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# Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb

## Author Biography

**Senior Master Sergeant Gregory A. Smith** is the command aerial gunner functional manager, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida. He leads, manages, and directs 254 aerial gunners in eight operational flying squadrons across two Special Operations Wings. He also serves as the senior evaluator aerial gunner for AC -130H/U standardization and evaluation section where he validates the combat readiness and proficiency of the Command's aerial gunners. He has held positions as an operations superintendent, operations flight chief, aerial gunner functional manager, and superintendent of plans, intel, and tactics with the 4th Special Operations Squadron; a special missions planner with the 16th Operations Support Squadron; and superintendent of the 16th Special Operations Wing Strategic Plans office. Sergeant Smith was the first planner from the 16th Special Operations Wing to deploy in response to the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. He single-handedly established the first Air Operations Center and then deployed deeper behind enemy lines to build the first Combat Search and Rescue Base and Joint Interagency Operations Center used in Operation Enduring Freedom.

## Abstract

This paper is organized into four chapters that focus on the terrorist group Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The four chapters examine different facets of the collective environment that have allowed AQIM to succeed and even thrive at times. The first chapter begins with Algeria's war of independence with the French. The second chapter focuses on the nomadic Tuareg people. It seeks to show how the Tuaregs were deprived by French occupiers and how European colonization cost the Tuaregs access to vital trade routes used for centuries. The third chapter will very briefly examine Algeria's civil war and the emergence of modern terrorist groups. The fourth chapter will discuss the post-9/11 world in terms of "shaping operations" for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and how this caused an evolution in terrorism as a reaction to actual or perceived American hegemonic ambitions. This paper is not a compendium of every event or in any way a complete history of the region. It is intended to reinforce the author's notion of outlying antecedents that normally coalesce around a central issue and how the addition of a political agenda can lead these antecedents toward a fusion point. When the fusion point is met, ethno-nationalist ambitions are catapulted down the road of terrorism and the fundamental message is lost in the debris of another attack. Such is the story of AQIM...

# Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb

**Gregory A. Smith**

## Preface

The devastating terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 will forever resonate in the minds of Americans. The images of billowing smoke emanating from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon caused many to ask “who could do this to us?” To answer that question we must examine the past and look at the policies enacted by our government that caused a cyclic reaction within our enemy. The same is true for other governments that seek to expand their sphere of influence without examining those critical antecedents that affect the indigenous population. These disenfranchised subjects, when facing a foreign invader or apostate government, will often draw on a shared identity, be it cultural, ethnic, religious, or political, to sound the battle cry of resistance.

This paper is organized into four chapters that focus on the terrorist group *Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM). The four chapters examine different facets of the collective environment that have allowed AQIM to succeed and even thrive at times. The first chapter begins with Algeria’s war of independence with the French. It focuses on how the Algerians were able to successfully isolate the French from the population through the use of terrorism. It also lays the foundation for the concept of terrorism within Algeria to further a political agenda.

The second chapter focuses on the nomadic Tuareg people. It seeks to show how the Tuaregs were deprived by French occupiers and how European colonization cost the Tuaregs access to vital trade routes used for centuries. The intent of this chapter is to briefly explain reasons for the lack of trust between the Tuaregs and foreign forces. It also seeks to show the exceptional ability to navigate the Sahara and how smuggling has become the basis of income for many Tuaregs.

The third chapter will very briefly examine Algeria’s civil war and the emergence of modern terrorist groups. It seeks to show the politicization of Islam by the government and the struggle to return the fundamental aspects. The emergence of the Groupe Islamic Armie (GIA) and the ensuing rise of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) played a significant role in shaping the modern landscape across the

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region. It will conclude with the arrival of American forces into the region and the resulting reaction.

The fourth chapter will discuss the post-9/11 world in terms of “shaping operations” for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and how this caused an evolution in terrorism as a reaction to actual or perceived American hegemonic ambitions. The arrival of AQIM served as a fusion point for many smaller terrorist groups and exacerbated an already difficult situation. It will examine the many facets of AQIM’s recruiting strategy of blending ethno-nationalism with religious identity to accomplish its near and far goals. It will also discuss the collaboration between the Tuaregs and AQIM on transit issues and mutual assistance against government threats.

