

**TERRORISM IN NORTH AFRICA: AN EXAMINATION  
OF THE THREAT**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
COUNTERTERRORISM  
AND INTELLIGENCE**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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## **TERRORISM IN NORTH AFRICA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE THREAT**

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**Wednesday, March 29, 2017**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m., in room HVC-210, Capitol Visitor Center, Hon. Peter T. King (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives King, Hurd, Gallagher, Rice, and Keating.

Mr. KING. Good morning. The Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence will come to order. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony from four experts on counterterrorism and terror groups in North Africa.

I want to welcome Ranking Member Rice and any other Member of the subcommittee that appears this morning. I understand that several will be showing up. I express my appreciation to the witnesses who have all traveled to be here today. I recognize myself for an opening statement.

During today's hearing, we will focus on terror groups operating in and across North Africa, their intent to attack the United States, and their capability to do so. While Iraq and Syria are the current epicenter of the Islamist extremist movement, that certainly has not always been the case, nor will it be in the future.

The threats posed by ISIS and al-Qaeda are dynamic and are expected to increase as ISIS loses ground in Iraq and Syria, and al-Qaeda seeks to reclaim its status as the leader of the global jihadi movement. In this context, North Africa, which sits on the edge of Europe, has emerged as an important theater in the war on terror.

Al-Qaida and ISIS elements are increasingly active and competitive, and have both expanded their reach deep into the continent. Earlier this month, al-Qaeda factions in the Sahel reconciled their internal disputes and formed a single movement called the "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims," pledging their loyalty to AQIM leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel.

Additionally, the emergence of ISIS in the Greater Sahara, which was informally recognized by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2016, confirmed the expansion of ISIS offshoots from Tunisia, Libya, and Sinai into the Sahel. Terror groups continue to reap the benefits of the permissive environment created out of political instability and large swaths of ungoverned space.

As of March 6 of this year, the State Department cautioned that terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and ISIS affiliates, are very active in North Africa, have demonstrated the ability to conduct attacks in the region. The U.S. Government remains, “highly concerned about possible attacks against U.S. citizens, facilities, and businesses.”

The *Long War Journal* reports that al-Qaeda affiliates launched over 250 attacks in the Maghreb and Sahel regions in 2016, a more than 150 percent increase from the reported 106 attacks in 2015.

Some argue that terror groups in the region are nationalists and do not pose a threat to the United States. However, 3 months ago, the Pentagon confirmed that airstrikes on an ISIS stronghold in Libya were directed against, “external plotters, who were actively planning operations against our allies in Europe.”

Additionally, the return of thousands of battle-hardened foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria to their home countries in North Africa will likely elevate the threat level in the region.

The goals for today’s hearings are to get a status update from you experts on the activities of the various terror groups, and the possible threat they may pose to the United States in the present and the future. Also to solicit your expert advice on what is working in our counterterrorism strategy and what more needs to be done as the Trump administration is evaluating current efforts.

I want to thank all of you for your work in this field, for appearing here today. I look forward to your testimony.

[The statement of Mr. King follows:]

STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN PETER T. KING

MARCH 29, 2017

During today’s hearing, we will focus on terror groups operating in and across North Africa, their intent to attack the United States and their capability to do so. While Iraq and Syria are the current epicenter of the Islamist extremism movement, that certainly has not always been the case nor will it be in the future.

The threat posed by ISIS and al-Qaeda are dynamic and are expected to increase as ISIS loses ground in Iraq and Syria and al-Qaeda seeks to reclaim its status as the leader of the global Jihadi movement.

In this context, North Africa, which sits on the edge of Europe, has emerged as an important theatre in the war on terror.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS elements are increasingly active—and competitive—and have both expanded their reach deep into the continent. Earlier this month, al-Qaeda factions in the Sahel reconciled their internal disputes and formed a single movement called “Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims,” pledging their loyalty to AQIM leader, Abdelmalik Droukdel. Additionally, the emergence of “ISIS in the Greater Sahara,” which was informally recognized by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2016, confirmed the expansion of ISIS offshoots from Tunisia, Libya, and the Sinai into the Sahel.

