

REASONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE "ALGERIA CRISIS". THE ATTEMPTS AT A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN 1991-1995

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Abstract

Algeria's domestic political environment began to change rapidly in 1989 February, after the adoption of the new Constitution, article 40 of which guaranteed the right to form political unions. This democratic process led to the legalization and further strengthening of many parties, including the Islamic.

The purpose of this article is to present the socio-political developments in Algeria, which emerged as a result of the widespread Islamic movements in the country. The systemic crisis in Algeria during this period was one of the most important factors that significantly influenced the spreading of extremist Islamic ideologies in society. The Islamic movement united around the Islamic Salvation Front in a very short time and the latter became the most influential, strong Islamic organization whose primary goal was the Islamization of Algeria. In this context, special emphasis has been required on the role of the army in resolving the Algerian crisis. Due to the peculiarities of historical development, the army had a special role in the political life of the country, it was the only real force that was able to maintain the secular system established in Algeria.

The attempts to resolve the economic, political, and social consequences of the armed struggle launched by the authorities against the Islamists are also studied in this article. The steps taken by the authorities and the opposition parties in the peaceful settlement of the "Algerian crisis" are considered separately. It is noteworthy that despite the fact that the supporters of the Islamization of the country were a huge and influential force, nevertheless, the authorities managed to maintain the established system of the government, preventing the further development of the Islamic extremist movements in the country.

Keywords and phrases: Algerian crisis, Front Islamique du Salut, army, Islam, parties, conflict.

**«ԱԼԺԻՐԻ ՃԳՆԱԺԱՄԻ» ՊԱՏՃԱՌՆԵՐՆ ՈՒ ԸՆԹԱՑՔԸ.
ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ԿԱՐԳԱՎՈՐՄԱՆ ՓՈՐՁԵՐԸ 1991-1995 ԹԹ.**

ԱՐԱՄ ԳԱՍՊԱՐՅԱՆ

ՀՀ Գիտությունների ազգային ակադեմիայի
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Համառոտագիր

Ալժիրի ներքաղաքական կյանքը սկսեց արագ փոփոխության ենթարկվել 1989 թ. փետրվարին՝ երկրի նոր Սահմանադրության ընդունումից հետո, որի 40-րդ հոդվածը երաշխավորում էր քաղաքական միավորումներ ստեղծելու իրավունքը: Ժողովրդավարական այս գործընթացը հանգեցրեց բազմաթիվ կուսակցությունների, այդ թվում նաև իսլամական կուսակցությունների օրինականացմանը և հետագա ամրապնդմանը:

Հոդվածի նպատակն է ներկայացնել Ալժիրում տեղի ունեցած հասարակական-քաղաքական զարգացումները, որոնք ի հայտ եկան երկրում իսլամական շարժումների լայն տարածման հետևանքով: Այս ժամանակաշրջանում Ալժիրում հաստատված համակարգային ճգնաժամը կարևորագույն գործոններից էր, որն էապես ազդեց հասարակության շրջանում ծայրահեղ իսլամական գաղափարախոսությունների լայն տարածմանը: Շատ կարճ ժամանակում իսլամական շարժումը միավորվեց իսլամական փրկության ճակատի շուրջ՝ վերածելով այն ամենաազդեցիկ և ուժեղ իսլամական կազմակերպությանը, որի առաջնային նպատակն էր Ալժիրի իսլամականացումը: Այս համատեքստում հատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում բանակի դերակատարությանը «Ալճիրի ճգնաժամի» կարգավորման գործում: Ելնելով պատմական զարգացման առանձնահատկություններից՝ բանակն առանձնահատուկ տեղ էր զբաղեցնում երկրի քաղաքական կյանքում և միակ իրական ուժն էր, որն ունակ էր պահպանել Ալժիրում հաստատված աշխարհիկ համակարգը:

Ներկայացվում են նաև իշխանությունների և իսլամիստների միջև սկսված զինված պայքարի՝ տնտեսական, քաղաքական և սոցիալական հետևանքների լուծման փորձերը: Առանձին դիտարկվում է թե՛ իշխանությունների, թե՛ գործող ընդդիմադիր կուսակցությունների ձեռնարկած քայլերը «Ալճիրի ճգնաժամի» խաղաղ կարգավորման գործում: Ուշագրավ է,

