

# CARNEGIE PAPERS

## Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria

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## Summary

Despite the repression of radical Islamist movements since 1992 and the promulgation of a National Reconciliation law in 1999 aimed at encouraging the repentance of jihadi fighters, Algeria is still subject to regular terrorist attacks. Rather than follow the 1990s model of Islamist parties that believed in politics, expressed themselves within the system, discussed the concept of democracy, and had the goal of building an Islamic State, the radical anti-state rhetoric in Algeria today finds its expression in movements that do not believe in working within the political system. These movements are Salafist in nature and include Jihadi Salafism, personified by the recently formed al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI), and Da'wa Salafism, inspired by Saudi Wahhabism. These apolitical or anti-political Salafi trends are the result of the marginalization of political Salafists, mainly during the 1990s. They reveal the failure of participationist strategies among the moderate Islamist parties and their difficulties in mobilizing their base, a growing depoliticization among the new young Islamist generation, and the urgent need to reinvent pluralistic politics in a post-conflict Algeria.

## Introduction

How to deal with Islamist movements is a pressing issue confronting not only Arab governments but also the United States and European countries. There is increasing acceptance of the idea that moderate Islamist movements should be integrated to some extent into the legal and political processes of their countries. However, virtually no one argues that radical Islamist movements—particularly the violent ones but more broadly those embracing a fundamentalist Wahhabi or Salafi view of Islam—should also be integrated. Those movements, it is argued, must be contained and possibly destroyed.

An analysis of Algeria's Salafi movement suggests a different conclusion. Despite prolonged attempts to crush it or to convince its members to lay down their arms in exchange for a generous amnesty, the Algerian government has not been able to contain the radical expression of Islamism represented by the various trends of Salafism. The government has succeeded in destroying the more openly political manifestation of Salafism, the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS, or al-Jabha al-Islamiyya lil-Inqadh), but it has not solved the issue of the political reintegration of its former leaders and followers. It has reduced the violent jihadi manifestation to just a fraction of what it was during the 1990s, but this jihadi movement is now again present in the emergence of the al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Thus the challenge of Salafism has not been eliminated. Though political and jihadi manifestations of the movement may have decreased in importance, a third type of Salafism, called Da'wa Salafism (*da'wa*: proselytizing, from *al-da'wa*, i.e., the call)—which concentrates on Islamizing its followers and isolating them from the political process rather than directly challenging the state—has grown greatly in importance. This development is mainly due to the economic boom the country is experiencing. The Da'wa Salafis, benefiting from the rising price of oil, through various rentier business networks, have adopted a neutral attitude toward the state, which in return is tolerating them. Their apolitical radicalism contradicts the usual idea that the spread of radical Islam among youth is at least partly linked to tough economic times.

As of 2008, the Algerian state still has not won its battle against radical Islamism and the country is still being subjected to regular terrorist attacks. Unlike the FIS, those Algerian Islamist parties with participationist strategies toward the state, like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas (Movement of Society for Peace, or Harakat Mujtama' As-Silm), and Islah (National Reform Movement, or Harakat al-Islah al-Watani)—have been allowed to compete politically. Since 1997, Hamas has even been part of the Presidential Alliance, comprising the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN, or Jabhat at-Tahrir al-Watani) and the National Democratic Rally (Rassemblement National Démocratique, RND, at-Tajammu' al-Watani ad-Dimuqrati).

However, the integration of these groups into the official politics of the country has not provided an alternative to Salafism or a democratic alternative to the rule of a political elite still rooted in the old FLN and the military establishment. Many of those who were seduced by the idea of building an Islamic state in place of the monopolistic FLN postindependence state are now turning to Da'wa Salafism. These Salafi followers, who reject any kind of secular or modern political system, which they consider as *bid'a* (an illegitimate innovation), take as their model for society and the state the practices of the Salaf, the "pious ancestors" from the first three generations of the Prophet Muhammad's followers. It is these early ideals, rather than the views developed and propagated by the Muslim Brotherhood since the 1920s in Egypt, that now inspire them. Even though certain forms of Salafism were already present in the Algerian independence struggle, this visible reemergence of Da'wa Salafism should be understood as the main revival strategy of politically weak and socially discredited Islamist parties.

Thus, there are now three types of Salafi movements in Algeria. The first is political Salafism (Salafiyya Harakiyya [dynamic]). The second is Jihadi Salafism (Salafiyya Jihadiyya), which advocates jihad. And the third is Da'wa Salafism (ad-Da'wa al-Salafiyya, also named Salafiyya 'Ilmiyya [scientific]), which is devoted to Islamic scholarship, or Wahhabiyya, in reference to its Saudi influences. Political Salafism, represented in the 1980s and 1990s primarily by the FIS, finds itself today in an ambiguous position vis-à-vis the Algerian state, which it rejects as non-Islamic while at the same time seeking to participate in the political process launched by the government to promote reconciliation between Algerians after the civil war. Jihadi Salafism, conversely, is unambiguous. It openly rejects the state and seeks to overthrow it by violent means. It was mainly represented in the 1990s by the Armed Islamic groups (known as the GIA, from the acronym of its French name, Groupes Islamiques Armés) and their successor, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (known as the GSPC, from its French name, Groupe Salafi pour la Predication et le Combat). In 2006 what remained of the GSPC formed AQIM, bestowing on Algerian Salafism a veneer of internationalism.

Both political Salafism and Jihadi Salafism are today in decline, although AQIM is still capable of carrying out terrorist attacks. Today, Da'wa Salafism is one of the most important manifestations of Islamism in Algeria. It is a strongly missionary movement that pushes Muslims to renew their commitment to Islam, returning to the purer ways of their ancestors. The use of the word *da'wa* (the call), in the movement's name symbolizes its proselytizing fervor. In Algeria, Da'wa Salafism has become a mainstream movement, part of a non-violent tradition that rejects modernity and Westernization and that considers the Algerian state to be the outcome of both, but does not seek to overthrow it. Though this movement is ostensibly apolitical, in reality it has significant political implications, which are discussed below.

