Occasional Papers

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Editing and design: Laurie King-Irani

On March 4, 2004, General Charles Wald, then-deputy commander for the European Command (EUCOM), observed that "there has, without a doubt, been some al-Qaida presence in portions of North Africa. But it isn't like Afghanistan or other places, and what's more, Pakistan, for that matter."[1] On March 10, 2005, Rep. Edward R. Royce (R-California), chairman of the House Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, mentioned in a prepared statement that the "train and equip efforts [undertaken by the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP)] are aimed at eliminating the 'next Afghanistan': another terrorist sanctuary" across the Sahara-Sahel region, which allegedly harbors Islamic militants and bin Laden sympathizers.[2] More recently, Rep. Jane Harman (D-California) argued that "North Africa could be the next front in [the] war on terror."[3]

Emerging official forecasts about the rise of violence in North Africa have enhanced regional governments' geostrategic positioning in the "Global War on Terror" (GWOT) by strengthening their diplomatic and military ties to the United States. Speculations and warnings about the "Afghanistan-ization" of North Africa have not, however, contributed to the development of a viable interpretive framework for assessing the contexts and interests underpinning radicalization. In reality, the threat level in the Maghreb in general, and in Algeria in particular, can only be understood by taking the internal political situation into consideration from an emic perspective. Only a fine-grained, qualitative framework, one that attends to the processes of radicalization from an insider's perspective, can reveal how and why individuals are vulnerable to recruitment into the ranks of radical Islamists, the so-called "salafi jihadi" network.

Salafist jihadism emerged dramatically on the international political stage during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan with the backing and blessing of the most conservative fringe of the Salafist movement[4]—the Wahhabi Saudi regime—and the world's most powerful liberal democracy—the United States of America.[5] This improbable alliance grew out of shared interests: the Saudis wished to export their ideology worldwide, while simultaneously channeling potentially violent groups as far away from the homeland and region as possible, particularly after the armed clashes between Saudi security forces and a group of Islamist militants at the Holy Mosque of Mecca in November 1979. The United States nurtured the alliance for various geostrategic reasons, most notably to minimize security risks to its Israeli ally while using salafists for their own purposes against the Soviets in Afghanistan.[6] Meanwhile, the mass appeal of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini in the region was checked by Saddam Hussein's 1980-1988 war on Iran. By the mid-1980s, the international media were lauding the "Arab-Afghan freedom fighters." Indeed, President Ronald W. Reagan described them as "the moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers of America."[7] Following the violent attacks on the financial and military symbols of the United States on September 11, 2001, these same freedom fighters instantly morphed into "Muslim terrorists"[8] and "Islamofascists."[9] The history of US-salafist common cause faded from public consciousness.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the Arab Afghans returned home to find themselves jobless and disenfranchised. Conditions in Algeria were ripe for the use of their military expertise. In the early 1990s, the Algerian state was facing bankruptcy and a new generation of young people was straining an already weak labor market. In an effort to avert an emerging crisis, the Algerian government tried to integrate the Islamist movement into the political process. Municipal and parliamentary elections conducted in 1991 witnessed the

victory of the Wahhabi-Saudi backed Islamic Salvation Front (known by its French acronym, FIS). This electoral achievement entailed the possibility of total regime change.

Alarmed, the political and military old guard annulled the election results and dissolved the FIS. The Islamist movement then split into two factions. The first of these, the moderates led by the activist Abbassi Madani, continued to call for political solutions appropriate to Algeria's cultural diversity and idiosyncrasies, while more radical elements formed the base of the second faction, which backed Abbassi's former deputy, Ali Belhadj. The latter faction aimed to assert their rights and reclaim their electoral victory by all available means–including violence.

Leaders of both factions soon found themselves imprisoned, and a second tier of less seasoned young leaders was thrust into a situation fraught with confusion and danger. Various armed groups soon sprung up, including the Islamic Armed Group (known by its French acronym GIA), which launched brutal attacks and a terror campaign against civilian targets and the Algerian security forces.[10] In December 1994 the GIA succeeded in attracting international media attention by staging its most sophisticated action to date: the hijacking of Air France flight 8969 from Algiers Airport. By the late 1990s, the GIA's membership had surpassed 30,000 individuals.[11]

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The confrontation between the GIA and the Algerian army had already pitted state forces against their militant adversaries by the mid-1990s. Although the state prevailed in these confrontations, many former Algerian intelligence officers asserted that Algeria's Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) had infiltrated and manipulated the radical wing of the GIA in order to exacerbate internal division among its leadership.[12] On one hand, infiltrated intelligence elements contributed to the internal weaknesses of the GIA. On the other, their presence eroded the group's ability to win broad-based external legitimacy, and likely influenced it to commit increasingly violent actions, ultimately reaching unspeakable levels of predatory behavior. The indiscriminate massacres of women and men, intellectuals and workers, children and elderly people, individuals and entire villages–a truly barbaric spree of carnage–shocked the entire world, including the Arab-Islamic world.[13]

The GIA's atrocities clearly undermined its credibility inside and outside of Algeria. Some members of the group argued that the GIA must readjust its strategy by targeting only members of the army and the security forces if they were to win the civilian population's backing. A new splinter group, led by Hassan Hattab, emerged in 1998: the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, known by its French acronym GSPC.

The public had yet to transcend the residual trauma of the indiscriminate violence of the late 1990s before this new splinter group could hope to enlist popular support for further violent actions. Thus, the GSPC decided to enlarge its objectives to include targets that the general public would find acceptable, such as US installations, personnel, and symbols. The GSPC reasoned that the public would support such attacks, given that the United States is a firm supporter and funder of Israel and an invader and occupier of Iraq. Another target was hegemonic and neo-colonial France and its "clients" in the region (the Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian regimes). In 2003, the GSPC kidnapped 32 German tourists, only to release them later for a sum of five million euros (six million USD). This event marked the GSPC's bid to engage the worldwide media and impact a global audience in ways that they hoped would give them local leverage.