This paper is not a compendium of every event or in any way a complete history of the region. It is intended to reinforce the author’s notion of outlying antecedents that normally coalesce around a central issue and how the addition of a political agenda can lead these antecedents toward a fusion point. When the fusion point is met, ethno-nationalist ambitions are catapulted down the road of terrorism and the fundamental message is lost in the debris of another attack. Such is the story of AQIM...

## Section One: The War for Independence: A State is Born

### Introduction

To understand the mindset of terrorist groups in the Maghreb, you must understand the history of struggle in the region. This chapter will briefly examine Algeria's War of Independence with France from 1954–1962 and its immediate aftermath. Many important characters are not mentioned in this chapter as they do not relate to the overall point of this paper which is the nationalist ambitions of a people, coupled with religious identity, and portrayed in the continual struggle for control. The first instance of this modern struggle occurred in Algeria following World War II. The War of Independence was a pivotal time in North African history as colonial doctrine and Islamic ambitions met head on in what would become a continual struggle in the battle of ideologies.

### The War for Independence: 1954-1962

Imperialism was the order of the day until World War II. Since as long as history has been recorded, a stronger country or band of people have attempted to conquer and control the weaker. Africa was no different. With Portugal and Spain conquering the majority of the out rim of the African continent, France, Germany, and Belgium worked their way through the center. Following the Anglo-French Agreement of 1889, France was granted significant influence over an area from the African coast to Niger River.<sup>1</sup> Much of this area would be known as French West Africa. This agreement gave France considerable influence over the Sahel and the Sahara.

World War II changed the composition of the boundaries in Africa as Germany saw her influence greatly diminished. The colonial powers were slowly coming to an end as Europe lay in ruins and vital resources were diverted to the rebuilding effort at home. At the same time, a man named Menachim Begin and his group Irgun launched an offensive in British Palestine. This was a new type of war as it did not involve the world powers vying for control but was a smaller insurgent group challenging a larger power for control. The insurgency levied a tremendous cost to the British and resulted in the United Kingdom, already weary from years of war, withdrawing from Palestine. The nationalistic efforts of Irgun led to the formal creation of the State of Israel. Israel's insurgency served as a model to many nations and it wasn't long until similar events sprung

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up in Cyprus, Armenia, Vietnam, and Algeria. The smaller nations used the advantage of local support to isolate the occupying forces from the population.<sup>2</sup> By isolating the larger force, you diminish their influence over the mass and delegitimize their justification for maintaining a presence.

Recognizing the anti-colonial movement of the people, several smaller political parties merged to become the National Liberation Front (FLN) in 1954. These groups waged a political and military struggle for independence that began in November of that year.<sup>3</sup> The FLN engaged in a series of bombings against French security forces in Algiers. The FLN had hoped to force French troops to remain in garrison as a safety measure. By remaining in garrison, the FLN would secure local support and increase participation in the revolution.

Leading the FLNs push for independence was Larbi Ben M'Hidi, an Algerian nationalist and devout Muslim. M'Hidi felt that Algerians were becoming westernized through the continual colonization of Algerian lands by French settlers. He and Ramdane Abane set about in establishing a guerilla campaign that focused less on direct confrontation and more on the psychological aspects of the conflict. Abane felt if the FLN could capture the imaginations of independence by the Algerian population that any hope of French success in the region would be lost.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental aspect of an internal revolution, supported by the local population, in order to return to a traditional Islamic state is what drives insurgent groups such as al Qaeda to this day. M'Hidi and Abane are regarded as the fathers of the revolution and serve as an inspiration to modern Algerian insurgents.

To accomplish the task of winning the psychological war, the FLN established an underground movement known as the Zone Autonome d'Alger (ZAA).<sup>5</sup> The ZAA would prepare to engage in urban terrorism and become famous in the movie *The Battle of Algiers*. In September 1956, the ZAA delivered the opening salvo by bombing several tourist locations popular with Europeans. The urban warfare insurgency had two main goals. First, it would prey on the "intruders" from Europe and dissuade further tourism. By reducing the number of European visitors and systematically eliminating French control in Algiers, the FLN would increase its foothold and continue to gain support. Second, the urban campaign would divert French resources to the defense of Algiers and allow the FLN time to build its rural uprising throughout Algeria. The future of the revolution depended on these simultaneous strategies coinciding with one another.