որ, չնայած երկրի իսլամականացման կողմնակիցները բավական մեծ և ազդեցիկ ուժ էին ներկայացնում, այնուամենայնիվ իշխանություններին հաջողվեց պահպանել երկրում հաստատված կառավարման համակարգը և խոչընդոտել իսլամական ծայրահեղական շարժումների հետագա զարգացումը:

Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ. Ալժիրի ճգնաժամ, իսլամական փրկության ճակատ, բանակ, իսլամ, կուսակցություններ, հակամարտություն:

ПРИЧИНЫ И РАЗВИТИЕ "АЛЖИРСКОГО КРИЗИСА". ПОПЫТКИ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО УРЕГУЛИРОВАНИЯ 1991-1995 ГГ

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Аннотация

Внутриполитическая жизнь Алжира начала быстро меняться в 1989 году после принятия новой Конституции, статья 40 которой гарантировала право на создание политических союзов. Этот демократический процесс привел к легализации и дальнейшему укреплению многих партий, в том числе исламских.

Цель данной статьи представить общественно-политические процессы в Алжире, возникшие в результате широкого распространения исламских течений. Системный кризис в Алжире в этот период явился одним из важнейших факторов, существенно повлиявших на быстрое распространение экстремистских исламских идеологий в обществе. За очень короткое время исламское движение объединилось вокруг Исламского фронта спасения, став самой влиятельной, сильной исламской организацией, основной целью которой была исламизация Алжира. В этом контексте особое внимание уделяется роли армии в урегулировании алжирского кризиса. В силу особенностей исторического развития армия занимала особое место в политической жизни страны, она была единственной реальной силой, способной поддерживать установившийся в Алжире светский строй.

Рассматриваются также попытки решения экономических, политических и социальных последствий вооруженной борьбы между властями и исламистами. Отдельно рассматриваются шаги, которые предприняли как власти, так и оппозиционные партии для мирного урегулирования «алжирского кризиса». Примечательно, что несмотря на то, что сторонники исламизации страны представляли собой крупную и влиятельную силу, тем не менее властям удалось сохранить сложившуюся систему правления в стране и воспрепятствовать дальнейшему развитию исламских экстремистских движений.

Ключевые слова и словосочетания: алжирский кризис, исламский фронт спасения, армия, ислам, партия, конфликт.

Introduction

In 1989 the new Constitution [1, p.101] proclaimed by Shadley Benjedid¹ launched a rapid change in the political system of Algeria. There was a transition from a one-party state government established in the country to a new democratic, multi-party political system. However, further events revealed that Algerian authorities were not ready for their own democratic reforms. The deep-rooted systemic crisis in the country, the inability of the state institutions to solve the country's social problem, the dominance of the clan elite in the economic and political spheres as well, annoyed and disappointed the Algerian society fought for the independence. In such circumstances, the ideology of Islam quickly spread among the society. The only way to solve the difficult social conditions was the creation of an Islamic state based on the principles of justice and equality.

The tendency of politicization of Islam acquired further momentum. The widespread Islamic movement united around the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS)² (Islamic Salvation Front), turning it into the most influential, strong Islamic organization in a short period of time. The spread of the Islamic ideology clearly shows that at the beginning of the 19th century the pro-secular political forces, especially the Front de libération nationale (FLN) (National Liberation Front)³ lost their longstanding, undeniable political prestige, significantly reduced their influence on various sections of society as well. The best example were the local elections in 1990s when FIS with 54% of the vote gained convincing victory, FLN got 28 % [3, p. 43. 4, 205].

Thus, the change of Algeria's political system led to the formation of various Islamic movements and groups. The latter's proactive activity and consolidation became dangerous for the FLN's monopoly and stability. An undisguised ambition of the Islamists to take their place in the government quickly grew into an uncompromising political conflict with the state system, which culminated in 1991 during the parliamentary elections.

