

bia, 3 from Macedonia (which, with its own problem of ethnic Albanian unrest, has united with Serbia), 2 each from the Vojvodina and Kosovo, and the 1 Army vote on the Presidium. With the Slovenian, Croatian, and Bosnian republics having 3 votes each, and all solidly opposed to him, Milosevic must get Montenegro's 3 Presidium seats to gain a majority for his "legal" coup.

This is why, during October, the center of the mass demonstrations calling for the regional party leaderships to resign has occurred in Montenegro, where the regional party plenum and a vote of confidence in the present leadership is set for Friday, Oct. 14.

The Serbian Central Committee Plenum was held Oct. 11. The leadership under Milosevic declared that they will demand "mass purges" at the forthcoming federal Central Committee Plenum, and denounced all "recent statements" which had attacked "Serbian nationalism," thus in effect declaring war on the party leaderships of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, all of whom had just issued strong condemnations of the "Greater Serbia" threat.

The leadership of Slovenia has accused Serbia of orchestrating the wave of demonstrations and through "the pressures of the mob . . . endangering the constitutional order of Yugoslavia."

Serbia is already acting as if it were Yugoslavia. From Oct. 8 onwards, each of the almost daily emergency meetings held by the federal party Presidium to try to prevent the coming explosion has been contemptuously boycotted by Milosevic and the Serbian Presidium members.

As the showdown approaches, the Serbian military coup threat has been activated. Timed with the Serbian Central Committee Plenum, General Visnic, the Serbian commander of the Ljubljana Military District (Slovenia), announced that the Army is "prepared to prevent any attempt to split the country," a direct warning against secessionist moves by Slovenia or Croatia should Milosevic gain power.

This followed a declaration by the Serbian Party Presidium on Oct. 10, charging the Slovenian leadership with "using the events in Montenegro to launch their own attacks on Serbia." These statements, however, have only cemented the already dominant view in Slovenia and Croatia that secession and civil war are the only answers to an unacceptable "Greater Serbia" coup.

The pre-civil war mood was shown by the statements of support for the embattled Montenegrin leadership, sent on Oct. 11-12 by the party leaderships of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia. Typical of them was the Slovenian declaration, which said that the Slovenian Party Presidium "extends its decisive support in the struggle against the pressure emanating on the part of Serbian Nationalism to nullify the national integrity of the Montenegrin people."

A Yugoslav civil war looms, and with it, the Balkan "powder keg" has again appeared on the historical scene, with unpredictable consequences for Europe and the world.

Riots end in Algeria, but crisis continues

by Omar al Montasser

It took less than a week for the Algerian regime of President Chadli Benjedid to quell the riots which started on Oct. 4 in Algiers and hit all major urban centers of the country; yet no one is claiming victory. Indeed, the Algerian crisis threatens to lead to a broader destabilization of northern Africa generally.

With extreme violence used on both sides, it is estimated that least 500 people were killed. During the peak of the riots in Algiers on Oct. 9, the Army was deployed with machine guns and heavy weapons, shooting to death scores of demonstrators, while the previous day, policemen were killed in the coastal city of Oran.

Addressing the nation on Oct. 10, President Benjedid announced a general program of political and constitutional reforms. A day later, the Algerian leadership announced that a national referendum would be held on Nov. 3 to decide on some major electoral and other reforms. Though the government has not been precise about what it intends to do, it is believed that the reforms will include a general program of democratization, including a move toward the establishment of a multi-party system, replacing the one-party rule of the National Liberation Front (FLN) which has existed since Algeria won its independence in 1962.

President Benjedid and the Algerian leadership know that cosmetic changes will not be enough, and that the present return to normalcy, evidenced by the lifting of the state of martial law imposed on Oct. 5, could be only temporary, if real changes are not made soon, especially in Algeria's economic and social balance.

Economic disaster

At the roots of the present crisis are those "objective" conditions which Algeria unfortunately shares with most developing countries. In Algeria's specific case, this has involved a decrease of no less than 50% in its export income—95% of which comes from its oil and gas sales—from \$12 billion in 1985 to \$7 billion this year. And while the crisis could be kept at bay in 1986 and 1987 because of a good

harvest, the summer of 1988 saw a combination of the locust plague in the south of the country, and an extremely severe drought, which pushed the country to the point of explosion. During the summer, there were water shortages in all of the main urban centers. By late summer, the shortage of basic food commodities, which had become a feature of Algerian daily life over the last 12 months, reached new peaks of intensity, with oil, flour, and sometimes even bread disappearing altogether from the state-subsidized food market, and even from the black market.