This overview of the Salafi movements in Algeria is based primarily on research carried out in Algeria and Morocco between 2006 and 2008. This research included many hours of observation and interviews in Salafi mosques and neighborhoods.

## The Birth of Political Salafism and the Islamic Salvation Front Experience

In the eyes of the West, the war that pitted the Algerian security forces against the FIS and other Islamist movements from 1992 to 1999 was a struggle by a modern secular state against an extremist retrograde religious movement. But the reality is more complicated. The violence of that period was perpetrated by both Islamists and government security forces, and it had clear antecedents in the war of national liberation waged by the FLN against the French in the 1950s. During this War of Independence, the FLN (which later came to be seen as a secular, socialist-oriented party) used religion as a way to acquire political legitimacy and used violence to achieve its goals. The anticolonial struggle was labeled a jihad, and the prerequisite for those who wanted to acquire positions of power after independence in 1962 was to have been a wartime *mujahid* (literally, a fighter for the faith).

The political Salafism advocated by the FIS in Algeria was first modeled on this Islamic-oriented nationalism, mixed with Wahhabi ideas on morals, education, purification, and the rejection of Western modernity imported into Algeria in the 1930s by members of the reformist Ulemas like Tayeb el Oqbi. However, in 1962 an entirely revolutionary FLN-oriented state took the place of the Islamic state envisaged by the early nationalist/reformist Salafi Algerian leaders. Despite the fact that many of them were integrated into the FLN in the 1960s and the 1970s, they never gained major political influence but acted mostly as a pressure group for the Islamization of public life. Nor were they allowed to form an Islamic party in opposition to the FLN, which had incorporated Islam by establishing it as the state religion and launching “Arabization” policies. Those marginalized by the FLN founded an association called Al Qiyam (the Values) in 1962. This was dissolved, however, after it publicly denounced President Gamal Abdel Nasser for executing Sayyid Qutb, who had been the leading thinker in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, in August 1966. The leaders of Al Qiyam, including Abassi Madani, the future head of the FIS, remained active in universities and mosques during the 1970s, seeking to reactivate the Salafi reformist Islam linked to the War of Independence.

The Salafis—who were marginalized by the FLN’s monopolization of power during the 1970s—divided into two factions. One faction, the Da’wa Salafis, drew closer to Wahhabism, focusing on the reform of society and the imposition of a strict code of conduct based on the original Islamic values and rejecting direct political involvement. The other faction, the political Salafis, also



embraced the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam and its insistence on strict social codes. But they also accepted the idea, set forth by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, that it was necessary to form a political movement to Islamize the state as well as society. However, the political Salafis never trusted parties and elections as a valid way to govern or to be integrated into a pluralist political system—contrary to the other Islamist political movements inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, which eventually founded parties such as Hamas and Islah. To them, democracy was nothing more than *kufir* (apostasy, rejection of Islam), and they participated in elections only as a means to overcome their marginalization.

In the 1980s, political Salafism gained new life and direction when it was joined by younger members of the postindependence generation, who had been rejected by the FLN, which considered only those who had taken part in the War of Independence worthy of sharing power. These members of the younger generation sought a different avenue into political life. Their first contact with political Salafism arose in nonofficial mosques and on university campuses. Many more were recruited during the antistate youth riots of 1988. By adopting a Salafi discourse against the “Westernized” institutions of the state, the future FIS represented an opportunity for the marginalized youth to circumvent the FLN’s restricted “revolutionary family,” from which they had been excluded. For this postindependence generation, political Salafism was an attempt to restore the values they advocated: social justice, the redistribution of political power, and the “threatened” Islamic identity that had underpinned the War of Independence but had been abandoned by a power-hungry FLN. The most representative figure of this postindependence generation was Ali Benhadj, who was later to become number two in the FIS. Political Salafism was given further impetus a few years later by young Algerians returning from fighting in Afghanistan.

During the 1980s, political Salafism was not a strictly organized movement with a well-defined ideology but rather an amorphous and disparate mass of actors, brought together because of their marginalization by the state. It was only with the founding of the FIS in 1989 that political Salafism found structure and organization. The FIS first rejected the modern Algerian state with its “perverted” political process, in line with the Wahhabi credo. Nevertheless, the party decided to use democratic methods and tools, such as party organization and participation in elections, to gain power when the opportunity arose in the 1990 municipal elections and the 1991 parliamentary elections.

In the end, the FIS did not achieve its goals. After obtaining very strong results in the municipal elections, it was set to win the 1991 parliamentary elections when the government canceled the balloting, imposed military rule, and banned the FIS. The political Salafi leaders were faced with their failure to use the tools of a modern political system to replace the FLN’s revolution with their own. Following their failure to build an Islamic state, the Salafis again divided. Many

activists chose to exit politics and embraced Da'wa Salafism to survive as a social and religious movement, while others turned to Jihadi Salafism and violence.

### **The Failure of the FIS Party and the Violent Exit of Political Salafism**

This recourse to violence was the inexorable outcome of the contradictory position taken by the political Salafis in the FIS. They rejected Western democracy and institutions but tried to use them to gain power in order to build an Islamic state. When that attempt failed, their political radicalism and their hatred of the FLN state, which had hitherto been contained within the FIS, exploded.