Armed conflict for power

In 1991, December 26, FIS won almost half of the seats in the parliamentary elections in Algeria⁴ [5, p.52], after this the cycle of events significantly changed the course of the country's historical development.

After the promulgation of the elections' results, it was obvious that the Islamists would be a majority in the second round of the upcoming elections which would give them an opportunity to change the Constitution and declare Algeria an Islamic state.

The treat of the Islamization of the country induced an army to take active actions. The army officers were a staunch supporter of the secular state, the armed forces were the

¹ 3th President of Algeria (1949-1992).

² Front Islamique du Salut was formed in 1989.

³ Front de libération nationale was formed in 1989.

⁴ Front de libération nationale won 188, Socialist Forces Front (SFF) 25, Front de libération nationale 15 of the 231 seats.

guarantor of that system, besides the army took an active part in the suppression of the Islamic riot in 1989-1990 [3, p.32-35], so they were fairly concerned about possible persecution by the Islamists. It should be noted that the Algerian elite, the Western-oriented intellectuals, and the Berbers had a similar position. A growing crisis in the country, the establishment of the new political realities, the polarization of the society, the secularism of the state, the will to preserve the secular state and the authority, the influence of the armed forces, eventually led to the latter's counterreaction.

In 1992, On the eve of the second round of parliamentary elections in January, Shadley Benjedid, the president of Algeria, dissolved the National Assembly at the request of the Supreme National Security Council, a few days later the military overthrown the president accusing him of collaborating with the Islamists. The governance of the country headed the State High Committee (SHC)⁵ leading by Mohamed Boudiaf [6, p.53]. At the same time, the state of emergency was restored in the country⁶, the activity of the FIS was banned, the leaders were imprisoned.

Thus, the army not only interfered in the domestic political life of Algeria, but also lead the direct authority of the country. After seizing power, the army attacked the Islamist movement unexpectedly arresting, convicting, and imprisoning more than 20,000 Islamist figures [7, p.179]. However, the military's operations did not yield the expected results. The radical Islamists launched a counterattack, which escalated the situation. Armed attacks were launched on various government institutes, there were armed clashes between the army and the police in different parts of the country, terrorist acts were carried out and so on. All this forced the Algerian leadership to change its tactics, from attacking to defending possible facilities and infrastructure of significant importance. The crisis in Algeria entered a new phase, which led to many casualties, bloodshed, devastation, huge economic losses.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the leadership of the National People's Army saw the only way to resolve the situation in the country in rapid, strong punitive actions, making extensive use of the special forces and the army forces. As a result of such actions, the army managed to achieve some success in the fight against Islamist militant groups.

It should be noted that military clashes between the Islamists and the army sometimes resembled a large-scale war. During the attacks, the army openly used not only the heavy artillery but also the air force.

Taking into consideration the fact that the Islamic groups were mostly settled in the populated areas, such practice led to devastation and many casualties among the civilian population, all this led to retaliatory violence in turn. In addition, many Algerians seeking the revenge joined various Islamist groups. Thus, the abyss between the Islamist forces and the Algerian authority was widening day by day.

⁵ The State High Committee in Algeria consists of five people and is endowed with presidential power. It was established in 1992, January 14.

⁶ The State of emergency was canceled in 1991 for the parliamentary elections.

We consider it possible that if the military leadership had decided to launch a large-scale offensive assault, the victory over FIS would have been guaranteed. But in this case, the possible human casualties and destruction would be comparable to 1954-1962. with the losses of the struggle for independence. And it was clear that the Algerian leaders, who had seen the horrors of that war, did not want to repeat the history leading the country in this way for a second time⁷ [8, p.68, 9, p.48].

In addition, we must take care into consideration that the Algerian crisis, which had been lasting for years, was exhausting itself. The majority of the Algerians, particularly the urban population, was "tired" of terrorist acts, massacres, "pacification" of the districts and the cities, assassinations, arbitrary arrests, torture, embezzlement of the generals, threats and so on [7, p.184]. For the reasons above, in 1993 there was a need to find other ways to resolve the situation.

