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Islamist De-Radicalization in Algeria: Successes and Failures

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This Policy Brief analyzes the de-radicalization process of armed Islamists in Algeria. It investigates the causes of, and the conditions under which, the dismantlement of the armed wing of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), known as the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), has taken place. That de-radicalization process was not limited to the AIS, but also included factions from the notorious Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and other smaller militias. The article concludes by highlighting comparative de-radicalization cases and providing a framework explaining the causes behind successful de-radicalization.

“We declared that ceasefire because the jihad was about to be buried by the hands of its own sons.”

— Medani Mezrag, Former Emir of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), 2005

THE PHENOMENON OF ISLAMIST DE-RADICALIZATION

In October 1997, the self-declared armed wing of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), known as the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), declared a unilateral ceasefire. That ceasefire led to disarmament and demilitarization processes that attempted to reintegrate the AIS members as well as other armed Islamist factions into Algeria’s civil ranks. The demilitarization process included subgroups from the notorious Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).¹ These groups and factions issued several communiqués to explain and legitimize their decisions to dismantle their armed wings; however, they did so without the production of ideological literature to legitimize the transformations.

The phenomenon of armed Islamist “de-radicalization” is not only confined to Algeria. In Egypt, *Al-Gama’at al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Group — IG) successfully dismantled its armed wings and abandoned its *fiqh al-’unf* (Islamic jurisprudence justifying violence) literature between 1997 and 2002.² A decade later, in 2007, al-Jihad Organization initiated a similar de-radicalization process.³ Those Egyptian transformations have influenced several British and other European Islamist leaders who revised their views on violence and democracy.⁴ Additionally, Islamist de-radicalization took place in several other Muslim-majority states in the late 1990s and the 2000s, albeit on a smaller scale compared to Egypt and Algeria. These de-radicalization cases include Libyan, Jordanian, Saudi, Yemeni, Tajik, Malaysian, Singaporean, and Indonesian armed Islamist groups, factions, and individuals.⁵

The aforementioned armed Islamist movements have shown remarkable behavioral and ideological transformations towards non-violence, and the “de-radicalization” processes of these movements has removed tens of thousands of former militants from the ranks of al-Qa’ida’s supporters and acted as a disincentive for would-be militants. However, the topic is not sufficiently analyzed in the literature, in spite of the great interest in explaining Islamism and the huge volume of literature produced after the 9/11 attacks.

THE ALGERIAN THEATRE: BETWEEN JIHADISM AND COUNTER-JIHADISM (1997 – 2008)

Algeria provides two cases of de-radicalization, one of which was successful while the other was a failure. The successful case was that of the Islamic Salvation Army



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1. Now the GSPC is known as al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Countries of al-Maghreb (QICM).

2. See Omar Ashour, “Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of the Egyptian Islamic Group,” *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Autumn 2007), pp. 596–627.

3. Ashour, “Lions Tamed;” Omar Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (New York and London: Routledge, forthcoming in March 2009).

4. Majid Nawaz, “*Muffakir Hizb al-Tahrir Yutalliq al-Usuliyya*” [“The Ideologue of the Liberation Party Divorces Fundamentalism”], interview by Muhammad al-Shaf’i, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 17, 2005, pp. 1, 5.

5. International Crisis Group, “Deradicalisation and Indonesian Prisons,” November 19, 2007; Ashour, “Lions Tamed;” Omar Ashour, “De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on al-Qa’ida,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Spring 2008), pp. 1-14.

(AIS), the self-declared armed wing of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). This process of de-radicalization took place between 1997 and 2000. The leadership of that organization not only was able to dismantle the AIS, but also was able to influence smaller armed organizations and factions to join the de-radicalization process. Currently, the leaders of that organization are attempting to re-enter the political process peacefully through a political party.

By contrast, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) is a case that has seen mixed results. Whereas some of its affiliated militias joined the AIS-led process, the bulk of the group failed to de-radicalize. Instead, part of the GIA was completely destroyed by 2005. Another part broke away as early as 1998 and in 1999 renamed itself the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). By 2007, a part of the GSPC was still negotiating disarming and abandoning violence (behavioral de-radicalization), but the largest faction underwent even further radicalization by internationalizing their cause and allying with the al-Qa'ida network. That splinter of the GSPC called itself al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Countries of al-Maghreb (QICM).

The AIS and the GIA started their armed action in the same crisis environment that plagued Algeria after the January 1992 coup. However, the two organizations ended up in very different positions. This *Policy Brief* attempts to account for the discrepancy in the behavior of both organizations and to answer the question of why the AIS-led de-radicalization process was successful. The argument in this *Policy Brief* rests on the empirical fact that both organizations were subjected to intense state repression and were offered several types of selective inducements. However, the AIS had a consolidated, charismatic leadership that was willing to de-radicalize. That leadership was influential enough to disarm the 7,000 militants that made up the organization, without causing any splits, as well as to influence several hundred militants from other smaller militias and factions. The GIA did not have this type of leadership at any point in its 13-year history (1992-2005). Additionally, the AIS was able to interact with other armed organizations, FIS factions, moderate Islamist figures and political parties to support de-radicalization and reconciliation. The GIA had very limited interactions with the “other,”⁶ mainly due to its excessively violent behavior. The violence of the GIA was not only directed against the “other” but also against GIA figures and factions who were supportive of interaction.

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THE LOST OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE IN ALGERIA (1992–1997)

Before 1997, the year in which the AIS declared a unilateral ceasefire, there were at least three attempts to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Algerian crisis with the FIS leadership. These three attempts took place in 1993, 1994 and 1995. They all had the following common characteristics. First, all were negotiated by the political leaders of the FIS, rather than its military commanders. Second, there was a near-consensus among these political leaders that armed resistance to the junta only should be halted if the FIS was reinstated and the electoral process was continued on the basis of the 1991 elections. Third, there was a belief among FIS political leaders that they could actually control or at least strongly influence the armed organizations that operated in the aftermath of the coup. That belief would be shattered later in 1995 when the FIS leaders, ‘Abbasi Madani and ‘Ali Belhaj, were removed from the Consultative Council of the GIA and when Muhammad Said and ‘Abdul Razzaq Rajjam, the two former provisional leaders of the FIS, were killed by the GIA on the orders of its leader Djamel Zitouni. Finally, there was no consensus on the regime’s part about the idea of negotiating a peaceful settlement with the FIS. Until 1997, the so-called “eradication trend”⁷ had the upper hand in the decision-making processes and the internal bureaucratic wars.⁸ Therefore, even while the negotiations with the political leaders of

6. The “other” is defined here as any social actor or entity who/which is not “Islamist” or is not recognized as such by the movement(s) under study.