Many observers, however, suspected that Algeria's DRS played some role in the Germans' abduction, which only served to enhance Algeria's international standing as a credible partner for the United States in its "Global War on Terror."[14] More significantly, Jeremy Keenan has argued that "GSPC activities not only eased Washington's political reticence about military support for Algeria, but also provided the missing link in its 'banana theory' of terrorism" in the Sahara-Sahel region.[15]

In mid-2005, a Mauritanian military base in the Lemgheity region on the border between Algeria and Mali came under attack one day before the beginning of a US-led joint military exercise named "Flintlock 2005," conducted within the framework of the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP).[16] Under this initiative, small teams of American special forces instruct the local forces of Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, while also coordinating with the armies of Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia in order to control "under-governed areas [of the Sahara] where terrorists find sanctuary."[17] In military terms, "under-governed areas" are "physical or non-physical areas where there is an absence of state capacity or political will to exercise control."[18] This means vast stretches of desert terrain inhabited by groups that have been in various phases of rebellion for years, and who, more recently, have had varying degrees of contact with Islamist rebel groups.

Fears of Islamist infiltration into governed and under-governed areas of Algeria were not entirely unfounded: the GSPC has indeed trained and supplied North African jihadist fighters for confrontations in other regions, including Iraq.[19] As reported by *The Los Angles Times* on July 15, 2007, a senior US military officer estimated that North Africans represented ten percent of foreign fighters in Iraq. The influx of young North African fighters into the Iraqi theatre of combat is not just a matter of ideological commitment, but rather, is very much the natural consequence of poor domestic economic prospects coupled with the oppression that young people endure at the hands of the Maghrebi intelligence and security apparatuses.

Recruitment into these groups does not draw primarily from the disenfranchised or under-educated strata of society, however. GSPC's recruiters target an urban as well as rural demographic that is relatively well informed and decidedly outraged by instances of

perceived or actual injustices committed against Muslims anywhere in the world. Potential fighters undergo psychological assessments to verify their readiness to sacrifice themselves for the cause. Background checks ensure that they are not informers. Supervisors oversee candidates for operations and arrange their travel to Iraq. Volunteers sometimes learn to use explosives and weapons before they leave North Africa, but they rarely study more than the basics of guerilla tactics.

What is certain, however, is that these North African fighters have joined Iraq's insurgency and have become highly skilled in urban operations. They can undertake actions that are more dangerous than guerilla tactics suited to mountainous settings because they are capable of communicating effectively and covertly when a powerful, well equipped, and sophisticated force is bent on neutralizing them. Thus, the fighter emerging from the crucible of Iraq has much greater expertise in lethal tactics than did the fighters who returned from Afghanistan nearly two decades ago,[20] which they can deploy in Europe as well as in the Maghreb.

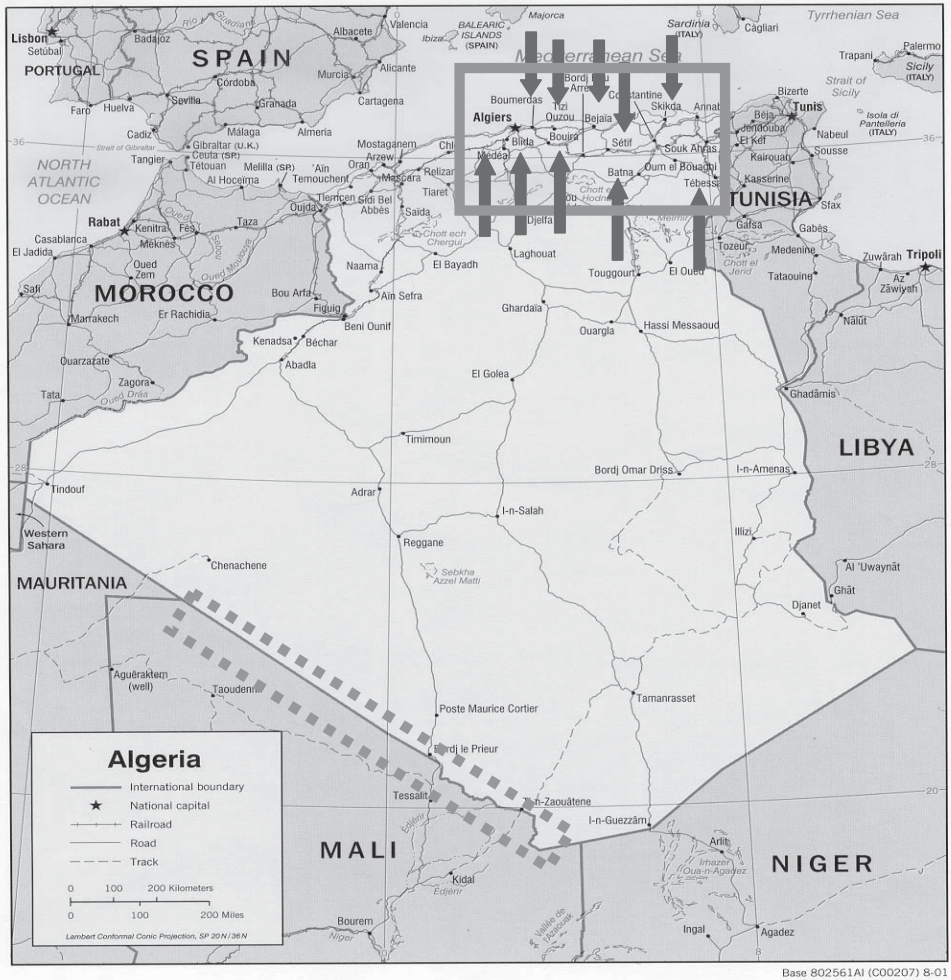
In September 2006, Al-Qaida officially announced that the GSPC had joined its network. On January 26, 2007, the GSPC changed its name to "Al-Qaida Organization in the Islamic Maghreb" (AQIM). AQIM quickly demonstrated global jihadi tactics, such as synchronized suicide bombings followed up with video statements on radical websites. AQIM deploys an array of terror tools, such as ambush, armed attack, assassination, guerilla style combat, bombing, incursions, roadblocks, roadside bombs, shakedowns, and kidnapping.[21]

At the operational level, the group "combines high-tech and low tech [tactics] at the same time."[22] By late 2006, AQIM carried out its first attack on US interests in Algeria with an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated at an affiliate of the US oil conglomerate Halliburton in a western suburb of Algiers. Later, on December 23, 2006 and again on January 3, 2007, the Tunisian security and military forces engaged, for the first time ever, in gun battles against a Tunisian GSPC affiliate group in the southern suburbs of the capital Tunis. During this clash, the Tunisian militant group, led by Afghanistan war veteran and former gendarme Lassad Sassi (said to have connections to militant cells in Milan, Italy), used unprecedented infantry weapons such as AK-47s, rifle ammunition, explosives, and rocket-propelled grenades, including the RPG-7.[23]

On April 8, 2007, a group of nine Algerian soldiers and five Islamist militants died during the ambush of a military patrol west of Algiers. The timing of the attack was significant: it occurred just as the Algerian army was mounting a major counter-terrorism offensive near the eastern border of the country. Only three days later, the group struck Algeria's capital city with an attack that killed at least 33 people and wounded more than 200. The previous day, another terrorist strike shattered the calm of Casablanca, killing three militants and one police officer. It is impossible to underestimate the impact of these attacks on the tourism sector, given Casablanca's significance as the economic capital of Morocco. Several media analysts attempted to draw links between events in Algeria and Morocco, suggesting that all of the attacks were masterminded by AQIM.