Section One: The War for Independence: A State is Born

Ramdane Abane<sup>6</sup> anticipated a French reaction and knew that it would draw the local population behind the FLN. His campaign of incessant small bombings ensured the French would respond, and respond they did. General Jacques Massu arrived in Algiers to establish order. Massu launched a counterterrorism campaign that involved rounding up suspected insurgents and committing acts of torture to secure their confession. Massu succeeded in killing Ben M'Hisi, destroying the ZAA, and forcing the FLN leadership into exile. His tactics were swift and lethal which allowed him to quickly and ruthlessly suppress the FLN. While Massu's method of rigid control of the Muslim population did eventually establish order, it cost the French the much needed support of the local population. The majority of Algerians did not lend support to the FLN but did respond by uniting under the banner of nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

The Battle of Algiers, while an effective counterinsurgency campaign, cost the French the overall goal of retaining Algeria as a colonial possession. They had soundly defeated the FLN at the expense of the conflict as a whole. The ensuing three years resulted in France depicted as an occupying and oppressive force that lacked popular support. With Morocco and Tunisia gaining independence in 1957, Algeria would soon follow suit in 1962.<sup>8</sup> France relinquished her colonial claim to Algeria and an independent country was born.

As official independence approached, the FLN leadership met in to discuss the transition from revolutionary organization to political party. The Tripoli Program called for massive reforms and the large-scale nationalization of Algeria's industrial infrastructure.<sup>9</sup> As a revolutionary group, the FLN was effective in developing a guerilla campaign that turned the struggle in their eventual favor. As a political organization, the FLN would soon realize the difficulty of establishing control in the political arena.

## Post-Independence: 1962-1989

In the years following independence, the FLN tightened its grip on control of Algeria. The majority of fighting came from coups within the FLN itself and resulted in Ben Bella assuming the presidency. Ben Bella was a member of the original executive committee of the FLN during the War for Independence and had the support of the National Assembly. He spent a significant amount of time nationalizing the major industry sectors vacated by French owners who had fled. This nationalization produced an economic boom in Algeria as well as objections from smaller

political groups.<sup>10</sup> These groups joined forces in an attempt to overthrow the Ben Bella government in 1963. Fighting erupted in the Kabylie region in the north and along the Sahel to the south.<sup>11</sup> The Algerian army, led by Minister of Defence Houari Boumedienne, put down both insurrections and consolidated his position as leader of the armed forces. Ben Bella reversed his course and attempted to include the insurgents in his government. This created a significant amount of tension and distrust between Ben Bella and the FLN leaders in power.

Tensions reached a crescendo in 1965 when Boumedienne successfully completed a coup and assumed presidency. He went on to declare a state of emergency, dissolve the National Assembly, and declare himself the absolute ruler of Algeria. Boumedienne successfully instituted a policy of non-alignment and maintained favorable relations with both the East and West. Boumedienne remained in power until he died from a blood disorder in 1978. An intense power struggle within the FLN followed with the ascension of Chadli Bendjedid. The new president did not share his predecessor's ability to balance the economy and the population. Algeria's industrial base lingered and unemployment soared through the early 1980s. A disenchanting population would look for answers to daily problems and a revised and recharged version of Islam was on the way.

## Iran and Afghanistan

In 1979, a revolution occurred in Iran. Iranian students had rallied behind the religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini and succeeded in deposing the Shah. This religious revival served as proof of what could be accomplished if faithful followers combined forces under the rallying cry of Islam.<sup>12</sup> This religious revival created a wave of religious ideology over the greater Middle East. The colonial pastimes and feelings of dependence on foreign powers gave way to a shared religious drive that inspired millions of Muslims across the globe.

Also in 1979, Soviet tanks entered Afghanistan under the guise of restoring stability to the region. The outrage shared by Muslims around the world manifested in thousands joining the ranks of the faithful. The religious sense of duty compelled many to travel to neighboring Pakistan to join the Jihad against the occupying forces. A Palestinian teacher named Abdullah Azzam led this charge by establishing the Office of Services of the Holy Warriors.<sup>13</sup> Azzam's organization would soon attract the likes of Osama bin Laden and, together, they would create the basis for the global jihadist network that would become al Qaeda.



