

Croatia. Fighter bombers have taken off from the Krajina and bombed Bihac. Unprofor Command has claimed that they are “unable” to disarm the Serbian forces inside Croatia, and that they are “unable” to enforce the air interdict against Serbia, because its planes take off from occupied Croatia, which is not subject to the interdict! By refusing to force its food convoys through, Unprofor has ensured that since June, only 630 tons in total of food has gotten through to the 300,000 people in the Bihac area. This amounts to one kilo (2.2 pounds) of food per person in five months.

Thanks to this, and other aid of the most-secret variety, from the British and the French, the Serbians, who now have the Bosnian 5th Army Corps outnumbered almost 3 to 1 in the Bihac pocket, have retaken perhaps 200 of the 250 square kilometers which the 5th Corps took back in October at the cost of great sacrifices. That this offensive by Serbia has also the aim of “showing the Americans what’s what,” was stated baldly by a French officer from the Unprofor General Staff to *Libération*. Gloating at the discomfiture of a nation of 3.5 million people, the officer said: “The Bosnian Army is doped up by its recent successes and the U.S. move, even turning arrogant! But Unprofor will not clear out so fast! The weight of the U.S. gesture will be measured tit for tat by the Serbian response. . . . The Serbians were caught off guard by the Bosnian offensive, but, when they started to bomb Bihac on Thursday, you could see that they are well back on the attack.”

President Clinton’s decision has come none too soon. According to reports finally made public in mid-November by the German Institute for Russian Studies (ISO), Russia has, over the last few months, quite emptied its arsenal withdrawn from East Germany, into the Serbian war effort. It is believed to have sent in, on 4,000 rail cars, an unknown number of ultra-modern missile launchers (15 km range), 300 BMP 2 armored vehicles, and 50 self-guided missiles, *inter alia*. Officially, however, there has been little said in Russia concerning Clinton’s move, save that it is “worrying.”

Over the week of Nov. 14, while attempting to defend Bihac and the Gremec Plateau in the West, the Bosnian Army moved on occupied Donji Vakuf; the aim has been to break through toward Jajce and the Bihac-Kljuc-Jajce road, which would allow the 5th and 7th Bosnian Corps to cut off the supply lines to Serbian-occupied Croatia. A state of emergency has been declared in Mostar—another area supposedly under European Union administration—due to heavy Serbian attacks. All schools in Mostar have been closed and street gatherings forbidden.

Lamentably, the government of Franjo Tudjman in the Croatian capital Zagreb has done little save grunt, faced with the Serbian offensive upon Bihac which has been mounted out of Serbian-occupied *Croatian* territory. Without a full-scale military commitment by Zagreb to reconquer its own occupied territories and to succor the Bosnian Army on its border, both Bosnia and Croatia will lose the war.

Algeria plunges into civil war

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

On the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the war of liberation against colonialist France, Algeria is plunging into a civil war with the full backing of certain sectors of the French elite. Although from a strictly military point of view it is an illusion to think that the state forces can wipe out an opposition which has vast popular support, the government and military are gambling precisely on a quick, bloody victory.

Algerian President Liamine Zeroual announced on Nov. 1 in a televised speech commemorating the anniversary of the liberation war, that the dialogue with the Islamic Salvation front (FIS) had been aborted. Zeroual blamed one of the two FIS leaders released from jail, but under house arrest, Ali Benhadj, for the decision, charging that Benhadj had incited the Armed Islamist Group militants to pursue armed struggle. Abassi Madani, the older of the two FIS leaders, dispatched a letter to Zeroual the following day, urging him “to demonstrate his wisdom, to remain the man of the solution and not to lead his people to the same impasse as his predecessors had done.” That day, however, the Interior Ministry issued a declaration that it was “determined to annihilate” those responsible for terrorism and violence.

What prepared public opinion for the escalation was an atrocity of unprecedented brutality. During the Nov. 1 commemorations of the liberation war against France, at the cemetery of Mostaganem, a bomb exploded, killing five children who were honoring the national heroes. Television crews on the scene flashed the images across the nation’s TV sets, and the government seized on the deaths, immediately attributed to the Islamists, to justify its crackdown.

