

Al Qaeda in North Africa

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Abstract

With the start of the 2013, a new focus on terrorism has taken center stage. North Africa has now become the new focus for counter-terrorism efforts with the recent Northern Mali Conflict as well as linked attacks to Mali's neighboring regions such as the Amenas Hostage Crisis in Algeria. These attacks have served as a wakeup call to the rest of the world validating what analysts have predicted for so long; that North Africa could become the new battleground for terrorism. To compound these challenges in the face of this new battleground have also come new strategies and tactics employed by insurgent groups within the region. This paper aims to address the current events surrounding the Northern Mali Conflict as well as the potential implications for policy change and counter-terrorist operations.

Key Words: Al Qaeda, AQIM, Mali, Algeria, Amenas Hostage Crisis, Northern Mali Conflict

Introduction

The recent events of Al Qaeda's affiliated group *Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb* have taken the world by surprise. Given that areas within northern Africa have received minimal to no open discussion about their level of impact on the *War on Terror*, it would come as no surprise that these events would appear to be sudden and sporadic. However, the recent occupations of Mali by Al Qaeda as well as other events such as the hostage situation with Algeria on January 16, 2013 are only part of a larger role that terrorism has created within North Africa over several years. The implications of these recent events also stretch beyond simply taking another strong hold for Al Qaeda, with the impact of these recent events having the potential to increase terrorism not just within North Africa, but also within Europe where disenfranchised Muslims adhering to radical Islamic ideology have already begun to carry out their own independent attacks. All of this, combined with isolated intervention strategies from Western nations such as France's intervention within Mali carry further implications for continuing terrorist actions and call for a change in strategy. This change requires a united global effort to stop the threat of terrorism within North Africa, and offers a chance at stopping the spread of terrorism into Europe and the U.S.

Mali: What led to the conflict?

Terrorism within North Africa is nothing new. While it has received less attention than terrorism within Afghanistan and other regions, Al Qaeda's presence within Africa is well established. Much focus has been given towards the Horn of Africa as its proximity to nations such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen, weak governance, and high levels of poverty and crime make them perfect targets for terrorist growth and strong holds (Prendergast & Thomas-Jensen, 2007). Indeed, Mali, a nation that only a year ago was seen as one of the most stable and democratic nations in northern Africa took the world by surprise when Al Qaeda affiliate *Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM) took control of Northern Mali and plunged the nation into the world spotlight (Gilmour, 2012).

The source of this conflict stems from a military coup that began back in March 2012 when soldiers from several military bases across Mali staged a coup led by Amadou Sanogo claiming that the government and senior military personnel had taken part in corrupt practices, looted funds, and failed to provide adequate training for its military to combat the Tuareg rebels; mercenaries that fought for Gaddafi during the Libyan conflict and had turned their attention towards Mali (Gilmour, 2012). In doing so, the rebels were able to take control of several vital towns including Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu (Gilmour, 2012). Following the coup, the Tuareg rebels were able to take advantage of the new weakened Mali government, assuming control of northeast Mali, a territory three times the size of Great Britain (Gilmour, 2012).

To combat the rebels and regain control, the Malian national army had enlisted the help of the Islamic Fundamentalist group *Ansar Eddine*, an organization that holds radical Islamic beliefs including a desire to create an independent Islamic state governed by Sharia law, as well as having close ties to AQIM, (Gilmour, 2012). The assistance of Ansar Eddine and AQIM allowed the Malian military to remove the rebels from Northern Mali, but also gave them control of the rebel territory where strict Sharia law and practices were enforced, as well as the toppling of pagan architecture (ex: mausoleums) and the removal of other national symbols (Gilmour, 2012). Realizing the necessity to stop AQIM, Amadou Sanogo signed a peace treaty with the Malian National Government reinstating its status as a constitutional-republic. However, on two different occasions since the reinstatement of the new transitional government, its leaders have been attacked by riots and political infighting (Gilmour, 2012), a clear sign that they are not capable of handling the new threat from Al Qaeda alone.