Section One: The War for Independence: A State is Born

The spirit of the Iranian revolution and the establishment of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan would have a lasting effect on the emerging militancy of Islam in Algeria. Clerics began to preach against the westernized appearance of Algerian women as well as the drinking of alcohol and lack of religious conviction of Algerian men. This led to a significant rise of Islamic activity and objection to the ruling government and would play a major role in the coming years.

## Section Two: The Tuaregs

### Introduction

To know a man, you must know his history. To identify with this man, you must understand his culture, his way of life, and his motives. Too often, we impart our ignorance on a people and expect them to comply with our demands without argument or hesitation. Western cultures expect to see these instant results without looking at the tremendous turmoil it causes to the local population. This chapter will discuss the role of the Tuaregs in this conflict. It seeks to briefly examine their history, the loss of traditional Tuareg lands as a result of European colonization, and the role of the Tuaregs in smuggling goods across the Sahara.

### A Brief History

In the vast wilderness of the Sahara live a people without a state. These people, the Tuaregs, have long occupied the empty expanses of the Sahel. Moving from oasis to oasis, they often survived on traded goods and lived in tents of woven camel hair.<sup>14</sup> Their culture thrived as the preeminent trans-Saharan traders of salt, gold, ivory, and slaves throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For nearly 1,000 years, the Tuareg operated this caravan trade connecting the cultural centers and cities that bordered the southern edge of the Sahara via five desert trade routes to the Mediterranean Sea port cities on the northern coast of Africa.<sup>15</sup>

The French colonial ambitions in Africa soon brought them into contact with the Tuareg. French expeditions through the Sahara made their way to the Niger River and led to the creation of French West Africa.<sup>16</sup> With territorial borders appearing along the trade routes, it wasn't long before a confrontation between the French military and Tuaregs occurred. The superior weapons of the French swiftly defeated those who resisted and forced the Tuareg to forfeit historical lands. Most were incorporated under French dominance and the tribal groups were dismantled.<sup>17</sup> The once proud people were now subjected to French colonial rule.

Tuaregs follow the Maliki Madh'hab line of Islam. This *fiqh* was established based on the preaching of Imam Malik<sup>18</sup> and is the third largest of the four recognized schools. Islam is the central binding factor for the Tuareg people and the offering of hospitality and shelter is an important theme when examining their relationship with radical elements within the Sahel. The Tuareg also combine Sunni Islam with pre-Islamic animistic beliefs such as Kel Asuf.<sup>19</sup>

## Borders

Following the establishment of French West Africa, artificial borders were established that prevented the Tuareg people from traveling long established routes across the Sahara. This loss of vital commerce greatly affected native Tuaregs and many were forced to the cities in search of employment and shelter.

The independence movement pervaded the world following World War II. Traditional colonies of European countries were quick to capitalize on the weakened state of their former masters and North Africa was no exception. In the late 1950s, there was a tremendous push for independence from France and French West Africa soon fractured into an ethnic free-for-all. In 1960, the breakup of French West Africa resulted in the establishment of the countries of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Libya. These new countries, along with Algeria, were quick to establish territorial borders that transcended traditional Tuareg lands. The Tuaregs revolted in Mali and Niger but were defeated in both cases and attempted to reunify with fellow tribes in the region. The revolt was crushed and the Tuareg people were, in many cases, forced to abandon their traditional nomadic lifestyle in order to survive.

It is important to note the psyche of the Tuaregs during this period in terms of the potential for conflict. Environmental and economic scarcity in both cases lends themselves to the potential for violence and a general lack of trust. Environmental scarcity comes in the form of the newly established borders. Traditional routes across the Sahara were no longer accessible. The dynamic environment that had been a staple for these people was, in many cases, forever lost. The loss of revenue generated from these routes led to the economic scarcity that forces many Tuaregs to the squalor of the ghettos that had become commonplace in Africa. The lack of economic opportunity led many Tuareg to commit crimes in order to advance their economic prospects.<sup>20</sup> In both cases, forced migration due to these external circumstances would play a role in the Tuareg mindset when dealing with outside agencies in years to come.

