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**THESIS**

**WHY FAILING TERRORIST GROUPS PERSIST:  
THE CASE OF AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB**

by

Richard A. Nessel

June 2012

Thesis Co-Advisors:

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<p>Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is less likely to reach its goal of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria than at any time since its earlier history as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Yet the group endures. The apparent resilience of AQIM relies less on its actual organization than the environmental factors that have allowed it to persist. By co-opting local anti-government groups, Algerian <i>jihadists</i> have long been allowed to live among and collaborate with Berber and Tuareg separatists. Turning to international notoriety to augment its local <i>jihad</i> the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) became AQIM even though an Al-Qaeda link had long since been established. Effective Algerian security measures have pushed portions of AQIM to ungoverned spaces where regional security pressure is less existent and illicit networks are numerous.</p> <p>Potential ends for AQIM rely heavily on Algeria to bear the weight of the effort, whereas Sahelian initiatives are peripheral to a complete end. U.S. strategy should subordinate the Sahel focus, as a Sahelian solution is not sufficient, while an Algerian solution is both necessary and sufficient to AQIM's demise. AQIM represents a lower priority challenge that, if not dealt with properly, can become a major priority or drag on indefinitely, like the FARC in Colombia. The U.S. must strive to meet AQIM with the most appropriate solution with the least force possible to expedite its departure, so that U.S. CT efforts can be engaged elsewhere against remaining Al-Qaeda affiliates.</p>				
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**WHY FAILING TERRORIST GROUPS PERSIST:  
THE CASE OF AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is less likely to reach its goal of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria than at any time since its earlier history as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Yet the group endures. The apparent resilience of AQIM relies less on its actual organization than the environmental factors that have allowed it to persist. By co-opting local anti-government groups, Algerian *jihadists* have long been allowed to live among and collaborate with Berber and Tuareg separatists. Turning to international notoriety to augment its local *jihad* the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) became AQIM even though an Al-Qaeda link had long since been established. Effective Algerian security measures have pushed portions of AQIM to ungoverned spaces where regional security pressure is less existent and illicit networks are numerous.

Potential ends for AQIM rely heavily on Algeria to bear the weight of the effort, whereas Sahelian initiatives are peripheral to a complete end. U.S. strategy should subordinate the Sahel focus, as a Sahelian solution is not sufficient, while an Algerian solution is both necessary and sufficient to AQIM's demise. AQIM represents a lower priority challenge that, if not dealt with properly, can become a major priority or drag on indefinitely, like the FARC in Colombia. The U.S. must strive to meet AQIM with the most appropriate solution with the least force possible to expedite its departure, so that U.S. CT efforts can be engaged elsewhere against remaining Al-Qaeda affiliates.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIS	Islamic Salvation Army
AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CMOCC	Combined Multi-National Operations Coordination Center
CT	Counterterrorism
DoD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FIS	Islamist Salvation Front
GIA	Armed Islamic Groups
GICM	Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
GWOT	Global War of Terrorism
JSOTF-TS	Joint Special Operations Task Force - Trans Sahara
KFR	Kidnapping for Ransom
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSCT	National Strategy for Counterterrorism
NSS	National Security Strategy
OEF-TS	Operation Enduring Freedom - Trans Sahara
OUSD(P)	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
S-AF	Department of State Bureau of African Affairs
S-CT	Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism
S-NEA	Department of State Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
U.S.	United States
USAFRICOM	United States Africa Command
USG	United States Government

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND

### 1. THE THREAT

A lethal terrorist organization, once thought to be on the verge of collapse has re-emerged. In 2010, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was responsible for killing 171 members of the Algerian Police/Military/Security forces, 196 bombings, 43 kidnappings, and 170 other terrorist acts. That year there were 235 civilians killed and 131 civilians injured by terrorist acts by this group.<sup>1</sup> In response the Algerian government reportedly killed 463 terrorists, and arrested 1473 others.<sup>2</sup> However, AQIM still remains.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, AQIM's reach extends well outside Algeria as demonstrated by the most prominent kidnapping of the Canadian Ambassador Robert Fowler in 2009 while in Western Niger and two French citizens in 2011 from Niamey—the capital of Niger. The latest statistics show an increasing frequency and effectiveness of AQIM's threat outside of Algeria and suicide attacks within.<sup>4</sup> What produced this turn of events and why is AQIM now on the upsurge?

### 2. RESEARCH QUESTION

Why do terrorist groups/organizations, specifically AQIM, continue to survive even though they are progressively less likely to meet their stated goals? AQIM has failed to meet its objective to install *Sharia* in Algeria, it garners little popular support inside Algeria, and shows less prospect of reaching its goals of an Algerian Islamic state; yet the organization continues its campaign of terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Crime and Safety Report: Riots/Civil Unrest; Crime; Terrorism," OSAC.gov, April 21, 2011.  
<https://www.osac.gov/s/ContentReportPDF.aspx?cid=10878> (accessed July 18, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Report," 1.

<sup>3</sup> Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Report," 3.

<sup>4</sup> Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Report," and "Algeria 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Crime, Political Violence and Terrorism," OSAC.gov, February 16, 2012,  
<https://www.osac.gov/s/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=11999> (accessed May 19, 2012).

### **3. SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

The scope of this thesis will focus on the factors that allow AQIM to continue to survive and operate. The focus of this thesis is primarily on the factors that influence AQIM's survival. This thesis will draw on other persistent terrorist organizations, but for the purposes of contrast and comparison versus case studies. This scope is meant to draw out a few additional questions: How might AQIM end? What has been the corresponding U.S. strategy towards AQIM and what U.S. strategy would most likely facilitate the end to AQIM? These results may have implications for other persistent terrorist organizations worldwide, as more resources can be dedicated against other affiliates.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the essential factors that allow AQIM, to persist. An immediate goal is to allow U.S. planners to effectively target these factors with a U.S. counter-terrorism (CT) strategy that will be most successful against AQIM. A broader importance is that this sort of analysis can be used as a basis for counter-terrorism strategies worldwide, against other persistent terrorist organizations.

### **4. HISTORY**

AQIM was previously known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), an offshoot of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) that fractured as a result of the loss of public support. The GSPC itself was a failing organization on the decline due to effective Algerian security measures. Although this organization appeared to be on a downward trajectory, under the AQIM banner it has managed to stabilize, and in some areas it is on the upswing.<sup>5</sup>

One key question related to AQIM is, are they really a threat to the United States? Lianne Kennedy-Boudali, in her 2009 testimony before the Congressional Foreign Relations Committee, concluded. “[that AQIM and like terrorist organizations] do not pose a strategic threat to governments in the region.”<sup>6</sup> At this point AQIM does not have

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<sup>5</sup> Diplomatic Security, “Algeria 2011 Report,” 3.

<sup>6</sup> Lianne Kennedy Boudali, “Examining U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Strategy Across Africa’s Sahel Region,” RAND Corporation, November 17, 2009, 2.

the capability or a stated interest in directly attacking the U.S., contrary to Al-Qaeda (AQ) efforts to goad such activity. Furthermore, this problem is fundamentally an Algerian one, because AQIM has the demonstrated capability and stated goal of attacking Algeria. AQIM is not an immediate or direct threat to the U.S., but poses another threat to the U.S..

Again Boudali states, “In sum, AQIM has the capacity to threaten U.S. citizens and U.S. interests in the region.”<sup>7</sup> This threat is resident even though AQIM, “is not in a position to destabilize states of the Sahel.”<sup>8</sup> AQIM is an indirect threat to the U.S. through western interests in North Africa and Europe. AQIM by its affiliation and proximity to the illicit trade routes of the Sahel directly affects the throughput and terminus of illicit trafficking.

There is a link between the criminal human, weapons, drug and material trafficking routes and the illicit routes terrorists use to move foreign fighters, weapons for the *jihad* and their logistics.<sup>9</sup> The linkage allows an Algerian centric organization, AQIM, to influence, infiltrate, and operate well outside of its primary Area of Operations (AO). This makes AQIM capable of affecting a large area (from Morocco in the West to Libya in the East, and Nigeria in the South). As an AQ franchise organization their goals now include attacking western interests within the Sahel.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, AQIM has ample opportunity to use the illicit routes to move operatives into Europe and affect America’s closest allies. This opportunity translates into an enemy operational capability.

Though AQIM may have the ability to operate within Europe and throughout the Sahel, AQIM poses another threat to the west. AQIM, can influence or intercede in the Islamist discussion of the budding governments in North Africa. When the recent events of the “Arab Spring,” mature, structured organizations like AQIM can easily cross-pollinate with the violent Islamist groups of the new nations. This likely scenario, only

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7 Boudali, “Examining U.S. Counterterrorism,” 2.

8 Boudali, “Examining U.S. Counterterrorism,” 2.

9 Modibo Goita, “West Africa’s Growing Terrorist Threat: Confronting AQIM’s Sahelian Strategy,” Africa Security Brief, February 2011: 3–4.

10 Amel Boubekeur, “Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria,” Carnegie Papers: From the Carnegie Middle East Center, September 2008: 9.

requires the pretext of government repression of the Islamist viewpoint to surge to the forefront and demand violent rebellion. This places the new North African governments in a dangerous balancing act. In their pursuit of a more democratic nation, the governments must avoid inciting an Islamist rebellion. The results of just such a swift shift to democracy led directly to the 1992 Algerian Civil War.<sup>11</sup> America's promotion of democracy in the region could be thwarted by these Islamists who wish instead to install a theocracy through violence.<sup>12</sup> Simply put, it is well within the interest of the U.S. to see AQIM fail. How can the U.S. ensure that the dangerous AQIM influence fails to make a leap into regional affairs?

Given the threat AQIM poses, the U.S. must refine its established CT strategy targeting AQIM. This strategy dedicates finite resources in an attempt to counter the threat of AQIM. However, the U.S. is currently engaged in many campaigns against terrorism: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Colombia, the Horn of Africa and Yemen to name a few. This places AQIM's priority as one among a myriad of threats to the U.S. Unless AQIM directly attacks the U.S., CT planners against AQIM are, justifiably, unlikely to receive priority over other more pressing threats. Additionally, the global economic crisis will likely further constrain resources and funding in the future. Therefore, it is a likely assumption that CT planners fighting AQIM are unlikely to receive all the resources that they request. This is why it is an absolute imperative that the CT planners find the most efficient and effective means to eliminate AQIM originated threats to the U.S. In the case of AQIM, an efficient defeat of AQIM would mean conducting a CT strategy with minimal resources and a high likelihood of success. This would allow, limited resources can be further reallocated to other emerging CT threats and foreign affairs priorities.

AQIM does pose a threat to U.S. interests abroad. The threat of the spread of militant Islamism while new fragile regimes are forming is contrary to U.S. foreign policy goals. Lastly and most basic of all, is the need to get the U.S. CT strategy right. With limited resources, it is essential to find the factors that allow AQIM to persist, so

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11 Michael Willis, *The Islamist Challenge in Algeria* (Lebanon: Ithaca Press, 1996).

12 Barack Obama, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," NSS, Washington, DC: The White House, 2010, 37–38.

that CT planners can draft an efficient plan of attack. If this approach is successful, the implications are far reaching within the CT world, and can affect the U.S. approach to other persistent terrorist organizations.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This thesis is divided into four major chapters of research and a final chapter for the purposes of a conclusion and recommended way forward. The methodology for the thesis is to first define AQIM and determine how it has come to be. Using this historical context, AQIM can then be picked apart to determine its traits, weaknesses and modes of operation. Armed with the intricacies of the organization, tangible ends to AQIM can be discussed in terms of necessary conditions and the likelihood of each occurrence. By looking to the possible ends first, current U.S. policy can be then analyzed to determine where success is likely or unlikely. The final chapter brings all of the previous four chapters into one conclusive summary, which is used to make recommendations for a way ahead in U.S. policy to counter AQIM.

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## II. ISLAMISM IN ALGERIA AND THE EVOLUTION TO AQIM

### A. ALGERIAN ISLAMISM

Islamism<sup>13</sup> has a long history in Algeria, but it has been marred in the past 20 years by the deaths of 100,000 to 200,000 citizens killed in conflicts with religious roots.<sup>14</sup> The notions of Islamism, Islamic fundamentalists, radical Islamists, and Muslim extremists within Algeria—and the world—lamentably have been lumped into one category, which oversimplifies the complex ideologies involved. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to define the forms of Algerian Islamism, which will expose the complexities and varying approaches to Islamism under a secular regime; and to highlight a particularly sinister brand of Islamism, which will demonstrate why the specific strain of revolutionary Islamism brought by the GIA is so radically unique.<sup>15</sup> This framework will allow for a better understanding of the current form of violent Islamism within Algeria as practiced by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Within this historical view, the recent rise of AQIM seems far less ominous as it appears to be little more than the GIA with a new name.

Algerian Islamist organizations are heterogeneous, with different philosophies that do not fit comfortably into one order, and they represent the full spectrum of views

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13 The terms Islamism and Islamist have different connotations, depending on the way they are used. Here, Islamism means the Muslim pursuit of establishing an Islamic state governed by Islamic law. As demonstrated in this article, there are varying degrees through which Islamists pursue this goal, be they fundamentalist or moderate. The way this term is used is meant to encapsulate the full breadth of those with Islamist pursuits.

14 Salima Mellah, “Justice Commission for Algeria: The Massacres in Algeria, 1992–2004,” retrieved from Justice Commission for Algeria website, (May 2004), [http://www.algerie-tpp.org/tpp/pdf/dossier\\_2\\_massacres.pdf](http://www.algerie-tpp.org/tpp/pdf/dossier_2_massacres.pdf) (accessed August 6, 2011).

15 The GIA would later fracture into the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which eventually would change its name to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). See Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of Al-Qa’ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: Saqi, 2010), 127, 195.

regarding how Islam relates to personal life and the government. Islamist groups fall into three broad categories, which are listed below:<sup>16</sup>

*Apolitical Islamists* believe adherence to the fundamentals of Islam is a community or individual responsibility, and that government or political reform is not necessary.<sup>17</sup>

*Political Islamists* believe an Islamic state is the best form of government, but think satisfactory Islamic governance can be achieved through political participation in a secular system.<sup>18</sup>

*Revolutionary Islamists* believe an Islamic state must be established immediately and think the only way to achieve this state is through violent jihad. Their goal is to overthrow the government and impose their version of God's will upon the people.<sup>19</sup>

### **1. Apolitical Islamists**

The first group of individuals, the apolitical Islamists, is the most benign, and for the most part benevolent. These are religious people who proselytize to individuals or communities in an attempt to persuade people to lead morally correct lifestyles through the tenets of Islam. These groups can be compared to many Western Christian community and church organizations such as the Salvation Army<sup>20</sup> and the Knights of Columbus;<sup>21</sup> these groups actively seek social change within their communities but do

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16 This is roughly analogous to Quintan Wiktorowicz's purists, politicos and jihadi categories of Salafism in his work, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," (2006), retrieved from CÉRIUM website, [http://www.cerium.ca/IMG/pdf/WIKTOROWICZ\\_2006\\_Anatomy\\_of\\_the\\_Salafi\\_Movement.pdf](http://www.cerium.ca/IMG/pdf/WIKTOROWICZ_2006_Anatomy_of_the_Salafi_Movement.pdf) (accessed September 7, 2011).

17 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 86.

18 Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria 1988–2002* (London: Verso, 2003), 100.

19 Luis Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990–1998* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 60–62.

20 The Salvation Army website, [http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www\\_usn\\_2.nsf/vw-local/About-us](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf/vw-local/About-us).

21 The Knights of Columbus website, <http://www.kofc.org/un/en/about/index.html>.

not advocate for fundamental political change or a theocratic solution. Algeria has a long history of organizations dedicated to spiritual enlightenment and reform that are comparable to these Western groups.<sup>22</sup>

The indigenous Berber population of Algeria is one example of a group based on enlightenment. The Berbers have maintained close ties to their long-standing Sufi traditions, without advocating for government intervention to enforce those traditions.<sup>23</sup> Abdelhamid Ben Badis is an example of an apolitical reformer. He brought about a more Salafist point of view and is probably the most notable leader of social reform within Algeria.<sup>24</sup> Ben Badis was responsible for the formation of the Association of Algerian Ulama (AUMA) in May 1931.<sup>25</sup> The AUMA specifically stated within its bylaws that participation in the Algerian political system was “rigorously forbidden.”<sup>26</sup> Instead, AUMA advocated for reform at the community and individual level, which was similar to the position of a 1960s Islamist group, al-Qiyam. Unfortunately, al-Qiyam was outlawed by the Algerian government in 1970 as it edged closer to political Islamism.<sup>27</sup> In recent years, organizations preaching Da’wa Salafism (an apolitical form of Salafism) have grown in popularity, primarily because it does not represent a notable threat to the Algerian government.<sup>28</sup>

Apolitical Islamist groups, like the Da’wa Salafists, have traditionally sought educational reforms in an attempt to incorporate Islamic education into the lives of the

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22 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 9–18.

23 Berbers are the native inhabitants of North Africa and Algeria. They are often called “Berber Arabs,” as they are nomadic people like the Arabs of the Middle East. The Berbers were conquered by Arab Muslims in the 700s, and subsequently converted to their own form of Islam. Sufism is a form of mystical Islam, and Berber Sufism incorporates traditions the Berbers practiced prior to being conquered by the Arabs. Before the fall of the Ottoman Empire, most of Algeria practiced Sufism. Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 1–8.

24 Salafism is a philosophy that seeks to return to the original form of Islam, based on scripture. Salafism is most similar to Wahhabism and Arab fundamentalism. Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 8–12.

25 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 10.

26 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 13.

27 Emad Eldin Shahin, *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 166–77.

28 Boubekeur, “Salafism and Radical Politics,” 13–17.

population.<sup>29</sup> Some reforms have been accomplished at various times in Algeria through the efforts of AUMA, and in the mid-1960s by Malek Bennabi.<sup>30</sup> The promotion of religious education is not at all foreign to efforts seen throughout Western nations, such as ideas promoted by the Christian Educators Association International (CEAI).<sup>31</sup> Apolitical Islamists advocate for private religious education similar to the programs promoted by CEAI. Their efforts contrast with those of the political Islamists who advocate for government-controlled, public, religious education.

## **2. Political Islamists**

This second group of Islamists participates and campaigns within the political system of the state to enact changes. This group believes an Islamic nation as dictated by the Quran prophetic model would be a better solution than the current secular government.<sup>32</sup> Political Islamists believe incremental political change should be the primary method to achieve this new government, which is an important distinction between them and revolutionary Islamists.

The pursuit of incremental Islamist changes has played out many times within Algeria. During the war of independence from France (1954–1962), Islamists were in the ranks of those attempting to form a new government.<sup>33</sup> Although other parties shut out the Islamists following independence in 1962, the political Islamists' ideals never faded.<sup>34</sup> When a more democratic government emerged within Algeria in 1988, the Islamists achieved widespread public popularity.<sup>35</sup> A 1991 Islamist political victory was

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29 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 11.

30 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 11–13, 57–60.

31 Christian Educators Association International website, <http://www.ceai.org/>.

32 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 45.

33 Boubekeur, "Salafism and Radical Politics," 4.

34 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 390.

35 Democracy began to emerge in Algeria as the regime sought to maintain control during a period of poor economic times and high public unemployment. To solve the unrest, President Chadli Bendjedid proposed a series of measures to improve transparency and plurality in the government. Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 394.

thwarted by a military coup d'état that unleashed a violent civil war, but even after that, political Islamists still advocated for negotiation and political solutions.<sup>36</sup>

Early forms of political Islamist groups were characterized by the Jazira trend, which represented the more peaceful-minded groups who advocated social and political movements to effect governmental change.<sup>37</sup> The leaders who formed this group were some of the politically involved AUMA members who had been crowded out of the political process by secular groups after Algeria won independence from France.<sup>38</sup> This power arrangement remained in effect until the death of President Houari Boumedienne in 1978, which created a power vacuum.<sup>39</sup> His death coincided with economic woes and widespread desire for change within the government.<sup>40</sup> The regime under President Chadli Bendjedid attempted to avert public unrest by making the government more transparent, democratic and allowed the participation of multiple political parties.<sup>41</sup> This was a significant change for Algeria, as Algeria had basically been a one-party system after it had achieved independence, and the shift to a plural democracy allowed the previously muted Islamist voice to rise to the top.<sup>42</sup>

The political Islamist groups during the pro-democracy period (1988–1992) were characterized by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), al-Harakat li-Mujtama' Islami (HAMAS) and the Harakat al-Nahda al-Islamiyya (MNI).<sup>43</sup> The political Islamists formed political parties and campaigned for office in local and national elections, and within a short time, they had won many seats within the local and national legislatures.<sup>44</sup> The next bout of elections in 1991 brought an even greater victory for the Islamists, in

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36 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 371–72.

37 Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 120–21.

38 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 35–37.

39 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 61, 69–70.

40 William Quandt, *Between Ballots & Bullets: Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998), 159; Shahin, *Political Ascent*.

41 Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 127–29.

42 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 112–13. This is akin to the Arab Spring movements of 2011.

43 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 65.

44 Martinez, *Algerian Civil War*, 20–22.

particular the FIS. With the political Islamists on the verge of taking a clear democratic majority (winning 188 of 232 seats in the first round of voting), events took a sudden turn away from democracy.<sup>45</sup>

In 1992, the Algerian military orchestrated a coup by claiming the regime was collapsing.<sup>46</sup> President Bendjedid was forced by the military to dissolve the National Assembly and resign from office.<sup>47</sup> The military feared that the election results would mean “one man, one vote, but only once.”<sup>48</sup> This prevailing anti-Islamist view feared that after the Islamists had won a political majority they would disassemble the democratic establishment to construct an Algerian theocratic system under *Sharia* law. Therefore, the coup essentially nullified the electoral victory by the Islamists. The political Islamist groups responded with demands to restore the constitution and the National Assembly, which evolved into open demonstrations and general unrest in an attempt to reestablish the democratic system.<sup>49</sup> The military, reacted to demonstrations and some violent acts by the revolutionary Islamists groups, outlawed the Islamist political parties and jailed some of their leaders and followers.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, even this severe repression did not stop the political Islamists from continuing to advocate for political solutions to the increasing violent struggle.

Since 1992, organizations like the Wafa party have continued to fight through peaceful demonstrations and political maneuvering to re-establish an outlet for their Islamist views.<sup>51</sup> The use of peaceful tactics by these groups does not mean these organizations never employed violence as a mechanism for change. On the contrary, violence was utilized by many organizations within this rubric—such as the Islamic

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45 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 369.

46 Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 149–50.

47 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 247–50.

48 Algeria’s Bloody Years. Directed by Malek Bensmail (2003, Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Films), VHS, 22 mins.

49 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 253–56.

50 Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 150–51.

51 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 277.

Salvation Army (AIS), the armed wing of the FIS.<sup>52</sup> However, such groups did not use violence as their primary tool to force change but as a tool to achieve political influence and leverage.<sup>53</sup>

The political Islamist philosophy continues to exist in Algeria, and as late as 2002 a resurgence of political Islamism has crept back into the Algerian political arena. The Movement for National Reform, a moderate Islamic party, has seen mild success, winning about 11% of the seats in the National Assembly.<sup>54</sup> Political Islamists continue to hope for reconciliation that will resolve the long-standing conflict and allow them to fully participate in the Algerian government. In sharp contrast, revolutionary Islamists are wholly against any reconciliation or notion of working within the bounds of secular government.<sup>55</sup>

### **3. Revolutionary Islamists**

The third form of Islamism promotes a view that Islam has an absolute interpretation and that the only way to achieve a nation under Islam is by violent *jihad*. Fundamentally, revolutionary Islamists believe the only solution to governance is an Islamic nation under *Sharia*. Further, they believe that any government not founded completely on Islamic tradition is tantamount to heresy and that the “heretics” of secular governments will not give up their power unless they are removed by force.<sup>56</sup> Thus, revolutionary Islamists justify uncompromising actions of violent *jihad* to achieve their goal of a nation governed by *Sharia*.

Such Islamist groups were initially characterized by the Algerian Islamic Movement (MIA), formed by Mustapha Bouyali, and later by the al-Takfir wa’Hirja.<sup>57</sup> After Algeria gained independence from France, these groups stockpiled weapons and

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<sup>52</sup> Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 164.

