saïd, Redjam, Saïd Makhloufi join it. Become also members of the *majless ech-choura* the two FIS leaders who were imprisoned, Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, therefore exacerbating the controversy between groups, some saying that they were never consulted, others claiming the opposite. The new-old GIA's national emir remains Cherif Gousmi. The final communiqué announcing the union sets out the GIA strategy guidelines, considered as the sole legitimate framework for the *jihad* in Algeria, a *jihad* establishing a caliphate according to the model of the Prophet. All the *mujaheddin* should join the GIA, which accepts 'no dialogue or truce or reconciliation with the regime'. The communiqué is signed by Cherif Gousmi for the GIA, Abderrazak Redjam for the FIS and Saïd Makhloufi for the MEI.

²¹ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

²² Y.B. and Samy MOUHOUBI, "Algérie, un colonel dissident accuse" (Algeria, a dissident colonel accuses), *Le Monde*, November 26, 1999.

²³ This meeting was filmed and, among the guards, one can see Antar Zouabri, a DRS agent, who will also be a member of the new *majless ech-choura* and will, in 1996, become the most blood-thirsty emir of the GIA (Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, note 16, p. 165).

The allegiance of the different group leaders to Gousmi is beyond doubt, as the entire ceremony was filmed on video. However, the list of members of the 'renewed' GIA's *majless ech-choura* as Liess Boukra publishes in his book, is a list manipulated by the 'services'. First, Cherif Gousmi is not mentioned, although he is the GIA's national emir. Then, out of the 48 members, 16 have no name, which is quite strange for such an important document. The names of persons known to be DRS agents are however on the list: Mouloud Azzout (presented by Abdelkader Tigha, former secret service member, as a DRS agent who will play a leading role in particular in the kidnapping of the Trappist monks in 1996²⁴) and Farid Achi (officer who infiltrated the Islamist movement in the Algerian Kasbah as soon as 1992, with the mission to channel discontented youth towards targeted actions, planned by the DRS and to finally have them eliminated by colleagues²⁵). As for Omar Chikhi, also registered in this decision body, in 2002, he will be presented by General Nezzar as an 'extremely dangerous terrorist' and 'founding member of the GIA'²⁶. He is however free to do what he pleases since he has given himself up to the authorities in the context of the 'civil concord' law. One is entitled to wonder what sort of services he has carried out for the DRS.

The truth is that this union of the groups is a DRS master stroke: in having an important section of the underground opposition, whether armed or not, integrate the GIA – especially the *jaz'ara* current, which is the most politicised and gathers many intellectuals - , they master it almost completely and moreover are in a position to get rid of it when the moment comes. Indeed, this is what will happen. First however, this largely DRS controlled GIA, is legitimated by well-known personalities such as Mohamed Saïd and Saïd Makhroufi and will be used for other gruesome ends. Before that, differences between partisans of the *jaz'ara* and those of the *salafiya* will intensify, reaching a point of no return and exacerbating the FIS dislocation abroad (the executive body), as the front uniting the various currents. More seriously, the assimilation between the FIS and the GIA that the authorities continue to impose in order to discredit the party in the eyes of its supporters and particularly on the international scene seems to be confirmed. Any denunciation by the FIS of acts of violence is either ignored or attributed to dual language: wishing to be accepted at international level, but in fact supporting the GIA crimes.

On September 26, 1994, the emir of the unified GIA, Cherif Gousmi, was killed by police forces during a clash, together with another GIA leader. Zitouni, who was with him, miraculously escapes.

The political context

It is important to place the Gousmi assassination episode, marking the total control of the GIA by the DRS via Zitouni, in the political context at the time, as the first months of 1994 are decisive in the setting up of structures for the counter-insurrectional battle. The ground was cleared on ideological, military, financial and human levels, and during the autumn, when the President's dialogue effort was jeopardised by the DRS, a cruel and savage war started to rage. The main success of the putchist generals was to make it in camera.

²⁴ "Algérie, dossier politique", *Nord Sud Export*, NSE, n°460, March 7, 2003.

²⁵ Valerio PELLIZZARI, "Ecco come il regime ha infiltrato la Casbah", *Il Messaggero Domenica*, February 1st, 1998 (mentioned in "What is the GIA", *loc. cit.*, p.399 and p. 402). This is confirmed by former colonel Samraoui (p. 175).

²⁶ Khaled NEZZAR, Mohamed MAARFIA, *Un procès pour la vérité (A trial for truth)*, Editions ANEP, Algiers, 2002, p. 102.

When the 1992 elections were interrupted, different efforts towards dialogue were attempted by some currents of power. However all will fail, as the generals in power, called the 'January putchist generals', end up by violently opposing them²⁷. This is to the point that it seems likely that, all along the 'dirty war' years, these generals regularly favoured starting negotiations with former FIS leaders, with the aim to 'occupy' them (and to reduce their influence on the most radical Islamists), before torpedoing the negotiations just when they were about to reach a successful conclusion.

Whereas for his foreign partners Zeroual appears as a man of reconciliation seeking to gather the opposition round the table, while taking control of some of the structures of the regime, the eradicating generals are preparing a new development in the war by encouraging the creation of militias. As from the summer of 1994, the latter appear totally illegally in Kabylia, while the GIA multiplies brutalities in the Algiers region, and in the whole country, the special forces loose their fury against the civilian population.

In August 1994, Zeroual seeks to begin discussions with five opposition parties. A little while before, Ali Benhadj wrote him a "letter (dated July 22 and made public in August) in which he distinguishes between the 'legitimate resistance' of the *mujaheddin* – that is not to be given up by virtue of an assumed dialogue – and 'blind terrorism' (hint to the GIA), and mentions the possibility of beginning negotiations with the authorities, in association nevertheless with the armed groups related to the FIS²⁸".

On August 23 and 26, Abbassi Madani, for his part, sends two letters to Liamine Zeroual, in which he refers to the President's speech approving the call for reconciliation. He supports the four 'permanent features' presented by Zeroual: respect for the Constitution and the republican regime, interchanging political power, application of the rules of democracy²⁹. After consultation with Ali Benhadj and other FIS leaders (three of them will be released on September 13, while the two leaders are placed under house arrest³⁰), it is obvious that the latter will accept a dialogue on the condition that beforehand a consultation meeting be held between FIS leaders.

During the negotiations, Gousmi is killed on September 26, 1994. The Algerian press announces that a letter from Ali Benhadj was found on him, in which he asks the GIA to intensify the *jihad*³¹. Whereas, according to Abdelhamid Mehri, former FLN secretary general, who attended the meetings between the opposition and government, one should read the entire letter, as while Ali Benhadj does indeed praise the *mujaheddin*, he mainly calls the

²⁷ Among others, these were generals Mohamed Lamari, chief of staff, Mohamed Médiène, called 'Tewfik', head of the DRS, Smaïn Lamari, head of the DCE and n°2 of the DRS, Larbi Belkheir, éminence grise of the Algerian system (adviser to President Bouteflika since 1999), Mohamed Touati (adviser to Bouteflika since 2000), Khaled Nazzar, former Minister of Defence, etc.

²⁸ Séverine LABAT, *Les Islamistes algériens (The Algerian Islamists)*, p. 281.

²⁹ *Monde arabe, Maghreb-Machrek*, Oct.-Dec. 1994, p. 75. In his first letter, Abbassi proposes to call for the cessation of armed struggle under certain conditions: sovereignty of the people, respect for pluralism, withdrawal of the army from political affairs and its return to the barracks, lifting of the state of emergency, release of political prisoners, cessation of repression and arrests, setting up of a commission to appoint a neutral government with the aim to prepare free elections. In the second letter, he refuses to discuss the first as long as he remains imprisoned and demands that a meeting of the FIS leaders be held (Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p.179 sq).

³⁰ On the day that they are released, a communiqué signed by Gousmi expresses the GIA's refusal of any form of dialogue (Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 181).

³¹ "The Ali Benhadj letter, made public by the authorities, asked the head of the GIA: one should deal blows to the pagan enemy's strong points and terrorize them by using the laws of the *charia* [...]; one should multiply the attacks and not lay down one's arms... ." (*Le Matin* and *El-Watan* of October 30, 1994, quoted by Hassane ZERROUKY, *La Nébuleuse islamiste (The Islamist 'nebula')*, *op. cit.*, p. 350).

different armed groups to accept Abbassi Madani's letter, to avoid Algeria becoming another Afghanistan and entrust the political leadership with the dialogue³².

But the war machine starts to race. Artificially generated verbal and paramilitary violence is the prelude to the military offensive to be officially triggered off in the autumn when head of staff Mohamed Lamari announces that dialogue is interrupted. For its part, international public opinion is satisfied with simulated negotiations.

The day when Liamine Zeroual is forced to announce the failure of negotiations with the FIS, a bomb explodes in a small cemetery near Mostaganem during November 1st ceremonies, causing the death of several young scouts, live before the cameras. The attack occurs at the right time, as to corroborate the announcement of the failure.

At the time, there were two clans who were apparently in conflict within the military hierarchy: they all agree on maintaining their political and economic power, but whereas the 'January putschist generals' – the true leaders of the game – display a 'total war' strategy, the 'dialogists' are charged with leading a FIS domestication strategy. The military 'eradicators' only grant formal concessions to satisfy recommendations by Western governments, thwarting any genuine option for ending the crisis, while ascribing the responsibility of the failure to the Islamists.

It is thus against this backdrop that the different dialogue initiatives are led. The eradicating clan – both military and civilian – do of course not want them to end up in an agreement between their rivals and the former FIS leadership. The 'decision-makers' within the Belkheir clan demand that FIS leaders keep control over their armed groups and bring all violence to an end, including that of the GIAs – although indeed the latter are largely controlled by the DRS. This enables them to illustrate that in fact the FIS leaders have no hold anymore over the groups, discrediting them as partners in the dialogue.

Most of the military troops are at that moment stationed in the Algiers region. The 1st military region gathers about 60% of the army, i.e. four divisions that general Lamari holds well under control. A new offensive is then launched by the 'eradicating' military 'special forces' particularly against the civil population suspected of support of and sympathy for the FIS and the armed groups close to it³³. At the same time, Liamine Zeroual announces that presidential elections will be organized. In fact, it is only an arrangement with General Mohamed Lamari: together with the other putschists, the latter will maintain his authority over the 'FIS dossier', but will tolerate a controlled electoral process set up mainly for external consumption.

The rise of a stranger : Djamel Zitouni

Late September 1994, the death of Gousmi, sets off a hard struggle for the position of GIA national emir. According to the GIA's internal rules, the role of emir passes to the first deputy. In this particular case, it is up to Mahmoud Tadjine, from the *jaz'ara* spheres, to succeed to

³² Mehri quoted by Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

³³ It should be recalled that, up to 1994, the Algerian authorities are not able to make the war that they wish. They are paralysed by debts and they are also driven by their Western partners requesting the implementation of a structural adjustment plan and the re-introduction of constitutionally codified structures (Parliament, elected President, electoral process, etc.). In 1994, the Algerian army obtains the support of France. Finally, the Algerian government is granted the favours of the Paris and London Club, while also committing itself to implement the structural adjustment plan prescribed by the IMF. As a result, funds are made available for the launching of the military attack. From then on, the number of victims of the repression will rocket.

Gousmi and he is indeed appointed by the *majless ech-choura*. Tadjine issues a communiqué in the *Al-Ansar* of October 16, 1994, where he renews the *majless ech-choura* in his position as GIA national emir, all the local emirs and confirms the names of his two deputies (Khaled Sahli and Ali Al-Afghani). However, another group, that of Antar Zouabri and Djamel Zitouni, opposes this nomination and holds a different assembly aiming at establishing the latter as emir of the GIA.

A communiqué is drafted, but before publishing, mediators try to find a solution to the conflict. Zitouni refuses all compromise solutions and threatens to split up the GIA. Tadjine ends up by waiving the confrontation and the GIA communiqué finally proclaims that Djamel Zitouni is henceforth GIA's national emir³⁴. According to Tawil, Zitouni partisans explain this takeover by the fact that the *jaz'arists* were planning to seize power with Tadjine who was one of them, and this would have jeopardized the *salafiya* principle³⁵. One needed to justify such a move, prelude to the fierce battle between the different groups. Brandishing the *jaz'arist* threat has always shown to be an efficient method...

Until then, Zitouni is unknown in Algeria and abroad. On August 3, 1994, he distinguished himself by attacking the high security estate of Aïn-Allah, where employees of the French embassy lived. The Algerian media (taken up by the French) organize a campaign granting him, before time, a reputation surpassing by far that of his predecessors:

On August 3, 1994, five Frenchmen are killed in Algiers, causing considerable emotion in France. The Algerian services saddle Zitouni with the attack. Relayed by Agence France Presse, one of the sole foreign media authorized in Algeria, this official version is taken up by all the TV news broadcasts³⁶.

In their report *Attentats de Paris: on pouvait les empêcher (The Paris attacks: they could have been prevented)*, journalists Romain Icart and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire interview different people who show how the lightning rise of Zitouni complies with the plot constructed by the DRS. A former Military Security officer (DCSA, Direction centrale de la sécurité de l'armée, Central Army Security Directorate), Hocine Ouguenoune, confirms :

It is true that the official version is: "Zitouni, a hardliner Islamist, killed five Frenchmen." In fact, reality is entirely different, as Zitouni was already manipulated and recruited by one of the heads of the Military Security operational services. (...). It is in fact Colonel Tartag Bachir who planned the whole operation where the gendarmes were killed³⁷.

