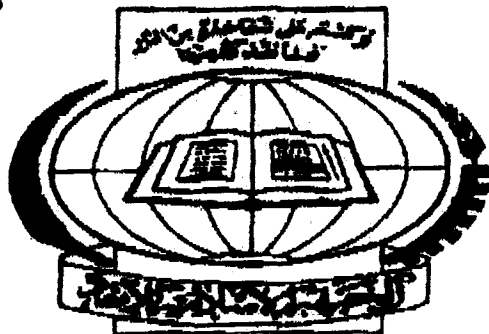


INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Katherine Roth
Paris, France

5 December, 1993

Peter Bird Martin
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755*The official emblem of the Islamic Salvation Front*

Dear Peter,

This week I finally met a man I've wanted to talk to for nearly a year. Rabah Kebir, 37, previously a leading officer in the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front [FIS], has been in exile in Germany since August 1992, when the FIS was banned in Algeria. In May of 1993 he was condemned to death by an Algerian court for involvement in the Algiers airport bombing the previous year. He was arrested by German authorities in June 7, 1993 after Algeria made an international appeal for his arrest and extradition, but was released from German prison September 7, 1993, after the Algerian government failed to provide sufficient evidence against him. He has been living in exile in Germany ever since and is currently acting as the President of the FIS Abroad. I had read many of his clandestine political leaflets while in Algiers, but this was my first chance to talk to the man who, in the Algerian press, is portrayed as a dangerous criminal but who Islamists look on fondly as a strong leader in the fight to overthrow a government widely perceived as corrupt.

After weeks of calling a man in Germany known only as "Youssef" about interviewing Mr. Kebir, I had almost given up hope when the phone rang one cold Paris morning at 7 am. "The sheikh can see you today in Germany," he said. I stumbled onto the next possible train and, during the six hour ride, tried to compose the questions I most wanted to ask. I was nervous about the interview and tired. When I finally arrived in the town in which we had decided to meet, I did as Youssef had instructed. I held a newspaper under one arm and waited in front of the main post office. A few moments later a man arrived to meet me and take me to a cafe, where we were to wait for "the sheikh." As we waited we talked. The conversation came easy. He was not much older than myself and we seemed to have a lot in common.

Katherine Roth is a Fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs
writing about tradition and modernity in the Arab world

After about an hour a car finally pulled up outside and we zoomed into the night to meet "the sheikh". The driver looked familiar but I couldn't place him. Drooping eyelids, a keen sense of humor, a knowing smile. I knew I had seen his face before.

We found a table at a German restaurant and ordered tea and cake. [The two Algerian men ordered, in fact, since their German was better than mine] I figured these were two assistants and we were waiting for the big man, so I forgot about my notes and my tape recorder and spoke as I would to friends. We talked aimlessly, of the gritty streets of Cairo and how Algeria had changed, of the meaning of modernity and tradition and Islam. I was exhausted from the journey and after a couple hours began to drift. Where was "the sheikh"?, I thought. How much longer would I be kept waiting? Slowly, slowly, it dawned on me. *This* was Rabah Kebir, the man who had driven us here and was now seated before me eating cheesecake and sipping tea. Easy going. Well dressed. Young. Clean shaven. Shit! My interview! My questions! I asked if I could record some of our conversation but the men were hesitant. There were lots of people around and the disco music was loud. We left the café, found a small hotel, and checked in. Crowded into the tiny room, I got out my tape recorder.

Q) You have said that the attacks against foreigners in Algeria are the fault of Western policies toward Algeria. Isn't that somehow justifying the violence?

A) It's not violence, but resistance. These acts are a reaction to a chain of events that began with the banning of the FIS, which represents a majority of the Algerian people. It is necessary for the people to freely choose their own government, and the current regime, by violently denying the Algerian people of that choice, forced the Algerian people to use militant resistance to defend their choice. Before the FIS was banned, this resistance was not necessary and when the FIS is recognized, it will no longer be necessary.

Q) So what do you think the West should do?

A) We ask the West to respect it's own principles. Nothing more. If the Western world is truly democratic, it should respect democracy. If it is not democratic, it should admit that. The fear of Islam does not explain all out support for the military junta in Algeria. This junta is killing the population, that is clear. Everyone knows that. It is dropping napalm on its people. It is systematically torturing its citizens. It is imprisoning its citizens without allowing them a fair trial. If a democracy can accept that and support that, we must be against democracy. We cannot accept that our people are tortured. The junta has said that if the FIS comes to power we will put people in prison camps and execute them and that we will torture Algerian citizens.