The banning of the FIS and the incarceration of its top leaders allowed the emergence of radical groups, which did not share any clear ideological convictions other than the determination to wage jihad against the state. With the FIS no longer able to steer radical politics, the old Islamist leadership that had been socialized during the Islamic revival of the 1970s and the 1980s—the political *Sahwa*—was replaced by those young people formerly marginalized in the FIS. In 1991, the average age of those taking to the bush was twenty years, with many coming from rough neighborhoods in Algiers or the surrounding rural areas. Until the banning of the FIS and the arrest of its leaders, these young people had not been truly part of the political movement. Though they had participated in mass gatherings and demonstrations organized by the FIS and in Friday prayers at Salafi mosques, the FIS had not allowed them to participate politically but had used them to terrorize their fellow citizens by persecuting women without a veil, men who drank or played dominos, and even French speakers. However, after the dissolution of the FIS, these new radical actors—who, in contrast to the FIS elite, lacked clear political or ideological socialization—abandoned the project of creating an Islamic state through politics. Their idea of jihad was greatly influenced by their criminal or marginal experience and by elements of Wahhabi ideology borrowed from the mosques affiliated with the FIS. They transformed jihad into a project in itself, as a way out of their political and social marginalization as delinquents or *trabendists* (smugglers). Thus, these marginalized youth became the core element of the new Groupes Islamiques Armés (GIA).

In the period 1991–1994, in the absence of any real alternative proposed by the exiled or imprisoned leaders of the FIS, many original members of the FIS joined the GIA. Others founded their own armed groups like the Mouvement Islamique Algérien (the Algerian Islamic Movement, originally formed by Mustapha Bouyali, the first Islamist to turn to violence in 1982 and who was killed in 1987). In the end, these groups gathered an uncontrollable mixture including local delinquent groups seeking wealth and notoriety in their neighborhood, former FIS militants, *moudjahidin* from the War of Independence who had been marginalized by the FLN, and “failed” jihadis who had returned from Afghanistan without really being able to participate in the fighting and who seized this opportunity to finally take part in jihad.

The political Salafists of the FIS finally aligned themselves with the violent jihadi logic of the GIA as a means to establish an Islamic state. While participating in the killing of policemen and civilian as collaborators, they also sought to open negotiations with the state they sought to destroy. In 1994 they founded the Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS, the Islamic Salvation Army) as the armed wing of the FIS. Nevertheless, they failed to unify and contain the violence of the GIA's Jihadi Salafism, and they never won back their militants, who had become members of other armed groups.

The anarchistic violence of the GIA and the AIS, purportedly directed against an “illegitimate and corrupt government” that had ignored the voice of the population, at first enjoyed some support, particularly after the government refused to negotiate. But this support decreased as violence escalated and became more indiscriminate. The political Salafis of the AIS and the FIS, for whom jihad was an instrument to siphon off the FLN's monopolistic power, were increasingly marginalized and killed by the Jihadi Salafis of the GIA. New groups took the lead, adopting increasingly radical positions—in 1995 the GIA issued a fatwa condemning all Algerian people as apostates. Violence escalated, with collective massacres of civilians becoming a frequent occurrence. The Algerian army largely allowed this violence in order to undermine the sympathies of the population for the armed groups and to punish those who had voted for the FIS in 1992. The AIS—failing in the field of violence, as the FIS had failed in the field of political opposition—first secretly negotiated a ceasefire in 1995 and then dissolved in 1997.

Various amnesty policies were implemented to put an end to the violence of the GIA and to pardon those who were responsible for crimes (both jihadists and security forces). These policies ranged from the first *rahma* (forgiveness) law in 1995, which was announced by President Liamine Zeroual after his election, to the Civil Concord Law in 1999 promulgated by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika after his election, to the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation approved by referendum in 2005 and designed during the 2004 presidential elections, won a second time by President Bouteflika. From the official number of 27,000 fighters in 1992, around 6,000 “repentants” have been declared (with the number varying according to the source). According to U.S. sources, almost 1,000 terrorists are still at large. As a result of these amnesty policies, the GIA has essentially disappeared. Many of its members have repented and taken advantage of the legal amnesty provisions. However, the new Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat emerged between 1997 and 2006, purportedly making a break with the GIA and its violence against civilians.

### **The Unsuccessful Attempt to Launch a Postconflict Political Salafism**

The violent exit of political Salafism symbolizes the failure of legalizing the FIS type of radical politics. At the end of the 1990s, the only possible choices

open to political Salafis were either to withdraw from official politics and reject *tahazoub* (partisan political activity) by joining movements like Da'wa Salafism or to withdraw from dialogue with the nation-state and plunge themselves into total violence, as did the GIA and later on the GSPC. The FIS, which at first was excluded from the AIS's secret negotiations with the army, has tried to find a third way and to reinvent a postconflict political Salafism. Many FIS actors, denouncing war and distancing themselves from terrorism, have supported the reconciliation processes and have tried to return to the political scene. The FIS, however, has never recovered from its dissolution in 1992 and the years of violence that followed. During that period, the government gave up on FIS leaders as useful partners in political negotiations when they proved unable to contain the violence of their followers.

Some former leaders of the FIS and the AIS have attempted to overcome their marginalization by developing a new postconflict political Salafism, but they have failed. They first tried to negotiate their social and political reintegration by supporting the national reconciliation project. However, this amnesty was also designed by the Algerian army to prevent the rebirth of the FIS, making its former leaders and activists appear as nothing more than repentant terrorists. As a result, the FIS's former leaders no longer have weight in national political life. Two of these leaders, Ali Benhadj and Abassi Madani, were released in 2003, but Madani lives in voluntary exile in Qatar and Benhadj is forbidden to speak publicly.

These former FIS leaders are still battling for the leadership of a party that de facto no longer exists. They halfheartedly denounce violence because they know that they must do so if they want to return to political life, but they are not allowed to play a significant political role. They continue to try new political strategies; they have denounced AQIM and tried to position themselves as mediators by calling upon its members to lay down their arms. They have attempted to form an alliance with other marginalized opposition members who they formerly considered miscreants. Some veterans of the dissolved FIS ran for office under the banner of non-Islamist parties, including Berber ones, during the legislative elections of May 2007. Others have announced that they will form a new party. Hamas and Islah, which are legalized, co-opted Islamist parties, have already announced their willingness to welcome them to their parties if they want to join.

