Does the media promote terrorism?

Television media coverage of a hijacking and France's political agenda

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1. Introduction

This is a preliminary study related to a larger project concerning threat image politics and official security agendas (Eriksson & Noreen 2002). My focus is on the media's role in shaping a country's agenda of threats and, in this case, France's official security agenda and non-state actor's use of spectacular events to attract the attention of the media.

The relations between the media and political decision-making is by no means a new subject, but in recent years the role of the media in international relations has become an ever more prominent issue and the media are often attributed with impressive influential capabilities, as reflected in the "Vietnam syndrome." In a survey done in 1995, twenty years after the war in Vietnam, while top military and civilian leaders no longer blamed the media, 64% of American military officers still believed that "the news media coverage of events in Vietnam harmed the war effort" (Taylor 1997:109). Many political practitioners believe that the media encourages terrorism. The assumption is that media, and in particular television media, by giving extensive media coverage to terrorist acts, provides the perpetrators of these highly mediatised acts with influence over the public. This influence ranges from acknowledging or magnifying their capacity to use violence to potentially giving the perpetrators actual political legitimacy.

The general question is under what circumstances television media coverage leads to an increase in the influence of actors that use spectacular violence. Because, international television media has increasingly become the main target audience for actors that publicly threaten or commit spectacular acts of violence, the focus is on efforts to internationalise a conflict through Western media, which usually implies getting the attention of, and trying to influence or change, Western policy. To explore this question a case study was done of the French television media's coverage of a plane hijacking that took place on Christmas Eve in 1994. Thus, the more specific question addressed in this paper concerns if the highly mediatised plane hijacking in 1994 may have led to a change in France's political agenda related to security issues, and whether this can be seen as an indication of an increase in political influence for the perpetrators.

The image analysis has been done by summarizing and analysing French television news broadcasts directly related to the hijacking and also by compiling descriptive statistics with the help of the "*Hyperbase*" database at the *INAtèque* media centre in Paris. Other news media and secondary sources were also used. To provide a framework, the paper begins with a basic theoretical discussion on the media's role in conflict and in international relations. This is followed by a description of France's security policy around the time of the hijacking followed by the rest of the case study, which includes the French television news media's image of the hijacking and the main actors involved. Before the final summarising conclusion the case is also considered from the point of view of the Algerian regime's interests.

2. Media, conflict and IR

During the last couple of decades the media has become an increasingly pervasive part of life and political dynamics (e.g. Taylor 1997; Strange 1995; Rosenau 1990; Kaldor 1999). Many have argued that the advent and consequences of the communications revolution, reinforced by the widespread acceptance of democracy as the most desirable form of political organisation, have resulted in the increased importance of the public dimension of political communication (e.g. Wolfsfeld 1997; Nye 2001; Nacos et al. 2000). Political decision-makers at national and international levels increasingly take into consideration, and cater to, national and international news media. In democratic, Western countries it is particularly obvious that decision-makers and even the military rely on, and cater to, the media (e.g. Nacos et al. 2000).

In a consolidated democracy public opinion plays a central role in state decision-making and television news has the widest public reach. While it is difficult to state the exact nature of the relationship between the media and political agenda-setting, state decision-makers assume the importance of the link between the media and public opinion. Political actors and decision-makers rely on some form of sanction from the public.[1] Mass news media is a key conduit for communication with nationwide audiences and, therefore, has the potential to mobilise very large audiences. At a mass level political communication is far from interpersonal in character and requires a mediator, the mass media (Taylor 1997). Furthermore, according to some

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[1] Public opinion is described as, "those opinions which an individual can or must display in public in order to avoid social isolation." According to this definition there are specific tendencies pertinent to this relationship. The first, which is most relevant to this study is that, "individuals become aware that opinion is strengthening or weakening on a particular issue, often guided in part by messages in the media." Furthermore, "individuals fear isolation, which causes them to heed the emerging opinion in the society" (Rusciano 1998:5).

scholars, the speed of political mobilization is greatly increased by the use of electronic media and the effect of television, radio or videos on non-reading publics cannot be over-stated (Kaldor 1999:7).

The communications technology of today creates a climate where the human mind is exposed to modes of political influence that are more invasive, insinuating, and sophisticated as well as varied and immediate (Price & Thompson 2002:1).[2] Television media reaches a wide audience; one that is not limited to the decision-making elite. This is certainly true when it comes to international politics, which in reality is usually only the concern of a very small percentage of the Western public (Mowlana 1997:33). However, the more media coverage an event receives the more decision-makers are likely to be receptive to the public's opinions and expectations (La Balme 2000:277).

Studies reveal that French decision-makers are very receptive to the news media and "perceive them to be the main operational source of public opinion –far more than opinion polls, elites, and elected officials" (La Balme 2000:277). In other words, French media is considered the main operational source of public opinion and is therefore a key strategic concern for government decision-makers. In a series of interviews conducted with French diplomats and other employees at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Quai d'Orsay*), and more specifically with those directly involved in relations with the Maghreb countries, there was a clear consensus among those interviewed as to the role played by the media in the management of international affairs (Charillon 1991:27).[3] According to the Quai d'Orsay's Director of Information in the early 1990's, "*l'opinion publique, c'est les médias*". In other words, "the media *is* public opinion" (Charillon 1991:30).

The mass media provides both an arena for political conflict and is also an actor itself with the capacity to influence political communication (Wolfsfeld 1996). In this sense the media consists of a specific dimension in which the more symbolic or psychological aspects of a conflict are played out and where threats are communicated. This is particularly important for asymmetric conflict involving non-state actors. The great majority of violent conflicts today are fought between state and non-state actors as opposed to inter-state conflicts. Non-state

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[2]So while, the Zapatistas in Mexico may not all have had unlimited access to the mass media, the internet access they did have and the way they chose to use it resulted in significant international support and recognition of their cause.

[3]"*Les responsables de la politique étrangère et de la politique des pays du Maghreb s'accordent tous pour conférer aux médias un rôle essentiel. Il en résulte qu'ainsi médiatisée, diffusée, l'opinion constitue un "paramètre" -voir obstacle- à gérer.*" (Charillon 1991:27).

actors are much weaker militarily and therefore will usually prefer to avoid outright battle because of this disadvantage. They are not only militarily weaker but also often lack political recognition or legitimacy. The difference, however, is that although non-state actors will still be at a disadvantage in relation to a state they can still compete and influence political dynamics in the non-military dimension of a conflict.

