

CHAPTER

II

The Logic of Massacre in the Second Algerian War

In the year the Bosnian conflict began, another civil war broke out in Algeria in which Islamism was to play a leading role. From 1992 to 1997, confrontations of unbelievable savagery and violence ripped the country apart, claiming over 100,000 dead. All this was the consequence of a coup d'état to cancel the result of a general election in January 1992, which the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) was poised to win. The fighting that ensued between the Algerian army and Islamist militants in the bush and in the cities hastened the break-up of the coalition behind the FIS, bringing the devout middle class and the young urban poor of Algeria into more and more open conflict.

The devout middle class, whose members mostly identified with the leaders of the dissolved FIS, gave their sympathy to the *Armée Islamique du Salut* (AIS), the FIS's military arm, and then to the "moderate" Islamic parties, especially *Flamas*, founded by Mahfoud Nahmah. Meanwhile, the Algerian regime, gradually consolidating its military successes in the field, endeavored in 1995 to win back the approval of that pious bourgeoisie by undertaking a program of privatization and a switch to a market economy. The faction on the other side—the young Algerian poor in the cities—tended to identify very strongly with the swarms of armed groups that eventually came together under the banner of the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA). Advocating total war against the government and rejecting all truces and compromises, the GIA's core consisted of former members of Mustafa Bouyali's *Mouvement Islamique Armé* (1982–1987), along with Algerian "Afghan Arabs." The

result was a jihadist-salafist movement of extraordinary brutality, which overtook those groups still loyal to the FIS in 1994 and attracted, along with large numbers of hitistes, a sprinkling of intellectuals who had previously gone underground. The GIA was led by a succession of so-called *amirs*, all in their twenties, who rose to power and then were killed in combat one after the other; in the process it cut itself off from its grassroots Algerian support and exported terrorism to France in 1995.

The drift toward aimless violence culminated in wholesale massacres of civilians in the suburbs of Algiers in the fall of 1997, at a time when the AIS was declaring a "unilateral truce" with the government. Deprived of its popular component—radicalized Algerian youth and the jihadist-salafist intellectuals who had gone along with them—the Islamist movement as a whole was incapable of remobilizing as it had done between 1989 and 1991, when it provided the FIS with a critical mass of support that allowed it to control the streets and win elections. Consequently, the Islamist movement in Algiers was defeated. In the aftermath of the civil war, the Algerian government took care to maintain its grip on the political situation and was eager to absorb on its own terms parts of the devout bourgeoisie—who were, by this point, prepared to live with the regime.

The scale of the Algerian Islamists' shipwreck was not fully appreciated until 1996–97, when it became clear that the strategy of *jinad* had lost all popular support and that its proponents had lapsed into self-destructive terrorism. Prior to this, in 1994–95, violence and insecurity had reached such a pitch within Algeria that the state seemed no longer able to withstand them—to the point where some observers (notably in the United States) braced themselves for the advent of the "next fundamentalist state" in Algeria. Many factors seemed to point to this outcome: the frustration of the majority of electors, who had voted for the FIS in December 1991, the conjunction of the two recent jihad traditions (Bouyali's native Algerian one and that of the returning "Afghans"), contrasting memories of the violence of the War of Independence—with its bush and the triumph of the colonels who hijacked power in 1962—and finally the fury of vast numbers of young people and their determination to have done with the "thieves" who ruled them.

Islamist leaders and opposition parties all over the Muslim world were riveted by the unfolding of the Algerian conflict, with each camp

expecting a boost from the success of whichever faction it supported. In Egypt, where a wave of terrorism was sweeping through the Upper Nile Valley and where the radical group Gamaa Islamiya was exchanging messages of sympathy with the GIA, the Algerian conflict was followed intently. In France, where a very large Algerian population resided and links formed with Algeria over 132 years of colonization were still very strong, the civil war quickly acquired a domestic dimension. After a number of French citizens were killed in Algeria, the French police cracked down hard on militant Algerian Islamists within France's borders, and this impelled the GIA to expand the conflict to France. An Air France jet was hijacked in December 1994, followed by a series of terrorist attacks throughout the summer and fall of 1995.

Many questions remain unanswered as to who exactly was responsible for this campaign and for the tangle of manipulations by which the bloody history of the GIA was brought to a close. What is certain is that by losing the war on the ground, in an orgy of unspeakable atrocities, the GIA drastically weakened Islamism as a whole, not only in Algeria but in the rest of the Muslim world, where it was now obliged to expend much time and energy distancing itself from its more extremist elements. The Algerian disaster put the movement (except for the most radical groups) on the defensive, in notable contrast to the offensive optimism of the 1980s. Intellectuals linked to the devout middle class found themselves obliged to reformulate their theories to reassure society in general, and to do so some of them began to embrace the rhetoric of democracy. Although this set them apart from the extremists, it created serious dissensions within their own ranks. Indeed, the Algerian drama of the 1990s had major consequences far beyond Algeria itself.