These speculations do not withstand critical analysis and empirical evidence, however. A number of factors nullify the hypothesis that the attacks were coordinated by the same organization.[24] First, the two operations were not simultaneous. The majority of actions executed under a single directive have been simultaneous attacks. Secondly, the "choreography" of the attacks varied considerably in each country. The Moroccan attacks were

AQIM Concentration Attacks (1998-2007)



Area of suspected AQIM camps

poorly executed, as evidenced by the fact that the police were able to chase the militants. In addition, they were reminiscent of the Casablanca attacks of March 11, 2007. Comparing these attacks to more recent events in Algeria, we note that the blasts in Algiers were carefully planned and executed, intending to strike at the heart of the Algerian political establishment.

It is premature to attempt to link these events, a point underscored by Morocco's communications minister, who asserted that the bombers did not have links to militant organizations outside the country.[25] Although contacts between Moroccan militants and AQIM have been reported, it is still far too early to make any definitive statements about their coordination. Decontextualized preliminary investigations have tended toward the conclusion that AQIM controls all regional terrorist activities, despite a dearth of hard evidence. Such overestimations of AQIM's scope of operations are designed to coax military aid and diplomatic support from the United States.

Nevertheless, the latest operations do support the conclusion that AQIM is structured along the lines of the former GSPC–Algeria, which serves as the epicenter for Islamist resistance in the region. The GSPC has quickly evolved into a cellular organization characterized by flexibility, adaptability, and intricacy – just the sort of organization that counterterrorism apparatuses have trouble infiltrating.

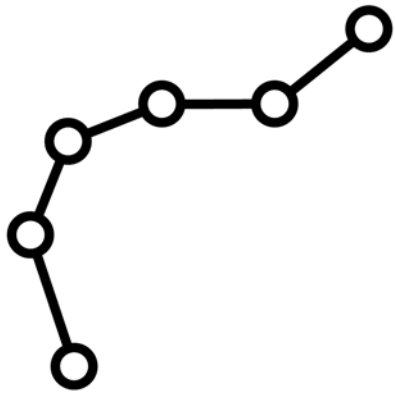
What is beyond dispute, though, is that GSPC is the only group in the region capable of ambushing military patrols using guerrilla tactics, and it is also one of the few organizations possessing the operational capacity to carry out suicide attacks in a short planning period, as witnessed in the bombing of the Government Palace in Algiers. The degree of coordination and discipline needed to execute such operations is still nonexistent in Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, even though local militant cells in those countries have benefited from GSPC insurgents' access to training and information.

GSPC's, or AQIM's, new strategy centers on launching spectacular attacks that affirm their association with Al-Qaida, thereby increasing their prestige, legitimacy, and recruitment capacities. One could characterize this as the theatrical payment of an "allegiance tax" to Al-Qaida. Nevertheless, the GSPC's rapprochement with Al-Qaida should not be seen as an entirely new phenomenon, but rather, as a culmination of the group's original intention of incorporating Algerian activists into worldwide global jihadist networks, thereby gaining access to Al-Qaida's tactical expertise and matériel.

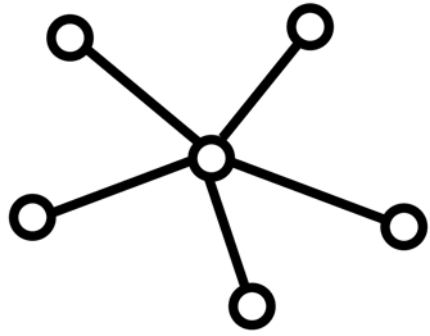
On February 13, 2007, seven deadly attacks on police stations in several towns east of Algiers heralded AQIM's evolution. Six people died and nearly 30 suffered serious injuries.[26] Car bombs were deployed in each explosion, and the relatively large-scale nature of these attacks led observers to claim that they represented "the cross-fertilization of a typically Al-Qaida tactic with AQIM, which had never used these methods before their union with bin Laden's group."[27]

Similarly, the regime's counter-insurgency efforts since late 2006 elicited a strong reaction from AQIM, which transferred operations from mountainous urban areas to urban centers. The Algerian military and security forces have implemented new counterterrorism measures, including "deploying units to live in the mountains for extended periods in order to combat AQIM, rather than trying to launch forays from regional military bases."[28] Indeed, the events of "Black Wednesday" (April 11, 2007) in Algiers have demonstrated that AQIM's future targets probably will not be limited to the centers and symbols of Algerian