With Zitouni as national emir, the DRS leaders took renewed control over the GIA, which had partially escaped them after the arrest of Layada. Under his authority, threats uttered in particular against France, were to be implemented.

³⁴ Published by *Al-Ansar* on October 27, 1994 (for further details on this episode, see Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-188).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

³⁶ Romain ICART and Jean-Baptiste RIVOIRE for the documentary *Attentats de Paris: on pouvait les empêcher (The Paris attacks: they could have been prevented)*, Canal Plus, November 4, 2002 (script: www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/sale_guerre/documentaire_attentats.htm).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The 'Armed Islamic Group' (GIA)

The GIA war towards the inside

Until 1994-1995, the GIA still enjoys some backing from the population. The inhabitants of the regions where the GIA are established often support them, even if it means accepting or incurring increasingly authoritarian and constraining rules. Their strike force, power and intransigence attract many recruits, who often are simply fleeing repression. When, gradually, control by the DRS linked branch strengthens and the counter-insurrectional features of the GIA intensify, only then do questions arise among the population and among the armed groups themselves. From that period on, the GIA fulfils several missions.

1. Subduing and terrorizing the population

Because of the subversive methods imposed or used, some armed groups distanced themselves from the GIA, openly expressing the reasons for their dissent. The Blida *Seriyat al-maouquou'oun bid-dima* confirms, for instance, the assassination of *mujaheddin* and the circulation of 'illegal communiqués' which it severely condemns: e.g. one legalizing the assassination of the Naftal company (hydrocarbon company) workers, the assassination of women and young girls, of young men moving around outside their own town, bomb attacks in town centres, the infringement of the people's dignity and property, etc.³⁸

Nesroulah Yous, survivor of the Bentalha massacre – locality situated at about twenty kilometres south of Algiers – committed in GIA's name in September 1997³⁹, gives accurate details in his account of the events that took place in this region, where he lived for several years before the tragedy, and that tally with the reports from other witnesses and observers. Indeed, between 1992 and 1993, the Islamist opponents, who were well established in the areas won over to the FIS cause, started to get organized and embark on armed battle in 1993. They perpetrated assassinations of policemen and hold-ups without attacking the population upon which they depended. As from spring 1994, after the escape in March of about 1200 prisoners from the Tazoult jail, the composition and features of the groups began to change. At their head, there were unknown men, who imposed increasingly violent dictates on the population (ban on smoking and on reading newspapers, compulsory wearing of the *hidjab* for women, ban on French courses, on working for State institutions, on paying taxes, etc.), which was already terrorized by the fierce repression carried out by police forces, through repeated arrest campaigns, arbitrary arrests, summary executions, etc.

At the time, inhabitants of many regions where the GIA were raging witness a division of work between the latter and the army. The ground seems left to the armed groups who hound the civilian population, whereas security forces only appear sporadically to repress the same population. A young man from Saoula had to flee from Algeria to save his life, having witnessed exactly this situation:

³⁸ *Seriyat al-maouquou'oun bid-dima*, March 16, 1996, in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya touakid ikhtiraq al-moukhabarat lil-jama'a al-islamiya al-moussalaha* (The jihad companies confirm GIA infiltration), collection of armed group declarations between 1995 and 1997, published by the 'Algerian community in Great Britain', without date or pagination.

³⁹ Nesroulah YOUS (in collaboration with Salima MELLAH), *Qui a tué à Bentalha? (Who were the killers in Bentalha?)*, La Découverte, Paris, 2000.

The political landscape changed dramatically during 1994-1995. Men who had taken up arms were less and less familiar. We did not know what had become of the FIS members of our region who were carrying out underground activities. Some had joined the resistance, others were declared killed, arrested or disappeared. More and more people were found dead without apparent reason. Assassinations were becoming increasingly arbitrary. For us, it was obvious that those responsible were not FIS members, but extremists, some having returned from Afghanistan. [...] When GIA members were ruling our area, police forces had inexplicably disappeared. But at certain times of the day, the gendarmes and military were present. For instance, the head of the gendarmerie moved freely around in the streets, not giving any impression of insecurity. Nevertheless, raids were frequent: they were not, however, aiming at GIA members, but at us, the youth of the district. They arrested and tortured people. Some never came back. Two of my friends were arrested by the gendarmes. Dreading to be arrested also, I frequently changed premises. GIA members showed some of my friends a list of eleven names of persons that they were ordering to join the resistance. My name was among them. This happened in late 1994. We often wondered whether the gendarmerie and the GIA were not collaborating: some were terrorizing us into joining the underground, others were hunting us down to lock us up in torture centres. We were understanding less and less of what was going on before our eyes, but we all had the unpleasant feeling that there was a link between all this⁴⁰.

Understanding less and less what was happening, many inhabitants of the regions concerned enrolled in militia controlled by the military, hoping to be protected from these groups that were raping women and killing entire families. Those who did not accept to go into auxiliary forces are hunted down, threatened and often forced to leave their homes and regions not to incur the violence of the armed groups coming to slaughter them.

A little later, there was a mass killing was at about 800 m south of our district: 17 dead. Survivors tried to alert the gendarmerie via the mosque's loudspeakers but that night nobody answered their appeal. Police forces came the following day and insinuated to the survivors that the authors of the massacre were to be found among their own children and that they should also better take up arms. Like many others, my family decided to escape to the shantytowns more to the north, towards Algiers⁴¹.

Some armed groups leave the GIA structures, motivating their decision by the massacres committed against the population.

The *mujaheddin* understood that these ongoing criminal acts were aiming at populations known for their support to them. Indeed, in one month's time, more than two hundred innocent people, mainly women and children, were killed. Our movement *al-baqun 'alal-'ahd* has never hesitated to proclaim before Allah its innocence in front of these crimes [...]. We solemnly renew once again our oath to combat the groups who commit these crimes and who, in their bulletins, maintain that the atrocities are legitimised by *fatwa's* justifying the assassination of women and children⁴².

There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that, early 1996, the army is entirely in control of the suburbs and the large periphery of Algiers, where the concentration of security forces is quite considerable. The autonomous Islamist armed resistance is decimated or paralysed by actions conducted in GIA's name. But the massacres do not cease for all that. On the contrary, they increase, together with bomb attacks. Finally, in 1997, when the AIS is about to lay down arms and many groups join this 'ceasefire-surrender', people in the Algiers region, which is totally controlled by the military, are victims of small and large massacres. The

⁴⁰ Evidence given by a refugee in Germany, taken by Algeria-Watch in 1997, www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/aw/awtermiloud.htm.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² AL-BAQUN'ALAL-'AHD, "Communiqué à propos des massacres à Blida et Médéa" (Communiqué on the Blida and Medea massacres), May 2, 1996, in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya...*, *op. cit.*

assailants target entire families from regions where the real resistance was established and where the DRS lead armed groups had forced them to flee the first time (in the Algiers suburbs, the refugees came, among others, from villages around Medea, Blida,...).

2. Discrediting the FIS among the Algerian population and the international community

Algerian authorities know perfectly well that these different factions, parties, movements or small groups are totally fragmented. However in October 1992, they will try to definitely discredit the FIS and all its components with a huge amalgam. The arrest of the authors of the airport attack is staged so as to thwart any attempt to reconcile government and FIS. Aim: to show that Front members, of whatever group, are all totally compromised in terrorist activities and, more particularly, in hatefully wild terrorism⁴³.

As from 1992, the authorities and the media close to the eradicating circles launch disinformation campaigns with a view to disqualify and discredit the FIS by highlighting its violent features and hiding its appeals for dialogue. Moreover, any attempt towards reconciliation, from whichever political quarters it stems, is qualified as backing 'terrorism'. With the arrival of the GIA, no opportunity will be missed to underline a presumed proximity between the FIS and the armed groups (in November 1991, already, the Guemmar barracks attack was attributed to the FIS, whereas the latter not only condemned the act, but had indeed no interest whatsoever in committing it, a month before the elections). The aim of this amalgam was to criminalize the party which was banned since March 1992 in order to justify *a posteriori* its prohibition and having it disappear from the political sphere, while losing its recognition. By declaring it as 'terrorist' makes out of each its sympathisers a criminal to be pursued. Repression is so harsh that even those who are not convinced of FIS responsibility in the crimes committed in GIA's name, prefer to distance themselves from it. Others even choose (or are forced) to enrol in militia that are urged to combat FIS sympathisers.

All means are used to condition public opinion, dictating the 'eradication' vocabulary to it, submitting it to a false reading of the events. Public opinion is not to know the truth, but only to replicate what is imposed as the truth. In 1995, François Burgat notes the true objective of a number of organised assassinations:

Of course, 'absolute' proof is not yet available, but there is substantially tallying evidence and considerable indication, that men and women were killed only for the benefit that their assassins were anticipating to draw from the repulsion inspired to the public for their admirers. Every portion of public opinion has been carefully targeted, as well as every social, ethnical or social and cultural mobilisation, in order to try to divert it from its natural course and to use it against the Islamist camp: women, of course, but also students, football or raï fans, the Berbers, moderate Islamists, etc. Latent or existing tensions were exploited, others reinforced where they were only vaguely credible (football, raï), or even (almost) entirely made up (universities, schools, consumers) when they did not exist⁴⁴.

However this demonization of the FIS is not only for internal use. International public opinion needs also to be manipulated and its attention diverted from the crimes committed by the junta in power towards those of the Islamists, presented as the sole blood-thirsty barbarians. French intellectuals reproduce the Algerian eradicating speech, radicalising it by prohibiting *de facto* anyone to question the identity of the groups who are killing civilians, especially in late 1997:

⁴³ Nicole CHEVILLARD, "Algérie: l'après guerre civile" (Algeria: after the civil war), *op. cit.* p. 71.

⁴⁴ François BURGAT, *L'Islamisme en face (Facing Islamism)*, La Découverte, Paris, 1995, p. 171.

The eradicators – both Algerian and French – who regard as 'obscene' the hypothesis that the massacres may be the responsibility of other groups than the Islamist terrorists, assert that the latter are indeed run by staff located chiefly outside of Algeria: in London, Germany or Switzerland. And, of this, they indeed hold as indisputable proof the existence of Arabic language newspapers openly inspired by the GIA, published in London, and where one can read that it is legitimate to slit people's throats in the name of one or other Koran sura. But at the same time they assimilate GIA and FIS, concealing the fact that the former is engaged in a merciless battle against the latter, while the FIS has in public press releases systematically denounced the massacres perpetrated 'in the name of Islam'⁴⁵

Only after the publication in February 2001 of a former Algerian army officer's book describing in detail military criminal activities⁴⁶ (followed by other evidence from deserters who clearly associate the army with the massacres and especially in the setting up and manipulation of the GIA), only then do the 'eradicator democrats' in France show some reserve. However, their propaganda is refuelled by the so-called collusion between the Algerian Islamist movement – armed or not – and the international organisation al-Qaeda.

3. Establishing terror within the groups

Once appointed GIA's 'national emir' at the end of 1994, Zitouni's first initiatives were to attack the *jaz'ara* movement. He orders the FIDA – an armed group affiliated to the movement – to dissolve and bans the two newspapers that the latter issues in GIA's name⁴⁷. He then announces that he alone may appoint those who are entitled to collect donations. He attacks the '*jihad* traders' (mentioning Kebir, Anas and Kherbane), whom he accuses of embezzlement⁴⁸. Indeed, via the powers that henceforth may only be given by Zitouni himself, the DRS has access to the external armed combat funding network⁴⁹.

This war inside the Islamic movement is illustrated – as we have noted on several occasions – by the rejection of the FIS and its policies, as often appears in the GIA's declarations. Previously under Gousmi's emirate, all FIS attempts to enter into dialogue with the government or with other parties was denounced and rejected. Such a position hardens some more after the May 1994 unification, as the FIS is categorically denounced as organisation and as GIA leaders request that all FIS partisans join the GIA as individual members and express 'their regret for this deviation' (*at-tawba mina al-bida*).

The November 1994 and January 1995 meetings in Rome between the opposition parties, resulting in the issuing of a 'platform to end the crisis', are violently attacked as being acts of 'apostasy'. Here again, the GIA position totally reflects that of the Algerian authorities. In May 1995, a GIA communiqué issues a death threat towards some FIS leaders, forbidding them to speak in the *jihad's* name in Algeria. Moreover, after the failure of the discussions with Abbassi Madani's emissary, who had gone to the GIA camp in order to explain the latest developments in the negotiations with the authorities, Zitouni excluded, in June 1995, Abbassi Madani and Ali Benhadj from the *majless-ech-choura*.

In a document published in July 1997 for the enlightenment of public opinion on the abduction and assassination of the Tibherine monks in March 1996, Ali Benhadjar notes that Zitouni's methods consisted in rejecting the principles and rules established by his

⁴⁵ François GEZE, "Algérie, face au poids de l'histoire et à la manipulation" (Algeria facing the weight of history and manipulation), *Politique Autrement*, June 1998.