To compensate for its low income, Algiers has cut its imports from \$20 billion in 1983 down to \$7 billion in 1988, though it still relies on imports for 60% of its food.

Despite this collapse of export markets and food production, Algeria prides itself on never having missed any payment deadline to its foreign creditors, and on not having negotiated any rescheduling of its \$20 billion foreign debt with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or foreign banks. To accomplish this, the leadership has called on Algerians to accept one of the harshest austerity regimes in the developing sector.

The October explosion took everyone by surprise. Most observers expected that such an explosion would occur first in other countries of the Maghreb and North Africa, like Egypt, but considered that the Algerian regime had a tight enough control over its internal situation to prevent any significant social unrest. The fact that the riots happened at all, indicates the broader political stakes involved in Algeria and North Africa as a whole. North Africans like to tell Europeans that without the 1942 landing in Algeria, the 1944 Normandy landing would have been impossible—thus to underline the symbiosis of interests, not only in economic, but also very much in political and military terms.

As subsequent reactions underscored, the threat of a broad destabilization of North Africa, with the rising specter of Islamic fundamentalism just across the Mediterranean, had many European politicians shivering in fright. For these same reasons, North Africa is becoming a major battlefield, after the Middle East, for whoever wants to influence continental Europe economically and politically. This ranges from the obvious competition among the London, Frankfurt, and Paris financial centers for the control of Middle Eastern and North African trade, to American and Soviet interests in strengthening their positions in Europe's sensitive backyard.

Fight within the leadership

The role these political elements played in the recent crisis, was revealed by the evidence that some hardline elements within the ruling FLN bet their future on a social crisis, in order to oppose Benjedid's policy of economic liberalization and military cooperation with the West, at the expense of Algeria's decades-long orientation toward the Soviet Union and the East bloc.

This became obvious in early September, when, after a

speech by the Algerian President, in which he once again called on the people to accept more austerity, a wave of spontaneous strikes spread through the industrial sector, from a car factory near Algiers, to a machine tool factory in the south, followed by a strike of postal workers and Air Algeria. Less than a week after their start, the strikes suddenly received the full support of the UGTA, the official trade union controlled by the FLN, which urged the government to negotiate. The UGTA-supported strikes led to further demonstrations, and eventually to the Oct. 4 riots.

During the riots themselves, there were signs of political manipulation. The fact that the rioters were left undeterred for 24 hours in Algiers, before any police intervention, raised as many questions as the fact that 24 hours after the imposition of martial law, Islamic fundamentalists were allowed to demonstrate on Oct. 7 for a full day in the Bab el Oued quarter of Algiers, without any government reaction.

Part of the problem is that the First Military Region, which includes Algiers, is led by Gen. Abdallah Atteilia, a renowned hardliner and opponent of Benjedid. It is perhaps not coincidental that the headquarters of the First Military Region, Blida, is also a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism, under the leadership of Sheikh Mahfoud.

Local observers report that the problem is broader. Opponents of the President, within the FLN as well as within the intelligence services, have been seen as playing the "fundamentalist card" against the regime. They decided that the deployment of the fundamentalists would be considered a serious threat, that could be blamed on Benjedid's liberalization, and therefore they would appear as the only ones able to defend the integrity of the nation.

This dangerous policy may have backfired already. First, because the President, pending any surprises at the congress of the FLN in December, remains very much the President, and has been able to use the deployment of the Army nationally to strengthen his own position. Second, unleashing the fundamentalists has opened a Pandora's box. Though the fundamentalists played no role in initiating the riots, they were quick to use the momentum of the crisis to install themselves as a factor in Algeria's social and political life.

The existence of an Algerian fundamentalist movement, which had so far only been hinted at, and primarily in reference to a group of exiled politicians around Ahmed Ben Bella and his organization, financed by Iran, Libya, and the Swiss-based Nazi banker François Genoud, is now a fact of daily life. It will not be easily dealt with, especially at a time when, after the ceasefire in the Persian Gulf, Islamic fundamentalism is becoming "respectable."

The Sept. 2-5 conference in St. Louis, Missouri of the North American Islamic Trend Movement, which gathered several hundred Islamic fundamentalists from around the world (see *EIR*, Sept. 23, 1988), was a signal, to the effect that after Algeria, then Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt may be the next targets of destabilization.