The future of these veterans of the FIS and of political Salafism will not be resolved because the state does not want any challenges to the fragile equilibrium that exists in Algeria today, thanks to a reconciliation process that has left power in the hands of the army and the president, over and above all the political parties.

## Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: The Emergence of an Internationalized, Media-Savvy, Jihadi Salafism

As discussed above, the Jihadi Salafist organizations that had taken part in the Algerian civil war, the GIA and the GSPC, were greatly weakened by government repression, discredited by their own actions against civilians, as well as by the *fatwa* of religious authorities, such as the Wahhabi Saudi scholar Mohamad Ibn Salih Al Otheimine, with the final blow being dealt by the Civil Concord Law and the amnesty, which caused many members of the early jihadi organizations to lay down their arms and return to their former lives. Since the early 2000s, the remaining jihadi have been joined by a new generation of radicals. They grew up during the ubiquitous violence of the 1990s and are interested in neither Da'wa Salafism's step-by-step project of Islamizing a "corrupted" society nor the FIS's failed theological debates on the nature of democracy and the Islamic state. They are no longer inspired by the War of Independence against France. They are instead influenced by the new transnational jihadism of Osama bin Laden and the Iraq war. They want to join a globalized jihad led by all Muslims against their powerful American, Jewish, and crusader enemies. To improve their situation as young Algerians marginalized from any political participation, they find al-Qaeda's global strategy more appealing than focusing exclusively on overthrowing an illegitimate FLN. This willingness to be heard and seen at the international level has largely motivated the emergence of a new media-savvy jihad. For instance, in 2005 the GSPC, seeking to align itself with the international jihad of al-Qaeda—this "great organization that fights the Americans"—and to enhance its own prestige, hailed the kidnapping and assassination of two Algerian diplomats in Baghdad by the Iraqi faction of al-Qaeda.

This new orientation of Algerian Jihadi Salafism was explicitly announced in December 2006, when the GSPC changed its name to the Organization of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and announced its affiliation with bin Laden's al-Qaeda. Even if it is unlikely that the GSPC/AQIM is active beyond Algerian borders today, or even has close ties to bin Laden, the use of the al-Qaeda label has allowed the GSPC/AQIM to stage a reappearance on the international scene. To generate international attention, AQIM has tried to draw different Maghrebi Jihadi Salafi groups together under its banner (the Algerian GSPC, the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and the Tunisian Islamic Combatant Group), although they are not linked to each other operationally.

The evolution of the GSPC into AQIM has epitomized the transition from a discourse of negation of the state and of society to a jihadi ideology for which international impact and visual media violence have become the main *raison d'être*. The GSPC/AQIM has reorganized its media propaganda, renewing its old rhetoric about the "illegitimate *taghut* [idolatrous] Westernized Algerian state" to enlarge its membership and increase its popularity among

young Algerians. Even if the great majority of young Algerians condemn and do not support AQIM, this new media-related Jihadi Salafism nevertheless has found a niche in the everyday postconflict gun culture of their environment. Propaganda videos now use the Berber language, whereas the use of Arabic had always been sacred; call for reconquering Al Andalous and revenge after 132 years of French colonization; and try to play on the existing social malaise by featuring images of riots between young people and the police or showing European countries humiliating “*harraga*”—the illegal immigrants who burn, that is, *hargue*, the frontiers.

This is essentially a jihad of images with no leader or ideological goal that is now seducing those who decide to join the ranks of AQIM. These young people have never known the political project of Islamism or the FIS—only the violence of the GIA and the GSPC. Others are even the children of killed jihadists or of militants tortured by the army. They lack any possible participation in national politics in today’s Algeria, but they are fed by the online jihadi chat rooms and such images as the traumatizing photographs of torture in the Abu Ghraib prison. Here, the process of jihad has become more important than a collective project of society. Being a jihadi has become “the thing,” rather than building an Islamic state or accumulating wealth by perpetrating racketeering against villagers, as did some former Jihadi Salafi in the 1990s. In September 2007, this fascination with the silver screen war drove a brilliant fifteen-year-old student, Nabil Belkacemi, to commit a suicide attack against a barracks in Dellys, a city near Algiers, and to give himself the war name Abou Moussaab al-Zarqaoui, after the name of the highly media-visible leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

It appears that these young people are recruited in mosques on the basis of their desire to “do something” and then sent straight off to radicalizing training camps for three to six months with a hope of fighting in Iraq. Without being too sure of what they are getting themselves into, a few realize too late that they have been taken hostage and will be expected to launch suicide attacks in Algeria. It is telling that the trucks used in AQIM suicide attacks since 2007 have been found with the windows welded shut to prevent any last-minute defection by the driver.

Abdel-Qahar, the son of Ali Benhadj, is a good example of the transition from voicing radical political demands, as the FIS did, to existing only through jihad and international visibility, as AQIM advocates. Abdel-Qahar migrated from the political *minbar* (the chair from which the imam preaches in the mosque) to the jihadi bush. He is famous for having preached to a rapturous crowd in Algiers, at the age of five, about the creation of an Islamic state, dressed in a white qamiss (a long shirt worn by men), pointing his finger, and reciting the profession of the faith. In 2006, at the age of nineteen, he went underground only to reappear on Arabic Al Jazeera television, in battle dress and holding a Kalashnikov.



