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Interview: Dr. Abdelhamid Brahimi

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## Convene an international commission of inquiry on stopping violence in Algeria

*Dr. Brahimi is the former Prime Minister of Algeria (1984-88) and was a founding member of the National Liberation Front (FLN). He is currently director of the Institute for Maghreb Studies in London. He has been active in calling for peace, dialogue, and national reconciliation, as the only means to change the tragic situation now facing Algeria. He was interviewed by Dean Andromidas in February.*

**EIR:** In the last weeks, we have seen several hard-hitting exposés in the international press create an outcry over the civil war in Algeria. It was hoped that these exposés would have broken the conspiracy of silence on the part of the international community, on the true role of the Algerian government in the violence that has engulfed Algeria since 1992. But this has not been the case. Can you explain?

**Brahimi:** Insecurity has become a deliberate policy of the regime; in other words, insecurity has been created by the regime itself, in order to justify its existence. That is why the regime, since 1994, has created a militia of 200,000 Algerians, in addition to the Algerian National Army of 150,000, in order to maintain a given level of violence. The collective massacres we read about in the international press are organized by these militias, under the direction of the Army and the government. The victims have always been the Islamists or people who voted, in 1991, for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Nonetheless, in its attempt to discredit and demonize the FIS, the regime has always attributed the massacres to the Islamists. This is the way this regime hopes to get more support from the West. The fact is, the Algerian regime has been organizing these collective massacres for years. As one of the regime's former Prime Ministers, Redha Malek, said in 1993, "It is time to terrorize the Islamists." The same was said by Salim Saadi and Cherif Meziane, two former Ministers of Interior who are outspoken supporters of this regime. Since 1994, the militias, armed by the government, have been used to fight the FIS, and have been used in areas where the FIS is strong, to force Algerian citizens to take up arms against the FIS. But if citizens refuse to take up arms, they are killed, with their families, by these same militiamen. This has been nurtured by the government.

Moreover, I would say that if the regime really wants to

guarantee security, it is possible. They seem to have no problem protecting the hydrocarbon areas and installations in the south and north of the country, near Skikda and Oran. So, it is possible. But the bloodshed has become a deliberate policy of the government.

Now, if you look at a map of the massacres, it corresponds exactly to the map of where the FIS had a strong showing in the 1991 elections. And, it also corresponds to the map of the national elections of June 1997, when the FIS, which, of course, was not allowed to participate, called upon Algerians not to vote. The overall turnout was much lower than the government will admit—below 50%—and in those regions which did not vote, we see collective massacres taking place. For example, since the militias were set up, since 1994, we can see these massacres concentrated on the plain near Algiers, the capital, and mainly in Blida, Bouaerik, Medea, Meliana, Ain Defla, and Chelif. Since last year, these collective massacres have been taking place in M'Sila, Batna to the east of Algiers, Djelfa in the south, and Tlemcen, Saida, and Relizane in the west.

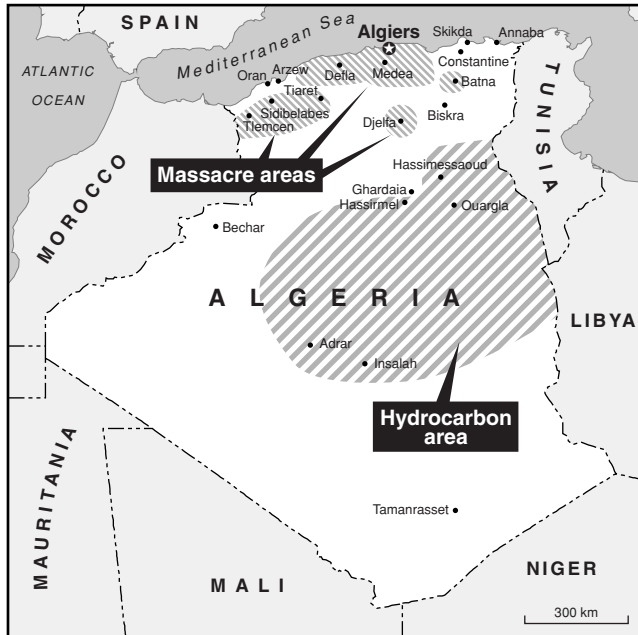
According to credible sources, there were more than 900 villagers recently killed on the same night, while the Algerian press reported 400, quoting Algerian military sources, and the government admitted only 78. The government always tries to minimize the number killed.