But they themselves are doing that and worse now.

Despite all that the junta has done so far, if there were to be an Islamic state later, there would certainly be legal guaranties based on the principles of Islam, which guarantee a fair trial for everyone. Our system is based on principles.

Now there is no real government in Algeria, neither a modern Islamic government nor a modern Western-style government. The West should take a fair look at the situation and defend its principles honestly.

Q) Have your policies changed over the course of the last six months? It appears there is a radicalization on all sides of the Algeria question.

A) If there has been a radicalization on all sides, then we too, must be becoming more radical. But with Islam there are always principles that preserve human rights.

Q) But now we have the impression that you are accepting violence. Is this true or untrue?

A) If there is organized violence against a people, we accept the resistance of the people. We are currently facing a military dictatorship.

Q) Are the recent assassinations of foreigners in Algeria part of that resistance?

A) We have nothing against foreigners themselves, we are against the regime now ruling Algeria by force.

Q) So if the West stops supporting the regime the violence will stop?

A) If the West wants to help the Algerian people, the situation will improve rapidly. If the West insists on supporting the junta, the situation cannot improve. It's the same as during the time of the French colonization of Algeria. Most of the West supported France in the war for Independence, but the victory was still with the people. I ask the West to choose. If they support the current regime, I don't think they will gain anything. If there is no security in Algeria, there will be no security for foreign investors and there will be no security for anyone. If they support the government chosen in the free elections, there will be stability and guarantees for international cooperation.

Q) When we read the papers, we hear about many different Islamist groups, for example the GIA, the MIA, and others. What is the relationship between the FIS and these groups? What is the FIS?

A) The FIS is the party elected by the Algerian people. It is the party ruling Algeria.

Q) And the others?

A) The others are part of Algeria.

Q) What do you mean?

A) Everyone knows, both the state and the Algerian people, that the Algerian people chose the FIS and nothing else. Because the regime chose the current situation and the solution of repression, the people organized themselves in order to face the military dictatorship. They created a resistance that did not permit the military to have its way in Algeria.

Q) So are you saying that these groups are part of the FIS?

A) I didn't say that, but I also didn't disagree with that.

Q) What is the role of Anouar Haddam in the FIS and what is your role? He is also putting out statements in the name of the FIS, but from the United States.

A) Anouar Haddam, like other officials of the FIS, is a member of the executive branch of the FIS abroad. I am the president of this executive body and Kamar Eddine Kherbane, the vice-president, and Abdallah Anas, a member, are in Algeria.

Q) Do you still keep in touch with Mohamed Said.

A) Yes, but it's not easy, given the current conditions inside the country.

Q) Are there any contacts between the FIS and Western governments?

A) Certainly. If the West really wants to understand the FIS, then the FIS also wants to better understand the West. Do they really respect their principles or are they just talking?

Q) There are now Islamic movements in nearly all Arab countries. What is the relationship between what is happening in Algeria and the situations in other Arab countries?

A) The Islamic movement is a revival of a society's concentration on its origins in hope of inspiring change. In reality it started at the time the Arab nations were colonized. In Egypt there was the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Algeria there was the Association of Ulema. At that time these organizations were most concerned with working for Arab independence. They succeeded in that goal. Later, the regimes which took power in Arab countries deviated from their initial objectives, and they governed the people in a manner contrary to the principles on which Arabs fought for independence.

Now these Islamic movements, inspired by the ordinary people, are taking up that original revival once again. As prior to Arab independence, we're again working for a return to the origins of Islam. The Arab people seem much more attracted to this Islamic concept than to other concepts.

But these Islamic movements, which exist in all Arab countries, do not have a common organic structure. In every movement, there are common points and objectives, but there are also differences. It is not one organization. The Islamic movement is a natural reaction of the Muslim people. They are not against the Western model in the sense that there is progress and modernization, but, they are inspired by the principles of Islam.

We in Algeria, that is the FIS, want to carry out the desires of the Algerian people. We want the people to choose its own model, and it has chosen its own model, and we want to put in place the government the people have chosen.

Q) Many people say that Islamists are trying to return to the days of Mohamed and that they are against modernity. What is your response?