<sup>53</sup> Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 350–51.

<sup>54</sup> Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 347.

<sup>55</sup> Martinez, *Algerian Civil War*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 34–35.

<sup>57</sup> Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 65, 71–72.

conducted covert warfare against the state.<sup>58</sup> Although these Islamists groups were ever-present, they were often termed as bandits or criminals and not seen as a substantial threat to the state. However, as the political situation within Algeria deteriorated, local support grew for revolutionary Islamists.<sup>59</sup> This newfound popularity allowed for the birth of militant Islamist organizations such as the GIA and the Movement for an Islamic State (MEI).<sup>60</sup>

Revolutionary Islamist organizations within Algeria took to the offensive after the 1992 coup, striking out against the government in a series of attacks and assassinations. The first attack was against an army barracks on January 22, 1992, which unleashed a series of government reprisals, effectively intensifying the violence on both sides.<sup>61</sup> A spiral of violent rebellion and repression ensued for the next five years.<sup>62</sup> During this period, a competition of ideologies began within the Islamists as well.

The political Islamists were competing with the revolutionary Islamists for legitimacy and public support. Groups similar to the FIS attempted to sue for peace and a return to politics, while organizations like the GIA and MNI<sup>63</sup> saw no place for compromise and purposely sabotaged ceasefire agreements.<sup>64</sup> The convictions of the GIA were so strong that its agents assassinated fellow Islamists simply for attempting to negotiate with the secular government.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, the GIA assassinated fighters of a neighboring *jihad* organization, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Groups (LIFG) for

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58 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 71–74.

59 Martinez, *Algerian Civil War*, 72–73.

60 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 131, 258.

61 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 255–57.

62 Martinez, *Algerian Civil War*, 19.

63 The MNI, like the FIS developed a militant wing following the 1992 coup. However, the MNI was less interested in political settlement, similar to the GIA.

64 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 268–69.

65 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 129.

attempting to intercede.<sup>66</sup> In effect, organizations like the GIA were not only disinterested in peace, they were actively preventing it from occurring.

However, the public finally lost tolerance for the indiscriminate killing and withdrew support for the GIA. About the same time, the government began reconciliation programs to reintegrate the Islamist fighters. These two factors brought the decline of the GIA in the late 1990s.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, one GIA commander who was disgusted by some of the group's actions separated and formed his own organization, the GSPC in 1998.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, the GIA withered on the vine by the mid-2000s was no longer a major threat.<sup>69</sup> The GSPC fought on against the Algerian regime but no longer waged an open war against the population and foreign interests.<sup>70</sup> Though this approach was more tolerable, the general public was by and large done with war after witnessing the death of between 100,000 and 200,000 citizens during the civil war.<sup>71</sup> This public sentiment, along with effective government reconciliation programs and the loss of religious support for the *jihād*, led to the steady decline in the GSPC as an effective insurgent organization.<sup>72</sup> The GSPC was on the path to failure.

Sensing a need for significant change, the leadership of the GSPC declared itself subservient to Al Qaeda (AQ),<sup>73</sup> and in 2007, the GSPC formally became Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).<sup>74</sup> More than a name change, the transformation was meant to project an image of an entirely new group, and along with a new propaganda campaign came a return to attacks on Western targets and a rise in suicide bomb

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66 The GIA created a long-standing grudge between the Libyan and Algerian jihad organizations, and that is why, contrary to public speculation, no real link exists between AQIM and the LIFG. This separation is plainly seen by the near simultaneous declarations to support Al Qaeda by each organization. Both organizations refused to fall under the authority of the other, and so each pledged their individual loyalty to AQ. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 131–33.

67 Boubekeur, “Salafism and Radical Politics,” 7.

68 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 372.

69 Boubekeur, “Salafism and Radical Politics,” 7.

70 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 299.

71 Mellah, “Justice Commission for Algeria,” 7.

72 This was a signed oath to Osama Bin Laden in 2003. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 182.

73 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 194.

74 Boubekeur, “Salafism and Radical Politics,” 9.

attacks.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, AQIM attempted to broaden its reach as a regional threat by increasing fundraising, trafficking, training, and recruiting in areas of the Sahel, such as Mali and Niger.

However, AQIM did not fundamentally change its strategic goals from those of the GSPC or GIA. Though publicized as a regional terrorist organization, AQIM showed “no real threat” to any regime within North Africa,<sup>76</sup> and the fundamental goal of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria remained its top objective. This focus is evidenced within the 2010 U.S. Bureau of Diplomatic Security report, which notes that AQIM has continued its focus on Algeria. The report summarizes 196 bombings and 170 other terrorist acts inside Algeria in 2010.<sup>77</sup> In comparison, AQIM conducted a total of six attacks in 2010 through the beginning of 2011 across the entire Sahel (Mauritania, Mali and Niger).<sup>78</sup>

AQIM and its predecessor, the GIA, have yet to meet their objectives of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria through *jihad*, and in fact appear further from success since 1992. Although the public appears to desire reconciliation, AQIM has continued to fight. The reason that Algerian revolutionary Islamism, in its latest form of AQIM, has persisted is predicated on the rise of the GIA, which is unique within the three forms of Algerian Islamism discussed thus far.

## **B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GIA AND THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF AQIM**

### **1. The Rise of the GIA**

Revolutionary Islamist groups, including the MIA and al-Takfir wa’Hirja, existed within Algeria well before the 1992 founding of the GIA.<sup>79</sup> However, the GIA had a wholly different origin and, therefore, a different strategy to *jihad*. The MIA and MEI,

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<sup>75</sup> Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 195.

<sup>76</sup> Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 195.

<sup>77</sup> Diplomatic Security, “Algeria 2011 Report,” 1.

<sup>78</sup> The Sahel is sub-Saharan North Africa, which includes Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria. AQIM’s attacks listed in this report occurred in only three of those countries. Goita, “West Africa’s Growing Threat,” 1–2.

<sup>79</sup> Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 65, 71–72.

which relied on attacks against the government and its institutions, predominantly viewed the public, foreigners, and competing Islamists as neutral parties.<sup>80</sup> The GIA did not, instead viewing all who failed to actively support its *jihad* as collaborators with the government, hence making them eligible military targets based on *takfiri* beliefs. Under the *takfiri* policy, the GIA slaughtered entire villages, murdered foreigners and killed citizens for “violating Islamic law,” with executions carried out for infractions ranging from infidelity to wearing Western clothing.<sup>81</sup> In this way, the ideas of the GIA essentially differed from those of other Algerian, revolutionary Islamist organizations.

The major difference in ideology arose during the Soviet-Afghan War, which exposed between 1,200 to 2,000 Algerian fighters who served in the conflict to the hard-liner precepts of Arab Islamism.<sup>82</sup> The Algerian-Afghans (as they became known) were particularly exposed to the ideology of Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden.<sup>83</sup> These Algerian fighters trained in the Pakistani camps set up by the Arab and Egyptian mujahedeen, and there, some members were indoctrinated while others were simply exposed to the more revolutionary ideas of the mujahedeen.<sup>84</sup> One Afghan-Algerian mujahidin, Qari Said al-Jazairi, served as an AQ facilitator and messenger and would later be influential in establishing the GIA with AQ startup money and recruiting.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Algerian-Afghan veterans like Qari Said imported their ideas from the future leadership of AQ.

AQ played an instrumental part to the formation of the GIA; however, responsibility for the carnage of the Algerian Civil War does not rest solely on Al Qaeda.

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80 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 282–84.

81 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 282–84.

82 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 70.

83 This claim was made by Abu Mus’ab Al-Suri, a leading Al Qaeda strategist, and by Abdullah Anas, one of Osama Bin Laden’s close friends and fellow mujahedeen (prior to their decision to go separate ways because of their differences in Islamist ideology). Abdullah Anas ran one of many hostels hosting foreign fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan and witnessed the Algerians as they were indoctrinated by the Arab forms of jihad and Islamism. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 13, 43–45.

84 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 44–48.

85 Though Qari Said’s role in the GIA has been questioned by later leaders of the GIA, author Camille Tawil states that, “their [the later GIA leaders] aim seems to have been to inflate the Salafists’ role at the expense of the Afghan veterans.” *Brothers in Arms*, 68, 73.

AQ leaders certainly had a hand in the war, but it was by no means all their doing. In the beginning, the few Algerian-Afghan veterans brought inspiration, leadership, professional fighting skills, organization, and determination with them to Algeria. But as the GIA evolved, Algerians who had not served in Afghanistan became its primary constituents. These GIA members more than likely were former members of the FIS, MIA, or other Algerian Islamist organizations. As AQ formed in Sudan, it played a role as a GIA sponsor, providing funding, training and support; and reports from before 2001 that highlight the open support coming from Sudan to the GIA may allude to the genesis of AQ in Sudan.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, however, as referenced by Wright in *The Looming Tower*, the GIA acted on its own to reach levels of violence well beyond the scope of what AQ had intended, which eventually caused a cooling of relations between the two groups.<sup>87</sup>

By the time Djamel Zitouni took over the GIA in 1995, he had completely incorporated the principles of *takfiri* violence.<sup>88</sup> Zitouni had condemned the entire society of Algeria and any foreign influence. “The Butcher,” as he became known, lashed out at all outside his organization. His successor, Antar Zwabri, went even further and was responsible for the worst massacres of the entire conflict.<sup>89</sup> In retrospect, the GIA was a spawn of AQ ideology that received its baptism under fire in Algeria as Algerians in the GIA simply ran with the ideological beliefs, taking them to an extreme end. The GIA village massacres of 1997 and 1998 precipitated the eventual split to the GSPC.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The following sources, writing before 2001, all mention the support from groups within Sudan, when Al Qaeda was a much lesser-known entity. Therefore, these authors most likely would have been unaware of the significance of Islamist aide coming from Sudan and noted it merely as an Islamist ally like Iran: Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 378; Quandt, *Ballots & Bullets*, 97, 154; Martinez, *Algerian Civil War*, 21. Martinez goes so far as to mention the notion of takfir originating from Egyptian values from the affiliation with the Afghanistan mujahedeen. After 2001, when reading these texts, the link between AQ in Sudan and the Algerian jihad is seen clearly. The fledgling AQ organization, in its first operational test, sent operatives to Algeria, according to Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 142, 216; and Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 96.

<sup>87</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower* 215–17.

<sup>88</sup> Zitouni had actually been a butcher by trade, and this reference stuck as he increased the GIA’s level of violence against the populace. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 127–29.

<sup>89</sup> Zwabri was credited with massacres of entire villages, killing 400 or more unarmed citizens. He was also the GIA leader who ordered the murder of the LIFG fighters. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 129.

<sup>90</sup> Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 127.

## 2. The Al-Qaeda Connection and *Takfiri* Violence

In 2001, AQ sent an emissary to meet with Hattab, the leader of the GSPC, in an attempt to influence the new revolutionary Islamist leader in Algeria. However, the emissary was killed by Algerian security forces, providing further proof that AQ was actively courting the Algerian *jihād*.<sup>91</sup> The 2003 allegiance to Osama bin Laden and the subsequent 2006 merger of AQ and the GSPC, announced by Ayman al-Zawahiri, were no surprise.<sup>92</sup> The reality is that Al-Qaeda had always been in Algeria.<sup>93</sup> With this historical perspective, AQIM does not appear to be a brand-new organization, formed as a new AQ front to the global *jihād*. Instead, AQ formally and informally sponsored the Algerian *jihād* with ideology, training, and financing for more than 15 years and had a part in the GIA, although it could not control it. In this context, the arrival of AQIM on the Algerian Islamist stage seems far less significant and can be seen as more of a rebirth of the GIA than anything else—an attempt to restart the engine of *takfiri jihād* begun by Afghan veterans like Qari Said. From this point of view, the rise of the GIA was more an important and dangerous event.

Prior to the formation of the GIA, Algeria had not experienced the indiscriminate types of violence that became routine under the group, which introduced two forms of violence: the murder of civilians in the name of *takfir* and the killing of foreigners. The concept of murder of noncombatants under *takfir* was justified by a GIA *fatwa*, which declared, “the populace should pick sides [either the state or the *jihād*] on pain of death.”<sup>94</sup> The *fatwa* meant the GIA was no longer satisfied with neutral parties or tacit support but would view citizens as either with the GIA or against it. The extermination of entire villages became a common practice after this *fatwa* was issued.<sup>95</sup>

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91 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 184.

92 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 194–95.

93 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 44–48.

94 A *fatwa* is an Islamic religious decree or law that provides religious justification for whatever actions are to be taken. Anneli Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalism of Domestic Terrorism*, Pretoria/Tshwane: The Institute for Security Studies, 2008, 48.

95 There were 250 village massacres in the next three years. See *Algeria’s Bloody Years*, Bensmail, 43 mins.

The *takfiri fatwa* also applied to all foreigners and foreign institutions.<sup>96</sup> One example of the GIA acting upon this tenet was the hijacking of Air France Flight 8969 in 1994, with the intent to crash the fuel-laden airliner in Paris, a predecessor to the 9/11 plot carried out in the United States.<sup>97</sup> Another example was the murder of seven French monks in Algeria.<sup>98</sup> These types of events were not prevalent prior to the rise of the GIA, and the only substantially new tactic brought by AQIM was the use of suicide bombings.<sup>99</sup> Overall, AQIM of today seems little changed from the GIA of the late 1990s.

### C. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

While the GIA provided a significant transformation of revolutionary Islamism in the country, AQIM can be seen as just another part of Algeria's long history of Islamism. Furthermore, Islamist ideals have never been homogenous but instead vary widely from individual spiritual salvation to the use of violent *jihad* to force compliance with the tenets of Islam. These principles can be explained broadly in the terms of apolitical, political, and revolutionary Islamist divisions. Grouping Islamists into these categories makes it easy to see how revolutionary Islamists differ from the rest. Even within the revolutionary Islamist groups of Algeria, the GIA was a clear aberration, representing something novel from traditional Algerian Islamism. The difference grew from the experiences of a few Algerian fighters as mujahedeen in the Afghan *jihad* combined with the subsequent influence by the future founders of Al Qaeda. However, because AQ has maintained a close relationship with the Algerian *jihad* throughout; the birth of AQIM can be seen as a fundamentally trivial evolution. In fact, AQIM appears to be an attempt to return to the GIA, the original Algerian *jihad* group of 1992. Essentially, AQIM is less

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96 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 34–38.

97 This attack was thwarted by French security forces when the plane was forced to land and refuel in Marseille, France. French snipers and hostage rescue forces stormed the aircraft, killing all the hostage takers. Algeria's Bloody Years, Bensmail, 40 mins.

98 This event was later made into an independent film, "Of Gods and Men." James Mackenzie, (May 18, 2010), retrieved from Reuters website, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/05/18/us-cannes-monks-idUSTRE64H3SQ20100518> (accessed August 20, 2011).

99 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 80–81.

of an instrumental transformation in Islamist ideology than an insignificant name change in a chapter of Algeria's Islamist history—a history of spiritual tradition, political reform, and unrestrained violence.

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### III. AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND METHODS OF OPERATION

AQIM is the latest evolution of an Algerian terrorist *jihād* that spans two decades. AQIM's initial predecessor organization was the GIA. The GIA, through its indiscriminate use of violence lost favor with the populace, and subsequently fractured.<sup>100</sup> From this fracture was born the Group for Salafist Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The GSPC did not fare much better than the GIA, because of effective Algerian reconciliation and repression efforts.<sup>101</sup> In an effort to survive, the GSPC instituted a form of "institutional imitation" to compensate for their lack of success in the changing operational environment.<sup>102</sup> With AQIM's case, they used this imitation to both rally local support and infuse some international clout and legitimacy to their cause by imitating a successful *jihād* organization, Al-Qaeda.<sup>103</sup> To renew the Algerian *jihād*, the GSPC aligned with Al-Qaeda, and eventually adopted the AQIM title.<sup>104</sup>

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's name change asserted an international stature for the previously domestic *jihād*. Though the former goals of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria remained; internationalist goals such as attacking foreigners, supporting other Al-Qaeda *jihāds* and expanding regional control and influence also became AQIM priorities.<sup>105</sup> Along with these new goals, AQIM implemented Al-Qaeda tactics previously unseen in Algeria. These tactics included suicide bombings and a dramatic increase in bombings as a form of engaging security forces (as opposed to small arms

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100 Boubekour, "Salafism and Radical Politics," 7.

101 Boubekour, "Salafism and Radical Politics," 7.

102 Institutional imitation is when an organization changes to emulate another organization that is dealing with a similar situation. The idea is that the imitation will provide a solution to their current failure to thrive. This is often an over-simplification and is typically unsuccessfully executed. Daft, *Essentials of Organizational Theory & Design*, 58.

103 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 195

104 Boubekour, "Salafism and Radical Politics," 9.

105 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 195.

engagements).<sup>106</sup> However, despite the new list of priorities and tactics AQIM is still primarily focused on Algeria.<sup>107</sup> This Algerian focus can be seen in AQIM's structure and organization.

#### A. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF AQIM

Like AQIM's focus, few structural changes have occurred from those of the GSPC. Fundamentally the headquarters and leadership structure of AQIM has remained unchanged.<sup>108</sup> The primary composition of the leadership has remained predominantly Algerian, and all were previous fighters in the GIA or GSPC.<sup>109</sup> However, AQIM has made a few changes to its structure. The previous nine zone structure has been consolidated into four (Central, East, West and South).<sup>110</sup> Further these zones of operation have been expanded as far as operationally feasible outside the borders of Algeria. These changes rely primarily on the personalities and the tactical situation of each zone leader experiences.

The structure of AQIM's headquarters and leadership has remained unchanged. Comparing AQIM's current structure (Figure 1)<sup>111</sup> with Anneli Botha's 2007 structure of the GSPC (Figure 2)<sup>112</sup> the same fundamental headquarters structure is readily apparent.

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106 Previously the GIA and GSPC had relied heavily and small arms attacks. The upsurge in bombings can both be seen as an indicator of Al-Qaeda influence, and an acknowledgement that AQIM was not succeeding with its small arms attacks. Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 55.

107 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 195.

108 This is a comparison both of the figures 1 & 2 and the corresponding literature from Botha and Jane's Defense. Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 40–49. Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): Profile," IHS Jane's: Defense & Security Intelligence & Analysis, March 8, 2011, [http://jtic.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0443.htm@current&Selected=allJanes&keyword=AQIM&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod\\_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC#toclink-j3742628](http://jtic.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0443.htm@current&Selected=allJanes&keyword=AQIM&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC#toclink-j3742628) (accessed September 14, 2011).

109 Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda Turn African in the Sahel?" Carnegie papers, June 2010: 1–11, 1 & 10. Dario Cristiani, and Ricardo Fabiani, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): Implications for Algeria's Regional and International Relations," Istituto Affari Internazionali, April 7, 2011: 1–15, 5.

110 Jane's, "AQIM Profile." Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 44.

111 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

112 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 41.

AQIM is headed by the Supreme Commander, Abdelmalek Droukdel.<sup>113</sup> Though Droukdel has overall command of AQIM, the leadership includes a council of People of Authority.<sup>114</sup> The People of Authority are divided into two councils: the Council of Notables and a Shura Council. The Council of Notables is made of senior ranking AQIM members that function similar to a war council or military staff.<sup>115</sup> The Shura Council's purpose is to provide legal and religious advice and legitimacy to AQIM.<sup>116</sup> Subordinate commanders in AQIM are designated as Emirs who control the zones, brigades, battalions and groups.<sup>117</sup> This structure has not changed with the AQIM moniker.

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113 Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian Islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region," *Concerned African Scholars*, Spring 2010: 12–29, 15.

114 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

115 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

116 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

117 The distinction from Brigade to Battalion is not directly translatable to western military structures. Instead the terms "Brigade," "Battalion," "Kitibat" and "Group" represent names of units versus actual size, composition or hierarchy. Andre Le Sage, "The Evolving Threat of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Strategic Forum: National Defense University*, 2011: 1–15, 13.

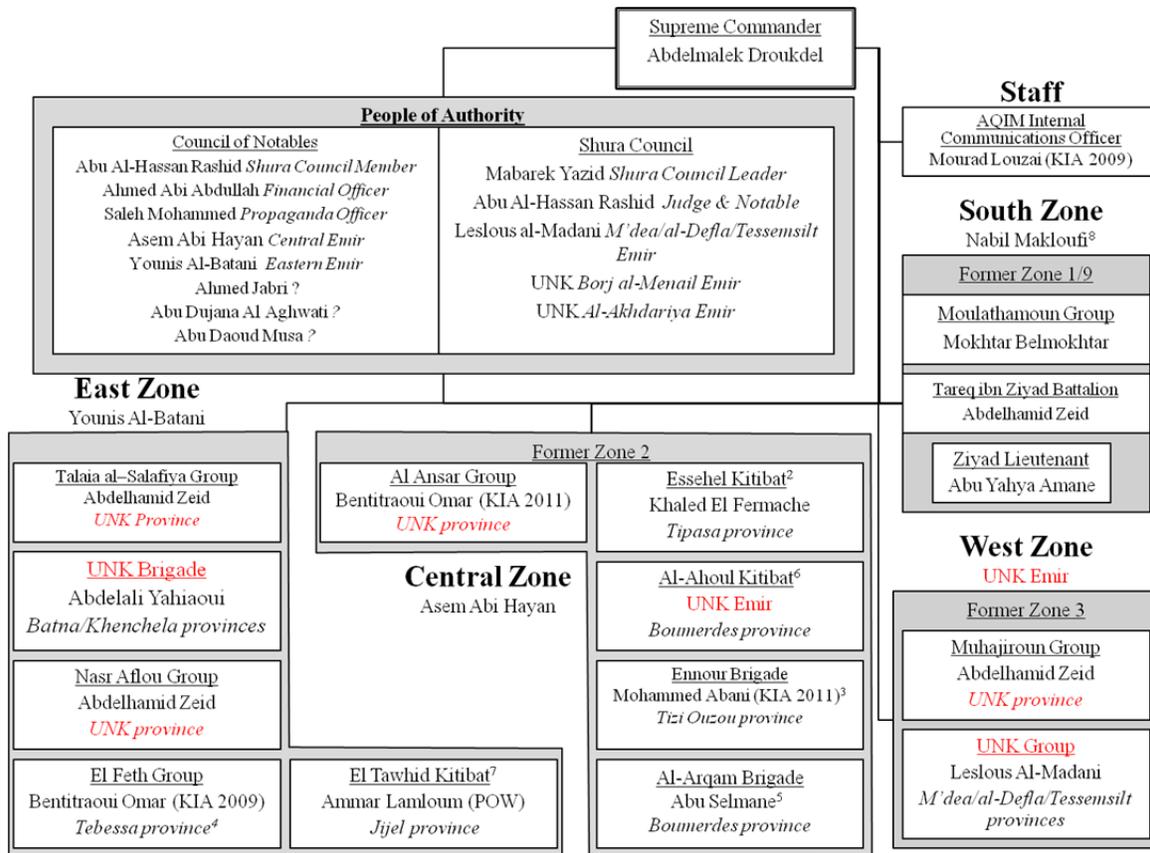


Figure 1. AQIM's Current Structure

A depiction of AQIM's structure, by the author, based on Jane's Defense and various sources. The depiction is an incomplete work, given the constantly changing leaders, and represents the open source information available to the author at the time. Incomplete information is denoted by "UNK."<sup>118</sup>

118 1. Jane's, "AQIM Profile." 2. Sofiane Abi, Algerian Terrorist AQIM Affiliate Behind Military Academy Attack; Redeploying, news, Algiers: Le Jour d'Algerie, 2011.3. S. Leslous, Algerian Security Forces Kill Terrorist 'Amir' in Maatkas, News, Algiers: Liberte, 2011.4 Moncef Redha, Two Armed Algerian Terrorists Surrender to Tebessa Security Forces., News, Algiers: La Nouvelle Republique, 2011. 5. Liberte, After the elimination of two terrorists near Thenia: The suicide bombers were about to do a carnage in Algiers. News, Algiers: Liberte, 2011. 6. T. O., Boumerdes: Five Terrorist from Ex-Salafi Group Call and Combat Eliminated by Security Agencies. News, Algiers: Midi-Libre, 2011. 7. Ikram Ghioua, Amir Ammar Lamoulou Lays Down His Weapons: All the Details About the Surrender. News, Algiers: L'Expression, 2011. 8. Jemal Oumar, "Africa Defense Journal," AQIM Replaces Sahara Emir, January 27, 2012, <http://africadefensejournal.wordpress.com/2012/01/27/aqim-replaces-sahara-emir/> (accessed May 1, 2012).