Besides this new generation of young people who have been radicalized by their violent environment and who find in jihad a way to escape the impossibility of functioning politically at the national level, Algerian jihadism has been invigorated by the rereadicalization of about 200 GIA and GSPC repentants who, once pardoned or out of prison, went into hiding and joined AQIM. After the declaration of the Civil Concord Law in 1999, only those leaders of the GIA and the AIS who had negotiated directly with the army were able to reconvert (often into business). Those excluded from the post-conflict clientelistic networks instituted after the civil concord continue to be subjected to police control or to encounter difficulty in receiving their promised monthly pension from the state (around 12,000 dinars, or 120 euros). Their social reintegration has also been complicated by the mistrust or hatred of their neighbors, often the victims of terrorist acts, who cannot accept seeing these repentants enjoying a peaceful life.

## **The Global War on Terror and the Obstruction of Political Pluralism**

In evolving into AQIM, the GSPC has also tried to contribute to the post-September 11 international support the Algerian army has received in its struggle against terrorism. Indeed, one of the paradoxes of the resurgence of this form of Jihadi Salafism has been the strengthening of the Algerian army through cooperation with the U.S.-led “war on terrorism.”

Since 9/11, the United States has considered Algeria an important partner in this fight against terrorism. Algeria’s experience with violence has enabled it to assume the mantle of “expert” partner for the United States in the fight against terrorism and major player in the region. In a message for the inauguration of the new U.S. Embassy in Algiers in May 2008, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice even praised Algeria as a “champion of regional and international security.” Rather than building a political Maghreb (the Arab Maghreb Union, central to the resolution of conflicts in the region, continues to be a dead organization), the United States has expressed a preference for the consolidation of a security-oriented Maghreb, designed to facilitate its presence in the region.

Algeria, therefore, is trying to position itself as a leader in the quest for this new regional security identity, in particular to challenge the privileged role played by Morocco in relation to the United States. Algiers has had no problem accepting a bilateral partnership with Washington in the war against terrorism; an office of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation is scheduled to open in Algiers before the end of 2008, and the Algerian army regularly benefits from American training. However, the Algerian government has refused to accept the possibility that the emergence of AQIM could present an opportunity for the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) to expand its presence on Algerian soil.

This AFRICOM project, announced by the George W. Bush administration in February 2007, officially consists of establishing a stronger U.S. military presence in Africa to “better focus its resources to support and enhance existing U.S. initiatives that help African nations” and to “to help address their security and related needs.” In 2007 Algeria, as a sovereign state, expressed its refusal to receive AFRICOM on its soil (which Morocco had declared itself ready to accept). The fear in some Algerian circles of power was that this initiative could allow a U.S. military base to serve as a point from which to control Algerian oil, which is mostly concentrated in the southern part of the country. This refusal also reflected the unwillingness of powerful Algerians to see this U.S. presence challenging their privileged trade partnerships with other countries, notably China and the European Union.

Some observers of Algerian political life suspect that the episodic reappearance in the Sahel region of groups more or less linked to AQIM, notably in the kidnapping of tourists, reflects the desire of certain army members to have privileged relations with the United States in order to convince President Bouteflika to review his policy on the U.S. presence in southern Algeria, particularly concerning the oil markets. In fact, the appearance of the GSPC and later AQIM in the Sahel coincided with the questioning by President Bouteflika of his partnership with the United States in 2005. At this time, the president terminated a number of contracts that had been granted to American oil companies, whose taxes then increased considerably. The status of American oil interests was thrown into question in July 2006, when the law on hydrocarbons adopted a year and a half earlier was modified to cancel the oil field concessions made to foreign companies, a measure meant to favor the setting up of American companies. By utilizing the threat of AQIM in the Sahel, it was charged that certain army members were also preparing for the return of the United States to the region through AFRICOM—the charge being that certain leaders would profit handsomely from the U.S. share of these exploitations.

The new presence of AQIM at an international level is also the direct result of the new postconflict political configuration in Algeria. With the country’s income from oil higher than ever, divergent interests rose up at the heart of the regime and objected to any renewal of governance in the direction of more pluralism or negotiation with the opposition, which might have provided a way out of the violence. The relations of Algiers with Washington reflect this instability of the decision-making processes in Algeria and are for the most part due to the conflict of interests over oil revenue. In the absence of strong, transparent leadership, the risk of terrorism and violence continues to regulate Algeria’s foreign and national policies.

On the national level, the security policies of the Algerian state continue to obstruct the development of a possible pluralistic political system. Since 1992, Algeria has been under a state of emergency, decreed to prevent the FIS from coming to power after the legislative elections, which allows the government to



continually postpone any political normalization or pluralization. According to the Algerian government, this state of emergency will only be lifted when the threat of domestic terrorism has been removed. This situation has allowed the government to limit the activities of numerous labor unions, to refuse licenses to various opposition parties (such as the Islamist party Wafa, led by Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi; the Union for Democracy and the Republic, led by Amara Benyounes; and the Democratic Front, led by Sid Ahmed Ghazali), and even to gag certain associations for victims of terrorism and for human rights that were opposed to political amnesty for war criminals and terrorists. The legitimacy of President Bouteflika is closely linked to the fact that he is perceived by the population as the man who “brought peace back to Algeria.”

Though this security-oriented legitimacy did allow the upper echelons of government to consolidate their position at an international level in the early 2000s, it is now being increasingly challenged by national public opinion—specifically because terrorism persists. In the absence of transparent elections, pluralist political dialogue, or at the very least an equitable redistribution of the country’s oil and gas riches, the state is finding it difficult to invent sources of legitimacy other than security, especially among the young. Since the late 1990s, promoting Da’wa Salafism has been tolerated and often encouraged by the Algerian ruling elite as a way to contain young people’s discontent and decrease their antistate feelings.