Through the use of terror, the junta wants to force people to accept its political line.

Now, the situation is very serious, the escalation of violence on the part of this regime is such that we cannot see any solution outside of the establishment of a genuine dialogue between the regime and the parties that signed the national contract in Rome in January 1995, that is, the Sant' Egidio group. Unfortunately, the Algerian regime continues to reject this proposal to stop bloodshed and to negotiate a period of transition, to return to the democratic process.

In recent months, the international media and public opinion have been following what is happening in Algeria much more closely. So, I think it is time to set up an international commission of inquiry to investigate these massacres. The refusal of the Algerian government to accept such a commission, shows that they have something to hide. The regime

FIGURE 1  
**Areas of frequent massacres in Algeria**



claims such a commission would be a violation of national sovereignty, but Algeria saw its sovereignty reduced starting in January 1994, when it accepted the IMF [International Monetary Fund] program. Now, the budget of Algeria cannot be approved by the Algerian Parliament, unless it meets the requirements of the IMF. So where is our sovereignty?

When foreign intellectuals or politicians denounce the government's wholesale violation of human rights, they say they are interfering in Algeria's internal affairs. But when it suits their own needs, for example in the 1990, 1995, and 1997 national elections, the Algerian government itself called for international observers to monitor these elections. But, when we call for an international commission of inquiry, they say, "No, no, you are interfering in our own affairs."

This is no longer acceptable. I think the only way to have the truth, is to set up an international commission of inquiry in order to investigate these collective massacres.

In this context, there was the European Troika mission, led by the British Foreign Secretary, last January. It was a failure. They were not able to meet anybody. How could they? It lasted only 18 hours. They were only allowed to speak with government officials and some other people whom the Algerian government wanted them to meet. So, they had no idea what was going on. The European Commission sent a delegation to Algeria in February, and that was also a failure. Even if we find some voices, like Daniel Cohn-Bendit, or the Belgian representative, who wanted to contact everybody, including the FIS, they were unable to do so. But the head of this commission, Mr. Soulier, a European Parliamentarian from France, tore up letters given to him by the chairman of

the human rights commission in Algeria, which included a letter from the FIS and from Ahmed Ben Bella, the former President of Algeria. And he tore up one of these letters right in front of the media, saying, "We do not have to talk with the FIS."

France, as a European nation, does not have to follow the instructions of the Algerian regime. They should, to be objective. But this has not been the case. That's why it was a failure, because they were not able to talk to everybody, and especially, they were not allowed to visit the zones where the massacres took place, and were not allowed to talk with the survivors and the families of the victims. Therefore, I think the only way to get at the truth, is to have the United Nations step in and set up an international commission of inquiry.

**EIR:** What role do you think the United States can play?

**Brahimi:** Unfortunately, the policy of the United States has been changing toward Algeria. In 1994, we heard public statements made by former Deputy Secretary of State [Robert] Pelletreau, to the effect that the cancellation of elections of 1992 was a political error, and that a dialogue should take place between the regime and the Islamists, once they renounced violence. Now, the FIS has renounced violence, but unfortunately, in the last year, the United States policy has followed that of France, which has been involved in the conflict from the beginning, and therefore they are, unfortunately, backing up the regime.

This is reflected in a recent statement made by the former U.S. ambassador to Algeria, who is currently Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Ronald Newman, who said a few weeks ago that the State Department is satisfied with the Algerian government. He said this on other occasions also. Last October, I attended a hearing in the Senate, in Washington, where Mr. Newman said the Algerian government is acceptable, and that they were only awaiting the outcome of the elections, which were to take place on Oct. 26. He said that after those elections were completed, the U.S. would only be waiting for economic reforms, and then the violence would stop. Of course, this was not true. The violence has not stopped, and it continues to be carried out by the regime itself. As long as the regime is not in a dialogue with the FIS, peace is not possible. The FIS represents a larger portion of the population; millions voted for the FIS and are ready to vote for the FIS again. So, I don't see any miracles happening. The violence will stop only when real political and economic reforms are carried out.