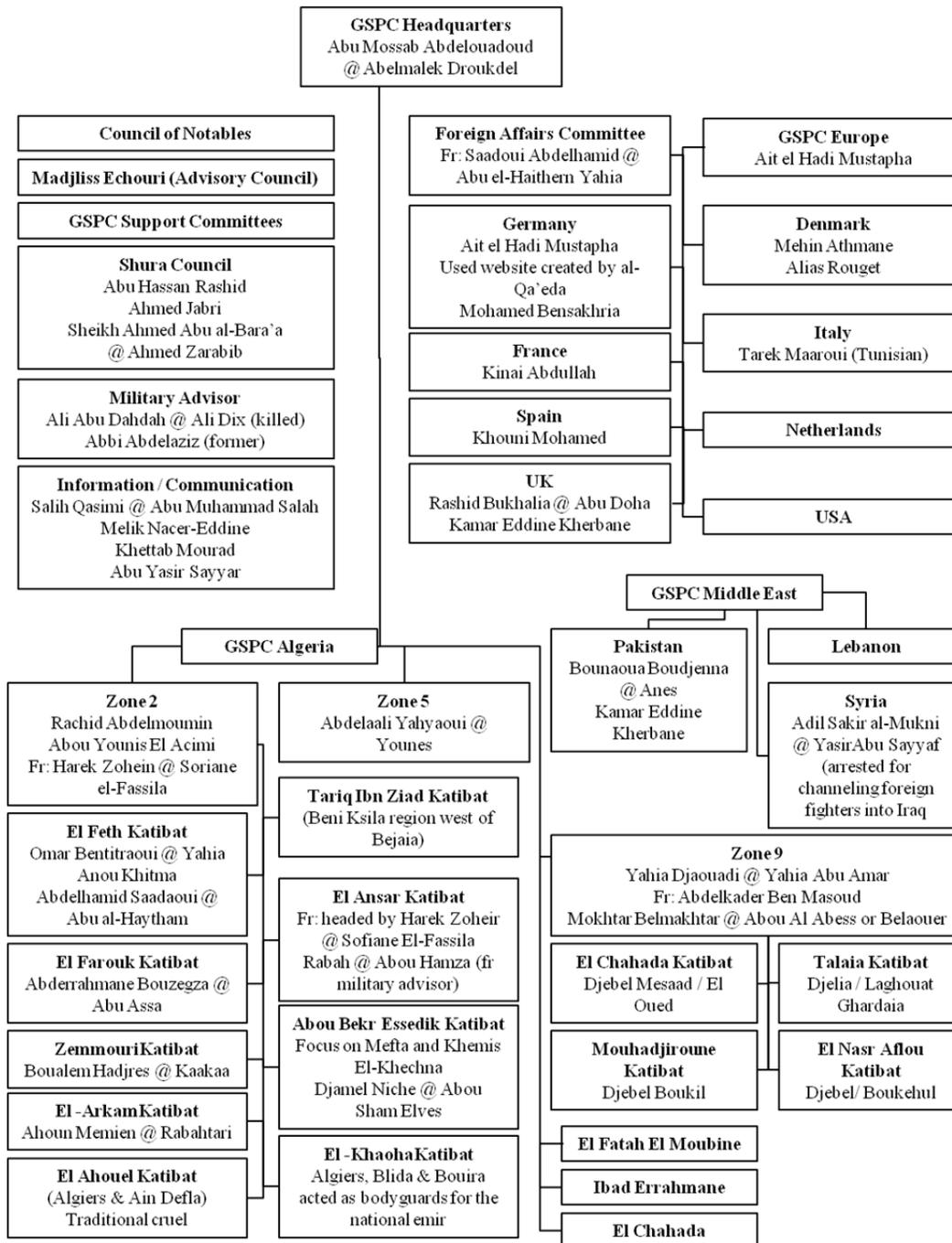


Figure 2. GSPC Structure

A copy of Anneli Botha's GSPC structure from her 2007 monograph.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 41.

Likewise, the composition of AQIM's leadership has remained predominantly Algerian. The Supreme Commander, the entire Shura Council, Council of Notables and almost all the regional and local Emirs are Algerian.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore all of the leaders are veterans of the GSPC or GIA. Droukdel was the former commander of Jerusalem Brigade of the GIA, a member of the GSPC's Council of Notables and finally took command of the GSPC in 2004.<sup>121</sup> Mokhtar Belmokhtar, led the Martyrdom brigade of the GIA, zone nine of the GSPC and remains a subordinate commander in AQIM's southern zone.<sup>122</sup> Abdelhamid Zeid, a commander in charge of AQIM groups in the east and southern zones, moved some of his forces from northeast Algeria to the Sahel; rather than create a new command composed of Sahelians.<sup>123</sup> These zones mark the basic changes that AQIM has made since its days as the GSPC.

AQIM's four zones of operation are the Central, East, West and South, as depicted in Figure 3.<sup>124</sup> The central zone contains the Algerian capital and the main urban centers of Boumerdes and Tizi Ouzou surrounding Algiers.<sup>125</sup> The eastern zone begins roughly east of Tizi Ouzou and including much of the mountainous forested areas that border Tunisia, but not into the Sahara desert.<sup>126</sup> The south zone includes the vast area of the Sahara dropping from the central zone, abutting Libya and into the nations of Niger, Mauritania and Mali.<sup>127</sup> The West zone begins roughly west of Medea province

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120 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

121 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

122 Mokhtar Belmokhtar was demoted from command of Zone nine, and now operates within the south zone semi-independently. Jane's, "AQIM Profile." Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, p.48.

123 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

124 Map image from: Wikipedia, Batna Province, September 10, 2011, [http://www.ask.com/wiki/Batna\\_Province](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Batna_Province) (accessed September 14, 2011). Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, p.65-70.

125 Jane's, "AQIM Profile." Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 44 & 65-70.

126 Jane's, "AQIM Profile." Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 44-46 & 65-70.

127 Jane's, "AQIM Profile." Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 48-49 & 65-70.

including the urban hub of Oran and into Morocco.<sup>128</sup> The naming convention of the zones has changed to cardinal direction versus numerical naming, as has the scope of each zone.

AQIM's zones of operation have been pushed well outside the borders of Algeria, and reflect a change in strategy. The Southern zone, long a supporting zone for smuggling and logistics, has become more involved in tactical operations due to necessity.<sup>129</sup> Algerian security forces have generally pushed AQIM into the Kabiyle Mountains and the wastelands of northern Mali.<sup>130</sup> With the South zone's 2011 attacks in Mali, 2010 in Mauritania and the 2009 kidnapping of Canadian Ambassador Robert Fowler in Niger contributing to a sense of AQIM as regional and international terrorist organization.<sup>131</sup> Operations in the East and West zones have likewise attempted to expand into neighboring nations, but were met with stiff resistance. AQIM's expansion into new areas is facilitated by the way in which they conduct operations.

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128 Jane's, "AQIM Profile." Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 46–47 & 65–70.

129 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 19.

130 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, (November 29, 2011).

131 Goita, "West Africa's Growing Threat," 1–2.



Figure 3. AQIM Zones of Operation

A map roughly outlining the new AQIM zones based on Jane's Defense.<sup>132</sup>

## B. AQIM'S METHODS OF OPERATION

AQIM conducts operations with centralized command and decentralized execution. The centralized command structure of the headquarters element (Supreme commander, Council of Notables and Shura Council) task or approve targets and

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<sup>132</sup> Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

campaign plans for the zone commanders.<sup>133</sup> Zone commanders and Emirs are given latitude within their areas' to execute their operations as they see fit.<sup>134</sup> The operational areas and zones of the Emirs are not fixed, but overlap and change according to the operational requirements.<sup>135</sup> The size and shape of operational areas depend more on commander's capabilities and relationship with fellow AQIM leaders, than boundaries. It is therefore feasible that an Emir from the Western zone could conduct an attack in the South zone without having to defer to any leadership other than the South zone emir. This allows AQIM to execute decentralized operations and seize opportunities more readily.

Another reason for the loose boundaries is that subordinate commanders are expected to be self-sufficient. Each Emir is expected to provide their own financing, weapons and recruits. The ability to cross boundaries and operate freely is essential to the survival of each subordinate. In effect, each subordinate group has its own cellular structure and is self-contained.<sup>136</sup> By doing this, AQIM has relegated the tough issue of centralized logistics and financing to the many semi-autonomous units below. The headquarters element is free to provide campaign guidance, and where necessary, provide key logistical support for high-priority operations.

AQIM's operations cover the full gamut of insurgent operations. However, the majority of AQIM's attacks are bombings and kidnappings. AQIM conducted 43 kidnappings for ransom in Algeria alone in 2010<sup>137</sup> and another 19 in 2011.<sup>138</sup> Kidnapping for ransom is likely a means of generating revenue as each cell is responsible for their own sustainment, through simple burglaries, extortion and Zakat. Kidnapping operations, in particular, have netted millions of Euro's for AQIM. Additionally, the

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133 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

134 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

135 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, p.44.

136 Boudali, "Examining U.S. Counterterrorism," 3.

137 Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Report," 1.

138 Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2012 Report."

organization has also conducted many bombings, with 196 bombings in 2010.<sup>139</sup> These bombings mostly targeted security forces and components of the government in Algeria; however, AQIM also targeted foreigners and civilians.<sup>140</sup> Beyond bombings and kidnappings, AQIM conducts raids on security forces, smuggling across Africa, into Europe and is involved in the drug trade.<sup>141</sup> AQIM also provides a means for foreign fighters to enter Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere to support AQ's global *jihad*.<sup>142</sup> Despite intense security pressure and the foreboding elements of the Sahara, AQIM has carved out an effective existence in the Sahara.

With decentralized operations spread over Algeria and beyond, certain factors are required to keep AQIM operationally viable. AQIM's leadership is a factor with its effective, dedicated leaders. These leaders operate in a semi-independent cellular fashion, contributing greatly to AQIM's survivability. Criminality is a primary driver to the cells success, as it is the source of self-sustainment. By being self-sufficient AQIM cells are free to expand their operations into new areas and draw upon both regional and international opportunities. The international flavor of AQIM, provided by central Al-Qaeda, offer the propaganda and media attention necessary to provide broader legitimacy to AQIM. These factors essentially have given AQIM a new lease on life.

As with the GSPC, AQIM's survival is often in question due to effective leadership targeting of counter-terrorism forces; however, since the 2007 transition AQIM's leadership has remained resilient. Regardless of repeated Algerian security successes against AQIM leadership, the independent groups continue to operate. In the cases of Droukdel and Belmokhtar, both leaders have evaded capture or death for the full two decade long conflict. This factor allows AQIM to have some interesting attributes, the ability to be both centralized and decentralized.

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139 Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Report," 1. William Thornberry and Jaclyn Levy, "Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb," CSIS.org. September 2011. [http://csis.org/files/publication/110901\\_Thornberry\\_AQIM\\_WEB.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/110901_Thornberry_AQIM_WEB.pdf) (accessed March 10, 2012).

140 Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Report," 1.

141 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 19.

142 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 126–128.

AQIM has taken the traits of both centralized and decentralized leadership. In Ori Brafman's *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable power of Leaderless Organizations*, he discusses a notion of a "sweet spot" for an optimal hybrid of centralization and decentralization.<sup>143</sup> "The decentralized sweet spot is the point along the centralized-decentralized continuum that yields the best competitive position."<sup>144</sup> In this case subordinate leaders are free to use their initiative and seize opportunity without overly obstructive meddling from the headquarters. The headquarters provides the continuity by nudging the zone commanders in one direction or another and approving bottom-up operations. This is not to say that AQIM has found nor continually holds the elusive sweet spot. On the contrary, AQIM has many internal disputes concerning the direction of the organization and leadership decisions.<sup>145</sup> These fissures have been a part of AQIM's evolution from the GIA to the GSPC, and the GSPC until now.

AQIM's continued operations rely on a cellular structure. This factor makes AQIM much more of a "starfish" organization, or an organization that if divided forms into multiple organizations instead of dying like a spider.<sup>146</sup> The self-sufficient groups are capable of independent operations that can potentially complement each other. In this way even though a provincial cell is suppressed by security forces, a neighboring cell can continue the operations of the suppressed cell within that province. This has two effects: the illusion of an irrepressible cell and to create a diversion to allow the pressured cell to recover.

When an AQIM cell is cut off from the leadership it is not prone to die, but continues on independently. Mokhtar Belmokhtar's group is an example of this in action. Belmokhtar, who had lost favor with the leadership of AQIM, specifically Droukdel, has

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143 Ori Brafman, and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, New York: Penguin Group, 2006, pp. 181–196.

144 Brafman, *The Starfish and the Spider*, 189. AQIM is certainly NOT a leaderless organization, but it does have some interesting competitive advantages, due to its decentralization, that fall in line with Brafman's theory.

145 Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda Turn," 5–6.

146 Brafman, *The Starfish and the Spider*, 34–35.

operated semi-independently for years in the deserts of the Sahara.<sup>147</sup> The Moulathamoun group under Belmokhtar's leadership has only grown operationally with its isolation.<sup>148</sup> The concept of independent cells that are self-sufficient requires a mechanism to provide recruits, finances and mobility.

The criminal nature of the cells provides the required mechanism for self-sustainment. Many of the cells are composed of former criminals or bandits with a long criminal history outside of *jihad*. Further using their experiences in criminality, AQIM can take advantage of the smuggling networks for the purposes of moving people, equipment and self-financing. Another source of AQIM income is hostage taking for ransom. Smuggling, ransoms and AQIM's involvement in the drug trade have buoyed AQIM's financial stability. These criminal activities offer a unique characteristic to AQIM's self-sustainment.

One interesting characteristic of AQIM's recruit base, is the proclivity for AQIM members to have criminal records in petty crime and drug trafficking. Following the mass arrests of the 1992 Algerian coup, prisoners confined to Saharan prison camps became radicalized.<sup>149</sup> Though these prisoners were not imprisoned for common criminality, they were allowed to intermingle with common criminals which set the precedent for future radicalization of prisoners. For example, an inordinate number AQIM's suicide bombers had served previous prison terms for crimes unrelated to AQIM or the *jihad* (drugs and petty crime).<sup>150</sup> Additionally, *jihad* leaders like Belmokhtar were more commonly known for their abilities to smuggle illicit trade rather than wage *jihad*.<sup>151</sup>

The ability to smuggle goods facilitates AQIM's transportation network and finances their operations. One case is Belmokhtar, who was specifically known for his

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147 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 46–48.

148 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 15–18.

149 Toby Archer, and Tihomir Popovic, *The Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative: The U.S. War on Terrorism in North Africa*, FIIA, Helsinki: Finnish Institute for International Affairs, 2007, 21.

150 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, p.55–59.

151 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 19.

successes in the illegal cigarette trade.<sup>152</sup> This smuggling route not only reaches east-west along the Sahara, but north-south into Europe. The operational utility provides both richer financial rewards for the illicit European trade and the ability to project operations into Europe. The criminal connection between AQIM and Europe is further enhanced by kidnap for ransom operations.

With the blessing from the AQIM headquarters, European hostages are taken for high ransoms. Taking European hostages for ransom has become a lucrative business for AQIM netting about 12 million Euros in 2009–2010 alone.<sup>153</sup> Though hostage taking has become a priority, the majority of hostages taken for ransom has remained Algerians for local ransom.<sup>154</sup> International mass media attention focuses almost exclusively on the few European hostages taken each year by AQIM, with little mention of the tenfold number of Algerian hostages in the same time period. AQIM has further financial connections in Europe through the drug trade.

AQIM has recently become involved in the European drug trade.<sup>155</sup> This trade has ties to South America and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Increasingly internationalized, the FARC has expanded their drug operations into Europe.<sup>156</sup> The FARC have begun using AQIM's illicit smuggling routes and security forces to transport their drugs.<sup>157</sup> The extent of the involvement or reliance on drugs for AQIM financing is unclear, but drugs are another criminal factor that allows AQIM to project their internationality.

AQIM's expansion to regional and international operations have provided renewed vigor for the organization. With the new operational areas has come new opportunities to exploit weak states. Specifically, the expanded Southern and Western

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152 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 17.

153 Goita, "West Africa's Growing Threat," 7.

154 Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Local and Global Jihad of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib." *The Middle East Journal*, Spring 2009: 224.

155 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 19.

156 Liana Sun Wyler, and Nicolas Cook, *Illegal Drug Trade in Africa: Trends and U.S. Policy*. Report to Congress, Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009, 4.

157 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 19.

zones enjoy more freedom of operation outside the pressure of Algerian security forces than the Eastern and Central zones.<sup>158</sup> Algerian security efforts have focused on denial of the urban areas of Algeria to AQIM, and isolation into the depopulated Sahara. The AQIM response is akin to a balloon being squeezed, they moved some of their operations outside the security pressure and into the Sahelian region.<sup>159</sup> However, instead of withering, AQIM has adapted and found ways to persevere. The relative lack of security pressure in the Sahel areas, and tribal nature of the population have made the location amenable to supporting AQIM cells.<sup>160</sup> However, this move does have significant disadvantages.

By expanding into regional affairs, AQIM has exposed itself to more opportunities, but simultaneously increased risk to multi-national security forces. AQIM has invited increased security cooperation with Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Mali with its regional expansion.<sup>161</sup> Additionally, the fundamental goal of achieving an Islamic state in Algeria through *jihad* is now further from AQIM's grasp. Though AQIM's cells have become increasingly isolated from the urban areas of Algeria, they were still capable of conducting 366 attacks in the most northern parts of Algeria in 2010.<sup>162</sup> AQIM not only has the ability to project power regionally, but internationally.

AQIM has long supported operations in Europe and AQ's global *jihad*. AQIM's networks were responsible for attacks in Europe following the United States September 11th attacks.<sup>163</sup> Similar networks were also responsible for the movement of Algerian foreign fighters into Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>164</sup> As of 2007, in Iraq, Algerians made up over 20% of the total foreign fighter population coming from North Africa.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, twenty-four Algerians were still being held in U.S. custody at Guantanamo

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158 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 46–47.

159 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 46–47.

160 Boudali, "Examining U.S. Counterterrorism," 4–5.

161 Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda Turn," 10.

162 Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Report," 1.

163 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 123–126.

164 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 126–128.

165 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 150.

Bay, as 2007.<sup>166</sup> These international networks provide a boost to AQIM's credibility as an international organization, and aid in recruiting.

Another important factor to lend to AQIM's credibility is by being an Al-Qaeda affiliate. By receiving the AQIM moniker they appear as a wholly new organization with global *jihad* aspirations.<sup>167</sup> Al-Qaeda's global propaganda machine further drive this message across with direct blessings from the senior Al-Qaeda leadership.<sup>168</sup> The purpose is not necessarily to garner international support to the Algerian *jihad*, but to be "local[ly]... backed by international rhetoric."<sup>169</sup> Becoming an Al-Qaeda affiliate does have its risks. AQIM has provoked international security pressure by declaring itself a member of the global *jihad*, in spite of their localized Algerian cause.<sup>170</sup> International security pressure does have a positive backlash, specifically, increased U.S. and French involvement in the Algerian *jihad* validates AQIM's credentials as a legitimate international threat.<sup>171</sup> Fundamentally, AQIM has changed the message that *jihad* is the only way to establish an Islamic Algeria, to a counter-Crusader *jihad*. The change in message has contributed to AQIM's viability and renewed their cause.

### C. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

AQIM is operationally viable due to its structure and methods it uses to operate. The structure of AQIM is founded on the GSPC framework, a structure with a Supreme Commander, Council of Notables and Shura Council for the purposes of decision making, strategy and legitimacy. Below the headquarters, AQIM's Emirs conduct operations within four zones semi-autonomously. The zones and boundaries are not rigid, giving Emirs the freedom to snatch opportunities as they become available. This structure alone is a significant contributing factor to AQIM's success as a persistent organization.

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166 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, Annex.

167 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 195.

168 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*: 194–195.

169 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 21.

170 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 12.

171 Filiu, "Local and Global Jihad," 220–221.

AQIM's centralized command with decentralized execution provide another reason for AQIM's overall resilience. Semi-independent AQIM leaders are free to exercise control over their areas preventing over-reliance on senior leadership. The semi-autonomous nature of the groups or cells requires criminal networks as a mechanism for logistics and funding. These criminal networks overlap with terrorist networks and routes to allow AQIM to expand or project into new areas and affect the region. AQIM's sponsor organization (AQ) provides the international legitimacy and credentials to expand its operations and bolster recruiting. These factors are not invulnerable, but have their weaknesses.

AQIM's structure and operations are imperfect. Its structure has not fundamentally changed since the change from the GSPC, meaning that it may not be postured to conduct global *jihad* operations.<sup>172</sup> At the tactical level AQIM is effective, however, at the strategic level, AQIM is far less likely of achieving its primary objective of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria. By insisting on this objective, AQIM is in effect limiting itself in what it could achieve in a regional context. Regionally, without significant non-Algerian leadership, AQIM will continue to miss opportunities for collaboration and the potential to spread its influence. Further, given the decentralized nature of AQIM's cells they have limited their ability to make drastic, timely changes from the top. Therefore, AQIM is capable of surviving and operating, but not of achieving any real strategic aim beyond persistence.

The internal process of AQIM is also not in perfect harmony, as the internal and external conflicts between its members have made its effectiveness debatable. Leadership in AQIM must be appointed by the Shura Council; however the succession of command has rarely been peaceful, often deferring to the more ruthless leader. In-fighting has marred the organization from its inception and has been the source of three subsequent divisions leading to AQIM. AQIM's divisiveness has boiled over to its relations with neighboring *jihad* organizations and potential allies. In the days of the GIA, GIA's leaders had reprimanded Osama Bin Laden for "meddling" in Algerian affairs<sup>173</sup> and

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172 Boudali, "Examining U.S. Counterterrorism," 2.

173 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 215-17.

were later responsible for the murder of members of the LIFG.<sup>174</sup> This xenophobia prevents non-Algerian members from ascending to leadership roles in the organization.

AQIM maintains an Algerian leadership, while using a diverse operating core from other countries at the bottom level of the organization. In effect, AQIM has hobbled its own international character, relegating itself to being primarily a regional, if not purely Algerian organization. The major block to change is the Shura Council. AQIM's Shura Council, composed entirely of Algerians (in most cases Northern Algerians) elects the leadership of AQIM, hence the Algerian focus. By failing to diversify the Shura Council, AQIM is unable to fully take advantage of emerging opportunities that are outside of an Algerian context, and provide the driver for Algerian centric goals and objectives.

AQIM has not truly accepted its international role; its xenophobic activities have alienated and isolated it from other potential allies in the fight against secular influence in the region. When Droukdel changed his organization from the GSPC to AQIM (taking a large regional name), the LIFG pledged a separate allegiance to Al-Qaeda just to make it clear that they did not fall under AQIM.<sup>175</sup> This expresses the divisive nature of AQIM, and its real effect has left AQIM out of Libya's Arab Spring. AQIM must instead seek coalitions and cooperation between the many *jihad* organizations within North Africa to see any appreciable viability to it as a regional organization with international influence. Without significant reconciliation efforts on the part of AQIM with peer organizations it will remain consolidated in the relatively benign portion of the Sahara desert and be no more likely of producing success in the urbanized areas of Algeria. Fundamentally, for AQIM to survive it must continue to evolve and change both its structure and objectives to prosper beyond mere survival to see any chances of its regional objectives being met.

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174 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 129.

175 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 131–133

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## IV. HOW COULD AQIM END?

### A. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Most all organizations come to an end, even more the case for terrorist organizations. With a full ninety percent of terrorist organizations ending in their first years after formation, terrorist organizations tend to be short lived phenomena.<sup>176</sup> However, terrorist organizations with strong racial and cultural ties like AQIM, the latest evolution of an Algerian insurgent/terrorist organization established in 2007, appear to endure. As Audrey Cronin and Martha Crenshaw posit, terrorist groups' perseverance is likely related to their ability to maintain local support, which requires the terrorist organization to be fundamentally homogenous with the population.<sup>177</sup> Given AQIM's pure Algerian leadership this gives a sense to why AQIM, as a twenty-year running Algerian insurgent/terrorist organization with roots in the GIA of the early 90s, has persisted.<sup>178</sup> Historically though, even culturally based terrorist organizations have come to an eventual end.