Algeria

Algeria, a neighboring state to Mali, has a large stake in the outcome of the Malian conflict. While the recent events occurring with Mali have brought Algeria back into the spotlight, Algeria has had terrorist influences within its nation long before the arrival of Al Qaeda affiliates. Coincidentally, the idea for using an airliner as a "smart bomb" to take out large infrastructures such as on September 11, 2001 came from an attempted attack by Algerian terrorists to use an airliner to crash into the Eiffel Tower in 1994 (Reidel, 2010). Algeria's current involvement with Mali stems from its proximity to it with many key players in the current conflict originating in Algeria. Amongst these is the most vital player within the conflict, Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb, who started out as a regional Salafist terrorist organization and

official became affiliated with Al Qaeda in 2006 (Gilmour, 2012). AQIM's goals have been very well established, having on several occasions publicly announced its intentions.

“AQIM has announced that their specific aim is to expel all westerners in the Sahel and establish an Islamic theocracy with poor countries which have limited resources and weak military forces to react to their insurgency operations. The AQIM is hoping that terrorism activities will destabilize such countries by recruiting extremists to their networks and cells” (Gilmour, 2012).

The recent hostage situation in Algeria on January 16, 2013 in which AQIM terrorists took control of a natural gas facility in Amenas that resulted in the death of over ninety individuals including the terrorists and almost forty foreign hostages outlines this desire to destabilize northern Africa (Jenkins, 2013). From the outset, the attack was seen as a response towards Algeria's assistance with French forces in neighboring Mali. Thus, it would be reasonable to assume that the attacks in Algeria and Mali were related. However, the logistics of the attacks show the doubtfulness of this claim. While Islamist militants have denounced France's role within Mali, going as far as to call them “crusaders” (Jenkins, 2013), the attacks were too well orchestrated to have been arranged for the incidences within Mali (Jenkins, 2013). The attacks were carried out just five days after French forces arrived in Mali, something which would have required months of reconnaissance and planning to carry out (Jenkins, 2013). It is more likely that the attacks were planned out months in advance with the convenience of France's recent intervention within Mali serving as a means to “justify” an attack that was already imminent (Jenkins, 2013).

The attack and the specific targeting of the natural gas facility indicate that the intention behind the attack was part of a larger operation to derail Algeria's economy (Jenkins, 2013). Given that Algeria relies heavily upon oil exports, an attack on a natural gas facility would serve a dual-purpose of attacking Algeria directly and removing foreign investment for fear of further attacks (Jenkins, 2013). This model of derailing a nation's economy fits closely with the typical insurgent strategies that attempt to gain public support through force and intimidation, something that is often employed when there is a lack of initial public support for an insurgent cause. This type of strategy, dubbed the “urban warfare” strategy by Bard O'Neill (2005) holds its advantages in that insurgents can gain public support not through mass appeal, as has been stereotyped by well-known revolutionary insurgents Mao Tse Tung and Che Guevara, but instead can be gained through a people's lack of faith in their own government. This type of strategic thinking bases much of its support on the fact that insurgencies will gain a large level of *passive support* (people who will not offer anything to an insurgency, but will not confront them either) rather than *active support* (people who offer resources to combat the government) because a populace does not necessarily agree with the insurgency, but simply lacks faith that the government can protect them if they stand up to the insurgents.

A Change in Strategy?

With the recent developments within Mali and the employment of insurgent tactics such as the seizing and controlling physical territory, it appears that Al Qaeda has begun to change its strategy. While the presence of Al Qaeda within another region of world may be seen as a

shocking, it is important to understand that areas in North Africa such as Mali, Morocco, and Algeria have long had an Al Qaeda presence within it, and that these nations are simply part of a larger global network that goes from South East Asia through the Middle East through the Horn of Africa into Europe and North America. It is also important to understand that Al Qaeda's role within Mali is however a new step in its strategy in that it is now attempting to take control of Mali and exercise autonomous authority, something which it did not do in Afghanistan. As former UN diplomat Robert Fowler had noted, "Al-Qaida never owned Afghanistan...they do own Northern Mali" (Callimachi, 2012). One must understand that Al Qaeda had previously operated out of Afghanistan under the protection of Mullah Omar and the controlling Taliban of the region (Riedel, 2010), but did not exercise any autonomy over the populace. This lack of control was perhaps best shown when on several occasions the U.S. had asked the Taliban to turn over Osama Bin Laden to them because they were operating as his host, offering protection for Al Qaeda's training camps and cells (Riedel, 2010).