According to certain scholars such as Nye, "reputation becomes even more important than in the past, and political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility" (Nye 2001:357). Both the increase in the access and the reach of the mass media as well as the fact that most conflicts today are asymmetrical, suggests that the media plays an increasingly important role and that getting the attention of the media is an important way of influencing political dynamics. Political practitioners and journalists often express this view as reflected in the discussions concerning the "CNN-effect" and the "Vietnam syndrome," in which political decision-makers are assumed to be forced into changing policy as a result of mass media coverage (Taylor 1997). On the other hand, researcher of media and political communication concludes that the mass media most often has close ties with decision-making elites, meaning that in a given society political power can usually be translated into power over the media (e.g. Paletz & Entman 1981; Chomsky & Herman 1988; Wolfsfeld 1997).[4]. Meaning that while many seem to believe that the media is all powerful studies of, for example, the "CNN effect" have shown that the relationship between the media and political agenda-setting is a complex relationship (Robinson 2002; Jakobsen 2000). Furthermore, media audiences rarely act as uncritical passive sponges, news is filtered through people's belief systems, previous experiences and knowledge. Although, it may be difficult to assess the media's effect on audience perceptions, most agree that the media does has an important agenda-setting function, and that both governments and non-state actors cater to and seek the attention of national and international mass media for their to communication strategies. The question is when and to what extent can the media, and actors who target the media, influence official political agenda-setting.

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[4] State actors are usually considered more credible and, therefore, more newsworthy. "When asked about their choice of sources most journalists mention two criteria, namely, authority and credibility" (van Ginneken 1998:88). Credibility is very much based on the authority of an individual and gives established actors such as political elites and decision-makers an advantage. One consequence of this is that journalists are sometimes reluctant to question the validity of information and the credibility of state leaders. Because decision-makers are often the most important sources of information, they have the ability to control the availability of information (van Ginneken 1998).

Method and sources

A combination of primary and secondary sources was used to gather information about the plane hijacking and perceptions reflected in the media and elsewhere. In order to capture the framing used by the media the main bulk of the primary sources consists of French televised news reports from December 1994 and of the Algerian regime newspaper *el Moudjahid*. Descriptive statistics have also been compiled from the *Hyberbase* database of the *INAtèque* located in the *Bibliotèque nationale de France* (BNF). In addition to this official statements from French decision-makers at the Quai d'Orsay Foreign Ministry have also been used.

The television news programs studied includes the main French TV channels TF1, France 2 and 3 from when the plane was hijacked until a week later. Because of the availability and accessibility of the data from *Hyperbase* database at the *Biblioteque nationale de France* (BNF), descriptive statistics could also be extracted and complied for longer time periods. The *Hyperbase* "depôt legal" database includes the titles, topics and subtopics of all television programs aired in France from 1995 and onwards.

3. France's security agenda, the media and the GIA Christmas Hijacking

When the Soviet Union disintegrated and in response to the Iraq war in 1991, the French government felt that there was a need to reassess its national security policy. In order to take into account the recent changes related to the end of the Cold War, the French government replaced the "*Livre blanc sur la défense*" from 1972 that outlined France's security policy, with a new *Livre blanc*. The purpose of drafting the new *Livre blanc* was to reorient France's security and defence policy to the new international state system and this included outlining the most important potential threats to France. As was customary, the text of the 1994 *Livre blanc* served as a backdrop to plan defence and security policy for the coming 15 to 20 years, including forecasting future resource needs and threats. The *Livre blanc* is divided into four sections and nine chapters that are dedicated to the main identified security concerns. The four sections include a description of the post-Cold War strategic context, France's strategy and defence capacities, France's defence resources, and finally a section on defence and society. Although the new *Livre blanc* included several important changes, including adapting the role and operational priorities of the army, overall security policy was still based on a traditional perspective of defence and security where states are the primary actors. Non-state actors are

mentioned but were not seen as primary actors or threats.[5] The language used in the *Livre blanc* is at times very general and at times specific. When issues relate to defence of the state within a system of state and to alliances with various intergovernmental organizations France's policy is clearly defined, while policy is unclear when it comes to identifying new threats that are not connected to states and armies (Méchain 1999).

A dominant preoccupation in the *Livre blanc* is the preservation of global stability, or more accurately the preservation of the status quo, among states. This suggests that its contrary, i.e. "de-stabilisation," is perceived as a primary threat to France's security.[6] This observation runs parallel to France's long-standing traditional vision of national security and defence. France's contemporary defence policy can be traced back to the end of the 2nd World War and, more specifically, to former French President de Gaulle (Sundberg 2003:4). Contrary to many other Western countries, there has been a relative consensus among French decision-makers over the years when it comes to the nation's defence and security policy, which in large part can be attributed to the dominance of de Gaulle's ideas. This general perception of security policy places the nation-state at its centre and prescribes a multipolar and a balanced state system as a prerequisite to defend France from outside threats. During the Cold War the objective was that France should have a strategic platform that placed it between the USA and the Soviet Union. Today, this has been adapted to the post-Cold War context by prioritising the increase of Europe's political influence to counterbalance the USA and other up-coming states such as China (Sundberg 2003:8). Intergovernmental cooperation to deal with threats resulting from globalisation is also an important objective, but less well defined.

At the time of the Christmas plane hijacking in 1994, post-Cold War non-state related threats to national security were was not clearly defined and were given lower priority. This was particularly the case concerning internal national or civil security, which is the area of France's defence policy that deals with threats also related to terrorist attacks. While one of the four sections of the *Livre blanc* is dedicated to "defence and society" this relates primarily to the necessity to develop relations between the army and society, which includes diversifying defence of the economy, defending the civilian population and developing mutual respect and trust between military decision-makers and representatives of the media.[7]

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[5] "Comprendre la Défense", *Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale* (2002) Paris, Economica, p.97.
[6] Ibid, pp.77-125.
[7] Ibid, p.97.

However, this part of the defence has always had a secondary role, and has often been considered the "poor cousin" of the defence policy family because it has not been allocated with the same level of resources and attention.[8] Furthermore, the formal definition of what constitutes civil or internal security is not clearly stated in the constitution (Méchain 1999).