7. This term usually refers to Algerian generals in the security, intelligence, and army bureaucracies who believed that the solution to the Algerian crisis lay in eradicating the armed Islamist opposition. To a large degree they were the mirror image of the GIA, upholding its slogan of “no truce, no dialogue, and no reconciliation.”

8. Even in 1997, Isma‘il Lamari, the Deputy Head of Military Intelligence, took a great risk by visiting the headquarters of the AIS to initiate a

the FIS were ongoing, there were several acts that showed “bad faith” on the part of the regime.

THE DE-RADICALIZATION PROCESS OF THE AIS

The failure of the 1995 talks between the regime and FIS leaders and the “victory” of General Zeroual in the presidential elections of November 1995 had several consequences for de-radicalization and reconciliation in Algeria. First, bolstered by the electoral victory, Zeroual and the presidential establishment felt that there was no need for dialogue with the political wings of the FIS.⁹ The presidential establishment thought that the regime could win the battle against the armed Islamist opposition through military means, regardless of the opposition’s objectives, backgrounds, and orientations. In other words, it shifted from a policy of dialogue to one of eradication.

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The second consequence arising from the failure of these talks was that the AIS leadership arrived at the conclusion that the political leaders of the FIS had by then failed three times to negotiate a resolution to the crisis (in 1993, 1994, 1995). In Medani Mezraq’s words,¹⁰ FIS leaders “did not rise to the level of the crisis and its severity” and that they were acting as if they were “captives of the GIA.”¹¹ Given that, the AIS took over the negotiation process and relegated the political leaders to a mere advisory role,¹² so that the 1997 reconciliation/de-radicalization process was imposed by the AIS leaders on the FIS leaders.

As a result, the AIS readjusted its approach to the calls for negotiations. For the first time since the beginning of the crisis, it did not request any authorization from the political leadership of the FIS. Also, the AIS did not address the President, the presidential establishment or the leaders of the army — thus the negotiation attempt this time was a bottom-up process. The AIS sent a message to several mid-ranking officers in the military establishment’s fifth zone (the eastern regions of Algeria), many of whom had blood ties with several AIS commanders from the eastern areas (mainly from Jijel province). These contacts became increasingly significant, from the mid-ranking officers to the army commanders of the fifth zone, and finally ended up on the desks of the military intelligence generals. The meeting with the Deputy Head of Military Intelligence, General Isma’il Lamari,¹³ in the headquarters of the AIS in Jijel’s Beni Khat-tab mountains was crucial to the initiation of the de-radicalization process and reconciliation in Algeria. It addressed the security dilemmas of both parties, built confidence measures, and reassured both sides that there were at least two factions within the two warring camps who were committed to reconciliation and willing to take risks for a peaceful settlement.¹⁴

THE AIS AND THE MAKING OF A CHARISMATIC LEADER

The first cells of the AIS were established in Western Algeria in 1993 with the help of Muhammad Shnuf and Abd al-Qadir Chabouti. In 1994, the AIS was mainly operating primarily in the west and the east of Algeria under the joint leadership of Ahmad Ben Aicha and Madani Mezraq respectively. Both figures were mid-ranking leaders in the FIS in 1991. Ben Aicha was an elected MP in el-Chelf district who had turned to armed action after the cancellation of the elec-reconciliation process.

9. Abdelkader Boukhamkham, “*Boukhamkham Yaftah Malaf al-Sulta wa al-Inqaz*” [“Boukhamkham Opens the File of the Regime and the FIS”], interview by Abd al-Aali Razzaqi. *Al-Hayat*, October 31, 1999, p. 10.

10. The National Emir of the AIS (1995–2000).

11. Madani Mezraq, *al-Nida’ al-Awal: Kalimat Haqq Liman Yuhimuhu al-‘Amr* [The First Communiqué: Righteous Words to Whom It May Concern] (Algeria: [No publisher], March 1995). Madani Mezraq, “*Madani Mezraq ... Na’m Aqsayyina al-Shiyukh al-FIS li Annahum Kanu Asra al-GIA*” [“Madani Mezraq ... Yes We Removed the FIS Sheikhs Because they were Captives of the GIA”], interview by Wazna Husam, <http://www.chihab.net>.

12. Mezraq, “*al-Nida’ al-Awal: Kalimat Haqq Liman Yuhimuhu al-‘Amr*.”

13. Isma’il is also written as Smain or Smail in some literature.

14. Mezraq pointed in one interview to the fact that Isma’il Lamari came to their headquarters in the mountains. Surrounded by armed AIS militants, Lamari was risking his life, not to mention his career. Mezraq mentioned that the AIS appreciated the gesture. See Madani Mezraq, “A Meeting with Madani Mezraq: the National Emir of the Islamic Salvation Army,” interview by Maysoun Azzam, *Mashahid wa Ara’*, Al-‘Arabiya Satellite Channel, October 18, 2004.

tions, his subsequent arrest, and two attempts on his life after being released.¹⁵ Mezraq was a former activist in al-Nahda Movement.¹⁶ He had no leading role in the FIS except after the Batna Conference in 1990, in which he was appointed the FIS representative in the Jijel province and a member of the FIS national committee for monitoring the elections.