This chapter will discuss the possible ends to terrorism as summarized by Audrey Kurth Cronin's "How al-Qaida Ends." Cronin uses seven "critical elements" which have precipitated the end to previous terrorist organizations throughout history.<sup>179</sup> Further, her format is readily familiar to most counterterrorism scholars and experts, and provides a suitable layout to discuss AQIM's ultimate end. The intent of this chapter is not to recreate or re-write Cronin's work, but to simply use her shell to input the unique attributes and environmental factors that are relevant to AQIM. Though all seven elements will be discussed individually, the purpose is to determine which combination of elements are likely to lead to AQIM's demise, as few terrorist organizations have

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176 David C. Rapoport, "Terrorism," In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, by Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1992), 1097

177 Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security*, Summer 2006: 13.

178 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

179 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 17.

ended on one factor alone.<sup>180</sup> Ultimately, these end game scenarios are to be paired up with a suggested counterterrorism strategy to encourage and facilitate AQIM's downfall.

## **B. POSSIBLE ENDS TO AQIM**

Cronin's seven critical elements are the framework for this chapter.<sup>181</sup> The first of which is the capture or killing of the leader. Second, is the inability to pass the cause to the next generation. The third element is the achievement of the terrorist's cause. Similarly, the fourth element is a transition to a legitimate political process. The fifth element is the loss of popular support. Repressive measures by the state is the sixth element. And the final element is the terrorist organization's transition to other forms of violence. These elements constitute the majority of reasons why terrorist organizations cease. Each element will be discussed as what this particular end would look like for AQIM.

### **1. Capture or Killing the Leadership**

The capture or killing of a terrorist leader is the most straight-forward counterterrorism strategy. This tactic is usually effective particularly on organizations that have a substantial hierarchy or rely on a charismatic leader.<sup>182</sup> If these leaders were sufficiently necessary to the organization's continued existence, the organization will typically collapse. This element speaks specifically to the demoralization or chaos created in the wake of such a decapitation, which starts the decline of the organization. In AQIM's case, decapitation would require targeting Abdelmalek Droukdel, members of AQIM's Council of Notables or those on AQIM's Shura council.

#### ***a. Targeting Droukdel, the Supreme Commander of AQIM***

Abdelmalek Droukdel, the Supreme Commander of AQIM, has a long legacy in the Algerian *jihad*. Droukdel's formative years were at the center of the popular Algerian Islamist movement in the 1990s. His education and experience allowed him to

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180 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 18.

181 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 17–18.

182 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 18–23.

climb the ranks of the Algerian *jihād*, by proving his worth and commitment. As he rose to command the GSPC, he sought to expand its reach and relevance, tying the GSPC to Al-Qaeda's global *jihād*.<sup>183</sup> This same drive to make AQIM part of a larger cause is also present in Droukdel's centralized leadership style; making him both an effective part of AQIM's leadership, and a vulnerability to the organization if lost.

Droukdel appears to be more of an empire builder than a coalition builder within AQIM. This was made clear during his 2008 *New York Times* interview. While he espoused unity in the *jihād* he emphasized AQIM's efforts tied to the bigger *jihād*, claimed a multi-ethnic constituency for AQIM; yet, he conspicuously omitted any claim of unity with the many other *jihād* organizations of the Maghreb.<sup>184</sup> Contrary to Droukdel's claim the leadership of AQIM has remained Algerian, in spite of the seven year emphasis on international terrorism.<sup>185</sup> Further, Droukdel has not been able to ally his cause with those of the Moroccan Islamic Group (GICM) or the LIFG. Droukdel changed his organization from the GSPC to AQIM to take a on large regional name to subsume the area that other organization with little return. Instead Droukdel's efforts seem to have had more internal implications.

Within AQIM, Droukdel has been primarily concerned with internal power struggles. The most well-known is the dispute between himself and Mohktar Belmohktar (MBM), a popular AQIM sub-commander in the southern region of the GSPC, who voiced his displeasure with Droukdel's climb to power and subsequent expansion of operations into the Sahel.<sup>186</sup> MBM was promptly demoted from his post as the Southern regional commander and a close ally to Droukdel was appointed as the new regional commander (Yahia Djoudai).<sup>187</sup> Droukdel then sent one of his many brigades

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183 Droukdel was one of the original signatories of Biyat to Osama Bin Laden in 2003. Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

184 "An Interview With Abdelmalek Droukdal," *New York Times*, July 1, 2008.

185 Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda," 1 & 10. Cristiani, and Fabiani, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," 5.

186 Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda," 5.

187 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 48.

(AQIM currently operates about 10 brigades or fighting units)<sup>188</sup> from Northeastern Algeria, led by Abdelhamid Abu Zeid, to commence Droukdel's campaign in the Sahel.<sup>189</sup> The result of which has caused the two commanders, MBM and Zeid to compete ruthlessly for resources and prove their worth to AQIM.

A less well known dispute is with the Shura Council. AQIM's leadership is composed of the Supreme Commander (Droukdel) and "the People of Authority."<sup>190</sup> The People of Authority are made up of two councils, the Council of Notables and the Shura Council. The Council of Notables is analogous to the Council of Elders, made up primarily of the senior commanders of AQIM. The Shura Council is composed of the religious elders, who provide the religious legitimacy for the organization. In March 2010, the Shura Council leader of AQIM released a video making contrary statements to that of Droukdel. This seemed to corroborate the claim that Droukdel had begun deferring to AQ-Central for its guidance, minimizing the role of AQIM's own Shura Council.<sup>191</sup> Droukdel has attempted to make himself the central link to AQIM and its global legitimacy.

As the Supreme Commander of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel is a high value target for counter-AQIM forces. Though, in the past, the Algerian *jihadists* have shown a great deal of resilience in the face of leadership targeting, Droukdel's long term as commander has made him more essential to the organization. He has been in charge of the organization since 2003, as the GSPC, and is now the longest serving leader in Algerian *jihad* history since 1992. Further, Droukdel is the primary link between AQ and AQIM, severing that link would have a pronounced impact.

The impact of Droukdel's death would be immediate. A meeting of the Council of Notables would be convened to establish a working leadership until a successor could be found. It is also reasonable to assume that those on the Council of

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188 The term Brigade is just a title, it does not relate to size or combat ability. The size of an AQIM brigade can be anywhere from 1000–50 fighters. Le Sage, "The Evolving Threat," 13.

189 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

190 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

191 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

Notables would also start jockeying for the key position themselves. The ultimate decision would be made by the Shura council, which would serve not only as the electing body, but as the religious authority for the successor to assume the position of Supreme Commander. Though this seems relatively clear-cut, succession has failed to be an uncontested matter in the Algerian *jihads*. There will likely be turmoil, infighting and even internal “house-cleaning” after the succession. Due in particular to Droukdel’s hunger for power and ruthless command, his rivals will have waited for quite some time to see him deposed.

***b. Targeting the Council of Notables, AQIM’s War Council***

The Council of Notables serves as the war council or the group of respected leaders who are brought together to make both tactical and strategic decisions for the organization. This council is primarily composed of the zone commanders, key staff and prominent emirs throughout the organization.<sup>192</sup> In effect, they are the likely contenders for succession in the organization and are the commanders of cells or groups of cells in the organization. The council represents the key people of AQIM and if targeted, a significant vulnerability.

Some of the members of the Council of Notables are highly important in the short term viability of the organization and may have long-term implications. An example would be to target the Southern Zone emirs: Nabil Makloufi, Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Abdelhamid Zeid. Makloufi is the new emir over the southern zone, sent specifically to quell the rivalry between Belmokhtar and Zeid.<sup>193</sup> His dispatch would certainly disrupt operations and acerbate the tension between the two emirs, until a suitable replacement could be found. Belmokhtar is a long time veteran of the Sahara, where he has served since 1992, the removal of Belmokhtar would have an immediate effect and effectively hamper half of the operating forces in the Sahara. Likewise, Zeid’s capture or death would leave his force equally adrift. By effectively targeting at least two

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<sup>192</sup> Jane’s, “AQIM Profile.”

<sup>193</sup> Jemal Oumar, “Africa Defense Journal,” AQIM Replaces Sahara Emir, Janaury 27, 2012, <http://africadefensejournal.wordpress.com/2012/01/27/aqim-replaces-sahara-emir/> (accessed May 1, 2012).

of these three emirs, the southern zone would be greatly hampered and internal strife would likely reign requiring intervention from the Algerian-based leadership of AQIM. The seriousness of just such an attack on AQIM, could temporarily cripple one of AQIM's primary sources of income and their smuggling routes. Both of which are essential to AQIM's survival. In the long-term, this setback and loss in expertise could severely degrade the ability regain the initiative in the south.

*c. Targeting the Shura Council*

The Shura or religious council serves as the legitimizing force of AQIM. Without the Shura council AQIM loses its primary pillar that is the foundation to its organization. Though AQIM has a great deal of tactical leaders and is operationally focused, their goals are religious in nature. Therefore, a religious leadership is essential to give the requisite validation for their actions in keeping with their views of Islam. Functionally, AQIM does not require the Shura council, but to hold any clout for recruiting, funding and general popular support the Shura council is vital.

Targeting the Shura council is extremely difficult. First, the Shura council is highly secretive, and few members are publically known.<sup>194</sup> Second, these figures are religious leaders who rarely take part in tactical operations. Therefore, the opportunity to discover and remove these leaders is not an easy task. However, if security forces were to discover the members of the council this would represent a great blow to the organization. Not only does the Shura council aide in decision making and give validity to AQIM's cause, but they are also central to the already tenuous succession process within the organization. Without an accepted, legitimate Shura, succession of command could easily go from an already tense situation to a breaking point in the organizational unity.

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<sup>194</sup> Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

## 2. Inability to Pass the Cause to the Next Generation

In order for a terrorist organization to survive over decades, it must have the ability to either appeal to new followers or morph to do so.<sup>195</sup> Without a contemporary message that resonates with the terrorist's target audience, the message is simply lost, as is the support to the organization. Remaining relevant is a continuous problem for terrorist organizations in particular due to their insular nature, which tends to keep them apart from large portions of society.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, it's incumbent on the terrorists to know the current issues of the public to both seize on opportunities and remain part of the conversation. Specific to AQIM, they are required to maintain a close association with urban Algerian population centers and the separatist groups of the Sahel, like the Tuaregs.<sup>197</sup>

### a. *Staying Relevant to Urban Algerians*

The majority of AQIM, nearly three quarters, reside within Algeria where a majority of the operations take place.<sup>198</sup> Though AQIM is relatively scattered throughout Algeria, their most notable stronghold is in the Kabiyle Mountains to the Northeast of Algeria with access to the urban areas of Algeria along the coast.<sup>199</sup> To stay relevant to potential supporters in these urban areas the GSPC changed its name and alignment to that of a successful brand, Al-Qaeda.<sup>200</sup> The GSPC also pledged its support to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I) during the height of Abu Musab Zarqawi's successes.<sup>201</sup> AQ-I has faded from the limelight and seems to be on the path of failure. The same can be said of Al-Qaeda central following the death of Osama Bin Laden. There have been few successful attacks or any such operation that shows any true capability that AQ had

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195 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 23–24.

196 Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda," 8.

197 The Berber separatists in the Kabiyle Mountains are another group, but I have chosen not to discuss them as the Tuareg example makes the point sufficiently.

198 Jane's, "AQIM Profile."

199 Boudali, "Examining U.S. Counterterrorism," 2.

200 Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 195.

201 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 15.

exhibited in the early 2000s. So by mere affiliation AQIM's star will dwindle as well, as the AQ moniker carries significantly less weight than in the past. In order to remain contemporary in the minds of AQIM's target population in the urban centers they need to find themes that resonate. This organization has done this twice thus far, by changing from the GIA to the GSPC and to AQIM. Without another change, AQIM may follow the same path of its fellow AQ affiliates.

***b. Taking on the Tuareg Cause***

In the South, AQIM has a whole other challenge with influence. The Tuaregs of the Sahara are not as impressed by the AQ title, but by the counter-state goals of AQIM.<sup>202</sup> Simply, the Tuareg's wish to rebel from the states of the Sahel and form their own autonomous society.<sup>203</sup> AQIM wants to see an end to the secular governments of the Sahel and install *Sharia*. Initially these goals are complimentary, but after autonomy has been achieved, how can AQIM remain relevant to the Tuaregs? The Tuaregs, who have rebelled in Niger and Mali in recent years are quite capable of achieving their goals, but where does that leave AQIM?<sup>204</sup> AQIM and the Tuaregs are likely to fight side-by-side in the initial throws against the state, but the Tuaregs are unlikely to maintain their support to AQIM during the phases following autonomy.

**3. Achievement of the Cause**

A stark end to a terrorist organization is the achievement of their cause.<sup>205</sup> With the goals sufficiently met, the terrorist organization need not continue. Though this element seems rare; for terrorist organizations with narrow, clearly defined goals, strong external sponsors or causes where the terrorists faced a weak colonial power that was no

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202 Another reason why the name change to AQIM was meant for internal Algerian consumption and less of an external maneuver to draw in the tribes of North Africa.

203 Kalifa Keita, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Sahel; The Tuareg Insurgency in Mali* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 1998), 10–11.

204 Jeremy Keenan, "Mali's Tuareg rebellion: What next?" Aljazeera, March 20, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/20123208133276463.html> (accessed May 3, 2012).

205 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 24–25.

longer willing or able to fight, terrorists often achieve their goals.<sup>206</sup> AQIM's cause is the establishment of an Islamic Algerian state under *Sharia*, with subordinate goals to depose the secular governments of the Sahel.<sup>207</sup>

Meeting AQIM's objective requires a dramatic change of events. AQIM must either sufficiently overcome the security forces of Algeria to force a toppling effect or the people of Algeria must rise up in support of AQIM's cause. These scenarios are not mutually exclusive and could very well happen simultaneously, as success on one side would likely encourage success on the other. As was the case in the Iranian revolution of 1979 where a student revolt quickly led to an Islamist takeover.<sup>208</sup> After the current regime has been effectively deposed, AQIM would then beat out fellow Islamist groups (like the former FIS) to establish its own regime.

#### **4. Negotiations Toward a Legitimate Political Process**

Often when a terrorist organization is either on the verge of success or failure, they enter negotiations and attempt to solve their grievance through the political process.<sup>209</sup> Either one of two outcomes typically brings about this scenario. The terrorist organization has become a popular movement, has the ability to hold political office and therefore does so in order to dominate the political process. Conversely, the terrorist organization appears to be losing the initiative and chooses to move away from violence to politics to resolve their issues (this is typically a concession). Cronin further describes this element as being a major source of fracturing of terrorist organizations as the devout tend to stay the course of violence and see the political figures as disingenuous.<sup>210</sup> In AQIM's situation the Shura council or members of the Council of Notables would need to actively seek joining the legitimate political process.

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206 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 25.

207 Boudali, "Examining U.S. Counterterrorism," 2–3.

208 Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 218.

209 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 25–27.

210 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 25.

The first step toward such negotiation for AQIM would be to renounce violence and reconcile for their past injustices. A step that Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has offered to AQIM previously, but one which they have flatly refused.<sup>211</sup> However, attitudes and situations could change, and this change would be essential to evolve into a political AQIM.

In order for AQIM to join the political process the Algerian government would have to be capable of allowing AQIM's participation. Currently, Algeria's political system is mostly closed off and only allows limited participation by competing political parties.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, at the moment, this glimmer of hope for success for AQIM is not currently possible.

Regimes, politics and attitudes do change over time. For AQIM to choose this route, the political process in Algeria must change to allow participation or this is not a viable option. Additionally, AQIM's attitude toward participation in secular government systems must also change. AQIM's current philosophy has remained unchanged since the *takfiri* decree in 1996 that made both active and passive participation with the secular regime akin to heresy.<sup>213</sup> Just such political participation is directly against one of AQIM's core beliefs. These beliefs would need to change in order for this sort of end to occur.

## **5. Diminished Popular Support**

Terrorist organizations require popular support for their very survival. When a terrorist organization loses local support it loses anonymity, the ability to gain resources, recruits, targets and most importantly access to audiences of its choosing.<sup>214</sup> In essence, the organization cannot operate nor sustain itself. Cronin highlights four ways this could occur: the populace could fear the government repression measures caused by terrorist activity, the government can offer more opportunity, the terrorists cause can become

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211 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 16, 21.

212 Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria*, 100.

213 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 14.

214 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 27–30.

outdated and the population could detest the violent acts of terrorism.<sup>215</sup> The GIA and GSPC has seen these four factors at some point in their lifetimes. Likewise AQIM has dealt with all of these issues and must continue to meet the challenge each case represents in order to survive.

*a. Public Fear of Government Repression*

Fear is a powerful tool and could be used by the state just as much as by the terrorist organizations. Aggressive counterterrorism measures implemented in direct response to terrorist attacks has a chilling effect upon the majority of the population. As was the case in the successful U.S. counterinsurgency campaign during the Philippine insurrection of the early 1900s.<sup>216</sup> Simply, the average citizen does not want to get involved nor do they wish to be implicated with the terrorists. The net result is at a minimum apathy by the population to the terrorist's cause or at the most collusion with the state to prevent the consequences of heavy-handed state repressive measures.

Fear of state repression (both military and police) comes in another form, fear of change and continued war. Populations generally speaking, want normalcy and strict security measures that impede the daily life of citizens is an obstacle to that normalcy. Though state repressive measures can backfire on the state, citizens also blame the terrorists for the added traffic, security screening and the general feeling of being in a police state. In the long-term, citizens grow wary of the continued violence and simply want the conflict to end. This was much the case of the GSPC in the 2000s, which lead to their restructuring.<sup>217</sup> For AQIM this is a very real threat to its existence, as little has changed since the days of the GSPC, except that AQIM is further disenfranchised from the public.

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<sup>215</sup> Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 27–28.

<sup>216</sup> Timothy K. Deady, "Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency: The Philippines, 1899–1902," *Parameters*, Spring 2005: 53–68.

<sup>217</sup> Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 182.

**b. *Government Opportunity as a Drain to Terrorist Recruitment Efforts***

Government reconciliation and economic growth are AQIM's greatest threat in the long-term. Previous reconciliation efforts almost completely snuffed out the GSPC.<sup>218</sup> In recent years Algeria has exhibited a growing economy with a surplus due to oil revenue.<sup>219</sup> The result of a higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is felt on the street, easing unemployment and general dissatisfaction with the government. AQIM's recruiting pool and support base would suffer under these conditions.

**c. *Outdated Ideology***

As mentioned previously in the section, "Staying Relevant to Urban Algerians," the Al-Qaeda ideology is becoming increasingly less in vogue. The so-called "Arab Spring," represents a contemporary ideology and methodology that has brought real tangible change to Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The Al-Qaeda ideology has no comparative successes. The implication is that peaceful demonstrations, not *jihād*, can bring about the required change. Therefore, AQIM is simply not needed. Even given the Islamist views of AQIM, the Islamists of all three nations have made significant gains and appear to have achieved their goals without *jihād*. The lesson learned is that AQIM simply cannot succeed as well, so why support them.

**d. *Revulsion to the Violence of Terrorism***

The public's revulsion to violence was the primary reason for the GIA's failing in the late 90s. The GIA perpetrated widespread massacres in suit with its *takfiri* edict.<sup>220</sup> A more modern example is Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's flagrant attempts to ignite a civil war in Iraq. What resulted was the "Awakening" where Sunnis saw that Al-Qaeda in Iraq had brought upon massive violence to Iraq and the previously dependable Sunni

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<sup>218</sup> Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 182–183.

<sup>219</sup> Isabelle Mandraud, "Algeria's leaders buy time with oil revenues," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/15/algeria-arab-and-middle-east-protests> (accessed May 3, 2012).

<sup>220</sup> Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 14.

support to Al-Qaeda diminished rapidly.<sup>221</sup> Similarly, AQIM may find itself in the same situation with the bombing of the Algiers UN headquarters in 2007 an attack which caused extensive collateral damage and was unlikely to garner much favor from the public.<sup>222</sup>

## **6. Repression of the Terrorist Group**

Government repression is an often used tool of the state when confronted with an internal terrorist organization. The government simply intensifies law enforcement efforts and employs overwhelming military power to diminish safe havens and stymie the growth of terrorist organizations.<sup>223</sup> Terrorists are forced to enact strict security measures or consolidate on foreboding territory far from their intended targets just to ensure survival. Over time, this separation from the target areas reduces the terrorists' ability to achieve success. Eventually, government repressive measures disperse the organization so severely that it cannot properly organize or the terrorist organization simply falls out of popularity due to its demonstrated ineffectiveness. Algerian security forces have employed state repressive measures to the extreme against AQIM.

### ***a. AQIM Pushed Outside of its Primary Target Area***

Algeria for the most part has been extremely effective at repressing AQIM within its borders. AQIM has been forced out of the major urban areas of Algeria, into the Kabiyle Mountains and the Sahara desert where they can mingle in with the resident tribes that are fundamentally anti-government.<sup>224</sup> Algeria's armed forces are large and capable, with a standing military of 147,000.<sup>225</sup> Since the coup of 1992 Algeria's security forces have become exceptionally adept at quelling disorder and rooting out

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<sup>221</sup> Andrew Phillips, "How al Qaeda lost Iraq," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, March 2009: 64–84.

<sup>222</sup> Robert R. Fowler, *A Season in Hell: My 130 Days in the Sahara with Al Qaeda*, Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2011, 314.

<sup>223</sup> Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 30–31.

<sup>224</sup> Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 21.

<sup>225</sup> Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda," 8.

extremists.<sup>226</sup> AQIM is now at great distances from its primary target, the urban areas of Algeria, and equally so of its secondary targets, the urban areas of the Sahelian states.

***b. Future if AQIM Cannot Overcome the Repression***

AQIM can be worn down in its current areas and simply fail to regain the initiative. The consequences of AQIM's separation from its target area and population are two-fold. AQIM has less access to its intended targets, and AQIM simply will become more out of touch with the public that it is attempting to influence. Over time AQIM will lose relevance, recruits and eventually fade into obscurity.

**7. Transition to Another Modus Operandi**

Terrorist organizations, like most organizations, don't simply go away, they typically turn into something else. This transition can either be deliberate or incidental. Cronin has divided this element into two categories for the sake of simplicity: transition to conventional warfare or criminality.<sup>227</sup> When a terrorist organization believes it has amassed the requisite strength against the state they may rise up as an insurgency, or in some cases as a conventional fighting force ready to lead a revolution or civil war. Other times a terrorist organization, so dependent on criminality for the purposes of self-sustainment may over time dedicate most of its efforts to crime versus the original objective. A criminal course is likely when the original objective seems less achievable or no longer relevant, but the organization is still sufficiently organized. Basically, the terrorist hierarchy makes the relatively easy transition to a mafia hierarchy. AQIM would either need to break out into full civil war, as the GIA had in the 1990s, or given AQIM's thorough attachment to the illicit trade of the Sahara, simply give higher priority to personal wealth, power and prestige.

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<sup>226</sup> Narrimane Benakcha, "The Algerian Regime: Arab Spring Survivor," *Columbia Journal of International Affairs*, March 7, 2012, <http://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/algerian-regime-arab-spring-survivor> (accessed May 3, 2012).

<sup>227</sup> Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 31–32.

**a. AQIM Transition to Insurgency**

AQIM could amass the numbers to launch attacks in Algeria or the Sahel. To be effective in Algeria, AQIM would require some sort of catalyst to put themselves in a position to make the transition to a full insurgency. Namely, the Algerian security network would need to collapse, as in a regime collapse or a massive social movement. Just this sort of window of opportunity would allow AQIM to stir up the recruits to make an attempt to directly confront Algerian security forces through guerilla warfare. This is very much what had occurred with the GIA in 1990s.<sup>228</sup>

AQIM may have a far easier time at overpowering a Sahelian nation. By co-opting the Tuaregs as mentioned previously, AQIM could very well topple a Sahelian state, albeit with a great deal of help from the Saharan tribesmen. This vary scenario seems to be playing out at the time of the writing this thesis, in Mali.<sup>229</sup> The question that remains unanswered is what happens next? Do the AQIM and Tuareg ideologies merge, will there be fighting between the former allies or will this insurgency be short lived?

