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Al-Qaida's Appeal: Understanding its Unique Selling Points

By Brynjar Lia

Introduction

Despite its seemingly extreme ideology and its even more extreme use of political violence, al-Qaida has been able to elicit sympathy and support from a surprisingly large number of people. Suspected al-Qaida members have been arrested in dozens of countries around the world, and opinion polls in both Western and Middle Eastern countries have shown that relatively large numbers of young Muslims express sympathy with al-Qaida. In other words, we have a situation in which al-Qaida has killed civilians on a massive scale, including a large number of Muslims, but still seems to enjoy relatively widespread support. How can we explain this apparent conundrum?

This article argues that al-Qaida's continuing appeal is a result of three key factors. First, al-Qaida *propagates a simple popular message*, which resonates strongly with deeply held grievances in the Muslim world. The organisation strives to follow the popular mood in many respects. Second, al-Qaida has created for itself *a powerful and captivating image*. It has become the world's most feared terrorist organisation, which has an immense attraction for certain groups of young people. In some countries in Europe, it has become "cool" to be a jihadi.[1] Third, the strength of al-Qaida's appeal lies in *its global character*; unlike most terrorist groups of today, membership of al-Qaida is open to virtually everyone, irrespective of ethnicity and nationality. As long as one is willing to accept its extremist ideology, anyone can, in principle, become an al-Qaida member. [2]

These three factors: *simple message*, *powerful image* and *global character,* lie at the very core of al-Qaida's appeal today. By studying these three factors in more detail, one may also find clues to identifying al-Qaida's inherent weaknesses.

Al-Qaida's simple populist message

Why is it that al-Qaida's message seems so powerful, and why does it appear to resonate so strongly among segments of young Muslims in most parts of the world? In propaganda, the key to success is simplicity of message and linkages with real-world grievances. Al-Qaida's propaganda has succeeded in both. During the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s, militant Islamist groups condemned the rulers in Muslim countries as apostates, hypocrites, and collaborators. They called for overturning Muslim regimes and preached the need for an Islamic state. Their theoreticians talked about abstract notions such as excommunication (in Arabic: *takfir*), and God's sovereignty on earth (*hakimiyya*), concepts which were formulated by Sayyid Qutb back in the 1960s. However, the problem for these militants was that this message did not have much resonance among ordinary Muslims. Very few Muslims were ready to sacrifice their lives for the abstract notion of an Islamic state. Furthermore, there is a religious taboo against internal strife among Muslims, (*fitna*), and militant Islamists who justified the killing of other Muslims often found themselves isolated and marginalised.

Al-Qaida has shrewdly avoided the ideological missteps and failures of previous Muslim extremist groups. It has not propagated the revolutionary, anti-regime Qutbist ideology of previous jihadi groups. Instead, al-Qaida has consistently rallied its followers around a simple populist pan-Islamic message, which is that "Islam is under attack", militarily, religiously, and economically. Al-Qaida focuses almost exclusively on the foreign or "Crusader" occupation of Muslim land, foreign desecration of Islam's holiest places, and foreigners plundering the Islamic world's natural resources, especially oil. [3]

This choice of focus on foreign occupation, religious desecration, and economic imperialism is not coincidental. Al-Qaida strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri has written extensively on why this choice of focus is so important for al-Qaida. [4] He correctly observes that Muslims will not sacrifice their lives for the abstract notion of an Islamic utopian state. However, they will die for *al-Aqsa*, and they will sacrifice themselves for liberating Palestine or other countries under occupation such as Afghanistan or Iraq. Al-Suri's conclusion is that Muslims are deeply touched by anything that smacks of foreign occupation. Hence, he urges al-Qaida to harness the power of pan-Islamic sentiments and the strength of popular Muslim solidarity in order to rally a mass following.

Clearly, this identification is key to understanding the power of al-Qaida's propaganda. Al-Qaida's simple message of foreign occupation, desecration, and exploitation seems to resonate deeply among Muslims today. The reason for this is simple: there is some truth to it. The Western world, led by the United States, has a strong and visible presence in this part of the world: militarily, economically, and politically. There are US-led military coalitions occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, while the United States supports Israel militarily, economically, and politically, even if the latter continues to maintain an illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. The ruling elites in many Muslim countries are not elected, corruption is widespread, and there is a widespread belief – right or wrong – that the United States keeps these regimes in power to secure its access to the region's oil reserves. The list of widely shared popular grievances against the United States' foreign policies in the Islamic world is very long. Hence, it is very easy for al-Qaida to find strong arguments for its propaganda messages.

Al-Qaida's image

Al-Qaida's second key selling point is its powerful and captivating image. Today, new information technologies are revolutionising our lives, at least in the way we communicate and socialise. Young people especially seem to live a considerable part of their lives in the virtual world of Facebook, or in other cyber communities. Furthermore, the new information technologies allow more and more people to disseminate their message to a global audience. In other words, the mass media is changing rapidly. The major news agencies face competitors, and the battle for capturing people's attention is tougher than ever. Hence, image and branding have become absolutely vital components in any marketing campaign that aims to promote a product or an idea through mass media.

Terrorism and violence have always attracted the media's attention, but al-Qaida has succeeded more than any other terrorist group in modern history in captivating and thrilling the world through its acts of violence. From its very inception, al-Qaida has given top priority to carrying out spectacular and unprecedented attacks. Until al-Qaida gained a foothold in Iraq, its total number of attacks was actually very small. However, its operations were audacious, and almost mind-boggling in devastation. Al-Qaida was very innovative in the art of terrorism. Its bombing of the USS Cole warship in Aden harbour, Yemen on October 12th, 2000, and the September 11th attacks on America were unprecedented acts of terrorism. The attacks on America made al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden household names all over the world, and a powerful media image of al-Qaida was created. Over night, al-Qaida succeeded in elevating itself to a "vanguard" among Muslim extremist groups, and managed to outbid groups with more limited regional objectives.

Al-Qaida's acts of violence provoked massive countermeasures by the United States and its allies. You will probably recall that the Bush Administration stated that 9/11 was not an act of terrorism, but rather it was "an act of war". [5] By using the word "war" about 9/11, the US President *de facto* declared that al-Qaida was a worthy counterpart in a global confrontation with the United States. To remove any doubt about who was the key player in the post 9/11 world order, the United States unleashed the so-called "Global War on Terror" against al-Qaida. In other words, the whole world witnessed a new drama unfolding. And it was al-Qaida and the United States who starred in this drama, nobody else. Needless to say, this contributed immensely to skyrocketing al-Qaida's popularity, at least for a while, and making its brand name the strongest on the market. [6]

The ensuing US attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq further elevated al-Qaida's status to almost mythical proportions. Not only did these invasions serve as "evidence" that al-Qaida's rhetoric about the aggressive Western world was true. The invasions also demonstrated the power of al-Qaida to provoke the sole remaining super power to drain its military and human resources in endless and costly occupation. The invasion of Afghanistan also had the effect of weakening many of al-Qaida's potential competitors, who had regional agendas and had opposed an attack on the United States. These groups lost their sanctuaries in Afghanistan and their remnants gravitated towards al-Qaida. [7]

Al-Qaida's global outreach

Al-Qaida's third selling point is its global outreach. Hardly any terrorist group of today is truly multinational with branches all over the world. Most violent extremist groups are diehard nationalist extremists who would never accept foreigners in their ranks. Al-Qaida is an exception. From its very commencement, al-Qaida has been a multinational and multiethnic enterprise, even if Arabs, especially Saudis and Egyptians, have always dominated the upper echelons of the organisation. The fact that membership in al-Qaida is open to virtually everyone, irrespective of ethnicity and nationality, is a key selling point for al-Qaida, because it strengthens the credibility of its pan-Islamic rhetoric. It greatly expands the recruitment base for the organisation. As long as one is willing to accept its extremist ideology, anyone can, in principle, become an al-Qaida member.

Hence, al-Qaida has succeeded in recruiting followers from a large number of countries. Furthermore, a substantial number of Western converts have played a role in al-Qaida, the American Adam Gadahn (a.k.a. Azzam al-Amriki) being the most famous example. [8]

However, al-Qaida's global outreach goes beyond its appeal to Muslims of every shade and origin. The organisation has also worked consistently over the past two decades to establish cooperative networks with other groups of Muslim extremists in many parts of the world, from South-East Asia to Northern Africa. Consider the following description from the 9/11 Commission Report on bin Laden's networking activities in the early and mid 1990s:

> 'Bin Ladin now had a vision of himself as head of an international jihad confederation. In Sudan, he established an 'Islamic Army Shura' that was to serve as the coordinating body for the consortium of terrorist groups with which he was forging alliances. It was composed of his own al Qaeda Shura together with leaders or representatives of terrorist organizations that were still independent. In building this Islamic army, he enlisted groups from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, and Eritrea. Al Qaeda also established cooperative but less formal relationships with other extremist groups [...] The groundwork for a true global terrorist network was being laid.' [9]

Some of the groups that gravitated towards bin Laden's organisation during the 1990s, later merged with al-Qaida, such as the *Islamic Jihad Group* in Egypt. Others renamed their organisations in order to become "al-Qaida's branches" such as Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's *Tawhid wa'l-Jihadi Group* in Iraq, the Algerian *Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat* (GSPC), and the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* (LIFG). Yet others have maintained close long-term collaborative relationships, such as the Taliban movement in Afghanistan and the Pakistani tribal areas. This vast array of cooperative relationships underscores how important such alliances are to al-Qaida. It is precisely this ability to find reliable local partners that is al-Qaida's strength *and* weakness. In the past, al-Qaida succeeded in finding local partners by offering training facilities, military expertise, and financial support. In more recent years, the organisation has also offered media services, and – increasingly – also its brand name, to local groups willing to work with al-Qaida. Al-Qaida's ability to sustain cooperative relationships with local partners and insert itself as a relevant actor in local and regional contexts is key to its survival.