⁴⁶ Habib SOUAÏDIA, *La Sale Guerre (The Dirty War)*, La Découverte, Paris, 2001.

⁴⁷ Kamil TAWIL, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

⁴⁸ July 27, 1995 communiqué in *Al-Ansar* (mentioned by Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 202).

⁴⁹ See also Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 219, footnote 16.

predecessors, even as far as killing those who followed, in his view, the unsuitable guidelines of the religious authorities:

When the GIA began to go adrift under Zitouni's leadership, who was manipulated by the security forces with fetwa's and absurd instructions, they cancelled our commitments and deviated from our course by legalizing bloodshed and the confiscation of the property and money of those who did not agree with them. It is not surprising that these vile lackeys end up kidnapping and killing monks, as they did not hesitate to kill the best preachers and *mujaheddin*, officers and civilians, who collaborated with them⁵⁰.

Other groups can bear witness to the methods used within the GIA. Indeed, *Seriyat al-iqdam* denounces "the spreading of sectarian ideas, [...] conflict, dissension and sedition among brothers of a same faith⁵¹". *Seriyat al-wafa* reports on infiltrations among GIA leaders of people who have "sown despair among the *mujaheddin* by generating a climate of fear, hate, terror and suspicion among brothers⁵²".

Another method used to spread fear within the GIA is to assassinate the relatives of fighters. Set up in February 1997 under emir Ali Benhadjar's leadership, the LIDD (Islamic League for the *da'wa* and the *jihad*) is composed of groups that had left the GIA at the end of 1995. It recalls the killing of relatives of GIA deserter fighters in various publications:

the GIA of the secret services found a new excuse for a cowardly revenge by committing these horrible massacres which target mainly families of the mujahidin who had left the GIA as well as the people who sympathise with those mujahidin, in addition to the FIS members. These massacres then spread to hit the population as a whole, and the excuses for such killing; are numerous and versatile as far as the GIA of the secret services is concerned. Hence, the most horrible crimes have been committed against the people, and the declared terrorist plan has been executed as promised.⁵³

Moreover, Ali Benhadjar himself, as leader of the LIDD, suffered GIA's fury when on February 1st, 1997, thirty-one members of his family were slaughtered in Ktiten, a district of Medea.

The leaders of another group, *al baqun 'alal-'ahd* (the faithful to the oath), explain the DRS strategy in a January 1998 communiqué, not distinguishing between the latter and the GIA, as in their eyes it is the same strategy aiming at putting an end to armed resistance:

After the successive defeats inflicted on the soldiers of the military government and the increasing desertions by members of the army and police, the secret services changed to using the old colonial methods by putting pressure on the unarmed people who are still backing their brothers. Their strategy is meant to force people to take up arms to face the mujahidin and plunge the country into a civil war. This is done in co-operation with the militias led by Mohamed Cherif Abbas and the special squad of the military intelligence sendees led by general Ismail Lamari. When the people refused this thesis, the renegade junta started these barbaric massacres with the aim of terrorising people to limit their support for the mujahidin and force them to take up arms. Their terror is designed to ultimately distort the image of the Islamic movement by causing unrest within the jihad movement [...] We want, therefore, to show to world public opinion that most of the victims of these barbaric crimes are families of the mujahidin in either the centre or the west of the country. Whereas the criminal military government fears any international inquiry, our movement welcomes an investigation into these massacres including the butchery of Benzerga

⁵⁰ Abu Cha'ib Ali BENHADJAR, "L'affaire de la mise à mort des sept moines (The affair of the killing of seven monks)", July 17, 1997 (translation: www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/tigha_moines/benhadjar.htm).

⁵¹ SERIYAT AL-IQDAM, in *Al-kataib al-jihadiya...*, *op.cit.*

⁵² SERIYAT AL-WAFA BIL 'AHD, in *Al-kataib al-jihadiya...*, *ibid.*

⁵³ *Ar-Rabita*, n° 2, October 1997, pp. 8-18 (quoted in « Responses of the Islamic movements », in *An Inquiry...*, *op. cit.*, p. 594).

(Bordj-El-Kifan), Medea, Larbaa, Chebli, Rais, Ben Aknoun, Sidi Kebir (Blida), Bainem, Tiaret, Saida, and recently the Relizane massacres.⁵⁴

In such a climate of suspicion and distress, the GIA leader dismissed the heads of local groups some of which were simply eliminated. Indeed, in early 1996, the *katiba al-Medea* reports the "dismissal of the commanders known for their efficiency against the tyrannical regime" and the "breaking off of the links between the jihad operation zones"⁵⁵. And the *al-iqdam* company reports: "Every time that an imam or a *mujaheddin* called to close ranks, to reduce discrepancies and to enter into dialogue, he was dismissed and disarmed, and then possibly disappeared without trace"⁵⁶.

4. Eliminating every internal GIA group that does not want to submit

Dozens, or even hundreds of fighters were assassinated by Zitouni's men. The most spectacular elimination was that of the *jaz'ara* group, who's leader was Mohamed Saïd. Ali Benhadjar, member of a group that joined the GIA and dissociated itself from it in 1996, relates the circumstances of these men's death:

In the spring of 1995, Mohamed Saïd and Abderrezak Redjam were on a mission in the west to convince the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) to join the *moubaya'a* [allegiance] to the GIA emir. Their meeting with Kada Benchiha from zone 4 (head of the western GIA, himself eliminated later), with Amor Habchi from the centre and Ahmed Benaïcha from the AIS demonstrated that among all the latter, there were serious reservations towards Djamel Zitouni and the way he had become the GIA national emir after Cherif Gousmi's death⁵⁷.

They were afterwards to go to Zitouni's HQ in Bougara:

Zitouni suspected they had plotted against him⁵⁸. On their way to Bougara, they stayed with us from July 20 to 22, 1995. I did all I could to convince them not to pursue their journey. There was some evidence of Djamel Zitouni's *djama'a*'s [group] intentions. The centre's emir, Amor Habchi, had been condemned to death and executed after his return from the west. But Mohamed Saïd did not want to listen. He replied that he did not wish to be the pretext for a division between Muslims⁵⁹.

Tawil reports that, late September or early October, Mohamed Saïd and Abderrezak Redjam went to a GIA camp in the Medea region after having heard about the assassination by the GIA of Abdennacer Titraoui in July 1995. They might have requested to meet the leaders. It is then that a trap was set for them. A car was to drive them to another place and they were never seen again⁶⁰. Later on, it was the turn of Mahfoud Tadjine and Abdelwahab Lamara (head of the FIDA) to be assassinated, in December 1995. Between forty and fifty

⁵⁴ Communiqué signed by Mustafa El-Arbaoui, January 9, 1998 (quoted in « Responses of the Islamic movements », in *An Inquiry...*, *op. cit.*, p. 596).

⁵⁵ KATIBAT AL-MEDEA, *al wathiqa ashar-iyā*, February 8, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 and 5 (quoted in "What is the GIA", *loc. cit.*, p. 43).

⁵⁶ SERIYAT AL-IQDAM, in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya...*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ El Kadi IHSANE, "Ali Benhadjar raconte la guerre interne au sein du GIA" (Ali Benhadjar relates the internal war within the GIA), *Algeria Interface*, December 27, 2001.

⁵⁸ Tawil reports that Zitouni suspected Mohamed Saïd to be in contact with the French secret services in order to avoid attacks in France (Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 223). We do not have other sources confirming these contacts, but it is sure that the *jaz'ara* members did not share Zitouni's strategy to involve France in the Algerian conflict.

⁵⁹ El Kadi IHSANE, "Ali Benhadjar raconte la guerre interne au sein du GIA" (Ali Benhadjar relates the internal war within the GIA), *loc. cit.*

⁶⁰ Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 247, note 1.

combatants were killed like that, almost all of them university graduates, close to Mohamed Saïd.

Only mid-December 1995 did the GIA announce the death of Mohamed Saïd and Abderrezak Redjam, mentioning that they "had fallen as martyrs". In answer to the questions and suspicions arising from different groups, such as the FIS, Zitouni signs a communiqué dated January 5, 1996 and published in *Al-Ansar* on January 11, 1996, where he justifies these killings by the fact that the *jaz'ara* leaders had tried to take over power within the GIA. On four occasions, they would have attempted a coup and the communiqué mentions the names of those 'incriminated', condemned to death and finally executed⁶¹.

It is of importance to insist on these eliminating operations aimed at the *jaz'ara* movement, as they mark the moment when several groups, who have observed the GIA drift since Zitouni has taken over power, decide to leave the organisation and to denounce its activities as well as the DRS manipulations. Some of the groups join in the ceasefire that was concluded by the AIS in October 1997. Indeed, the *Seriyat al-iqdam* reports that the *jihad* was the victim of internal conspiracies aiming at draining its fundamental nature and diverting it from the 'Islamic path' and from the legal principles, so as to have it found lacking, and to isolate it from the people. The company is wondering: who is behind the elimination of Saïf Allah Dja'far? What are the motives for the Mohamed Saïd's assassination? Who draws benefit from these murders? Was all this done so that the leadership of the battle would come to an unknown group of suspects set up by the secret services⁶²?

However, as we have noted, the *jaz'ara* followers are not the only victims of these elimination operations. The *katibat al-Maout* denounces that in their company a group of men, among the best, would have been abducted for judgment and eliminated. Moreover, the GIA leadership would have dismissed thirty armed men from their company and placed forty others under control, with the order not to carry arms⁶³.

The *jama'a hamat ad-da'wa as-salafiya* reports that they had condemned the Djamel Zitouni communiqué legalizing the assassination of the spouses of gendarmes, military and policemen, which, according to them, was contrary to the Islamic law. When they informed Zitouni of this, he sent them a clear death threat message⁶⁴.

These assassinations also raised serious questioning among organisations that were supporting the GIA from abroad, in particular among those who were in charge of the *Al-Ansar* publication in London (which was not issued during eight months from June 1996 and started again only after the death of Djamel Zitouni).

5. Waging war against all those who refuse to join the GIA

The GIA's opposition to the AIS starts right from the latter's creation in the summer of 1994, but it becomes particularly harsh in early 1995. In March 1995, the GIA declares war against all who do not join it. In the east and west of the country, where the AIS is well established, the GIA fails to impose itself, but in the centre, all groups that have not asserted their allegiance to the GIA are targeted. Quoting information given by Abdelkader Tigha, Samraoui writes that the DRS stirred up these fratricidal wars:

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247, notes 6 and 8.

⁶² SERIYAT AL-IQDAM, in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya...*, *op.cit.*

⁶³ KATIBAT AL-MAOUT, January 31, 1996, in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya...*, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Abou Abderrahim Bikhalel, January 9, 1996, in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya...*, *ibid.*

In fact, so that the two organisations would kill one another more efficiently, the DRS helped both the GIA and the AIS, supplying ammunition, arms, liaison means, medicine (Dr Metizi, CPO doctor, even tended the injured in the underground resistance groups). Such tactics enabled the elimination of a significant number of Islamists⁶⁵.

When dozens of politicians of the GIA and of the Islamist armed movement had been eliminated, violence against the population increased in intensity. 1996 was marked by considerable bloodshed, with eighteen attacks by car bombings in Algiers killing seventy-nine and wounding more than three hundred during the month of January alone⁶⁶. Then the murder of entire families started, a strategy that culminated in the 1997 mass slaughters causing hundreds of victims each time.

Since the beginning of 1995, the radicalisation of GIA positions towards all those who refuse to join it and towards the population has increasingly grown under the Zitouni emirate. A series of *fatawa* (plural of *fatwa*) are pronounced, one of which is dated February 6, 1995 threatening to kill the wife of a security service member for each Islamist woman held prisoner. An ultimatum is set for March 10, by when the Islamist female prisoners should be released⁶⁷. This communiqué initiated the abduction, rape and assassination of women that later will coincide with each massacre.

Late 1995, a book was published under the name of Djamel Zitouni, dealing with the GIA strategy, its principles and methods⁶⁸. He explains his idea of the Islamic movement, which, in fact, amounts to the exclusion of everything that is not GIA: no alliance with the Muslim Brothers (who have accepted the notion of democracy), the Sufis, the *jaz'ara* (which maintains that the "*jihad* is not a civilizing method" and calls for "peaceful coexistence"), the Qotbists, etc. In this document, Zitouni enumerates all the institutions to oppose as products of apostasy: "The GIA considers as apostate the Algerian State institutions, the government, ministries, law courts, popular, parliamentary or *choura* (consultative) assemblies, the army, gendarmerie and police⁶⁹." Tawil explains that the GIA considers the Algerian authorities as non-Muslim (*kafir*), but distinguishes between the latter and the people who, indeed, are Muslims. He goes on to detail the conditions of GIA membership, defined as *salafi*. A person attains it as an individual, and

needs to be a Muslim, salafi, has to assert allegiance to the emir, break all contacts with the 'tyrants' [*tawaghit*, plural of *taghout*], express repentance and recognize one's mistake if one has been a member of the FIS, of the AIS, of *at-takfir wal hijra*, of lay or communist parties, the An-Nahda party, Hamas, the *jaz'ara*, the Sufis or the Muslim Brothers⁷⁰.