Now the situation has changed. Instead of the traditional "hit and run" tactics that had made Al Qaeda such a complex organization to combat, it has decided to now take regional control. This step emphasizes a key transition for Al Qaeda because these new concepts of control and autonomy are synonymous with traditional insurgent tactics that focus on controlling a particular region or state, something which Al Qaeda was initially known for not employing. Prior to this new change in strategy, Bard O'Neill (2005), a professor at the National Defense University in Washington D.C., had given Al Qaeda its own category of insurgency because the tactics they employed were vastly different from any other insurgency before them. This "transnational" strategy as O'Neill (2005) described was marked by operating from multiple different terrorist cells across the globe, and employing attacks against civilian targets in different countries to achieve their objectives. To emphasize this change in strategy, Al Qaeda's actions within northern Mali have been noted as being similar to tactics employed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, whereby insurgents have exercised their own forms of government and enforcement of Sharia law such as conducting public amputations and flogging women for not covering up (Callimachi, 2012).

One of the primary reasons for this change according to William Young (2013) of the RAND Corporation is due to the fact that the continuing wars within Afghanistan and Iraq, in conjunction with the military strikes in Yemen and Pakistan, have forced Al Qaeda to tap into further resources. Al Qaeda's strategy has always been one that has been challenging to define, initially operating as a transnational terrorist group, this forced change in strategy due to its losses in other parts of the world have highlighted one of its key aspects and what makes Al Qaeda so challenging; its decentralized networks. Unlike the traditional concepts of insurgencies that have been regionally based, Al Qaeda has been able to operate internationally, taking advantage of many of the new technologies of the 21st century to have bases set up in varying countries, from South East Asia to The Middle East, to Northern Africa, and even Europe. This strategy is why Al Qaeda has been able to tap into its resources within Mali while its current resources within the Middle East are wearing down.

While the new strategy of Al Qaeda is something that should be investigated further, a word of caution needs to be understood when it comes to analyzing Al Qaeda within Mali; its influence must be taken "with a grain of salt." As Al Qaeda relies upon networks of supporters

for assistance, local leaders also rely upon Al Qaeda's support and material resources. While there are certainly local leaders of Al Qaeda operating within Mali, others may only be using Al Qaeda for recognition and low levels of support, indicating that Al Qaeda is not carrying out direct orders in every aspect of the Mali conflict. As Michael Shurkim (2013) of the RAND Corporation noted,

“AQIM is clearly insinuating itself in Malian affairs—which is a new development—but that is not necessarily proof that ‘Al Qaeda’ is insinuating itself in Malian politics as part of some broad strategy... Mali's two militant Islamist groups, which have been making common cause with AQIM as of last year, appear to be focused more locally, as many of those who have rallied to their flags probably pursue parochial interests, such as local political rivalries or simple economic opportunism, as opposed to jihad.”

Déjà vu? Lessons learned from Afghanistan

While the events and actions in North Africa have shocked the world with its surprisingly quick transition from stable democratic nations such as Mali into nations heading towards failed states and safe havens for terrorism, this transition is reminiscent of what had occurred over the past half-century in Afghanistan. Similar to the current crisis in Mali, Afghanistan's downfall and path towards terrorism began with a coup d'état that removed Afghanistan's national leader, Zahir Shah, from power in 1973. Before his removal, Afghanistan had fifty years of stable leadership under Shah with a movement towards making Afghanistan a democratic nation under Shah's *Loya Jirga* initiative which attempted to restructure the Afghan government giving it a constitution and a system of checks and balances (Jones, 2010). Following the removal of Shah from power, a series of coups that had attempted to centralize Afghanistan's power had led to destabilization of the nation's government, and allowed for a progressive increase in Soviet influence within Afghanistan's government (Jones, 2010). In response, Afghanistan's government enlisted the help of Islamic fighters known as the Mujahedeen to combat the Soviets and drive them from Afghanistan (Jones, 2010). Following the removal of the Soviets, continued in-fighting between different tribes and soldiers from the Mujahedeen led to the creation of the Taliban who systematically took advantage of Afghanistan, enforcing Sharia Law and removing pagan architecture from their controlled provinces (Jones, 2010).

Afghanistan is being repeated again today. The destabilization of a national government through a coup (Sanogo's military coup), the influx of a foreign army (Tuareg rebels), the enlistment of radical Islamists to fight the foreign soldiers (AQIM), and the subsequent power grab from the radical Islamic faction following the conclusion of the initial conflict (AQIM's current occupation of Northern Mali) all indicate that the lessons learned from Afghanistan need to be understood and applied to Mali. The response from Mali's government and its assisting forces (i.e. France) need to understand how the Taliban was able to regain control of Afghanistan following the U.S. intervention after September 11, 2001.