Robert Entman argues that the definitional void left by the absence of the convenient East vs. West divide has led to new opportunities to influence political dynamics. This argument relates specifically to the media's increased opportunities to influence politics because the definition of what constitutes threats is still open to interpretation (Entman 2000:13). However, by using the media as an intermediary, opportunities for non-state actors to influence perceptions of threat and perceptions of who uses violence justly or unjustly, may also have increased. In other words, groups such as the Algerian *Group islamique armé* (GIA) had more opportunity to influence France's political agenda also because of the uncertain state of official definitions of non-state threats to France. This, together with France's lack of a more developed civil security policy, suggests that terrorist attacks that acquire extensive media coverage can potentially have important consequences for the French governments security agenda.

3.1 Christmas Eve 1994

On Christmas Eve, 1994, four armed men hijacked an Air France plane that was about to take off for Paris from the Houari Boumediene airport in Algiers. There were 227 passengers and 15 Air France staff members on board. The hostage takers demanded that the two most well-known leaders of the *Front islamique de salut* (FIS) be released and that they should be allowed to take off and fly to France and speak to French journalists.[9] The hijackers first killed an Algerian policeman who tried to stop the hijackers and later executed a Vietnamese diplomat and, finally, a French citizen who worked as a cook at the French Embassy in Algiers.

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[8] Ibid, p.182.
[9] The FIS is the Islamic opposition party that won Algeria's first democratic elections in 1991. When the results of the elections became known the Algerian military stepped in, annulled the election results and outlawed the FIS. The FIS went underground and an armed struggle ensued.

The first demand in the official statement of the *Group islamique armé* (GIA) was that France should cut and boycott the 'material' and 'immaterial' support to the Algerian regime.[10] The Christmas hijacking started on Algerian territory at the international airport in Algiers; the plane had not yet left the ground. Algerian authorities initiated negotiations with the hostage-takers. The hijackers had several demands. They not only demanded the release of historical leaders of the FIS, Ali Belhadj and Abassi Madani, and several other political prisoners, but also demanded that France cut all support to the Algerian regime and that France should take a neutral position by not 'internationalising' the Algerian conflict. They also demanded that France should give material restitution to Algerians for the losses during the war of independence (Boumezbar & Djamila 2002:228).

The political ties between France and Algeria are complex and still riddled with painful memories of the war of independence. Only very recently, in 1999, did France officially acknowledge that there had been a war in Algeria, between 1954 and 1962, at all. France is also the Western country with the largest Muslim population, the great majority of which originate from the Maghreb countries and Algeria in particular. French opinion regarding the Algerian conflict is best described as ambivalent. While the Islamic opposition party had won democratic elections, the religious connotations and inflammatory rhetoric of the FIS leaders did not ring well for Western ears. The French government did not support the FIS but at first seemed cautious about openly taking sides.

While France was initially reticent about open involvement in Algeria, but by 1994 the French government had openly sided with the Algerian regime's "eradication" policy after several attacks on foreigners by Islamic extremists and, in particular, on the French consulate in Algiers. The conflict in Algeria was characterised by intensifying violence and allegations of rampant human rights abuses, by both the regime and the extremists, created concern also among international observers and NGO's. But there was very little information as to who was doing what and it was difficult for outsiders to obtain first hand knowledge.

France was not the only Western state that preferred a military regime to an Islamic state in Algeria, and it actively sought to help the Algerian regime by procuring large loans for

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[10] The GIA is an Algerian group of armed Islamic extremists that initially fought with the sanction of the FIS, but eventually the FIS tried to distance itself from the GIA because of their indiscriminate use of violence against civilians.

Algeria. In early April 1994, the Algerian government sent a 'letter of intent' to the IMF outlining the reforms that were to be undertaken to further liberalisation of the economy to qualify for an IMF loan. Two days later the Algerian dinar was devalued by 40.7 percent. This was strongly criticised by the FIS in a communiqué, which warned that Western countries should beware of the "risks" involved by co-operating with the Algerian regime. In reply, the French Foreign Minister declared that "France is prepared to contribute" to help Algeria economically. Less than two weeks later Algeria was officially accepted into the *Club de Paris*[11] and the European Union decided to grant the Algerian government a loan of 150 million ECUs. Later on April 27th, the French Minister of Finance turned to the G7 to ask on behalf of Algeria for more economic support, which resulted in an extra 200 million ECU in loans.

An important aspect of the French government's justifications for supporting the Algerian regime and its fight against the armed Islamic groups was based on the idea of maintaining stability, which dealt specifically with the spread of the Algerian conflict. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time declared that, "the economic card, is the only card" left to play by the international community in order to avoid "the destabilisation" (although violent conflict had already erupted) of Algeria. This declaration was made just after they had facilitated the decision of the EU to add an extra 200 million ECUs to the loan already granted to the Algerian regime a couple of weeks earlier. [12] Although officially the aid was economic, it had a significant political dimension. During the same month in an interview for the journal *Le Point*, Alain Juppé declared that he feared "the effect of contagion" in the rest of the Maghreb region if the state was taken over by an "extremist regime".[13] In May, Alain Juppé travelled to Washington to lobby for more economic aid in order to defend against the resulting "incalculable consequences" of an acceptance of the 1992 election results. In other words, the renewed *raison-d'être* of the Algerian military as the primary actor capable of quelling the violence of the armed Islamic groups, after the annulment of the election results in 1991, was in large part financed and sanctioned by the international community through lobbying by French decision-makers. According to Césari, France's support of the Algerian military regime's eradication policy took away the legitimacy, not only of the armed Islamic

[11]The Paris Club is an informal group of official creditors whose role is to find co-ordinated and sustainable solutions to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor nations. Paris Club creditors agree to reschedule debts due to them. Rescheduling is a means of providing a country with debt relief through a postponement and, in the case of concessional rescheduling, a reduction in debt service obligations. See, www.clubdeparis.org.
[12]"Chronologies", *Monde arabe: Maghreb, Machreck*, (1994), July-Sept(145), p.74.
[13]*Le Point*, (15th of April 1994).

groups, but more importantly, of any real opposition to the military regime (Césari 1994/1995:184).