The beginning of the process of peaceful settlement of the "Algerian crisis"

Considering these circumstances State High Committee considered it possible to achieve national solidarity by restoring the electoral system partially, allowing the Algerian society to participate in that process. To implement this idea, the SHC organized an Assembly of National Accord, during which it was supposed to elect a new head of state and to decide the type of governance for a three-year transitional period, during which it was planned to prepare for parliamentary and presidential elections. Initially, it was decided to elect the head of state by compromise between the SHC and its pro-government forces on the one hand and the Algerian political parties represented at the Assembly of National Accord on the other hand.

However, the authorities failed to involve the opposition in the Assembly, they could not find common ground with either the moderate Islamist movement or the democratic forces. As a result, the conference intended to resolve the situation was ignored by almost all Algerian political organizations and parties, both Islamists (including moderates) and supporters of a secular state. However, it was held in the capital of Algeria in 1994 January. The conference had a predictable ending in such circumstances. The new President of the Presidential Council was simply appointed by the Supreme National Security Council [5, 63-65]. Thus, the sixth President of Algeria was declared the Minister of Defense Liamine Zéroual [9, p.50].

It should be noted that the appointment of Liamine Zéroual would not lead to a significant change in the policy of the military elite. At the same time, Zéroual was a compromise candidate who was accepted and perceived by both the military and at least by part of the Algerian society

The appointment of the army's representative in the public office did not set a precedent for the country. Due to the historical development's peculiarities, the army

⁷ According to official data 27 thousand people died in 1992-1997 during Algerian crisis, according to Algerian military and western researchers death toll rises accordingly to 40-45 and more than 100 thousand.

played a special role in the political life after the independence⁸ [1, p.82]. The real power in the country was more often concentrated in the hands of army commanders, especially in the first years of independence, who defined the most important social and state issues [10, p.157].

The president Liamine Zéroual's one of the first promises was to solve the Algerian conflict politically. However, Zéroual didn't manage to keep his promise. One of the main reasons hindering the negotiation process was the fact that there were two opposing camps around Zéroual. Not all the members of his government were the military, they were in favor of a peace process, they were supporters of a peace process. On the other hand, the president's inner circle, mostly high ranking military officers, were supports of a hard line. This dichotomy prevented any dialogue with the Islamists [3, p.66]. According to the latter, FIS would not make concessions and would not renounce the violence and the terrorist acts. Nevertheless, Zéroual tried to start a dialogue with the leaders of Islamist groups through personal meetings, but that was to no avail. After that Zéroual focused on recovering the economy.

Zéroual rose to power in a time when Algeria was in the throes of crisis, the country was in a though economic crisis. Zéroual was forced to turn to various international financial and credit organizations in order to end and stabilize Algeria's sharp economic decline. The latter demanded that Zéroual, as a precondition for the loan, resumed dialogue with the parties involved in the Algerian crisis and initiate reconciliation efforts with Islamists and democratic parties.

Taking into an account these requirements, Zéroual yielded and took steps to isolate those who were opposed to negotiations with the Islamists contributing to the creation of a positive atmosphere. In the end, Zéroual managed to get financial aid from the international organizations [3, p 66]. In 1994 and in 1995 Algeria got \$1.8 billion loan from International Monetary Fund [6, p.62] which provided an opportunity to upgrade the army's armament [11, p.148].

It should be noted that the Algerian opposition was also looking for the ways to resolve the crisis. In late 1994 and in early 1995 the representatives of the most reputable opposition parties, met twice in Rome through the mediation of the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio [5, p.73]. After long and difficult negotiations, the parties, including the Front Islamique du Salut, adopted so-called "The platform for a peaceful and political settlement of the Algerian crisis." The platform called to recognize FIS as a legitimate political party, prepare and hold democratic elections, deprive military from the political arena as well [12, p. 98].

Although the demands of the opposition coincided with the plans of Zéroual in some respects, the government had a negative attitude to both the participants and the results of the meeting and declared that they were against the agreements reached in Rome [7, p. 187-189].

⁸ Houari Boumediene, Shadley Benjadid and Laimine Zeroual, the 3 presidents of Algeria, were high-ranking militaries before becoming a president.