When the electoral process was "interrupted" (to use the customary euphemism) in Algeria on January 13, 1992, several small radical groups that viewed elections and democracy as "ungodly" (*kufri*) were fully prepared for a jihad. They had inaugurated it in spectacular fashion with a bloody attack on the military outpost of Guemmar on November 28, 1991—two years, almost to the day, after the assassination of Abdallah Azzam in Peshawar. The head of the group responsible, the Afghanistān veteran Aïssa Massoudi (also known as Tayyeb al-Afghāni)

was later arrested, tried, and put to death. The attack, which the authorities blamed on the FIS so as to damage its electoral campaign (the party formally denied the charge), was the first indication of a jihadist-salafist contingent at the fringes of the Islamist party in Algeria. The jihadist-salafists had never believed that power could be won through the electoral process and thus had waited for the right moment to precipitate an armed struggle.

According to one of the Afghan veterans who founded the GIA, the idea of forming an armed group that would take power through jihad had been hatched in late 1989, when jailed leaders of Bouyali's former Mouvement Islamique Armé were released. But the spectacular success of the FIS mobilization right up to the strike and uprising of June 1991 created a climate that appeared to favor a political victory for the Islamist movement and made the proclamation of a jihad seem unnecessary. It was only after the arrest of Madani and Benbadj at the end of the strike, which was taken as a sign that the regime was determined to use force to keep control of the situation, that the armed groups decided to go on the offensive at Guemmar. They judged that the conditions for a jihad were now in place, because there were more than enough militants sufficiently disenchanted with the electoral strategy of the party to go into action.²

This jihadist faction was actually made up of a number of different cells, nursing bitter rivalries of doctrine, personality, and experience. These differences later furnished a pretext for murderous infighting. There were two leading networks: former militants of Bouyali's MLA (among them Abdalkader Chebouti, Mansouri Meliani, and Ezzedine Baa) and veterans of Afghanistan such as Qari Said, Tayyeb al-Afghani, and Djafar al-Afghani—the latter was the amir of the GIA between August 1993 and February 1994.³ To these were added a number of FIS dissidents, notably Saïd Mekhloufi, a former officer of the Algerian army, who later became the editor of the FIS's official newspaper, wrote a 1991 *Treatise on Civil Disobedience* advocating violence, and was excluded from the FIS's Batna Congress in July of the same year. Finally, there was a stream of young men with no experience in combat or activism, which increased steadily in volume from 1992 onward. All these members diverged widely in terms of culture and experience: the jihadist-salafists who had originally come together in Afghanistan had

was left to his successor, Abdelhak Layada, an autobody mechanic from the Baraki district of Algiers who had discovered Islam during the October 1988 uprising, to make the decisive step—namely, the amalgamation of the three small groups into the unified GIA.

By the close of 1992, the armed movement consisted of two main branches. These were the MIA, led by "General" Cheboubi, which was well-organized and structured and favored a long-term jihad based on a maquis like that of the War of Independence and of Bouyali. The MIA's struggle was mainly directed against the state and its representatives. In January 1993 a fatwa promulgated by Ali Benbadji from his prison cell gave the MIA the blessing of the number-two figure in the dissolved FIS. Layada, who represented the other branch, implemented the GIA's strategy of immediate action to destabilize the enemy, with repeated attacks designed to create an atmosphere of general insecurity. His verdict on the FIS was severe, and he declared impious those leaders of the party who had declined to take up arms on the pretext that they abhorred violence.

Initially, Layada, the first amir of the GIA, threatened journalists ("grandsons of France") and the families of Algerian soldiers. These threats were fulfilled a few months later, in the spring of 1993. In an interview published by the *Al-Shakāda* (Profession of the Faith) bulletin in March 1993, Layada placed his movement within the context of contemporary history: "According to him, the greatest disaster ever to befall the Community of the Faithful was the fall of the caliphate in 1924. The Muslim Brothers and the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami had fought manfully during the struggle to establish an Islamic state against the ideas of jahiliyya (barbarity); this was all very well, but the overall results of the last seventy years were distinctly meager, according to Layada. The ungodly had everywhere succeeded in clinging to power, because the movements opposing them had hesitated to embrace jihad and to resort to armed struggle."

The one project of Islamic jihad that had achieved most of its objectives while yielding strategic experience that could be emulated on a global level was Afghanistan, according to Layada. In Algeria, where enemies of Islam trained by the French had seized power at the time of independence, a few preachers had continued to nurse the flame of resistance, until "the martyr Bouyali" arrived and became aware that the way to raise high the word of Allah was the way of jihad.⁶ Yet he too

remained isolated, according to Layada, "because the preachers lived in a world of dreams, mirages, and intellectual and operational naivety." Next had come the FIS, whose objectives were commendable but whose strategy was defeated by the forces of impiety and godlessness. Now the hour had come for jihad, for the launching of which "the GIA has assembled the necessary justifications according to Shari'a." Layada went on to express his amazement that "those who issued fatwas to proclaim that the jihad was an obligation [*farḍ ayin*] for everyone in Afghanistan have not done likewise in Algeria and the other Muslim countries, whereas the basic principles that ought to guide them are exactly the same."