**b. AQIM Transition to a Criminal Network**

There is a great deal of literature pointing to the potential for AQIM to go down the criminal path. Explicitly, with a weakening likelihood of achieving success in Algeria, does AQIM simply become another set of thugs and smugglers in the Sahara. This process would not be intentional, but an insidious shift to expanding operations to support drug operations for an example.<sup>230</sup> Likewise, the resource intensive business of kidnapping for ransom can tie down an entire *katiba*, which, can find itself doing solely these operations.<sup>231</sup> Over time AQIM cells become more concerned with financing and

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228 Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 305

229 Jemal Oumar, "Timbuktu rejects al-Qaeda," Magharebia. April 27, 2012, [http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/reportage/2012/04/27/reportage-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/reportage/2012/04/27/reportage-01) (accessed May 3, 2012).

230 Keenan, "Mali's Tuareg rebellion."

231 A *katiba* is a fighting element of AQIM. Mokhtar Belmokhtar's *katiba* was responsible for the holding of Ambassador Fowler in 2008–2009, which effectively took his forces away from other operations. Fowler, *A Season in Hell*, 261.

growing turf than their original aspirations in the *jihad*. The slow relegation to primarily criminal activity was the case for the FARC.<sup>232</sup>

### **C. AQIM'S END, AND THE CONDITIONS REQUIRED**

AQIM is unlikely to end outright, because an organization's default position is survival in some form. In order to bring about an end there must be a catalyst to precipitate the end. Without a specific catalyst, like increased repressive measures, new government efforts to reconcile the conflict, or sudden loss of popular support due to a major errors in the terrorist strategy or attacks, an organization will tend to continue to exist. Though we know AQIM cannot and will not continue forever, something must happen to bring AQIM to its end. This section will discuss which AQIM ends are likely to occur and what it will take to make those ends possible.

#### **1. Probable Ends: Obsolescence, Repression, Succession and Crime**

AQIM may suffer its demise in one of four likely possibilities. These possibilities are separated for the purposes of analysis, but in reality they would occur in concert or in some combination. First, AQIM may lose popular support as the government of Algeria may enact significant change and provide a positive alternative to *jihad*. Second, AQIM may lose its safe haven in the Sahara either due to tribal reconciliation by the government or effective government repression measures. Third, in-fighting and internal fracturing may occur due to the independent structure of the leadership and the poor succession of command process within AQIM. Finally, an over-reliance on criminality for organizational sustainment may lead to the cells drifting further from *jihad* and more to criminal efforts.

##### ***a. Obsolescence in the Wake of Political Change***

First, the origins for AQIM stem from the unjust reaction of the government to the Islamist electoral victories of the 1990s. The rallying cry for AQIM is the illegitimate nature of the Algerian government and the need to right the injustice of

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<sup>232</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, Huda Aden, Adam Frost, and Benjamin Jones, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," CRS Report to Congress, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2004, 90–92.

the military coup of 1992. If the Algerian government were to reform, reconcile and offer legitimate elections, AQIM's cause would no longer be as necessary. The result of better governance could serve to sap the strength of the *jihad* in both their ability to recruit and the important tacit support needed to operate. Within these constraints AQIM would find it far more difficult for its agents to maintain anonymity and supply themselves. AQIM would slowly fade out as an effective organization.

***b. Repression: Nowhere to Run but into the Desert Wasteland***

AQIM's expansion to regional and international operations has provided renewed vitality for the organization, but has also highlighted AQIM's necessity for safe haven. Specifically, the expanded Southern and Western zones of AQIM enjoy more freedom of operation outside the pressure of Algerian security forces than the Eastern and Central zones.<sup>233</sup> Algerian security efforts have focused on the denial of the urban areas of Algeria to AQIM, and isolation into the depopulated Sahara.

By expanding into regional affairs, AQIM has exposed itself to more opportunities, but simultaneously increased risk to multi-national security forces. Additionally, the fundamental goal of achieving an Islamic state in Algeria through *jihad* is now further from AQIM's grasp. By expanding, AQIM has invited international pressure to squeeze AQIM out of its last stronghold, the Sahara. AQIM's final bastion in the Sahara may disappear with reconciliation efforts underway in Mali, with the Tuareg tribes of the Northern Sahara, and increased regional security cooperation.<sup>234</sup> The combined pressure of Algerian and international security pressure may cause the balloon to burst.

***c. Failures of Succession: By Leader Targeting or Generational Gap***

Additionally, in-fighting due to the decentralization of the organization and a weak process for command succession may lead to AQIM's fragmentation. AQIM has many internal disputes concerning the direction of the organization and leadership

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<sup>233</sup> Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 46–47.

<sup>234</sup> Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

decisions.<sup>235</sup> Also, leadership targeting will likely cause fracturing instead of destroying AQIM.<sup>236</sup> Individual cells are more likely to break from the main organization; lending possible credence to state reconciliation efforts or psychological operations to sow seeds of discontent between the AQIM cells and their headquarters.<sup>237</sup> Disputes such as these could fragment the organization in the same way as the GSPC had fragmented away from the GIA in 1998.

Two probable catalysts to infighting within AQIM could be leadership targeting and failure to transition to the next generation. AQIM is a deeply paranoid organization that has a penchant for ruthlessness.<sup>238</sup> Leaders vying for power following a successful decapitation strike is not uncommon to Algerian terrorist organizations. Specifically, Droukdel's demise would have a definite effect on the organization as a whole, given his tenure as the leader. His long term as leader has also imbued a specific form of Salafist ideology that may not represent contemporary audiences. The implication is that the organization could split along the lines of new and old generation, as was the case with the Baader-Meinhof group which became the Red Army Faction.<sup>239</sup>

***d. Crime Pays, a Failing Jihad Does Not***

The last case of probable failure is that the cells may drift more toward criminal activity than *jihad* operations as a result of the high dependence on illicit finances. Mokhtar Belmokhtar's group is an example of this in action. Belmokhtar, who had lost favor with the leadership of AQIM, specifically Droukdel, has operated semi-independently for years in the deserts of the Sahara.<sup>240</sup> The concept of independent cells that are self-sufficient has required a mechanism to provide recruits, finances and mobility.

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235 Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda Turn," 5–6.

236 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 18 & 40–41.

237 Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 172.

238 Roberts, *The Battlefield*, 130–131.

239 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 23.

240 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 46–48.

The criminal nature of the cells provides the required mechanism for self-sustainment. Many of the cells are composed of former criminals or bandits with a long criminal history outside of *jihād*.<sup>241</sup> Further using their experiences in criminality, AQIM has taken advantage of the smuggling networks for the purposes of moving people, equipment self-financing and the aforementioned kidnapping for ransom operations.<sup>242</sup> Smuggling, ransoms and AQIM's involvement in the drug trade have buoyed AQIM's financial stability. These criminal activities offer a unique characteristic to AQIM's self-sustainment. However, over-indulgence can lead to AQIM venturing closer to a mafia like organization, rather than its *jihād*ist roots. AQIM's extensive use of criminal networks may become means to their own end, such as the case with the like terrorist organizations of the FARC and Abu-Sayyaf.<sup>243</sup>

## **2. Improbable Ends: Success, Politics and Civil War**

### ***a. AQIM Achieves its Goals***

Attainment of AQIM's goal of an Islamic Algeria seems highly unlikely, and AQIM seems further from achieving that goal more than at any time in its long twenty year history. Sparking an insurgency or civil war in Algeria seems like quite a stretch and would require some fortuitous changes in the current situation to be probable. Complete success for AQIM appears to be quite a reach for two major reasons. First, none of the three caveats: narrow goals, strong external sponsor or ambivalent colonial power, that relate to an easy win for a terrorist organization are present. AQIM's goals are very broad-reaching as opposed to the freeing of a political prisoner or the change of specific policy or law. Further, AQIM has no strong external partner like a state; nor is AQIM fighting a colonial power, but a resident regime. Second, success requires that AQIM not only beat the Algerian state, but to then defeat any peer competitors; something the GIA couldn't do after being responsible for over 150,000 casualties in the

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241 Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 55–59.

242 Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 19.

243 Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 31–32.

mid-90s.<sup>244</sup> One last possibility on success, could be through joining the political process, and affecting regime change through that manner. However, the issue at question is how AQIM co-opts such a movement.

**b. AQIM Turns to Politics**

AQIM taking a turn toward politics seems to be quite an inviting idea, however there are some major roadblocks to such a possibility. Namely AQIM's stated *takfiri* beliefs that it is not be involved in secular politics, has been the Algerian *jihadi's* battle cry since 1992.<sup>245</sup> If AQIM were to move toward politics, this would likely only come with a split in the organization from the more devout followers of AQIM. In that scenario only portions may cede to politics but others will continue the mantle of *jihadi*, so is it a true turn to politics? AQIM has remained on the outside of Algerian society and fellow Islamist organizations like those that replaced the politically active FIS seem more likely to accede to power than the *jihadi* AQIM.

**c. AQIM Ignites a Civil War**

A renewed civil war as the GIA had fought in the 1990s, may have some concerned given the Arab Spring protests and the large number of weapons from Libya that are now available for a budding Algerian insurgency. However, the Algerian government has been extremely effective at cracking down on similar protests and has compiled a string of successes against AQIM in Algeria. It is unlikely that AQIM has the capability and local support to seriously confront Algerian security forces directly, or at a minimum, to the level that the GIA had achieved previously. Simply, public tolerance for such efforts has come and gone, and Algerian security forces are better equipped and trained for counterinsurgency while AQIM is weaker and more dispersed than previously.

AQIM could also ignite a civil war in the Sahelian nations, as mentioned previously. With the aid of local tribes, and the limited resources of the Sahelian states, what is to stop them? The problem lies within the tribes that AQIM would need to co-

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<sup>244</sup> Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM," 14.

<sup>245</sup> Martinez, *Algerian Civil War*, 60–62.

opt, specifically the Tuaregs. Tuareg is an Arabic word that means “the Abandoned of God.”<sup>246</sup> This is not a name they have given themselves, but were given to them as an epithet by the conquering Arabs during the seventh century. The Arabs found these desert nomads to be ungovernable and unwilling to convert to their form of Islam. Eventually in the 1900s, the so-called Tuaregs did convert to a form of Sunni Islam that conveniently retained many of their originally religious beliefs.<sup>247</sup> At the core of this issue is that the Tuaregs are against the governments of the Sahel, but they are not Salafists eager to install *Sharia*.<sup>248</sup> A scenario where the Tuaregs, after winning a multigenerational fight for independence over the Sahelian governments, only to give up their victory to an Algerian Salafist organization is unlikely. A quote from the Tuareg leader of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) seems to sum up the situation best: “What do Ansar al-Din and al-Qaeda mean?” [Mouhi Ag Boulkhei] asks. “What benefit can they bring to the people? We’ve already warned them to leave our land because we won’t be governed by people who don’t belong to us.”<sup>249</sup>

For AQIM to prevail the relatively easier fight in the Sahel, they would have to defeat, convert or subjugate the vary people they depend upon for their survival in the Sahara. A very daunting task at best. There are many other possible scenarios that could lend itself to an AQIM victory, but all require substantial, if not improbable change to the current reality. In summary, these elements are the least likely to bring about the end to the AQIM we currently know.

#### **D. CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

AQIM is a substantially resilient organization that has all the factors required for survival, but no organization can go on forever. Even with an optimistic outlook to AQIM’s future reveals that success, politics and renewed civil war are unlikely futures without significant changes. Changes that substantially alter the conditions on the ground.

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246 Douglas Porch, *The Conquest of The Sahara* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 65.

247 Porch, *Conquest of the Sahara*, 34.

248 Filiu, “Could Al-Qaeda Turn,” 9.

249 Oumar, “Timbuktu rejects al-Qaeda.” ‘Azawad’ is the Tuareg name for the territory North of Timbuktu that includes portions of the Sahara to include parts of Niger and Algeria. The MNLA is the liberation organization that has formed the largest constituency of Tuaregs in the fight for independence.

However, fading into insignificance, collapsing under the yoke of repression, infighting and fixation on criminality are more probable outcomes for AQIM. The timeline for these ends are uncertain and an end to AQIM does not rule out some facet of the organization continuing under a new banner. In sum, an end may merely lead to a new birth. The importance to studying these ends is to evaluate what is probable and how these ends relate to U.S. strategy. By pairing probable ends with outcomes desirable to U.S. national objectives, the U.S. can develop strategies that facilitate a set of ends to AQIM. Ends that are most congruent to U.S. goals with the least likelihood of spawning the next generation of Algerian terrorists. The next chapter will discuss these vary goals and the counter-AQIM policy that is now being executed.

## V. U.S. POLICY AND STRATEGY TOWARD AQIM

### A. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

U.S. operations in the Maghreb and Sahel to counter AQIM, such as Operation Enduring Freedom Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS), have a direct link to U.S. policy objectives and ultimately U.S. national interests as presented by the President. National interests set the stage for how the U.S. views possible solutions to problems, and here specifically, how the U.S. addresses a problem like AQIM. These interests directly affect our national policy objectives, which have set out to build partnership capacity with the nations of the Maghreb and Sahel to defeat AQIM. Further, the policy establishes the boundaries for the counter-AQIM strategy, which favor Sahelian partnerships due to operational limitations. The deviations in strategic and operational planning with the policy level create friction. This friction both desynchronizes the full national effort, but is also the catalyst to enact changes to policy that the strategy may be unable to achieve under the current boundaries.

#### 1. Definition of Key Terms

In this chapter it is important to differentiate policy from strategy. Both of which are intrinsically intertwined, as they inform each other and can be viewed more as a cycle than a linear progression. Policy, is defined as, “a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions,” or ,”a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body.”<sup>250</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, U.S. policy toward AQIM will follow this definition, meaning that the policy is determined by those in the U.S. government from the information they currently know of AQIM. In similar fashion Strategy is formed in this way.

Strategy is, “the science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum

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<sup>250</sup> *Merriam-Webster* online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy> (accessed January 8, 2012).

support to adopted policies in peace or war.”<sup>251</sup> In this way strategy is what is determined after the policy has been created thus a linear relationship. However, this is not how the system actually works. The policy is created which provides the boundaries for possible strategies. These strategies then return to the policy makers in a feedback loop, which informs the policy makers what it will actually take to employ the policy. An example of this in action is General Eric Shinseki’s now famous congressional testimony about the size of forces required to occupy Iraq.<sup>252</sup> The strategist (Shinseki) was informing the policy makers (the Senate Armed Services Committee) what the limitations were of a policy of regime change in Iraq with a limited footprint. The concept is that through this feedback loop, policy is amended and new strategies are produced, although in this case the desired outcome is not always achieved. This cycle is continuous and changes as information about the situation and the desired end-state evolve over time.

In the United States politicians and diplomats author policy; specifically, the President and Executive Branch, Congress, Ambassadors and the diplomats in the various Bureaus within the State Department; based on U.S. national interests. U.S. strategy is authored by the government agencies like the National Security Council, Department of Defense and to some extent the sub departments of the State Department. This strategy informs policy in a feedback loop. Thus our starting point for policy and strategy are U.S. national goals.

## **2. The Path From Policy to Strategy**

The U.S. national goals or interests can be found in various locations: the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution, the President’s State of the Union addresses as it relates to matters of national security, and the President’s National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSS is a periodically updated document of national security objectives that feeds the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, National Defense Strategy, and

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<sup>251</sup> Merriam-Webster, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strategy> (accessed January 8, 2012).

<sup>252</sup> Though initially unsuccessful in changing the policy, Shinseki’s testimony would become the centerpiece for the argument to add additional forces later in the Iraq campaign. John Althouse, “Army Chief: Force to Occupy Iraq Massive, USA Today, February 25, 2003, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-02-25-iraq-us\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-02-25-iraq-us_x.htm) (accessed February 25, 2003).

National Military Strategies. These documents restate policy and introduce the strategy used to counter AQIM. The Strategy serves the operational plans created by the operational level commands; for this thesis, USAFRICOM (United States Africa Command) and SOCAFRICA (Special Operations Command Africa). The NSS is the starting point used for this thesis, because of the clear cogent way these elements align.

## **B. U.S. POLICY TOWARD AQIM**

### **1. U.S. National Security Strategy**

The NSS states that the U.S. national interests are, security, prosperity, universal values, and international order.”<sup>253</sup> These four interests are not independent, but interrelated and codependent. The Obama administration defines security of Americans as the most important responsibility along with the additional requirement to “promote international security.”<sup>254</sup> Prosperity is founded on the notion of a, “prosperous American economy.”<sup>255</sup> Universal values, as stated by the NSS, is based on the belief that, “certain values are universal and [the U.S.] will work to promote them worldwide.”<sup>256</sup> Finally, the U.S. seeks to encourage, “a just and sustainable international order that can foster collective action to confront common challenges.”<sup>257</sup> The NSS’s four national interests define U.S. policy to meet those interests and for the purposes of this thesis define the highest echelon of U.S. policy toward AQIM.

The NSS is the source for the initial framework of the counter-AQIM policy as a function of the national interests. With regards to security, AQIM is termed as an Al-Qaeda “affiliate,” therefore subject to the, “disrupt, dismantle and defeat,” policy set forth in the NSS.<sup>258</sup> Further, this policy specifies that it will protect, “the [U.S.] homeland... denies al-Qa’ida safe-haven, and builds positive partnerships with Muslim communities

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253 Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 17.

254 Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 17.

255 Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 28.

256 Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 35.

257 Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 40.

258 Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 19.

around the world.”<sup>259</sup> Of note is the allusion to U.S. pre-emptive action which states that, “Al-Qaeda must not be permitted to gain or retain any capacity to plan and launch international terrorist attacks, especially against the U.S. homeland.”<sup>260</sup> These two passages establish the policy for both aggressive action to find and attack the AQIM, and to do so preemptively before they have the ability to attack the U.S. or its interests.

Only one passage specifically mentions AQIM within the NSS: “Wherever al-Qa’ida or its terrorist affiliates attempt to establish a safe haven as they have in ... the Maghreb, and the Sahel we will meet them with growing pressure... [and] strengthen our own network of partners to disable al-Qaida’s... networks.”<sup>261</sup> Within the same paragraph of the NSS is an emphasis on international law-enforcement, intelligence and CT cooperation as the method to deny and dismantle AQ safe havens.<sup>262</sup> The significance is that though the earlier passages invoke preemptive rights of the U.S. to attack emerging threats, the following passages prioritize that effort through cooperation and non-unilateral action. Further, subsequent passages discuss not overreacting to the threat, which can cause the U.S. more international harm, and the judicious use of force.<sup>263</sup> Thus, from the national interest of “security” within the NSS, the U.S. policy is to prevent AQIM from action, deny them safe haven and ultimately utilize non-unilateral pressures to accomplish these goals; yet use unilateral force with restraint only if necessary.

The next national interest that is germane to the discussion of AQIM is the “international order,” which dovetails with the emphasis on non-unilateral action. The U.S. is specifically interested in encouraging effective partnerships that help prevent conflict within the African continent, calling U.S. cooperation “consultative.”<sup>264</sup> The

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<sup>259</sup> The National Security Staff has chosen the “al-Qa’ida” spelling for AQ. To remain consistent I have chosen the Al-Qaeda spelling. Otherwise there is no difference in meaning between the two spellings. Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 19.

<sup>260</sup> Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 20.

<sup>261</sup> Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 21.

<sup>262</sup> Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 21.

<sup>263</sup> Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 22.

<sup>264</sup> Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 45.

emphasis is on “building partnership capacity,” or the ability of the African nations to take on more of a leading role; requiring less U.S. intervention.<sup>265</sup> The policies associated with the national interest of an international order place the precedence of U.S. involvement with regards to AQIM as primarily advising North African governments and their a corresponding security sector organizations to disrupt, dismantle and defeat AQIM on behalf of combined U.S. and the African nations’ interests. When combined with the policy from the security interest, U.S. policy toward AQIM equates roughly to a policy of proactively disrupting, dismantling and defeating AQIM by, with or through the use of African governments and security forces. Further U.S. unilateral force should be used discreetly and only when necessary. This policy feeds to the next document which addresses specifically the counterterrorism policy.

## **2. U.S. National Counterterrorism Strategy**

The National Counterterrorism Strategy is a document that reiterates the U.S. national interests and focuses more closely on terrorism. This document is also authored by the National Security Staff and endorsed by the President. Within 2011 CT strategy the national interests, as they relate to counterterrorism, are further refined to four principles: adhering to U.S. core values, building security partnerships, applying CT tools and capabilities appropriately, and cultural resilience.<sup>266</sup> The overall message is similar to the NSS, meaning that the U.S. CT strategy sets the policy for seeking to uphold U.S. values by leveraging international partnerships and engaging the full breadth of the elements of national power to establish an environment that is resistant to Al-Qaeda’s efforts.<sup>267</sup> Further, where necessary, the U.S. will use ethical and judicious application of

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<sup>265</sup> Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 45.

<sup>266</sup> Barack Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, NSCT, Washington, DC: The White House, 2011, s 4–8.

<sup>267</sup> The elements of National Power are commonly referred by the acronym DIME (diplomatic, Intelligence, military and economic power) or PMESII, and refers to everything the nation has at its disposal to affect its national interests. John R. Mills, “‘All Elements of National Power’: Re-organizing the Interagency Structure and Process of Victory in the Long War,” Center for Contemporary Conflict, July 2006, <http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2006/Jul/millsJul06.pdf> (accessed February 6, 2012), 3–4.

force to meet those ends. The most pronounced difference in the National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT) comes in the more detailed description of the U.S. plan in dealing with AQIM.

The detail within this strategy focuses on two primary areas: an initial assessment or description and the proposed way ahead. Herein the document, AQIM is viewed as an Algerian rooted insurgency which has, “shifted its center of gravity southward,” for the purposes of evading the strong Algerian for the weaker Sahelian security forces.<sup>268</sup> Additionally, this move places AQIM in an area of instability where access to weapons and illicit goods are readily available.<sup>269</sup> AQIM has also used kidnappings as a source of revenue to maintain itself, making the Sahel unsafe for westerners.<sup>270</sup> Combined, the NSCT describes AQIM as an organization that threatens U.S. interests by its shift southward where it can affect the weaker Sahelian nations and has potential to strike U.S. interests in the region.<sup>271</sup>

The response to the AQIM incursion is in line with the NSCT, in that of building resilience to AQIM efforts. This will be accomplished through building regional capacity to deal with AQIM, and specifically notes that traditional CT tools do not represent the total resolution to the threat.<sup>272</sup> Regional partnership and capacity building support multiple lines of operation against AQIM and ultimately make the Sahel more immune to further AQIM infiltration.<sup>273</sup> However, the U.S. does retain the right and where necessary, to take steps in the near-term to directly address the problem of AQIM.<sup>274</sup>

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268 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

269 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

270 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

271 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

272 This final statement ‘that traditional use of CT tools...’ comes from the statement, “eradication of AQIM will not be addressed by traditional CT tools alone,” which is a perplexing statement. In short, it declares that the typical capacity within the region for CT is just not there to counter AQIM. Further, the U.S. at this moment does not have a driving need to use its power directly. This is immediately contradicted two sentences later in the NSCT. It leaves the reader with the idea that partnership is essential and the full solution, but the threat is imminent and requires near-term U.S. intervention. Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

273 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

274 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

The total strategy is to “contain disrupt, degrade and dismantle AQIM.”<sup>275</sup> Most of these goals refer to the “resilience” principle referenced earlier in the NSCT, but of interest are what the NSCT terms as “enabling elements,” which may refer to the Tuaregs within the Sahel, Boko-Haram of Nigeria and the various criminal or terrorist organizations of the Maghreb/Sahel which directly or indirectly allow AQIM to survive and thrive within the region.<sup>276</sup>

Two other references within the NSCT have marked importance to the total strategy toward AQIM: the use of U.S. force and the importance of Algeria. Though the strategy states the U.S. right and reasons for using force, there is also specific discussion of weighing the “costs and benefits” of such action as they relate to “regional dynamics and perceptions.”<sup>277</sup> The significance is that this cautionary language is used in the NSCT when discussing CT in Europe, and not used for South Asia, East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Southeast Asia and Central Asia strategies; meaning that the strategy for these latter regions is set apart from the strategy toward AQIM.<sup>278</sup> Plainly, from the viewpoint of the NSCT authors, U.S. CT force used in the Maghreb and Sahel is comparably sensitive to similar actions taken in Europe, versus force used in the other CT focus areas. This point will have further significance in this chapter when Department of State (DOS) and Department of Defense (DoD) strategies are discussed.

