

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

12 June 93. Algiers

Mr. Peter Martin
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755

Dear Peter,

It was the unlikeliest of reunions and took place in the shadow of a mosque known to locals as "Kabul", named for the Afghani-trained Muslim extremists who used to hold meetings there.

The Islamist smiled warmly as he lifted the ornate Algerian teapot to pour fragrant glasses of mint tea for the two police officers. The three spoke haltingly of recent events. The assassination of the Berber journalist and poet Tahar Djaout. The fact that gunfire is now heard in broad daylight in heavily populated neighborhoods of the capital, and that many women in the neighborhood no longer go shopping on Fridays, traditionally the biggest market day, because of frequent clashes between Islamists on their way to the mosques and security forces.

At that point the conversation eased into more mundane topics. The rising price of tomatoes. The heat and humidity of summer. Then there was a pause in the conversation.

"Anyway, we're all Muslims and there's no reason we can't get along," said the Islamist to his nephews.

"Of course not," replied his nephews, both police officers. "This is just a difficult time and it will pass." said the eldest of the two.

This type of interchange has become typical in Algerian families. many of which are collapsing in the face of the current power struggle which threatens to destabilize the country.

Katherine Roth is a Fellow of the Institute studying traditin and modernity in the Arab World

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

One story currently circulating in Algiers is that of a group of police officers who go to an apartment to arrest some Islamic militants. Before entering the premises, Mohamed, one of the police officers, sees that one of the militants is his cousin. He tries to intervene on his cousin's behalf, but his superior says they must go on with the bust. Instead, the officer suggests Mohamed listen from behind the door so as not to be seen by his relative. The interrogation begins. When the officer asks who the next person on the hit list is, Mohamed is shocked to hear his own name.

"Our family is all mixed up. My uncle on the third floor is RCD (the more militant of the two Berberist parties). I have another uncle on the other side of the building who is FFS (the other Berber party). My other uncle and cousins are Islamists and my father supports the ruling FLN party right down the line, which I think is ridiculous. I'm neutral and try to stay out of politics," explained one of the two police officers as we sipped our tea.

He said the family holds together by avoiding political discussions. But some Algerian families are not that fortunate. Cases of interfamilial arrests and assassinations are becoming increasingly common and if putting individual beliefs first is a sign of modernity, Algeria has certainly made the grade.

But as striking as the cases of policemen turning in their brothers and sons and Islamic militants turning on family members, are the cases of tolerance and lasting friendship in this increasingly violent situation.

Abdel-Kader Hussein (not his real name) seems much like any American youth. He likes rock music and flashy clothes and joking around with his buddies. He teases people mercilessly, but with charm and a smile that somehow lets him pull it off.

After introducing me to a security guard friend of his chuckles and adds: "Oh well, it doesn't matter whether you know his name or not. because he'll probably be killed tomorrow anyway."

During the recent Eid El-Adha holiday, when Muslims slaughter lambs to commemorate God's intervention to spare the life of Abraham's son Isaac, Abdel-Kader and his Islamist brother helped their uncle slaughter the family lamb. Midway through the slaughter he turns and says: "Look at this bearded guy next to me. You see how much he loves violence. It's because he's a fundamentalist."

As the conflict between Algerians who favor an alternative Islamic state and those determined to defend their secular lifestyle grows hotter, individuals like Abdel-Kader, who seem able to walk the line between the two camps, are becoming increasingly rare.

"If you're not for the cause you're against it," explained an Algerian grocer before a recent rally against terrorism. "If you don't participate in the rally you are demonstrating against it."

KLR-3

"You can't believe some of the fights we've had in our family, doors slamming and cousins storming away from dinner conversations." said a young Berber woman. "I have an Islamist cousin who doesn't talk to anyone in the family anymore. But what am I supposed to do?"

The different sides of the battle are inextricably wound together here. Islamists hold positions at all levels of the government structure and many of those against political Islam find themselves at odds with friends and family. There are opponents of political Islam in even the most Islamist ghettos. There are also Islamists who drive Mercedes home to their villas in chic upper class neighborhoods where most of the residents are ministers and army officers. It's a matter of individual choice and seems to have little to do with class, region, ethnicity or gender.

"We should not be putting the emphasis on a political consensus, but how we can manage to live together. The stakes are high and at the extreme, this could lead to civil war," said Rachid Mimouni, a respected Algerian writer and one of the few internationally acclaimed intellectuals still left in the country (others have either been assassinated or have moved abroad).

Clashing views on personal liberty and what role religion should play in a modern Arab state divide all levels of society here and a peaceful middle ground seems about as possible as a snowstorm in Tamanrasset.

For now, having tea with the family is as close as most folks come to successful negotiation.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. R. H.' with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Katherine

Intellectuals Being Killed In Algeria

Terror Wave Blamed On Muslim Militants

6/27/93

By William Drozdiak
Washington Post Foreign Service

ALGIERS—Eighteen months after Algeria's military leadership canceled the country's first free parliamentary elections to prevent Islamic militants from coming to power, the already violent struggle between security forces and Muslim guerrillas appears to have entered a more ominous phase.