After a phase of preparation following the unification of the first jihadist cells in the GIA, Layada set about bringing together all other armed militants under his own command "according to a single intellectual principle: namely, the way of orthodox Sunni Islam as our pious ancestors understood it."⁷ Referring to Oswald Spengler's theory of the decline of the West and Bertrand Russell's idea that the "white man has had his day," the amir went on to suggest that a new caliphate should be established by force of arms in Algeria. He divided the existing Islamist movements into two categories. On the one hand were those who gave their allegiance to the "godless government . . . and we shall be innocent of their blood, because Allah's judgment on them is made clear when he announces that 'he among you who pays allegiance to them, is one of their number.' As to those who are not allied to the government, we say to them, 'why do you wait to join the caravan of the jihad?'"⁸ Pleading for the combatants to unite, Layada sought to avoid the dissensions that, by the time his text appeared in March 1993, had transformed the victory of the Afghan mujahedeen over the Red Army into a fratricidal war.⁹

This interview—whether Layada was its real author or whether the editors of *Al-Chakāda* doctored it—places the GIA firmly in the line of the Afghan jihad and the saga of Bouyali. Layada suggests that the GIA is the natural outcome of the Algerian Islamist movement after the failure of the FIS. He sees his own vocation as rallying the disappointed FIS militants to turn the GIA into the single controlling organization for armed struggle. This double ambition took shape in 1993 during Layada's time as amir and came to fruition during the amirac of Cherif Gousmi in 1994. It was set in motion by a cycle of violence

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aimed not only at the Algerian government and its officials but also at all those men and women who were viewed as having links of any kind with that government.

Beginning in March 1993, a steady succession of university academics, intellectuals, writers, journalists, and medical doctors were assassinated. Not all of them were connected to the regime, but all—at least in the eyes of the young urban poor who had joined the jihad—were associated with the hated image of French-speaking intellectuals, with their inaccessible cultural assets. In military terms the regime was unscathed by this purge, but the myth of its easy triumph over the Islamist movement in 1992 was exploded. The visibility of the victims and their lies abroad meant that their murders greatly damaged the credibility of the state. More worrisome still, though less easily understood outside Algeria, was the regime's loss of control of mountain and rural districts as well as of the main roads and the working-class areas of the cities. These passed into the hands of the armed insurgents, revealing the fragility of the government and the tilt toward dissidence that was taking place across broad swathes of the population. Without actually enlisting with the still-embryonic GIA and MEI, many young men from humble backgrounds—who were more or less under the orders of local amirs—managed to expel the police from their neighborhoods and proclaim them "liberated Islamic zones."

This process, which was fairly well received at the time by a population who had voted overwhelmingly for the FIS and deplored the disappearance of the "fair" management of the municipality by the elected officials of the party, was reflected by a change in the social hierarchy within the Islamist movement itself. During the period when the FIS controlled many municipal authorities (June 1990–April 1992), local power had remained in the hands of the devout middle class and the intellectuals of the party, who implemented a populist policy intended to satisfy the social demands of the impoverished urban young. This involved fighting corruption in public services, cracking down on crime, "improving" public morals, and so on. In 1993–94, when young militants seized local power by force, Islamist notables, entrepreneurs, and shopkeepers—united in their hostility to a government that had robbed them of their election victory in January 1992—initially funded the *littiste* amirs, journeymen workers, and plumbers, whom they saw as tools for their political revenge. But as the months

went by, their voluntary "Islamic tax" turned into a full-scale extortionist racket, operated by bands of armed men claiming to represent an ever more shadowy cause, while fighting one another for turf on which to continue their exactions. Meanwhile, the army, having withdrawn from these areas, surrounded them and turned them into ghettos.¹² The devout middle class found itself first pauperized, then victimized through extortion by gangs of deprived young men. Its members responded by deserting their districts, and this was a powerful contributing factor in destroying all semblance of social unity within the Islamist movement. In fact, in the long term it would lay the groundwork for a gradual return of the middle class to the government fold.

In political terms, this passage of influence from the devout bourgeoisie to the working class became clear when the GIA won supremacy over the FIS in 1993–94. Layada, who was arrested in Morocco in May 1993, was succeeded (after a period of indecision) by Mourad Si Ahmed, also known as Seïf Allah Djafar (Djafar the sword of Allah) or Djafar al-Afghani (in recognition of the two years he spent in Afghanistan with Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami). Aged thirty when he became amir in August 1993, this leader had not been educated beyond primary school and had made his living from trading in contraband goods (*trabendo*).¹³ Like his predecessors and successors, he was an underprivileged youth from the city. His amirate, which continued until his death in combat on February 26, 1994, was distinguished by an escalation of violence, as his alias would indicate. He began by expanding the GIA's base of support outside Algeria. From July 1993 onward, a weekly bulletin called *Al-Ansar* (The Partisans) was published in London by the international jihadist-salafist movement, under the supervision of two Afghan veterans, a naturalized Spanish Syrian named Abu Mousab and a Palestinian, Abu Qatada.¹⁴ These two would supply doctrinal justifications for the GIA's actions until June 1996, keeping up a steady stream of pro-GIA publicity outside Algeria and maintaining contacts between the local and international jihad.