An extreme drought occurred in the Sahel from 1968–1974. The Tuareg population in Mali was particularly affected. Many Tuaregs, along with their cherished livestock, perished during the ensuing famine. The promised assistance from the government never materialized and the Tuaregs, already distrustful of these new regional leaders, developed a bitter hatred for the Malian government. This intense dissatisfaction with the government of Mali and eventually Niger continued to fester as Tuareg conditions continued to worsen. The situation reached a

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crescendo in the spring of 1990 when Tuaregs attacked a Malian police station near the border with Niger.<sup>21</sup> The ensuing government crackdown resulted in hundreds of Tuaregs killed. Niger and Mali identified the Tuaregs as a security threat while Tuaregs felt the governments were persecuting them to the point of extinction.

## Smuggling

With the loss of traditional trading routes, many Tuaregs began to smuggle goods as a means to survive. With their historical knowledge across the Sahara, many could find work smuggling cigarettes, drugs, and other illicit commodities. Tuaregs distrust for the governments of the region grew as captured smugglers were imprisoned for illegal commerce.

The civil war in Algeria (see Chapter three) resulted in new opportunities as Tuareg smugglers were often the only means of goods in the southern regions of Algeria. The caravans of camels were slowly replaced four-wheel drive Toyota pickups and the smuggling business boomed throughout the later 1990s. It was around this time the Tuaregs began a loose alliance with another group of people. Radical Islamic fighters, fresh from the battlefields of Afghanistan and eager to topple the apostate leaders of the region, found they had an ally in the Tuaregs. Although on opposite ends of the ethno-nationalist spectrum, both parties wanted the same thing: the removal of godless tyrants from power. The Tuaregs wanted the borders erased and a return to the traditional norms that were seized during French colonization and the creation of several independent states. The Islamic fighters wanted an Islamic state in Algeria and, ultimately, a pan-Sahelian Caliphate. The Tuareg smugglers began to transport arms along the established routes to help fuel the insurgency. A new era was brewing along the Sahara and across the Sahel.

## Section Three: Algeria's civil war and 9/11

### Introduction

“Mr Gorbachev, Tear Down This Wall!” exclaimed President Ronald Reagan. America rejoiced as the United States watched her archrival fall. The Cold War was ending and freedom was sweeping the globe. The mujahedin in Afghanistan had defeated the Soviet Union and demonstrated the power of Jihad. Now it was time for these brave holy warriors to return to their homes. As with every war, fighting changes a man as his convictions become deeper and his views become even more entrenched in his mind. This was the case with Islam. A conservative strand of Islam was beginning to take shape as these fighters returned home, emboldened by training and inspired by Pakistan's firebrand version of Islam. No longer would they be subjugated to apostate governments. By organizing, they could win and establish at home what they had helped in Afghanistan. Islam was on the offensive.

### Riots and the GIA

Following independence from France, Algeria became a predominantly one-party government. The FLN had controlled all facets of the government from the interior to the army. They had promoted a socialist agenda and had relied heavily on oil revenues. Along the way, many Algerians felt the FLN had lost its way in terms of representing the people. The “people's party” was no longer an advocate for the people. Nowhere was this truer than Algiers.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, many Algerians who had gone to fight in defense of Islam returned home to limited economic opportunity. Serving alongside other devout Muslims in Afghanistan had a profound and lasting impact on these men. They began to see the Algerian government as rife with corruption and noted the lack of religion in daily life. Political parties, such as the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), were not making progress on reforms<sup>22</sup> and these veterans were quickly growing frustrated. Most returnees from Afghanistan had been thoroughly indoctrinated in the Afghan philosophy of jihad until either victorious or the achievement of martyrdom.

In 1988, the price of oil fell to an unprecedented \$10 per barrel. With Algeria dependent on oil exports to support its socialist agenda, it

wasn't long before an economic crisis ensued. Algerians flocked to the streets to protest the government and demand reform. The emerging Islamic movement was quick to adopt the cause and fueled the anger of Algerians by accusing the government of abandoning the tenets of Islam.<sup>23</sup> President Bendjedid agreed to instill many reforms and announced the first multiparty elections would be established. The FIS gained tremendous support from the people as a movement dedicated to establishing an Islamic state in Algeria.