A final aspect of al-Qaida's image building is its exploitation of the Internet. There is little doubt that al-Qaida's appeal owes a great deal to its shrewd media strategies. The importance of "the jihadi web" for al-Qaida's widespread appeal cannot be overstated. The organisation has demonstrated an ability to exploit the potential of the Internet for a wide variety of purposes. Al-Qaida and its numerous online sympathisers are producing enormous amounts of material on the Internet. The scope of this material is far too extensive and variegated to be discussed in this article. Suffice to say that al-Qaida's Internet resources include thousands of audiovisual products, tens of thousands of audio-

files, and probably millions of written documents. They span a wide range of genres, all designed to cater for the needs of jihadi sympathisers, recruits, operatives, and not the least, the recruiters. [10]

Al-Qaida's Weaknesses

In conclusion, a few thoughts on al-Qaida's current and future weaknesses, especially in terms of its appeal, are warranted. A major weakness of groups such as al-Qaida is that their targeting of civilians is difficult to justify. In recent years, public outrage against al-Qaida-related violence has become more visible. There have, for example, been mass demonstrations in Jordan and Morocco against al-Qaida following terrorist attacks by al-Qaida-related groups. A number of leading militant ideologues, from Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in Jordan, to Sayyid Imam al-Sharif in Egypt, have severely censured al-Qaida for its acts of violence. [11] Such criticism does not go unheeded. Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaida's second-in-command, felt compelled to respond to al-Sharif's criticism in a 216-page document that was posted on the Internet in early 2008. Al-Zawahiri described the document as being "the most difficult text" he had ever written. [12] At the same time, al-Qaida also authorized an online "open meeting with Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri" where the latter responded to a number of very critical, even satirical, questions of al-Qaida's acts of violence. [13]

Schisms are not new to al-Qaida. In fact, recently declassified documents reveal that there has been far more internal dissent in al-Qaida than has hitherto been acknowledged. [14] These internal tensions started right after al-Qaida's foundation, and have been a recurrent feature of the organisation. In recent years, issues such as the repeated massacres of Shia Muslim civilians in Iraq by al-Qaida's Iraqi branch, have been a particularly controversial issue inside al-Qaida. [15] Last year, there were also seemingly contradictory statements by al-Zawahiri and bin Laden regarding al-Qaida's future course of action vis-à-vis Pakistan following the Lal-Masjid showdown during the summer of 2007. [16]

Another inherent weakness of al-Qaida is that it does not seem able or willing to prepare for a future transition to politics. Al-Qaida's appeal is totally dependent on the continuation of violence. Its brandname is simultaneous with car bomb attacks and suicide bombers, not state building and party politics. Bin Laden seems to suggest that al-Qaida's victory is simply to inflict pain and economic losses on the enemy, and undermine its political resolve. As Bruce Lawrence has noted, in bin Laden's speeches "no alternative conception of the ideal society is ever offered. There is an almost complete lack of any social program". [17] This means that al-Qaida's appeal will diminish quickly whenever the population grow tired of violence that does not lead anywhere. At some point, al-Qaida's image will inevitably fade; just as all extremist ideologies have a limited life span, so too does al-Qaida's extremist interpretation of Islam. Some time in the future, al-Qaida will lose its attraction among the youth, and to pose as a jihadist will no longer be "cool".

It may be that the lack of political vision from within al-Qaida will doom the organisation to decline before it loses its captivating image. Already, we find that that overall public support for al-Qaida in Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, and Turkey, has declined since 2002, according to the 2005 Pew Global Attitudes survey. [18] Another poll in Saudi Arabia from late 2007, also strongly suggested that local populations, "… have so overwhelmingly turned against bin Laden, al Qaeda and terrorism in general that nine out of 10 of them look at all three unfavorably". [19] Very few people would like to see Osama bin Laden as their ruler. Furthermore, it is not very likely that al-Qaida would be willing to negotiate seriously with the United States, nor is it likely that the US would negotiate with al-Qaida, although the issue was recently raised in Britain by Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's chief of staff from 1995 to 2007. [20] However, al-Qaida's biggest problem is that several of its key regional partners in Iraq and Afghanistan may be contemplating the idea of negotiating a political solution with their enemies. [21] This spells trouble for al-Qaida. Its Iraqi branch, *al-Qaida in the Lands of the Two Rivers*, has already lost territory and support bases in that country due to the rise of the *Sahwa* ("Awakening")-movement, consisting of predominantly of former Sunni insurgents who have now decided to switch sides. The situation could become particularly precarious if the Taliban movement agrees to a ceasefire with the Karzai government and enters into negotiations with a view to reaching a powersharing settlement. If this happens, al-Qaida would no longer be useful to the Taliban. On the contrary, the Taliban might consider al-Qaida a major liability of which it needs to rid itself. Or alternatively, the Taleban might begin to view individual al-Qaida fighters as bargaining chips that can be handed over to foreign powers for a suitable price. Both outcomes are, of course, bad for al-Qaida's future.

However, for now, this is an unlikely scenario, even though Mulla Muhammad Omar has recently hinted that he might be prepared to sever relations with al-Qaida sometime in the future. [22] Even if sympathy for al-Qaida appears to be on the wane and its ideological message has come under attack, the organisation will continue to enjoy a degree of support. As long as the United States and its Western allies continue to maintain a strong military, political, and economic presence in the Islamic world, groups like al-Qaida are ensured a certain minimum level of support. In the long run, however, al-Qaida is doomed to vanish, at least in its present form. The factors that underlie al-Qaida's appeal today, namely its simple populist message, its powerful image and its global character, will be its weaknesses in the future. Terrorist groups and extremist ideologies have limited life spans, and so will al-Qaida.

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[1] In mid-2006, Jessica Stern noted that "[...] among many Muslim youths, especially in Europe, jihad is a cool way of expressing dissatisfaction with a power elite whether that elite is real or imagined". See Jessica Stern, "Jihad - a global fad", *Boston Globe*, 1 August 2006.

[2] In this article, the term "al-Qaida" refers to the remaining al-Qaida leadership structures, presumably located in the Afghan-Pakistani border areas, as well as the al-Qaida movement (sometimes also dubbed "the global jihadi movement"), consisting of affiliated local and regional groups, who have adopted al-Qaida's brandname, its ideological worldview, and modus operandi.

[3] There are a number of collections of the al-Qaida leadership's writings and public statements in Arabic and in translation, see for example *Complete Archive of Speeches by the Mujahideen's Imam Shaykh Usama bin Muhammad bin Ladin (May God Protect Him)* (in Arabic). 3 June 2006. Compiled by *Shabakat al-Buraq al-Islamiyya*. Accessed via www.alfirdaws.org/vb/, July 2006; *Budskap til verden. Osama Bin Ladens ytringer.* [Messages to the World: Osama bin Laden's Statements] Edited and Presented by Bruce Lawrence. Translations by Anne Aabakken and Nora Eggen; Thomas Hegghammer, "Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004 - A compilation of translated texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri", *FFI Research Report* No. 2005/01428, http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2005/01428.pdf; Thomas Hegghammer, "Dokumentasjon om al-Qaida - intervjuer, kommunikéer og andre primærkilder, 1990-2002", *FFI Research Report* No.2002/01393, http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2002/01393.pdf; *What Does Al-Qaeda Want? Unedited Communiqués.* With Commentary by Robert O. Martin IV. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004); Laura Mansfield, *His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri* (United Kingdom: TLG Publications, 2006); and *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*. Edited and Introduced by Bruce Lawrence. (London: Verso, 2005).

[4] A translation of extensive excerpts of al-Suri's writings can be found in my book *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp.347-484.

[5] The exact phrase was: "The deliberate and deadly attacks, which were carried out yesterday against our country, were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war. This will require our country to unite in steadfast determination and resolve. Freedom and democracy are under attack." Cited in "Text of Bush's act of war statement", *BBC News*, 12 September 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1540544.stm

[6] I have developed this argument more fully in my book *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism: Patterns and Predictions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005/2006), pp.30-32.

[7] See my book *Architect of Global Jihad*, pp.246-250, 313-316.

[8] Daniel Benjamin at the Brookings Institute has observed that "[t]heir numbers are indeed astonishing. Converts have been involved in jihadist activity since before al-Qaida was fully formed." See "The Convert's Zeal: Why Are So Many Jihadists Converts to Islam?", *Brookings website*, 7 September 2007, www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/0907terrorism_benjamin.aspx?p=1. Numerous press reports have covered the issue of jihadi converts over the past few years, see f ex Emma-Kate Symons, "Muslim converts answer jihad call", *The Australian*, 2 October 2006; Matt Leingang, "U.S. Man Accused of Plot to Bomb Resorts", *Associated Press*, 13 April 2007 [Christopher Paul, 43, of Columbus, Ohio]; Raffi Khatchadourian, "Azzam the American: The making of an Al Qaeda homegrown", *The New Yorker*, 22 January 2007; "Journey of Belgian female 'bomber'", *BBC News*, 2 December 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4491334.stm [on Muriel Degauque]; and "France Links German Suspect to al-Qaida", *Voice of America*,11 Jun 2003, 17:47 UTC [on Christian Ganczarski].