Within Algeria, Djafar al-Afghani managed to broaden the influence of his organization to include new groups, who used its name to claim responsibility for spectacular military actions and raise the struggle to a higher intensity.¹⁵ On September 21, 1993, a group allied to the GIA killed two French surveyors at Sidi Bel Abbas in the west of the coun-

ity. The communiqué claiming responsibility for this execution, signed by the new amir and published by *Al-Ansar*, indicated that godless fighters as well as godless Algerians were legitimate targets for the jihad. This was the beginning of a deliberate campaign of murder against foreigners: twenty-six individuals were killed before the end of 1993.¹⁶ Nor were those in the Islamist movement who opposed the war spared by "the sword of Allah": in November 1993 Sheik Mohamed Bouashimani, a popular figure who was prominent in Nahnab's devout middle class Hamas party, was kidnapped and executed after refusing to issue a fatwa endorsing the GIA's tactics.

The exacerbation of the violence forced the FIS-based groups to engage more actively in the fight so as to keep the GIA from outflanking them. In the summer of 1993, the djazairist Islamist intellectuals attached to Mohammed Saïd created the FIDA (Front Islamique du Djihad Armé, whose Arabic acronym means "sacrifice"), which specialized in assassinating secularist intellectuals, their bitterest adversaries. In March 1994, at the end of Ramadan, several hundred fighters of the MEI led by Abdelkader Cheboui attacked the Lambeze prison near Batna and freed all the Islamist inmates. Prior to this, in the middle of a month of fasting which saw a substantial increase in violence, Djafar al-Afghani had been killed in circumstances suggesting that the army had been given exact information on his whereabouts.

Yet al-Afghani's death in no way affected the growing strength of the GIA, whose new amir, Cherif Gousmi (also called Abu Abdallah Abnéd) was introduced by *Al-Ansar* on March 10. Before his death in combat on September 26, 1994, Gousmi achieved one of the chief objectives of the jihad—the unification of its troops—by absorbing some of the original adherents of the FIS. His amirate saw the high-water mark of GIA power, during which the use of violence was combined with precise political objectives. Gousmi, aged twenty-six when he took control, had been the imam and local representative of the FIS at Birkhadem before being sent to the Sahara camps in 1992. Thereafter, he joined the GIA as head of its religious committee, and within this context gave an interview to an Arab newspaper in Peshawar in January 1994.¹⁷ The new amir appeared to have national and international militant credentials, along with experience in religious matters that made him a more influential personality than any of his predecessors or successors.

On May 13, 1994, Mohammed Saïd, Abderrazaq Redjem, and Saïd Mekhloufi met with Gousmi in a tent in the mountains, where the three leaders decided to give their allegiance (*bay'a*) to the amir and pool their resources within the GIA.¹⁸ The "communiqué of unity, jihad and attachment to the Koran and the Sunna" that resulted was signed by Redjem on behalf of the FIS and by Mekhloufi on behalf of the MEI; it established a consultative council (*majlis al chourri*) that included two jailed FIS leaders, Madani and Benhadj (who actually were not consulted).¹⁹ But the real architect of unity was, without a doubt, Mohammed Saïd, whose charisma and culture set him head and shoulders above the rest. His influence would soon be felt on the GIA, which thereafter was the undisputed principal Islamist force in Algeria. Whatever the real intentions of the various signatories, the historic unification meeting acknowledged the ascendancy of a group that had emerged from the ranks of impoverished urban youth. One of the most prestigious Algerian Islamist intellectuals, the fifty-year-old Saïd, paid allegiance to an amir of only 26 years of age. This meeting showed quite clearly that the devout middle class had lost the initiative, and it confirmed the decline in its status within Algerian society.

The FIS's executive branch abroad, which was directed from Germany by Rabah Kebir, refused at first to give credence to the unity communiqué and organized a riposte favoring the creation of an Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS). The aim here was to furnish those of the middle class who favored the FIS with a mode of expression to match that of the jihad without obliging them to join the GIA, with its radical objectives. By excluding from its ranks the supporters of Mohammed Saïd and denying that Redjem had any right to sign anything on behalf of the FIS, the IFFE paved the way for the proclamation of the AIS on July 18, 1994.²⁰ This move united in loyalty to the FIS, and under the authority of its imprisoned leaders, a network of well-established resistance groups operating in Algeria's eastern and western regions. Their national amir, Madani Merzag, was the counterweight to the GIA amir, Gousmi, whose troops were present in central Algeria and the outskirts of Algiers. Very soon the two factions found themselves locked in bloody combat.