The authorities' position can be explained by a number of circumstances. First, the fact that the meeting of the opposition organizations in Rome and their common position was already a matter of concern. At the same time Z  roual wanted to solve the crisis in the country on his own terms, he and his supporters had their vision and the plan, so they didn't need someone else's guidance. The elite of Algeria immediately rejected the "Rome Platform" considering it as an attempt of external influence on the domestic political life of the country [13, p.48]. In addition, we must take into account the position of the army, which was not inclined at all, at least during this period, to leave power, leaving it to the Islamists.

At the same time Zeroual was holding secret negotiations with one of the leaders of FIS Ali Benhadj to carry out his plans, he was persuading him to end the violence and start a dialogue. However, they did not yield any positive results [3, p. 67]. Ali Benhadj either did not want or could not have influence on the activities of the FIS.

Various political forces immediately criticized the attempts to reach an agreement with the Islamists. The representatives of democratic circles (Rally for Culture and Democracy, Socialist Forces Front) strongly argued against the authorities' "flirtation" with radical Islamists and blamed them for trying to share power with the Islamists [10, p. 165].

However, Liamine Zeroual's negotiations with the Islamists didn't last long. It soon became clear that the latter were not going to give up the armed struggle. Radical Islamist groups intensified their activities, accompanied by violence and terrorism (political assassinations, explosions, kidnappings, etc.) during 1995.

As the wave of violence escalated, Liamine Zeroual was forced to turn to the security forces again, but this time the main strike force of the authorities was not the regular army, but the police units with special anti-terrorist training. In 1995 their number was reaching 60.000 [14, p. 232].

The country was in need of a radical change in political life. There was only one way to resolve the situation. The Algerians should have the right to vote. Liamine Zeroual chose to legitimize his power through presidential elections which took place in 1995 November. It should be noted that the decision to hold the elections received a negative response from both extremist Islamic forces and some democratic parties, declaring them in advance neither independent nor democratic. The latter called on the Algerians to boycott the elections and not to go to polling stations. The Armed Islamic Group of Algeria threatened to kill anyone who voted [7, p. 191].

The candidates in the election were Liamine Zeroual (independent), Mahfoud Nahnah, (candidate of the Islamist Movement of Society for Peace (MSP), Said Sadi (candidate of the secularist Rally for Culture and Democracy), Nour al-Dine Boukrouh (candidate of the Party of Algerian Renewal (PRA)). Taking into the consideration the Islamists' threats tens of thousands of reservists were conscripted a month before the election to ensure the security of the polling stations [5, p. 74-75]. Thanks to the measures taken, the presidential election took place without any serious obstacles.

The results of the presidential elections in Algeria were predictable for the majority, Liamine Zeroual secured 61 percent of votes, Mahfoud Nahnah won 25 percent, Said Sadi and Nouredine Boukrouh won 9 and 4 percent⁹ [4, p. 69, 15, p.236]. In this context, it should be noted that the ISF was barred from running in the elections, which ensured Zerual's victory.

Conclusion

Thus, the election of Liamine ZerOual not only legitimized his presidency, but also showed once again that the army continued to maintain its influence, remaining the only well-organized and functioning institution. In addition, two important realities emerged as a result of the elections. The low ratings of secular opposition parties and organizations suggest that these parties did not have the confidence of voters to solve the country's problems. The moderate Islamists were in the same situation. The majority of Algerians did not associate peace and sustainable development in the country with them at least in this period. At the same time, it should be noted that the policy adopted by Liamine Zeroual was perceived by some as a guarantee of dialogue At the same time, it should be noted that the policy adopted by Liamine Zeroual was perceived by some as a guarantee of dialogue, peace and stability in the country with the Islamists, peace and stability in the country.

The presidential elections in 1995 concluded the most difficult period of Algerian political development. Liamine Zeroual and his supporters succeeded in establishing effective cooperation between the military and moderate Islamists, which was a precondition for building a stable political system.

⁹ It is notable that despite the calls to boycott, the elections in 1995 had higher voter turnout (75%) than in 1990 and 1991.

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