## Da’wa Salafism: An Antidote to Violence?

Da’wa Salafism is a network-based social movement, rather than a political party, that was first introduced in Algeria in the 1920s by Tayeb al Oqbi, a member of the Algerian Muslim Ulema Association who had spent some time in the Hijaz. Like all Salafi movements in Algeria, Da’wa Salafism gained strength with the Islamic revival movement that developed during the 1930s in reaction to colonial domination and the resulting loss of identity. But soon the movement divided, with one part turning toward Algerian nationalism and eventually leading to political Salafism. The other part of the movement, inspired by Saudi Wahhabism, focused instead on *da’wa*, symbolizing the need to preach, purify, and re-Islamize society. This apparent depoliticization deeply transformed the usual relationship between Islamist actors and the state. Following scholars’ advice to be respectful of the state—which was mainly rooted in Wahhabi scholars’ consensus on allegiance to their Saudi rulers—they condemned any political use of Islam and placed themselves as orthodox actors, satisfied with the official Islamic character of Algerian institutions.

Da’wa Salafism was strengthened during the 1980s by the numerous young Algerians sent by the Algerian government to Saudi Arabia to study the Islamic sciences and who returned to teach in their country. Saudi-trained- or inspired preachers such as Ali Ferkous, Azzedine Ramdani, Lazhar Sounayquirat, and

Abdelghani Aouissat are the main figures in this movement in Algeria. They all maintain close ties to Saudi and Algerian religious institutions. A more popular Algerian Salafi outside Algeria is Abdelmalek Ramdani, an imam in a mosque in Saudi Arabia who was forced into exile by the threats of radical Islamists opposed to his nonviolent and pro-state views. The influence of these preachers is increased by the authorization to teach Salafi dogma, the *ijaza*, granted to them by Saudi Wahhabi scholars. They teach lessons in Algerian mosques under Saudi influence and issue fatawa on a whole series of issues concerning daily life, often to young Algerians who contact them on their mobile telephones.

This form of Salafism gained ground in the 2000s because of disappointment with the politics engendered among young Algerians by the violence of the recent past and by the FLN's continuing domination of the political scene. Since 1999, the government has no longer allowed new political parties to form. This gap is now filled by Da'wa Salafism, which relies on popular associations rather than political parties, reviving the old system of unofficial Islamist associations that prevailed during the 1970s and 1980s when the FLN was Algeria's only party. Few Algerians now believe in the country's election process—only 36.5 percent officially bothered to vote in the May 2007 legislative elections. Many regard the legal Islamist parties, such as Hamas and Islah, as *khobzistes* (from the Arab word *khobz*, bread, meaning those who only want to earn their bread) that are only interested in power. Young Algerians in particular have thus turned their backs on politics, and adherents of Da'wa Salafism are investing their effort in forming a network of organizations that help their members lead a pure life based on the original precepts of Islam and at the same time find their place in society.

Da'wa Salafism rejects all political activities. Its members consider the electoral system and the concept of the political party to be Western imports that make no sense from an Islamic point of view. They consider those who engage in party politics to be *hizbi* (literally, partisan, but with a strong negative connotation) and responsible for the *fitna* (discord) that is dividing Muslims. Their criticism of politics has become even stronger in the wake of the bloody experience of FIS-type political Salafism in the 1990s. A famous statement by one of the main Salafi scholars, Nasir ad-Din Al-Albani, emphasizes that “nowadays, it is a good policy to abandon politics.” Rejecting politics, they turn for guidance to religious scholars as keepers of a knowledge that is above partisan divisions (this is the reason they are called “scholarly Salafi”). Because many Da'wa Salafi scholars are employed by the state in Islamic universities or mosques, the role they play ensures that Da'wa Salafism remains neutral in practice vis-à-vis the state, even if it rejects its secular content in theory.

### **Salafism as a Way of Life**

The number of followers of Da'wa Salafism has literally exploded during the last decade. Its followers, located mainly in big cities like Algiers or Constantine but

also found in little rural enclaves, together set up communities of Salafi families and gradually build Salafi neighborhoods through an intrusive but nonaggressive strategy. Most of the adherents are young Algerians between fifteen and forty years of age who feel let down by the political Islam of their elders. The conditions for membership in these Salafi groups are uncomplicated. There is no need to attain a high level of university, religious, or political education. The required knowledge is easily acquired. Numerous Internet sites propose ready-made fatawa, advising on the way to eat, to dress, to vote or not, to enter into alliances with other Islamic organizations, and so on. The religious television channels of the Gulf captured by Algerian satellite dishes allow young Algerians to further familiarize themselves with the doctrine of Wahhabi Salafism. Salafi religious literature is easily available and, most important, very affordable. With about 20,000 religious titles imported every year from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Syria, Wahhabi Salafi literature is monopolizing the market for religious material and spilling over beyond the immediate circle of its sympathizers, notably by offering free books in mosques.

Although the legal Islamist parties like Hamas and Islah largely reject the membership of these youth, considering them both insufficiently educated and too visible with their *niqab* (full face veil worn by women) and *qamiss*, Da'wa Salafi groups not only welcome them but also provide them with membership in a community. By going to the right mosque or visiting the right Internet sites, these adherents can gain friends, find people to marry, and obtain help in finding an apartment or starting a business. The solidarity created by Da'wa Salafism is not based on a common political affiliation but on membership in different small networks, notably in mosques and trades.

Political and Jihadi Salafism failed to achieve power through either the political party system or violence. Learning from this experience, the members of Da'wa Salafi groups allow this young “terrorism generation,” as they call themselves, to experience a “soft” rejection of the Westernized aspects of Algerian society without entering into violent conflict with their milieu. They are not ready to pay the price of new violence and see attempts to rely on Islam in challenging the state as an utter failure. Their goal is simply to carve for themselves a space where they can live in the image of an ideal Islamic society. They neither obligate people to join them nor openly criticize the lifestyles of other Algerians. However, they restrict their resources only to the benefit of their peers—contrary to the Islamist movements, they do not become involved in charity initiatives. They do not openly exchange their views with other non-Salafi people, but instead communicate through small groups, through which they try to gradually transform the common pluralist mosques into Salafi ones, mainly by appointing a Salafi imam and funding the maintenance fees.