According to Algerian officials it was their responsibility to solve the drama as they saw fit. This was, at least officially, the opinion of the French authorities too, who mentioned on several occasions that they respected Algeria's sovereignty, thus precluding any interference, although they sympathised deeply with the families of the hostages.[14] Insisting upon Algerian sovereignty underlined the authority and autonomy of the Algerian state and that the regime was a credible and capable actor that honoured system stability. However, the French insistence on non-interference suddenly changed, after a third hostage was killed, and instead they put pressure on the Algerian regime to authorise a take-off, thereby handing over the responsibility to the French authorities.

It was not the deaths themselves but rather the identity of the third victim, which seem to have played a pivotal role. Unlike the other two passengers who were killed (and also unlike most of the passages on the plane) Yannick Beugnet was not Algerian and did not have duel nationality. He was French, and an employee at the French Embassy in Algiers on his way home to celebrate Christmas in France. According to French television news at the time of the crisis, "after the execution of the young Frenchmen the Prime Minister […] insisted that the Algerian President give the authorisation for the plane to take off, in fact...he demanded it. *That is the key moment in the hostage taking"* [my italics].[15]

On December 26th the plane landed at an airport in Marseilles and the crisis ended after a spectacular military operation where, a French special task force (GIGN) boarded the plane, killed the four hijackers and rescued the remaining passengers. The hijacking and rescue was continuously filmed broadcast to a mass television audience. Extra news broadcasts and news reporting on all the main channels was dominated by the story for weeks.[16] Despite the seemingly phenomenal success of the operation, a day later the French government cut all diplomatic ties with Algeria and requested that all French transport companies cease business

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[14]Prime Minister Edouar Balladur insisted on the "national sovereignty of Algeria and on the authority of the foreign government [Algerian authorities]" stated in news broadcasts at 8pm on channels 1 (TF1) and 2 (France 2) 24th of December 1994.

[15]News broadcast at 8pm on channel 1 (TF1) the 26th of December 1994.

[16] However, this was not the case in the Algerian media, where the event was given relatively little media attention.

with Algeria. This measure was only lifted in June 2000, after lengthy negotiations with the regime.

3.2 French television media's image of the hijacking

From a French perspective the Christmas Eve hijacking is considered as the event that internationalised the Algerian conflict (Césari 1994/1995:176). By hijacking an Air France plane about to take off for France with 242 people aboard, and threatening to kill the passengers unless their demands were met, the GIA managed to capture not only the undivided attention of the Algerian authorities but also the French government and mass media.

Generally speaking the French television media most frequently reiterated official statements. After the victims, French and Algerian government officials are the most often cited sources and seen actors in the television media coverage. But, while French security policy and its focus on stability was prominent in aired official statements the overall emphasis in the media (the most common frame as shown in table 1) related to the safety of the passengers and to Yannick Beugnet especially.

TABLE 1: **Frequency of most common topics and frames in televised news programs of the hijacking**[17]

Episodic Frames:		
Security and liberation of the hostages	63	44%
Chronology of events	18	13%
Profile of armed Islamic groups	5	4%
Diplomatic relations between France and Algeria	3	2%
Algerian domestic politics (conflict)	3	2%
Thematic Frames:		
Life in Algeria for French/Christian citizens is difficult[18]	20	14%
French authorities are taking assertive steps to deal with the crisis	16	11%
Islamic extremism is a threat to France	4	3%
Algerians /Muslims in France are also threatened by extremists	2	.05%
(Other)	(10)	(6.5%)
Total:	144	100%

Source: TV news broadcasts from TF1, Soir 2 and F3 between the 24th to 31st December 1994.

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[17]This includes the main topics and most common frames used, it does not include interviews with experts.
[18]This includes lengthily pieces on the White Monks *(Pères blancs)* and on Yannick Beugnet the French Embassy employee, and does not take into account the length or time spent on each topic.

The victims of the hijacking are by far the most prominent actors in the media coverage. However, with the exception of Yannick Beugnet the third passenger killed by the hijackers, they largely remain anonymous. The cook at the French Embassy in Algiers is the only victim who figures by name in the news titles and, an impressive, five lengthily reportages are dedicated to him and his family who had eagerly been awaiting him for Christmas. Based on this image depicted in the media, it is feasible to assume that French decision-makers would have interpreted the media audience's expectations to be above all concerned with the safety of the hostages (as opposed to the stability of the international system). In this case, the media coverage may have played a role in magnifying certain emotional reactions and also in pressuring the government to act according to the perceived expectations of the media audience. French decision-makers knew what the audience expected, and/or were themselves moved and became more apprehensive of the threat after a French national had been killed.

Algerian authorities had not managed to avoid the assassination of Yannick Beugnet and as a result French authorities demanded that Algeria let the plane take off for France. The Algerian regime reluctantly agreed, despite allegations and recent information that the Algerian regime had already secured the liberation of the hostages.[19]

Winning respect from their own audience's is also an important goal for non-state actors that use spectacular terror attacks to attract attention. As Nacos states,

> Whether a relatively inconsequential arson by an amateurish environmental group or a mass destruction by a network of professional terrorists, the perpetrators' media-related goals are the same: terrorists strive for attention, for recognition, and for respectabilityand legitimacy in their various target publics (Nacos 2002:38).

Assuming that the hijackers were aiming to communicate a message, either as critique to France's Algeria policy or against the Algerian regime, the news media coverage gives very little attention to these topics both in the week following the hijacking and also in the long term perspective (see appendix). Television-news gives very little information about the Algerian regime while at the same time uses primarily quotes from Algerian authorities to describe Algerian domestic politics.[20] This coincides better with the image or strategy that the Algerian regime itself preferred.

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[19] http://www.lematin-dz.net/09052002/jour/la_tele.htm

[20] Few (3 out of 144 titles related to the hijacking between the 24th to the 31st of December) of the many hours dedicated to the hijacking even discussed the Algerian conflict or the state of Algerian society at the

The hostage takers are often mentioned in the media coverage but they themselves never directly address the media audience. Any statements or demands made by the hijackers were communicated via the Air France personnel on board the plane and then communicated to the media through Algerian government authorities. It is known that at least one of the hijackers spoke fluent French and authorities knew the identity of (at least) one of the perpetrators, but in the media they remained anonymous. It is interesting to note that, while government authorities consistently referred to the hijackers as terrorists, news media presenters did not do so until the special task force began the military operation to free the passengers in the last day of the hostage drama. Once it was clearly established that the GIA was behind the hijacking all news channels repeatedly broadcast the same visual images from video archives of crazed looking smiling men with beards showing off their weapons (with a close up of an axe). It would be difficult to argue that this coverage could give any political credibility to the GIA, it could on the other hand magnify feelings of fear among the media audience, which may very well also have been the aim of the hijackers. On the other hand, while Islamic extremism as a threat to France was mentioned in the media, relatively little news coverage was dedicated to this during, and directly after, the hijacking (see table 1). This would suggest that the GIA's threats were not perceived as serious enough or that they chose not to emphasise the threat for other reasons.