When the coup happened in 1992, the FIS had no leading figures to organize armed action, and no militias operating in its name.¹⁷ In 1994, Muhammad Said and Abd al-Razzaq Rajjam, both former provisional leaders of the FIS, joined the GIA instead of organizing or leading the AIS cells. Others like Said Makhroufi, a former officer in the military intelligence, an experienced veteran of Afghanistan and a former member of the Consultative Council of the FIS, had also joined the GIA.¹⁸ In Ahmad Ben Aicha's words, the armed men of the FIS became "orphans" after these leading figures joined another organization different from the FIS.¹⁹ However, Mezraq and Ben Aicha emerged as the new field commanders who upheld the "original line" of the FIS.²⁰

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Their leadership was challenged on several occasions. The first challenge was in the aftermath of the unity agreement with the GIA, which the AIS had rejected in 1994. In one interview, Mezraq described the reactions to the 'unity' of 1994 within the AIS: "It was extremely difficult for any leader of an armed Islamist organization to stand up in front of his soldiers and tell them that he is against the 'unity' because he was not consulted ... especially when the GIA was at the peak of its strength."²¹ However, Mezraq passed that leadership test, and most of his men obeyed his orders, without splits or factionalization.²²

The second challenge was during the negotiations of 1997 and in the aftermath of the unilateral ceasefire declaration. During this time, around 30 AIS detained affiliates, suspected sympathizers, and relatives of members were summarily executed in the area of 'Umm al-Thalathin,²³ which is close to some of the hills that were controlled at the time by the AIS guerrillas.²⁴ This action was just before the meeting between General Lamari and Mezraq. The latter interpreted this act as an attempt by other factions in the military establishment to "drive his followers crazy" before the talks: "They wanted to tell us that the authorities have no intention to reach a resolution ... and possibly drive one of our men to kill their delegate [General Lamari]," Mezraq recalled.²⁵ Despite the incident, there was no violent retaliation on the part of the AIS and Mezraq was able to control his militiamen. On the other hand, Mezraq argued that the commanders of other armed organizations in Algeria were following the emotional and radical views of their soldiers: "Weak commanders in other organizations were leading their soldiers via the concept of 'whatever the listeners want' because these commanders loved leadership and fame ... that was a disaster for the [armed Islamist] movement."²⁶

15. Ahmad Ben Aicha, "Ben Aicha: Haqq al-'Amal al-Siyasi Madmun fi Itifaq al-Hudna" ["Ben Aicha: The Right of Political Action is Guaranteed in the Truce Agreement"], interview by Muhammad al-Muqqadim, *Al-Hayat*, February 3, 2000, p. 8.

16. This was created by Abdullah Djaballah and was mainly based in eastern Algeria (and is therefore sometimes known as the "eastern group").

17. There was an initial assumption that all armed Islamist organizations in 1992 were fighting for the FIS and its leaders. That assumption was incorrect, especially after the GIA's official establishment in September 1992. Also, in 1991, when tensions were rising between the FIS and the Algerian regime, one of the FIS leaders suggested to Abbasi Madani that the FIS should form an armed wing as a precaution. Madani refused the suggestion (See Ahmad Ben Aicha, "Ben Aicha: Haqq al-'Amal al-Siyasi Madmun fi Itifaq al-Hudna" ["Ben Aicha: The Right of Political Action is Guaranteed in the Truce Agreement"], interview by Muhammad al-Muqqadim, *Al-Hayat*, February 3, 2000, p. 8.

18. He co-established an autonomous armed organization (Movement for the Islamic State — MEI) in 1992; this organization joined the GIA in May 1994.

19. See Ahmad Ben Aicha, "Al-Hayat Tuqabil Emir al-Gharb Ahmad Ben Aicha" ["al-Hayat Interviews the Emir of the West Ahmad Ben Aicha"], interview by Muhammad al-Muqqadim, *Al-Hayat*, June 8, 1996, p. 8. Said and Rajjam probably joined for pragmatic reasons rather than ideological affinity. Those reasons included the actual strength of the GIA, its control of 'liberated zones' in the Algerian center, and the large number of veterans of Afghanistan and Algerian army personnel who joined the GIA and therefore contributed with their experience to its military might.

20. The AIS activists usually mean by the "original lines of the FIS" the acceptance of electoral democracy, to distinguish themselves from the GIA and Salafi-Jihadi groups who reject all forms of democracy. They also mean loyalty to the leadership of the FIS (Madani and Belhaj).

21. Mezraq, "A Meeting."

22. Mezraq, "A Meeting."

23. Known as the Umm al-Thalathin massacre and it occurred in July 1997.

24. Mezraq, "A Meeting."

25. Mezraq, "A Meeting."

26. Mezraq, "A Meeting." That problem not only confronted armed Islamist leaders but also FIS leaders from the very beginning. Due to the populist

Following that second challenge, the talks developed into a negotiation process that finally led to the dismantlement of the AIS, and several other smaller organizations in January 2000.

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The third challenge came after January 2000, when the political leaders of the FIS, Madani and Belhaj, expressed their support for behavioral de-radicalization but also their opposition to the terms of the agreement between the AIS and the regime. The two leaders refused the dismantlement of the AIS and other pro-FIS militias.²⁷ Madani sent a letter to ‘Ali Ben Hajar, the Emir of the Islamic League for Jihad and Preaching (LIDD)²⁸ and a formerly elected FIS MP in al-Medea. In it, he asked Ben Hajar to keep his arms and men, refused the details of the Lamari-Mezraq agreement, and called for a resolution along the lines of what he (Madani) had proposed in 1994 and 1995 during the talks with the regime.²⁹ When asked directly if he thought that Madani approved the dismantlement of the LIDD, Ben Hajar answered: “I do not know ... but Sheikh Abbasi is a wise politician; he knows that we did not put down arms except for exigency³⁰ and that we did not abandon our duty.”³¹ ‘Ali Belhaj and ‘Abd al-Qadir Hachani,³² the provisional leader of the FIS who led the party to the electoral victory of 1991, had similar views. They both approved of an end to the violence. However, they wanted better terms in the agreement with the regime, especially with regards to rehabilitating the FIS and allowing its members to be politically active.

Despite such a stance from the FIS political leaders, the dismantlement of the AIS and the de-radicalization of other groups and factions were successful. The AIS militiamen were following the orders of their direct commanders, who were in turn following the orders of the AIS’ national Emir, Madani Mezraq. The latter also was able to convince the emirs of other armed organizations to de-radicalize. In addition to that crucial role of leadership, the other three variables of state repression, social interaction, and selective inducements contributed to the success of the de-radicalization process of these organizations.