From the start, their political goals were different. For the FIS, the creation of a military branch in the form of the AIS was a tactic to fa-

cillitate negotiation with the government from a position of strength. In August, the month following the creation of the AIS, Abassi Madani wrote from prison to General Liamine Zéroual—who had assumed the presidency in the previous month—suggesting they work together toward a solution of the crisis on the basis of the original conditions set by the FIS. The regime did not respond, though Madani was transferred from jail to house arrest and three other FIS leaders were freed on September 13. On the same day, by contrast, Gousmi went public with a letter in which he violently criticized the strategy of the FIS, recalling that the GIA was not fighting a war in order to open a dialogue with "apostate" rulers, nor to establish the "democracy" of a "moderate Islamic regime favored by the West, but to purge the land of the ungodly" and establish through jihad an Islamic state. He reiterated the watchword inscribed on all the GIA's communiqués: "No agreement, no truce, no dialogue." On the ground, the GIA was gaining against the AIS, carrying out more and more executions of apostates and ungodly ones, as well as assassinations of foreigners (to which the AIS was opposed). But within two weeks of this declaration, on September 26, at the height of his power, Gousmi was killed.

The confused events that followed the amir's death and the installation of his successor, Djamel Zitouni, have been interpreted in various ways, and the absence of reliable sources precludes any firm judgment about what happened. While the FIS and AIS were weak, the GIA had in Mohammed Said a potential leader whose stature was far greater than that of any of the younger amirs. It was fully expected that he would consolidate his hold over the group and make it a tool to control the field and present a major threat against the government. He alone was capable of rebuilding the original movement, fragmented as it was by repression, radicalization, and terrorism, while at the same time appealing to those of the devout middle class who were not frightened by the djazarist faction to which he belonged. On October 6, *Al-Aynar* announced that the amirate had been conferred on Mahfoud 'Ajine, one of Gousmi's aides and a supporter of Mohammed Said. But the more intransigent salafists would not hear of a djazarist at the head of the GIA and staged an armed coup to replace him with Djamel Zitouni, who was formally presented as the new amir by *Al-Aynar* on October 27.²¹

Zitouni, the thirty-year-old son of a poultry merchant, had received

a francophone secondary education. His mastery of written Arabic was as limited as his knowledge of the texts of Islam—unlike his predecessor, the imam Gousmi. After Zitouni's internment in the desert in 1992–1993, he joined the GIA and quickly attracted attention as a specialist in killing French citizens. The circumstances under which he came to power were so murky that he found his leadership quickly contested by many of the local phalange who made up the group: not only the djazarists, angry at his treatment of 'Ajine, but also a number of senior salafists of the Bouyali and Afghan generations. Where Gousmi had succeeded in unifying the armed movements, both Zitouni and his successor, Antar Zouabri, created dissensions within it that eventually proved fatal. From the first months of his amirate, rumors fueled by his AIS rivals—which many people took seriously—suggested that Zitouni was being manipulated by the Algerian special services. His shaky religious credentials, the odd manner of his assuming power, and the negative effects of the initiatives he took during his two-year amirate served only to heighten the speculation and mistrust surrounding him.²²

It was this amir—probably the best French-speaker of any GIA leader—who unleashed a war of terrorism against France. In late December 1994, the GIA seized a French Airbus at the Algiers airport and flew it to Marseille, where the hijackers were neutralized by French police.²³ For a while it seemed that the organization had broken through to a new level and was now capable of carrying the war to France proper. Apart from the prestige the GIA acquired among the hitlisters by striking this blow "at the former colonial power and bitterest enemy of Islam in the West," it expected to trigger a political dynamic whereby the French government, concluding that the price of terrorism within France was too high, would withdraw all support from the Algerian regime and hasten its collapse. But the dead and wounded in the bombings of summer and fall 1995 produced exactly the opposite effect, stiffening the resolve of the French authorities to combat an extremist Islamist movement that appeared to be imperiling civil order among young French Muslims whose families had recently emigrated from the Maghreb.

This new escalation of violence took place at just the moment when the FIS was preparing a "platform for a political and peaceful solution to the Algerian crisis," alongside several other opposition parties. This

text was signed in Rome on January 13, 1995. The aim of the dissolved FIS was to demonstrate that it was still a central, unavoidable player on the political scene and that it might have ways of bringing an end to the armed struggle, if the regime would agree to negotiate, send the army back to its barracks, and give back the reins of power to the devout middle class. This initiative was a real challenge to the Algerian authorities, given that the Rome platform was receiving a favorable reception within certain influential circles in the United States. However, the project assumed that the FIS was still capable, in 1995, of controlling the young urban poor, the swollen battalions of the *jihād*, and the world of the devout entrepreneurs and shopkeepers—and this was no longer the case. The urban notables, exhausted by the predations of local warlords and their people, were more in favor of Hamas, the Islamist party run by Mahfoud Nahnah, which had agreed to collaborate with the government and defend their interests.