[9] Cited in Chapter 2.3, "The Rise of Bin Ladin and Al Qaeda (1988-1992)", *The 9/11 Commission Report*, www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Ch2.htm.

[10] For studies of al-Qaida's exploitation of the Internet, see f ex Brynjar Lia, "Al-Qaeda online: understanding jihadist internet infrastructure", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 2 Dec 2005, www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00075/Al-Qaeda_online__und_75416a.pdf; and Brynjar Lia, "Jihadi Web Media Production: Characteristics, Trends, and Future Implications", conference paper, Berlin, 26 February 2007, www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00092/Jihadi_Web_Media_Pro_92100a.pdf; Hanna Rogan, "Al-Qaeda's online media strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007", *FFI Research Report* No.2007/02729, http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2007/02729.pdf; and Anne Stenersen, "The Internet: A virtual training camp?" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no.2 (2008 forthcoming).

[11] Al-Maqdisi's criticism of al-Zarqawi's conduct of war in Iraq was articulated in several articles and in an interview with al-Jazeera. See Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Al-Zarqawi; munasaha wa munasara: amal wa alam" [Al-Zarqawi: Advice and Support: Hopes and Pains], *Minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, August 2004, http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=2979. For more details, see Anouar Boukhars, "The Challenge of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Jordan", *Strategic Insights* V (4) (April 2006), pp.7-8 and Nibras Kazimi, "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* (Hudson Institute), (12 September 2005), pp.65-68. For Sayyid Imam Sharif's criticism of al-Qaida, see his series of 15 articles in the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Jarida* between 17 November and 4 December 2007, entitled *Tarshid al-'amal al-jihadi fi misr wa'l-'alam* [Guiding Jihad Action in Egypt and the World Today]. I am indebted to William McCants for sharing his insight into Dr Fadl's thinking. See also Mohammed Al Shafey, "Jailed Islamists Revise Jihad Concept", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (English Edition) 26 November 2007; and Jarret Brachman, "Leading Egyptian Jihadist Sayyid Imam Renounces Violence", *CTC Sentinel,* 1 (1) (December 2007), pp.12-14.

[12] See Ayman al-Zawahiri, *al-Tabri'ah: Risalat al-tabri'at ummat al-qalam wa al-sayf min manqasat tuhmat al-khawar wa al-da'f* ["Disavowal: A Letter Exonerating the Writers and Fighters of Islamic Nation from the Unsubstantiated Accusation of Feebleness and Weakness] (as-Sahab Media, January 2008), p.3.

[13] See "The Open Meeting with Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri: Part One" (as-Sahab Media, April 2008). See also Ian Black, "Al-Qaida deputy goes online to justify attacks", *The Guardian*, 4 February 2008.

[14] See especially Vahid Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa'ida from 1989-2006* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), Report, 2007), http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq3.asp.

[15] See in particular "Zawahiri's letter to Zarqawi" (11 October 2005) and "Atiyah's Letter to Zarqawi" (26 September 2006), *Combating Terrorism Center website*, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq3_pdf.asp.

[16] It is too early to conclude that these statements actually reflect disagreements between the two, but it is interesting to note that al-Zawahiri and bin Laden appear to offer radically different recommendations to their followers in Pakistan regarding where and whom to fight given the current circumstances. Compare Ayman al-Zawahiri, "The Aggression against Lal Masjid (as-Sahab Media, July 2007), audiotape; and "Come to Jihad: A Speech to the People of Pakistan. Shaykh Usama bin Ladin (may Allah protect him)" (as-Sahab Media, September 2007).

[17] Cited in *Messages to the World.* Edited and Intruduced by Bruce Lawrence (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p.xxii.

[18] "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics. Support for Terror Wanes Among Muslim Publics", *Pew Research Center website*, 14 July 2005, http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248; "Where Terrorism Finds Support in the Muslim World", *Pew Research Center website*, 23 May 2006, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/26/where-terrorism-finds-

support-in-the-muslim-world; and Robin Wright, "Support for Bin Laden, Violence Down Among Muslims, Poll Says", *Washington Post*, 15 July 2005, p.A13.

[19] Cited in "Poll: Most Saudis oppose al Qaeda", *CNN.com World*, 18 December 2007, www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/12/17/saudi.poll/index.html

[20] Ian Katz, "Top Blair aide: we must talk to al-Qaida: Former No 10 chief says Irish peace process showed link to enemy needed", *The Guardian*, 15 March 2008; and Ian Black, "Terror talks: would contacting al-Qaida be a step too far?" *The Guardian*, 15 March 2008.

[21] See for example Bernhard Zand, "Al-Qaida versus The Islamic Army: Insurgents in Iraq Turn on Each Other", *Der Spiegel*, 12 June 2007; and "Clash between ex-insurgents, al-Qaida in Iraq kills 18 in terror group", *The Associated Press*, 9 November 2007.

[22] Consider the following excerpt from an interview with Mullah Muhammad Omar by the Dawn newspaper in January 2007: "Q: What is the present relationship between the Taliban and Al Qaeda? A: We have never felt the need for a permanent relationship in the present circumstances. But they [the Al-Qaeda] have set jihad as their goal while we have set the expulsion of American troops from Afghanistan as our target. This is the common goal of all the Muslims. Cited in Ismail Khan, "Omar threatens to intensify war: Talks with Karzai govt ruled out", *Dawn*, 4 January 2007, www.dawn.com/2007/01/04/top4.htm. I am indebted to my colleague Anne Stenersen for this source and for sharing her insight into al-Qaida-Taleban relations.

Turmoil in the Delta: Trends and Implications

By Jennifer Giroux

'If we don't use violence, we find it difficult for the government and the companies to attend to our needs. It works. When you are quiet, nobody cares about you even if you are dying.'
Earnest Tonye, a militant from the Niger Delta [1]

Introduction

The discovery of oil in Africa has created a flurry of multifarious activity throughout this continent. During the last 15 years, multinational oil companies and state actors, most notably China and the United States, have flocked to North Africa and the Gulf of Guinea to increase exploration and extraction of the easily refined "light" and "sweet" crude oil that lies beneath Nigeria, Algeria, Angola, Gabon, Sudan, and Egypt, amongst other countries. [2] While the increased foreign investment in oil-exporting African countries has contributed to some economic growth on the continent, it has yet to address the abysmal economic realities and constant state of social and political instability that determines the lives of most Africans. [3] On the contrary, the discovery of oil in many of the aforementioned countries has caused, fueled, or aggravated conflicts. [4] Nowhere is this more apparent than in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is home to nearly 140 million civilians, 36 states, and more than 250 ethnic groups. [5] Due to its abundant oil and gas reserves, it has become the largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa, the fifth-largest oil exporting country to the United States (US), and the eighth-largest exporter in the world when pumping at full capacity (2.5 million barrels per day). [6] In addition, Nigeria recently became the first African country to pay off the estimated US$30 billion in debt that it owed to the Paris Club. [7] While this paints a promising picture, Nigeria, like many African countries, is rich in natural resources, yet has a long history of poor microeconomic management and social and political instability, making it one of the poorest countries in the world, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). [8]

Since gaining independence from Britain in 1960, political corruption and turmoil, ethnic and religious tensions, and inadequate development initiatives have not only severely hampered growth, but also resulted in multiple coups d'état, a brutal civil war, and various other types of violent outbreaks – the most recent of which include terrorist attacks on the oil industry, the backbone of the Nigerian economy. In the context of this latest development, this article will examine the symbiotic relationship between oil and violence in Nigeria and the realization by local actors that violence aimed at the oil industry can further their political agenda.

The first section will provide an historical reference by briefly discussing the rise of oil production amid social and political instability, followed by a discussion on the deteriorating conditions in the oil producing Niger Delta region and the subsequent phases of political violence and criminal activity that emerged. The next section will focus specifically on the Movement for the Emancipation of the People of the Niger Delta (MEND), a Delta-based group which has introduced a new level of militancy and insurgency in this region by carrying out significant, large-scale attacks on the oil industry and Nigerian government. This part will examine MENDs local and global objectives, structure, financing and tactics, and the effects that their violent campaign has had on Nigeria's oil production.

Within the resource curse literature the situation in Nigeria - where the discovery of rich natural resources has been associated with negative social, political, and economic outcomes - is not entirely unique. Since the 1980s there have been numerous studies that have shown how an abundance of natural resources (largely oil, gas, and minerals) coupled with weak state institutions, meager economic management policies and a negative political climate result in poor development and, in some cases, conflict (oil-exporting countries are particularly prone to conflict). [9] Such factors are common elements in African postcolonial state history. What is unique, however, is the way in which MEND has sought to severely, if not completely, destabilize Nigeria's oil production while also using various media to claim attacks and communicate its larger objectives. These developments question Nigeria's future as a stable energy supplier and raise some serious concerns regarding the possibility of local actors in other oil-producing African states causing serious energy disruptions at a time when demand is rising while reserves are dwindling.

Oil and Violence: A Symbiotic Relationship

The Niger Delta, locally referred to as the Oil Rivers, sits in the eastern region where the Niger River and Gulf of Guinea meet and is home to Nigeria's vast petroleum and natural gas resources. [10] The start of oil exportation in 1958 [11] marked the beginning of an exploration race driven by multinational oil companies eager to capitalize on Nigeria's mineral rich land, uncertain political future, and weak institutions. By 1970, oil production had steadily risen to nearly one million barrels per day (bpd) [12] despite an extremely volatile period that included two military coups in 1966 and the civil war of 1967–70 that erupted in the oil rich region. [13] While oil was not the explicit cause of such volatility, it did, however, encourage the fighting, as competing factions vied for equitable treatment and a share of the political and economic power.