A) What does the word "modern" mean? We Muslims know that in today's world we need televisions and computers and airplanes. Today there are hotels and cities and every Muslim accepts that. We can accept that and we can build on that. We are not trying to return to the Middle Ages. Nobody wants to regress. We're not going to live in a desert with camels, that's ridiculous. We think the basic principles of Islam are good, and its the principles alone we want to return to. The environment has changed, but the heart of man has not. Many FIS supporters are teachers and scientists. They want a state that is modern and Islamic. We are trying to integrate Islamic principles and modernization. It's the Islamization of modernity.

Islam is not sand and camels and backward ways. In the time of Mohamed, that was the state of all humanity. We progress and we move forward. We are certainly not against modernity.

Q) How do you explain the fact that so many intellectuals are being attacked by Islamists?

A) You are oversimplifying the question. If there are a dozen communist intellectuals who are attacked because they're trying to push communism, there are a thousands of intellectuals who are now in Algerian concentration camps being tortured by the regime.

Q) But what about all the francophone intellectuals who are being threatened?

A) That is not true. You have to distinguish between francophones [those who speak French] and francophiles [those who love all that is French]. The francophones are not being threatened in great numbers, but those who have more difficulty are perhaps the francophiles.

A German who speaks French, for example, can still think like a German. Maybe a German who is obsessed by all that is French will start to have problems integrating.

Q) How do you propose to protect the rights of Algerian francophiles in an Islamic state?

A) That is something completely different. If there is an Islamic state, and there certainly will be an Islamic state, everyone will be free to think the way he wants. The liberty of thought and expression is the right of everyone. Like in the West, there will be all different kinds of newspapers with all different points of view. In an Islamic Algeria there will certainly be francophiles, and they will be free to think the way they want.

The problem they have now is that these francophiles have directly implicated themselves in the conflict. They are not attacked because they have a different ideology. It's also not because they are intellectuals. There are plenty of people who speak French who are not targeted by the people. It's not even because they have aligned themselves with the West.

They are supporting the dictatorship against the will of the vast majority. In some cases they have gone even further than the military in the battle against the people, so they became the potential enemies of the population.

Q) But there are also others who are being attacked. There are Islamic reformists....

A) Not really. Maybe there are two or three people like that, and they are targeted by military security agents, not by anyone else.

Q) Would you call the situation in Algeria a war?

A) It's a war, but it's not a civil war. It's a war between the people and a military junta. There is only fighting between the people and those who represent or support the regime. That's not civil war. Civil war is a war among the population itself.

Q) What about the conflict between Islamists and Berbers and with many intellectuals. These people are not part of the government.

A) How so? What conflict between Berbers and Muslims? The Berbers are themselves Muslim? As far as I know there is no problem at all between the Islamists and any segment of society. There is a problem between the people and those who represent the junta, such as the army, the police, etc.

Q) But when I speak to francophiles, they say that they too also against the current regime. They are not necessarily in favor of those in power.

A) It's not because they don't accept what the current regime is doing, but they are denying the choice of the people and they are trying to put their own will ahead of that of the population. People are not targeted because they are against the FIS, but when these people participate in the combat against the people, of course they are targeted.

Someone who is a snitch and tells the police "kill this person or kill that person," he becomes a target. That's normal. That's logical. It's a war between the power structure and the majority. We have no problem with those who don't agree with the Islamic movement. They are free to think what they want. But any person who clearly supports the power structure, that's a different manner.

A real intellectual is not that kind of snitch. He has the dignity that should not allow him to earn small change for turning others in. Unfortunately, there are many people like that, especially journalists and other so-called intellectuals.

You have to understand. For thirty years Algeria has lived in a one-party system, under a single regime that has blinded them. Those people have forgotten how to think for themselves. They are the ones who are living in the Middle Ages.

Western journalists and researchers never want to talk about all the Algerian intellectuals who have been tortured to death, and the intellectuals who have been in concentration camps for over a year and a half without having been tried.

Closing one's eyes to thousands of intellectuals and speaking of five or six, breaking things into category A for francophiles and category B for the rest, that's not right. Does a true intellectual accept a blind dictatorship that is systematically torturing people? In my opinion, no. These are people who are demanding the army to round up the population.