This condemnation of everyone who does not submit to the GIA will take on staggering forms when Antar Zouabri, one of Djamel Zitouni's right-hand men, becomes GIA emir in September 1996, after the latter's death. Indeed, the weaker in number the GIA gets, owing to the desertion of dissident groups and to the blows carried by the army against the 'real' groups, the more it is reduced to a nucleus totally controlled by the DRS, with increasing violence and barbarity. The peak of this barbarity will be reached with the 1997 and 1998 'great massacres'.

⁶⁵ Mohamed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, *op. cit.* p. 209.

⁶⁶ Hassane ZERROUKY, *La Nébuleuse islamiste (The Islamist Nebula)*, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

⁶⁷ Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 213. According to him, the FIS would have asserted that it was in fact a DRS 'fatwa'. Many armed groups condemned this fatwa in their communiqués (*Al-kataib al-jihadiya...*, *op. cit.*).

⁶⁸ The book was entitled: *hadaya labbi-al-'alamine fi tabyine ussul as-salafiyine wa ma yadjib mina-al-'ahd 'ala al-mudjahidine*, had no editor's name on it and would have been signed by Zitouni under the name Abu Abdurrahmane Amine, on 28 rabi' ath-thani 1416, corresponding to September 23, 1995. The book was distributed where *Al-Ansar* was circulated (see Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 222, note 39).

⁶⁹ Quoted by Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

Dissident armed groups assimilate GIA and DRS

The murderous programme assigned by the DRS leaders to the GIA corresponds exactly to those of the underground anti-insurrectional groups set up by the military regimes in various Latin American or African countries, in the 70's and 80's. Moreover, right from the beginning of 1995, voices start to rise inside the resistance groups to denounce the GIA as a counter-insurrectional instrument lead by the 'January putchist generals'. As from late 1995, when the groups that had joined the GIA start to break away, there is a proliferation of declarations about infiltrations in the organisation . Many of these dissidents are convinced that the GIA leadership is controlled by an unknown group that has introduced the *at-takfir walhidjra* doctrine (resulting in the excommunication of entire portions of society, even declaring as *kafir* – infidel – the whole population) and thus diverted the *jihād* from the straight and narrow way. They assert that this group is in fact controlled by DRS agents who allow infiltration by other elements in order to radicalise the armed movement, to discredit it and terrorize the population.

In May 1996, *Al Baqun 'ala-l-'ahd* summarizes what groups like *wafa bil-'ahd*, the Movement for an Islamic State (MEI), *katibat rabbaniya*, *katibat al-khadhra*, *katibat al-fath*, *katibat Medea*, *katibat al-maout*, etc. have already denounced in their own declarations:

It is now well known to the people, in general, and to the mujahidin in particular, that the schismatic khawarij and excommunication groups are infiltrated by the junta secret services who are manipulating these groups according to plans they have devised to hit the mujahidin's noble combat (jihād) from within, and this is by disgracing them in the eyes of the public, the scholars and the callers for this religion [...] Incidentally, these massacres occur in the regions of Blida and Medea known for the heavy concentration of the junta troops. While the areas of the real mujahidin are subjected to the unceasing air raids of the junta, the Khawarij (GIA) regions have not been targeted by the junta raids for over a year [since early 1995]. This is substantial proof of the existing relationship between the GIA and the junta secret services that maintain them and use them according to their plan to hit the jihād at the roots.⁷¹

The Movement for an Islamic State (MEI) goes even further and announces in March 1996:

At present, our movement is convinced that the GIA leadership is infiltrated by baneful secret services and we have undeniable evidence that their commander, Abou Abderrahmane Amine (*alias* Djamel Zitouni), collaborates with secret agents. Copies of documents that our movement has obtained were handed over to some of the GIA commanders, who revolted against such corrupt leadership, which had legalized the rape and murder of breast-feeding or pregnant women⁷².

Saïd Makhloufi, head of the MEI, gives the names of those he considers to be in the hands of the DRS: he mentions Abou Abderrahmane Amine (Djamel Zitouni), Abou Raihana (Farid Achi), Abou Talha al-Djanoubi (Antar Zouabri)⁷³. The FIDA (Islamic Front for the armed jihād) confirms that these men are DRS agents and adds the names of Redouane Makador, Omar Chikhi, Bouzid Abdel Sami' and Abou al-Bassir⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Communiqué on the massacres in the Blida and Medea regions, Abdurahmane Abou Jamal, May 2, 1996 (quoted by M. BENDRISS, « Responses of Islamic movement », in *An Inquiry...*, *op. cit.*, p. 596).

⁷² Movement for an Islamic State, communiqué n° 2, signed by commander Saïd Mekhloufi, March 14, 1996 (in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya...*, *op. cit.*).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ FIDA, communiqué n° 1, February 15, 1995 (in *Al-kataïb al-jihadiya...*, *op. cit.*).

However, the GIA dissident groups are not the only ones to assert that the GIA leadership as well as other groups are infiltrated, manipulated and even created by the DRS. From 1997 on, while the country is devastated by massacres of which size, scale and circumstances are in the news, Algerian army deserters speak up and reveal DRS manoeuvres. Since then, victims, witnesses, former military and NGOs continue to draw attention to the involvement of official agencies, such as the DRS, in the crimes committed in Algeria, but in this period of "international Islamist terrorism", they are not heard.

Former officers confirm that the GIA is an instrument of the DRS

In September 1997, a group of policemen having taken refuge in Europe circulates an appeal claiming that the massacres are committed by three groups: "Special Forces [of the army] and Military Security; militia and organisations created by 'eradicators' [...]; finally, the GIA who, since 1994, are totally infiltrated and are therefore entirely at the service of the DRS." They continue:

We are shocked and suffer to see how often, since late 1992, unmarked police cars leave DRS barracks and stations to attack civilians: judges, high officials, journalists, foreigners and ordinary people, but also policemen and army officers. The day after, we read in the papers that these terrorist acts had been committed by extremists.

As from 1993, we received orders not to arrest or wound people anymore, but to kill them. They turned us into bloodthirsty murderers and rapacious bandits.

Some of our colleagues– by order - carried out attacks against civilians, such as the February 1994 raids in Blida and Chlef, where dozens of civilians were killed and slaughtered, and their heads cut off and thrown into the streets. This was the start of a new antiterrorist method: the collective assassination of civilians. The orders were: kill their families and relatives.

On the other hand, we witnessed the elimination of dozens of police colleagues by Military Security agents, for having expressed disagreement towards these events or for having hesitated to execute orders to kill and slaughter.

Many were tortured because they had refused to kill and slaughter civilians. Many became insane on account of the tortures. Many of us were forced to leave Algeria and our families are paying the price of this situation⁷⁵.

In November 1997, a former Algerian secret agent tells the newspaper *Le Monde* that:

Djamel Zitouni, presumed former head of the GIA (Armed Islamic Group), was in fact the creation of the former Military Security. "He was recruited in 1991 in a security camp in southern Algeria. We helped him take the leadership of the GIA in 1994", he specifies⁷⁶.

In January 1998, a former captain tells the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* how the men of colonel Athmane Tartag, called 'Bachir', head of the CPMI (Main Military Investigation Centre, a DRS service located in Ben-Aknoun, on the heights of Algiers), proceed with subversive operations:

His (Tartag's) speciality was the implementation of a sort of collective murder – he ordered the execution of families of Islamists who had gone underground. His men spread out at night, not wearing uniforms but the *kachabias*, the long robe of the pious. They knocked on the relevant

⁷⁵ Appeal in Arabic on September 2, 1997, signed by three police officers: Ramadani, Meziani, Arfi (German translation: www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/mrvreuve/Erklaeru.html).

⁷⁶ « Un officier algérien accuse les services secrets dans les attentats de Paris » (An Algerian officer accuses the secret services in the Paris attacks), *Le Monde*, November 10, 1997.

family's door and murmured: "Open up, we are the brothers", then they entered the apartment and committed their crime⁷⁷.

Also in January 1998, this was confirmed by another secret agent, Adlane Chaabane, who explains in an Arab daily newspaper in London:

Contrary to what is said in the press, the massacres are not new. Since 1994, mass killings are lead by the security services, and more particularly by a special section of the Military Security that organizes them and carries them out. It is called the 'Military Security Central Direction'⁷⁸. It operates within the framework of an 'operational centre' composed of a commando unit headed by Colonel Athmane Tartag, known as 'Bachir'. The aim is to terrorize Islamist families in the Islamist areas in order to isolate them from other families who could be of great support to them.

This special unit is based in the Ben-Aknoun barracks in Algiers. In the beginning, the unit was composed of six to ten members dressed in the *kachabia* or in the *djellaba* and growing ten day beards. Their working method is as follows: in the middle of the night, they are transported in civil vehicles to the Islamist districts such as Cherarba, Les Eucalyptus, Sidi-Moussa, Meftah, etc. They enter into the districts and pick specific families, those of the Islamists they are looking for. They knock on the door, shouting: "Open up, we are the *mujaheddin*." As soon as the door opens, the occupants are all killed. Early morning, there are about thirty dead. Afterwards, during the day, the houses are burned down⁷⁹.

To avoid that security forces be charged with these crimes, they are more and more frequently claimed by the GIA.

The most detailed revelations on GIA manipulation by the secret services are certainly those made in 2002 by former captain Ahmed Chouchane, instructor-parachutist in the army's special forces. Arrested in March 1992 and sentenced to three years imprisonment for 'armed conspiracy', he is the victim of an unsuccessful abduction attempt when leaving the prison on April 1st, 1995:

After the kidnapping had failed, the security services commander started blackmailing me. Major General Kamel Abderrahmane himself [head of the DCSA] told me that some among the security services had decided to eliminate me and that I could only escape by working under his personal authority; and he promised my immediate promotion to the rank of colonel and to give me all the money I wanted. [...] After the first meeting, they proposed that I participate in a plan to assassinate FIS underground leaders who had taken up arms. As an example, they mentioned: Mohammed Saïd, Abderrezak Redjam, Saïd Makhloufi. I expressed my surprise at these targets and said that these people were politicians and had been forced to take up arms; and that it seemed possible to discuss solutions with them that would safeguard the rights of all Algerians and prevent further bloodshed. I also said: "If you had mentioned the assassination of Djamel Zitouni, who had admitted his responsibility in the massacre of women and children, I would have better understood my mission!" Then, Colonel Bachir Tartag virulently interrupted me and said: "Leave Zitouni alone, he is with us and it is with him that you will be working from now on; we shall organize an appointment with him"⁸⁰.

To gain time, Chouchane accepts this blackmail; he flees his country in November 1995 and arrives in England in November 1997, where he obtains political asylum.

⁷⁷ "Ils soupçonnaient la Sécurité militaire" (They suspected the Military Security), *Der Spiegel*, January 12, 1998 (French translation by Algeria-Watch, www.algeria-watch.org/mrv/mrvmass/Spiegel3.html).

⁷⁸ It is in fact the DCSA (Army Security Central Direction), lead by general Kamel Abderrahmane from 1990 to 1996.

⁷⁹ *El-Watan el-Arabi*, June 2, 1998.

⁸⁰ Evidence given by former Captain Ahmed Chouchane, MAOL, August 13, 2002, www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/nezzar_souaidia/chouchen_temoignage.htm. See also his testimony at the lawsuit instituted by General Nezzar against former second-lieutenant Habib Souaïdia, in *Le Procès de "La Sale Guerre"*, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-175.

Early 2003, Abdelkader Tigha, former DRS warrant officer on duty in one of the most important centres, the CTRI (Territorial Research and Investigation Centres) in Blida (that was headed between August 1990 and October 2003 by Colonel M'henna Djebbar) confirmed, in the magazine *Nord-Sud Export*, the cooperation between his service and Zitouni's GIA, in particular the abduction of the Tibhirine monks in March 1996. But already in 1993, this service had infiltrated the GIA:

Let's have another look at Blida in 1993 and the way the arrests of suspects identified by Tigha's research and investigation service operate, with the help of agents infiltrated in the circles considered as close to the GIA. Supported by the GIS (Special Intervention Group of the Gendarmerie), the judicial police teams go into action during the curfew established by the army, arresting people who were supposed to be involved in subversive activities⁸¹.

Infiltration rapidly meant taking control of the relevant group. Tigha reports that:

During 'infiltration' operations, an agent is recruited in a specific circle with the aim to keep watch over it, to neutralise or annihilate it. This is what happened with Djamel Zitouni's GIA, with the ex-FIS party and several independent armed groups. Such a group operating in Algiers and led by Khelifi Othmane, known as Hocine Fliche, was wiped out in such an infiltration operation in July 1998. The infiltrated agent was Boulafaâ Bouzid, DRS warrant officer and explosives expert. By making parcel bombs and other explosive devices, he contributed to spread terror in Algiers before allowing the annihilation of the armed group.

He also confirms the secret service's involvement in the GIA right from the start:

When asked if Zitouni's GIA was in the service of Algerian Military Security, Abdelkader Tigha answers 'yes' without hesitation: "Because the GIA manipulation and infiltration were of greater profit to the interests of the political and financial mafia and a few military leaders. The GIA was also used to annihilate other armed groups, in particular the AIS that was very popular among the Algerian population".