In addition to providing a reference point and sense of belonging for disenfranchised young Algerians, preaching Salafi groups have also attracted a number of former political Salafis seeking a new home since the outlawing of the FIS in

1992. A number of Jihadi Salafis, disillusioned by the reconciliation policy, have also swapped their weapons for the businesses and commercial networks offered by the preaching Salafi groups, notably in connection to the Gulf region.

Finally, the Da'wa Salafi movement has been strengthened by the arrival of some Muslims from Europe, both European Muslim converts and born Europeans of Maghrebi origin, who are attracted by the possibility of a new Islamic way of life in a community enclave, separate from the rest of society. Algeria's economic boom and its French-speaking Salafi scholars make it more accessible than Saudi Arabia to young European Muslims who do not speak Arabic. Algeria also seems more attractive to them than Morocco or Tunisia, where Da'wa Salafism has been severely repressed since the recent terrorist attacks in those countries.

### **Da'wa Salafism and the Algerian State**

The scale of the Da'wa Salafi movement is not unduly worrying to the Algerian state. On the contrary, it represents a means of channeling the discontent of Algerian youth with their difficult living conditions and high level of unemployment in a nonthreatening direction by allowing them to earn wealth. The Algerian state largely allowed them to prosper economically through business networks. Instead of being integrated politically, as the other Salafi and Islamist movements asked, they have been integrated economically by the redistribution of oil wealth. They have become clients of the state rather than citizens asking for accountability or political competitors asking for power sharing.

As they clearly stated in many interviews with the author of this paper, the adherents of Da'wa Salafism want above all to be left alone to practice their religion and way of life in peace, with their own schools, commercial networks, and style of dress. The movement is averse not only to violence but also to politics in general, thus giving the state a chance to bury the specter of radical political Salafism. By authorizing Wahhabi-inspired Salafist preachers to preach, the regime feels that it is encouraging the Islamic revival among the young without dissenting political demands. Just as in the 1970s, when the Algerian authorities encouraged the growth of Islamist groups to stifle the leftist opposition, the Algerian government now sees nonengaged, apolitical Da'wa Salafism, with its massive presence in mosques and universities, as an antidote to the influence of political Islam and the return of the FIS. Furthermore, this brand of Salafism also provides ready theological justification for the condemnation and repression of terrorism.

Since 2007, the ideological struggle led by the Algerian government against AQIM-type terrorism has relied heavily on the preaching in Wahhabi-controlled mosques. The government's minister for religious affairs, for example, organized nightly discussions led by preaching Salafi imams on the topic "Islam is tolerance" in mosques during the month of Ramadan 2007. The Algerian government has also recently commissioned Abdelmalek Ramdani, the above-

mentioned leading Algerian preacher living in Saudi Arabia, to issue counter-fatawa denouncing AQIM's jihadi ideology. These fatawa are to be broadcast in the mountainous areas where jihadis operate. In January 2008, Radio Quran also broadcast statements by Ramdani and Abdelghani Aouissat denouncing suicide bombing and *takfir* (the practice of condemning Muslim groups as infidels) as practices contrary to Islam.

The book *Fatawa l-'Ulama al-kabir fima Ouhdira min Dima fil-Jazair* (Fatawa of the Great Religious Scholars on the Blood Spilt in Algeria), by Abdelmalek Ramdani—a collection of statements by the Wahhabi Salafi theologians Albani, Ibn Baz, Al Otheimine, and Rabi' Ibn Hadi—is the epitome of these preachers' condemnation of both political and Jihadi Salafism. On one hand, they denounce the origin of the FIS as an armed movement and also call on Algerian jihadis to repent. On the other hand, they glorify the Algerian revolution that led the country to independence and considers it as Islamic—a political concession to the need to coexist with the Algerian state and accept the Algerian national identity. Through this acceptance of the Algerian state and the national identity it has promoted since independence, the Algerian Da'wa Salafis are de facto positioning themselves to become a potential political force through their control of the process of social re-Islamization among the young people of Algeria.

Although Da'wa Salafism is ostensibly apolitical, in the Algerian political climate where openly partisan activity is curtailed, the social networks of which the movement consists are in the end political. The Algerian government is aware that Da'wa Salafism is a social force with enormous political potential—greater than openly political Salafism ever had. The government tolerates Da'wa Salafism, because this movement supports the reconciliation program and is ideologically opposed to jihadism and the FIS, but the government also keeps a close eye on the movement, questioning its national loyalty and its ties to Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs regularly bans certain works of Wahhabi Salafi literature—more than 1,000 Salafi titles were banned from the 2007 book fair—forbids imams from preaching wearing clothing that is not Algerian—that is, Saudi clothing—and occasionally accuses Salafis of distorting the Quran. During Ramadan, it even accused them of breaking the fast ten minutes too early.

Nevertheless, even in its present apolitical form, Da'wa Salafism is still an obstacle to President Bouteflika's own project of promoting state Islam. Since his reelection, Bouteflika has sought to reinvest in religion to promote state control. This can be seen, for example, in his use of religious arguments to denounce terrorism, the launching of projects such as the construction of the \$3 billion Algiers Great Mosque, the promotion of Islamic morality, and the inclusion of Hamas alongside the FLN and the National Democratic Rally in the Presidential Alliance. The two projects are in competition, and it is unclear yet whether Da'wa Salafi organizations will maintain their autonomy and influence thanks to their roots in civil society or whether they will be absorbed into the state project.