As to the GIA, in spite of Benhadji's support for the Rome platform, it conducted a virulent campaign against the agreement, "signed in the shadow of the Vatican," accusing the leaders of the FIS of being no more than "betrayers of the *jihād*, selling the blood of its fighters" to satisfy their own political ambitions.²¹ In June, Madani and Benhadji were excluded from the consultative council of the GIA, to which they had been appointed (without their knowledge), after the unity meeting a year before. On May 4, Zitouni published a communiqué forbidding representatives of the FIS abroad from speaking in the name of the *jihād* and giving them a month to repent or die. Among the five leaders targeted was Sheik Abdelbaki Sahtoui, who was killed on July 11. This marked the beginning of a series of terrorist actions in France that continued unabated until the Algerian presidential election was held in November 1995.

The war against the French in metropolitan France was part of the complex struggle between the FIS, the government, and the GIA over the direction of the Algerian civil war. In organizing a broad-based terrorist campaign in France, the GIA's goal was to prove that the FIS was irrelevant to the armed struggle and to counter its preferred tactic of negotiating with the Algerian regime with the prospect of civil peace as its main bargaining chip. From this point of view, the government recouped a major advantage, because it now appeared in the eyes of Western leaders and Western public opinion-makers as the only force capa-

ble of stopping the terrorists who threatened them in their own backyards. By this reasoning, the leaders of the FIS and a certain number of observers were strengthened in their conviction that Zitouni's GIA was playing into the hands of the Algerian government, and indeed that it had been thoroughly infiltrated by government agents.

In Algeria itself, dissension was growing within Zitouni's amirate. To affirm his hold on it, at the end of 1995 he published a 62-page tract entitled *The Way of God: Elucidation of Salafist Principles and the Obligations of Jihad Fighters*, in which he reiterated the line of the GIA and answered its detractors.²² This text, which was unoriginal in its jihadist-salafist doctrine, attempted to lay to rest suspicions about Zitouni that had begun to surface within the ranks of the GIA itself, by furnishing a precise chronology of the various groups that had preceded it, from Bouyali's MIA to the series of amirs and their most significant achievements. Special care was taken to include Zitouni himself in their legitimate line. Again and again he incriminated the *Kharjites* (Islamist extremists) and other partisans of *takfir*, or excommunication of society as a whole, recalling that such people had been killed by the successors of the Prophet and that their contemporary heirs met with the same fate whenever they fell into the hands of the GIA. This was Zitouni's attempt to disassociate himself from the members of this faction: he had been accused of behaving like them in his February 1995 communiqué, when he gave the order that "for every pure Muslim woman arrested by the government, an apostate's wife would be executed." But if Zitouni spared society as a whole, in the hope that its members would join the ranks of the *jihād* fighters, he condemned out of hand the other devout Islamist factions as godless, particularly the Muslim Brothers and the *djazarists*. Their militants were enjoined to repent, adopt salafism, and adhere to the GIA, according to a precise procedure detailed in Zitouni's text.²³ As for those who betrayed their allegiance to the amir, they deserved instant death: a judgment that Zitouni went out of his way to justify with abundant quotations from the holy texts and salafist authors.

The year 1995 was marked by a series of major GIA purges. In June, Ezzedine Baa, the number-three figure in the *Mouvement de l'Etat Islamique* (which had merged with the GIA in May 1994) and a veteran of Bouyali's campaign, absconded back to the AIS: he was caught, judged, and executed.²⁴ In the following month, Abderrazaq Redjem

announced that he too wished to rejoin the AIS and was mysteriously killed, along with Mohammed Said, in November. The GIA did not announce the two men's deaths in *Al-Ansar* until December 14, and then laid the blame on the security forces. In its issues of January 4 and 11, 1996, it changed tack and assumed responsibility for the killings, accusing the two men, as "members of the heretic djazarist sect," of plotting a coup d'état against Zitouni. These executions caused a sensation within the Algerian Islamist movement, given the prominence of the two victims. Indeed, they had the effect of isolating Zitouni, who found himself abruptly dropped by a number of regional GIA leaders, though for a few months longer he continued to benefit from the support of the principal jihadist-salafist theorist in London, the Palestinian Abu Qatada. Nevertheless the disquiet was such and the charges of manipulation so numerous, given that the deaths of the two men were perceived as placing in doubt the entire future of Algerian Islamism, that before long even *Al-Ansar* was demanding explanations from Zitouni. These were not forthcoming until the summer of 1996, when video cassettes were released showing two wretched friends of the victims (Abdel Haq Lamaza, a djazarist university professor, and Maïfoud Tajine, who had been ousted by Zitouni after the death of Goussmi) "confessing" to the plot and humbly requesting summary execution for themselves, in a production as lurid as any Moscow show trial.²⁴

This piece of "evidence" arrived too late to bolster Zitouni's image, however. As the spring wore on, militants began to desert in droves, accusing the amir of straying too far from the authentic jihadist-salafist line. On March 27, Zitouni kidnapped seven French Trappist monks from the monastery of Tibhirine, who were subsequently beheaded after the failure of negotiations with Paris.²⁵ The news of this latest massacre, on May 21, shocked even the most extreme fundamentalists, who pointed out that Islamic tradition had always enjoined respect for monks. Moreover, they feared that the killings would have disastrously negative effects, at a time when many Islamist representatives in the West had forged close links with Christian ecclesiastics.