3.3 A change in France's official security agenda?

French security policy was not brought up in the media as a result of the plane hijacking. On the other hand, as reflected in the figure 1 below, French security policy did become a major topic towards the end of the year in relation to the metro bombings in Paris, which were also carried out by elements of the GIA.

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time. While there were 5 pieces dedicated to profiling the armed Islamic groups, none mention or attempt to give a profile of the Algerian military regime.

FIGURE 1:

Television programs or subheadings including "securité du territoire" in 1995
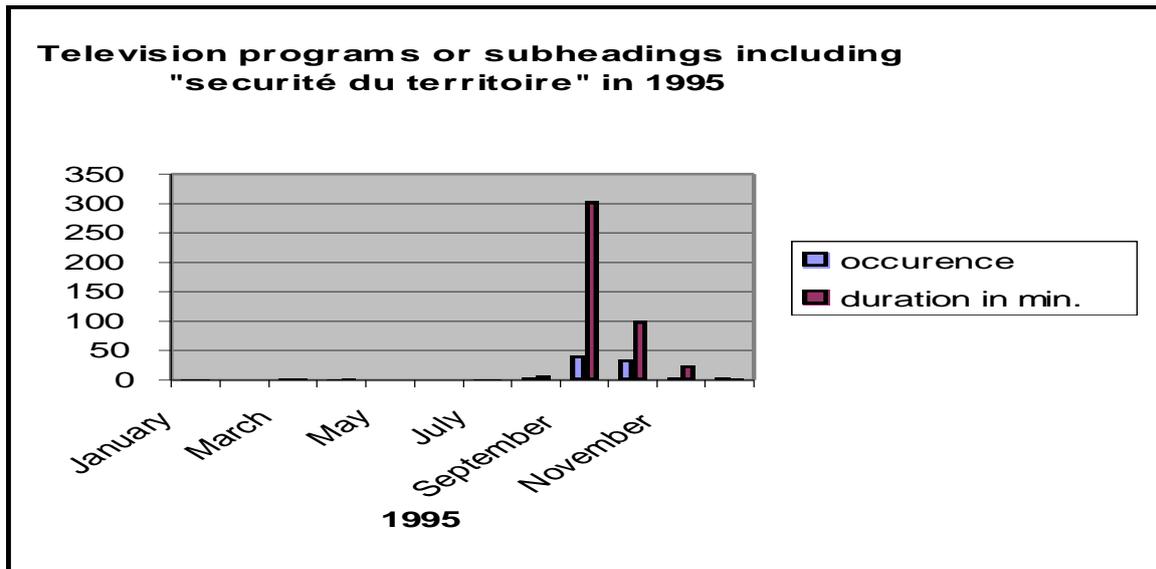
The plane hijacking internationalised the Algerian conflict to the degree that the GIA as an actor was introduced to the Western mass media arena. However, it was only after repeated terrorist attacks on French soil later in 1995 that the GIA seems to have been perceived as a threat to France. This is reflected in figures 1 and 2 where television media coverage of France's security policy *("securité du territoire")* and coverage including the GIA coincide for the first time in a peak in September.

FIGURE 2:

Television programs or subheadings including "GIA" in 1995
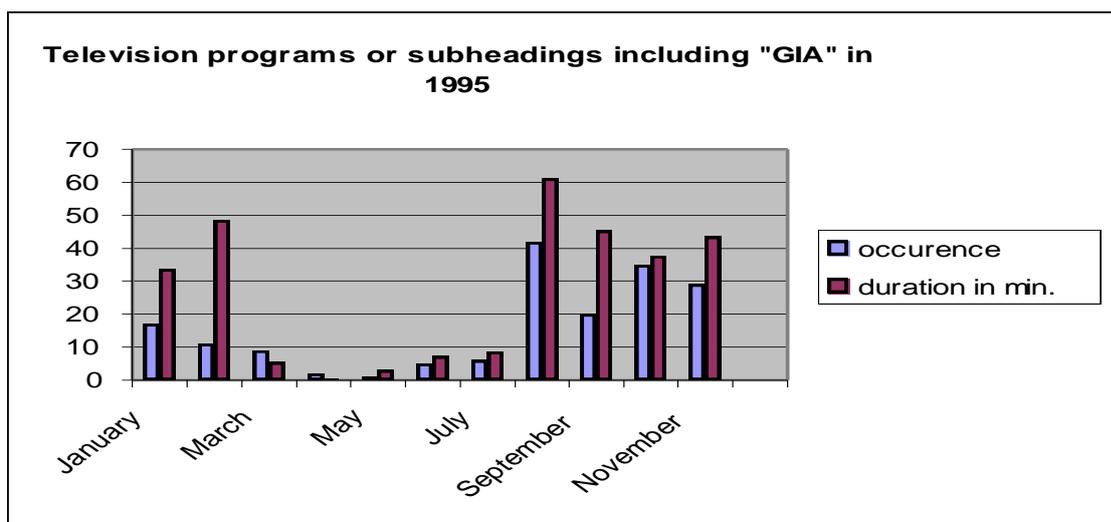
Steps taken to counter the threat of the Algerian Islamic extremist's came about after the bombings that occurred in Paris in the summer and autumn in 1995. The government activated the *Vigipirate* plan, which are extraordinary security measures that were already conceived in 1978 as a response to the threat of terrorist attacks. Although, the exact mandate of the plan is classified, police and gendarmerie activities are reinforced with the aid of the military in the aim of preventing and detecting any terrorist threats.[21] During the whole period between 1995 and 2003 the two highest peaks of television media coverage, consisting of programs or subheadings including the word *"vigipirate",* were in September/October in 1995 and in 2001. The same pattern emerges when considering the media coverage given to issues concerning of interior security, or *"securité du territoire"* as it was most often referred to in the media.