REPRESSION: THE AIS BETWEEN THE STATE’S HAMMER AND THE GIA’S ANVIL

Algeria was plagued by several types of violence and repression following the cancellation of the elections by the army generals in January 1992. The costs of that violence were estimated by several parties. In 2005, Algerian President

rhetoric of the FIS leaders, outbidding by followers was a common phenomenon. For example, there was a widespread chant used by FIS supporters in 1991 before the elections (which was heard again in 1997 after the ceasefire declaration): “*ya Ali, ya Abbas al-Jabha rahu Hamas*” [“O ‘Ali (Belhaj), O ‘Abbas (Medani), the Front had become like Hamas”]. Hamas (Currently Hams or MSP) is the Algerian Muslim Brothers party, which has been in an alliance with the military regime since 1992. It is perceived by FIS supporters as being too compromising and as betraying Islamist ideals (Muqqadim 1999, p. 6; Shahin 1997, p. 160). That chant was a condemnation of the FIS leadership’s “lenient” positions by FIS followers.

27. Ali Ben Hajar, “*Ali Ben Hajar Yarwi Lil Al-Hayat Tajribatoh Dakhil Al-Jama’a Al-Musalaha Wa Tafasil Inshiqaquh ‘anha*” [“Ali Bin Hajar Tells Al-Hayat His Experience Inside the Armed Group and The Details of His Secession from It”], interview by Muhammad al- Muqqadim, *Al-Hayat*, February 5, 2000, p. 8.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 8. The LIDD is a 300 to 500 men-strong Islamist militia operating mainly in al-Medea, in Central Algeria. Its affiliates were able to ambush and kill the GIA Emir, Djmel Zitouni, in July 1996.

29. Those included the freedom for him and other FIS leaders to consult with the military commanders of the AIS and other groups. In addition, Madani insisted that any agreement with the regime should have neutral witnesses (Ben Hajar, 2000, p. 8).

30. He meant by that the fact that AIS had struck a deal with the regime and was already dismantling its armed units. The LIDD was a part of those units at this point in time, and Ben Hajar was following Mezraq’s orders.

31. Ben Hajar, “*Ali Ben Hajar Yarwi Lil Al-Hayat Tajribatoh Dakhil Al-Jama’a Al-Musalaha Wa Tafasil Inshiqaquh ‘anha*,” p. 8.

32. He was assassinated on November 22, 1999, allegedly by a GIA member named Fouad Boulemia. His death mainly served military generals who did not want a political role for the FIS. Hachani was coordinating with several political leader from the left (Louisa Hannoué — WP) and the right (Abd al-Hamid Mehri, FLN), demanding more political freedoms in the country as well as the rehabilitation of the FIS. His alleged “assassin,” Fouad Boulemia, was convicted in a controversial one day trial, sentenced to death, and then released in 2006. Boulemia mentioned during the trial that he was tortured by the military and threatened by General Toufik (the alias of Mohamed Mediene, Head of *Département du renseignement et de la sécurité*, DRS) to write a confession saying that he had killed Hachani by mere “coincidence.”

Abdelaziz Bouteflika estimated the war's toll at 150,000 fatalities between 1992 and 2002.³³ Other estimates place the toll at well above 200,000.³⁴ In addition, a group of researchers documented 642 massacres occurring between 1992 and 1998.³⁵ Most of these massacres took place in districts that voted for FIS candidates in 1991 elections.³⁶ Whereas the GIA took responsibility for some of those massacres, some researchers, opposition figures, and former Algerian intelligence officers and diplomats accuse the regime of being complacent or even directly responsible for others.³⁷

In addition, following the 1992 cancellation of elections, between 30,000 and 40,000 FIS supporters, suspected supporters and sympathizers were detained, mainly in detention centers known as *al-Muhtashadat* (Concentrations) in the Algerian desert. In 2006, a government committee appointed by President Bouteflika blamed the security services for 6,146 "disappearances" between 1992 and 1998.³⁸ According to the government, the total number of disappeared persons in this period was more than 10,000,³⁹ a number that exceeds the totals for any other place in the world other than Bosnia in the 1990s.⁴⁰ The same committee declared that the security establishment arrested more than 500,000 Algerians during the crisis as "terrorism suspects." Finally, Prime Minister Ahmad Oyahia declared in 2006 that the security forces had killed 17,000 "armed Islamists," out of an estimated 25,000⁴¹ operating between 1992 and 1997.⁴² These figures, although slightly suspect because they come from one party in the conflict, still reflect the general level of state repression in Algeria in the 1990s. This section, however, focuses on a specific type of repression: that directed against the AIS and its affiliates, as well as how that repression affected the AIS decision to de-radicalize.

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Between 1993 and 1997, the AIS faced a double threat. First, there was a war against its guerrillas by the official National Popular Army (ANP), the pro-regime militias, and the GIA.⁴³ The AIS dealt with that threat relatively better

33. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, "Bouteflika Yatlub 'al-'Afuw' min 'al-Ta'ibiyin'" ["Bouteflika Asks for 'Forgiveness' from the 'Repented'"], report by Muhammad al-Muqqadim. *Al-Hayat*, February 9, 2005, p. 1.

34. Hussain Ait Ahmad, "Al-Zikra Al-Arba'un Li Istiqlal Al-Jaza'ir" ["The Fortieth Anniversary of Algerian Independence"], *Bila Hudud*, Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel, July 3, 2002, 18:35 GMT. 'Ali Yahia Abdennour, "On Human Rights in Algeria," in Youcef Bedjaoui et al., *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres* (Genève: Hoggar, 1999), pp. 5-13. Most of the numbers mentioned in this section are estimates due to the lack of records, especially between 1992 and 1997. Within these years, both the security services and armed militias often burned the bodies of some of their victims. The phenomenon of "disappeared persons" resulted from these practices. Taking the "disappearances" into account, other sources claim that the number of fatalities from 1992 to 2001 exceeded 200,000. (See Hussein Ait Ahmad, "Al-Zikra Al-Arba'un Li Istiqlal Al-Jaza'ir" ["The Fortieth Anniversary for Algerian Independence"], *Bila Hudud*, Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel, July 3, 2002, 18:35 GMT.)