The reference to Algeria is another significant point that has an impact on the eventual strategy adopted by the agencies of the U.S. Government. The NSCT states that cooperation, “between the Algerian and Sahelian countries of Mauritania, Mali, and Niger as an essential element,” in defeating AQIM.<sup>279</sup> This basically says that not only is U.S. bilateral partnership capacity building of importance, but that a multi-national interdependent partnership is vital. Moreover, this multi-national effort with Algeria is the lynchpin to the strategy to counter AQIM. As with the previous reference of

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<sup>275</sup> Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

<sup>276</sup> Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

<sup>277</sup> Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

<sup>278</sup> Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 10–17.

<sup>279</sup> Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

cautionary language, this multi-national partnership will be discussed more thoroughly in the DOS and DoD strategies. Though the NSCT is the source document for U.S. CT policy, the U.S. intelligence bureaus also inform policy.

### **3. National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)**

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), which reports to both the President and the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), provides an assessment of the threat posed by AQIM to the policy makers in the U.S. government.<sup>280</sup> Ms. Maren Brooks of the NCTC assesses, “that [AQIM] poses no direct threat to the U.S. homeland, but to its interests.”<sup>281</sup> Further, the most pressing threat posed by AQIM is the increase in successful KFR operations, of which AQIM has netted millions of dollars from European nations.<sup>282</sup> Though given the uptick in attention to AQIM in the recent years, NCTC views AQIM as a schizophrenic organization that may fracture and collapse on its own or fail due to loss in funding.<sup>283</sup>

Given this assessment, the NCTC views that two approaches are necessary to properly counter AQIM: building partner capacity and attacking AQIM’s finances.<sup>284</sup> Building partner capacity for the NCTC is the same sort of capacity building mentioned in the NSCT, and vies to increase the regional partners of the Maghreb/Sahel capabilities to deal with AQIM on their own.<sup>285</sup> Brooks views Algeria as the regional leader in this matter and “pivotal” to an overall counter-AQIM strategy, to the extent that Algeria views themselves as being capable of handling AQIM without major U.S. intervention.<sup>286</sup> The Sahel countries are both less able and willing to counter AQIM as compared to Algeria. For this reason, Brooks believes the long-term solution is to build

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<sup>280</sup> National Counterterrorism Center, “About the National Counterterrorism Center,” [http://www.nctc.gov/about\\_us/about\\_nctc.html](http://www.nctc.gov/about_us/about_nctc.html) (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>281</sup> Maren Brooks, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, National Counterterrorism Center Official (November 28, 2011).

<sup>282</sup> Brooks, National Counterterrorism Center Official.

<sup>283</sup> Brooks, National Counterterrorism Center Official.

<sup>284</sup> Brooks, National Counterterrorism Center Official.

<sup>285</sup> Brooks, National Counterterrorism Center Official.

<sup>286</sup> Brooks, National Counterterrorism Center Official.

regional capability and will, but in the near-term interdicting AQIM's KFR operations is important.<sup>287</sup> KFR represents not just the threat to U.S. interests, but the resources by which AQIM funds larger operations and is fundamental to its survival as an organization.<sup>288</sup> Essentially, NCTC advocates for a policy that increases partner capacity in the region and neutralizes AQIM's ability to finance through KFR. The combination of the assessment provided by the NCTC and the policy written in the NSCT add another layer to the foundation of the U.S. policy, advising DOS, who produce the subsequent level of the counter-AQIM policy.

#### **4. U.S. State Department**

The diplomats of the Department of State provide the detailed policy on how the U.S. elements of national power will be used to counter AQIM. How DOS arrives at this policy is through the policy documents/assessments from other agencies and by relatively non-hierarchical collaboration between the professional bureaus of State. In terms of AQIM, the bureaus of Counterterrorism, Near Eastern Affairs and African Affairs have reasonably similar levels of authority, and serve to inform each other. This is in contrast to a DoD structure which is predominantly top-down or bottom-up, as compared to the lateral collaboration illustrated by DOS. Lateral collaboration provides the slight variations between the bureaus that will be discussed below, but also a lack of clear understanding of the total DOS policy as viewed by the other government agencies (particularly DoD). The various bureaus of State contribute their input toward an AQIM policy, creating an amalgam of professional experiences from their bureaus' point of view.

##### ***a. State Bureau for Counterterrorism***

The State Bureau for Counterterrorism (S-CT) provides the closest to a concise AQIM policy, as they cover all aspects of the organization, whereas the Bureaus of African and Near Eastern Affairs are more germane to their regional focus areas. This

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<sup>287</sup> Brooks, National Counterterrorism Center Official.

<sup>288</sup> Brooks, National Counterterrorism Center Official.

is not to say that S-CT holds the entire policy or authority over the other bureaus, they do not. They contribute their input which is of relative equal weight with the other bureaus and embassies. Though for the purposes of this thesis, beginning with S-CT provides a point of continuity when viewing DOS.

The official policy from S-CT is to “contain, marginalize and disrupt AQIM,” which comes from their analysis of the threat and U.S. interests in the region.<sup>289</sup> Foremost, according to S-CT, AQIM does not pose a threat to any, “vital U.S. interests [and the U.S. interests] are limited.”<sup>290</sup> Further, “there is nothing to make [the U.S.] think that there has been a line crossed that requires [U.S.] involvement,” specifically addressing DoD pressure to increase the U.S. military role.<sup>291</sup> S-CT assesses that AQIM will not reach its “jihadist goals” (of winning the insurgency in Algeria and establishing an Islamist government) and the stronger force is contained to the Kabiyle Mountains of Algeria and the weaker elements are in the Sahel.<sup>292</sup> This last comment is significant, because the majority of western media attention and intelligence work focuses on the Sahel.

The Sahel has gained a great deal of attention in the last decade due to the increase in westerners taken for ransom and the murder of a U.S. citizen in Mauritania. S-CT explains both of these situations very simply: KFR has increased, because the Europeans pay the ransom and the American who was killed, Christopher Leggett, was a Christian missionary who had been warned numerous times over concerns for his safety to stop his proselytizing and attempted conversion of Muslim Mauritians.<sup>293</sup> Therefore, the relatively mild U.S. response to these actions seems warranted. S-CT has gauged their Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCI), and Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Program (TSC-TP) as successful in preventing the expansion of AQIM, and the organization of roughly 800 fighters will be further

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289 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

290 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

291 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

292 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

293 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

contained, marginalized and is expected to eventually transform into mainly criminal activity.<sup>294</sup> This assessment is what has determined the S-CT policy toward AQIM and the strategy forward.

S-CT's policy is in line with the NSS and NSCT policies by primarily focusing on building partnership capacity without the U.S. military in the lead. The S-CT programs evolved sequentially to form the program of record called TSCTP, costing roughly \$145 million annually.<sup>295</sup> This program provides CT equipment and training primarily for the Sahel countries of Mali, Mauritania and Niger (though Senegal, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Chad also participate).<sup>296</sup> TSCTP focuses on building the CT capability for the countries to produce the resilience to further AQIM incursion in their nations.<sup>297</sup> This capability is to be improved in law enforcement, border security, CT forces and aviation assets.<sup>298</sup> Though this program has been "successful," it has not been a smooth road, particularly in the Sahel.<sup>299</sup> Both Niger and Mauritania, which have a relative strong will to combat AQIM, have been marred by recent coups and State Department human rights re-evaluations; causing the programs to fall off track.<sup>300</sup> Mali has been defined as having less will to fight AQIM, and has been more concerned with the Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali over the recent years.<sup>301</sup> Noticeably, Algeria is not one of those countries that regularly participates in the program for one specific reason: they view AQIM as an African not American problem.<sup>302</sup>

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294 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

295 USAID, Funding for the Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Partnership, Washington D.C, September 2011. A program of record is a program that is specifically approved for regular funding. This sets the program apart from adhoc initiative or discretionary programs. Meaning that, the TSCTP has a pre-forecasted budget and goes through a streamlined process to receive funding. In other words, in order to end the program you have to take action to de-fund it versus having to make an effort to keep it going. Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

296 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

297 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 8.

298 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

299 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

300 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

301 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

302 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

Algeria has represented a significant problem to the S-CT strategy. Whereas Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria (the Maghreb Countries) are assessed to be more capable of dealing with the AQIM threat and less needing of U.S. support; they are still a major part of the overall strategy.<sup>303</sup> Here Algeria is “adamantly opposed to U.S. boots or lead” and have refused many attempts at partnership.<sup>304</sup> Some progress has been made in limited training and equipment, but Algeria has often failed to reciprocate and has refused to sign end of use agreements for equipment.<sup>305</sup> Additionally, the multi-national headquarters established in Tamanrasset, Algeria (Southern Algeria) that showed promise of providing synchronized Maghreb/Sahel CT efforts has provided few gains as Algeria seems to want to be the hub for the incoming information and plans, but has done little to take the lead or share intelligence or information with the Sahel nations.<sup>306</sup>

Though State’s programs have met with many obstacles along the way, S-CT’s view is that overall the programs are a long-term success.<sup>307</sup> This assessment is based on the steady progress made in the region and that AQIM has failed to expand beyond the ungoverned space of the northern Sahel.<sup>308</sup> In part this is due to lack of responsiveness to the AQIM Salafist movement in a predominantly Sufi region of Africa; causing a general lack of interest to participate in AQIM’s cause.<sup>309</sup> Thus, S-CT views the best policy as using a long-term strategy with limited U.S. military forces involved that will take “ten years or more.”<sup>310</sup> This policy is basically shared by the other bureaus’ of State.

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303 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

304 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

305 This theme was consistent with all my interviews concerning Algeria (S-CT, S-NEA, the U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, State Arms Transfers, Deputy Directorate of Special Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense - Policy and Joint Special Operations Task Force Trans Sahara). The end of use agreements basically are an insurance policy that the nation of Algeria will use the U.S. equipment appropriately and not for other means (say against their own people). By refusing to sign the agreements Algeria is basically saying that they want the equipment, but not any of the strings attached. Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

306 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

307 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

308 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

309 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

310 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

*b State Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs*

The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) covers the North African States from Morocco in the West to Egypt in the East, and includes the Middle Eastern countries to Iran. NEA views AQIM as the “most important intelligence and CT issue for NEA in the region [of North Africa].”<sup>311</sup> This view is in spite of the assessment that “AQIM does not pose a threat to [the U.S.].”<sup>312</sup> NEA’s position is based on AQIM as having its ideological base in the Kabiyle region of Algeria and its Southern forces (in the Sahel) more focused on criminality.<sup>313</sup> The reason that AQIM persists is due to their use of culturally enabled safe havens, with the Berber nationalist movement in the Kabiyle region and the Tuareg tribal areas of the Sahel.<sup>314</sup>

The notion of safe haven is central to NEA’s assessment of AQIM. This safe haven is essential, because AQIM has been, “neutered by Algeria... and has changed its focus [to the Sahel] due to [this] circumstance.”<sup>315</sup> The only way AQIM can achieve spectacular effects is through KFR or the occasional “limited raid.”<sup>316</sup> Another contributing factor to this safe haven is the general unwillingness of Algerian CT forces to operate outside of their borders.<sup>317</sup> This has set the stage for the policy to counter a dying Algerian insurgent organization, which persists over the border in the Sahel.

NEA’s policy, as with S-CT, aligns well with the NSS and NSCT. Algeria is viewed as the, “number one partner in CT in Northern Africa,” with border security training and some limited intelligence sharing (the building partnership capacity principle found in the NSCT).<sup>318</sup> Adhering to U.S. core values and developing a cultural resistance is also apparent in the NEA policy. NEA views Algerian government reform, with an

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311 State Department Official, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, Official on Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (November 30, 2011).

312 Official, interview concerning NEA.

313 Official, interview concerning NEA.

314 Official, interview concerning NEA.

315 Official, interview concerning NEA.

316 Official, interview concerning NEA.

317 Official, interview concerning NEA.

318 Official, interview concerning NEA

open society and encouraged entrepreneurship as the “only solution” to AQIM.<sup>319</sup> In essence NEA assesses AQIM as a problem, with Algeria as the solution.

*c The U.S. Ambassador to Algeria*

U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, Henry Ensher, assesses AQIM as not an urgent threat to the U.S. and that Algeria is the center for solutions to AQIM as well. Ambassador Ensher describes AQIM as not posing, “a physical threat to the mainland of the United States [and] it’s not at all clear, and there is no particular evidence that they are interested in targeting the United States itself.”<sup>320</sup> Further Ambassador Ensher stated that, “They are very much interested in their home turf which is Algeria and the Sahel...[making them] currently a threat to U.S. interests [in the region] rather than a physical threat to lives and property.”<sup>321</sup> Fundamentally taking the stance that AQIM can threaten our allies or destabilize the region, but there is no pressing need to aggressively pursue AQIM.

Ambassador Ensher further expounded on his thoughts on the “mixed” motivations of AQIM from deep religious conviction to low-level criminal motivations.<sup>322</sup> AQIM’s propaganda has been described as having a, “*jihadi* approach to the world and that they are duty-bound to impose their version of *Sharia* law on Algeria and other states.”<sup>323</sup> This belief is straddled by the AQIM belief that they’re world view has been excluded in Algeria and that there is no other way to achieve their objectives but by violence.<sup>324</sup> The feeling of political exclusion is further compounded by feelings of personal exclusion from society, which has driven a number of young Algerian’s to criminal activity and AQIM; as they feel there is no other way to improve their way of

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319 Official, interview concerning NEA

320 Henry S. Ensher, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria (December 2, 2011).

321 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

322 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

323 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

324 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

life.<sup>325</sup> However, fundamentally AQIM views itself as part of the broader AQ struggle, their primary objective is to overthrow the government of Algeria and install their version of *Sharia*.<sup>326</sup>

The notion of Algeria as the centerpiece for AQIM's strategy is the foundation of the Ambassador's assessment. AQIM's "victory" would be taking over Algeria while the Sahel is a "staging area" for this primary objective, versus declaring victory by installing an Islamic state in the Sahel.<sup>327</sup> Ambassador Ensher does agree that, given the events of the recent "Arab Spring" with instability in the region, particularly Libya, AQIM's goals could change, but there is no evidence that that has yet occurred.<sup>328</sup> This correlates to the Ambassador's policy forward, with Algeria as the focus for a counter-AQIM strategy.

The policy has Algeria in the lead with the U.S. supporting the effort by direct support and by building partner capacity in the region. Here the Ambassador states that the U.S. should "fall in on the Algerian approach," which he describes as working closely with and supporting the efforts of the regional states, using the full spectrum of efforts: development programs, training, information sharing and equipping, and following one strategic vision versus developing our own strategy.<sup>329</sup> Further, AQIM would end if the states of the region were able to engage in full spectrum counter insurgency and CT: projecting governance into the area, economic development that would provide a clear alternative, and multi-national cooperation to use law enforcement and military action to constrain AQIM's areas of operation and their ability to recruit.<sup>330</sup> As mentioned in S-CT's policy, the policy is long-term. The Ambassador sees the ultimate solution, much as NEA has, as government reform to encourage economic prosperity and to be inclusive on every level of society to encourage Algerian's to take

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325 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

326 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

327 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

328 His specific comment with regards to an AQIM/Libyan jihad link was, "I'm looking for that phenomenon, but I haven't really seen it yet." Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

329 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

330 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

part positively in society by showing that they have alternatives to terrorism.<sup>331</sup> These reforms will not occur overnight, nor will they immediately resonate with the disenfranchised, but overtime can whittle away at the drive for action by AQIM.

*d State Bureau for African Affairs*

The State Bureau of African Affairs (S-AF) fundamentally concurs that Algeria could solve the AQIM threat themselves.<sup>332</sup> S-AF assesses AQIM as, “a potential problem, versus a problem,” that could threaten U.S. citizens and facilities in the Maghreb and Sahel, but not the mainland U.S.<sup>333</sup> The potential problem stems from the S-AF notion that AQIM has essentially lost the fight to establish an Islamic state in Algeria and has been forced to broaden itself to a more regional agenda.<sup>334</sup> With the shift, AQIM has had to change their approach. S-AF views AQIM’s shift as out of necessity, which has driven them toward criminality, specifically KFR, to buy off local loyalty in an area mostly unsupportive of Salafist ideology.<sup>335</sup> AQIM needs the funds generated from criminality to negotiate with the illicit groups inherent in the Tuareg lands of the Sahel. This new emphasis on criminality leads S-AF to view that AQIM will not likely end, but remain as a relatively marginal threat without gaining ground on their objectives.<sup>336</sup>

The persistent marginal threat presented by AQIM has led S-AF to conclude that if AQIM is isolated to the rugged areas of Northern Mali and fails to project out, that there is no reason to escalate a counter-AQIM strategy.<sup>337</sup> In order to prevent AQIM from projecting out of its isolated areas S-AF proposes the policy of building a resistant Sahel, in-line with the “cultural resistance” mentioned in the

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331 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

332 State Department Official, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel., Official on Bureau of African Affairs (November 29, 2011).

333 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

334 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

335 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

336 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

337 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

NSCT.<sup>338</sup> The purpose is not to defeat the criminality, but to isolate AQIM from western interests.<sup>339</sup> As mentioned by the other bureaus, a regional partnership is key for this strategy to work effectively, which facilitates the limited U.S. role sought by S-AF.<sup>340</sup> Simply put S-AF sees AQIM as a potential threat that will endure, but the U.S. can help to inoculate the region to prevent the threat from expanding outward. With the addition of S-CT and S-NEA's greater emphasis on finding solutions with Algeria, holistically this is State's policy with regards to AQIM.

## C. U.S. STRATEGY TOWARD AQIM

### 1. Policy Reiterated in Strategy

#### a. *The National Defense Strategy*

The policy is reiterated in a few strategy documents like the National Defense Strategy (NDS), the National Military Strategy (NMS), which serve as the first line of U.S. strategy to defeat AQIM. The 2008 NDS focuses on providing for the common defense and the responsibility of the defense strategy to not only defend the homeland, but U.S. global interests.<sup>341</sup> The NDS focuses on the international order, building partner capacity, as well as the defense of the homeland as the policy issues the military must confront.<sup>342</sup> The primary purpose of these documents is to introduce the top level of our national counter-AQIM strategy or how these policy objectives will be accomplished by DoD.

One key area of emphasis in the NDS is on building partner capacity and serving the cultural resilience as mentioned in the NSCT. In 2007, Defense Secretary

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338 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

339 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

340 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

341 The NDS has not been revised, even though the 2011 NSS supersedes the NDS, the policies and strategies set forth in the NDS still apply until such time as it is updated. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, "National Defense Strategy," Defense.gov. June 2008, <http://www.defense.gov/news/2008%20national%20defense%20strategy.pdf> (accessed August 14, 2011), s 1 - 5.

342 Admiral Michael Mullen, "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America," Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 8, 2011, [http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800\\_2011\\_NMS\\_-\\_08\\_FEB\\_2011.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf) (accessed August 14, 2011), s 1-6.

Robert Gates defines the cause against AQ and its affiliates as “the Long War,” which requires, “the patient accumulation of quiet successes and the orchestration of all elements of national and international power.”<sup>343</sup> Further, Gates views the loose network nature of the AQ affiliates as requiring individual strategies that specifically address the regional grievances that fuel the local drive to align with AQ.<sup>344</sup> Bearing this in mind, Gates points out that local nations are better suited to deal with their local AQ problems and U.S. capture/kill operations are, “likely subordinate to measures to promote local participation in government [and programs to address the local grievance].”<sup>345</sup> As this relates to AQIM, the NDS essentially implies that a strategy must be developed to deal with the local grievance (Algerian government reforms) and U.S. use of force, though applicable, is subordinate to addressing the Algerian grievance as the root cause for AQIM’s allegiance to AQ.

***b The National Military Strategy***

The NMS is slightly more specific when it addresses the strategy toward AQIM as building partner capacity and, where necessary, assisting the nations of the Trans-Sahel.<sup>346</sup> Here the intent is to, “identify and encourage states and organizations that have a demonstrated leadership role to... contribute to Africa’s security.”<sup>347</sup> The significance is that Admiral Michael Mullen is stating that the principle component of his strategy in the Trans-Sahel is to find the right partners, to ensure the security of the U.S.’s African interests. The nations that seem to best fit this model, based on capability and will, are Algeria and Morocco, both in the Maghreb; whilst in the Trans-Sahel Niger is most capable and willing, Mali and Mauritania are in the proximity, but both lack the will and resources. Neither the NDS nor the NMS delve very deeply into AQIM strategy, but

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343 Gates, “National Defense Strategy,” 7–9.

344 Gates, “National Defense Strategy,” 8.

345 Gates, “National Defense Strategy,” 8.

346 Mullen, “National Military Strategy,” 12.

347 The Maghreb population is predominantly Berber-Arab and includes: Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. The Tran-Sahel stretches east-west across Africa is predominantly black African including Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Sudan, Mullen, “National Military Strategy,” 12.

they set the stage for the geographically oriented offices in DoD to plan within the left and right limits of these strategy documents.

## **2. Where Policy and Strategy Meet**

### *a. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Policy*

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Policy, OUSD(P), supports DoD with assessments and policy advice based on U.S. national security objectives.<sup>348</sup> Simply, OUSD(P) provides assessments for future use of DoD and the corresponding policy recommendations internal to DoD. Though called “policy,” for the purposes of this thesis, the work of OUSD(P) is best defined as strategy advice, as it is only policy to those inside DoD and would be externally viewed as a component of DoD strategy. Given this construct, OUSD(P) provides one of the major components of DoD strategy next to the assessments produced by the regional combatant commands (i.e. United States Africa Command, United States European Command, etc...).

Mike Banaszewski from OUSD(P) assess AQIM as a dying threat to Algeria, but an increasing threat to the Sahel. Banaszewski’s point of view is that Algeria has mostly removed AQIM from within their borders.<sup>349</sup> Moreover, AQIM has remained viable because, “Mali and Niger cannot control the area [allowing] AQIM to prosper.”<sup>350</sup> The threat AQIM poses is described as, “limited to the U.S.,” yet, “significant to the regional forces;” citing that KFR is the only real current threat to U.S./Western interests.<sup>351</sup> The perceived shift of AQIM to the Sahel is representative of a change in goals to secure territory within the Sahel from their previous Algerian goals. Banaszewski surmises that AQIM will attempt to remain, “in the mind of Algeria,” while using the AQ moniker as a means to help secure their Sahelian objectives. Within the Sahel Banaszewski calls the relationship between AQIM and the local Tuareg tribes as,

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<sup>348</sup> OUSD(P), The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, <http://policy.defense.gov/> (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>349</sup> Mike Banaszewski, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official (November 30, 2011).

<sup>350</sup> Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official.

<sup>351</sup> Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official.

“not ideological or political, but financial,” requiring both KFR and the AQ name for a means of producing revenue.<sup>352</sup> Banaszewski cites the possibility of developing relationships with al-Shabab, Boko-Haram, and potential involvement in shoulder fired surface to air missile proliferation as potential threats to the U.S.<sup>353</sup>

The real and potential Sahelian threat posed by AQIM has led to OUSD(P)’s strategic recommendation for increasing partnership capacity in the region. Banaszewski believes the focus should be on the Civil-Military Operations Coordination Center (CMOCC) countries: Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali; to disrupt AQIM and potentially shut down the KFR network.<sup>354</sup> The primary role for the U.S. is to advise and assist these countries to fill their own capability gaps, by means of the TSC-TP and the Joint Special Operations Task Force - Trans Sahara (JSOTF-TS).<sup>355</sup> Examples of this type of assistance is counter-IED training for Algeria, logistical training for Mali and helping to normalize tribal relationships in Niger.<sup>356</sup> Collectively, this strategy is meant to counter AQIM’s expansion, neutralize the KFR threat and though not expected to destroy AQIM in its entirety, is likely to wear them down significantly.