Did Bush refuse to step down when he lost the election to Bill Clinton? No. he and his supporters can't just go and round up everybody in the other party. That was the choice of the people and they have to respect it. Said Saadi and other opposition candidates who do not accept the election results, that's not right.

We demand of you Westerners to compare us to yourselves. People always say "oh, the Algerian people, they are from the Third World, it's completely normal to lash out against them." We don't accept that.

Q) Are you supported in your efforts by other Arab governments?

A) No. Unfortunately not. Other Arab governments do not seem ready to help us. We are supported by the Algerian people, and that is clear. We are supported by many fellow Muslims, but not by the governments who represent them. That may be because their interests do not lie with the free choice of their people.

Q) Many people fear the arrival of political Islam. Should the West be afraid? How should the West deal with this new unknown?

A) The West is wrong to be afraid of Islam. First, they ignore the true concepts of Islam. They ignore that our view of Islam defends individual liberty and human rights and the aspects of government that the West values most. We also see that there are many parties who want to give a false image of Islam and Muslims, and the West bases its perception of Islam on these false images. If it knew the true Islam and the true orientation of the Muslim world, it would discover that Islam can exist in harmony with the West. What are the real values that the world is trying to defend? What are the qualities of Islam that go against those values? There aren't any.

Q) When Westerners try to imagine an Islamic state in Algeria, they fear it will be another Iran, with the possibility of another Khomeini. Could you describe your model of an Algerian Islamic state?

A) We have stated time and time again that the Islamic state to be created in Algeria will be neither a Saudi Arabia nor an Iran. Our model is the model of the life of the Prophet Mohammed. The most important values for us are justice and equal rights for all. We cite that in our tradition, in the time of Khalif Omar, there was a problem between Khalif Ali and a simple Jew. After reviewing the case Khalif Omar decided against Khalif Ali and in favor of the Jew. Our system is based on respect for human rights.

Q) Do you think this Islamic state will be anti-Western?

A) In what sense should we be anti-Western? Perhaps we don't agree with everything that exists in the West. We don't agree with all the things that appear on Western style television and we believe alcohol and pork is forbidden. That is part of our philosophy. But that doesn't many we're anti-Western. We Muslims share many basic principles with Western societies. We are much more like Western societies than communism was, for example. We believe the people have the right to choose their own leader, whereas as Communism and the so-called Muslim Arab governments now in power have shown that they don't agree with that. It is not necessary to be afraid. We could easily live together and it is absolutely possible that there be cooperation

between an Islamic state and a Western state. We have differences but we also share many of the same human values.

Q) But Ali Benhadj has said he is against democracy.

A) I think it's necessary to read Ali Benhadj's book, in which he explains his ideas. For example, he explains Shura councils and the way they work. It may not be exactly like Western-style democracy, but it is a democracy. We have to be specific about what kind of democracy we're talking about. The democracy of Pasqua is different from the democracy of Clinton.

How can a real democracy accept and support a dictatorship? The things Western states do concerning smaller and poorer nations increase sensibility against certain Western countries.

If democracy means the free choice of the people, we support democracy. If democracy means supporting a military dictatorship, we are completely against it.

Q) What would your Islamic economic system look like? Would it resemble capitalism?

A) It will be a marriage of socialism and capitalism. The Islamic system does not accept unfettered capitalism, in the sense that we can not accept a society where a few people have everything and most of the people have nothing. Our religion cannot accept that. But at the same time, we could never accept anything like a communist system. Citizens should be free to do business and accumulate wealth with a minimum of restrictions, just as in many Western countries that have free market economies, but also have guarantees for workers and the underprivileged.

Q) It sounds a bit like socialism.

A) No. No, because the socialism we experienced in Algeria was against Islam. There are several interpretations of this system. I guess you could say it closely resembles a market economy, because people are free to possess what they want and earn as much as they want if it is earned fairly and legally.

Q) So your economy would be a little like that in France or in other European countries? A country that is basically capitalist, but which has certain unemployment and workers benefits and socialized medicine sounds a lot like Europe. I don't see how what you're describing is different.

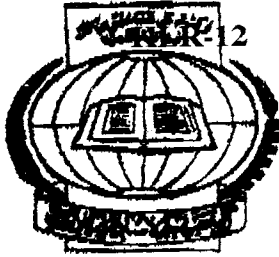
A) We're not going to create a completely new world. The Prophet Mohamed accepted the parts of existing society which he considered good and he changed the others. In France as in elsewhere in the world, there are things which are good and things which are not so good.