In 1990, the FIS wins several seats at the local elections. They are unprepared for this victory but quickly organize to prepare for the upcoming elections. The 1992 Parliamentary elections had just begun when the Algerian military interrupted the proceedings and canceled the voting. Several FIS leaders were imprisoned and the ensuing chaos led to the creation of two paramilitary organizations. The Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) would operate in the rural areas and the newly created Armed Islamic Group (GIA) would operate in the urban environment. Disagreements soon arose between the groups as the GIA felt the FIS party leaders were too accommodating and needed to follow strict Islamic rule. The MIA organized with several smaller Islamic groups and joined the FIS-backed Islamic Salvation Army (AIS). The GIA responded by declaring war on the FIS/AIS alliance.<sup>24</sup>

The GIA, led by Djamel Zitouni, united under the umbrella of an anti-government guerilla organization. Zitouni expanded the organization by enlisting many former mujahedin fighters from the fields of Afghanistan. This radical ethno-nationalist organization blended the notion of religion identity as a nationalist cause. To be a true Muslim, you must unite under one banner and prepare for jihad in order to secure your homeland in the name of Islam. The GIA initially targeted government and military facilities but also became known for attacking civilians and personnel associated with the AIS.<sup>25</sup> The GIA engaged on a campaign of bombing and indiscriminate killing across Algeria throughout the mid-1990s. Several villages suspected of supporting AIS elements were burned to the ground and its inhabitants killed by brutal methods. Many of the victims, including women and children, were executed by machete attacks and had their bodies dismembered.

The primary goal of the GIA was the establishment of an Islamic state in Algeria. While many Algerians desired the same end state, the brutal nature of the GIA resulted in a significant loss of popular support. Most Algerians were terrified of the methods in which the GIA sought to promote their agenda. As the 1990s progressed several members of the GIA leadership began to disagree with the methods in which the GIA

attacked civilian targets. They realized these attacks were leading to a continual loss of popular support. These men, Hassan Hattab and Amari Saifi, issued a fatwa in 1997 calling for the GIA to cease targeting civilians and for the creation of a new Islamic organization that would carry the will of the people. Ethno-nationalism in Algeria had taken another turn.

## Rise of the GPSC

Hassan Hattab was a paratrooper in the Algerian armed forces. He used his military service to further his understanding of tactics and the political situation in Algeria. Following his military service, he became a mechanic where he saw the struggles of ordinary Algerians in daily life. He became disillusioned with the Algerian government and eventually joined the GIA.<sup>26</sup> While serving as a field commander for the GIA, Hattab was enraged by the GIA's tactic of massacring Algerian civilians. He felt this tactic detracted from the original goal of binding Algerians together in the creation of the Islamic state. Hattab and several others created the *Groupe Salafiste pour le Predication et le Combat* or the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GPSC).

The GPSC immediately moved out of Algiers and set up operations in two key areas. First, the Kabylie region in the north had access to the major cities along the Mediterranean yet provided cover and concealment. Its forests and mountains provided training areas and sanctuary from military intervention. To control the forests and hills was to have an advantage and the GPSC wasted no time in adopting this strategy. Second, the vast southern region along Algeria's border with Mali and Niger offered access to established smuggling routes and the freedom of movement required. Both regions were instrumental to the GPSCs overall strategy of challenging government forces at every step.

Amari Saifi, also known as Abderezzak El-Para, was a senior field commander under Hattab in the early days of the GPSC. Known as a "special forces" type of leader, Saifi often developed elaborate schemes of ambushes. His elaborate plans would lead him into direct confrontation with the Algerian military. In February of 2000, Saifi and his men conducted a large-scale attack on an Algerian convoy. The GPSC successfully killed forty-two paratroopers and set the stage for the next round of attacks. To succeed in his conquest, he'd need arms and equipment to prepare for battle. To achieve this end, he turned to his friend Mokhtar Belmokhtar.

Mokhtar Belmokhtar (MBM) was born in Algeria in 1972. He went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets and returned in the early 1990s to Algeria. Belmokhtar moved to the southern town of Tamanrassat and began to build a smuggling ring. He made a loose alliance with the Tuaregs and often used Tuareg convoys to move his goods.<sup>27</sup> MBM lost an eye while fighting in Afghanistan and is often called “one-eyed” by those in the region. MBM joined with the GSPC is thought to be the Amir of the Saharan faction where is smuggles arms from Niger, Libya, and Chad to the GSPC operating sites in Mali and Algeria. MBM is known throughout the region and even married the daughter of a Tuareg tribal chief in order to secure the loyalty of the Tuaregs in the region.<sup>28</sup>