With the removal of the Taliban from power during *Operation Enduring Freedom*, the Taliban retreated into neighboring Pakistan. Subsequently, the U.S. had decided to maintain a light footprint strategy within Afghanistan allowing Afghanistan's government to have far greater autonomy over how it was going to restructure itself (Jones, 2010). This turned out to be

disastrous as corrupt government officials and inadequate law enforcement was unable to provide basic security for the Afghan people. As a result, in 2006 when the Taliban returned to Afghanistan, many individuals who had hated the Taliban for its practices decided to remain passive and refused to stand up to them because they believed that the government could not protect them from the consequences of resisting the Taliban (Jones, 2010). This gave the Taliban the ability to take control of territory with little resistance and was able to reestablish a strong hold within the region.

This same strategy is being played out right now. AQIM is not attempting to gain public support for their cause, but is instead relying upon complacency and fear to establish itself. Beyond Mali, Algeria is also experiencing the same issues. As was mentioned earlier with the Amenas attack, destabilization of a national economy is part of gaining power through fear. If Algeria's people no longer believe that they can be provided for (economic as well as physical security) the same events of Afghanistan could replay out in North Africa. It is a strategy that has worked for insurgent groups within the past and is now being employed because AQIM knows that it could work again.

Current Threats/Implications: Europe's New Challenges

When discussing the larger implications of Al Qaeda's shift to areas such as Mali, William Young (2013) a former U.S. Intelligence Officer currently working for the RAND Corporation had noted, "What makes their shift into the Levant and the Sahel regions of North Africa particularly dangerous is the proximity to Europe, where it can play to an increasingly frustrated underclass of young, unemployed Muslims, and where it already has a traditional support network." Indeed, Europe has seen an increase of radical Islamic terrorism in the past few years; the London fertilizer plot in 2004, the London bombings on July 7th 2005, three terrorism plots in Denmark between 2005 and 2007, two German terror plots in 2006 and 2007, and the assassination of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004 (Precht, 2007). While Europe has had a well known history of terrorism, especially with secular and economic based motivations, the rise in Islamic terrorism is disturbing. This is because many of the terrorists involved within these recent attacks have operated independently, with the only connecting factors to established terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda being a shared belief in their ideology (Precht, 2007).

These concepts of "homegrown" terrorism can trace their roots back to post-World War II where many Islamic immigrants from across Europe and North Africa who were displaced from the war came to different European nations to seek refuge (Leiken, 2005). During this time period various nations had rejected them, forcing them to congregate amongst their own communities where their traditional customs and practices of their home country were kept (Leiken, 2005). While Europe was not the only area of the world known for this practice, it is important to understand that the concept of a nation founded and built by immigrants did not exist within Europe as in the U.S. due to their vastly different histories. As a result, unlike the U.S. where immigrant customs were eventually absorbed into the mainstream culture, the customs and culture of Islamic immigrants continued to be homogenous amongst its local communities, never entering the mainstream (Leiken, 2005). This belief in being seen as outsiders within Europe has carried over today with the next generations from the post-World War II Immigrants continuing to see themselves as a minority, identifying themselves as part of

their local communities, not citizens of the their host states, holding them in contempt for their treatment (Leiken, 2005). To these individuals, the concepts of radical Islam such as the creation of an Islamic Caliphate and contempt for Western Lifestyles appeal to them, often believing that Western imperialism is what had led to their status as second-class citizens and making arguments that it continues today across the world. Images of Western influence within its nation's foreign policy and world events like the *War on Terror* drive home messages that other Islamic societies are being destroyed by the West, something that they claim to identify with (Leiken, 2005). Even world events such as the Israeli and Palestinian crisis have given this next generation an identity and something to connect with because they view Israel's independence and the removal of native Palestinians as a byproduct of Western imperialism similar to that of their own current minority status (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005).