In his last note-book, Tigha relates how the GIA was created:

The GIA was taken over since the beginning in 1993. Its manipulation started when the DRS recruited an emir in Blida as one of the first to set up the GIA. He was called Merdj Abdelkrim, code name Mike, voluntary ex-imam of the town of Boufarik in Blida.

Thus, his recruitment would have helped to influence the GIA's then national imam, Benamar Aïssa. At the time, his communiqués were signed in the DRS premises in Blida. When in late 1993, Benamar died, Merdj Abdelkrim might also have worked for the DRS with Zitouni:

He phoned abroad, giving instructions from our offices..." Further, Tigha specifies: "The DRS sent Emir Merdj Abdelkrim away west of the country, to Oran, where he still is, in a house supplied by the DRS⁸².

Probably the best information was given by former Colonel Mohammed Samraoui, Smâïn Lamari's ex-right hand and head of the DCE. From March 1992 to June 1992, Samraoui was in charge of DRS's SRA (Research and Analysis Service), before being appointed military attaché at the Algerian embassy in Germany in September 1992. He deserted in February 1996 and obtained political asylum in Germany. It is not possible to give all the details that Samraoui reports in the book mentioned above on the involvement of the secret services in the creation, development and instrumentalisation of the GIA – we have mentioned a few -, but it is important to return to his clarifications on the GIA's creation.

⁸¹ NORD-SUD EXPORT, *Dossier politique*, March 7, 2003.

⁸² *Ibid.*

As already pointed out, after the FIS victory at the local elections in June 1990, the future putchists understand that they are threatened and do everything to control the Islamist movement, by radicalising some of its groups, driving them to violence, seeking to discredit the FIS as a whole.

Quite rapidly, the DRS seeks to reconstitute armed groups by using the former MIA. At first, this fails, but it does not prevent the DRS to set up hideouts for future underground groups. Samraoui reports that in July 1991, Commander Amar Guettouchi, head of the Main Centre of Operations (CPO) - a DRS unit in charge of illegal actions, goes with Ahmed Merah, former MIA member turned DRS collaborator, and an ANP company, to Aomar in the wilaya of Boumerdès, to prepare the setting up of a false resistance camp⁸³.

The 'Afghans' were infiltrated and put under control – according to Samraoui – already in 1990, in particular via Captain Ahmed Bouamra: he had been to Afghanistan on orders of the DRS, pretending to be an Islamist deserter, and upon his return became emir and imam of the mosque called 'Kaboul' in Algiers, where young people were indoctrinated, trained for guerrilla warfare and made familiar with weapons⁸⁴. Later on, the 'Afghans' will partly be found in the GIA. But at the same time, other groups are created by the DRS:

In April 1991, that is to say two months before the legislative elections initially foreseen on June 27 (they were postponed until December 26, 1991, owing to the FIS strike and the establishment of the state of siege), in my presence, Colonel Smaïl Lamari instructed Commander Guettouchi to create entirely DRS controlled Islamist cells and to ensure their coordination: the idea was that each agent would lead a group of five to ten men. At the time, there was no question of setting up armed groups from scratch, but only organizing networks serving to supervise and control FIS activists ready to follow the 'civil disobedience' watchword advocated by the party hard-liners (like Saïd Makhloufi), as well as the young radical Islamists hostile towards the legalistic line of the FIS and who were beginning to go underground and join the resistance⁸⁵.

The ground was thus more or less cleared for part of the Islamists to resort to violence, from which the decision-makers could draw profit if necessary. At the moment the electoral process was interrupted on January 11, 1992, the DRS prepared several attacks that will make an impression: the assassination of six policemen in Bouzrina Street on February 9, 1992, and, a few days later, the attack of the military naval repairs unit, 'l'Amirauté'; and above all, a few months later, the raid on the airport of Algiers on August 26, 1992, killing nine and wounding more than a hundred people⁸⁶. These attacks were of course meant to discredit the FIS, but also to prepare some of the men to become future GIA leaders. The Bouzrina Street killings were thus attributed to Moh Leveille, whom we have already mentioned.

Samraoui enumerates the different methods used to control the Islamist opposition:

- infiltrate the genuinely autonomous armed groups, via turncoat Islamist activists (they mainly had been arrested by the services and 'returned into circulation' after acceptance to collaborate, by blackmail or compromise), or via DRS agents, like the military presenting themselves as 'deserters', [...].

- use the groups that are already manipulated and that went over to armed combat in the beginning of 1992 (mainly the MIA, the El-hidjra oua at-takfir sect, the ex-Afghanistan servicemen) to attract new recruits;

⁸³ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87 sq.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.93.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143 sq. Police officer Kamel B., in charge of the investigation on the policemen assassinations in Bouzrina Street, reported that some army men committed the crime.

- encourage the creation of groups by sincere activists, who were in fact manipulated from the start without knowing (such as the Movement for an Islamic State, of Saïd Makhloufi, set up in the spring of 1992);
- in the southern security camps and in the penitentiaries, infiltrate false Islamist delinquents who, when released, will set up, as from 1993, armed groups operating in the regions known for their support to the FIS;
- create from scratch armed groups led by 'emirs' who were in fact DRS officers⁸⁷.

An example of the latter method was revealed in 1998 by an Italian newspaper: in 1992, a certain lieutenant Farid managed to infiltrate Casbah youths and create his own group by simulating an escape after an arrest. A year later, he was one of the national GIA leaders, as he had demonstrated efficient subversive activities, in particular the recruitment of men (among whom many other DRS agents) and the supplying of arms. Once his network was operational, he would have had policemen, magistrates and civil servants killed by men who were convinced that they were fighting for the good cause. During the next stage, he set up operations where fighters were killed, he disclosed arms and men's caches and, in the end, when this 'false' group was of no further use, he distributed among his men about two hundred pairs of sports shoes of the 'Tango' brand, unknown in Algeria. The members of these groups were therefore easily recognisable by well-informed security forces and just shot like rabbits⁸⁸.

The GIA against France

"A spectacular event will opportunely occur that will both launch the Algerian army against the terrorist hideouts and entail, if not the approval, at least the momentary understanding of foreign governments, and of France in particular⁸⁹": late October 1993, three French consular agents (the Thévenot couple and Alain Freissier) are kidnapped in Algiers by a GIA group and, after an incredible cavalcade, set free a few days later holding an ultimatum summoning all foreigners to leave the country by December 1st⁹⁰.

The numerous assassinations of foreigners (almost a hundred)⁹¹ are followed by the banning of free movement for journalists and other visitors. In 1994, western embassies shut down and only maintain an emergency service. The presence of cumbersome foreign witnesses is therefore considerably reduced and the war can go on for years in camera.

During Zitouni's emirate, the GIA's influence reaches France, to which it 'declares war' shortly after it comes to power in late 1994. On December 25, 1994, an Air France Airbus is stormed by a GIA group on Algiers airport. The raid's circumstances are very disturbing:

⁸⁷ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, op.cit., pp.167-168.

⁸⁸ Valerio PELLIZZARI, "Ecco come il regime ha infiltrato la Casbah", loc. cit.

⁸⁹ Pierre DEVOLUY, Mireille DUTEIL, *La Poudrière algérienne*, op. cit., p. 318. For more details on the abduction of the three consular agents: MAOL, www.anp.org/affairesdesotages/affairesdesotages.html.

⁹⁰ In fact, the operation was arranged by the DRS in coordination with the then French Minister of the Interior, Charles Pasqua, and his network. In the news coverage of the event by Jean-Baptiste Rivoire broadcasted on Canal Plus on December 1st, 2003, a former DGSE member posted in the French embassy in Algiers and who moreover was the Thévenots' son-in-law, reveals that he knew from the start that the whole affair was set up by the DRS and the DST (see *Services secrets: révélations sur un vrai-faux enlèvement (Secret services: revelations on a true false abduction)*, www.algeria.watch.org/ft/mrv/mrvreve/affaire_thevenot_script.htm).

⁹¹ Salah-Eddine SIDHOUM, *Liste non exhaustive des victimes étrangères (Non exhaustive list of foreign victims)*, in: Documents de base, n°3-18.

travellers' luggage is not searched, sixty-six passengers embark without ticket control⁹², the abductors bring in arms and explosives, at a time when Algerian authorities are supposed to take exceptional control measures due to acts of terrorism that have already struck the same airport in August 1992. A wrestling match begins between French and Algerian authorities: the former want to send the French gendarmes and the latter refuses. In the meantime, three passengers are killed (it is surprising that several well-known key figures are on board the plane and are not affected; the victims are a Vietnamese, a French cook and an Algerian policeman). In the end, the plane is allowed to take off for Marseilles airport, where it is stormed by a special GIGN unit, killing the abductors – who, to date, have not been identified.

The legal enquiry is at a standstill as Algerian authorities refuse all collaboration.

We have already seen that early 1995, the peace initiative launched in Rome by the Algerian opposition makes the 'decision makers' feel very ill at ease. The meeting is closely followed by Western partners – among which France -, and President Liamine Zeroual tries once more to negotiate an end to the crisis with FIS leaders. The connection between the two initiatives could endanger the 'eradicators' position on both sides of the Mediterranean. The Algerian military and their French friends do everything to avoid that the French government – their main ally – joins the peace plan. Soon the Paris bomb attacks will compel French politicians to accept Algerian terms.

From July 11 to October 17, 1995, five attacks shatter French public opinion, who, being targeted by a tremendous media coverage, will be persuaded that the people behind the raids are Algerian Islamists. However, this is quite unclear.

Bomb attacks against France

We have seen that as from 1993-1994, threats were voiced against France as the country was supporting the Generals' regime. Up to then, the French were a privileged target among foreigners in Algeria, but in the month of July 1995, it is in France that the GIA strikes.

From the first bomb on, an accusing finger is pointed at the GIA, while four other attacks were to follow. Moreover, the GIA claimed responsibility for the attacks in a communiqué dated September 23⁹³. As from that moment, however, many French policemen and political leaders wonder who is behind the bombings: "One cannot exclude that the Algerian intelligence service is involved in the first operation. Afterwards, the Islamists naturally took over", one French high official asserted. [...] "The Algerian Military Security attempted to direct the French police on false tracks so as to eliminate people who were cumbersome", Jacques Chirac's Minister of the Interior declared⁹⁴.

But these doubts are not made public and the French public opinion hold that the GIA is the sole responsible for the attacks. Such a conciliatory position towards the Algerian authorities is to be found a few years later during the trial of two men imprisoned for their participation in the attacks, as the elements involving the DRS will not be taken into account by the examining magistrate. Moreover, the French investigators remain curiously inefficient in getting hold of a certain Ali Touchent, although he was considered by the police as the coordinator of the attacks. He slips several times through the net and in the end is exfiltrated and killed in Algeria. Mohamed Samraoui reveals that, after a few months spent in France, Touchent was approached in early 1993 by the Military Security, who asked him to

⁹² Lounis AGGOUN and Jean-Baptiste RIVOIRE, *Françalgérie, crimes et mensonges d'Etats (Françalgeria, crimes and lies of States)*, op. cit., p. 415.

⁹³ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, op. cit., p. 247.

⁹⁴ *Libération*, November 1st, 2002.

collaborate in exchange of the settlement of his administrative problems. The first GIA units appear during the summer and Djamel Zitouni appoints the responsibility for these networks in Europe to Ali Touchent. He is in permanent connection with his DRS contact officer, recruiting several young people who, via him, are directly manipulated by the DRS⁹⁵. Among others, there is Khaled Kelkal who, in front of the television cameras, is eliminated by a member of a French special unit.

Manipulation spreads even further as the French intelligence service, the DST, is also involved in the weird DRS moves. As Samraoui explains, the cooperation between the DRS and the DST is such that the latter covers the traffic of forged identity papers and arms towards Algeria, in order to have access to information on Islamist networks in France and Europe. Moreover, it is the DRS that sets up these networks itself! When the DST agents realize how far their Algerian counterparts are going – organising attacks on French territory - it is too late and they can do nothing but cover up for the Algerian operations⁹⁶.

In a documentary on the Paris attacks broadcasted in 2002 by Canal Plus, journalists Jean-Baptiste Rivière and Romain Icart demonstrate that several French officials, politicians and secret service agents knew that the GIA was an instrument in the hands of the Algerian DRS. A French General Information officer explains to the two journalists that Ali Touchent was necessarily a DRS agent, in following terms: "He must have been an agent. In France, we have already seen such agents setting up a network, always getting away with it and then setting up another one. For me, he is an agent, there is no other explanation⁹⁷..." Former magistrate Alain Marsaud, ex-head of the antiterrorist central service (1986-1989), confirms: "It is true that one of the considerations made by the DST is to establish that when following up the Kelkal networks, one found Algerian official service men. We all had good reasons to be extremely careful."

M. Marsaud is totally convinced that the terrorist acts committed in France in 1995 are the deeds of the Algerian State: "When one has lived through the years from 1983 to 1990, one realizes that State terrorism is something quite peculiar, it uses screen organisations. In this case, one can imagine that, at one moment or another, the GIA served as a screen organisation for the French raid." Why? Simply to take France hostage and force its politicians to subscribe to the Algerian 'putschists' strategy. And the former head of the anti-terrorist unit adds that it is in the interest of those who order the attacks to make it known and disclose the origin: "There is no use in committing attacks if you don't get the message through and if you don't force the victim to give in. Therefore, afterwards, a parallel diplomacy is set up: it must be well understood where the threat comes from and how it can be eliminated in return for certain advantages⁹⁸..."