With Hattab in charge and Saifi and MBM ready to act, the GSPC prepared for direct engagement with the Algerian government. To accomplish this feat, the GSPC developed and refined three key tactics. First, the trusted guerilla hit and run tactics was particularly effective along the roads that traversed the Kabylie region. GSPC squads could lie in ambush and attack military convoys as they moved from region to region. This also gave the GSPC the benefit of cover and concealment as well as a retreat route following the attack. Second, bombings were still a hallmark of the GSPC. To drive a truck bomb into a military checkpoint or a power station would continue to tax government resources to their very limit. Finally, more high tech equipment such as anti-aircraft artillery and surface to air missiles would allow the GSPC to engage in direct conflict if they deemed it necessary.<sup>29</sup>

With the pieces in place, the GSPC had successfully carved out a viable operating area in which they could train, recuperate and reorganize, and smuggle both people and arms into and out of the region. These factors, coupled with an effective tactical campaign, allowed them to grow in influence and promote the ideology of the establishment of the Islamic state. It was around this time that the GSPC began a loose affiliation with other terrorist groups throughout the region and across the globe. GSPC emissaries visited Islamic groups in Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia. Veterans from the Afghan conflict also appeared in Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan. It was beginning to appear this small insurgency, where ethno-nationalist ambitions and local recruitment goals, would soon become part of a larger world order. The GSPC would soon become an arm of the global jihad nexus known as al Qaeda.



## Section Four: Jihad goes Global

### Introduction

Around 9:00 on a Tuesday morning, the world changed. Four airliners were hijacked by Islamic terrorists and the ensuing tragedy recalculated the face of terrorism in the minds of the West. America was quick to identify the hijackers as members of the terrorist group al Qaeda. In the weeks that followed, President Bush delivered a riveting speech to both houses of Congress in which he declared “You are either with us or you are with the Terrorists.” In the geopolitical world of nations, this message was clear but in the nebulous world of non-state actors, the banner of jihad went global.

### The GSPC after 9/11

With the attacks in America, most terrorist groups were forced to reevaluate their positions. Attacking anything remotely American would certainly bring unwanted intervention in an ongoing campaign. American involvement in Algeria may tip the balance and cause the GSPC all of the tactical gains it had made over the past few years.<sup>30</sup>

While the attacks in America were carried out by Egyptians and Saudis, most North African terrorist focused their attacks on European interests. This was in part because of the lasting colonial influences in Africa and the large number of ethnic Africans that had immigrated throughout Europe. Fundraising and support networks for the GSPC had been established throughout Europe in the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and France. These cells also prepared attacks within Europe and served as safe houses for terrorists in transit. These European cells also provided logistical aid to members of al Qaeda and a loose affiliation ensued.

Al Qaeda, recognizing this affiliation, sent emissaries to visit the GSPC in 2002. Hassan Hattab, the Amir of the GSPC, was quick to renounce this intrusion as he still maintained the overall goal of the GSPC was an Islamic state in Algeria.<sup>31</sup> Several other members of the GSPC saw the overall goal expand from a domestic struggle to a larger struggle in defense of Islam. Among these dissenters were Nabil Sahraoui and Abdelmalek Droukdel.<sup>32</sup> A significant amount of infighting began and ended in June 2004 when Hattab was forced to resign as Amir. The Shura Council appointed Sahraoui as the new Amir of the GSPC. This was an important step in the transformation from domestic to global as Sahraoui had very different views than Hattab. He felt the jihad was a

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global responsibility and directed the GSPC down the path of inclusion into al Qaeda's global nexus.<sup>33</sup>

In 2003, Amari Saifi, alias El Para, staged a daring capture of thirty-two German tourists in the Algerian Desert. El Para kept thirty-two of the hostages until the German government paid approximately five millions Euros in ransom. This event led to a significant increase in troops along the borders of Mali, Algeria, Niger, and Chad. The military intervention forced El Para into Chad where he was captured by Chadian rebels and eventually turned over to Algerian authorities.<sup>34</sup> The loss of El Para and the removal of Belmokhtar from the zone 9 command signaled a turning point in the GSPCs evolution.

With Sahraoui in control, there was a significant change in recruitment and tactics. Jihadists from Tunisia and Libya were actively recruited upon completion of training in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> The GSPC was continuing to move toward the global nexus. In 2004, Sahraoui was killed in a fight with Algerian forces in the Kabylie region. Two members struggled to succeed Sahraoui with Droukdel emerging victorious.