Terror groups continue to reap the benefits of the permissive environment created out of political instability and large swaths of ungoverned space. As of March 6, 2017, the State Department cautioned that terrorist groups, including AQIM and ISIS affiliates, are very active in North Africa, have demonstrated the capability to conduct attacks in the region, and the U.S. Government remains “highly concerned about possible attacks against U.S. citizens, facilities, and businesses.”

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My goals for today's hearing are to get a status update from experts on the activities of the various terror groups and the possible threat they may pose to the United States in the present and future. And to solicit your expert advice on what's working in our counterterrorism strategy and what more needs to be done as the Trump administration is evaluating current efforts.

I want to thank you all for your work in this field and for appearing here today. I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. KING. Now I present the Ranking Member, my colleague from New York, Kathleen Rice. Miss Rice.

Miss RICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for joining us here today.

About 2 years ago I had the opportunity to travel to Africa on a Congressional delegation that was led by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and we were able to meet with government leaders and security officials in Tunisia, Chad, Djibouti, Kenya, and Senegal.

That trip was just a few months after I was sworn into Congress and joined this committee. It was an instructive experience for me because while groups like ISIS may have dominated headlines at the time, as they often do now, it is critical that we never lose sight of the fact that the threat of terrorism doesn't start and stop with ISIS.

That trip made it clear to me that the threat of terrorism emerging in Africa is very real and cannot be ignored or overlooked until it generates more headlines. We need to confront that threat head on, and our ability to do so depends heavily on the strength of partnerships with leaders who fight on the front lines against these terrorist groups every day.

We don't have to look far to see how serious a threat we are dealing with in Africa, particularly in North Africa. A truck bomb was detonated last year near a police training college in Libya killing 60 policeman and wounding about 200 others.

A commercial plane bombing in Egypt in October 2015 killed 224 people. An attack at a tourist resort in Tunisia in June 2015 left 38 dead, and of course the attack on the U.S. embassy and CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya, which left 4 U.S. citizens dead, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens.

While ISIS has taken credit for many recent attacks, al-Qaeda operatives and other violent extremist groups have had a presence in North Africa for almost 2 decades.

For example, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM, had primarily operated in the northern coastal areas of Algeria and in parts of the desert regions of southern Algeria, but in recent years has expanded into Libya and Tunisia.

AQIM claimed responsibility for many terror attacks in the region, and has been responsible for kidnappings for ransom and smuggling. Most concerning, according to U.S. officials, AQIM has focused on local and Western targets in North and West Africa, including U.S. interests and personnel by often urging supporters to target U.S. embassies and U.S. Ambassadors.

Earlier this month, the head of the U.S. Africa Command testified before the Senate and characterized the instability in Libya and North Africa as potentially the most significant near-term threat to U.S. and allies' interests on the continent.

Protecting our assets and people in this region is absolutely a National security priority for our country right now, but I am concerned that this administration doesn't seem to recognize that.

President Trump's so-called America First budget seems to put Africa last, proposing deep budget cuts to the continent. In fact, many have speculated that confronting the threat of terrorism in Libya and throughout the region will be a low priority for this administration.

By proposing to cut the Department of State's international affairs funding by one-third, President Trump has signaled that he is not interested in maintaining long-standing international partnerships, which are crucial for U.S. diplomacy and development across the globe, including in North Africa.

As I said, I believe that our success in confronting the threat in Africa depends on the success of our partners leading this fight on the ground. And while President Trump may not have a sophisticated understanding of the value of diplomacy, we cannot allow that to jeopardize the partnerships we have built in North Africa.

The terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland since 9/11 has continued to evolve, and our counterterrorism policies must evolve as well. They cannot be singularly focused on prevention only within our borders.

It is imperative that the United States works with our allies to improve counterterrorism and intelligence efforts in North Africa, as well as investing in education, economic development, and free and open civil societies in order to root out many of the drivers of violent extremism in the region.