Thomas Precht (2007) outlines that many of these independent terrorists go through a period of radicalization whereby they begin to develop grievances towards their society or government. The nature of these grievances may be based upon radical Islamic teachings (ex: a dislike of democracy because it runs counter to the Sharia concepts of governance) but their motivations stem from articulable actions taken by their society or government, such as its domestic practices or foreign policies. These individuals then begin a socialization phase whereby they meet with others who hold this same ideology, thus solidifying and verifying their biases. Overtime many of these potential terrorists "drop out" due to a number of factors leaving a small number of remaining "hardened" terrorists who are willing to carry out attacks against their governments. Now while this is certainly disturbing, the challenging aspect of this is the fact that many of these potential terrorists have used resources such as the Internet to gain information and meet with others to begin the radicalization process (Precht, 2007). This has allowed these terrorists to operate with a large level of independence and has spread the radicalization process much faster than the more traditional means of person to person contact such as with the attempted millennium bomber Ahmed Ressam who went through a similar process of radicalization over a period of years before carrying out the attempted bombing (Sageman, 2004).

While many of the terrorists have operated independently, emerging elements of radical terrorism from northern Africa are beginning to show up in Europe as well. For example, both the Madrid train bombings and the assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh was carried out by Moroccan terrorists with heavy beliefs in radical Islam (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005). The close proximity of North Africa and Europe makes the increase in terrorist violence a dangerous spot for future recruitment. With fighting and conflict at Europe's backdoor, the wars that while technically being fought on another continent could set the stage and carry a large level of influence and support for disenfranchised Muslims in Europe. In addition to influencing Islamic terrorism, the new North African conflicts also offer Islamic fighters such as AQIM a chance to use Europe as a base of operations. This has already happened in European countries that are within a few days drive from war regions such as Chechnya and Iraq (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005). Europe has also been able to be used as a central hub to restock and replenish supplies for Islamic fighters within these conflicts, something which could happen with these new conflicts in northern Africa. This central hub concept also poses a greater challenge because future recruitment for these conflicts could stem from the presence and connections made between fighters and the disenfranchised Islamic communities of Europe, further driving home

the point that the conflicts within Mali and the surrounding nations carry implications beyond a simple regional conflict.

To combat European terrorism and prevent Al Qaeda's influence within Europe requires a coordinated effort from the national European governments and the local Islamic populations. Currently there have been several steps taken by different European governments to streamline Muslims into the mainstream culture. For example, France has banned the public display of religious garments such as headscarves and crucifixes within institutions such as public schools (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005). The logic behind such actions is to remove the tensions between different religious factions within France and foster a more secular sense of community thus removing the identity as being a "Muslim within France" to being "a French citizen who is also a Muslim." Where the former creates a sense of minority status, the latter creates a sense of acceptance for who they are, as well as well as commanding respect for a government that is not based upon their own personal religious identity. Despite the initial controversy surrounding the initiative, it was met with a large amount of praise from moderate Muslims within France (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005). Other actions such as within the UK have also attempted to remove the religious and cultural barriers by ensuring that all immigrants understand English and are educated in European History (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005). Other attempts at integration have focused on bringing members of the Muslim faith into government such as the creation of the Council on Muslim Faith within France, as well as trying to foster more "homegrown imams" into Islamic communities rather than relying on foreign imams who may bring with them elements of radicalism or lack of knowledge about their host country (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005).

While these attempts at removing religious and cultural barriers may make sense, it is also predicated upon a concept that removing the Islamic identity from individuals will breed a more secular based view of government and closeness amongst their communities. Indeed, many commentators such as those who advocate for policies banning religious displays in public believe that Islam and European secularism cannot come together (Archick, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005). This is certainly understandable given that elements of Islamic extremism believe that concepts such as democracy and parliamentary rule run counter to true Sharia law. Despite this, it is important to understand that as was noted before, the *idea* (i.e. Salafists beliefs) is secondary to the *connections* when it comes to being radicalized and committing terrorist attacks (Sageman, 2004). While new technologies have helped terrorist make those connections, this also works both ways. Taking potential terrorists away from the connections that lead to terrorism by allowing them to connect with others who can serve as positive reinforcement is an effective way to achieve this. Preventing the radical connections also requires removing those elements that preach and encourage radical actions from the local Islamic communities. Actions such as those by the UK that introduce native imams instead of foreign ones into Islamic communities are such an example. Removing the demonizing of Islamic communities is also a drastic step that needs to be undertaken. While the initiatives such as in France to remove public displays of religious items can be seen as an attempt to remove religious barriers, it also may work counter and be seen as an effort to hide Islam from the greater community, removing any healthy connections with the greater communities. Walking this fine line between religion and integration is crucial because removing the display of religious items and instating policies of integration may run counter and create further hostility as these actions may be seen as national governments forcing

individuals to abandon their religious identities. So while these attempts at removing cultural barriers are certainly amiable, there also needs to be an understanding that these policies may further alienate Islamic community members as well.