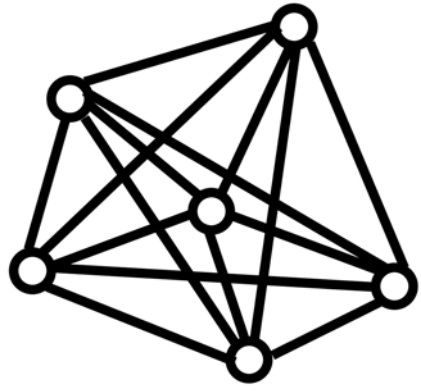
AQIM's TYPES OF NETWORKS



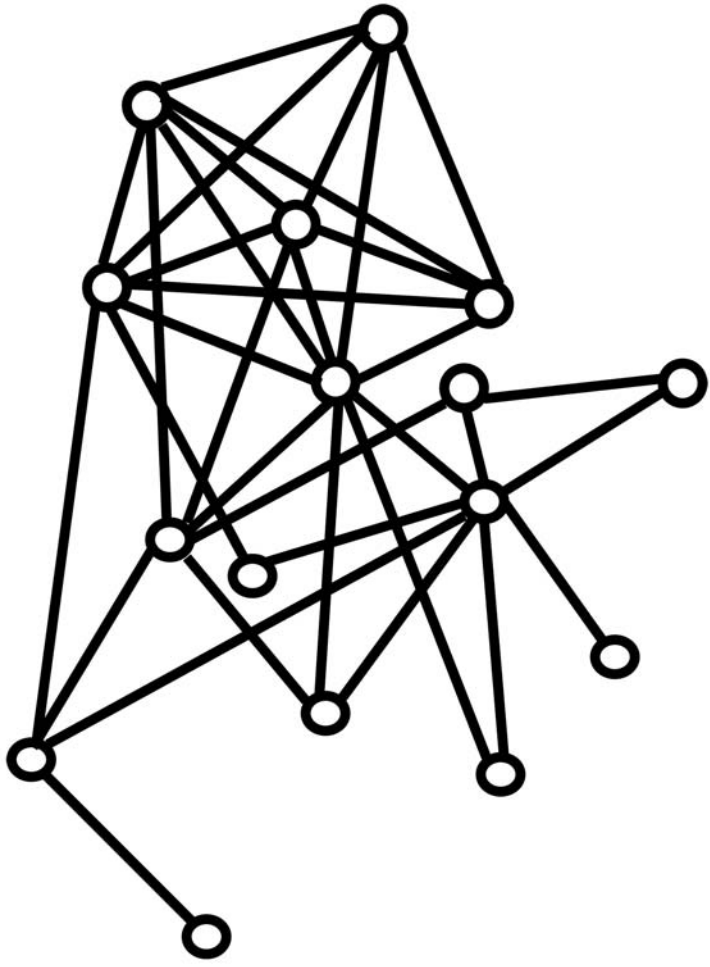
Chain Cell (Mountainous Area)



Star and Hub Cell (Mountainous and Urban Areas)



All-Channel Cell (Urban area)



Dynamically Networked Cell
(Chain, Star and Hub and All-Channel combined)

Networks

Compared to the GIA's single, hierarchical network structure evident in the 1990s, AQIM's organization is characterized by more diverse and complicated network configurations. In general, AQIM's cells are dispersed through different areas and have relative autonomy, except in operational matters that require sustained coordination. Responsibilities, including planning, surveillance, reconnaissance, and attack, are dependent on diverse network structures. The organization of each cell is determined by both its target as well as its environment.

Algerian Islamist insurgents use a hybrid organization combining characteristics of more than one network structure. Generally, however, AQIM employs three types of networks: Chain, Hub and Star, and All-Channel, as described by Arquilla and Rondfelt.*

- **Chain:** Cells are connected linearly to enhance and accelerate the information exchange process. This network structure is more efficient in rural areas than in urban ones, particularly for smuggling and ambush operations.
- **Hub and Star:** Peripheral cells relay information and plans through a central cell, even though it this cell-type is not a decision maker for the network. This structure is often found in urban areas, where it is very difficult to infiltrate or dismantle.
- **All-Channel:** Cells are networked to each other. While there is a center of gravity, the network lacks a sustained central command and hierarchical organization. Therefore, operations are decentralized, and local cells have the tactical-level autonomy to assess targets and carry out operations. Like a hub and star network, an all-channel network is effective in urban areas, but requires logistical support between and among the cells to effectively communicate and exchange functional information within the network.

Despite the disparities among them, these three network structures can be complementary, especially when fused in a hybrid structure oriented toward a common objective.

* John Arquilla and David Rondfelt, eds., Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 7-10.

political power, but rather, will increasingly affect the civilian sphere as well. The advent of frightening new tactics, such as the "human bomb attack"[29] of September 6, 2007 in the Algerian town of Batna (270 miles southeast of the capital Algiers), confirms this emerging trend.

The Batna attack occurred shortly before President Bouteflika's scheduled visit, killing 22 people and wounding more than 100. In a statement released two days later at roughly the same hour that a suicide truck bomber killed more than 30 people at the coast guard barracks in Dellys (62 miles east of Algiers), AQIM claimed that "the Algerian president was the intended target of the Batna bomb," but its operative was forced to detonate his device prematurely after being discovered by Algerian security forces. AQIM's statement added that "the majority of those killed in [the Batna] operation were from the police and security forces ... and …we did not target innocent people as reported by the media."[30] If Bouteflika were indeed the intended target, it would have been the first attempt against the life of an Algerian head of state since Boudiaf's assassination in June 1992.

More recently, on September 21, 2007, a suicide car bomb in the Lakhdaria region (60 miles east of the capital Algiers) struck a police convoy carrying foreign workers from the French firm Razel, which is involved in dam construction. This explosion injured nine people, including two French citizens and one Italian citizen. The attack occurred one day after Al-Qaida released a videotaped message featuring Ayman al-Zawahri, the Egyptian deputy chief of Al-Qaida, urging Muslims to attack French and Spanish interests in the Maghreb. While in the past, GSPC's aim has been to gain the support of the Algerian population against the government, its primary goal now is to generate sufficient media attention to enhance its status as the only credible regional representative of Al-Qaida. Although the Algerian Islamist insurgency is but a shadow of its former self, it has nonetheless enjoyed an infusion of "fresh blood" thanks to its association with Al-Qaida.

In order to understand the persistence of violence orchestrated by the Islamist insurgency, we must add an important socio-historical element to our analysis. For Algerians, Salafism is not a new movement. Its roots reach back to 1931 when Sheikh `Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis, a prominent and influential Algerian Islamic scholar, founded the Association of Algerian Muslim `Ulama (*jam`iyyat al-`ulama al-muslimin al-jaaza'iriyyin*) to mobilize his countrymen against the French occupation of their land. His chief aim was to preserve Algerians' identity, threatened by the so-called French *"mission civilisatrice"* that sought to erase their language and religion so as to define Algerians, especially Berbers, as true descendents of the "Gaullois."