In the early 1970s, Nigeria joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) [14] and encountered its first oil boom as output rose to two million bpd while the price jumped from US$3 to US$12 per barrel, quickly propelling this country to a position where it became one of the wealthiest on the continent. By 1979, prices increased to US$40 per barrel – largely due to conflicts in the Middle East – and thus Nigerian annual export earnings rose from US$1 billion to US$26 billion; accounting for 95 per cent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and about 85 per cent

of federal revenue. [15] Unfortunately, while foreign investment and oil production proliferated, so too did the corruption, military coups, and local actors scurrying to claim a share of the oil wealth. All of these activities stymied development and exacerbated the general sense of social and political unease; especially in the Niger Delta.

Shortly after the 1979 civilian elections, [16] the oil boom decade came to a halt. Oil prices slid from a generous US$40 a barrel to nearly US$10 a barrel in 1985, sending export earnings tumbling to barely US$7 billion in 1986. In addition, considerable corruption, lack of economic diversification, and poorly planned and managed development projects of the 1970s left Nigeria with little infrastructure, a deserted agriculture sector, and unable to cope with the sudden decline in revenue. The years excess oil money and an overvalued currency had bloated the economy; increasing prices to the point where local goods became more expensive than imported goods. [17] Sadly, millions were driven deeper into poverty while a small oil-rich bourgeoisie emerged.

Coupled with the worsening economic state, however, were deteriorating environmental conditions in the Niger Delta - adding another problematic dimension. By the 1990s, oil exploration, extraction, and poor government standards and regulations caused severe environmental degradation to a region where 50-68 per cent of the workforce was employed by a labor-intensive agricultural sector (mainly crop farming and fishing) that had little technology and resources to adapt to new, challenging environmental conditions. [18] Pollution from oil spills, gas flares, and seismic work affected the regions ability to engage in agricultural activities, which consequently lead to a drastic decline in output in both fishing and farming activities. [19] The combined effects of land degradation, scarce government support, inadequate infrastructure, and forced migration to other rural and urban areas due to loss of agriculture jobs had a number of negative effects, such as: a significant rise in regional poverty as civilians were unable to cope with job losses and rising food prices; decrease in drinkable water supplies; lack of roads, schools, electricity; and increased pressure on the poor, existing infrastructure. [20]

As opposed to improving the quality of life in the Delta, oil production lead to worse living standards and lost income for inhabitants as the employment lost from the dwindling agriculture sector was not replaced with employment in another industry. The young, poorly educated men who heavily populated the Delta were confronted with the reality of poverty and lost livelihoods; thus threatening the very survival of the Delta communities and consequently generated feelings of socio-cultural alienation, humiliation, hostility, frustration, and deprivation. [21] Such factors were critical elements in the birth of armed resistance and criminal activities in the Delta. Though the oil industry was never a direct target of violent outbreaks in previous years, certain local actors within the Delta community would emerge to not only target this industry but eventually seek to completely destabilize it.

A New Era: The Oil Industry Becomes the Target

"While oil production is easily the nation's most crucial economic life-line and has been the major contributor to the nations overall economic development over the decades, the

oil bearing Niger Delta communities have basically remained persistently deprived of the benefits of oil resources" Eteng [22]

Phase 1: Ogoni Resistance

Following another coup, General Sani Abacha took power in 1993 at a time when Shell Petroleum and Development Company of Nigeria (Shell Nigeria), a subsidiary of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group and the first oil company to commence operations in Nigeria, was producing nearly one million bpd -half of Nigeria's total output. Not only was Shell Nigeria the largest producer, but it was also the most visible; with pipelines covering 6,200km throughout the Niger Delta. The Ogoni, a small ethnic group who lived amongst the web of pipelines, were the first Delta-based communities to protest the environmental degradation and demand a share of the oil revenues. They turned to Shell and the Nigerian government for answers.

In 1990, Ken Saro-Wira, an Ogoni activist and author, was the first to mobilize the Ogoni through the formation of the non-violent group Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which advocated for autonomy, environmental protection, and control of a share of the revenues. What started off as a non-violent movement, however, inspired other members in the Ogoni community to launch a violent campaign aimed at disrupting the oil industry and thus affecting government revenues. [23] Shell's own data on community disturbances in the Delta revealed patterns of escalating violence – largely sabotage, vandalism, and looting – between 1993–5. At one point, Shell was forced to suspend production in Ogoniland due to the estimated US$42 million in damage to its installations. The violent outbreaks, however, lead to severe government crackdowns, including the execution of Saro-Wiro and other Ogoni activists, and permanently weakened the Ogoni resistance. [24] Despite this, the ability of the Ogoni to affect oil production and elicit such a strong government response was a significant development that only ignited more armed resistance.

Phase 2: Ijaw Resistance

In 1998, the Ijaw, a Delta-based clan located in the Bayelsa State and the fourth-largest ethnic group in Nigeria, began to organize and protest under similar grievances expressed by the Ogoni. [25] After negotiations with the government for a larger share of oil revenue and political representation failed, militant groups formed and launched an offensive on government officials and the energy sector. [26] The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), lead by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, [27] and Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), lead by Ateke Tom, were the first significant Ijaw militant groups to emerge; however, many other smaller, autonomous militias were formed as well. [28] These groups, in combination with a supportive local community, created a violent milieu where lawlessness and attacks flourished, damaging oil infrastructure, stealing oil, and attacking foreign oil workers. While the aforementioned Ijaw groups maintained explicit political objectives, many other local actors emerged who sought only profit and personal gain by engaging in criminal activities that included kidnapping oil workers for ransom

and siphoning oil from pipelines. This blurred the lines between attacks that were politically and criminally motivated. [29]

Phase 3: Criminal Motives

With the government unable to manage the violence, the oil sector struggled to cope with the heightened intensity of attacks. For a brief period, government officials and the oil companies attempted to cope with the situation by luring the Ijaw with small grants of aid for development projects and promises of political participation, but no substantial measures were undertaken. Violence, in fact, proliferated as more community members realized the profitability of attacks or threat of attacks. During this period, criminal gangs dominated the region and distracted the Ijaw from their political objectives. While these criminal activities did not destabilize oil production it was incredibly costly. In 2003, anti-corruption chief Nuhu Ribadu stated that 70 per cent of Nigeria's oil wealth was negatively affected by criminal activity and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) 2003 report estimated that the 400-500 yearly attacks on the oil industry (between 1998 and 2003) had resulted in nearly $1 billion in annual losses. [30]

A New Type of Violence Emerges

In 2005, the Movement for the Emancipation of the People of the Niger Delta (MEND), another Ijaw group with connections to NDPVF, emerged during the rule of President Olusegun Obasanjo and re-introduced the political aims of the Ijaw clan. Fueled by the arrests of notable Ijaw militants and frustration with the political regime, MEND carried out severe, destabilizing attacks on the oil industry so to generate fear within the oil community, significantly affect supplies (they sought to cut output by 30 per cent), and force the government – which depended on precious oil revenues – to address their political and economic grievances. Fear and damage became the goal.

MEND was also eager to reach out to national and international media to publicize the Delta's deteriorated, unstable climate and claim credit for attacks. This clearly took the campaign of violence to another level, where terrorism was the tactic of choice and oil was the target and the weapon. While MEND's leadership structure and size are not clear, its membership comprises poor, unemployed young Ijaw men and former military personnel. It does not claim to have any direct links to other militant - or terrorist - groups operating in the region however other Delta-based groups, such as the Martyrs Brigade and the Coalition for Military Action in the Niger Delta, maintain loose associations.

In December 2005, MEND carried out its first attack when it bombed a pipeline and demanded for the evacuation of all foreign oil companies by 12 February 2006. Subsequent and increasingly more significant attacks followed in early January 2006 when members raided an offshore Shell oil rig, kidnapped oil workers, and demanded that Shell pay US$1.5 billion to local communities for the oil exploration and exploitation activities. [31] Shortly after, on 16 January, it carried out another attack by storming one of Shell's facilities, damaging a pipeline, and killing at least 17 people. [32] This attack reduced operations by 106,000 bpd and led Shell executives to consider evacuating. In a

subsequent e-mail to the media, Jomo Gbomo, [33] a member and spokesperson, warned the oil industry that

"It must be clear that the Nigerian government cannot protect your workers or assets. Leave our land while you can or die in it [...] Our aim is to totally destroy the capacity of the Nigerian government to export oil." Another major attack followed in April 2006 when MEND detonated a bomb near an oil refinery as a warning against Chinese expansion in the region. They issued the following statement:

> "We wish to warn the Chinese government and its oil companies to steer well clear of the Niger Delta. The Chinese government by investing in stolen crude places its citizens in our line of fire." [34]

MEND continued its violent campaign that not only targeted Shell and other oil companies such as Chevron and Agip, but also government targets such as the Port Harcourt, Bori Camp military base, which was bombed, killing two people. MEND subsequently released an e-mail statement, noting that the incident "serves as a further warning to the Nigerian military, oil companies and those who are attempting to sell the birthright of the Niger Delta peoples for a bowl of porridge. In the coming weeks, we will carry out similar attacks against relevant oil industry targets and individuals." [35] Such militancy also led to the withdrawal of other businesses, including the Julius Berger construction company and other significant enterprises with operations in the Delta. [36]

Financing and Tactics

The goal of MEND was, (and continues to be), for greater control of the Delta's oil wealth and to undermine the underlying political order of the Nigerian government so to make the Delta region a political force to be reckoned with. To achieve this, MEND has launched more sophisticated, large-scale attacks that aim to terrorize the oil companies and cause serious disruptions in production and overall output. While the financing structure is not entirely clear, it is evident that MEND largely profits from local affluent community supporters and criminal activities that include receiving huge ransoms in exchange for abducted workers. [37]

MEND employs a variety of tactics that require sophisticated arms, familiarity with the Delta mangroves, and methods that produce significant damage. For example, an attack on a link to a major Shell operated oil export terminal took over a year to repair and was quickly re-attacked after it had resumed service. Other examples of attack methods included:

- Swarm-based maneuvers where MEND would use light plastic speedboats to quickly attack targets in succession. This would leave the oil companies and Nigerian military unable to protect the thousands of miles of oil and gas pipelines, multiple oil fields, and flow stations based in the delta.
- Using advanced bombing, firepower and combat training to destabilize and storm facilities.

