

built 140 years ago, cannot be used for a speed train. But somebody from abroad is there, so this plan is implemented.

What I consider important is not speedy links, but railway links in general. If you go very speedily from Paris and Berlin, to Warsaw and Moscow, this is fine. From Moscow you will go, not so quickly, because the distance from Moscow to Vladivostok is 9,000 kilometers, so you cannot get there, even at extreme speed, in five hours. It is not so important.

It is important to have this speedy link between Moscow and the West and the Productive Triangle, and then to use this extremely important line, in two directions: from Moscow to the Trans-Siberian line, from Moscow through Chardzhou and Central Asia, and from Moscow—we think and pray we will finish with the fight in Chechnya—and then from Moscow, through North Caucasus, through Transcaucasia, and south. So it will be a link from East and West Europe, a link from Turkey, and a link from the Persian Gulf, and all *this* will concentrate in Central Asia. I consider it one of the most important events of the end of the 20th century, I would call it a 21st-century event, because the real result will come in the 21st century.

EIR: Many of these very good railway-development ideas were thought of by Russia's Count Sergei Witte, in the late 19th century, in cooperation with France's Hanotaux, but this produced a violent reaction from the geopoliticians in London, determined to oppose development in what they called the "Eurasian heartland." How do you see the British, today, reacting to these proposals for rail-vectored economic-infrastructure development?

Bondarevsky: Why should you remind them of this? I will tell you an important example: In 1989, Rafsanjani, the President of Iran, visited Moscow and had confidential discussions with Gorbachov. They signed this agreement about the Ashkabad-Mashad line. The next day, I was consulted on the matter, and that the agreement for the Ashkabad-Mashad line was only the beginning. I said, "I know, you discussed the continuation from Mashad up to Chaknehar, here in the Arabian Sea." I was asked, "How can you know, we discussed it only yesterday with Gorbachov?" I said, "Yes, but I discovered the blueprint of this railway, made by Russian experts in 1901, in the archives."

So many current ideas also existed at this time, you are right. I will send you a book of my daughter's doctoral thesis, on the Iranian railway. The British tried to stop the building of railways through Iran, because of this trans-Asian railway. As a result, up to 1928, Iran did not have railways, because of this Russian-British controversy, and all the activity of the British geopolitical school! You are right. Afghanistan, up to today, has no railways. It is correct, but the epoch is totally different. If the French and Germans invest in Central Asia using the railway, you may be sure that the British will run behind.

Algerian opposition meets in London

by Dean Andromidas

On March 22, representatives of the Algerian opposition, as well as political figures from Morocco and Tunisia, held a seminar in London. Not a negotiating session, the event was organized around a presentation by Maître Al Yahia Abdenour, president of the Algerian League for Human Rights. The Algerian participants had attended a conference of opposition leaders in Rome in January, and their aim was to present the case, developed at the Rome conference, for a political dialogue to find a solution to the Algerian civil war, to the extensive Arab media based in London. The seminar also aimed at presenting the Algerian opposition case before British public opinion and policymakers.

Although sponsored by the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), the home of the British Crown's foreign policy establishment, it was in fact the initiative of the Center for Maghreb Studies, whose director is former Algerian Prime Minister Dr. Abdehamid Brahimia (see *EIR*, Dec. 9, 1994, for an interview with him).

Among those in attendance were Cheikh Abdallah Djaballah, president of the Nahdha Islamic Movement; Louisa Hannoun, secretary general of the Algerian Workers Party; and Ahmed Ben Bella, former President of Algeria. Although London-based members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) attended, Anwar Haddam, the official FIS representative to the Rome conference and currently based in Washington, was denied a visa by the British Foreign Office. The Algerian government refused to allow Abdelhamid Mehri, general secretary of the National Liberation Front (FLN), to leave Algeria. Political leaders from Morocco attending included Dr. Mohamed Boucetta, former minister of foreign affairs and leader of the Al-Istiqal Party; Mohamed Al-Yazighi, acting general secretary of the Popular Union of Socialist Forces; Dr. Abdelkrim Al-Khatib, a former minister said to be close to King Hassan II and to the Islamist movement in Morocco. From Tunisia, participants included former Prime Minister Mohamed M'zali; former minister Ahmed Ben Salah; and Dr. Cheikh Ghanouchi, leader of the An-Nahdha, the Islamic party of Tunisia.