So, we hope that the United States will once again assess the situation objectively, and move away from the current French policy.

**EIR:** Could you inform our readers who in France is complicit with the Algerian regime, in continuing this unacceptable policy?

**Brahimi:** We have two sets of factors, internal and external.

The responsibility of France is clear, but France could not do anything, if there were not Algerians with strong links to France. So, since 1992, you have had in Algeria, for the first time since 1962, the year of our independence, an Algerian Army which is led by *generals who were all former officers in the French Army during our national liberation struggle*. For example, General Lameri, the Chief of Staff of the Algerian Army, was in the French Army; he wasn't even an officer; and now he is at the highest level. So, it took France 30 years to have six or seven of her men controlling the whole Army. That is why I do not accuse the Algerian Army as a whole, or as an institution, but I am accusing only some generals, who were in fact former military officers in the French Army before our independence. It is these officers who created and now direct the militias who are responsible for the collective massacres. It is these officers who, through having deeply infiltrated it, manipulate the so-called Armed Islamic Group (GIA), to carry out terrorist attacks.

In Algeria, we call them the Party of France. They got the green light from France for the coup d'état of 1992. In Algeria, they enjoy marginal support; that is why they were eliminated politically by the free elections of December 1991, and that is why they cancelled these elections. Outside of Algeria, this military regime receives its primary support from France.

In this context I think it is worth noting that François Mitterrand, who was President of France in 1992, and gave them that green light, had been Minister of the Interior in November 1954, when our revolution started. At that time, he declared that the only way to deal with the National Liberation Front, was "war by every means."

And Charles Pasqua, who was Minister of the Interior between 1993 and 1995, and lent his full support for the Algerian military regime, was a parachutist in the French Army 40 years ago, during our national liberation war. As Interior Minister in 1993, he was given the Algeria file by Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, because he considered Algeria an internal affair of France. Pasqua took, as special adviser for Algeria, Jean Claude Machiani, who, like Pasqua, was a former parachutist in the French Army who fought against the liberation of Algeria. Machiani worked with the French *piénoirs*, former active members of the Secret Army Organization (OAS), famous for its crimes against innocent Algerians in 1961-62. These French colonialist forces still exercise powerful influence at the top of the French administration and the intelligence services. It is as if they are trying to have their revenge, by operating through this putschist group, to finish the job they could not accomplish during our national liberation war.

Now, everyone can see that Algeria has lost the prestige that it had earned for more than a century, for 132 years, 60 of which it spent fighting against French colonization. And now, we have these massacres that have taken place since 1992.

So, I think one can say that the French are trying to reconquer Algeria by other means, than the colonialism of the last

century. That is why the French government is pouring military assistance and very sophisticated weapons into Algeria, in order to eradicate Islamism from Algeria. It is very critical to see this, and as a matter of fact, the Algerian regime is now trying to bring Algeria into the Francophone club, as the French wish to reconquer their lost colonies.

As a justification, the French claim their historical links to Algeria. But history has shown that it was military, political, and economic repression that characterized French colonialism, the 132 years of French colonial rule. It was bloody, oppressive, and inhuman, and followed by a savage war against the Algerian people from 1954 to 1962.

Economically, France still considers Algeria its captive market. For example, in 1991, Algerian imports from France were only 17% of its total imports, but after the coup d'état, Algerian imports from France jumped to 34%. If you add to this official trade, the informal imports, this figure jumps to more than 50%. Another example: All food and industrial products imported from France are sold to Algeria at 30-40% higher than world market prices, because there is no international competition, rampant corruption, and other factors. So, I think one can better understand why certain people in France and Algeria are against democracy, transparency, and competition, both economically and politically.

**EIR:** IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus once re-

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ferred to Algeria as the economic model for implementing IMF policies. Could you comment on how cynical such a comment is, in light of the reality facing Algeria?