Current Threats/Implications: Combating the Imperialist Beliefs

The implications of terrorist support motivated by French intervention into Mali also pose a challenge. Nations within North Africa such as Algeria and Mali have had a long history with France due to its conquests during the 19th century. While both of these nations have become independent (Mali 1960, Algeria 1962), France has still had a large level of influence within the nations. For example, within Mali its official language is French and its currency is based upon the French Franc; the CFA Franc (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). In addition to its currency and language, France has also remained a close trading partner and ally of Mali including direct investment within Mali's infrastructure with a large focus on mining (ex: gold, minerals, etc.) (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

While France and Mali have both been able to improve their nations through each other's cooperation, this close relationship has also bred contempt and accusations of continued imperialism from France. One can look at the statements of the hostage takers in Amenas who called the French "crusaders" (Jenkins, 2013) or the 1994 attempt to destroy the Eifel Tower to see how the level of French influence within Northern Africa has spawned accusations of imperialism and motivations for terrorism. As disheartening as these accusations may be, they also play into Al Qaeda's ideology. Aayman al-Zawahiri, one of the founders of Al Qaeda had based the organizations goals upon the belief that the Middle East was formulated and divided up by imperialistic powers of the Western World, and that elements of this still exist today (ex: the creation of Israel from British controlled Palestine, the establishment of U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia, Western support of secularist leaders within the Middle East, etc.) (Riedel, 2010). As response to this, al-Zawahiri had formulated Al Qaeda to remove Western influences from the Middle East and establish an Ottoman style caliphate, which he viewed as the last true Islamic State operating according to true Sharia Law (Riedel, 2010).

The influence of France within Mali during this conflict may actually help to support Al Qaeda's propaganda and alienate Mali's citizens. As there were already elements and accusations of imperialism from France before, now facing an organization that was created based upon these very beliefs, the insurgents may be able to capitalize on this sentiment and gain supporters. Even nations such as the U.S. who historically have not had the same level of influence over northern Africa as France has been accused of continuing to use nations such as Mali for its own self-interest. For example, in 2007 a U.S. command structure called *Africom* was created to coordinate all military operations on the continent under a unified organization (Gilmour, 2012). This initiative has drawn sharp criticism even from members of *Africom* as a means to build and create U.S. infrastructure within northern Africa and that any interest in stopping terrorism lies within protecting the U.S.'s own investment (Gilmour, 2012). To quote one of *Africom*'s officers who when asked of *Africom*'s primary goals replied, "recognition of the increasing growing importance of Africa-mainly due to terrorists and oil" (Gilmour, 2012).

What Needs to Be Done

In discussing the steps that the U.S. needed to take to prevent terrorism from flourishing within Africa, John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen (2007) remarked,

“The essential lesson of U.S. counterterrorism policy over the last five years--apparently unheeded by the Bush administration--is that in order for local Muslim populations to take the United States' counterterrorism agenda seriously, the United States must take their state-building and power-sharing agendas seriously, too.”

Despite the U.S.'s attempts to draw in support and implement counterterrorism measures within nations such as Mali, it has operated sporadically with its military operations, and from a political standpoint, frequently supported autocrats without looking at the long-term implications (Prendergast & Thomas-Jensen, 2007). This was the case with Mali both post and pre-9/11. Before the September 11th attacks, Mali had received aid money from organizations such as the International Monetary Fund as a means to curtail its growing debt starting in 1982 (Gutelius, 2007). In an effort to gain foreign investors to put money into Mali's economy, the IMF had begun a series of programs to continually privatize its markets, with the results indicating that the majority of Malians were not helped by the initiative but instead still live in poverty (Gutelius, 2007). The primary reason for the failing of the aid money was due to the fact that the Malian elites of the ruling Traoré government at that time had hoarded most of the aid money instead of dispersing it into their economy (Gutelius, 2007). Post 9/11, the U.S. had put in place initiatives to curtail the influence of terrorism by training local armed militias and offering aid to modernize Mali's security forces (Gutelius, 2007). While the military initiative was helpful in better equipping Mali's security forces to combat terrorism, the U.S. also implemented programs that had lost favor with the Malian people. For example, the U.S. had begun a series of large crackdowns on private religious schools in primarily Salafist based communities, something which was seen as an attack on Islam (Gutelius, 2007), as well as cracking down on black markets, something which was used heavily by terrorists within Mali, but also a necessary part of the local economies for many Malian citizens (Gutelius, 2007). To combat this current conflict, any intervention strategies need to learn from these mistakes and focus on improving the local communities rather than focusing on just the military effort to remove terrorists from the region. This is critical as the support, whether it is active or passive, comes from the people of Mali. If assisting nations continue to overlook the larger implications of their actions on the local populations in Mali, they will lose the support of its people.