- Carrying out specific attacks on targets that would strategically shut down production and delay and/or halt repairs.
- Performing sudden attacks on offshore facilities, which industry experts believed were secure. In a June 2006 attack, MEND stormed a rig that was located about 65km offshore and kidnapped eight oil workers and the International Maritime Bureau has reported that Nigeria's shores have become the worst area for piracy. [38]
- Utilizing hostages to coerce the government and the company for ransoms; in 2006 an estimated 70–100 foreign oil workers had been kidnapped (typically all were released after ransoms).

Political Influence

In November 2007, the Managing Director of Shell Nigeria reported that MENDs attacks on the oil industry had amounted to losses of $61 million per day; a staggering amount that aggregates into billions lost annually. [39] The anticipated April 2007 elections – expected to be the first transfer of power from one civilian leader to another since independence – created an opportunity for MEND to see whether its violent and costly campaign had influenced the political establishment. While the elections were flawed with reports of vote-rigging and fraud, MEND celebrated some success when President Obasanjo did not pursue a third term and Goodluck Jonathan, an ethnic Ijaw and former Governor of the Bayelsa State, was elected as vice president, giving the Ijaw their first direct voice in a major government position. [40] To emphasize their influence on the region and send a political message to the incoming government, MEND attacked the Chevron Pennington Offshore terminal and kidnapped six foreign oil workers on 1 May. Following this attack, they released the following statement:

> "We promised to give the present Nigerian administration a shameful send-off. This attack is one in a series intended to embarrass the out-going regime. It is also a warning to the incoming government, which we view as an extension of the present. We will continue with our struggle for justice until we achieve all our goals without exception." [41]

By May 2006, MEND's violent activities had led to a 25 per cent cut of Nigeria's oil production. [42] In an effort to give the new government an opportunity to address MEND's demands – chiefly the release of jailed members and the Delta's share of the oil revenues – the group agreed to a temporary ceasefire. [43] MEND ended the ceasefire on 24 September, after talks with the government had failed and Henry Okah, a silent yet significant member of MEND, was arrested in Angola en route to Nigeria. As a result, the violent campaign was reignited and continues with intensity. [44]

Global Effects

Not only did attacks drastically affect – and in some cases, cripple – oil production, but they also affected the price of oil at the global level. For example, in January 2008, an attack on oil facilities in Port Harcourt killed 13 people and sent crude oil futures soaring as market analysts speculated that Nigerian supply would face further disruptions. Shortly

after this attack, Olivier Jakob of Petromatrix in Switzerland noted: "With the military and the militant warlords engaged in a violent tit-for-tat, the risk for oil disruptions in Nigeria remains higher than in the past few months." [45] In response to market sensitivity, Gbomo noted that "the fact that we have influenced the price of world oil, no matter how little, and caught the attention of the foreign media indicates we are on the right track." [46] This statement reveals that MEND had realized that the scale of their attacks translated not only into local disruption, but also into regional and international shocks in the form of higher oil and gas costs.

In a March 2008 e-mail to the Financial Times, Gbomo stated that 2008 would bring the most destructive attacks that "will begin with a calm before the storm" and create "an economic tsunami that will sweep the entire oil industry". [47] Gbomo also noted that this next escalation would begin on a date "that will never be forgotten, like 9/11". [48] While such dramatic attacks have yet to occur, violence persists. Attacks to two Shell pipelines on April 21 contributed to another increase in oil prices and market unease as Shell noted that it "may not be able to deliver some 169,000 barrels per day of crude in April and May". [49] This attack was meant to send a message to potential foreign investors, especially the United States which Gbomo, in an e-mail addressed to President George W. Bush, stated that the bombings were "our way of saying 'welcome'" to a US warship that was visiting the Gulf of Guinea to conduct training with the Nigerian navy. [50] As this violent campaign continues to gain momentum and global exposure, MEND becomes a stronger and more lethal force that could potentially expand its attacks to other targets in Nigeria and throughout the Gulf of Guinea to offshore oil installations. Not only is such a development dangerous as it would cause greater volatility in the market but it might also inspire militant groups living in other oil-rich countries to mimic such a model.

Conclusion

"We [MEND] alone, your hosts, can guarantee your [the oil companies'] security." [51]
Jono Gbomo, spokesperson for MEND

Okah was extradited to Nigeria in February 2008 and charged with treason based on an alleged coup plot. [52] His arrest has created a flurry of activity and the threat of an even greater escalation in violence. [53] Indeed, as I write attacks continue on almost a weekly basis as the price of oil climbs. The threat of escalation, however, raises interesting questions: What is the next step in this violent trend, and what will the next phase of violence look like? Will it evolve into a civil war or have local actors found a more efficient way to express their dissent through small and large-scale attacks on the oil industry? For it appears that the use of terrorism against the energy sector has been resourceful way for armed youth, aggrieved individuals, and defected military members to express their grievances at the local, national, and international stages. In fact, violence becomes more difficult to suppress in a land where grievances are high and obtaining a gun is easier then finding food.

The turn of events in Nigeria should give pause to foreign oil companies and states whose national interests stretch into this region; for the social, political, and economic situation in Nigeria is similar to many other oil-producing African nations. In some cases, the situation elsewhere is worse. In fact, as such state and non-state actors cascade into this unfamiliar territory in a quest for rich mineral resources – of which there are many – and market dominance, they should examine the escalation of violence in Nigeria and note how the use of terrorism in Africa will not only be cloaked in the banner of religion. It should also be noted that the ability of MEND to use terrorism to negatively affect Nigeria's oil output and communicate political objectives globally has rivaled the attacks carried out by the African-based jihadist groups, most notably Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Indeed, the activities in the Delta have revealed another face of international terrorism.

In April 2008, Nigerian President Umar Yar'Adua asked MEND and other militants in the Niger Delta to "give peace a chance" while his administration addresses the underdevelopment issues. Such pleas, however, are met with understandable skepticism. Since oil was first discovered, the Delta has only deteriorated while violence has emerged and evolved into the militant campaign that exists today where the government has been either unwilling or unable to address local grievances and provide a stable environment. In fact, the situation only seems to be worsening not only for the Delta community and the oil companies who operate there but also for the oil importing countries that rely on Nigeria's output.To remedy this dire situation, multifaceted engagement will need to be employed by both state and non-state actors with interests in this region. On the state side, oil importing countries need to aid the Nigerian government's ability to counter the political violence in this region by providing military training, funding and assisting in strenghtening capacity. Such states must also work with the central and local governments to demand for greater resources to be allocated to addressing the abysmal socio-economic realities. [54] Unless the latter is addressed, criminal activities and terrorist attacks will continue to challenge the regions stability and ability to produce oil at full capacity

On the non-state side, multinational oil companies and community organizations (NGOs) also have a unique role to play as they can reach out directly to the community to assess needs and develop creative solutions to the Delta's dire situation. Shell has taken one interesting step by hiring "community liaison officers" to begin direct dialogues with the Delta communities and has provided storage tanks and generators to 21 towns and villages. But, they need to go a step further. Multinational oil companies have the resources to broaden the scope and reach of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives; which are actually deducted as costs of oil production, meaning that it is the government that ultimately pays. As opposed to sponsoring isolated programs such as scholarships to local youth they should investigate how to sponsor and develop entire "host" communities. Such an approach would require working directly with local governments, NGOs, and international organizations to implement basic development programs that would include the building of roads, homes, schools, hospitals, etc. Essentially this would employ a bottom-up approach to counter-balance the measures employed from the top down. By utilizing such state and non-state approaches that would

aim to simultaneously increase the regions security apparatus while also directly addressing community needs, the ability of militants to find recruits, mobilize, and carry out attacks may be greatly reduced over time.

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[1] McAllester, M., 2006. Rebels threaten all-out attack on Nigeria's oil. The Observer, [internet]. 5 September. Available Online: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/nov/05/oil.business [accessed on: 10 April 2008]

[2] Mahtani, D., 2008. The new scramble for Africa's resources. Financial Times, [internet]. 28 January. Available at: http://media.ft.com/cms/64340c28-cdb4-11dc-9e4e-000077b07658.pdf [accessed on 25 March 2008]

[3] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank. 2008. African Development Indicators, 2007. [internet]. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSTATINAFR/Resources/adi2007_final.pdf [accessed on 2 April 2008] During the last decade, Africa has experienced 5.4 per cent growth due to effective trade, private sector investment, and increased oil production and exportation. Despite this promising economic trend, most of the growth is occurring in oil-exporting countries, which account for 27.7 per cent of the continent's population. Poor infrastructure, volatility, and corruption continue to impede development efforts.