After these attacks, no French politician in duty will dare publicly condemn the Algerian regime. Lionel Jospin himself, previously quite critical about the Algerian generals, once Prime Minister, in the heat of the raids, explains on TF1 news, on September 29, 1997: "In the case of Algeria, the main difficulty is that we cannot understand what is truly going on in Algeria. [...] We are hostile to a fanatic and violent opposition fighting against powers that themselves, in a way, use violence and State force. We need therefore to be quite careful. [...] I must also think of the French people: we have already been hit. I must bare these issues

⁹⁵ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, op. cit., pp. 231-232.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁹⁷ Jean-Baptiste RIVOIRE and Romain ICARD, *Attentats de Paris : on pouvait les empêcher (Bomb attacks in Paris : they could have been avoided)*, Canal Plus, November 4, 2002. See the script : www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/sale_guerre/documentaire_attentats.htm.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

in mind. I am all for taking our responsibilities, but the French population must also be protected. It is hard to say this, but you will also understand why it is of my responsibility to say so⁹⁹."

On October 30, 2002, Boualem Bensaïd and Smaïn Aït Ali Belkacem, accused of having participated in three of the 1995 attacks, are sentenced to life imprisonment by the special court of assizes of Paris. The shadow of Ali Touchent floats over the court, but his crucial role that would allow to understand the practical DRS involvement was never truly discussed.

The abduction and assassination of the Tibhirine monks

Another affair that has a serious impact outside Algeria is that of the abduction and assassination in 1996 of seven monks of the Tibhirine Trappist community in the Medea region. Several books have been published on this tragedy but unclear aspects still persist up to now: no serious survey has been urged either by the Algerian or the French authorities – in spite of the fact that they were French citizens. The Catholic Church also, and in particular the archbishop of Algeria, Mgr Teissier, preferred to keep to the official version blaming the crime on the GIA, requesting no other explanation. However, information available demonstrates that the truth in this affair is most certainly far from what the Algerian and the French authorities are claiming.

During the night of March 26 to 27, 1996, an armed group enters the monastery and kidnaps seven of the monks living there. According to Ali Benhadjar, a member of the region's resistance movement, who had joined the GIA, but who left it after the assassination of the monks, their abductors might, also that same night, have led an important reprisals operation in the area. They kidnapped several inhabitants from their homes, killing three of them, destroying doors and furniture and making such a din that security forces should have been alerted, all the more so that the raiders were moving around by car during curfew¹⁰⁰. Once the monks were kidnapped, they would have taken the mountain road on foot with their hostages. One of the latter would have escaped and warned police forces of the place where the monks and the armed group were hidden, but they would not have lifted a finger (on the other hand, later on, the region was bombed...with napalm¹⁰¹).

On April 18, 1996, i.e. one month later, the GIA claims the abduction and proposes to exchange prisoners. On April 30, a Djamel Zitouni emissary is sent to the French embassy, where he hands over a videocassette of the monks recorded on April 20. From then on there is no more news until the announcement of their execution on May 21, 1996. Their heads are found – according to Algerian authorities – on May 31.

At present, we have a first hand account that sheds some light on part of the facts: late 2002, former warrant officer Abdelkader Tigha, on duty in 1996 at the Blida CTRI, reports having seen DRS number two, General Smail Lamari, called 'Smaïn', meet Mouloud Azzout, who is both DRS agent and Djamel Zitouni's right-hand man, the day before the monks' abduction. On the evening of the kidnapping, he sees two vans exit the barracks, as if off to carry out arrests. He asks for the vans' destination and is told: "Medea". When the two vans

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Abu Cha'ib Ali BENHADJAR, "L'affaire de la mise à mort des sept moines" (The seven monks murder affair), *loc. cit.*

¹⁰¹ According to Father Armand Veilleux, who was at the time general 'procureur' of the Cistercian Trappist order and who had closely followed the whole tragic affair, this would explain the fact that he was allowed to see the corpses only after much insistence with the Algerian authorities, and what's more, he then only saw what remained of them: the heads. (Armand VEILLEUX, "Hypothèses sur la mort des moines de Tibhirine" (Hypotheses on the death of the Tibhirine monks), *Le Monde*, January 24, 2003).

return, "we thought they had arrested terrorists, says Tigha. Unfortunately, it was the seven monks who had just been kidnapped. They were interrogated by Mouloud Azzout. Two days later, he took them to the Blida mountains and then to Djamel Zitouni's headquarters, in a locality called Tala Acha, consisting of underground hideouts, a makeshift infirmary and a school for the new [GIA] recruits¹⁰²". From there, Mouloud Azzout maintains contact with the CTRI. According to Tigha, conflicts between GIA factions would have forced Zitouni to hand over the hostages to a rival group, which was not member of the DRS. Did the DRS try to recuperate them by bombing the area?

It seems that the abduction of the hostages was not meant to end up in the assassination of the monks. DRS' double objective appears to have been to send these cumbersome witnesses of the 'dirty war' away and to ensure once more the French government's support. However, not only did the 'armed groups' get out of control, but the French information services also interfered: René Guitton, author of a book on the affair, reported – certainly on the basis of French secret service information – that the DST had negotiated during the whole kidnapping period. Prefect Jean-Charles Marchiani, close to Charles Pasqua, would even had had a contact with the abductors and claimed to have obtained their liberation if the DGSE had not interfered¹⁰³. It is entirely conceivable that once again this is a DRS operation about which some DST leaders were informed – very close to their DRS counterparts, in particular 'Smaïn' Lamari -, but which got out of control for the two reasons mentioned. One can formulate the hypothesis that, to avoid discovering the truth, the seven monks and Djamel Zitouni were eliminated.

Further to the Tigha revelations, on December 9, 2003, the family of one of the murdered monks (Father Lebreton) and Father Armand Veilleux lodged a complaint against persons unknown, associating in an action with the doyen of the examining magistrates at the Paris high court, so that at last an investigation may be carried out.

The GIA of Zouabri

Officially Zitouni would have been killed on July 16, 1996. According to Tigha, his death probably occurred in May 1996 – thus at the same time as the assassination of the Tibhirine monks, that he had ordered. Antar Zouabri, called 'Abou Talha', would then have been propelled GIA 'national emir' thanks to an internal coup in the organisation.

After the many group defections, Zouabri seeks to regroup those remaining, while getting rid of rivals. Indeed, late August 1996, he orders the murder of Benchiha, emir of the second region that had participated in the creation of the GIA, but had dissociated himself from it in the beginning of 1996. Zouabri feared that he would gather the dissident groups and threaten him. Once his monopoly is more or less re-established, Zouabri renews relations with the leaders of foreign jihadist organisations: the Egyptian organisation *al-djihad* and the Libyan *al-muqatala*, the Palestinian Abou Qotada partisans and those of the Syrian Abu Monsab, who had voiced criticisms against the GIA. Because of the support he is giving the Rome 'national contract', they require explanations on several issues, in particular the exclusion of Ali Benhadj from the GIA (we recall that the latter never pronounced himself on his

¹⁰² Arnaud DUBUS, "Les sept moines de Tibhirine enlevés sur ordre d'Alger" (The seven Tibhirine monks abducted upon Algiers orders), *Libération*, December 23, 2002.

¹⁰³ René GUITTON, *Le martyre des moines de Tibhirine, (The martyrdom of the Tibhirine monks)*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 2001, p.153 sq.

'automatic' integration in the GIA's *majless-ech-choura*, on the occasion of the May 1994 union).

When questioned on assertions concerning the GIA being a follower of Kharidjism (from the *al-hijra wa-t-takfir* group), Zouabri replies that it is called like that by the *jaz'ara*. Late 1996, a sixty-page manual is drafted in by Abu Mondhar in answer to the different questions asked by allies abroad. In substance, the war led by the GIA against those who joined it at the time of the May 1994 union, but also against the FIS, the Algerian authorities, France, etc. is justified by affirming that this was by respect for the *salafi* method that the Ancients had already followed¹⁰⁴. In the booklet, the writer explains why the GIA could not be treated as Kharidjite. In lengthy developments, he expresses the idea that the Algerian people cannot be considered as *kafir* (non-believer), if they follow the GIA's precepts and fight on its side. However, the drift towards qualifying the Algerian population as *kafir* will happen rapidly in order to 'justify' the massacres.

In the end, Abou Hamza, who was responsible in London for the publication of the GIA bulletin *Al Ansar*, decides to take up service again in February 1997, after eight months interruption. He explains that those who had accused the GIA of being infiltrated by the DRS had not supplied him with the convincing evidence that he had asked for.

Although reduced in numbers, the GIA increases its savagery. From the autumn of 1996, massacres against villagers take on a new dimension. They increase in number and intensity in the beginning of the following year. The vast majority of these massacres occur in the Algiers region, known as a 'GIA stronghold', although controlled by the army. They are committed against the population who in the past had supported the resistance or had refused to enrol in the militias, particularly in the Medea, Chebli, Larbaâ, Blida, Meftah, ... regions.

The killings take on unbearable scales during the first half of 1997. The GIA claims them, saying that they do not purposely kill children, but the wives of 'apostates', this being 'lawful'. The first declaration by which the GIA takes on responsibility for these crimes is published after the massacre of twenty-five people in Hammam Melouane near Bougara on February 10, 1997, and that of Chrea on the 17th of the same month, in a region controlled by militiamen and the army.

During the following months, several massive massacres horrify the world: on April 21, in one night, one hundred and twenty people are killed on a farm in Bougara; in July and August, there is hardly a day without a mass slaughter in the areas of Blida, Medea and Aïn-Defla, making hundreds of victims. On August 29, in Raïs, near Sidi-Moussa, in the outskirts of Algiers, where the military are concentrated, nearly three hundred people are murdered (and two hundred wounded). A few days later, in the night of September 5, seventy people are killed in Sidi-Youcef, although special force units are stationed there. And on September 22, in Bentalha, 20 km from Algiers, more than four hundred people are killed in an enormous blood bath. Following the great agitation caused by these horrible crimes, late September, the GIA issues its last communiqué, where it finally oversteps the mark and considers the Algerian people as *kafir* (non-believer), justifying all the violence committed against them:

The unbelief (*koufr*) showed by these hypocritical people, who oppose the victory of the *themujaheddin* and their followers, does not undermine our determination and will not weaken us, if it is God's will. [...] Our acts of carnage, massacre, throat slitting, expatriation, arson, women capturing [...] are actions that bring us closer to God¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p.288, note 28.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted by Kamil TAWIL, p. 283.

It is impossible to understand why these mass killings were committed without considering the political situation at the time among the 'decision makers'. Since early 1996, a cruel and underhand conflict opposes the 'putchist' and the Zeroual clans, the latter hoping to pull off an agreement to their advantage with the former FIS heads. The President seems to be gaining ground and threatening the 'Januarist' supremacy. Zeroual is thus aimed at via the assassination of those close to him (mysterious deaths of General Saïdi Fodhil in June 1996 and of the UGTA head, Abdelhak Benhamouda, in February 1997), via denigration campaigns (against Mohamed Betchine, his counselling Minister), via threats against his men and finally via the great massacres aiming at totally discrediting him. In September 1998, Liamine Zeroual throws in the sponge and resigns.

Massacres continue to shake Algeria until the summer of 1998, the greatest occurring in the west between late 1997 and early 1998, making almost a thousand dead. The GIA then ceases its activities. Only the 'eradicating' press revives it from time to time. It seems to have fulfilled its mission and now only serves as a bogey. Other groups emerge, as mysterious as the GIA.

The AIS, armed wing of the FIS, from its creation to the ceasefire announcement

Attempt to reconstitute FIS abroad

When FIS was banned on March 4, 1992, a delegation of three of the party's MPs, representing the 'parliamentary delegation' led by Anouar Haddam (of the *jaz'ara* faction) travels abroad to heighten international public opinion's awareness of the 'non lawful' situation raging in Algeria. A few months later, a FIS representation is sent abroad, led by Rabah Kebir (a moderate *salafi*). In fact, they illustrate two different trends within FIS, not always expressing identical positions.

Owing to repression, underground activities, weak analyses and political organisation, emergence of armed resistance forcing FIS leaders to take a stand, FIS gradually breaks up in Algeria and abroad. In September 1993, several FIS leaders representing the most important trends operating in Algeria, meet in Tirana (Albania): Saïd Makhoulfi's MEI followers (represented by Kamereddine Kherbane), Mohamed Saïd's *jaz'ara* (represented in particular by Anouar Haddam and Ahmed Zaoui), Rabah Kebir who represents the major part of the FIS troops, mainly in the east and west of the country (of which two men become AIS leaders a few months later) and finally Abdallah Anas, who as ex-'Afghan' may be able to moderate some of them who had joined the GIA.

FIS is thus reconstituted with its most important components, under the name of 'FIS Foreign Executive Body': Rabah Kebir is President, Anouar Haddam and Abdallah Anas Vice-Presidents. Participants accept the principle of lawful defence of the people against the regime's repression, but do not reach an agreement on the political and military representation at home, except of course that of the two sheikhs Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj. It becomes also rapidly clear that none of the relevant parties agrees to disappear and to abandon its assets, be they information or financial means¹⁰⁶. The difficulty also lies in the fact that on the

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-142.

ground, armed struggle is already organized by groups of different currents, which do not easily submit to political leadership – all the more if it is formed late in the day and abroad.