The religious ideology of Ben Badis's movement laid the groundwork for jihad against France, colonialism, and Christianity. In so doing, it shaped an emergent Algerian national identity. In the words of the founder of the Ulama's Association, the Algerian Muslim nation "has its history, defined by innumerable great events; it has its linguistic and religious unity, it has its own culture, its traditions, and its customs both good and bad, as do all the others nations. Therefore, this Algerian Muslim nation is not France, it is not possible that it be France; it does not want to become France, and even it wished, it could not be France."[32]

The consensus surrounding the post-independence Algerian state model gradually disintegrated under Boumeddiene, and became quite attenuated under his successor, Chadli Benjedid. By the mid-1980s, the state was "functioning for the exclusive benefit of

clients and not promoting any of the values leading to collective identity."[35] The 1988 riots of "Black October," a popular response to the failure of the development model advanced by the Algerian state, the authoritarian nature of regime, and the rise of a powerful Islamist movement, sparked a crisis of legitimacy inside the FLN. The administration of President Chadli Benjedid adopted a multi-party system in hopes of "[using] the Islamists against the FLN...[and to] allow [Benjedid] to define a new presidential majority whose aim would be precisely to bar altogether the extremist factions of the FLN and the FIS from power."[36]

"The unintended consequence of Benjedid's initiative was the delegitimization of the one-party authoritarian state and the crystallization of an alternative Islamist approach. Combined with other interacting socioeconomic dynamics, as well as the shortsighted politics of the Algerian élites, a violent Islamist insurgency sprung up."

This decision, designed to attract moderates while excluding radicals, soon revealed a dual inadequacy: neither the FLN and nor the FIS were prepared to accept a historical political compromise. More significantly, the conceptions of Algerian society held by the two protagonists were fundamentally incompatible. The unintended consequence of Benjedid's initiative was the delegitimization of the one-party authoritarian state and the crystallization of an alternative Islamist approach. Combined with other interacting socioeconomic dynamics, as well as the shortsighted politics of the Algerian élites, a violent Islamist insurgency sprung up. Some influential members of the Algerian security and military establishment—who adhered to a French notion of uncompromising secular ideology—instigated the government to annul the FIS electoral victory, thereby propelling the military into the bloody confrontation with Islamists who "accused Algeria's bureaucratic and intellectual elites of constituting a *hizb fransa* (or "French party"), and further, of being toadies to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank."[37] The adversaries laid claim to some valuable symbolic capital: "Algerian Islamist fighters described themselves as the new mujahidin in the unfinished war against (neo-) colonialism, Western economic domination, and cultural hegemony symbolized by the Francophone military state."[38] The army, for its part, claimed to be the "repository of the memory of the heroes of the War of National Liberation."[39] The ideals and concerns the Islamists invoked were transnational, compelling, and easily conveyed by the international media.

By the year 2000, two new realities obtained. First, Algerian civil society was profoundly traumatized by the lethal conflict of the 1990s. The government proposed clemency for Islamic fighters in 1995 on the condition that they lay down their arms. The relinquishment of weapons permitted the government to enact a "Civil Concord Law" in 1999.

Secondly, rising oil prices replenished the state's treasury, enabling it to repay debts to international creditors. Appeasement now emerged as an attractive option. President Bouteflika soon proposed a "Presidential Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation." This charter, adopted by 97 percent of Algerian voters in a national referendum on September 29, 2005, granted a general amnesty and lessened some harsh sentences handed down by the courts in the 1990s. The charter absolved the government and its security forces of any blame, placing the onus of responsibility for a decade of bloodletting on the Islamist groups, including the FIS. In return for acknowledging their culpability in atrocities, FIS leaders would remain unmolested as long as they recused themselves from all political participation.

The charter was thus little more than a façade, a substitute for the application of a genuine lasting policy. It is widely viewed by seasoned Algeria-watchers as arbitrary and lacking in transparency. The charter avoids entirely the serious question of missing and disappeared persons.[40] NGOs and other human rights sources have long argued that Algerian security forces have been involved in many disappearances, which are clearly criminalized under International Humanitarian Law, and thus cannot be amnestied.[41]

The Charter and the Players

The charter's mandate specifies three Islamist groups: the salafi jihadist network, the GIA, and the leadership of the FIS.

1. The salafist jihadi network includes two sub-groups:

a) Former GSPC/Al-Qaida Organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): Estimates of members of this movement, led by Abdelmalek Droukdel, alias Abu Musab Abdul Wadud, vary widely from a few hundred to as many as 4,000 fighters.[42] According to an official Algerian estimate, Wadud's group does not exceed a few hundred, although exact figures are still unknown.[43] Recent Algerian official reports claim that AQIM "is suffering from intense internal problems due to the policies of the national emir, Abdul Wadud," whose ambition to link the group's activities to "Al-Qaida's wider Islamist campaign is said to have been opposed by GSPC's founder Hassan Hattab, [but only] as a diversion [to further Hattab's] primary goal of establishing an Islamic state in Algeria."[45] This group typically operates in the northeast of Algeria as well as in areas of the vast southern desert. AQIM trains its operatives in mobile camps, which allow militants to disperse and disappear quickly. Another central figure and leader of the southern GSPC group (sometimes called the Free Salafist Group, known by its French acronym GSL) is Mukhtar Bilmukhtar, the *nom de guerre* of Khaled Abu al-Abbas, a veteran of the Afghan jihad. He was reportedly killed in northern Mali in September 2006, but the Algerian government has yet to confirm his death officially. These two groups have shown themselves adept at criminal forms of fundraising, including kidnapping and extortion, popular donations, illegal smuggling (by using proceeds from cigarette trafficking to purchase weapons from Mali and Niger), business fronts (utilizing a travel agency as a façade to in-

crease its revenues), and European fundraising (reactivating a former GIA sleeper cell and operatives across Europe).[46] The GSPC rejected the presidential initiative and considered it to be a conspiracy against jihad in Algeria. The GSPC has even gone so far as to forbid its members from reading the charter.

b) Another component of the Salafist trend is the "Protectors of the Salafist Call,"[47] which is active in the governorates of Glizan (211 miles west of Algiers), Muaskar (224 miles west of Algiers), and Ain Defla (93 miles west of Algiers). It is second to the GSPC/AQIM in influence and strength, and includes 120 armed elements led by Salim al-Afghani. Al-Afghani has not clarified a distinct position regarding the charter, but presumably leans toward rejecting it.[48] Moreover, it is still difficult to assess the military posture adopted by the "Protectors of the Salafist Call," which steers clear of any direct confrontation with the security forces. Nevertheless, it is believed that within the Algerian security and military apparatuses many people oppose any concessions to or appeasement of this group on the grounds that it would take advantage of the military truce to improve its network and operational capabilities. The army and intelligence services believe "that confrontation with [Protectors of the Salafist Call] is inevitable, if it is not today it will be tomorrow."[49]