Indictment of the Algerian regime

In his presentation, Abdennour called for implementing the National Contract that was drawn up at the Rome confer-

ence convoked by the Catholic lay association, the Community of Sant'Egidio (see *EIR*, Jan. 20, 1995), as the only solution to the "worsening political situation" in Algeria, the consequence of which has been "a higher loss of human life, a very grave economic financial and social cost, and the progression to civil war." He proceeded to lay out the massive violation of human rights following the cancellation of the 1992 elections by the military-backed regime, after the electoral success of the Islamic Salvation Front. He criticized the international community and press for their failure to denounce the "grave, systematic, and repeated violation of human rights, including even the right to life," by the Algerian regime. He denounced the Algerian government's widespread use of administrative arrests and charged that torture "is current administrative practice and is systematic." He further denounced the regime's use of capital punishment as "an instrument of repression against political violence" and as a "cruel and barbaric act."

Abdenmour went on to expose the failure of the "security options" favored by the regime in the last three years. These have created a "system of close surveillance, security checks, and control of the population, with sweeping arrests and kidnappings of large numbers of young people, followed by summary executions." He also accused the government of conducting a policy of reprisals against the civilian population, following attacks on authorities by the armed Islamic groups.

Abdenmour then laid out the principles of the National Contract drawn up by the opposition parties that attended the Rome conference. It calls for a political, peaceful, and negotiated solution to the crisis, of which one of the keys was the political rehabilitation of the Islamic Salvation Front, which must be integrated into the normal political life of the country. The National Contract calls for the establishment of a transitional regime, which would include the government and all opposition parties, and which would seek to normalize the situation in the country and lay the basis for elections. He warned against backing the current regime's plans for presidential elections which he characterized as an "electoral masquerade," whose purpose would be to seek international legitimacy and which would in fact worsen the situation. The Algerian government has refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Rome conference.

Why at Chatham House?

The Chatham House sponsorship of the conference is said by observers to represent a softening of British policy, which has been against any dialogue with the FIS. In fact, the Algerian leaders were received by the Foreign Ministry at the level of the head of the North Africa and Middle East Department.

A shift in British policy could very well reflect the sagging political fortunes of British stooge Charles Pasqua, the French minister of the interior who is a leading supporter of

the hard-line Algerian government military faction known as "the liquidators." Pasqua is said to enjoy intimate political and business relations with that faction, and has facilitated massive covert support from France for crushing the opposition in Algeria.

Pasqua, who had thrown his support behind Prime Minister Edouard Balladur in the current French presidential elections, has been the target of several scandals, including a "French Irangate," in which he is accused of arranging a secret arms deal with Iran, an arrangement facilitated by his friends in the Algerian military. The British appear to be tailoring their policy to a French presidential election victory of Jacques Chirac, whose Algerian policy appears closer to that of French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé, who is said to support a dialogue.

Britain's response to the Clinton administration is also a factor. Some establishment circles in London are hopeful of ridding of 10 Downing Street of John Major come May; after that, their diplomatic menu would include a policy at least appearing to be a bit less beastly to President Clinton (for whatever advantages that might produce). The U.S. position is, that the talks should clear the way for the FIS to be integrated back into the Algerian "establishment," and given a fair shot in decently early general elections. Until now, London, echoed by Pasqua, has been absolutely opposed to this.

Factional moves

In Algeria, the factional situation is growing more and more acute. Moves toward some sort of dialogue by elements in the regime appear evident. FIS leaders Ali Belhadj and Abassi Belhadj have been once again transferred from prison and put under house arrest. The Arabic press reports that eight Algerian generals have begun secret negotiations with the two leaders.

Nonetheless, military hard-liners have escalated brutal operations. According to published reports, up to 800 Islamic fighters were killed in one military operation, in which heavy armor and war planes were used to target groups of Islamic militants in the mountains southwest of the capital, and the special forces of the Algerian Army ambushed 450-500 Islamic militants who were on their way to the capital to support their comrades. Some reports put casualties as high as 2,600, although Algerian sources dispute such figures, saying that the militants operate in small groups of no more than 30 or 40, so these reports of casualties must include reprisals against the civilian population. This atrocity follows a prison massacre in which hundreds of political prisoners were killed.

Over 30,000 Algerians have been killed in the last two years, in a struggle that is rapidly degenerating into a full-scale civil war. The Army is now arming village militias, often along ethnic and tribal lines, which can only worsen the situation.