Indeed, orientations taken by the Islamist movement's political representatives outside the country are mainly dictated by the armed groups, and not by political leaders defining a strategy. One can imagine the loss of control that such a situation may lead to as regards policy positions. This is in fact the reason why the DRS will have no difficulty in infiltrating, manipulating and directing the armed movement, whereas the political movement has to obey if it does not wish to disappear, when it is not itself infiltrated by secret agents. As a consequence, initial conflicts are not sorted out. However, according to Kamil Tawil, in the country, the news of the creation of the Executive Body would have been welcomed with great satisfaction, in particular by Mohamed Saïd. Yet, the union of MEI and *jaz'ara* within the GIA in May 1994 puts the seal on the break-up between the different currents existing inside the Executive Body.

As the two historical FIS leaders did not give directives on the armed struggle issue and how to manage it, nor on its legitimate representation, the problem became all the more difficult. To our knowledge, they did not comment on the existing armed structures and left each FIS leader free to organize individually. On the other hand, the GIA and AIS integrated Abbassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, as a matter of course, in their respective *majless-ech-choura*, so as to be able to claim the necessary legitimacy to speak in the name of the FIS and Islamist movement leaders.

Creation of the AIS and first negotiations with the authorities

Facing the GIA, that the Rabah Kebir followers refuse to join (but indeed, they were never invited to do so), the AIS (Islamic Salvation Army) is created between June and July 1994, describing itself as the armed wing of the FIS¹⁰⁷. Ahmed Benaïcha becomes head of the western AIS (June 3, 1994 communiqué) and Madani Mezrag of the eastern AIS (July 10, 1994 communiqué)¹⁰⁸. The AIS was not able to get organised in the centre of the country, which was totally controlled by the GIA. On July 18, the two branches of the AIS issue a common communiqué in which they reject the union with the GIA, as the latter 'excommunicates' all fighters outside it.

Caught unprepared by the union of the different factions of the armed movement within the GIA in May 1994 and fearing that the latter would occupy the whole field, the new AIS leaders announce its creation as a matter of urgency. Thus the AIS makes considerable reference to the two FIS leaders in prison and finds its political representation in the Executive Body of which the leader Rabah Kebir is in exile in Germany.

For the two heads of AIS, Madani Mezrag and Ahmed Benaïcha, the *jihad* represents only a way to hold a strong position when negotiating with the authorities. For the GIA, the creation of an Islamic State through armed violence, without concession, acts as a programme and a strategy¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ This is disputed by its critics. According to Tawil, AIS members reported that on several occasions during 1993, some FIS members had raised the issue of uniting with the GIA, whose leaders rejected this possibility. AIS development might have started at the beginning of January 1994 (Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 172).

¹⁰⁸ Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 168-169.

¹⁰⁹ Hassane ZERROUKY, *La Nébuleuse islamiste (The Islamist Nebula)*, *op.cit.*, p. 199.

In a communiqué dated August 2, 1994, Rabah Kebir welcomes the AIS creation, but shortly after, conflicts within the Executive Body are such that he excludes two of its members: Anouar Haddam and Ahmed Zaoui, who, he says, had chosen to operate in another context. They deny being GIA followers and continue claiming their allegiance to FIS, which would not have self-dissolved; it is however true that the attitudes of some remain ambiguous up to the death of sheikh Mohamed Saïd, late 1995. This is also one of the reasons for which the actions claimed by the GIA were only clearly denounced with great delay by these men (they did however condemn a number of attacks, in particular those against foreigners).

In this respect, according to Samraoui, as from springtime 1993, the French parallel services of the then Minister of the Interior, Charles Pasqua, had contacted Rabah Kebir via Moussa Kraouche, a member of the Executive Body, living in France and agent of the DRS representative in France, Colonel Habib¹¹⁰, in order to control part of the FIS abroad. At a meeting with Kebir, Jean-Charles Marchiani would have suggested to get rid of the 'extremist' elements within the Executive Body, so that it may be considered as a potential partner in negotiations with the Algerian authorities¹¹¹.

Dense AIS activities allow FIS leaders to negotiate with the authorities in a relatively strong position, all the more so that the methods of its armed wing are entirely different from GIA's barbarity. Yet, one notes that at each attempt to negotiate, there is a resurgence of violence both on behalf of the regime and by the armed groups. AIS is permanently under GIA attack.

What's sure is that the DRS efficiently manage to exploit conflicts between Islamist currents, supporting them with logistics and extra fighters, while simultaneously opposing one against the other – including as we have seen within the GIA itself.

AIS head prepares the ground for negotiations between FIS and the authorities

The AIS represents the rallying point for FIS activists who do not sympathize with the *jaz'ara* or with the GIA *jihadists*. It advocates armed battle aiming mainly at military objectives and in step with a political strategy that does not exclude communication or negotiation. Besides, as from 1995, negotiations are being held with the authorities¹¹² - after much temporising and many new developments, they end up with the October 1st, 1997 ceasefire, which will be rallied by many groups that had left the GIA.

To understand why a few months after the announcement of its creation – or even at its creation itself -, the AIS enters into negotiations with the authorities, we need to return to certain decisive events of this period.

On January 11, 1995, with the assistance of the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio, the Algerian opposition gathered in Rome signs a platform document to find an issue to the crisis.

¹¹⁰ Colonel Habib –real name Mahmoud Souames – is in charge of the DRS at the Algerian embassy in Paris. He was not only responsible for gathering useful information on the arms supply networks, but also for infiltrating existing Islamic associations and creating DRS controlled and led groups, in particular those responsible for the Paris raids in 1995 (see Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, *op. cit.*, p. 227-229.

¹¹¹ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, *op. cit.*, p. 229; Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, p. 178-179.

¹¹² Samraoui maintains even that, from AIS's creation in 1994, negotiations were ongoing via Abdelkader Sahraoui, a FIS sympathiser living in Germany (Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, *op. cit.*, p. 270).

Prospects seem encouraging as all representative parties at the time subscribed to it. However military decision makers need to accept the working document in order to negotiate the end of the non-lawful situation and this will not be the case.

The fact that some Western governments favourably welcome this initiative seriously worries the military, who launch an all-out media campaign to discredit the platform and the signatories, calling them 'traitors', accomplices of the FIS 'terrorists', assimilated to the GIA, etc. And as mentioned above, a few days after the 'Rome contract' signature on January 30, a terrible GIA attack plunges Algiers into mourning, clearly showing, on behalf of the GIA-DRS, a blunt refusal to the peace solution. Finally, on February 22, the police forces commit a massacre in the Serkadji prison causing the death of some hundred convicts, among which many FIS leaders condemned to death or to heavy prison sentences (authorities claim that it was just a 'mutiny').

In the political and military fields, early 1995 witnesses manoeuvres with important consequences: President Zeroual re-launches a dialogue initiative on the conditions for holding presidential elections, which the FIS and other opposition parties nevertheless reject. To be reassuring, Zeroual, in February, promulgates a law called of *rahma* (mercy), enabling armed group members to show repentance. Shortly after, in March, the army launches a big military offensive in the Aïn-Defla region, that causes, according to Habib Souaïdia, 'a thousand dead' (mainly among the civilian population)¹¹³. The AIS is increasingly being attacked from both sides, driven back by the regular army, but most of all by the unceasing GIA raids, that cause the death of dozens if not hundreds of its members. It is in such circumstances that it accepts – or is forced – to negotiate.

Some time after he self-proclaimed himself AIS's 'national emir', Mezrag proposes to negotiate. Some observers interpret this as the proof that the AIS has been driven into engaging in war, in particular against the GIA, so as to get cornered and forced to accept the terms of negotiation. Thus Madani Mezrag, whose itinerary is partly unclear, would be the architect of these negotiations where he is in a weak position. During a clash in early 1995, he is wounded and taken prisoner. The DRS would have made him turn his coat by simulating an escape so as to rejoin the AIS. If this is true, the AIS has been discretely controlled by the DRS almost since its creation: for the secret services, this was probably a way of 'neutralizing' the less radical Islamist spheres, by embarking, on the one hand, on long-drawn-out negotiations (constantly re-launched and then failing, they are only finalized in 1997) and, on the other hand, on a sterile war with the GIA (which becomes, as we have seen, a genuine anti-insurrectional war machine at GIA's service).

As AIS's 'national emir', Mezrag imposes himself as the authorities' interlocutor. In the Algerian press, he is suddenly presented as 'moderate'¹¹⁴. In March, he writes a series of letters¹¹⁵ addressed to various addressees (to FIS leaders, to former *mujaheddin* of the

¹¹³ Habib SOUAÏDIA, *La Sale Guerre (The Dirty War)*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹¹⁴ Y.B. and Samy Mouhoubi write: "A MAOL member believes that, "when Madani Mezrag [head of the AIS] returns from Kadhafi's Arab Legion, he is 'debriefed' by the secret services. A dark zone then surrounds his escape from the Constantine hospital. He joins the resistance, but in 1995, just before the presidential elections, he is wounded in an ambush and once more imprisoned, where he writes a letter of allegiance to the Head of State – a seven-page document – in which he recognizes Liamine Zeroual's authority and asks him to strive for a political solution. From then on, the AIS leader is well and truly in direct contact with the military." But one of them, General 'Smaïn', head of the Internal Security, short-circuits the Presidency by taking control of the talks. It is then decided to maintain the AIS resistance groups in order to counterbalance GIA uncontrolled elements and arrange negotiating possibilities in due course. The manoeuvre ends on October 1st, 1997 when Madani Mezrag, in AIS's name and under his military tutors, announces an 'unilateral and unconditional ceasefire'".

¹¹⁵ Published by the FIS Executive Body abroad as a booklet entitled: *Mots de vérité à ceux qui se sentent concernés (Words of truth for those who feel concerned)*, April 1995.

liberation war, to political organisations and personalities, to the Algerian people, to the ANP, to the *mujaheddin*, to scholars and preachers, to the President). The aim is to differentiate himself from the GIA, to condemn them as being instruments in the hands of the secret services and to push the two imprisoned leaders to also differentiate themselves, while calling on the armed groups which have left the GIA to join the AIS.

DRS imposes capitulation

According to information reported by Kamil Tawil, the fresh upsurge of massacres against civilians in early 1996 urges Madani Mezrag to address a letter to the army leaders expressing the wish to call a truce. Via unofficial channels, the letter reaches General Rabah Boughaba, commander of the 5th military region and member of the Zeroual clan. When informed of this initiative, Smaïn Lamari, head of the DCE, sends an officer to the AIS camp to sound out opinions and discuss the potential conclusion of a 'live' agreement¹¹⁶. The meeting seems successful as both parties agree that a settlement should be found within the context of a global political solution. Finally, this leads to a DRS-AIS agreement the details of which were discussed at numerous meetings held during the following months: it is foreseen that pacification measures would pave the way for an AIS call for a ceasefire, the latter undertaking to convince other groups to join; in return, the army commits itself not to attack AIS camps and to do all it can to facilitate AIS grass root initiatives. Abbassi Madani and Abdelkader Hachani are set free in July 1997 and promises are made to take positive measures towards FIS once the ceasefire is announced¹¹⁷.

The agreement signed between the AIS emir and the DRS emissaries on August 20, 1997 remained secret. According to the London newspaper *Ach-Charq Al-Awsat*, it includes following clauses:

1. General amnesty for all ceasefire groups.
2. Consider all those who died during the years of violence as victims of the national tragedy.
3. Total State covering and compensation for all victims.
4. Definitive cessation of hostilities by AIS and groups joining the ceasefire.
5. Setting up of a joint follow-up committee for contacts between ANP and AIS.
6. Setting up of an inter-ministerial committee with the Ministries of Justice and the Interior to supervise the release of ex-FIS personalities within a period of eighteen months.
7. Concentration of all AIS factions and other armed groups in specific locations under ANP control.
8. Integration of these elements in special units fighting terrorist groups.
9. Registration of all arms and ammunition held by ceasefire groups.
10. Evacuation of ceasefire member families to a safe place far from antiterrorist operation zones.
11. Drafting of a law as a ceasefire legal framework.

¹¹⁶ In a report analysing the origins of the 'civil concord', the NGO International Crisis Group writes that discussions between Mezrag and the army might have started in May 1996 and that, from the first contact with General Boughara, Smaïn Lamari took control of matters (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *La Concorde civile: une initiative de paix manquée (Civil Concord: a missed peace initiative)*, Brussels, July 9, 2001, p. 4).

¹¹⁷ According to our information, there is however no question of releasing Ali Benhadj, although he is FIS number two.

12. Recognition by AIS of ANP 'as the sole army in Algeria' and 'as the product of the glorious ALN'.

13. Definitive cessation of all armed activities, with the commitment to give no direct or indirect support to whatever terrorist faction or group throughout the national territory¹¹⁸.

Finally, according to the London newspaper, the item that could cause trouble and revive still impassioned polemics relates to the "ex-FIS return on the national political scene". With, however, an important point of information: according to the same source, such a come back depends on "the creation of a new set of initials and headed by a new leadership with no connection with the ex-FIS 'historicals'".