FIGURE 3:
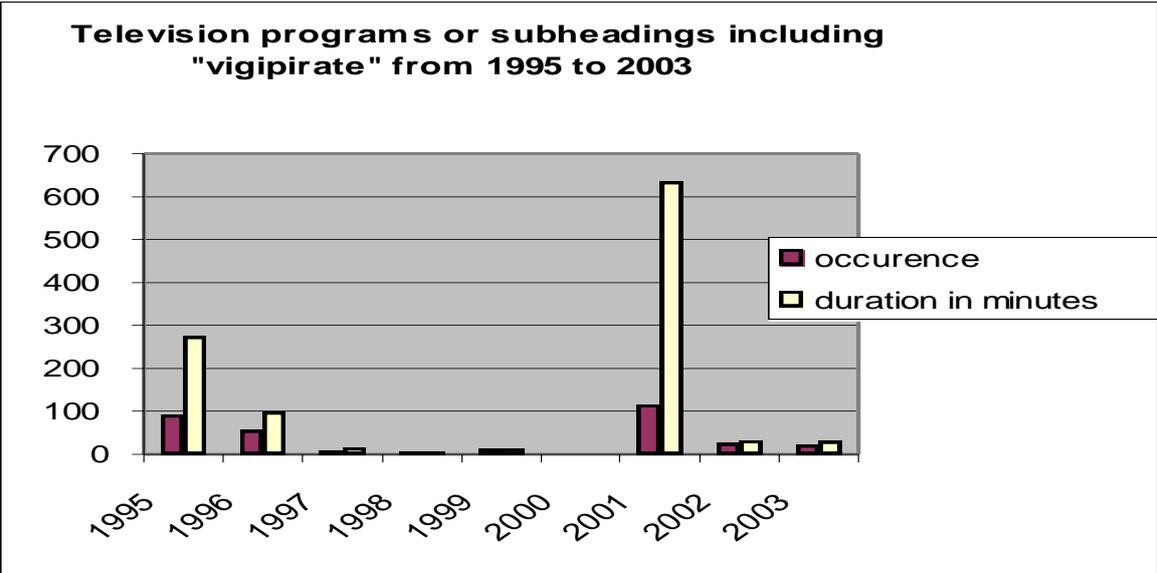
Since 1995 several steps have been taken that give interior security policy a more important role than it had previously. For example, while most parts of the military have been downsized. The Gendarmerie (the Gendarmerie is particular to France and is a military body that carries out police duties) has been scheduled to increase its personnel by 4%.[22] Furthermore, a new council specifically pertaining to interior or civil security was created in 1997. The Council for Interior Security falls under the leadership of the Prime Minister and includes, among others, the Minister of Defence and the Minister of the Interior and the

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[21] http://www.service-public.fr/accueil/vigipirate_definition_impr.html
[22] "Comprendre la Défense", *Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale* (2002) Paris, Economica, p.166.

minister in charge of customs.[23] In other words, measures have been taken that clearly reflect that internal civil security issues have climbed the security agenda ladder and are perceived as more important than earlier, but this cannot be attributed to the 1994 plane hijacking alone.

Although perhaps not directly the purpose of this paper, comparing the two media coverage peaks involving the issue of internal security and of *vigipirate* from 1995 to 2003, helps to give some perspective on the scope of the reactions to the GIA attacks in 1994 and 1995. In both cases, the attacks on the World Trade centre and Pentagon on September 11th 2001 stimulated quantitatively and qualitatively *more* coverage of the attacks than the hijacking and the metro bombings in Paris in 1995.

FIGURE 4:
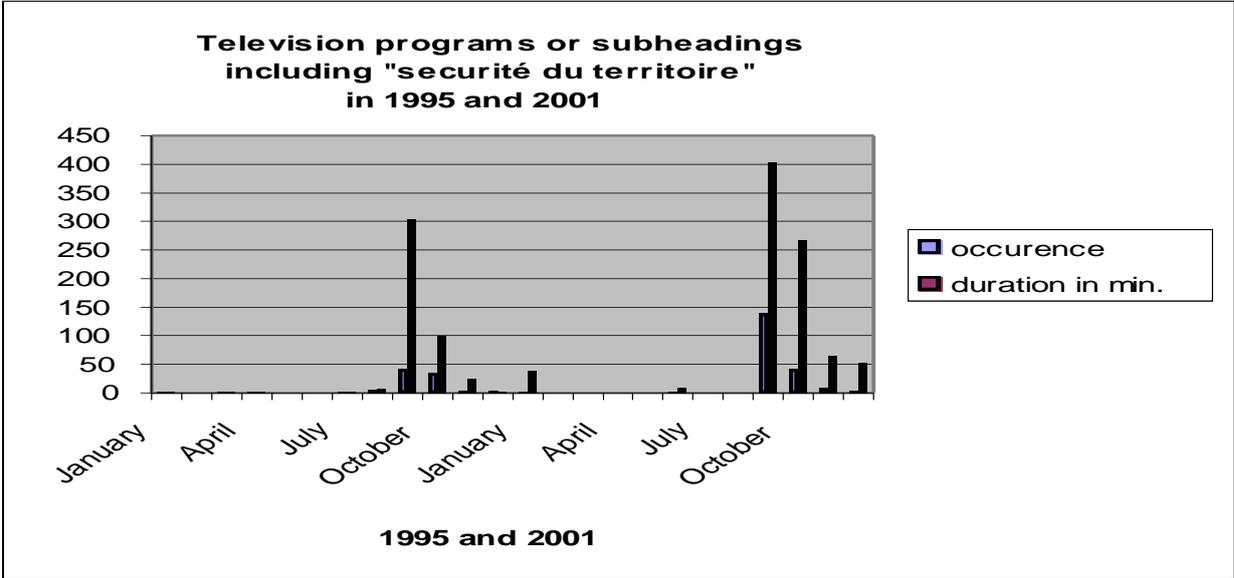
More acute concern is also reflected in specialised publications concerning France's defence policy (e.g. *Defense nationale*, *Revue politique et parlementaire* and publications from the *Institut des Hautes Etudes de Defense nationale*). In other words, while some measures were taken in 1995 through the reactivation of the *vigipirate* plan, the outline of French defence policy as encoded in the *Livre blanc* from 1994 never seriously come under question until the events of 9/11. This seems somewhat surprising considering the large number of immigrants that come from the Maghreb and that France was not targeted directly, as was the case in 1995. The official security agenda as enshrined in the *Livre blanc,* only came under serious

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[23] "Comprendre la Défense", *Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale* (2002) Paris, Economica, p.101.

question from all levels after the USA had been attacked.[24] To conclude, the hijacking introduced the GIA to a Western mass media audience that may not otherwise have known of the GIA, but the hijacking in itself did not have an immediate impact on France's national official security policy. However, this only captures part of the picture because it does not take into consideration of the possible effects of the hijacking in relation to the Algerian political context.