## Conclusion: Renewing Politics in Postconflict Algeria

The failure of the Algerian government to politicize and then institutionally and democratically neutralize the radical Islamist voice of the 1990s led both to a rejection of politics—as embodied in Da’wa Salafism—and to the use of jihadi violence as a tool for political negotiation. The presence of the three Salafi groups—political, Jihadi, and Da’wa—reveals a persistent, deep-seated problem, which embraces issues that go beyond the interest in political Islam, namely, the absence of any true political pluralism, blocked by a preeminent struggle against terrorism since 1992. The secular parties and legal Islamist opposition are weak, and as a result there has been no renewal of the political elite through elections. Salafism mainly represents a reaction to the powerlessness of the nonviolent democratic opposition and should not be considered a possible political substitute for the democratization of the Algerian system.

The historical evolution of Salafism reveals its inability to think of itself as existing in a pluralistic system, which it denies through the idea of the Islamic state, the use of violence, or the rejection of politics. However, Algerian Salafi movements also reveal the need for the international community to rethink the place of radical Islamist movements. To international observers, it is the political participation of hard-line Islamists like the FIS, and their rejection of a democratic and secular state, that led Algeria to the violence of recent decades. Democracy promotion thus should focus on reinforcing a secular state, getting hard-line Islamists to change their views on democracy, and encouraging elections with an insistence that parties accept the democratic rules of the game. But it is precisely the marginalization of radical actors from modern state institutions and the lack of politicization among the base that allowed the emergence of the various Salafi tendencies in the first place. The illusion among international actors of promoting moderate, depoliticized networks is the main reason behind the failure of democracy promotion in the Arab world. Keeping young people away from politics will not prevent their radicalization. Furthermore, the struggle against terrorism needs to isolate radicalism as a way to act and not radicals as closed, off-center groups.

Profiting from their rejection of violence, members of the preaching Salafi, especially the younger ones, should be invited to engage in democracy promotion initiatives promoted by international actors. By allowing Da’wa Salafism to develop, the state has found sizable support for its politics of reconciliation and has periodically stemmed the tide of Islamic political radicalization. However, the religious radicalism element within Da’wa Salafism, along with its rejection of mainstream social values and any perspective of coexistence with the rest of the population, could prove problematic in the future, particularly if the living conditions of young people do not improve rapidly. Algerian policy makers should also try to integrate them into representative, democratic institutions and to promote a feeling of belonging and full citizenship toward them.



Renewing peaceful, nonviolent forms of political participation appears to be a major challenge for political Salafism and the former actors of the FIS. With the coming presidential elections of April 2009, how can the issue of their political reintegration be resolved? Political Salafism has no fixed political essence and can evolve according to the political framework made available to its adherents by the state—ranging from Islamic nationalism to jihadism to support for national reconciliation. Political Salafism has understood that if it wants to return to the political stage, it needs to abandon its obsolete references to an Islamic state and begin working toward an alliance with the ruling elites. The old FIS utopian ideology needs to be tempered by being faced with real political issues reflecting the daily lives of Algerian citizens. Instead of offering an example of ready-made protest ideology in a context where Algerians are marginalized by the closure of the political field, former FIS followers should be invited to join democratic political parties and work on developing pragmatic political skills. They should be disembedded from a binary opposition to the state and learn about political pluralism and regular politics.

Finally, the evolution of the GIA and GSPC types of Jihadi Salafism into an organization like AQIM has added an international dimension to the drama lived out in Algeria and enabled the state to become more efficient militarily. However, this globalization of Jihadi Salafism also signified the state's failure to offer real security to its citizens at the national level. Cooperation with international partners should be reinforced, but the Algerian government should make sure that these partners respect the sovereign interests of its population. Indeed, civil society groups should not be subjected to national and transnational security policies, but rather should be allowed to offer their own views.

What Algerians have suffered in the name of terrorism is still barely acknowledged. It is noteworthy that very little public communication is heard from victims and that civil society is only just beginning to take a timid interest in the question of terrorism, notably through the taboo issue of compensation for victims. The Algerian government should carry on with its efforts to support the victims of terrorism and empower civil society groups in their struggle against violence. Making the reconciliation process more transparent and fighting against the criminal, corrupt environment of the national economy that allows the survival of terrorist groups will also avoid the risk of reradicalizing repentants and strengthening the remaining armed terrorist groups.

It is true that the climate of terror has not prevented the Algerian government and its American and European partners from maintaining full control over a flourishing oil industry. However, the country's never-ending violence has already allowed the continuation of a state of emergency that still regulates and limits the Algerian political arena. The security pressure has failed to totally defeat terrorism but has cost civil society very dearly. In this environment, other forms of normalized violence are appearing, with no particular ideological framework—as seen in the increasing riots throughout the country, in football

stadiums, on the highways, and in the generalized criminality and widespread gangsterism that are growing apace. Social stability and national cohesion are challenged because the Algerian people still do not have real opportunities to engage in a process of dialogue uniting civil, political, and military actors. With their own relationship to the state, Algerian forms of Salafism reveal the deep need to switch from the security-oriented politics that has been in force for sixteen years to new modes of participatory politics.

The memory of the civil war is today crystallized by the different strains of Salafism in their various approaches toward politics. There is certainly a need to renew political dialogue and cooperation among all the actors in postconflict Algeria. The Algerian state's primary requirement to find international partners for the economic reform needed to rebuild the country will not be fulfilled without strengthening its postconflict political institutions. The renewal of the political elite and the consultative, peaceful involvement of the postterrorist young generation are crucial to the country's stability. For the past twenty years, it has been mainly the use of violence that enabled Algerian political elites to emerge—from a colonial system of extreme violence, to the postindependence supremacy of the FLN "revolutionary family," and finally to the jihadi logic of Salafism. Models of citizenship-based participation and political negotiation based on professional competencies far removed from any kind of jihadi or violent basis for legitimacy still need to be developed in today's Algeria.







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