35. Youcef Bedjaoui et al. *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*. A massacre is defined as a violent event in which more than five civilians were murdered. See Muhammad Abdul 'ati, "Muhasilat Al-Sira" [The Result of the Conflict], May 27, 2002, <http://www.aljazeera.net/in-depth/aljeria-election/2002/5/5-25-2.htm>; Abbas Urwa, "Al-Mazabih Fi Al-Jaza'ir: Huwar Ma' Al-Profissir Abbas Urwa" ["The Massacres in Algeria: An Interview with Professor Abbas Urwa"], *Bila Hudud*, Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel, February 19, 2001.

36. Bedjaoui et al., *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, pp. 25-30.

37. Mohamed Samroui, *Chronique des Années de Sang: Algérie, Comment les Services Secrets ont Manipulé les Groupes Islamistes* [Chronicles of the Years of Blood] (Paris: Denoël, 2003); Habib Souidia, *Al-Harb al-Qadhira* [The Dirty War], translated by Rose Makhoulouf (Damascus: Ward Publications, 2002); Hugh Roberts, "France and the Lost Honor of Algeria's Army," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 12, 2001, p. 3.

38. Faruk Cosantini, "al-Jaza'ir: Tahqiq Hukumi Yuhamil al-'Amn Mus'uliyat Ikhtia' 6,146 Madani" ["A Government Investigation Blames the Security for the Disappearance of 6,146 Civilians"], interview by Bou Allam Ghimrasa, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 1, 2005, p. 1; Faruk Cosantini, "Huwar ma' Ra'is al-Lajna al-Istishariyya li Himayyat Huquq al-Insan" ["Interview with The Head of the Consultative Committee for the Protection of Human Rights"], interview by Omar Taha, *Al-Zaman*, November 11, 2006, p. 19; Faruk Cosantini, "al-'Amn Awqaf Nisf Million Jaza'iri bi Tuh, mat 'al-Irhab" ["The Security Forces Arrested Half a Million Algerians for 'Terrorism' Charges"], interview by Ramadan Bil'amry, *Al-Arabiya*, January 24, 2006.

39. Ahmad Oyahia, "al-Jaza'ir Tu'lin Maqqatal 17 Alf Musallah Munzu Bidayyat al-'Unf" ["Algeria Declares the Death of the 17 Thousands Armed Men since the beginning of the Violence"], interview by Bou Allam Ghimrasa, *al-Hayat*, March 22, 2007, pp. 1, 6.

40. In addition to the humanitarian tragedy, Algeria's economy was devastated with the loss of billions of dollars in revenue (an estimated \$30 billion between 1992-1998), a dramatic increase in security expenditures by the regime, ballooning of the external debt (\$30.7 billion in 1997), and rampant unemployment.

41. According to Faruk Costantini, the head of the regime's Consultative Commission for Human Rights in Algeria, this number does not include the supporters of armed Islamists inside cities and towns (Costantini, *Huwar*, p. 19).

42. Costantini, *Huwar*, p. 19; Oyahia, *al-Jaza'ir*, p. 1.

43. The war with the GIA began with skirmishes in 1995 and intensified in 1996 and 1997.

than the other two. Contrary to the GIA between 1994 and 1995, the AIS did not pose any significant threat to the ANP during the crisis. However, it was able to hold its positions in the face of the ANP strikes, and the latter was unable to destroy it. Furthermore, the AIS was able to gain new ground at the expense of the GIA in 1996 and 1997. These gains were mainly due to the GIA's behaviour under the leadership of Djmel Zitouni (1995–1996) and Antar Zouabri (1996–2002), which alienated the affiliated militias as well as potential sympathizers. In a few cases in 1996 and 1997, the AIS gained new territory from the GIA through armed clashes.

These massacres had a strong impact on the AIS decision to disarm and dismantle ... it could protect neither the families of its members nor the FIS supporters, especially in central Algeria.

The second threat to the AIS came partly from the GIA and, allegedly, from factions within the military/security establishment. That threat came in the form of the massacres that mainly targeted civilians in electoral districts that voted for the FIS in the 1990 municipal elections and 1991 legislative elections. The massacres became a regular phenomenon in 1997 when there was a massacre occurring almost every day — the total number in 1997 exceeded 300 massacres.

These massacres had a strong impact on the AIS decision to disarm and dismantle. On the one hand, the AIS was a self-declared armed wing for the FIS. However, it could protect neither the families of its members nor the FIS supporters, especially in central Algeria. For example, in 1997 the GIA claimed responsibility for the mass-killing of 31 “convicted apostates” in Ktiten village in al-Medea province.⁴⁴ The “convicted apostates” were mostly women and children from the extended family of ‘Ali Ben Hajar, the Emir of the LIDD, who was coordinating with the AIS and whose group assassinated Zitouni, the GIA Emir, in 1996.⁴⁵ In Bentalha, a small town south of Algiers whose residents overwhelmingly voted for the FIS in 1991, 417 civilians allegedly were massacred by the GIA in one night (September 22-23, 1997).⁴⁶ Many of those victims were relatives of the AIS members. Awad Bou ‘Abdullah (alias Shaykh Nur al-Din) was the AIS commander of the sixth zone, the nearest area to Bentalha in which the AIS had a militia.⁴⁷ Bou ‘Abdullah recalls that after hearing the news of the massacre, he sent an armed detachment to Bentalha to defend their relatives and supporters but it was “too late.”⁴⁸ In 1996 and 1997, it was clear that most of the mass-killings were targeting areas that had supported the FIS in 1990 and 1991. The AIS, as a self-declared armed wing of the FIS, was unable to protect these areas, not to mention unable to protect the relatives of its own members.

Answering a question in one interview about the causes behind the unilateral ceasefire, Mezraq mentioned that the AIS declared it because the “jihad was just about to be buried by its own sons.”⁴⁹ By this, he meant that the whole concept of jihad in Algeria was being tarnished by the massacres and by intra-Islamist fighting. There was consequently no point in continuing the fight against the regime, due to the waning in popular support.⁵⁰

Mustafa Kabir, the AIS commander of the east, argued that the ongoing massacres were among the main reasons for declaring the unilateral ceasefire in 1997. “We were used as an umbrella to hide the perpetrators of the massacres ...