**Brahimi:** The economic situation is a catastrophe. All of the economic and social indicators have been in the red since 1993. Now, you have the impact of the privatization of the economy. You have two factors here. First, you have the privatization of the state farms, which have belonged to the state since the departure of the French in 1962. In 1987, there was a law passed which gave priority in the sale of the land to the farmers themselves. It wasn't bad, because only the workers could buy the land. But unfortunately, now it has been reported that the massacres have been very intense in the area near Algiers, in precisely the area where these privatizations are taking place. The plan is to clear the land by killing people, and after killing them, to give it to the military and the friends of generals. So the privatization is not benefitting the people, but only a narrow group of people in the regime.

Second, you have the privatization of state companies in the industrial and service sectors. This privatization will bring about 400,000 layoffs; the already high level of unemployment will be even higher. To give you an example, the unemployment figure rose from 1.3 million in 1992 to more than 2.5 million in 1996; there will be 3 million unemployed by the end of this year. Since opportunities for job creation are very poor, because of low rates of investment, unemployment will increase even more. Now, according to my calculations, there is an increase of 250,000 potential new workers coming into the labor force each year, which means that the unemployed workforce will increase to 4.5 million by the year 2002.

Also, because the IMF ordered the Algerian government to devalue its currency, the dinar, this devaluation increased the prices of all imported goods, and Algeria is importing 90% of its consumer goods, so you can imagine its impact on the Algerian population. Prices have gone up very steeply, especially in food products. This causes a drop in purchasing power of the population, leading to a growth in poverty, and I now have reliable information from Algeria that the average salary is unable to cover the basic needs of the average household, let alone the situation of the unemployed. So, the situation is very serious. You cannot have economic growth without investment, and, except in the hydrocarbon sector, the rate of investment is very, very low—I would say it is the lowest in the last 30 years, since our independence. All the economic and social indicators are very bad. Besides that, you have corruption, and the external debt jumped from \$26 billion in 1992 to \$40 billion in 1998, if the military debt is included. It is a very, very dramatic situation, and I don't see by what miracle the economic situation will improve in the next three or four years. I would say, to the contrary, that I expect that the Algerian economy will be bankrupt in the next few years.

## What's at stake in jailing of Shubeilat

by Our Special Correspondent

Anyone desirous of understanding what the prospects are, for peace or war in the Middle East, should carefully follow the developments in the case of Laith Shubeilat, the independent Jordanian Islamist currently being held in prison, on charges of incitement to riot and *lèse-majesté*. If plans proceed, to put Shubeilat on trial before a military tribunal, ram through a conviction, and serve him a lengthy sentence, it means that



Laith Shubeilat

some time this summer, war will engulf the region. It may begin as a revival of the Palestinian Intifada against Israeli occupying forces, and/or as fratricidal strife fomented among the desperate Palestinian population; it will most likely lead to an Israeli military move to expel up to a million Palestinians from the West Bank, into Jordan, along the lines of the plan associated with Israeli Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, known as the "Jordan Is Palestine" option. Some in the region are even mooted that the "surplus" Palestinian population would be driven into Iraq, perhaps under a different government. Regardless of the variations in the scenarios, one thing is clear: This would destroy Jordan as a nation, as well as Iraq, if it were thus besieged.

Shubeilat is being kept in jail because he is the only opposition figure with the political credibility and courage to speak out and denounce the process which is leading in the direction of catastrophe for the region. He has consistently denounced the "normalization" process of Jordan with Israel as a fraud, and detrimental to the economic interests of Palestinians and Jordanians. Most significantly, he has led the charge against the International Monetary Fund and its systematic destruction of the Jordanian economy since the IMF structural adjustment policy was imposed in 1992.

To keep Shubeilat quiet, and to terrorize anyone who might share his views, he was thrown in prison Feb. 20 on hoked-up charges. To keep the entire political class quiet, the press has been ordered not to print anything pertaining to his case. On March 19, following a request from State Security Court Prosecutor General Ma'amoun Khasawneh, the head