

## Algerian hijack: Look for British geopolitical hand

by Hussein Al-Nadeem and Dean Andromidas

The Christmas 1994 hijacking of an Air France airliner in Algiers must be seen as an attempt by the Anglo-French "Entente Cordiale" faction to sabotage the Clinton administration's policy of trying to calm down the Middle East and Africa by encouraging negotiations between groups in conflict. By bringing the Algerian civil war directly into Europe, the Entente Cordiale crowd (named for the cozy relations between France and England which began in 1904 and led into the First World War), also aims to use the Algeria crisis as an issue to divide Europe against potential American and German initiatives for peace through economic growth—just as the same Anglo-French partners have done with the Serbian war against Bosnia.

Four gunman posing as workmen boarded and seized an Air France airliner at Algiers international airport on Dec. 24. The Airbus A300 was bound for Paris and had over 200 passengers. The hijacking ended Dec. 26 when the plane was flown to Marseille and was subsequently stormed by French anti-terrorist commandos. The raid left four terrorists dead and several passengers and others wounded, but allowed all the passengers to be freed. It was later claimed by Interior Minister Charles Pasqua that the terrorists had brought explosives on board with the intention of blowing the plane up over Paris. The French government then suspended all land and sea links with Algeria for an indefinite period.

In France, the relative success of the operation at the Marseille airport has strengthened the hard-core Entente Cordiale group, which has been moving in concert with the British against President Clinton's pursuit of relations with Germany as the leading economic and political power in Europe. Occurring in the midst of the French presidential election campaign, the whole affair has inflated the "danger of Islamic fundamentalism" and "security" into one of the main issues of the campaign—a huge distraction from the

real issues which face France.

The British hand was revealed in a little-noticed article in the Arabic daily *Al-Arab*, based in London. Quoting unnamed government officials, *Al-Arab* reported that Britain recently advised the Algerian military-backed regime against initiating a dialogue with Islamic groups opposing the government. In this effort, British officials were said to have intensified their contacts with their Algerian counterparts, offering them aid in the economic and security fields. This was the first published report exposing Britain's pursuit of a policy course directly colliding with that of the United States in this region.

As Lyndon LaRouche observed in a Dec. 28, 1994 radio interview, the British "do not want peace in Algeria. They have been fighting the United States on this issue. The United States wants peace, or wants a process that leads to stability. The British are fostering and running, actually, together with their French partners, that war of genocide against Bosnians and others in the Balkans, also, as part of their geopolitical anti-Islam operations. The same anti-Islam combination, as you might call it, which the British and French are running in Bosnia, with the help of [U.N. Secretary General] Boutros Boutros-Ghali, is behind the Algerian 'terrorist' attack on the Air France plane."

### 'No evidence of FIS-terrorist links'

Since early 1994, the Clinton administration has been holding talks with representatives of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in both Germany and the United States. In March 1994, for example, Mark Parris, the acting assistant secretary of state for Middle East and Europe, testified before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Africa subcommittee. Asked about possible FIS links to terrorism in Algeria, he replied: "We have felt it important . . . to distinguish between those groups' activities and the activities of elements who had been

active within the umbrella of FIS before the crackdown on its activities in January of '92. We have looked very hard, we have found no evidence indicating that the FIS leadership abroad is currently in any way controlling the activities of those groups who have come responsibility for the acts you have referred to."

The U.S. effort has been aimed at bringing the FIS, who were the big winners in the 1992 elections in Algeria but were outlawed after their victory, into the government. The Algerian crisis has turned into a civil war, with a death toll of over 20,000 so far. Meanwhile Algeria continues to suffer under the weight of a \$26 billion foreign debt and an International Monetary Fund "stabilization program" that has led to massive cuts in government subsidies, particularly for food.

While on a European tour last summer, President Clinton discussed the Algeria situation with French President François Mitterrand and other European leaders at the Naples meeting of the Group of Seven industrialized countries. This topic also came up during the President's personal meeting with Pope John Paul II. The pontiff has been pursuing an Algerian policy parallel to that of the United States. Most recently U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau, Jr. told a meeting of the North Atlantic Council that the United States supports a policy of dialogue. He made a similar statement on French radio only last Dec. 2.

Just before the hijacking, the State Department's top Arab specialist had been holding talks with French Foreign Ministry officials. Those talks resulted in a shift in French policy. Foreign Minister Alain Juppé made statements calling for a dialogue with the Islamic Salvation Front and authorizing French officials to meet with FIS representatives. Days before the jet was seized, Rabah Kebir, the Germany-based FIS spokesman, told *Al-Arab* that he recently met with French Foreign Ministry spokesman Jean Charles Marciani. He described the meeting as fruitful but "noisy," and added that Marciani said that the French government is ready to mediate national negotiations between the FIS and the Algerian government. The U.S. for its part agreed to support other Algerian democratic parties and to dissuade the opposition leaders from making strong anti-French statements. The hijacking has effectively overturned all these efforts to temper the inflamed antagonisms.

Despite the provocation, the U.S. State Department on Tuesday, Dec. 27, repeated its view that France should support a Muslim-led moderate front and press Algeria to set a date for elections.

### **British seek more influence**

British pressure on France to back Algeria's current regime to the bitter end, is consistent with other British moves to intensify their interests in North Africa, traditionally a sphere of French dominance. Last summer, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd made a major speech announcing the naming of a new British ambassador to Algeria. Hurd declared, "We want to keep Britain informed, involved, and

on the spot. We appointed a new ambassador to Algeria this summer for this reason."

According to a senior Algerian opposition source, the new British ambassador, Christopher Donald Crabbie, was named specifically because of his former posting in Paris as an economic adviser, where he developed good relations with the French government. The source added that such a report did not surprise him, since the British are moving with the French in the European Union to counter both German and American policy.

Acting in concert with Britain, French policy under Prime Minister Edouard Balladur and Interior Minister Charles Pasqua has been to support the diehards in the Algerian military while conducting massive security sweeps among the large Algerian community living in France. These operations have led to the arrests of hundreds of Algerians both of Algerian and French citizenship, many of whom have nothing to do with Islamic militant groups.

Despite granting independence to Algeria following a bitter liberation war, France maintains a strong economic and political hold over the country. Many of the hardliners within the military-backed regime whose policy is to "eradicate" the Islamic movement, were actually former French military officers who only joined the Algerian revolution in the closing months of the war. They are known as the "party of France." Some even have relatives who are still French military officers.

The Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which took responsibility for the hijacking, is known throughout Algeria to be a thoroughly infiltrated and manipulated asset of elements of the Algerian security services linked to French and British intelligence which may indeed have created the GIA. It serves as a "countergang" to the regime in the use of terror and counterterror to break the morale and resistance of the political opposition and to undermine the FIS.

Meanwhile, there has been a campaign by the German news media alleging weapons trafficking by the FIS in Germany, charges joined by similar claims from the German federal security services. As a result, recently Rabah Kebir, one of the most senior FIS leaders residing outside of Algeria, was refused permission by the German authorities to attend an Algerian peace conference in Rome sponsored by a leading Rome-based Catholic organization which often reflects the policy of the Vatican. Great Britain also kept an Algerian ex-prime minister who is seeking political asylum in London, from attending the same conference.

However, the German government did rebuff French Interior Minister Pasqua's demand that authorities arrest Kebir and other FIS leaders residing in Germany. Dieter Vogel, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's spokesman, told a press conference that the Bonn government, which officially carries out surveillance of their activities, has no evidence linking Algerian exiles to the hijacking. Vogel also declared that it cannot be said that Islamic foreigners living in Germany are extremists, and that in fact the vast majority are moderate.