44. GIA, Communiqué no. 13, 1997.

45. Izel Wafa and W. Isaac, “What is the GIA?” in Bedjaoui et al., *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, p. 415.

46. Nasurallah Yous, *Qui a Tué à Bentalha?* [*Who Has Killed in Bentalha?*] (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), p. 13. Bentalha is a small town south of Algiers that voted for the FIS in the 1991 elections. Many inhabitants were initially in favor of the FIS/AIS Islamists and some had joined them.

47. Awad Bou ‘Abdullah, “*Nar Taht al-Ramad fi Balad al-Million Shahid*” [“Fire under Ashes in the Country of the Million Martyrs”], interview by Ahmad Abdullah, *Al-Ain al-Thalitha*, Al-‘Arabiya Satellite Channel, November 10, 2006.

48. Ibid. It was unclear what he meant by “too late.” However, during the massacre the army was blocking all entrances and exits to Bentalha and reportedly shot and killed a policeman who attempted to interfere. Security forces were stationed on the edge of Bentalha and were aware of what was going on without interference. The neighborhood of Hai El-Djilali, which was specifically targeted by the attack, was repeatedly illuminated by huge projectors recently installed in a nearby field by the police. Also, a military helicopter hovered over the scene throughout much of the six hours that the massacre lasted. Given these conditions, it was almost impossible for an AIS detachment to reach Bentalha (see the details in Yous, *Qui a Tué à Bentalha* and Hugh Roberts, “France and the Lost Honor of Algeria’s Army,” p. 3).

49. Madani Mezraq, “*Mezraq lil Hayat: Jihat fi al-Hukum Kant Tuharik al-Ahhdath*” [“Mezraq to al-Hayat: Factions in the Regime were Moving the Events”], interview by Muhammad al-Muqaddim, *Al-Hayat*, March 8, 2005, p. 8.

50. Mezraq, “*Mezraq lil Hayat: Jihat fi al-Hukum Kant Tuharik al-Ahhdath*,” p. 8.

and therefore we had to remove this umbrella and dismantle our organization (AIS).⁵¹ Kabir was referring to the fact that many Algerians and non-Algerian monitors did not distinguish between the AIS and the GIA. To them, they were all armed Islamists fighting against the regime, and the massacres hurt the reputation of Islamists in general. By declaring the unilateral ceasefire, the AIS wanted to send a message to Algerians and the rest of the world that they were not behind the massacres and that they were putting down arms to “expose whoever is behind them.”⁵²

In addition to the “regular” forms of repression (imprisonment, torture, extra-judicial killings, media smear campaigns, and others), the massacres had a strong impact on the AIS decision to de-radicalize regardless of who was really behind them. Whether it was the GIA practicing its takfiri ideology, army factions using the massacres as “counter-insurgency” tactic,⁵³ or a mix of both,⁵⁴ the massacres served as a main cause for the decision of the AIS to declare the unilateral ceasefire.

SOCIAL INTERACTION: DE-RADICALIZATION AND “SOFT” POLITICS

The AIS had nuanced differences in its ideology and behavior that separated it from the GIA and other jihadist groups. The main difference was its belief that armed jihad was a last resort, a defensive tactic to create an Islamist state after the failure of electoral politics. The AIS also believed that violence would not resolve the Algerian crisis. Therefore throughout the civil war it attempted to negotiate a settlement, first via the FIS political leadership in 1995 and then via its own leadership in 1997. That political position was remarkably different from the “Three Nos” stance that was upheld by the GIA from 1992 until its factionalization and partial destruction between 1998 and 2005.⁵⁵ The political position of the AIS can be considered partly as a product of interactions between AIS figures and non-violent Islamists and secular groups.

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The interactions between the AIS and moderate Islamists and non-Islamist factions (external interaction) were important in influencing the stance of the AIS on violence. First, the leadership of the AIS was influenced mainly by the ideas and works of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers (MB), a group that had renounced violence against the Egyptian regime since the early 1970s. For example, when asked about the books that influenced his Islamist ideology and behavior, Medani Mezraq mentioned *The Collection of Letters of Hasan al-Banna*, *The Muslim Brothers: Events that Made History* of Mahmud Abdul Halim,⁵⁶ and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s *Revival of Religious Sciences*.⁵⁷

Second, throughout the Algerian crisis there have been calls from the Egyptian MB leaders for dialogue. The position of some of these leaders was quite different from that of the mainstream Algerian Muslim Brothers (HAMS or MSP); in general, they tended to be closer to those of the FIS/AIS rather than those of the military establishment. For example, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a leading MB Islamic scholar who taught in Algeria for seven years, argued in one inter-

51. Mustafa Kabir, “Amir Manttiqatt al-Sharq al-Jaza’iri li Jaysh al-Inqadh: ‘Awdatt al-Inqadh Mas’alat Waqt” [“The Commander of the Algerian Eastern Zone in the Salvation Army: The Retrun of the FIS is a Matter of Time”], *Al-Zaman*, February 2, 2002, p. 8.

52. AIS Communiqué, 1997, p. 1.

53. In his book *La Sale Guerre* and in several interviews, Lieutenant Habib Souidia mentions that he drove some Algerian Special Forces officers and soldiers to the houses of Algerian civilians who had voted for the FIS. The group that he drove massacred the voters. Souidia mentions that he is ready to stand trial for these and similar actions (see Souidia, La Salle). If these accounts are correct, it shows that some units in the army were directly involved in the massacres, and not just lacking the will to interfere or providing indirect support for the GIA, like in the case of Bentalha. For comparative cases of targeting civilians as a counter-insurgency tool, see Izel Wafa and W. Isaac, “What is the GIA?” in Bedjaoui et al., *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, pp. 373-459.

54. Like an infiltration of the GIA’s units or even leadership structure as Colonel Mohamed Samraoui and others argue. Given the simplistic mobilization and the lack of recruitment screening, as well as the basis for “promotion” inside the GIA, the infiltration scenario is not highly unlikely.