### ***b The Pentagon and Joint Staff***

Those in the Pentagon share the opinions of OUSD(P) as the initial level of the strategy, but based on their own assessments, view the threat posed by AQIM as more complex and potentially dangerous. A Pentagon official stated that the official DoD policy toward AQIM was that it was the, “number three concern on the continent [of Africa] next to the ‘Arab Spring’ and al-Shabab.”<sup>357</sup> Additionally, there is growing concern over possible collusion with Boko-Haram and the proliferation of the

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352 Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official.

353 Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official.

354 The CMOCC is the multi-national headquarters located at Tamanrasset, Algeria. Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official.

355 Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official.

356 Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official.

357 Pentagon Official, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, concerning the Joint Staff (November 30, 2011).

aforementioned surface to air missiles.<sup>358</sup> Further, the Joint Staff is skeptical whether there is a clear link between the AQIM in Algeria and that of the AQIM in Sahel; arguing that the Algerian AQIM has remained steadfast in its goal to overthrow the government of Algeria, while the Sahelian AQIM is more opportunist and focused on criminal entrepreneurship than the AQIM Islamist ideology.<sup>359</sup> The Joint Staff does not see an end to AQIM without a significant change in enemy action requiring U.S. intervention.<sup>360</sup> In total, AQIM is viewed as a growing threat in the Sahel, and U.S. intervention can be the best spoiler of this expansion.

Building partner capacity again is the first choice to deal with AQIM, however, these efforts have not been very fruitful. The CMOCC, which held a great deal of hopes for regional cooperation, has failed to pay any dividends.<sup>361</sup> Although Algeria is viewed as the lynchpin to any partnership concerning AQIM; Algeria has not participated as actively as expected, forcing U.S. forces to turn to other nations for more productive partnerships.<sup>362</sup> Within Mali specifically, partnership has been down to the lowest unit level, but has failed to significantly impact the effectiveness of the higher government or military institutions.<sup>363</sup> The concern is that the elements of national power are not being properly synchronized, and the U.S. military may be getting ahead of the diplomatic reform efforts, preventing the proper conditions to be met for military partnership efforts to be successful.<sup>364</sup> The net result of these partnership challenges is a view that partnership efforts alone may be inadequate to defeat AQIM.

The lack of results in partnership has led some to view an increase in U.S. involvement as the correct answer. An attempt to shrink AQIM's Sahelian safe haven through regional partnership is seen as a solution only as long as AQIM is not a direct

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358 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

359 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

360 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

361 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

362 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

363 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

364 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

threat to the U.S. However, if AQIM exhibits clear indications as a threat to the U.S., combined and unilateral operations are preferred to strike at AQIM.<sup>365</sup> U.S. intervention or escalation is seen as inevitable and justified, through proactive attacks on the organization before it manifests into a significant threat. The comprehensive strategy calls for more diplomatic efforts to provide better success in the Sahelian partnerships and to have the flexibility and forethought to have U.S. forces available to intervene directly or in combination with regional partners.

### **3. U.S. Strategy from the Bottom-Up against AQIM**

The need for regional partnership is reiterated by the operational assessments of USAFRICOM and JSOTF-TS.<sup>366</sup> A USAFRICOM North Africa analyst characterizes the threat of AQIM as credible toward U.S. “soft targets and citizens,” but has not shown a willingness nor capability to threaten the U.S. directly.<sup>367</sup> JSOTF-TS J3 (officer in charge of operations) Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Schmitt agrees, but warns that, “there was no clear and present danger 15 years ago in Kabul either [and] maybe putting pressure on them is preventing [a spectacular AQIM attack] from happening;” conveying the potential threat posed by AQIM.<sup>368</sup> The AFRICOM analyst views AQIM as “equally weighted” between Algeria and the Sahel, serving different immediate purposes, though together serve the long-term goal of overthrowing the government of Algeria.<sup>369</sup> LTC Schmitt mostly agrees, but views the southern (Sahelian) portion of AQIM as almost a separate franchise, with its own objectives; separated from the staunch ideology of the Northern AQIM forces.<sup>370</sup> In Algeria, the successes against AQIM have forced them out of the urbanized areas, proving that effective CT efforts, without U.S. intervention have

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<sup>365</sup> Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

<sup>366</sup> JSOTF-TS is the Special Operations Task Force designated by Special Operations Command Africa, a subordinate unified command of USAFRICOM, to prosecute Operation Enduring Freedom - Trans Sahara, the named operation to counter AQIM under the Global War on Terrorism.

<sup>367</sup> USAFRICOM J2-Molesworth, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, North African CT analyst (December 3, 2011).

<sup>368</sup> LTC Christopher Schmitt, interview by MAJ Rich Nessel, Joint Special Operations Task Force - Trans Sahara J3 (Operations Officer) (November 13, 2011).

<sup>369</sup> J2-Molesworth, North African CT analyst.

<sup>370</sup> Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

had a significant effect.<sup>371</sup> However, both the AFRICOM analyst and LTC Schmitt view AQIM's ability to conduct KFR operations in the Sahel as a major enemy "center of gravity."<sup>372</sup> This center of gravity could be disrupted through partnership building in the region, specifically by Mali, Niger and Mauritania.<sup>373</sup>

Based on the assessment of AQIM's threat in the Sahel, JSOTF-TS has proposed a strategy to work all angles to improve partnership in the region. The pinnacle of this regional partnership has been the annual "Flintlock Exercise" involving the TSC-TP nations and many European allies; forming a combined headquarters to fight simulated battles against AQIM or other likely regional threats.<sup>374</sup> These efforts have been lauded, recently as participation has grown and the African nations have become more accustomed to working with each other.<sup>375</sup> Routine exercises like Flintlock and Joint Combined Exercises and Training (JCET's), running an annual budget of about \$25 million dollars, have proven to be the primary vehicle to encourage partnership in the region and bolster their capabilities.<sup>376</sup> The Sahelian nations have been the primary beneficiaries of this training.

Algeria has not been excluded purposefully, but has chosen to exclude itself. LTC Schmitt summarizes, "it's hard to work with Algeria, they distrust us... [and] the Algerian's don't know how to work with us. We're bottom-up and they're top-down."<sup>377</sup> Schmitt cited Algeria's refusal to participate in the "Flintlock" exercises, the last minute refusal of the Algerian government to train Algerian Special Forces in the United States

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371 J2-Molesworth, North African CT analyst.

372 Center of gravity is a doctrinal term from Carl von Clausewitz, relating how an enemy can be leveraged. Specifically, attacking AQIM's KFR (based on the analysis) would eliminate one of the main drivers to AQIM's survival, thus destroying AQIM's strategy. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), s 595-597. J2-Molesworth, North African CT analyst. Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

373 Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

374 Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

375 Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

376 JCET's are agreed upon exercises between the U.S. and the nation hosting the U.S. The purpose is to train the host nation on set of tasks while the U.S. trainers receive local training as well. Over time, JCET's are used to increase a host nation's capability through advanced training. This budget also includes Civil Affairs missions and Humanitarian Assistance programs run under OEF-TS. Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

377 Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

(a JCET on their terms) and the lack of reciprocation whenever gains were made.<sup>378</sup> Though confronted with these challenges, the basis of JSOTF-TS's strategy is to continue to build partnership capacity to keep the pressure on AQIM and prevent them from emerging as a more lethal threat to the U.S. and its regional partners.

**D. WHERE INTERESTS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES CONVERGE; WHERE THEY DIVERGE**

Generally speaking the flow from goals to policy to strategy to operational planning for the most part converge. From the President to the Task Force designated to fight AQIM, AQIM is assessed as a limited threat to U.S. interests in North Africa, and not an immediate threat. AQIM is seen as having a weak link with AQ Senior Leadership, choosing more to use the AQ name for local benefits than assume AQ's global agenda. As a whole, AQIM is viewed as an organization with Algerian roots and Algerian leadership, while portions of the organization operate within the Sahel. With the notion that AQIM is not as pressing a threat as others, is the belief that AQIM has potential to become a greater threat to the U.S. and its interests. AQIM's potential to become a destabilizing force by trafficking weapons or colluding with other the extremist organizations of the region is a real threat that the NCTC, DOS and DoD agree requires vigilant monitoring. Moreover, AQIM's KFR operations have become a major concern to the U.S. agencies that focus on North Africa.

To counter AQIM, members of the U.S. government fundamentally agree that building partnership capacity and better governance are the roads to success against AQIM. There is a clear line from the NSS to the annual "Flintlock" exercises to involve regional actors in local matters for the purposes of building partnership capacity to deal with AQIM. Better governance is emphasized in the U.S. AQIM policy produced by the President and DOS, but also reiterated in DoD strategy documents as using a "whole-of-nation approach"<sup>379</sup> and avoid, "getting ahead of the rest of the elements of national power."<sup>380</sup> The point being that although partnership capacity building is important in

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378 Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

379 Mullen, "National Military Strategy," 6.

380 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

the near-term, the long-term root cause for AQIM's continued existence requires regional government reforms. From these aspects, the U.S. governments views on AQIM marry well, and primary actions that are required are pursued.

However, policy, strategy and operational planning are not always in harmony. Differences in the priority AQIM should be given, versus other African threats is a major point of contention. A common S-AF view is that, "Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, DRoC [Democratic Republic of Congo] and Nigeria keep State awake at night. Calling AQIM the number three terrorist organization in the world is a clear divide in opinion," as stated by one official.<sup>381</sup> The specific mention of the, "number three terrorist organization in the world," contrasts the Pentagon official's statement that AQIM is the, "number three threat [in Africa]...", and is therefore more worthy of DoD activity than Sudan, Kenya, DRoC and Nigeria.<sup>382</sup> Though this may merely seem a semantic difference, the difference in priorities have real consequences. For example, S-AF had called for DoD intervention in DRoC to halt the genocide, but until recently DoD has remained primarily focused on prosecuting the "War on Terrorism."<sup>383</sup> DOS has also served to thwart DoD attempts to escalate military operations within the Sahel stating, "State has resisted DoD efforts to 'kineticize' the conflict."<sup>384</sup> The DOS apprehension to DoD kinetic action is based on the concern that lethal action will only escalate AQIM's violence; in particular, AQIM may take punitive action against U.S. targets that they had previously avoided.<sup>385</sup>

The difference in priority is fundamentally caused by the organizational differences between DoD and DOS. DoD, which has led the War on Terrorism through the "defense approach" by, "identifying and destroying terrorist organizations," has stayed predominantly fixed on its strong trait of directly combating terrorist organizations.<sup>386</sup> DOS is more centered on the "development approach" which seeks to,

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381 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

382 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

383 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

384 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

385 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

386 Donovan C. Chau, *U.S. Counterterrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Understanding Costs, Cultures, and Conflicts* (Washington, D.C. : Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 20.

“use the non-military instruments of the USG [U.S. government] to establish peace and cooperation.”<sup>387</sup> The variation in DoD and DOS organizational cultures have led to the feeling in DOS that if U.S. military direct action were to occur in the region, that those diplomats would have failed in their jobs.<sup>388</sup> The real disparity is that DoD with the majority of the funding and resources to execute the counter-AQIM strategy is frequently at odds with DOS who holds the preponderance of authority to exercise policy in the region. More directly, DOS retains the authority for DoD to operate in the region, yet DOS cannot work towards its policy objectives without DoD assets. Variations in opinion are expected and are fundamentally beneficial to the total process, but cooperation, mutual understanding and synchronization are essential to move an AQIM policy/strategy forward.

Another source of friction is the assessment of the Sahelian AQIM versus the Algerian AQIM. The crux of this debate is that those closest to the problem, in particular DoD, view the Sahelian AQIM threat as mostly a separate entity from that of the Algerian AQIM. The first such reference in policy or strategy can be found in the NMS is the use of the word “Trans-Sahel” to describe the AQIM threat, which may have inadvertently or deliberately excluded the Maghreb from Mullen’s strategy.<sup>389</sup> Why DoD leans toward a Sahelian centric AQIM is simple, their CT efforts in Algeria have been relatively fruitless and the most willing partners are in the Sahel. LTC Schmitt’s frustrated statement on the Algerian CMOCC as “a waste of time,” sets the stage for a DoD aversion to an Algeria centric strategy.<sup>390</sup> DoD’s Sahel focus is represented at every level of the DoD counter-AQIM strategy, but the NDS.<sup>391</sup> The impact is that over time this divergence, which is based on both convenience and what can be done today, has an inertia onto itself that vectors strategy away from the original problem. This inertia

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387 Chau, U.S. Counterterrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa, 7.

388 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

389 Mullen, “National Military Strategy,” 12.

390 This is not for lack of trying. DoD has tried many times to encourage partnership with Algeria, but have failed to make significant in-roads. Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

391 Mullen, “National Military Strategy,” 12. Banaszewski, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Official. Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff. Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

has led JSOTF-TS to suggest that the Sahelian AQIM force is a franchise of AQ of its own, separate from the Kabiyle AQIM.<sup>392</sup>

NCTC/DOS generally disagree with the Sahelian focus of DoD, but do try to leverage the capacity building efforts to bolster the weaker partners of the Sahel. The thought being that if Algeria requires assistance they should ask for and pay for it,<sup>393</sup> while in comparison the Sahelian nations are currently incapable of handling security in their region.<sup>394</sup> At issue is that the emphasis on the Sahel threat does not fully address the root cause of AQIM in Algeria. Ambassador Ensher bluntly stated, “If we win in the Sahel, say Mali or Niger, that’s nice, but if we fail in Algeria and there is significant destabilization and it spills over into Europe, we really have a problem.”<sup>395</sup> DoS views that solving the Sahel problem does not necessarily solve the AQIM problem, but is helpful. Therefore, DOS has been reticent to approve increases in DoD manpower in the Sahel.<sup>396</sup>

## **E. CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

The way in which the U.S. has pursued its counter-AQIM strategy is directly related to its national interests. Security, universal values and international order<sup>397</sup> set by the President in the NSS set the stage for building security partnerships and cultural resilience established in the NSCT.<sup>398</sup> These policy documents influence and direct the policy objectives of the diplomats to, “contain, marginalize and disrupt AQIM,” through long-term efforts to help shape a Maghreb/Sahel that is resistant to AQIM.<sup>399</sup> In the initial strategy documents DoD’s focus is on winning “the Long War”<sup>400</sup> through “a whole-of-nation approach” requiring close synchronization of the USG to meet the threat

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392 Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

393 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria

394 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

395 Ensher, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria.

396 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

397 Obama, *The National Security Strategy*, 17.

398 Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 16.

399 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

400 Gates, “National Defense Strategy,” 7–9.

posed by AQIM.<sup>401</sup> On the cutting edge of the AQIM policy/strategy, USAFRICOM and JSOTF-TS have implemented partnership building activities at the operational level to meet these national goals.

The execution level of the counter-AQIM strategy has met with many challenges. Algeria, the nation most capable and willing to fight AQIM in the region, has remained an aloof partner to the U.S. and vehemently opposes U.S. “boots on the ground.”<sup>402</sup> This opposition has produced a digression in the strategists’ most direct path to meeting their policy objectives. In response, DoD has shifted their focus away from Algeria to the Sahelian threat, where gains in building partner capacity can be more readily realized. The DoD shift due to operational realities and inertia have caused a divergence with the policy by increasing efforts in the Sahel beyond that envisioned at the outset.<sup>403</sup> DOS’s concern with the deviation is that DoD will unnecessarily “kineticize” the conflict, and serve to escalate AQIM’s anti-western violence.<sup>404</sup> From the point of view of DoD, constant pressure and proactive strikes are required to prevent AQIM from executing spectacular attacks on U.S. interests in the region or abroad.<sup>405</sup> Combined these challenges are a source of much debate in the U.S. government over the best policy and strategy to defeat AQIM. Though these challenges are major sources of friction, overall the U.S. government views AQIM as a viable threat to U.S. interests abroad; which requires both due diligence and regional cooperation to ultimately address, counter and over the long-term build a region resistant to the Salafist radicalization of organizations like AQIM. U.S. policy and strategy will be scrutinized in the next chapter to determine if the U.S. truly has the endgame in mind.

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401 Mullen, “National Military Strategy,” 6.

402 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

403 Official, interview concerning S-AF.

404 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

405 Pentagon Official, concerning the Joint Staff.

## VI. CONCLUSION: THE WAY AHEAD

AQIM has continued to persist despite the fact that it has become increasingly less likely to meet its objective of a Salafist Algeria. The reason AQIM has continued is for two basic reasons: Algerian and neighboring states' CT measures have not been completely successful and the original grievance in Algeria has remained unresolved. Within each of these two major categories, there are a myriad of complex sub-components that fuel them. State measures to repress AQIM have pushed the organization far outside their preferred zones of operation into ungoverned spaces that represent a challenge to repression. Within these ungoverned spaces exists criminal and anti-establishment networks which facilitate AQIM's survival. The impetus for the rise of *jihadism* in Algeria, that became AQIM, stems from the military junta of 1992. Fundamentally the power elites of the Algerian government have changed very little since these early days and still remain in control. Additionally, the *takfiri* ideology of AQIM does not lend itself a political resolution to their grievance. In effect AQIM has achieved a stalemate with each side maneuvering for an opportunity to gain some advantage that may someday lead to an end of either the Algerian state or AQIM.

### A. THESIS SUMMARY

This final chapter will review how these conclusions were made and a possible way ahead for U.S. policy and strategy against AQIM. The intent of this thesis was to draw attention to the factors that have allowed AQIM to survive. These factors, much like the origination of the problem, are predominantly Algerian. The apparent "shift to Al-Qaeda" was nothing more than an open declaration for what was already present. An Al-Qaeda name provided the credibility to the cause in light of AQ successes of the early 2000s, but the Algerian *jihad* cause has remained unchanged. At issue is where does AQIM go from here without a notable evolution or re-structuring? They are likely to succumb eventually to environmental and social pressures. Moreover, the U.S. role in the counter-AQIM strategy to hasten AQIM's demise is without the significant Algerian partnership necessary to synchronize efforts and achieve a united end.

## **1. GIA Uniqueness and Insignificance of the “Shift” to AQ Affiliate**

Islamist movements have been a facet to the Algerian political and social structure throughout its history. The true significance of the GIA’s *jihadist*, no compromise, stance introduced a revolution in the form of North African Islamist organizations that held no previous precedent. With the introduction of the Arab-Afghan form of Salafism, and sponsors from the forefathers of Al-Qaeda, the GIA became an aberration. As the GIA drove their brand of Salafism off the rails it had to evolve to become the GSPC just to regain the dwindling support it had remaining from the Algerian people. The GSPC also looked to AQ for credibility and support to attempt to gain a renewed level of popular support. When the GSPC formally became an Al-Qaeda affiliate (AQIM) strategically little had changed. AQIM was merely a name change for the purposes of legitimacy and credibility. Though some new tactics were employed after the name change, the strategic direction and purpose of the organization had not shifted considerably. From this standpoint AQIM’s Al-Qaeda affiliation did not represent an appreciable evolution to the organization. Simply, there was no real shift once the GSPC became AQIM and the formal association with AQ thereafter represents no greater threat than the affiliation that had been on-going since the 1990s.

## **2. A Local *Jihad* with an International Name**

Much like the goals of AQIM, the structure of AQIM has been unaffected by the change from the GSPC. The overall operational boundaries of AQIM are the same as they were under the GSPC. Also, the Supreme Commander, Council of Notables, Shura Council and all the sub-commanders (or emirs) are all Algerian. The result is that AQIM lacks the internationalism needed to expand beyond its constricted areas of operation. AQIM is capable of achieving tactical successes, but strategically these tactical successes have not materialized into appreciable gains toward an Algeria under *Sharia*. By failing to expand its objectives AQIM is in effect limiting itself in what it could achieve in a regional context.

The choice of the “Maghreb” title was no accident, it was meant to convey the stature of a large organization with reach over the entire region of North Africa that was

at one time under Arab rule. However, the actual operating area of AQIM is limited to a small slice of this territory, that is bounded on the East and West by similar *jihadist* organizations. At issue is the territorial nature of these organizations and unwillingness to be affiliated with or be subsumed by the Algerian *jihadists* of AQIM. For their part, AQIM has done little to assuage the concerns of the fellow jihadist organizations of Morocco and Libya, or concoct some loose alliance. Similarly, AQIM's collaboration with the far neighboring Salafist organizations like Boko Haram and Al-Shabab has been anecdotal thus far, with no evidence of AQIM as a North African nexus organization. Further there is little definitive proof of AQIM providing support to these organizations outside of using similar illicit networks and having parallel ideologies. Thus AQIM is sequestered to Algeria and the areas directly South, terminating where their Salafist ideology is culturally and religiously less compatible, in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>406</sup> The local nature of AQIM's operating area belies its international name and lends credence to AQIM's persistence, as being the only strategic aim it is capable of achieving.

### **3. Obsolescence, Repression, Succession and Crime**

AQIM has proven that it is capable of surviving under intense environmental pressures but history attests that without organizational change, few terrorist groups remain. Achievement of their goals or leading a new civil war, at the moment, seem out of AQIM's reach. Less likely is AQIM's reconciliation and entrance into the political stage without considerable fracturing of the organization into an AQIM off-shoot. More likely is AQIM's irrelevance in Algeria as AQIM is further marginalized and separated from the populace (the target audience to their terrorism) by Algerian repression. AQIM's structure is not impervious, spats over succession could easily break the organization along its independent cell lines. A last probable outcome over the long-term is an eventual fixation on criminality based on illicit activity as the main source of income and power for the cells and their leaders. Simply, AQIM could spend increasingly more time and resources on gaining and maintaining its criminal networks and territories

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<sup>406</sup> There is also a racial aspect to this lack of acceptance. The "white" Arab-Africans have historically not mingled well with the "black" African population. This racial tension makes it difficult for AQIM to gain a substantial foothold.

than fighting the *jihad*.. These ends will not occur in a vacuum, but require a catalyst to precipitate the proverbial beginning to the end which may cause a multitude of ends simultaneously. The challenge to counterterrorism planners is how to take advantage of fortuitous events and prod preferred outcomes without morphing a more virulent form of AQIM.

#### **4. Partnership Building without the Partner in Mind**

U.S. policy is to use regional partnerships and develop cultural resiliencies against groups like AQIM. The U.S. State Department sees this as containing, marginalizing and disrupting AQIM within the Maghreb and Sahel. Unfortunately the full weight of this effort has been thwarted by Algeria, the most desired partner by the U.S. to counter AQIM. The lack of desire by Algeria to partner with the U.S. more actively has frustrated U.S. CT efforts against AQIM. As a result the U.S. has sought more active partnerships with the Sahelian nations in effort to meet American policy objectives. These partnerships too have been fraught with obstacles, as the instability of the Malian, Nigerien and Mauritanian governments has prevented significant counterterrorism gains. As a consequence AQIM's operating capabilities and areas of operation have not been greatly hampered since U.S. involvement in the Sahel.

The primary block to U.S. success against AQIM has been the lack of a viable Algerian partnership. Though it is easy to blame Algeria for their lack of participation, from their point of view U.S. involvement is questionable. AQIM is effectively a fragment organization from Algeria's most bloody civil war in their history. The U.S. offering unsolicited help to the Algerian cause would be akin to the French government offering to aid the Union, post civil war, with their Ku Klux Klan problem. Though this analogy is imperfect it does set the stage for a partnership that must be on Algerian terms. Beyond the fact that AQIM is predominantly an Algerian problem, that has escaped its borders; tactically speaking the Algerians have had the most success in the fight against AQIM and therefore likely have a better way forward. The weight of U.S. DoD efforts has imposed U.S. policy and strategy upon the Algerians without taking into account that the Algerians may be the best source for a campaign strategy against AQIM and therefore

the likely lead. Instead the U.S. has left Algeria to its efforts, while in the Sahel the U.S. attempts to institute some form of its strategy without synchronization.

The lack of synchronization has not gone unnoticed. Within Algeria two multi-national fusion cells have formed for the purposes of synchronizing intelligence and operations across the campaign area. These cells have not lived up to their promise, as they have served as monitoring posts for Algerian intelligence to determine the actions of its neighbors and western partners without providing the intended multi-lateral operational planning envisioned.

U.S. strategy against AQIM is adrift without Algeria as the primary focus. Algeria holds two important elements necessary to AQIM's survival: the key to international cooperation to repress and subdue AQIM, and meaningful government reform that would resolve the original grievance caused by the junta. But what of the threat in the Sahel?