2. The second of the Islamist groups targeted in the presidential charter is the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The GIA was organized into the following military battalions: Kateebat al-Khadra (Green Battalion); Kateebat al-Ansar (Supporters' Battalion); Kateebat al-Ethabat (Fixed Battalion); Kateebat al-Sunna (al-Sunna Battalion); and Kateebat al-Ahwaal (Horror Battalion). According to the Algerian government, the GIA is now virtually "broken up." The number of its fighters does not exceed 100 men,[50] spread across the hinterland of Algiers in small cells in localities such as Blida (27 miles southwest of Algiers), and Médéa (50 miles south of Algiers). This group is among the most ruthless and violent, conducting collective massacres, aggression, and rape against the civilian population. Algerian authorities have instituted largely symbolic forms of punishment against this group, often resulting in total amnesty for those who have served half of their sentences, or reducing punishment in order to encourage members to reintegrate into society.

3. The third of the Islamist groups targeted is the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) leadership. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika commuted the sentences of the FIS leadership in order to enable them to return to their communities. In return for this amnesty, they are forbidden to return to political life, and they may not reinstate the FIS or found a new party. The charter does not offer any rights to FIS adherents, other than the right to live; it is based on the fundamental principle that the government cannot be found guilty in any way, while Islamist groups, including the FIS, have to admit their responsibility for atrocities and be banned from political life.

The charter legitimized extensive *de facto* impunity for abuses committed by the Army and armed groups allied with the Algerian state.[51] Furthermore, the charter left unspecified procedures for determining whether members of armed groups were disquali-

fied from seeking amnesty due to their responsibility in "collective massacres, rapes, or the use of explosives in public places." On the one hand, the text fails to mention members of civilian militias armed by the state, the so-called "Legitimate Self-Defense Groups." On the other hand, passages mentioning "architects of safeguarding …the Republic" and "any components whatsoever of the defense and security forces," indicate that the amnesty in fact covers abuses perpetrated by members of these groups.

The amnesty also covers other serious crimes carried out by armed groups, including willful killings by death squads, torture, extrajudicial killings, and abductions. The Algerian state continues to monopolize discourses about reconciliation, tending "to ignore the roots of the civil conflicts, [and] the extant political and socioeconomic inequities that frequently map onto class, ethnic and religious divides."[52] The state-sponsored version of reconciliation reinforces a "culture of impunity" because "amnesty had come at the price of a total evisceration of any pretence of justice for the victims."[53] Without accountability and recognition of crimes committed, amnesty results in official amnesia, creating political fractures since "social memory obviously rejects amnesia."[54]

In sum, the implementation of the Presidential Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation absolves hundreds of military and auxiliary groups from the crimes they committed during the "Dirty War." President Bouteflika endorsed this approach to national reconciliation in order to enhance his legitimacy after the questionable 1999 elections, in which he attempted to present himself as the uncontestable leader before Algerian generals by refusing to be "three–quarters of a president."[55]

Regional Specificities

While it is true that AQIM has been active in the south, across the Sahara into Mauritania and Niger, its contribution in a practical sense to Al-Qaida's worldwide jihad is still unknown. Theories positing a grand process of unification into a single and centralized Salafist movement remain untested and unconvincing. Although various jihadist groups are certainly in contact and enjoy mutual assistance and information sharing, their alliance is based on secondary logistical goals rather than primary strategic objectives. Political rhetoric and media claims to the contrary, the scale and nature of Al-Qaida's involvement in the Maghreb is still quite uncertain.

It is clear, however, that Salafist jihadism poses greater and more immediate dangers in Morocco than in Algeria, as evidenced by the attacks launched by the Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group (known by its French acronym GICM) in Casablanca in 2003 and in Madrid in March 2004.[56] These attacks exhibit all the earmarks of Al-Qaida actions, unlike the violence in Algeria, which is more a matter of internal Algerians affairs than proof of "terror's globalization."

Possibly the biggest unknown in the Maghreb is the future evolution of jihadist groups in Tunisia. When the Tunisian regime clamped down on non-violent Islamist movements in the 1990s, they not only eradicated them from the political scene, but they also curtailed democratic and civil rights' reform as well, countered the secular opposition[57] with the battle of the veil—described in the law instituting the ban on "sectarian dress"—and undertook arbitrary arrests, torture, and unfair trials.[58] The end result of the regime's exaggerated response to the non-violent Islamists was a political vacuum that encouraged

the emergence of more militant jihadist phenomena. Tunisian militant attacks, however, are likely to be an occasional irritant; they are not harbingers of more vigorous domestic insurgency. Still, jihadist militancy could increase in the absence of clear and consistent governmental efforts to integrate the non-violent Islamic opposition into the political system.

The first international treaty that the United States signed was with Morocco in 1787.[59] More than two centuries later, however, US policymakers have paid scant attention to this area, particularly during the Cold War, viewing it as part of Western Europe's zone of influence. US foreign policymakers and military planners consider the Maghreb important geopolitically "only insofar as the events in the area could have negative consequences on the stability of Southern Europe, NATO's southern flank." [60] During an official trip to the United States in March 1963, King Hassan II stated that Morocco, though officially non-aligned, recognized that its major interests were with the Western world. [61]

More significantly, traditional forms of Islam practiced in the Maghreb for over fourteen centuries have never posed a security threat to the interests of the United States. Only one violent fringe minority has emerged among the North African people under the conditions that we mention above: Salafism can only make inroads into these societies because genuine and legitimate political grievances and economic duress persist in the Maghreb.

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In the Algerian case, Salafist elements benefit from the poisonous politicization of the question of identity by the Algerian state, which has tried to endorse ahistorical conceptions of identity, based respectively on the "Arabo-Islamic conception," the "Berberist conception" and the "Islamists' conception," all of which hinder Algeria "[from developing] the characteristics of a civil society in reality as well as in name and in aspiration, and one of these characteristics is an informed and correspondingly self-confident public opinion."[62] Furthermore, the failed educational system, sub-standard healthcare delivery system, and widespread poverty have significantly weakened political legitimacy.[63]

For its part, the United States remains concerned about the potential or virtual capacity of Al-Qaida to create operational bases in the hinterlands and cities of the Maghreb. If terrorists succeed in securing facilities in the Sahel (the southern fringe of the Sahara desert that extends from Mauritania in the west to the Sudan in the east), they may be able to infiltrate Europe by way of Morocco and Algeria. This was the route utilized in 2004 by the men responsible for the lethal train-bombings in Madrid, most of whom were Moroccan. But is the threat of terrorism in North Africa enough to justify a significantly ramped-up American military presence and increasing diplomatic and financial investments?