3.4 The Algerian conflict and relations between France and Algeria

French media played a pivotal role in framing the Algerian conflict for international media in general. Another fact that places French television right at the heart of the Algerian conflict is the fact that since the de-monopolisation of the media in the beginning of the 1990's more and more Algerians watch French television. Alternative news sources are particularly important in authoritarian countries were news is heavily censored by the state. According to a field study done by Mostefaoui in 1996, approximately six inhabitants out of ten had access to foreign news channels. Although satellite dishes make other channels accessible, French programs dominate the reception of foreign television (Mostefaoui 1995:27). Furthermore, as a result of the outbreak of violence people have tended to stay at home for security reasons and on average, Algerians watched between 5 and 6 hours of television per day (Mostefaoui 1997:30).

Just before the Christmas hijacking several important developments in the Algerian conflict had taken place. The conflict had undergone a significant escalation of violence, with the new representatives of the regime vowing to completely eradicate the Islamic political opposition with any means necessary. But a significant step had also been taken towards dialogue in the hope of reaching an agreement on how to resolve the armed conflict. The first non-regime attempt to encourage dialogue between the warring parties was taken by the Rome-based Community of Sant' Egidio; a Catholic charity organisation that has been involved in several peace initiatives around the world, such as the negotiations that led to the resolution of the armed conflict in Mozambique.[25] In an attempt to initiate dialogue between the parties of the

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[24] See for example the report for 55th National Session by the *Institut des Hautes Etudes de Defense Nationale*, entitled "Le renforcement de la protection du territoire et des populations doit-il conduire a un concept de defense interieure?" and special issue entitled "Sécurité-Défense: Quelles réponses?" of *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, (2002) vol. 104, no. 1016, and
[25] http://www.santegidio.org/en/ (January 2003)

Algerian conflict, the Sant' Egidio Community sent out invitations to all the parties, including the regime and known military figures such as the former head of the army, General Benyelles. It was the first and only attempt at dialogue that had not been orchestrated or initiated by the regime (Mira 1994/1994:147).[26] The first meeting took place in November 1994 in Rome. Present were, not only representatives of the FIS, but also representatives from all the major political parties that had participated and won the first democratic elections in 1991 and 1992.[27] During the meeting the participants decided that another meeting would be organised with the aim of reaching an agreement. It was to be held a few months later in January 1995. Meaning that, apart from the fact that the hijacking became the most publicised event in the French media of the Algerian conflict,[28] the hijacking occurred less than a month before negotiations were to take place in Rome. The hijacking, therefore, may also have been an attempt to create a focal symbol due to the proximity of the upcoming Rome negotiations.

The Algerian press, more specifically the newspaper *el Moudjahid* closest to the Algerian regime, i.e. the GIA's main opponent, gave considerable attention to both meetings in Rome. Unlike the plane hijacking, which was mentioned only three times between December 1994 and January 1995, the meetings in Rome got considerable coverage. During the same two-month period, the second Rome meeting was the principal front-page story in seven issues of *el Moudjahid*. The reportage of the first meeting that took place in Rome in November 1994 was consistently negative. From the start the entire initiative was framed as a conspiracy with the Community of Sant' Egidio posing as humanists but who were in fact a front for foreign governments plotting to re-colonize and control Algeria. Headlines included wording to ridicule the Community of Sant' Edigio by alluding to the mafia and to the crusades. Headlines included phrasing such as "No! To the Pax Romana" and "The Rome Seminar: the Apostles of Intrusion"[29] Headlines similar to "A breach of Algerian sovereignty and to Algeria's independence," printed on November 22 in 1994, reflect the dominant frame used in reference to the meeting. The Algerian political parties and personalities that participated in

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[26] According to a FIS representative, Abdelkrim Ould Adda, the purpose was above all to agree on a plan to end the armed conflict and establish a framework for how the political conflict could be resolved (Clémenceau 1994/1995:24).

[27] This included representatives of the FIS and almost all of the opposition parties including the largest one, the historical FLN. The FLN being the ruling party that dominated the Algerian government until the political liberalisation of the country. Most Algerian politicians had at one time or another been associated to or active in the FLN. Now it was a political party among others but was still of central importance even if an opposition party. Together, these groups represented approximately 80 percent of the Algerian votes from the first round of legislative elections held in December 1991 (Abderrakim 1994/1995:19).

[28] Although there was only a very brief mention of it in *el Moudjahid*.

[29] *El Moudjahid*, 20th and 23rd of November 1994 and (10th of January 1995).

the meetings were called traitors and 'heretics.' That the regime feared international involvement is clear and was reflected by reoccurring defensive article headlines such as, "The Algerian state has nothing to hide."[30] This is one good indication of how adamant the Algerian military regime was to not allow any external scrutiny, let alone outside involvement, of Algerian political dynamics. The regime also repeatedly refused UN proposals to send observers to Algeria and any foreign journalists who managed to get to Algeria were closely monitored by the regime. FIS leaders were also well aware of the possible implications of international involvement in Algeria. For example, Abdelkader Hachani, a leader of the FIS, declared, "there is a difference between 'internationalisation' and 'international intervention'. The West has the power to force the Algerian military-state to negotiate with *all* representative Algerian political groups".[31]

Although in an internal context the use or threat of violence against civilians was of little concern to the Algerian regime, when the threat of violence was directed against French civilians and broadcast live to an attentive French population, this endangered the regime's relations with the French state. With an unstable semi-anarchic situation in Algeria and the state's uncertain legitimacy, the military regime had a lot to lose if it lost its international credibility as an honourable state devoted to fighting for the "stability" of the international system. Disobeying France's demands also potentially meant that France might question its support to the regime, thereby creating an opening for the Algerian non-state opposition. Both France and the Algerian regime wanted to avoid French involvement. The threat of internationalised violence by the opposition to the regime opened a challenge to the Algerian regime's international reputation and the regime's ability to maintain the violence within its borders.