AQIM operatives in the Sahel of Mali, Mauritania and Niger are a supporting effort to the overall organization and not the main effort. The Sahelian portion of AQIM which consists of a quarter of the total cells of AQIM provides: funding, weapons and a means to grab needed media attention.<sup>407</sup> Without the Sahelian forces, AQIM would be handicapped, but not out of the fight. Conversely, if the Algerian network were targeted the Sahelian forces would become aimless without their primary connection to their cause, authority and legitimacy, but active as dispersed cells. More simply, U.S. strategy against the Sahelian sub-portion of AQIM represents a necessary component to the strategy, but finishing the Algerian nerve center-portion of AQIM is essential.

## **B. WAY AHEAD**

To the very core of the AQIM problem a way ahead for the U.S. must thoroughly involve Algeria as both the owner of the problem and the most likely path to a resolution. The scope of this thesis does not incorporate techniques or methods to facilitate this necessary involvement. However, as a result of this thesis research it has become clear that a U.S. focus on the Sahel as an answer to AQIM may not fulfill U.S.

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<sup>407</sup> See Figure 1. The Sahelian portion of AQIM is headed by two commanders under one zone commander. The remaining 11 cells are in the East, West and central zones. I say one quarter of AQIM in the South, because the Southern force has larger cells than the other individual cells.

counterterrorism goals. Within this thesis there is a capacity to discuss general strategies forward or ways to evaluate future strategies against the AQIM of today. Though the AQIM of tomorrow may become the center for North African terrorism that it has claimed to be and that pundits fear; however, that evolution has yet to materialize. Therefore, three strategies are proposed below to combat the likely course of AQIM: seeking out and destroying AQIM, allowing AQIM to continue on its own natural course to ruin, and mitigation. Purposefully, these ways forward are directed toward U.S. policy and strategy as to what they could achieve. The intent is to provide polar opposite strategies in order to compare and contrast, knowing full well that a practical strategy may lay in between or as a combination thereof.

### **1. Destroy AQIM to its Core**

AQIM persists due to the unsettled grievance caused by the junta and the use of safe haven in the ungoverned spaces of the Sahel. In order to resolve these issues both must be aggressively addressed. First, the Sahelian portion of AQIM, which has become a center for KFR operations, must be systematically dismantled. Second, the Algerian regime, which functions similar to an autocracy, must make governmental reforms to repair the damage done in the 1990s. This strategy is the most aggressive and direct to counter AQIM.

#### ***a. Attack the Sahelian Kidnapping for Ransom Network***

AQIM's KFR operations have two main effects: funding and media attention. European nations have paid millions of Euros for each of their citizens kidnapped by AQIM.<sup>408</sup> Though westerners are not the most kidnapped by AQIM, it is by far the most lucrative.<sup>409</sup> Additionally, the international attention AQIM receives from these western kidnappings effectively keeps them in the media and bolsters their standing to the supporters of the *jihād*. By removing the elements of substantial funding and media attention AQIM will be less capable of expanding internationally and

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408 Goita, "West Africa's Growing Threat," 7.

409 Diplomatic Security, "Algeria 2011 Crime," 1.

sequesters their influence in Algeria and limits their influence to its neighbors. Fundamentally, this is what the current U.S. strategy in the Sahel is attempting to accomplish through Sahelian partners; to affect a level of security and governance in the Sahel to make this possible.

Sahelian partnerships are not enough to stem the tide of the KFR, a more active role is required. The nations of the Sahel are too weak and preoccupied with their own internal problems to have a palpable effect on AQIM's network. In the short-term, to make substantial gains requires the U.S. to make a personal commitment to erode the KFR network in the form of intelligence collection, tracking, intelligence sharing and if necessary, force. All of which require international and Algerian support. The European nations whose citizens have been held by AQIM and have subsequently paid exorbitant ransom are a major issue. However, diplomatic pressure to prevent such payments is unlikely to gain much traction with the European nations, but security cooperation is more likely. Intelligence sharing and tracking of ransom money flow could illuminate the network for better targeting. Another essential link to the KFR network is the Algerian headquarters of AQIM which authorizes the kidnappings and dispatches cell members to the Sahel to conduct these missions. AQIM will continue to dispatch operatives to the Sahel to conduct the KFR mission until they become no longer capable of transiting beyond the Algerian border.

With international and Algerian cooperation, those involved in KFR need to be targeted directly. Within the Sahel this could be through some form of overhead intelligence collection that could lead to either regional partner interdiction, a U.S./European multi-national task force or the combination of the two based on capabilities and timeliness. Across the border into Algeria, a similar approach could be used, but would most likely be an Algerian unilateral operation with international support. Further, the multi-national intelligence collection effort could target illicit banking systems, accountants and couriers that can wear away at the financial backbone of AQIM. Given the necessity for Algerian support to these operations, this campaign needs to be on Algerian terms, if not Algeria's overall campaign plan and lead.

**b. Algerian Government Reform**

In the wake of the so called “Arab-Spring” where the former autocratic regimes of North Africa were toppled by popular uprising, Algeria has suppressed any notion of such reform. Algerian security forces swooped in promptly to disrupt the wave of popular support against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s now 13 year reign.<sup>410</sup> The election results of May 2012 seem to confirm the regime’s grip over the electoral process and the inuring effect it has had on the people.<sup>411</sup> As a result anti-regime supporters are receiving a boost, including AQIM, as the populace searches for viable solutions to the continued elitist rule in Algeria.

The U.S. can and should support Algerian government reform that can bring about a peaceful resolution to the illegitimacy of the regime and quell the need to support change via violent *jihad* over the long-term. A core belief for the *jihadists* of AQIM is that change is not possible through the secular system as the power elites will inevitably corrupt the system to their favor.<sup>412</sup> The thwarted “Algerian Spring” and predictable election results only serve to give credence to the *jihadists* claims and render some modicum of support, if only tacitly, to AQIM. Therefore, given that the U.S. sees an end to AQIM as one of its national goals, Algerian government reform must be the long-term overarching solution to that problem. How U.S. policy makers decide to go about this change is left to the experts, but all international diplomatic and economic pressure, as well as incentives should be considered. Without such declared support to reform, AQIM and the *jihadist* offshoots (that are sure to spawn from the base grievance), will continue to persist.

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410 Adam Nossiter and Timothy Williams, “Algerian Riot Police Break Up Protest,” [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), February 12, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/world/africa/13algeria.html?wanted=all> (accessed May 15, 2012).

411 Adam Nossiter, “Algerian Election Results Draw Disbelief,” [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), May 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/12/world/africa/algerians-skeptical-of-election-results-favoring-party-in-power.html> (accessed May 15, 2012).

412 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 34–35.

*c. Risks and Gains of the Destroy Strategy*

The “destroy” strategy has both the highest potential for risk and gain based on the aggressive and direct nature of the strategy. Both the risk and gain can be delineated into short-term and long-term over the course of the strategy. The short-term represents the intelligence collection and destruction of the KFR network. Pressure for the Algerian government to reform will be addressed as a long-term risk or gain. Both in the long-term and short-term, Algeria’s stability is the primary factor.

Over the short-term, a ramp up to U.S. involvement in Algeria causes significant risk to the state of Algeria and westerners abroad. Any prospects of the counter-KFR campaign to be swift, holds counter to the previous 20 year resilience of the Algerian *jihad*. Therefore, U.S. and international involvement in Algeria will be noticeable and potentially enduring. The significance is that the Algerian people are keenly conscience to imperial western powers influence on Algeria, particularly that of France a key component to an international alliance against AQIM.<sup>413</sup> Further, Algerian popular support for Iraq against the U.S. in the 1991 and 2003 invasions does not bode well for U.S. support to Algeria.<sup>414</sup> There is substantial risk to the stability of the state of Algeria based on overt western collaboration, which, could represent a challenge to the Algerian regime. Additionally, open U.S. support to the Algerian regime may spark reprisals throughout the region, to which AQIM has formerly been unable or unwilling to target Americans. Potential gains may out-weigh these risks.

The gains to such operations could hobble AQIM and provide a path to its eventual downfall. With the threat of KFR diminished, AQIM would lose its leading form of national celebrity and its means for propagating throughout the region. Further, the KFR network is not a network in isolation, but is composed of the operational cells of AQIM and its resources. The destruction of the KFR network also represents the destruction of the cells of the Sahel and the financial pathway that leads directly to the

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413 Post-colonial paranoia is still rampant in Algeria. This is a consequence of first being conquered by Arab armies in the seventh century, then being under the yoke of the Ottoman Empire and only recently winning their freedom from French colonialism in 1962.

414 (1991) Willis, *The Islamist Challenge*, 245. (2003) Harmon, “From GSPC to AQIM,” 19.

main component of AQIM in Algeria. An additional gain is the partnership that will be forged with the nations combating AQIM, can serve to mitigate future problems that may arise in the region. Though, this strategy would be resource intensive, financially significant and likely last for years, it is the most direct and quickest of the three strategies.<sup>415</sup>

Over the long-term a major shift must occur in U.S. relations with Algeria, which poses its own set of risks. The U.S. must pressure Algeria to reform its government to mend the root cause for the Algerian *jihād*. There is no guarantee that this process will proceed without violence or that the reforms will not result in an Islamist victory as in 1991 or Egypt after its 2011 revolution against President Hosni Mubarak. In fact, reform may very well be the catalyst that sets Algeria into disarray. On the other hand, the Algerian regime may reject international pressure to reform and retain its authority, thereby eliminating the short-term gains against the KFR network in the Sahel, only to have it re-emerge years later.

The long-term potential gain to Algerian reform is a true solution to the root cause of AQIM. Without the principal cause and rallying cry for the *jihād* against an unjust government AQIM's relevance and support would witness a sharp decline that may prove catastrophic to its continued existence. Also, U.S. support against the Algerian totalitarian regime provides not only a local, but an international signal that the U.S. does truly support a just international order. Though this gain may take many years if not generations to achieve, the result is closure to the Algerian *jihād* issue caused by the junta.

## **2. Let AQIM Die on the Vine**

On the opposite end of the spectrum, U.S. involvement against AQIM can be scaled back to allow AQIM to simply run its course. At first glance this strategy seems

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<sup>415</sup> One early estimate placed the U.S. cost for action in Libya in 2011 at just under one billion dollars. A similar cost could be expected for action in Algeria and the Sahel. Jason Ukman, "Libya war costs for U.S.: \$896 million so far," August 23, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/libya-war-costs-for-us-896-million-so-far/2011/08/23/gIQA5KplYJ\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/libya-war-costs-for-us-896-million-so-far/2011/08/23/gIQA5KplYJ_blog.html) (accessed May 15, 2012).

implausible as AQIM represents a viable threat and some sort of action must be taken to see that AQIM fails. However, AQIM is not a direct threat to the U.S. or its citizens, but a potential threat.<sup>416</sup> Given that only one American has been killed by AQIM, the U.S. can be seen as having the least stake of the western powers to ensure AQIM's demise.<sup>417</sup> Locally, Algeria is the primary stakeholder, proprietor of the problem and most capable internationally for CT efforts against AQIM. This strategy does not simply suggest that the U.S. drop the AQIM issue, but acknowledge that it is not their problem to solve and to let those who have more stake take the lead.

The U.S. should not merely leave the Maghreb and Sahel, but take a passive role except where invited. First and foremost, the U.S. must maintain an ability to assess and monitor the AQIM situation as it develops for the purposes of being capable of taking proactive action if necessary. In order to meet these ends the U.S. will need to sustain intelligence and partnership capacity that can provide sufficient capability if needed; in military terms "phase zero" development.<sup>418</sup> Beyond preparation and setting the conditions for action, if required, the U.S. should involve itself only where requested against AQIM.

AQIM may reach its demise with or without U.S. intervention. Of the four likely ends to AQIM, repression is the one which the U.S. could directly influence. Obsolescence, failures in succession and criminal fixation can be caused by Algeria or by some fortuitous event. Just such an event may occur as a result of the Tuareg rebellion in Mali. The inevitable clash between Tuareg and Salafist ideologies may render AQIM's safe haven no longer viable.<sup>419</sup> U.S. involvement against AQIM serves to heighten AQIM's stature as a credible international threat and provides an impetus to target American interests and citizens. AQIM is a severely myopic organization, there is little reason to

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416 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

417 Official, State Bureau for Counterterrorism.

418 Phase zero is the shaping phase, it is what proceeds the deterrence phase. In order for deterrence to be effective, phase zero must have set the conditions for these efforts to meet the challenge appropriately. A failure in phase zero operations can lead directly to failures as the crisis deepens and costly major combat operations may become the only viable resolution. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0: Joint Operation Planning, Washington, D.C., August 11, 2011, III-39.

419 Oumar, "Timbuktu rejects al-Qaeda."

encourage it to take on a broader view. Over time, AQIM's *jihadist* bent will be rejected by the Algerian population as they have before with the GIA and the GSPC.<sup>420</sup>

A scaled back strategy does offer less risk and fewer gains than the “destroy” strategy, but it is nonetheless worth analysis. The most apparent risk to a scaled back approach is that AQIM could grow a capability that it does not currently exhibit and emerge more capable of threatening U.S. interests and citizens. Further, a U.S. withdrawal may be perceived as a weakness to be exploited by AQIM. A withdrawal may serve to alienate U.S. CT partners in the Sahel who may feel abandoned after the 10 year long partnership stemming from the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI). The risks inherent to the withdrawal would be a less accurate intelligence picture of AQIM, which could mask the catastrophic attack on western interests AQIM analysts have feared since its inception.

The prospects for substantial gains from this strategy are slim due to the lack of an active component to force an end of AQIM. Therefore, gains of the scaled back strategy can be measured in resources saved, a reduction in the perception of meddling in Algerian matters and empowering international powers. The amount of national treasure spent annually on the AQIM fight is roughly \$170 million, not a tremendous amount of money as compared to typical U.S. federal spending, but this money could be used against higher CT priorities elsewhere.<sup>421</sup> Beyond simple dollar figures, finite resources that are strained; such as military forces, intelligence experts and humanitarian assistance programs could be re-tasked to better fulfill the many more pertinent needs around the globe.

U.S. involvement does not necessarily provide a positive return. Algeria has remained wary of U.S. intervention against AQIM from the outset. By scaling back, the U.S. serves to alleviate the tension, and may serve as a stepping stone for renewed relations. As with NATO involvement in Libya, the U.S. sought to take a supporting role

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420 Mullen, Admiral Michael. “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America.” Joint Chiefs of Staff. February 8, 2011. [http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800\\_2011\\_NMS\\_-\\_08\\_FEB\\_2011.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf) (accessed August 14, 2011), 6.

421 USAID. Funding for the Trans-Sahel. and Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

to global crises, to allow other nations to take on the mantle of global security.<sup>422</sup> The benefits to the U.S. are more global partners capable of rendering a just international order and less focus upon the U.S. for lack of intervention where other nations are just as capable. Lack of U.S. involvement can serve to encourage others to solve the AQIM problem and not rely solely on the U.S. AQIM may not cease to exist under this strategy, but the prophesized threat to the U.S. may never materialize either.

### **3. Mitigate and Marginalize AQIM**

Mitigation and marginalization simply means preventing AQIM from taking decisive action and separating them from the populace. Fundamentally, this strategy does not deviate from the current U.S. policy in principle, but differs by focus and realization. By focus the U.S. strategy must look to Algeria for true mitigating and marginalizing efforts; versus mitigating AQIM's southern force while Algeria deals with the remainder of AQIM. In terms of realization, the U.S. must recognize that overall there are no shortcuts to the counter AQIM strategy that may obviate the need for extended U.S. involvement over decades. Specifically, the aggrandized vision of military strikes in the Sahara wrapping up a 20 year long insurgency in a matter of weeks is at best optimistic thinking or at worst over-confidence.

In order to mitigate AQIM the use of security and CT forces are essential. Security forces include border security, local police and general anti-terrorism forces to deter or hamper AQIM efforts to conduct successful operations. CT forces are required, in typical military axiom: to find, fix and finish AQIM wherever they represent a tangible threat. Likely this would involve long-term security and CT partnerships with the goal of bolstering partnership capacity in a similar fashion to what is being currently executed by JSOTF-TS and the Department of State.<sup>423</sup> The key difference between this strategy and the "destroy" strategy is that the intent is merely to manage the AQIM threat over many years by preventing its expansion and heading off major operations rather than seeking

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<sup>422</sup> Michael O'Hanlon, "Libya and the Obama Doctrine," [www.foreignaffairs.com](http://www.foreignaffairs.com), August 31, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68237/michael-ohanlon/libya-and-the-obama-doctrine> (accessed May 15, 2012).

<sup>423</sup> Schmitt, JSOTF-TS J3.

out and annihilating the organization. Military strikes in the desert will be required, but only to serve the purpose of keeping AQIM confined to their inhospitable desert and Kabiyle Mountain refuges. These strikes need not be conducted by U.S. forces, but simply supported in such a way as to allow partner forces to gain capability and address the problem themselves.

By mitigating the threat, fundamentally AQIM can be marginalized and secluded from its intended areas of influence. Marginalization also implies that AQIM's *raison d'être*, the Algerian grievance, is sufficiently resolved. As with the first strategy, U.S. diplomatic policy must seek to persuade and where necessary pressure Algeria to reform its government in order to expropriate any remaining popular support from AQIM. In concert with this effort is the acknowledgement of Tuareg grievances as they attempt to establish their own nation, Azawad.<sup>424</sup> In so doing the U.S. detaches the weak alliance between AQIM and the Tuareg's that served as a marriage of convenience based on similar anti-government pursuits. Without Tuareg assistance or apathy, AQIM loses an essential environmental factor that has allowed their survival amongst the wasted expanses of the Sahara. Essentially, AQIM will have lost its audiences and succumb to obsolescence or criminal fixation.

The risk and gains to this strategy are as to be expected, about the median of the other two strategies. By seeking to mitigate and marginalize AQIM there is an intrinsic risk that the threat may only grow without a more direct approach. The gains from this strategy are unlikely to be realized in the near-term, but may ultimately provide a sufficient end to the *jihad*, although this may take decades. Can the ends justify the means?

A major risk to this strategy is its defensive nature and its reliance on detection. As with the scaled-back strategy, intelligence is paramount. By seeking to mitigate or manage the AQIM threat versus attack it, the U.S. cedes the initiative. AQIM can plan and prepare its spectacular attacks from its safe haven, while only venturing out to execute them with little advanced warning. Given the long time horizon of this strategy,

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<sup>424</sup> Oumar, "Timbuktu rejects al-Qaeda." "Azawad" is the Tuareg name for the territory North of Timbuktu that includes portions of the Sahara to include parts of Niger and Algeria.

there may be ample opportunity for AQIM to seize on auspicious events and make gains similar to the scaled-back strategy risks. Contrary to the scaled-back approach, this strategy will require a long-term investment in manpower, material and funding. Using the \$170-million-dollar-a-year amount currently used against AQIM as an estimate, the financial commitment of this strategy would easily breach two to three billion dollars over ten years. Again, the amounts are not inconsequential as money and resources used against AQIM are assumed to not be available for other urgent or emerging priorities elsewhere.

The benefits to this course of action strike a balance between the two previous strategies. First, the U.S. meets its national goals by fostering security and partner capacity in a region of inherent instability. Second, the mitigation strategy dovetails well with the mitigation strategy of steady government reform by the Algerian government. By realizing that this strategy will play out over tens of years, partners can settle in for long-term permanent solutions instead of quick fixes that ultimately degrade or have unintended consequences. Lastly, by seeking to mitigate and marginalize AQIM, the U.S. is attacking AQIM's strategy by preventing it from becoming a regional terrorist power and sapping the acclaim and notoriety it would gain from a combating a major western power. AQIM would fade into obscurity.

#### **4. Evaluation**

The third strategy, that of mitigating and marginalizing AQIM seems the best fit for the AQIM of today. AQIM's indirect threat to U.S. interests requires a proportional effort that will not generate unintended consequences in the wake of overzealous military action. The long-term strategy of mitigation allows for the most flexibility of the three strategies to meet the natural ebbs and flows of geopolitics and environmental changes. Direct action, when required, is conducted by, with or through partners and most directly empowers these partner nations to take the responsibility for their own security. Lastly, this strategy has the primary end in mind and has the most leverage to encourage an Algerian political reformation.

These three strategies have some significant commonalities that deserve mention. Namely, all three strategies require an intelligence network capable of gleaning the true disposition of AQIM and a capacity to intercede when and where the need arises. Neither of these two requirements should be taken lightly, nor should the requirement to have an in-depth knowledge of the terrain and local culture be assumed as a tertiary task. Failure at this preparation level can lead to costly mistakes in lives and to a lesser extent the willingness to allow further operations against AQIM. Disagreements like the interpretation of National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) - 38 between the Departments of State and Defense has served to hamper just the sort of preparation and intelligence collection efforts that are vital to the success of counter-AQIM strategies.<sup>425</sup> Without the necessary infrastructure in place any sort of predictive analysis would be incapable of providing the clarity that decision makers in Washington will need to make apt decisions in a timely manner.

Algeria is also at the center of all three strategies, because a Sahelian solution only addresses the periphery issue and not the source of AQIM. All courses of action are incumbent on Algeria resolving the longstanding dispute of the junta, which has allowed AQIM's primary cause to have traction with the people of Algeria. With a seemingly legitimate government in place the need for a *jihad* organization or silent support for one will diminish. To survive, AQIM does not require active support, but mere apathy from the populace to have the ability to operate within Algeria.

Though a mitigation and marginalization strategy is best for dealing with the AQIM of today, the other two strategies do have situations where they may be more appropriate. If AQIM were to present a significant direct threat to the U.S. and its interests or if the government of Algeria were to collapse into turmoil; the destroy strategy would be more appropriate. Both of these situations represent an urgent need for action and place AQIM far higher in the CT priority. On the contrary, if AQIM were to

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<sup>425</sup> NSDD-38 is a directive from 1982 which allows U.S. Embassies to control the number of personnel within its confines. The dispute has become more about controlling DoD or circumventing DOS efforts, according to your point of view. The net result is that personnel who should be doing the requisite intelligence collection and infrastructure building have been significantly set-back. Department of State, "National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 38," [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov/m/pri/nsdd/). <http://www.state.gov/m/pri/nsdd/> (accessed May 15, 2012).

represent less of a CT priority to the U.S. or a regional partnership with Algeria at the helm does appear to be moving in the right direction; a scaled-back strategy may be apropos.

### **C. THESIS CONCLUSION**

AQIM is more unlikely than ever to reach its goal of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria since its history as the GIA, yet it endures. The apparent resilience of AQIM relies less on the actual organization than the environmental factors that have rendered it extant. A long tradition of Algerian *jihadism* has founded the basis for AQIM's being. By co-opting local anti-government groups, Algerian *jihadists* have long been allowed to live among and collaborate with Berber and Tuareg separatists. Turning to international notoriety to augment its local *jihad* the GSPC became AQIM even though an Al-Qaeda link had long since been established. Effective Algerian security measures have pushed portions of AQIM to ungoverned spaces where regional security pressure is non-extant and illicit networks are numerous. These environmental factors have allowed AQIM to survive.

The U.S. must have an endgame in mind with respect to its counter-AQIM strategy. Potential ends for AQIM rely heavily on Algeria to bear the weight of the effort, whereas Sahelian efforts are peripheral to a complete end. U.S. strategy should subordinate the Sahel focus, as a Sahelian solution is not sufficient, while an Algerian solution is both necessary and sufficient to AQIM's demise. An end solution to AQIM demands more than the brute force Algeria has exerted for 20 years, it requires change at the foundation of the regime. If the U.S. continues to view AQIM as a threat to its national interests, a strategy that cuts to the source is required, while the side-show in the Sahel represents a waste of time, resources and talent that could be better employed on more urgent threats. AQIM represents a lower priority challenge that if not dealt with properly can become a major priority or draw on indefinitely like the FARC. The volume of challenges the U.S. is faced with since the onset of the War on Terrorism demands a level of efficiency and effectiveness to right-size efforts in order to meet these challenges and reorient on new emerging challenges. In this regard the U.S. must strive to meet

AQIM with the most appropriate solution with the least force possible to expedite its departure so U.S. CT efforts can be engaged against remaining Al-Qaeda affiliate in other parts of the world.

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