Islamic extremists appear to have embarked on a new terror campaign in the past three months, targeting prominent intellectuals instead of government figures. Meanwhile, more than 15,000 troops have been bought into Algiers to man checkpoints and shake down suspicious characters—though their presence seems regarded more as a nuisance than a contribution to public order.

Last Tuesday, Mohamed Boukhobza, a respected sociologist, was killed in his apartment by intruders who slit his throat in front of his daughter, who was left bound and gagged. His assassination was preceded by the slayings of five other professionals who have preached against the intolerance of militant Islam and advocated bold steps to modernize Algerian society.

Boukhobza, 52, was recently named head of an institute for global

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— novelist Rachid Mimouni

strategic studies, replacing former education minister Djillali Lyabes, whose slaying in March began the current rash of killings.

Rachid Mimouni, a popular novelist, says he is convinced that Islamic extremists have carried out the slayings to intimidate their secular opponents, though no reliable proof of who perpetrated the killings has been produced. He says that after killing hundreds of gendarmes in a protracted struggle with the government that has left 800 dead on both sides, Islamic militants now want to go after big-name personalities.

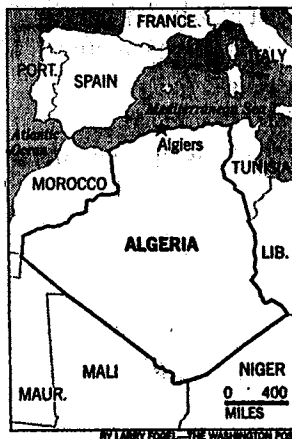
Mimouni contends that the killing of a well-known writer such as Tahar Djaout, who was gunned down last month, is "more effective than assassinating 1,000 policemen," because it generates a climate of fear throughout the population.

The killings have already sent shivers of fear and suspicion through Algeria's middle-class professional community. The names of those "sentenced to death" by armed Islamic groups allegedly have been posted in some mosques, and speculation about a hit list of 150 personalities dominates conversation in coffeehouses and universities.

"A lot of people have changed apartments or telephone numbers, and we try to go out only in groups," said a journalist who requested anonymity. "Now we know a little of what Salman Rushdie must feel."

The security forces, meanwhile, have stepped up their operations in tracking down what the government estimates to be 1,100 armed Islamic terrorists on the loose.

At dusk, heavily armed special forces patrol poor, dusty districts like Kouba and Bachjarah, known as breeding grounds of Islamic militants, to frisk and interrogate throngs of angry youths.



But the patrols seem only to further alienate a disenchanting population. Growing exasperation with a nighttime curfew and general state of emergency that were decreed after elections were suspended, has fueled rumors that the security services are fomenting, or even participating in, the wave of terrorist assassinations.

"You have to wonder who benefits the most from these killings," a journalist said. Given the regime's unpopularity, this theory goes, there is a certain logic in doing everything possible to discredit Islamic militants and justify the harsh security crackdown.

Indeed, a year after the assassination of President Mohammed Boudiaf by a junior army officer said to have "religious convictions," few people are convinced that Islamic extremists were behind his death. The

Algerian press accuses shadowy figures in the country's "political-financial mafia" of ordering the killing; many analysts say a disgruntled faction of the armed forces assassinated Boudiaf.

The intensifying security pressures, combined with a bleak economic outlook, have not aroused much enthusiasm for the ruling High State Council, led by Maj. Gen. Khaled Nezzar and backed by the military. Nor have civilian politicians, led by figurehead President Ali Kafi, inspired much confidence.

Nonetheless, the regime has tried to restore hope that Algeria's experiment in democracy will be resumed. Last week the High State Council announced it will hand over power at the end of the year to a transitional body that will preside over the country until new elections can be held, probably after 1996.

By that time, officials—whose government is \$25 billion in debt—expect higher oil and gas revenues and a lowering of the debt burden to improve the staggering economy. At the same time, the military-backed regime is banking on the hope that most Algerians will lose their fervor for transforming the country into an Islamic state.

Many of the 3 million voters who cast their ballots in December 1991 for the now-banned Islamic Salvation Front clearly did so as a protest against the way the country was run by the anti-colonial guerrilla leadership that drove out the French three decades ago. It was only after serious riots erupted in 1988 that the ruling National Liberation Front agreed to surrender one-party rule and establish democratic pluralism.

But the government's task of finding jobs and a prosperous future for much of the country's 26 million people seems more daunting than ever. Algeria has one of the world's highest population growth rates; 70 percent of the population is under age 30. Unemployment is close to 30 percent, and government officials say they cannot cut loose the corrupt, inefficient state-run enterprises that are ruining the economy because such actions would throw more people out of work and unleash a social explosion.

"This is a very unhappy society, but that's a familiar feeling for Algerians," a Western diplomat observed. "What may determine the future is whether things get much worse, and radical solutions look more attractive."