Some observers argue that the TSCTP appears to have more to do with securing emerging petroleum resources in the Sahara and Sahel region than consolidating an efficient counterterrorism strategy.[64] In addition, North African civil societies are troubled by the implications of financing the TSCTP. They fear that this assistance will strengthen the Maghrebi internal security establishment by "making the *mukhabarat* state" in the Algerian case, as Entelis has correctly remarked, "more robust and thus less inclined to accede to societal demands for greater democracy."[65] The perception is that external military and financial assistance will enable political oppression and deny legitimate demands for an authentic democracy, resulting in the sort of erosion of the political atmosphere that provides armed groups with their most fervent militants. Ordinary citizens can become aggressive Islamist militants if subjected to authoritarian states that deny them civil freedoms and use the threat of terrorism to justify human rights abuses.

Terrorism is "the bastard of dictatorship."[66] Clearly, the post-September 11 era created unique opportunities for North African regimes to amplify the security threat in order to advance their own political agendas.[67] The "Global War on Terror" has helped North Africa's authoritarian regimes "to repress and silence legitimate political opposition by labeling it or linking it with 'terrorism,' 'putative terrorism' or 'incipient' terrorism, to use another fairly meaningless colloquialism, 'Islamic extremists' and the like."[68]

"Although jihadist groups are certainly in contact and enjoy mutual assistance and information sharing, their alliance is based on secondary logistical goals rather than primary strategic objectives. Political rhetoric and media claims to the contrary, the scale and nature of Al-Qaida's involvement in the Maghreb remains uncertain."

Until recently, the mix of authoritarian regimes, the search for legitimization, and relative prosperity have allowed North African states to manage terrorism without major difficulty. The region has thus enjoyed a certain degree of stability in comparison with the rest of the Middle East. This situation could change in light of the new transnational, anti-American, and anti-French strategy of the AQIM and the "symbolic support" provided by Al-Qaida at large. But the enduring appeal of Al-Qaida's call to "true Muslims," especially in Algeria, to resist the United States and France is likely to ensure that Islamist violence will continue. The challenge for Algerian authorities and their concerned Western allies will be to ensure that Al-Qaida is contained.

However, describing the Sahara as the "next Afghanistan" is not only an overstatement, but also an index of the polarizing national, regional, and global crises that nourish violent movements. AQIM does not pose a threat to the Algerian regime, or any other

government in the region. The last nine months of AQIM terror campaigns have had scant effect on the morale of the Algerian people, who demonstrated their unfailing willingness to sustain Bouteflika government the day after the attacks on April 11, 2007.

Strategic Implications for US North African Policy

Given the forgoing analysis, the United States government should rethink its strategic posture toward the region, particularly *vis-à-vis* its Algerian counterparts. Clearly, the "cookie cutter" approach currently used by the architects of the "Global War on Terror" has not improved the US position in North Africa. In the future, the following recommendations should guide threat assessments for the region, particularly for Algeria:

- The American military could better manage its public image by keeping the lowest possible profile due to its reputation, recently scarred by scandals in Iraq (torture at Abu Ghraib and the killings at Haditha). The new regional unified combat command, AFRICOM, should be tapped for US military and linguistic needs, and can provide effective cultural training for understanding the North Africa region. US commanders should include significant cultural sensitivity training, tapping into the topics of religion, history, psychology, language, local population patterns, customs, and ethnic issues as a main component of the US Special Forces pre-deployment training in the Sahara-Sahel area, as well as in southern Algeria. Once on the ground, the US commanders should repeat this training and take into account particular socio-cultural nuances in their specific operations environment. US military efforts will not be able to win the battle of ideas by reaching "hearts and minds." This struggle is infinitely more ideological than physical. Societies in the Maghreb are still traumatized by the decade of the Algeria's "Dirty War." Thus, they are unlikely to be responsive to the American cultural myopia that categorizes and perceives North Africa only in terms of a "new front in the Global War on Terror" to the exclusion of historical context and the specificities of the region's political culture.

- The changing security landscape since September 11 demands an ability to address "threats at their inception," i.e., at "Phase Zero," by "eliminating conditions favorable to terrorists."[69] Consequently, a new and proactive approach to conflict should "promote stability and peace by building [the] capacity in partner nations that enables them to be cooperative, trained, and prepared to help prevent or limit conflicts."[70] Properly executed in the North African environment, this approach requires less focus on raiding tactics and parachute jumps, and more attention to sustainable development and humanitarian assistance that is responsive to the social and economic structural problems fostering the ideological and operational capabilities of the jihadist community. A completely reformed new American security plan for the Maghreb region is imperative for ensuring US interagency coordination by incorporating "soft power" to strengthen regional economic progress, promote good governance, and ease political transitions. Therefore, US policymakers should understand that the war against terror cannot be won by armed force alone. Force may be effective in dealing with active terrorists, but cannot prevent the regeneration of terrorists. A "kill or capture" approach is too

restrictive and does not acknowledge the sociocultural and political complexities of the North African environment. Poverty, cultural alienation, and authoritarianism continue to fuel jihadi violence. The salafist movement remains a very attractive life choice for disillusioned North African youth.

- US military assistance to Algeria has increased dramatically since September 11. Between 1990 and 2001, for example, Algeria obtained only 20.8 million USD, compared to funds totaling 374.3 million USD from 2002 until 2007.[71] Since 2002, Algeria has enjoyed 18 times the total amount of military assistance the country received over the previous 12 years. Growing military assistance to Algeria has been justified by its status as an "outstanding partner in the global war against terrorism"[72] and its central role in regional counter-terrorism, including Algeria's active participation in the TSCTP. These justifications are cast into doubt, however, by the United States' failure to vigorously assist training in the rule of law. The American government needs to show its North African partners that fighting terrorism can never mean violating basic human rights.[73] Human rights values must be observed at all times, especially in light of the exceptional measures implemented by the Algerian state against terrorism in recent decades.