55. Those were “No Dialogue, No Truce, and No Reconciliation.”

56. One of the leaders of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. His three-volume book is one of the most detailed accounts of the history of the Brothers in Egypt.

57. The latter book is a classic of four volumes that deals mainly with theology, jurisprudence, spirituality, and Islamic philosophy. It is one of the classics that the Muslim Brothers teach and emphasize in their curricula.

view that the struggle of the AIS was a legitimate one. However, on many occasions he urged armed Islamists to cease violence and negotiate a settlement and, at a later stage, to follow the AIS-led de-radicalization process.⁵⁸

[T]he Algerian regime under President ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Bouteflika had to address five major issues ... political prisoners, the “disappearances,” social reintegration, the political rights of the de-radicalized groups and individuals, and the role of the military in politics.

In addition to the intra-Islamist interaction, the Rome meeting organized by the Catholic Community of St. Edigio was another chance for external interaction with other political forces in Algeria. Although there were not any AIS representatives at the meeting, Rabih Kabir, the head of the FIS Executive Committee abroad and the closest FIS leader to the AIS,⁵⁹ was among the signatories of the accords.⁶⁰ As opposed to the GIA and the regime, the AIS upheld the results of the talks and called for continuing negotiations based on them.

Given this inclination to negotiate and the perception that armed “jihad” as a means to an end,⁶¹ the internal interaction process to convince the AIS guerrillas to de-radicalize was less difficult as compared to those of other jihadist groups. Medani Mezraq and Mustafa Kabir both mention that the internal interactions with their followers aimed at convincing them to de-radicalize were not easy, but were successful in the end. Indeed, there were no splits within the AIS. In fact, other factions from the GIA and the GSPC as well as independent armed organizations joined the AIS-led de-radicalization process.

SELECTIVE INDUCEMENTS: POLITICS AS USUAL AND THE SOCIOECONOMIC DIMENSION

To support the de-radicalization process, the Algerian regime under President ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Bouteflika had to address five major issues. These issues were political prisoners, the “disappearances,” social reintegration, the political rights of the de-radicalized groups and individuals, and the role of the military in politics. Despite the activation of the Charter of Peace and National Reconciliation in 2006 (the legal framework that covers these issues), most of the problems underlying the issues still remain unresolved due to their complexities and sensitivities. However, the inducements provided by Bouteflika’s government with regards to these five issues were enough to bolster the de-radicalization process and make it attractive to thousands of militants.

Regarding political prisoners, the main demand of the AIS was the release of all its detainees, FIS leaders, and other affiliates and supporters. The government complied with these demands, releasing high-profile prisoners like ‘Ali Belhaj and ‘Abd al-Haqq Layada, the founder of the GIA, in 2006. Tens of thousands of other political prisoners were released between 1999 and 2005.

Reintegration was another issue that the Bouteflika regime had to provide as an inducement. It was mainly centered on socioeconomic issues and safety concerns. The two socioeconomic issues were reemployment/employment and compensations for families who were victimized by the regime during the conflict. Although some of the AIS leaders became successful business entrepreneurs, others were denied jobs due to their history. In addition, many of the former militants were denied passports and were harassed continuously by the military and security agencies. These conditions forced President Bouteflika to apologize and “ask forgiveness” from former guerrillas in a gathering at el-Chelf stadium that was attended by thousands of former AIS members and other former militants (el-Chelf is one of the towns in western Algeria in which the AIS had a strong presence under Ahmad Ben Aicha).⁶²

58. Yusuf Qaradawi, “*al-Mas’uliyya al-Shar’iyya ‘an Ahdath al-Jaza’ir*” [“The Legitimate Responsibility for the Algerian Events”], *Al-Shari’a wa al-Hayat*, Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel, February 1, 1998.

59. His brother Mustafa Kabir was the AIS Emir of the east starting in 1995.

60. Kabir could not attend because the German authorities prevented him from going (he sought refuge in Germany). Abd al-Karim Walad ‘Idda represented him in the meeting.

61. Not an end *per se*. The latter was an ideological preference for the GIA.

62. After apologizing, Bouteflika said that the AIS militants honored their word (with regards to abandoning violence), whereas the state did not

As for the safety issues, the state provided personal arms, mainly for the commanders of the AIS to protect themselves against the GIA and its splinters, pro-regime militias, and other potential threats. This, however, did not prevent various reprisals like the assassination of 'Ali Murad, a member of the AIS joint leadership staff, by one of the pro-regime militias in Souk Ahras province in 2006. This is in addition to the more recent attempt⁶³ on Mustafa Kertali, the former AIS Emir of central Algeria, a car bombing orchestrated by a QICM operative in which he lost a leg.⁶⁴

Another sensitive topic is that of political rights. On several occasions, the commanders of the AIS have mentioned that they would not accept being “second class citizens,” by which they meant the *de facto* ban on their political rights.⁶⁵ Mezraq is in the process of applying for a permit to launch a political party for the second time, although he expects the Algerian authorities to deny his application request. The AIS leaders assert that the agreement with the regime upheld their political rights. However, President Bouteflika mentioned on several occasions that he did not find “anything written” with regards to that.⁶⁶ Given this stance by the regime, 'Ali Ben Hajar, former Emir of the LIDD, went so far as to refuse to call on the GSPC and QICM militants to put down their arms.⁶⁷ He argued in one interview that the regime did not honor its promises; therefore he believed the reconciliation process is “symbolic but not real.”⁶⁸

A more critical issue concerns the role of the military establishment in Algerian politics. After all, it was a group of incumbent army generals⁶⁹ who decided to cancel the 1991 elections and crack down on the opposition, thereby catalyzing the civil war.

On the other hand, it was almost the same group who negotiated and supported the 1997 ceasefire and the subsequent de-radicalization process, and therefore reduced the status of civilian officials.⁷⁰ After the re-election of Bouteflika in 2004, it seemed that it was in the interest of both the Islamists and civilian politicians to limit the army's interference in politics. Powerful military figures like Muhammad Lamari who was the Commander of the Land Forces at the time of the coup and the Chief of Staff (1993-2004), had resigned (or was asked to resign) in 2004. Following his resignation, around 800 other senior officers were removed from their positions and given pensions, including Lamari's deputy Sherif Foudayl.⁷¹ Those removals were widely regarded as an attempt by Bouteflika to professionalize and de-politicize the army.