Thus, once released, Abbassi Madani has to read the document announcing the ceasefire on the Algerian television. However - as in the past - the authorities' procrastination prevents him from doing so. On August 30, 1997, shocked by the almost daily mass killings plunging the country into mourning, Abbassi Madani sends a letter to UN Secretary General, Kofi Anan, who has just made a declaration on the issue. He informs him that he is prepared to cooperate with his institution to put an end to the slaughters¹¹⁹. The reaction of the Algerian authorities is immediate and brutal. The 'January' clan refuses such an act, that it compares to a call for foreign interference, and Madani is placed under house-arrest and banned all outside communication¹²⁰.

As a matter of fact, it is not so much this initiative that jeopardized negotiations, but rather the fact that the 'January' clan rejects the idea of dropping a military battle that they have been fighting for years against the Islamists, with the assurance of winning. Still more importantly, they refuse to be outstripped by President Zeroual, who, in their eyes, has acquired too much autonomy. Moreover, overall, the military are convinced that, if they are really given the means to do so, they can crush the Islamist insurrection. Habib Souaïdia, author of *La Sale Guerre (The Dirty War)*, remembers these times:

We had also learned – and we talked a lot about it between young officers – that the AIS had engaged in discussions with the President's men in view of a 'negotiated solution'. And that General Smaïn Lamari, 'Tewfik's deputy, had been charged by the latter to ruin this move that, at the time, was very unfavourably looked upon in the barracks. Like many comrades, I was indeed convinced that the ANP had the capacity of defeating all armed groups. But looking at the field, I can certify that the climate of insecurity suited the military leaders' interests – and this is still true five years later¹²¹...

Thus despite the umpteenth failure of negotiations between Islamists close to the FIS and the authorities, in September, the AIS announces a ceasefire as from October 1st 1997, joined by other armed groups, among which the Ali Benhadjar group (LIDD). The agreement terms settled between DRS and AIS have to date never been officially made public. In any case, it is well established that, as from autumn 1997, some thousands of AIS men are placed in camps under army control; they will be authorized to go back to civilian life after the promulgation

¹¹⁸ Quoted in *La Tribune*, December 20, 1999.

¹¹⁹ "In response to your call addressed to the Algerians in favour of dialogue and understanding, as well as to find a solution to the crisis and end the bloodshed; considering the will of the wounded Algerian people together with that of all wise men, of the faithful and of national and international public opinions, and owing to the situation in which the Algerian issue has resulted and what the Algerian people endure as mass killings, I am fully willing to immediately launch a call to stop the haemorrhage and to prepare a serious dialogue that will put an honourable end to the crisis, safeguarding the country, and this with the help of Allah and of the advocates of the right of people to self-determination, in the respect of human rights." (Abbassi Madani letter dated August 30, 1997, in FIS, *Le FIS du peuple, politique, droit et prison en Algérie (The people's FIS, policy, law and prison in Algeria)*, May 2003, p. 257).

¹²⁰ Kamil TAWIL, *op. cit.*, pp.227-228.

¹²¹ Habib SOUAÏDIA, *La Sale Guerre (The Dirty War)*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

of the so-called 'civil concord' law by President Bouteflika in July 1999 and on which we shall come back later.

Ceasefire on a background of massacres and battles of clans among the authorities

It must be recalled that, during the year 1997, the conflict intensifies between President Liamine Zeroual and the 'January' clans, irritated by his wish to emancipate. In early July, when Zeroual releases Abassi Madani, we have seen that the latter pledges to call for a cessation of hostilities. But shortly after, the mass killings of civilians reach a climax and the 'presidential clan' – Liamine Zeroual, his Minister-counsellor for Security, Mohamed Betchine, and the head of the national gendarmerie, Tayeb Derradji – undergoes enormous pressure, as is reported by a MAOL spokesman:

You are negotiating with cut-throats, he is told. However, what the Presidency ignores or does not wish to understand, is that staff and services, when entering into the last phase of the fight against terrorism, will kill two birds with one stone: on the one hand, they conduct their own secret negotiations with the AIS in order to hinder a potential agreement between FIS and the Presidency, because staff and services object to such an agreement. And, on the other hand, they can then put pressure on the AIS, forcing it to dissociate itself from the massacres. It resolves to do this and formally accuses the GIA of being responsible for all the acts of violence¹²².

The number of mass killings does not decline. It can be said that from the month of July, hardly a day goes by without a massacre making at least twenty victims. International public opinion is beginning to wonder what is happening. Indeed, the prospect of a political settlement between the President, who relies on a parliamentary majority and has American support, and the FIS, threatens to weaken the opposite clan. This is the reason why pressure increases both on Zeroual and his counsellor Betchine, and on the AIS and FIS. For some, such a complex constellation of struggles between clans makes Madani Mezrag's role decisive: by allowing the scheme made up by Smaïn Lamari to materialize, he deprives President Zeroual's clan of one of their trump cards.

On September 21, the AIS announces its intention to cease fire as from October 1st. On September 22, more than 400 people are slaughtered in Bentalha. Mass killings do not stop and more and more voices rise pointing at the army's responsibility: such as the FIS leaders, but also Hocine Aït-Ahmed, President of the FFS, who denounces the shared responsibility of the Islamists and the army. The most vehement calls to stop the killings come from abroad. Whether by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Secretary General of Amnesty International or even the American Secretary of State, the official version declaring that the Islamists are the only ones responsible for the massacres is heavily challenged and an international enquiry required. The government will then engage in a colossal offensive to reject all allusions to the army's responsibility in the violence.

But the AIS ceasefire of October 1st, 1997, in no way appeases these struggles between clans. The massacres mark the last term of 1997 while geographically moving towards the west. The most important ones occur in the Relizane wilaya end December 1997 and early 1998, causing almost 1000 dead. Only in February 1998 does the violence somewhat subside. After an unprecedented media campaign against the Minister-counsellor Mohamed Betchine during the summer of 1998 and on a background of mass killings that continue to discredit the

¹²² Quoted by Y. B. and Samy MOUHOUBI, "Algérie, un colonel dissident accuse" (Algeria, a dissident colonel accuses), *loc. cit.*

President and his government, unable to protect their population, Zeroual resigns on September 11, 1998 and new Presidential elections announced.

As for Samraoui, he mentions another aspect, and an important one at that, of the 'agreement' with the AIS:

In parallel with this absolute barbarity, the DRS leaders become increasingly concerned with the reactions of the international community and start organising the withdrawal of part of their Islamist groups: this is the 'ceasefire' agreed in October 1997 by General Smaïn with the AIS. This settlement served mainly as a 'legal' cover-up to pardon the DRS agents and leaders who had simulated desertion to infiltrate the groups (and later allow their reintegration in the ANP ranks)¹²³.

Thus, the 'putchists' won that battle.

Civil concord

On July 13, 1999, to ratify the AIS ceasefire joined by several armed groups, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, elected President of the Republic after all the other candidates had withdrawn at the April 1999 elections, promulgates the so-called 'civil concord' law. On September 16, a referendum gives a 99% 'yes' vote to the Presidential initiative on civil concord, a plebiscite used to legitimize the President who had been elected with difficulty.

The 'civil concord' law is not very different from the *rahma* decree promulgated in early 1995 by President Liamine Zeroual. However, Bouteflika innovated by introducing what was called an 'amnestying pardon' for the AIS members who were known and registered. Some of them had assisted the military in their fight against yet active armed groups. Besides, one should insist on the fact that the initiative, understood as an attempt to establish peace, obtained the support of many FIS leaders, among whom Abbassi Madani. On June 11, 1999, the latter even sent a letter of support to President Bouteflika, where he calls for a cessation of the battles.

The law is implemented immediately after its publication on July 13, 1999, with a 6-month validity period. It is made up of two sections¹²⁴. The first section relates to the fighters who laid down their arms as from October 1st, 1997, and respected the ceasefire: they will not be prosecuted as they have declared being at the entire disposal of the State. On January 11, 2000, the President promulgates a decree on "an amnestying pardon for the benefit of the members of the organisation called 'AIS'¹²⁵". Article 1 specifies:

By implementation of the provisions of article 41 of law n°99-08 of July 13, 1999, on the re-establishment of civil concord, are exempt from prosecution for the acts foreseen in article 1 of this same law, persons who belonged to organisations which have voluntarily and spontaneously decided to give up acts of violence and have set themselves entirely at the disposal of the State and whose names are attached to the original of the present decree¹²⁶.

As a matter of fact, this list was never published and the number of fighters having benefited from the law has never been made public. Figures given by the press are contradictory and cannot be verified.

¹²³ Mohammed SAMRAOUI, *Chronique des années de sang (Chronicle of the sanguinary years)*, op. cit., p. 291.

¹²⁴ Law n°99-08 of July 13, 1999 on the re-establishment of civil concord.

¹²⁵ APS, January 11, 2000, www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/ais/aisamnistedecret.htm.

¹²⁶ Decree published by the APS, January 11, 2000, www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/ais/aisamnistedecret.htm.

As for the second section, it applies to the members of the armed groups (according to article 87 *bis* 3 of the Algerian penal code), who spontaneously give themselves up to the Algerian authorities in an interval of three months (article 8) counting from the promulgation of the law. They appear before a 'probation committee' formed in majority by representatives of the executive. They are held on probation and may have their sentence reduced if they have not committed mass killings, attacks or rapes according to the provisions set out in the law and are deprived of their civil rights. Those who supported the activities of the groups without being members and did not commit these crimes are not prosecuted, but are deprived of their civil rights for a period of ten years.

This law was strongly criticized for several reasons. Some see it mainly as an amnesty for the 'terrorists', others as the rehabilitation of armed group infiltrated agents. What is certain however is that the implementation of the 'civil concord' was carried out under totally obscure circumstances. Public opinion does not know how many persons went spontaneously to the authorities (figures published in the press range from 1500 to 5500¹²⁷), how many combatants benefited from the 'amnestying pardon', how the probation committees operated, how many people appeared and benefited from probation, what were the sentences, what has become of those who were set free but are deprived of their rights, etc.

Answers to these questions would show whether the persons benefiting from these measures were in part secret service members, the whole affair being in fact a vast laundering operation for them. We should finally underline, as did the International Crisis Group report, that, although the AIS and other group fighters have always maintained having negotiated a counterpart to the ceasefire announcement, apart from settling individual situations not known to the public, no single claim of a political nature has been satisfied (release of political prisoners, FIS recognition, etc).

Not only is one of the most important FIS leaders, Abdelkader Hachani, assassinated in November 1999, but all other prerequisites preparing for negotiations have been thrown overboard by the government: the prisoners who are released are those who have served their entire sentence, the others remain in prison; the state of urgency is not lifted; there is no guarantee for the return of FIS leaders in exile, etc. Abbassi Madani feels he is betrayed and removes his support for President Bouteflika, in an appeal addressed to the AIS leaders on November 26, 1999¹²⁸.

It therefore appears that civil concord is only a manoeuvre allowing to ratify the security strategy of the military: there is no question of negotiations, but rather of Islamist surrender, while clearing the military of their reputation of 'eradicators'. But the master stroke goes even further, as the laundering operation envisaged in Liamine Zeroual's period in order to find a solution for the hundreds of agents involved in 'terrorism', had not been accepted by the latter. Bouteflika however accepts it and assumes the paternity of the civil concord law in order to make up for the legitimacy deficit resulting from his notoriously faked election.

Once more, the authorities have put up a masquerade as a manner of appeasement, promising peace and reconciliation which never materialize. Notwithstanding this, it rapidly

¹²⁷ "According to the information now in public domain and that has been provided or confirmed to the media or the NGOs by governmental sources, some 5500 members of armed groups gave themselves up between July 1999 and January 2000. A little more than 1000 were AIS and LIDD members, who benefited from the Presidential amnesty [...]"(AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Algérie: La vérité et la justice occultées par l'impunité (Algeria: Truth and justice obscured by impunity)*, November 2000). It must be noted that among those who left the resistance groups to reintegrate a legal life, there were many women and children of combatants who had fled army reprisals; we ignore whether these people are counted among the 5500.

¹²⁸ INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *La Concorde civile... (Civil Concord...)*, *op. cit.*, p. 7, p. 8 and 9.

appears that 'civil concord' is only a half measure. Indeed, Bouteflika very soon calls on the need for a 'national concord'. For some time the idea was quite vague, but during his first mandate it became clearer: it hardly dissimulates the will of the military decision makers to promulgate a law that would amnesty all the crimes committed by the 'dirty war' protagonists, meaning that neither the armed group members, nor the military leaders would have to account for their actions before the law. However, even for such a general amnesty to be recognized by the international community, it needs to be more or less in conformity with international law provisions to which the Algerian government has subscribed: this is a genuine difficulty (as demonstrated during the '90s by the woes of the Chilean and Argentine generals who had self-amnestied themselves), which explains why President Bouteflika has not been able to find a satisfactory solution to the problem during his first mandate.

There is hardly any doubt that this is the primary mission that the 'January putschist generals' have entrusted him with when enabling him to be re-elected in April 2004, the context of international terrorist threats allowing to count upon some indulgence on behalf of the Western powers...