However, the most decisive blow to the GIA was dealt by those in London who had previously given it legitimacy in the world's eyes through the publication of *Al-Ansar*. On May 31 1996, its editors suspended the bulletin. Then, on June 6, the two principal London ideologists of the jihadist-salafist persuasion, Abu Qatada and the Syrian Abu

Musab, joined with Zawabiri's Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya and a Libyan armed group to announce that they had withdrawn their support from Zitouni, who was guilty of "deviations" in the implementation of the jihad. He had, they claimed, "shed forbidden blood" by assassinating Said and Redjem along with several veterans of Afghanistans who had criticized the growing isolation of the GIA as a result of the amir's policies.²⁶ When other dissidents announced Zitouni's exclusion from the GIA and the return of the group to an authentic jihadist-salafist line, the amir found himself completely abandoned. Eventually, he was hunted down and shot on July 16 near Médéa, probably by djazarists wishing to avenge the death of their leader in November 1995.

Zitouni's twenty-two months at the head of the GIA brought the Algerian jihad to its knees, and Antar Zouabri, his successor as amir, finished it off altogether. The GIA was especially split in Algiers, where the devout middle class, fed up with the endless violence and racketeering by gangs of young men in the name of jihad, participated en masse in the presidential elections of 1995 despite calls from the FIS to boycott them. More significant than the victory of Zeroual—a foregone conclusion—was the achievement of the man who finished second in the polls, the Hamas candidate Maïfoud Nahnah, who now emerged as a serious rival to the FIS among the religious petite bourgeoisie.

The terrorist campaign against France also emphasized the contradictions between the GIA and the FIS. The GIA exalted the enthusiasm of the disinherited in the cities every time the former colonial power was attacked, whereas the FIS leaders abroad had gone to great lengths to persuade the governments of Europe and the United States that their accession to power would guarantee social order and the expansion of the market economy within Algeria. Now, in 1996, the same governments were convinced that the FIS was no longer capable of controlling the armed struggle, that it had lost touch with the impoverished youth of Algeria, and that it now stood a far lesser chance of assuming the reins of power after the assassination of Said, a charismatic leader who alone had looked able to reconcile extremists and moderates, the poor and the middle classes, the jihadists and the djazarists. Finally, the growth of violence at every level of society and the indiscriminate killings—whether or not some were provocations or deliberately arranged by the security forces—were steadily eating away at the popularity the jihad had enjoyed in 1993–1994. The final break between a population

that was growing more and more tired of the unending conflict and the armed Islamist groups was accomplished by the last amir, Zouabri.

A faction of the GIA that was considered questionable by the others nominated the 26-year-old Zouabri, amid general confusion. Born in a shack at "Houch" Gros next to a former colonial estate in the foothills of the Atlas near Bouzarik, he had been an activist since adolescence; his brother Ali was also the leader of an armed formation. After returning from Iraq, where he was a member of the contingent sent by Ali Benhadji, Zouabri had taken part in various groups that later merged with the GIA. A close confidant of Zitouni, Zouabri continued where his predecessor had left off—with a strategy of ever-increasing violence and redoubled purges within the GIA. He killed anyone who questioned his authority and flatly rejected the criticisms of the international jihadist-salafists. With these methods he managed to re-establish a certain authority by early 1997, and he found in the Egyptian Abu Hamza—a veteran of Afghanistan and Bosnia who preached at the Grand Mosque in Finsbury Park, London—a new theorist abroad who was prepared to back up his jihad with the necessary fatwas.

In February, Hamza relaunched the publication *Al-Ansar*, having assured himself of Zouabri's salafist orthodoxy as laid out in a manifesto entitled *The Sharp Sword*.³¹ Apart from justifying the various murders and liquidations that had taken place since Zitouni's time, this text presented Algerian society as being resistant to the jihad, whereas it should do battle against the impious as a Muslim community and join the struggle of the GIA. Yet only a small minority of Algerians were really supporting their religion by taking part in the holy war, according to Zouabri. Confronted by godless and apostate rulers, the majority of the people had "forsaken religion and renounced the battle against its enemies."³² *The Sharp Sword* harbored no illusions about the jihad's unpopularity, in contrast to the triumphalist tone of the GIA's previous published texts. In practice, this attitude translated into a series of violent acts aimed at "punishing" a population that had betrayed the hopes placed in it.

The month of Ramadan (January–February) in 1997 was the bloodiest of the entire war, with horrific massacres of civilians, whose throats were cut with knives. It seems that the creation by the state of armed "patriot leagues" in villages where jihad militants were denied access contributed to the privatization and spread of the violence by adding

the ingredients of vendetta and local dispute to the wider struggle between the GIA and the government. In the absence of reliable research or evidence, it is difficult to see who exactly was responsible for the wave of killings that characterized Zouabri's amirate and that culminated with the bloodbaths of August and September in Rais, Beni Messous, and Benthalha, where several hundred people lost their lives. The Algerian press laid the blame exclusively on the "GIA criminals" and gave special emphasis to the links between some of its founders and the FIS. By contrast, the exiled FIS party leaders refused to see the killings as anything other than provocations by the government security forces, whose aim was to alienate the population from the Islamist movement in general.