To combat any claims of imperialism by assisting forces, international organizations such as the United Nations as well as the International Community in general need to lend their support to Mali. France's actions to help Malian people can be dissuaded by Al Qaeda by claims of self-interest (i.e. wanting to protect a nation they have invested money into) rather than altruism. A united effort however by nations and international bodies that do not have any “skin in the game” would dissuade and deter these arguments. While Al Qaeda could still preach and argue that history of today was determined by international actors over a century ago, international organizations within Mali would discredit arguments that foreign intervention would be another form of imperialism.

While Mali needs to be secured and AQIM needs to be removed from the region, Algeria needs to be handled with more of a preventive measure. As has been seen time and time again, failed states lead to terrorism. The recent terror attacks at the oil refinery outline the continued presence of AQIM within Algeria. Algeria's economy is their prime target and is something which needs to be protected. If investors flee and more refineries are attacked, Algeria could lose its top export and give AQIM a chance to control the nation. This strategy has been employed by insurgents for decades because it works; economic security needs to be treated with the same regard in Algeria as physical security in Mali. A stable economy is vital to these nations and has been a source of conflict for years within North Africa. This was the case with Mali who experienced rebellions and conflicts stemming from droughts peaking in 1973 and 1984 as well as low precipitation between 1965 and 1990 (Gutelius, 2007). The local economies that were driven by agriculture, combined with corrupt officials who took control of aid money led to violent conflicts erupting into a rebellion within Mali and neighboring Niger in 1990 (Gutelius, 2007). All of this points to the fact that maintaining Algeria's economy is greatest step that can be taken to prevent a conflict such as within Mali right now. In addition to the potential disaster to Algeria's current economic situation, its proximity to Mali is also troublesome. Given that many core individuals within the Mali conflict came from Algeria, the threat of it being used as an operating point for AQIM and other terrorists cannot be understated. If its borders remain unsecured, Algeria could be used as a safe haven if AQIM is driven from Mali. This strategy was employed by the Taliban who used Pakistan as a safe haven after being driven from Afghanistan which allowed them to resupply and emerge again.

The underlining point of this is to understand that the mistakes that have been made in the past need to be analyzed and understood. These strategies, while new for organizations such as Al Qaeda, are not something new in general terms. Other terrorist organizations have employed tactics of derailing economies and using weak borders to find safe havens from conflict. Applying these concepts of the past and using them effectively within the modern context lies the key to preventing future conflict and the loss of North Africa to radical Islamists.

Conclusion

The role of Northern Africa for Al Qaeda should not come as a surprise. Its actions have continued the pattern of traditional insurgencies, more so now with its new focus on conquering territory, than before when it operated in a "hit and run" fashion. Nations such as Mali and Algeria have established but weak governments who serve as the perfect breeding ground for contempt from their people. These citizens need only remain passive in the face of insurgency, as support for organizations like Al Qaeda within that region have already shown itself to operate in a similar fashion to the Taliban in Afghanistan. It is then reasonable to assume that they will thrive off of the Malian citizens' doubts in their own government's security and operate within Mali uncontested. Intervention into the area to combat this threat must come in the form of unified support from the international community and must first give the people belief that they can be protected. Without this belief, their fear of challenging Al Qaeda cannot be overcome. Al Qaeda does not have public support; committing forced amputations, floggings, and changing a nation's culture through force will not give them that. However, it is not what they have to offer, but what Mali lacks; a stable government and protection of citizenry that will allow them to operate without contention. If Mali can receive the security and reassurance that its people will

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be protected, Al Qaeda will not gain any further support and can be contested and beaten on the battlefield because the greater war for public support will have already been won.

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