On several occasions, the commanders of the AIS have mentioned that they would not accept being “second class citizens,” by which they meant the *de facto* ban on their political rights.

CONCLUSION: THE COMPLEX PHENOMENON OF DE-RADICALIZATION

In the first three years of the Algerian civil war, only state repression and very limited inducements to disarm were honor its commitment towards them.

63. This was the second attempt on Kertali's life. The first was organized by a pro-regime militia in Larbaa. It ended with a gunfight in which one of the assailants was injured and Kertali survived unharmed.

64. Al-Qa'ida later “apologized” for the attack, mentioning that one of its members decided to act on his own, without the leadership's consent.

65. For example, former AIS members were not allowed to run in the Algerian parliamentary elections of May 2007.

66. Bouteflika, *Yatlub*, p. 8; Muhammad Muqqadam, “*Bouteflika Yatlub Al-afuw 'an 'Al-Ta'ibiyin*” [“Bouteflika Demands Amnesty for the ‘Repentants’”], *Al-Hayat*, September 5, 2005, p. 6.

67. 'Ali Ben Hajar, “*Ali Ben Hajar Yarwi Lil Al-Hayat Tajribatoh Dakhil Al-Jama'a Al-Musalaha Wa Tafasil Inshiqaquh 'anha*” [“'Ali Bin Hajar Tells Al-Hayat His Experience Inside the Armed Group and The Details of His Secession from It”], interview by Muhammad al- Muqqadam, *Al-Hayat*, February 5, 2000, p. 8.

68. Ben Hajar, “*Ali Ben Hajar Yarwi Lil Al-Hayat Tajribatoh Dakhil Al-Jama'a Al-Musalaha Wa Tafasil Inshiqaquh 'anha*.”

69. This group included Khalid Nazar, the incumbent Defense Minister at the time of the coup; al-Arabi Belkhair, the incumbent Interior (Security) Minister at the time of the coup; Muhammad Lamari, the incumbent Commander of the Land Forces at the time of the coup and Chief of Staff from 1993 to 2004; Lamari's deputy General Sharif Fouday; Muhammad Médiène (alias Tawfiq) Head of the Military Intelligence (DRS) (1988- Present); General Isma'il Lamari, his deputy, and General Muhammad Towati.

70. For example, Benjedid was forced to resign when he hesitated to cancel the elections against the wishes of the generals. Zeroual resigned in September 1998 and discontinued his presidential term when he refused to acknowledge the AIS ceasefire, again against the wishes of the generals.

71. It should be noted that before his removal, Lamari was critical of Bouteflika's policies that controlled the army, resulting in a decrease in the army's influence. He went so far as to threaten a coup to “correct” the democratic process in Algeria if there was fraud in the presidential elections of 2004 or if the presidential candidates withdrew.

Although these interactions prepared a fertile ground for a compromise and a resolution of the conflict, they were refused by the military regime as well as by the GIA. That refusal by the GIA underlined a significant problem within the larger armed Islamist movement in Algeria: the lack of leadership.

available to support the de-radicalization of armed Islamists. These were by no means enough to definitively spur change. The state repression variable caused the initial radicalization of the FIS, whose dominant factions were willing to abide by electoral democracy. The selective inducements provided between 1992 and 1994 were not sufficient to bolster de-radicalization. In 1995, there were some significant social interactions reflected in the Rome Accords as well as in the few talks between the FIS, the AIS, and the GIA. Although these interactions prepared a fertile ground for a compromise and a resolution of the conflict, they were refused by the military regime as well as by the GIA. That refusal by the GIA underlined a significant problem within the larger armed Islamist movement in Algeria: the lack of leadership. Whereas the FIS leaders thought between 1992 and 1994 that they could control the GIA and other armed movements, that belief was shattered in 1995 after the murder of the FIS' former provisional leaders by the GIA. By then, it was apparent that only a part of this armed Islamist movement had a leadership that could control its followers and was willing to compromise. The presence of this type of leadership within the AIS ultimately led, along with the three previously mentioned variables, to its successful de-radicalization.

In the cases of the GIA, GSPC, and QICM, although they were the object of intense state repression between 1992 and 2008, and despite the presence of selective inducements after 2000 (following the de-radicalization of the AIS), there was a constant lack of charismatic leadership within these groups and very limited interactions with the "other." As a result, there was continuous splintering and factionalization in all directions, whether toward radicalization, de-radicalization, or even along apolitical paths.

Compared to Egyptian de-radicalization processes like those of the Islamic Group and al-Jihad Organization, as well as compared to other large-scale processes, the AIS had the shortest de-radicalization process (three years; 1997-2000). The fact that the process was a pragmatic one, without an ideological/theological component, helped in quickening it. Ideological debates on the issue of violence within the same, formerly armed organization can often lead to factionalization. However, the caveat in pragmatic de-radicalization is that it lacks the ideological/theological arguments that de-legitimize violence whether in the past, present, or future. The importance of the ideological/theological components lay in the fact that they represent one of the hurdles against a future reversal towards violence.

Finally, the failed de-radicalization cases of the GIA and the GSPC have shown the crucial importance of a charismatic leadership supportive of de-radicalization. In both organizations, there were factions who were willing to de-radicalize. However, in the case of the GIA, the leadership was opposing the process. A few factions insisted on de-radicalization and joined the AIS.⁷² In the case of the GSPC, the same scenario was replicated with one exception: the GSPC had a weak leadership which was willing to de-radicalize in 2005. However, at that time it was not in control of most of its followers and it was easily removed and ended up leading only one small faction.⁷³ The rest of the factions formed what is known currently as QICM. Evidently, patterns of radicalization and de-radicalization are interacting and running concurrently in Algeria.

72. Omar Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (New York and London: Routledge, forthcoming in March 2009), p. 277.

73. Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, p. 285.