The FIS responded in an unusual manner, denouncing the assassination, and directly implicating the government in the bloody deed. In a declaration circulated in Europe, the FIS executive abroad characterized it as a “massacre which had targeted the tombs of freedom fighters and had killed innocent children in an ignoble manner.” The release also referred to passages in Zeroual’s speech, given the evening before the bombings, which allegedly “alluded to acts leading to assaults on the graves of freedom fighters, although”—the communiqué explains—“no such acts have been registered in the past two and a half years.” Rather, the allusion recalled desecrations of cemeteries in the period prior to the Algerian elections (1992), which the FIS was poised to win. The FIS communiqué expressed “shock which surprised and frightened us” when the news of the bombings in the cemetery was made

known, the day after Zeroual's speech. The FIS "denounces and forcefully condemns this ignoble assassination and the perpetrators," it said. It concluded with condolences to the victims' families. In short, the FIS accused the security services of being behind the cemetery bombings. The suspicion was shared by many, according to the French press.

The decision to abandon dialogue was made by the Algerian military in consultation with circles in France. According to the Paris daily *Le Monde* on Nov. 11, Algerian Army Chief of Staff Mohammed Lamari, who had just been promoted to the newly created rank of General of the Army Corps, was in France just prior to the government's shift. In Paris, French military and political leaders, including Gen. Jacques Massu, assured him of their support for total war against the Islamist opposition. Following Lamari's trip, French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua launched the largest raid to date against suspected Islamist supporters, jailing 95.

The French also reportedly agreed to supply military matériel to the Algerians for the war. *Le Monde*, on Nov. 10 and 11, reported that weapons and equipment were being flown in on cargo planes. The shipments were said to include oxygen-absorbent bombs and night-fighting equipment to be mounted on Russian MI-24 helicopters. On Nov. 16, the news was released that France had also signed a contract to sell nine Ecureuil helicopters to the Algerian Interior Ministry, for anti-terror use.

The situation inside Algeria has escalated to all-out war. Up to 1,000 civilians died between Nov. 1 and Nov. 9, according to an FIS release; the figure is in the hundreds, according to government sources. Executions and atrocities, for which the Islamists are being held responsible (though many suspect government manipulation), are being given mass circulation by the media, which have been brought under total control of the state; and weapons are being distributed to the population by government forces.

Reason for hope

Although Algeria appears to be hopelessly locked into civil war, there are still means to halt the bloodshed. Inside the country, it is known that the entire military leadership does not share the view of hardliner Lamari, who was most responsible for pushing Zeroual into breaking the dialogue. It is not inconceivable that Lamari could be replaced by a nationalist military man eager to negotiate a reasonable agreement with the FIS and other opposition forces, in the interests of national reconciliation. Such an option would require support from those sectors in France still committed to a policy of dialogue. France, in the final days of the Mitterrand regime, is, however, caught in a political vacuum.

A further crucial factor in the Algerian crisis concerns Washington. The policy of dialogue, which was aborted by Pasqua-Lamari at the beginning of November, had been warmly encouraged by the U.S. administration. President Clinton had established a liaison with the FIS, and, on his

trip to France last June, had stressed the need to develop contacts with the moderate Islamists to avoid military escalation. The question of what the Clinton administration's reaction to the dramatic turn of events in Algeria would be, seemed to be answered by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau, in a press conference on Nov. 15.

According to *Le Monde*, Pelletreau expressed concern about the "excesses committed by the security forces" and about the "growing influence of the most hard-line individuals within the military hierarchy" in Algeria. This trend "casts doubt on the viability of any election that the regime would organize in 1995," he said. Pelletreau said that the United States condemned terrorism by Islamist groups, but was particularly worried about the extreme actions of the forces of order, which were committing "extra-judiciary executions, torture, and arbitrary detention." Washington, he stressed, still favored the opening of "a dialogue with the members of the opposition, lay or Islamist, who want to work for a non-violent solution to the crisis."

Finally, there are scenarios already being floated for a U.N. intervention. This option was introduced on Nov. 14 in the London *Independent* by Robert Fisk, who asked: "Can Europe stand aloof from a calamity which will inevitably endanger French security? Or must the West now consider a massive U.N. deployment, larger than anything previously contemplated, to put out the fires of Algeria?"

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