[4] Williamson, H., 2008. Poor governance can boot a country out of the industry. Financial Times, [internet]. 28 January. Available at: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a534472c-cad7-11dc-a960-000077b07658,dwp_uuid=8bed9962-cad2-11dc-a960-000077b07658.html [accessed on 25 March 2008] Also note that the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) estimates that 3.5 billion people live in poorly governed, mineral-rich countries where resource endowments lead to corruption, poverty, and conflict.

[5] United States Central Intelligence Agency. 2008. The World Factbook: Nigeria. [Online]. (Updated 15 April 2008) Available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html [accessed 15 April 2008]

[6] Ibid. In addition, there are 184 trillion cubic feet of proven gas reserves, giving Nigeria the seventh-largest gas reserves worldwide. The world uses a reported 84 million bpd, which is expected to rise to 120 million bpd by 2020.

[7] 2006. Nigeria settles Paris Club debt. BBC News. [internet]. 21 April. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4926966.stm [accessed on 17 April 2008]. The Paris Club is an informal group of financial officials from 19 of the world's wealthiest countries. They meet throughout the year and provide financial services such as debt restructuring, debt relief, and debt cancellation to indebted countries and their creditors.

[8] Seventy per cent of Nigeria's population lives below the poverty line. The HDI (a composite measurement of life expectancy, education, and standard of living) for Nigeria is 0.470, which gives the country a rank of 158th out of 177 countries. Available at: http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_NGA.html. In addition, many African countries that have abundant natural resources (e.g. oil and/or minerals) have had poor development outcomes (poor economic performance, little to no economic diversification, inflation, etc.) and experience various forms of conflict (this dynamic is commonly referred to as the resource curse). A study conducted by Wheeler (1984) found that during the 1970s resource rich sub-Saharan African countries experienced less growth then countries that had little to no natural resources. Wheeler, D., 1984. Sources of stagnation in sub-Saharan Africa. World Development, 12(1), p.1–23.

[9] Collier, P. and Hoeffler, A., 2000 Greed and grievance in civil war. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: http://worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/greedhtm. This study confirmed findings that natural resource abundance, defined in terms of the ratio of primary exports to GDP, is a strong and significant determinant of the onset of civil war. They examined 98 countries and 27 civil wars. In a similar study, Reynal-Querol (2002) found that found that an abundance in natural resource was an important variable in explaining the incidence of non-ethnic civil wars and other forms of political violence. Reynal-Querol, M., 2002. Ethnicity, political systems, and civil wars. Journal of Conflict Resolution 46: 29–54.

[10] The Niger Delta consists of nine oil producing states and is home to more than 20 million people. Today there are 300 oilfields, 5,284 wells, over 7,000 km of pipelines, four refineries, and multiple export terminals, flow stations, and gas plants.

[11] Nigerian oil exploration began in the early 1900s, and it was not until 1956 that oil in commercial quantities was discovered.

[12] Frynas, J.G., 2000. Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and litigation between oil companies and village communities. Hamburg, Germany: Lit Verlag, p.15–25.

[13] It should be noted that the 1967 oil embargo negatively affected oil output, but production resumed in the latter half of 1968. Nafziger, W.E., 1972. The Economic Impact of the Nigerian Civil War. The Journal of Modern African Studies, 10(2), p.223–45. Another fairly significant event during this period occurred during 1966 when Isaac Boro, a local actor who recognized the potential gains made by oil extraction, sought to create the first Republic within Nigeria (Niger Delta Republic NDR). NDR only lasted 12 days and is noted as the earliest moment in the history of the Delta's insurgency.

[14] Despite access to incredible wealth through oil production, the per capita gross national product (GNP) of OPEC countries has been in steady decline for the past 30 years, whereas the per capita GNP of non-oil producing countries in the developing world has risen.

[15] Shaxson, N., 2007. Poisoned Wells. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillian. Ch. 1.

[16] In 1976, after nearly a year of military rule, Brigadier Murtala Ramat Mohammed was assassinated in a failed coup attempt. His deputy, Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo, replaced him and sought to introduce a US-style presidential constitution. The 1979 elections brought Alhaji Shehu Shagari to power.

[17] Shaxson, p.17.

[18] Eteng, I.A., 1997. The Nigerian state, oil exploration and community interest: Issues and perspectives. Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt.

[19] Staney, W.R., 1990. Socio-Economic Impact of Oil in Nigeria. Geography Journal, 22(1), p.67-79.

[20] Ibid. Negative environmental consequences of oil production included: polluted streams and rivers, oil spills, forest destruction and bio-diversity loss, gas flaring, and refinery waste.

[21] Shell Nigeria was actually a joint venture with the Nigerian federal government (which owned a 55 per cent stake), Royal Dutch/Shell (30 per cent stake) and two European oil companies strategically aligned with Shell (15 per cent stake).

[22] Pegg, S., 1999. The cost of doing business: Transnational corporations and violence in Nigeria. Turkey: Belkint University.

[23] Eteng, p.4.

[24] Marquardt, E., 2006. The Niger Delta insurgency and its threat to energy security. Terrorism Monitor, [online]. 4(6), Available at: http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370099 [accessed on: 10 April 2008]

[25] Between the late 1990s and 2003, there were episodes of violence in the delta where oil was a factor and contributed to ethnic rivalry. The creation of the non-violent Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) in 1998 was the true beginning of the Ijaw's movement to address the issue of oil exploration and exploitation in Ijaw territory. In response to this movement, the government employed harsh, violent tactics to stop the IYC and suppress the Ijaw community. This conflict indirectly affected the oil industry operating in Ijaw territory. The IYC continues to operate today and reportedly has chapters based throughout the world, as well as a website that can be found at http://www.iycworldwide.org/.

[26] The Ijaw also sought ownership and management roles.

[27] Wosu, C., 2007. Nigeria: Asari-Dokubo Arrives PH, Vows to Continue Struggle. AllAfrica.com, [Online]. 17 June. Available at: http://allafrica.com/stories/200706170006.html [accessed on 10 April 2008]. In 2005, Asari was arrested, charged with treason and imprisoned. He was released on 14 June 2007 as part of President Umaru Yar'Adua's pledge to try and bring peace to the Niger Delta region. He continues to be a significant political player of the Ijaw movement in the Niger Delta.

[28] Marquardt. Such groups were made up of disaffected young men who lived around Port Harcourt and Warri (Niger Delta). The NDPDF and the NDV maintained alliances with some of the smaller groups

[29] Stealing oil is referred to as "bunkering", and this became a huge business in the Delta; estimates have stated that 5-10 per cent of Nigeria's oil is bunkered. The two ways to bunker oil include bribing and siphoning; the latter being more dangerous.

[30] Watts, M. 2008. Anatomy of an oil insurgency: Violence and militants in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. In K. Omeje, ed. Extractive economies and conflicts in the global south: Multi-regional perspectives on rentier politics. Ashgate. Ch. 3.

[31] Howden, D., 2006. Nigeria: Shell may pull out of Niger Delta after 17 die in boat raid. Corp Watch, [internet]. 17 January. Available at: http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=13121 [accessed on 3 April 2008] It should be noted that the monetary demands were not reported as a ransom for the hostages. Rather, this attack was unprecedented in that MEND demanded the release of two incarcerated ethnic Ijaw leaders (one of whom was Asari) and payment of damages for the pollution and oil exploitation. It reported that the hostages were released unharmed on 30 January 2006.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Jomo Gbomo is the elusive official spokesperson for MEND and is credited with engaging the media through e-mails. Very little is known about him outside of the public correspondence with foreign journalists.

[34] Taylor, I., 2007. China's Environmental Footprint in Africa. China Dialogue, [internet]. 2 February. Available Online: http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/741-China-s-environmental-footprint-in-Africa [accessed on 3 April 2008].

[35] 2006. Intelligence Brief: MEND Escalates Instability in Nigeria. Power and Interest News Report (PINR), [internet]. Available at: http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=480&language_id=1 [accessed on 3 April 2008]

[36] Watts, Ch. 3.

[37] Murray, S., 2007. The shadowy militants in Nigeria's Delta. BBC News [internet]. 10 May. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6644097.stm [accessed on: 7 May 2008]

[38] Junger, S., 2007. Blood Oil. Vanity Fair, [internet]. February. Available at: http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/02/junger200702?currentPage=2 [accessed on: 8 April 2008].

[39] Watts, Ch. 3.

[40] Mouawad, J., 2007. Renewed violence limits oil production in Nigerian region. The New York Times, [internet]. 14 May. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/14/business/14oil.html [accessed on 18 April 2008]. More than 300 people died during the April elections, and many international observers witnessed ballot boxes being stuffed or simply stolen.

[41] Ibid

[42] Major oil companies were forced to either shut down facilities or pull out of Nigeria. From the time MEND launched its 2006 campaign, Shell reported losses of 500,000 bpd; Chevron nearly 75,000 bpd; Eni nearly 100,000 bpd.

[43] BBC, 2007. Nigeria militants set conditions. BBC News, [internet]. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6708277.stm [accessed on 26 March 2009].

[44] BBC, 2007. Nigerian militants call off truce. BBC News, [internet]. 24 September, Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7010028.stm [accessed on: 15 April 2008] MEND claimed that the arrest had been orchestrated by the Nigerian authorities.