Q) So an Islamic economy would basically be similar to Western-style economies?

A) Yes. It would be very similar.

Q) Now everyone is waiting for the 31st of December. What do you expect to happen in the coming months?

A) In my opinion, nothing will change. The military and the francophiles that back it refuse to support the people. They have chosen to detest the choice of the people. They have foreign passports and open visas, according to our information, and they are free to leave the country. They are now trying by any means to plunge the country into civil war. That will not be possible, God willing.



Au nom de Dieu le Clément, le Miséricordieux

Front Islamique du Salut

Instance Exécutive à l'Etranger

Communiqué N° 8

Allah dit "Demeurez tous fermement attachés au pacte d'Allah et ne soyez pas désunis" (II - 102)

Avec l'aide d'Allah, toutes les forces et potentialités du Front Islamique du Salut ont été unifiées sous l'égide de l'Instance Exécutive du Front Islamique du Salut à l'Etranger, assurant la continuité, le bon fonctionnement et plus d'efficacité dans notre lutte par rapport à tout ce qui a été entrepris jusqu'à présent.

Nous annonçons cette bonne nouvelle au peuple algérien musulman, avec le coeur plein de foi, d'espoir et de détermination dans la continuité de notre mission.

Ni les crimes perpétrés par la Junte militaire, ni les exécutions d'innocents ne nous arrêteront dans notre lutte, pas même l'infâme assassinat de sept hommes innocents figurant parmi les plus sincères de la nation, exécutés dans le cadre de ce que l'on appelle "l'affaire de l'aéroport" et ce, après un simulacre de procès que les observateurs nationaux et internationaux ont qualifié d'injuste, innocentant les accusés par la même occasion. Le peuple algérien n'oubliera jamais ces crimes et en particulier ce dernier.

Peuple algérien ! Nous t'invitons aujourd'hui plus que jamais à unifier tes rangs afin d'empêcher toute infiltration d'hypocrites et de comploteurs. Nous t'invitons à la solidarité et à la fraternité afin que tu puisse arriver à récupérer ta fierté, à gagner ta souveraineté et à commencer la construction de ton pays sous l'égide de l'Etat Islamique auquel tu aspirés

Avant de conclure, Nous précisons que l'Instance du Front Islamique du Salut à l'Etranger, issue des souffrances de notre peuple se compose comme suit :

Rabah Kébir	Président de l'Instance
Kamar Eddine Kherbane	Vice-Président
Abdallah Anas	Membre
Anouar Haddam	Membre

Peuple algérien, nous te sommes reconnaissant pour ton sacrifice et ta détermination à lutter pour faire valoir ton projet de société et nous sommes très honorés de ta persévérance à dévoiler les criminels et à mettre en échec leur complot contre ton choix et ton projet.

Allah dit : "...ils ourdissent leur complot et Allah ourdit le sien. Cependant Allah est le meilleur des stratèges."

Europe le 28 Rabi' I 1414
14 septembre 1993

Le Président de l'Instance,



INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Katherine Roth
Paris, FRANCE
16 February, 1994

Peter Bird Martin
Institute of Current World Affairs
4, West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755
USA

DEATH AND HOPE IN SYRIA

Dear Peter,

The sudden death of an heir-apparent can blight a nation's mood unbelievably quickly and in Syria last month a swelling ebullience over the peace possibilities raised by the Clinton-Assad talks in Geneva seemed to disappear almost overnight.

Baseel Assad, the eldest son of President Hafez Assad, was for many Syrians a shining hope for liberalization. On January 21 he was killed in a still-unexplained car accident and left a widespread sense of hopelessness in a nation that had -- perhaps unconsciously -- been counting on him to improve the nation's political climate.

The 33-year-old son of the president, a major in the Syrian army and a prize-winning horseman, Baseel was widely expected to succeed his father as ruler of Syria, one of the most influential countries in the Middle East region.

That winter Friday, I sat with an Aleppo family and watched in stunned silence as regular programming on the country's only two television stations was suddenly halted for a special reading of the Koran. The image faded to black and an Arabic text in white scrolled across the screen, announcing the death of "the nation's loyal son, a beloved of God."

Katherine Roth is a Fellow of the Institute
writing about tradition and modernity in the Arab world