"Cultivating the establishment of governance systems that tolerate diversity, promote human rights, and respect religious tolerance is a* sine qua non *for minimizing both Islamists' and secularists' suspicions about American intentions in the region."

- The Algerian armed Islamist insurgency presented a serious challenge to the Algerian armed forces. It is important to mention that for three decades (1962-92), the Algerian National Popular Army (ANP) had focused its attention on exterior threats, not internal challenges. The emergence of a domestic terrorist threat and the crystallization of a new international environment following the Cold War demanded rapid and dramatic changes from the ANP. Notwithstanding its strategic and operational doctrine (based largely on the Soviet model), the Algerian armed forces and security apparatus successfully adjusted their modus operandi to guerrilla warfare. Nevertheless, AQIM's emerging profile indicates that Algerian counter-terrorism teams will succeed if they recognize that the only jihadist they can track is a known one. There is insufficient information regarding AQIM's recruitment process among Algerian and North African youth. Hence, it is difficult to predict the profile of the next generation of terrorist. Both Algerian and Western governments remain anxious about their capacity to combat younger, technologically proficient, geographically mobile, and socially well-rooted militants benefiting from ideological and possibly operational support from international jihadist networks, particularly those comprised of young people who have

sharpened their urban warfare skills in Iraq. The most deadly of these skills is the ability to utilize improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Since the GSPC changed its name to AQIM, IEDs have become a preferred method of ambushing Algerian military convoys. The United States could assist the Algerian military by transferring knowledge about IEDs obtained from both Iraq and Afghanistan to its North African partners.

- The US military should not give the impression that partnerships are entirely focused on military and security aspects. Most importantly, the US Government should demilitarize the TSCTP by incorporating civilian leadership into its structures and decision making processes. Recognizing the civilian dimension of the TSCTP is a significant step toward guaranteeing its durability and legitimacy. It is important that US policymakers support a democratic civil-military relationship and increased civilian control over the armed forces as a key stage in consolidating the American-Algerian relationship. Recently, the US foreign policy agenda has showcased the fundamental mechanisms of democracy, including human rights, freedom of expression, rule of law, good governance, transparency, electoral systems, and the media, while excluding instruments of national security power, including civil-military relations linked to the control of institutions by the armed forces, intelligence agencies, and security forces. It is crucial for the United States to realize the importance of genuine democratic participation to sustainable governance. "[I]t would be extremely unrealistic for Western governments to suppose that they are in a position to promote progressive political reform in Algeria….Only if the elected representatives of the people become the source of government mandates can the demilitarization of the Algerian political system be definitive."[74] It is particularly risky for the United States to privilege Algerian military effectiveness over eventual civilian control of the armed forces, because "every state has an army, but in Algeria, the army has the state."[75]

- US policymakers tend to perceive political Islam in the Maghreb as the next "-ism" threatening the universal values of democracy, and thus imperiling American national interests. This is a monolithic and simplistic conception of complex and heterogeneous phenomena. In many cases, Islamist groups may reject democratic rights only because they have never themselves benefited from or experienced them. How can people be democrats when their regimes are undemocratic? Unfortunately, being anti-democratic has become a way of affirming one's identity in contrast to Western governments. This reactionary tendency simply serves to confirm Western policymakers' negative perceptions of political Islam. The obsessive focus on terror by American policymakers and mainstream media misrepresents Islamic revival as an entirely religious phenomenon, rather than as a means of expressing a wide array of cultural and political demands.

- The United States must distinguish between violent Islamists and reformist Islamists, and commit to supporting the interests of the latter instead of demonizing the former, given that many wish to work toward improving the socioeconomic and political conditions in the Maghreb. Cultivating the establishment of governance systems that tolerate diversity, promote human rights, and respect religious tolerance is a *sine qua non* for minimizing both Islamists' and secularists' suspicions about American intentions

in the region. It is important to note that the United States, unlike European countries, is unencumbered by colonial "baggage." This comparative advantage could be promoted by US policymakers keen to implement genuine and constructive dialogue with different components of North African civil society.

- Public diplomacy is an important tool for improving America's image in the Maghreb region. Broad anti-Americanism is a fact today throughout the Muslim world. The perception and misperception of American values systems, culture, and policies have hindered real partnerships with key components of North African societies. In fact, the shortcomings of public diplomacy are among the gravest weaknesses of US policy today. Youth, representing more than a third of the population in the Maghreb, should be the "high value target" of American public diplomacy efforts. It is among the most disenfranchised and frustrated members of this population that radical elements find support. At present, the countries of North Africa have a virtually inexhaustible layer of young candidates for martyrdom operations. Although Algerian officials will deny it, martyrs and martyrdom are widely revered by youth. Unfortunately, US efforts rarely engage with this vulnerable and crucial audience. In contrast, jihadist groups have made aggressive efforts to build youth networks.[76] Public diplomacy should focus on small, substantial steps rather than ambiguous and pretentious slogans. A new American public diplomacy approach should not attempt to control and dominate the global communication landscape, but rather, it should persuade and convince. Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra TV are widely viewed as propaganda tools of the US government. The American Arabic-language satellite television station Al-Hurra has "seemed far more interested in promoting itself in Congress than in the Middle East."[77] Despite the high budgets allocated to Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra TV, neither has succeeded in winning influence and credibility, and neither has changed Arab audiences' perceptions of the United States. In the North African context, it is judicious to support the emergence of a new media landscape responsive to and rooted in local political and cultural realities, rather than spending more funds on Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra television, whose reputations have sunk to "Radio Marti levels of irrelevance."[78]

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Conclusion

As long as American policymakers ignore the dynamics of power and coercion in the Maghreb, particularly its roots in the "iron trinity of authoritarianism" comprising the security and intelligence establishment, the business oligarchy, and the strong executive branch, US and regional forces' ability to respond to the political and security challenges created by salafist activism is unlikely to achieve regional stability in North Africa.

Genuine reconciliation will require a real opening up of the political system to all political forces—including Islamists who repudiate violence. A firm and lasting peace also necessitates sound economic and social development policies wedded to a serious fight against corruption and mismanagement of public funds; a separation of powers; and respect for the independence of the judiciary. Thus, it is crucial that the Bouteflika government not miss the unique and rare opportunity afforded by current high oil prices. In spite of the oil boom, the tendency of the regime after 2001 has been "to co-opt opposition and buy social peace…and the effective pressure for fundamental institutional reform is low."[79]

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