Given that the Algerian military regime is known to be very violent, it is difficult to conceive that the Algerian military regime might have made a different choice had the hijacking happened on a domestic flight or on a buss in the Algerian countryside. In making the choice they did, they put aside their claim to non-intervention and respect of state-sovereignty while they also avoided the risk of being held responsible for the violent deaths of more than 200

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[30]*El Moudjahid*, (22nd of November 1994), front-page. There is also an image of a Trojan horse with the caption "Sant'Egidio, the torjan horse of intervention".
[31]Quoted from an article in *Le Figaro*, (12th of January 1998). *"il y a une différence entre 'internationalisation' et 'ingérence'. L'Occident a les moyens d'amener le pouvoir à négocier avec toutes les forces politiques représentatives du pays."*

highly mediatised civilian lives. The regime had to sacrifice its image of autonomy to maintain its credibility and not jeopardise relations with France.

In light of the French government's active support of the Algerian regime and the success of the rescue, the decision to cut diplomatic ties on December 27th with Algeria was clearly to signal French disapproval with the Algerian regime or a response to the GIA's threats (Baraki 1995:521). In a recent French documentary, broadcast in 2002, Prime Minister Balladur states that the French government finally decided to intervene because they did not trust the Algerian authorities to resolve the crisis because there were suspicions that the hijackers had connections high up in the military.[32] There are also indications that the French government displayed a more positive and encouraging attitude toward dialogue between all the parties to the conflict and, in particular, to the Rome negotiations that were to be held less than a month later (Césari 1994/1995:191).

While not covered extensively in the French television media the issue of the French government's support of the Algerian regime was brought up and despite the general disapproval of indiscriminate violence used by the armed Islamic groups, journalists nevertheless questioned Alain Juppé (the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time) as to the neutrality of France's role in the Algerian conflict. On the news at 8 pm on channel 1 (TF1), the 27th of December, a journalist asked Juppé, "according to other Western countries France actively supports the Algerian regime?". Juppé's reply was, "the only support is to democracy."[33] On the whole the regime did not lose much reputation in the eyes of the media audience after the hijacking.[34] But, the questions were not so much regarding the legitimacy of the state, as they were questioning the credibility of the military regime and whether supporting an 'eradication' policy really was the best way to contain or resolve the conflict. And, relations between the French state and the Algerian regime were later restored, suggesting that the effects of the hijacking were short-lived.

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[32]Information that may suggest this is that both the brother and father of one of the hijackers worked at the French Embassy in Algiers. http://www.lematin-dz.net/09052002/jour/la_tele.htm

[33]"*d'après les autres pays occidentaux la France soutient activement le regime algérien*" and *"le seule soutien est à la démocratie"*. TF1, 8pm the 27th of December.

[34] The complete lack of credibility of the hostage-takers may have weakened the effects of a possible backlash.

4. Conclusion

While it would seem that the media coverage of the hijacking led to an immediate change in policy after the assassination of Yannick Beugnet, it did not lead to questioning France's official security agenda. The media may have contributed to pressuring decision-makers to prioritise the safety of the passengers instead of continuing to publicly insist on the importance of Algerian state sovereignty. The majority of mass media publics have little interest in international affairs and do not have insight to political dynamics at elite levels. French political decision-makers may have been convinced or satisfied with the importance of prioritising the status quo whereby the Algerian military regime took full responsibility for dealing with and containing armed Islamic opposition, but it is not likely that the media audience would prioritise the Algerian regime's authority over the safety of the hostages. The hijacking in itself was not perceived as a serious enough threat to take more drastic measures, when the *vigipirate* plan was re-activated it was in relation to the Paris metro bombings later that year.

More as an act of obedience than of concern for the passengers, the Algerian regime momentarily and reluctantly paid with the integrity of its state-sovereignty and the exclusive right to communicate with the Islamic extremists. The Algerian regime was highly dependent on the support it got from France and the GIA purposely targeted this inter-state relationship in order to influence the internal dynamics of the Algerian armed conflict. By cutting off all diplomatic relations with Algeria, despite the successful outcome of the crisis, the French government publicly displayed serious doubts as to the credibility of the regime. In the French media the issue of the French state's support to the Algerian regime did come into question. Furthermore, contrary to the wishes of Algerian regime, after the hijacking the French state seemed more positive to the Rome negotiations, which included the FIS. Yet, again this effect seems to have been short-lived and there is little that implies that the GIA were ever considered or recognised as political actors. These varied conclusions suggest that the event did create a temporary opening, which under certain circumstances may have led to more influence for the perpetrators of the hijacking. However, even as television media may have helped to create a temporary opening for the non-state actor to temporarily sabotage relations between France and the Algerian regime, the media could not ultimately control the political consequences of the hijacking. Accessing mass media audiences may be an important strategic tool when trying to create watershed events in a conflict, but media dynamics cannot

adequately explain any long-term political consequences, such as possible changes in France's official security agenda, of such an event.

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Appendix

Frequency of descriptive words in news broadcasts from 1995 to 2000 concerning Algeria

"Algeria/Algerian" + news programs + descriptive words:

	DESCRIPTIVE WORDS:	TOT: 2287	%
(Contexts):	Domestic politics	278	12%
	Foreign relations	28	1%
	Social issues	3	.01%
	Economy	2	.009%
(General Topics):			
	Terrorism	1218	53%
	Islam	1018	45%
	Massacre	280	12%
	Protests	183	8%
	Kabylia	140	6%
	Violence	58	3%
	Security	63	3%
	Repression	26	1%
	Society	29	1%
	Human Rights	22	.9%
	Negotiations	16	.06%
	Revolt/Uprising	12	.05%
	Democracy	10	.04%
	Unemployment	8	.03%
	Corruption	2	.009%

*The 'descriptive words' are words from the titles or sub-titles of the television news broadcasts, or from the summaries describing the topic.
**Note that the descriptive words are not mutually exclusive and the contexts and topics can appear in the same summaries and titles of the broadcasts.

Source: INAtèque. *Hyperbase*, database dépot legal 1995+ *Bibliotèque Nationale de France*