[45] Heath, N., 2008. DJ Update: Oil Futures: Crude Up $2 on Nigerian Attacks, US Data. Dow Jones Commodities News, [internet]. 2 January. Available Online: http://www.zibb.com/article/2432485/DJ+UPDATE+OIL+FUTURES+Crude+Up+2+On+Nigerian+Attacks+US+Data [accessed on 24 March 2008] Because of the financial risks involved, oil reserves in politically stable countries have more value, per barrel, than oil in politically unstable countries.

[46] Cummins, C., 2005. As oil supplies are stretched, rebels, terrorists get new clout: media-savvy guerrillas roil global oil prices in fight with Nigerian Government. The Wall Street Journal, [internet]. 12 April. Available Online: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB114463092157621421.html?mod=todays_us_page_one [accessed on: 10 April 2008].

[47] Green, M., 2008. Nigeria: Unfulfilled potential. Financial Times, [internet]. 28 January. Available at: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a9886736-cad7-11dc-a960-000077b07658,dwp_uuid=8bed9962-cad2-11dc-a960-000077b07658.html [accessed on 26 March 2008].

[48] Ibid.

[49] International Herald Tribune, 2008. Nigerian militants report two attacks on oil pipelines. International Herald Tribune, [internet]. 21 April. Available at: http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/04/21/africa/AF-GEN-Nigeria-Oil-Unrest.php [accessed on: 23 April 2008].

[50] Ahemba, T., 2008. Nigeria rebels attack Shell oil pipelines, defy US. Reuters, [internet]. 21 April. Available at: http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L21129451.htm [accessed on: 7 May 2008]. The militant activity in the Delta coupled with

the Nigerian governments inability to control the violence has resulted in increased attacks in the maritime corridor across the Gulf of Guinea, thus threatening other neighboring oil producing countries.

[51] For instance, since 2005, sabotage of energy infrastructure, lead by militant groups aggrieved by the lack of development and opportunities despite the booming oil business, has shut in more than 500,000 barrels a day of Nigerian crude production. In 2006, after insurgents attacked a link to a key oil export terminal on the Forcados River in the Niger Delta region, it took a year and a half for Royal Dutch Shell to make repairs and get part of it running again. It took just two months for insurgents to shut it down again.

[52] Fiske, N., 2008. Nigeria rebel charged with treason for alleged coup plot. Jurist, [internet]. 5 April. Available at: http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2008/04/nigeria-rebel-charged-with-treason-for.php [accessed on 22 April 2008]. It should be noted that Okak was arrested and charged in Angola after reportedly attempting to buy weapons and explosives for an alleged coup in Equatorial Guinea. This was the first hearing since Okah was extradited to Nigeria. The Nigerian government has placed Okah in solitary confinement without access to visitors, and his trial has been suspect.

[53] Shenk, M., 2008. Oil Rises More Than $3 on U.K. Pipeline, Nigeria's Output Drop. Bloomberg.com, [Online]. 25 April. Available at: http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601081&sid=aTykVY694ZYY&refer=australia [accessed on 25 April 2008] On 25 April 2008 MEND sabotaged a Shell operated major crude oil pipeline located at Kula river in the Delta and sent oil prices rising. The attack occurred on a line that feeds oil to the Bonny Light export terminal. MEND began escalating attacks during April 2008.

[54] The US has recently initiated a number of measures to address the multitude of security issues in sub-Saharan Africa, with particular focus on the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) region. In late 2007 the US navy began training government officials from the Gulf of Guinea region to improve maritime security and have since worked specifically with the Nigerian navy to enhance their ability to counter the threats posed by MEND and other militants. In addition, in September 2008 the US is also looking to launch the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), which seeks to encourage US military cooperation with African governments. Such initiatives, which are clearly connected to protecting US interests, offer some promise however they do not address the abysmal socio-economic realities that have fueled militancy and insurgency where terrorism is increasingly the tactic of choice.

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb Strikes Again

By Hanna Rogan

On 22 February 2008, two Austrian tourists disappeared from southern Tunisia. On March 10, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for their kidnapping. In return for the liberation of the Austrian hostages, now believed to be held in northern Mali, AQIM demanded the release of fellow mujahideen from prison, as well as a ransom. This incident, which has received little attention in Western media, is significant as an illustration of the current state of the main Islamist network in North Africa and how it has changed throughout the last few years. It sheds light on the general escalation of insurgent violence in the Maghreb, and demonstrates how AQIM has resorted to new operational tactics, partly as a result of its need for financial resources. The incident also illustrates a de facto regional expansion of the AQIM, as well as the group's international aspirations.

The History of AQIM

Until January 2007, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb was known as the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (known by its French acronyms GSPC). An offspring of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA – an umbrella organization for a number of jihadist militias during the Algerian civil war of the 1990s), the GSPC continued the violence into the 2000s and emerged as the main militant Islamist group in Algeria and the wider Maghreb. Regime crackdowns and amnesty programs throughout the last decade have severely weakened the Islamist movement in Algeria. Nevertheless, the last year witnessed a steep increase in violent activity. This development coincided with the announcement by al-Qaida's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in September 2006 that GSPC had joined forces with al-Qaida. The name change from GSPC to AQIM occurred four months later.

While it is still difficult to determine the full implications of the al-Qaida–GSPC merger, the period following it has been extremely violent, and has involved new operational practices on the part of AQIM, most notably suicide attacks which were previously near unheard of in Algeria. Moreover, the group seems to have increased its activities outside Algeria. For example, Mauritania has been the location of several operations since late December 2007, and AQIM-affiliated cells have also been intercepted in Tunisia. It is likely that the brand name al-Qaida has attracted new recruits, including from Algeria's neighboring countries. Employing the term "Maghreb" in the group's name also seems to indicate an effort to unite likeminded actors in the whole region. [1] As for the international dimension, AQIM's hatred of the West is mostly present in the group's official communication, in which it verbally attacks the "Crusader West". However, in 2007 there were also several attacks on international targets within Algeria, the most well-known being the 11 December suicide operation against a UN building in Algiers. The kidnapping of the two Austrian tourists could be yet another indicator of AQIM's international aspirations.

The Austrian Hostage Affair

The hostage situation that currently unfolds is shrouded in uncertainties regarding the kidnapping operation and the claims put forward by the kidnappers. According to the communiqués published by AQIM's media committee on the Internet, and a videotaped statement broadcasted by al-Jazeera satellite channel, the Austrian tourists Wolfgang Ebner and Andrea Kloiber were abducted in Southern Tunisia by a group of mujahideen affiliated with AQIM led by Abd al-Hamid Abu Zayd, the second-in-command of the Tariq bin Ziyad brigade, also known as the Sahara brigade. [2] The communiqués state that the condition for liberation of the hostages is the release of mujahideen prisoners from Algerian and Tunisian prisons. They warn that any military intervention to free the hostages will result in their killing, and conclude by advising Western tourists to stay away from North Africa.

Neither AQIM nor the governments involved have indicated the current location of the hostages, ransoms to be paid by Vienna, or the names of the mujahideen whose release was demanded. However, because Vienna has sent two special envoys to Mali to negotiate the liberation of the hostages, and because it is well known that AQIM holds rear bases and training camps in the Sahara (including on Malian soil where the group is protected by Tuareg tribes hostile to the Malian government), it must be considered likely that the hostages have been taken from Tunisia through Algerian territory to northern Mali, as reported by the Arab press. [3]

It must also be considered likely that AQIM has demanded a ransom. This is common practice for the group which is known to struggle with low cash flow. AQIM has previously openly declared its need for funds, asking supporters to provide money – "the backbone of jihad". [4] An unofficial message recently published online specifically called for money, food, and medicine to be sent to the Maghreb mujahideen. [5] Lately, kidnappings of native Algerians, with subsequent demands for ransoms, have become more commonplace. [6] Moreover, the group recently carried out a raid in Tizi Rached, Algeria, targeting the post office and a bank. Though it claimed the life of one police man, the operation was unsuccessful from an economic perspective, as the bank vault was empty. [7] Other operations targeting Algerian and Mauritanian army facilities and soldiers have been more rewarding for the mujahideen. They have seized large numbers of weapons and vehicles, which are proudly shown off as war booty in videos of the raids published on the Internet.

It is important to note this is not the first time foreigners have been kidnapped in the Maghreb. In 2003, thirty-two tourists, mostly Germans, Swiss, and Austrians, were taken hostage by GSPC's emir in the Sahara region, Abd al-Razak, also known as al-Para. The hostages were released after a month-long ordeal, during which two hostages died from insolation, and reportedly after the payment by German authorities of a 5 million Euro ransom. [8] Coincidentally, al-Para, who was captured in Chad in 2004 and subsequently extradited to Algeria where he now awaits trial, is believed to be among the mujahideen prisoners whose release has been demanded in the current kidnap case. Along with al-Para, the AQIM has supposedly also listed Samir Saioud, also known as Mousab and

responsible for recruiting suicide bombers, Abd al-Fatah Abu Basir, emir of the Algiers area, as well as 10 named salafists imprisoned in Tunisia. [9]

The Real Targets

This information reveals an imbroglio of involved parties, some of which are reluctant for political and economic reasons, to admit any involvement in the hostage crisis: Tunis, eager to remain an attractive tourist destination, claims that "… for the time being, no one can confirm the presence of the two Austrians on Tunisian soil, nor that they were abducted from Tunisian territory". [10] Algiers which actively has sought to document the success of anti-terrorism measures, states that "Algeria [was] not directly concerned with the hostage affair", emphasizing that "… the abduction took place outside Algeria." and that "… the hostages are currently held outside Algerian territory". [11] Nevertheless, the AQIM holds Austria, Algeria, and Tunisia responsible for the safety and the liberation of the hostages, thus indirectly targeting these very countries. The operation threatens tourism as a source of income and aims to impair the economy of the North African states, as well as their reputation, by demonstrating their inability to contain terrorism. Moreover, kidnapping foreign nationals reinforces this strategy because it increases international pressure.