Whoever was responsible for the bloodletting, it led in September 1997 to two events that spelled the end of organized jihad in Algeria. These were the virtual disappearance of the GIA and the unilateral truce declared by the AIS. The GIA's final communiqué, signed by Zouabri, was issued at the end of September. It claimed responsibility for the massacres and justified them by declaring impious all those Algerians who had not joined its ranks. Thus, the GIA had finally chosen the option of takfir, the excommunication of society as a whole. Abu Hamza published this in the September 27 issue of *Al-Ansar*, along with a critical commentary, and two days later announced the closure of the bulletin and the termination of his support for Zouabri and the GIA, whom he accused of abandoning the line of jihadism-salafism by "condemning the Algerian people for impiety (kufr)."³³ After that date, the GIA, with no representation abroad, ceased to be able to publish its communiqués and lost its identity. This in no way brought an end to the violent actions of groups within Algeria, which continued to wage an erratic jihad led by independent commanders, with no cohesive structure nationwide. The last amir, Zouabri, has scarcely been heard of since that time.

The GIA vanished both as a structured entity and as the leading participant in the Algerian civil war, in a way that was even more confused and mysterious than the one whereby it came into existence in 1992. By pronouncing takfir against the whole of society in his final communiqué, Zouabri gave his blessing to a sectarian tendency within the group that gradually cut it off from any possible base within Algerian society, and even within the ranks of the young urban poor from whom its

support had originally come. And indeed this class had emerged demoralized and demobilized from five years of relentless violence, with little inclination to engage in an Islamist political project that would involve further sacrifices in the unequal struggle against the government.

On September 21, the same day that the GIA's final communiqué reached London, Madani Merzag, the AIS's national amir, called on all the fighters under his command to observe a unilateral ceasefire from October 1 onward. This again demonstrated the weakness of the armed wing of the FIS, which had already been exposed by the widespread massacres in September that had taken place while the AIS stood by powerless. As an "honorable" intermediate solution between defeat and surrender, the truce negotiated with the army high command allowed the AIS to keep its men together in the interval before they could be integrated into the security forces. In military terms, it reflected the conditions under which the government was prepared to give amnesty to the devout middle class who had supported the FIS—basically, its members would be granted clemency provided they gave their full allegiance to the regime.

Despite the disappearance of the GIA and the ceasefire with the AIS, massacres continued unabated throughout 1998. In the absence of any credible claim of responsibility, they were attributed to a continuing campaign of indiscriminate terrorism by armed groups that had formerly belonged to the GIA. Some of these had lapsed into pure banditry; others were settling scores among themselves or with the "patriots" who continued to harass them; and still others, according to a brand of logic akin to that which had prevailed at the end of the War of Independence, enlisted themselves in the service of landowners who needed to frighten illegal occupants away from property that would later become valuable with the advent of peace. Here again we have no reliable way of knowing exactly which groups were responsible, but after a year in which violence was not followed by any coherent political or ideological demands, it was clear that the social movement represented by the various categories of Islamism had more or less petered out. This made it possible for the regime to organize a series of elections aimed at institutionalizing the gradual return of peace in 1999. These culminated in May with the election to the presidency of

Abdelaziz Bouteflika, followed by a referendum of "national concord" in September, which attained a plebiscite.

After nearly a decade of civil war, the government had vanquished the Algerian Islamist movement. The young urban poor, who had rebelled in October 1988 and taken control of the streets on behalf of the FIS before supplying the GIA with its base of recruits, had been crushed as a political factor. The devout bourgeois, whose economic interests and cultural demands were now represented within the government by Hamas, was in the process of rallying behind the conditions set by a president who had expressed his respect for Abbasi Madani.²⁴ Madani had simultaneously expressed his desire to abandon politics. Ali Benhadj, the idol of the impoverished young, was still in prison; and Abdelkader Hachani, hated by the Islamist radicals but still the only political leader of the movement capable of negotiating on an equal basis with the government, was assassinated in mysterious circumstances on November 22, 1999.

Will the passage from socialism to a market economy, which had curiously enough been hastened by the civil war, now make it possible for the leaders of Algeria to absorb private entrepreneurs and businessmen into the system, who were formerly attracted by the FIS because they rejected the generals' "total control over the import-export economy"?²⁵ The reconstruction of Algeria, whose infrastructures have been neglected or destroyed over the last ten years of warfare, offer rich opportunities to these investors, provided that civil authorities manage to carry out the necessary political arbitration. But so far, endless bickering between the top brass and President Bouteflika has paralyzed any serious attempt at reform. While it seems unlikely that the social dynamic which allowed the emergence of the Islamist movement will begin all over again, after a war in which its ambition to seize control of the state has been literally drowned in blood, despair is the dominant feeling. And with violence resuming in the bush at the hands of unidentified "Islamist" radical gangs, the regime's military success over the militants is still short of the kind of political victory that would reconcile it with Algerian society as a whole.