Abdelmalek Droukdel was quick to establish control of the GSPC. He quickly revamped the organizational structure and set the group on a path in line with al Qaeda's strategy. Several cross border raids into Mauritania and ambushes in the Kabylie showed Droukdel's willingness to commit "spectaculars." The revamped GSPC took on a Taliban-like command and control network.<sup>36</sup>

## Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb

With Zawahiri and bin Laden leading al Qaeda's charge, Droukdel soon decided to change the name to focus on the global jihad. In January of 2007, a message was posted declaring the establishment of the al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) organization. Jihadist groups around the world posted messages of congratulations to AQIM as they had joined the global jihad. This merger ended to nationalistic dreams spawned by the FLN and reinforced by the FIS. This chapter of the ethno-nationalist fight for a united Algeria, governed by the principles of Islam, was lost.

## Religion versus Religious Identity

Droukdel was quick to identify with the fundamental aspect of al Qaeda. The idea that Islam was under attack and it was the duty of every Muslim

to defend Islam through jihad transcended the notion of one country. The FLN identified with religion when dealing with the colonial ambitions of France. The FLN used terrorism from 1954–1962 to further the political agenda of nationalism. Uniting Algerian Muslims against an occupation was a religious duty. The tactics of engaging French targets, to include civilians, was purely nationalistic. AQIM calls of Muslims from around the region, around the world, to help in establishing an Islamic Caliphate in North Africa. While they still primarily attack government targets, AQIM is quick to identify with the larger Islamic cause. Mobile training bases in the Sahara Desert provide jihadists from around the region with training in explosives and guerilla tactics. The use of suicide bombers has risen significantly in line with AQIM's alignment with al Qaeda. The Salafis have shunned the tribal Sufis in the region as being “colonial lackeys” and resistant to the greater ambition of independence and the Caliphate.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

Spawned from the days of French colonial ambitions, Algeria is home to the original idea of independence. Algerians as a whole sought to marginalize French influence through defiance and unity. The National Liberation Front (FLN) resorted to domestic acts of terrorism to combat the occupation and force France to withdraw. The idea of isolating French forces from the population and driving France into repressive measures worked. The heavy handed tactics of General Massu defeated the FLN but cost the French the war. Faced with the loss of popular support, France granted Algeria her independence.

Across the region, former colonies were ceding from their colonial masters. The rise of Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and Morocco created new borders across the Sahara and Sahel. Ethnic tribes such as the Tuaregs were forced from their traditional caravans and pastoral grazing routes and relegated to a lower-class subject in a new country. The Tuaregs resorted to smuggling as a way to survive. By moving goods, cigarettes, gasoline, and arms, the Tuaregs were valuable to future separatists for two reasons. First, they knew the routes across the Sahara and were the cultured people of the region. Second, they held the governments of these new countries responsible for the loss of traditional rights to the grasses of the Sahelian savannah.

The FLN, marginalized by politics and ruling with an authoritarian notion, canceled free elections in 1990. This led to the creation of the FIS and the radical GIA. The GIA felt the FIS was far too accommodating

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and resorted to a campaign of terror across Algeria and Europe. The GIA used brutal tactics to ensure compliance and often destroyed entire villages in the process. They also waged a campaign of terror in France and other European countries. Angered by the GIA's senseless killing of civilians, the GSPC was created by Hassan Hattab as a means to return to the fundamental concept of an Islamic state in Algeria. Hattab and the GSPC were primarily a nationalist group. They enjoyed warm relations with the Tuaregs and had built a formidable smuggling operation in the years leading up to 9/11.

The start of the global war of terror changed the landscape in much the same way that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had just 20 years earlier. It served as a rallying cry to many Muslims already experienced in the way of jihad. al Qaeda was quick to tie the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq into a global attack on Islam. Many nationalist groups were pulled from their domestic plight into a larger counterbalance to the American world order. The GSPC reorganized as AQIM and aligned itself with the global jihad. This meant an end to the traditional nationalist cause in the region and the beginning of a larger Islamic nationalist campaign.

Ethno-Nationalism takes on many faces and the global war on terror has succeeded in tying many different causes into the counterbalance to perceived American hegemonic interests in the world. The new face of resistance is Ethno-Nationalism "with a twist."

## Endnotes

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## Author Biography

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