AQIM's International Aspirations

Indeed, while the geographical movements of AQIM activists in this affair indicate a viable regional network, the case also sheds light on the international dimension of the group's activities. The abduction of the two Austrians took place after several attacks on Westerners and Western-affiliated companies in Algeria throughout the last year and a half, such as "The Bouchawi raid" in December 2006 that targeted workers of Brown and Root Condor, a subsidiary of Halliburton, and attacks on Russian workers of Stroytransgaz in February and December 2007. The latter incident took place only days before the UN building in Algiers was struck by a suicide bomber, taking 17 lives. Yet it should be stressed that the preferred AQIM target remains national army and police forces in the region.

Signs of a subsidiary international dimension of AQIM's motive, aims, and strategies might be read out of the group's public communications. For example, the communiqués issued on occasion of the hostage situation refer to the situation of the Muslims in Gaza:

> "We say to the Western tourists who are flocking to Tunisian territory in search of fun at a time when our brothers are being slayed in Gaza by the Jews with the complicity of the Western states [...] we warn them to stay away from the Islamic Maghreb." [12]

The communiqués go on to "demand the release of prisoners in Algerian and Tunisian jails, imprisoned with the support of the Western states, [...] victims of the new Crusader campaign against Islam". [13]

This kind of rhetoric is indeed not new on the part of GSPC or AQIM. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the previously nationally oriented insurgent group has paid increasing attention to the "Islamic Umma", to international "fronts of the jihad" from Chechnya to Iraq and Somalia, and to Muslims suffering under "apostate regimes" and "infidel intervention" in the Muslim world. Several attempts to align the group with the global al-Qaida network resulted in the September 2006 al-Qaida-GSPC merger and the famous words that the group be a "thorn in the neck of the American and French Crusaders".

It is not only the rhetoric of the AQIM that coheres with al-Qaida's global jihad. A change in tactics may be observed, most notably with the use of simultaneous attacks and suicide operations that are well-known from the Iraqi theatre and one of al-Qaida's trademarks. Abductions are also a well-known tactic used by a large number of terrorist and insurgent groups worldwide. Many jihadi groups from all over the Muslim world have used abductions as a tactic of local and international jihad, the prime example being the abduction campaigns inside Iraq.

It should be noted that the use of suicide operations is a highly controversial issue also within the mujahideen communities. The AQIM struggles with lack of popular support, and has declared its intentions since its inception as the GSPC in 1998 not to target Muslim civilians. Indeed, this vow represented its hallmark as it sought to distance itself from the massacres perpetrated by its predecessor, the takfiri-oriented Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Therefore, the current rise of suicide operations and indiscriminate targeting of victims in Algeria is at the core of ideological dissent within the AQIM. This has been attested to by former members of AQIM who have recently surrendered under the Algerian regime's amnesty program. Repentant Benmessaoud Abdelkader, for instance, claims that there is no religious justification for employing suicide operations, that the tactic is counterproductive, and imposed on the group unilaterally by the leadership. [14] Other adversaries of the leadership's strategy, who reportedly also oppose the entire al-Qaida merger, have allegedly joined rival jihadi factions in Algeria, such as the Protectors of the Salafi Call. In response to press reports about dissent within AQIM, the leadership issued an official statement, categorically denying "any internal opposition to the tactic of martyrdom [suicide] operations" and assuring "that there is agreement within the organization". [15]

A less controversial topic is the 'mediatization' of the jihad in the Maghreb. Like al-Qaida affiliated groups elsewhere, the AQIM operates a Web site (currently unavailable), distributes communiqués and video recordings of operations to jihadi web forums, publishes an online magazine, and has also used the Qatar-based satellite TV station al-Jazeera to spread its message. The operations carried out by the group have also become more spectacular and 'media friendly', including the already mentioned suicide operations, high-casualty operations, attempted attacks on high profile individuals, [16] and an attack on the Israeli embassy in Mauritania. [17]

Conclusion

The abduction of the two Austrians in Tunisia in February 2008 by AQIM adds to the list of such spectacular operations. Moreover, the incident's international dimension suggests an AQIM commitment to the global al-Qaida network and its doctrine. However, further research is needed to improve our understanding of the actual relationship between al-Qaida and the radical Islamist movement in the Maghreb, and the implications of their alignment. While the AQIM seems to benefit from a certain flow of new recruits, some willing to commit suicide attacks, the reported internal discord on the issue of employing this tactic, and perhaps more importantly on the issue of GSPC's merger with al-Qaida, indicates certain weak points. What appears as a quite successful attempt by al-Qaida to incorporate another group and to unify the jihad, may, after all, have the opposite, splitting effect in the longer run.

For the time being, the AQIM remains a mainly regionally focused jihadi network. And while it is a fact that AQIM cells have been eliminated in several countries in the region because of counterterrorism measures, and that the network therefore is weakened, it is to a large extent precisely the cooperation between militant Islamists across borders that turns the AQIM into a threat today. This is recognized by counterterrorism officials in the Maghreb. Yet while the threat is multinational, it is problematic, as one Algerian officer laments, that there is no "joint military unit" facing it. [18] Thus, operating mostly freely in the vast desert area on the borders of the Maghreb countries, and developing new al-Qaida-like operational tactics, the AQIM is likely to strike again in the near future.

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[1] It is in this regard interesting to note that the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) joined al-Qaida – and not AQIM – in November 2007 through an announcement made by al-Zawahiri and Abu Layth al-Libi, a former LIFG member (killed in Afghanistan in January 2008). This suggests a lack of coordination between the established jihadi groups in the region, yet does not prevent links between jihadi individuals/cells of various Maghreb origin and AQIM.
[2] The Tariq bin Ziyad brigade has its name from the Muslim general who in 711 conquered parts of Spain.
[3] "2003 scenario of the European kidnapped tourists repeated: The Austrian hostages located in the Sahel region" (in Arabic), An-Nahar online, 11 March 2008, www.ennaharonline.com/national/5923.html.
[4] GSPC Media Committee, "Wealth of spoils... Facts or Illusions?" (in Arabic), 21 Dec 2006, www.qmagreb.org\pages\tharwa.htm (accessed July 2007).
[5] "Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb refutes the presence of its leader in the area besieged by the army" (in Arabic), Al-Sharq al-Awsat online, 10 March 2008, www.asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=462027&issueno=10695.
[6] "Huit enlèvements dans une seule commune en Kabylie", Tunisia Watch, 11 March 2008, http://tunisiawatch.rsfblog.org/archive/2008/03/11/huit-enlevements-dans-une-seule-commune-en-kabylie.html.
[7] "50 terroristes font une incursion à Tizi Rached", Liberté Algerie Online, 3 March 2008, www.liberte-algerie.com/edit.php?id=91206&titre=50%20terroristes%20font%20une%20incursion%20à%20Tizi%20Rached.
[8] "Should Germany Pay to Free Hostages?", Spiegel International Online, 30 July 2007, www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,497269,00.html.
[9] "Al-Qaida bargain to release al-Para and Salafists arrested in Tunisia" (in Arabic), El-Khabar, 15 March 2008, www.elkhabar.com/quotidien/lire.php?idc=30&ida=101210&key=2&cahed=1, or "Austria sends envoy to Bamako and the kidnappers settled 150 kilometers from Kidal"(in Arabic), an-Nahar online, 15 March 2008, www.ennaharonline.com/national/6177.html.
[10] "Tunisie-Autriche : Précisions d'une source officielle à Tunis", Info-Tunisie, 10 March 2008, www.infotunisie.com/2008/03/100308-10.html.
[11] " L'Algérie n'est pas directement concernée", L'Expression edition online, 16 March 2008, www.lexpressiondz.com.
[12] AQIM Media Committee, "Statement claiming responsibility for kidnapping of the two Austrian tourists in Tunisia" (in Arabic), 10 March 2008, via www.al-ekhlas.net/forum.
[13] AQIM Media Committee, "The Mujahideen's conditions for release of the Austrians" (in Arabic), 13 March 2008, via www.al-ekhlas.net/forum (accessed March 2008).

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[14] "Révélations de Mossaab Abou Daoud. Désarroi des groupes armés", L'Expression edition online, 15 Août 2007, www.lexpressiondz.com/.

[15] AQIM Media Committee, "Statement about the latest delusions of some media outlets" (in Arabic), 14 May 2007, www.qmagreb.org (accessed July 2007).

[16] "Al-Qaida vise des personnalités politiques", l'Expression edition online, 23 March 2008, www.lexpressiondz.com/article/2/2008-03-23/51028.html.

[17] AQIM Media Committee, "Statement about the attack on the Israeli embassy in Nouakchout" (in Arabic), 2 February 2008, via www.al-ekhlas.net/forum (accessed March 2008).

[18] "Lutte antiterroriste : en attendant l'union sacrée » Jeune Afrique Online, 23 March 2008, www.jeuneafrique.com/jeune_afrique/article_jeune_afrique.asp?art_cle=LIN23038lutteercasn0.

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