The level of U.S. funding, resources, and personnel dedicated to these efforts must continue, if not increase, in order to limit the risk and progress of terrorist groups in the region.

Again, we cannot underestimate the value of building and strengthening local and international partnerships to combat terrorism and radicalization in North Africa. International cooperation and partnerships are the foundation of our counterterrorism efforts.

I look forward to a robust discussion with our witnesses today about the threat of terrorism and radicalization in North Africa and how we can shape U.S. policy to support our partners and defeat our enemies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Rice follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER KATHLEEN M. RICE

MARCH 29, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. And thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

About 2 years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to Africa on a Congressional delegation led by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and meet with government leaders and security officials in Tunisia, Chad, Djibouti, Kenya, and Senegal.

That trip was just a few months after I was sworn in to Congress and joined this committee, and it was an instructive experience for me. Because while groups like ISIS may have dominated headlines at the time, as they often do now, it's critical that we never lose sight of the fact that the threat of terrorism doesn't start and stop with ISIS.

That trip made it clear to me that the threat of terrorism emerging in Africa is very real and cannot be ignored or overlooked until it generates more headlines. We



need to confront that threat head-on, and our ability to do so depends heavily on the strength of partnerships with leaders who fight on the front lines against these terrorist groups every day.

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A truck bomb was detonated last year near a police training college in Libya, killing 60 policemen and wounding about 200 others. A commercial plane bombing in Egypt in October 2015 killed 224 people. An attack at a tourist resort in Tunisia in June 2015 left 38 dead. And of course, the attack on the U.S. Embassy and CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya which left four U.S. citizens dead, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens.

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For example, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb—AQIM—had primarily operated in the northern coastal areas of Algeria and in parts of the desert regions of southern Algeria, but in recent years has expanded into Libya and Tunisia.<sup>1</sup> AQIM claimed responsibility for many terror attacks in the region and has been responsible for kidnappings for ransom and smuggling.<sup>2</sup>

Most concerning, according to U.S. officials, AQIM has focused on local and Western targets in North and West Africa, including U.S. interests and personnel, by often urging supporters to target U.S. embassies and U.S. ambassadors.<sup>3 4</sup>

Earlier this month, the head of the U.S. Africa Command, testified before the Senate and characterized the instability in Libya and North Africa as potentially “the most significant near-term threat to U.S. and allies’ interests on the continent . . .”.

Protecting our assets and people in this region is absolutely a National security priority for our country right now—but I'm concerned that this administration doesn't seem to recognize that.

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By proposing to cut the Department of State's international affairs funding by one third, President Trump has signaled that he is not interested in maintaining longstanding international partnerships, which are crucial for U.S. diplomacy and development across the globe, including in North Africa.

As I said, I believe that our success in confronting the threat in Africa depends on the success of our partners leading this fight on the ground. And while President Trump may not have a sophisticated understanding of the value of diplomacy, we cannot allow that to jeopardize the partnerships we've built in North Africa.

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The level of U.S. funding, resources, and personnel dedicated to these efforts must continue, if not increase, in order to limit the risk and progress of terrorist groups in the region.

Again, we cannot underestimate the value of building and strengthening local and international partnerships to combat terrorism and radicalization in North Africa. International cooperation and partnerships are the foundation of our counterterrorism efforts.

I look forward to a robust discussion with our witnesses today about the threat of terrorism and radicalization in North Africa and how we can shape U.S. policy to support our partners and defeat our enemies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

**Mr. KING.** Thank you, Ranking Member.

<sup>1</sup>*Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)*, National Counterterrorism Center, <https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqim.html>.

<sup>2</sup>*Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al Murabitoun*. Alexis Arieff & Tomas F. Husted. Congressional Research Service. 25 November 2015.

<sup>3</sup>Id.

<sup>4</sup>Id.

Other Members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record. We are pleased to have, as I mentioned before, a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this important topic. All the witnesses are reminded that their written statement will be submitted for the record.

Our first witness is Dr. J. Peter Pham. Dr. Pham is vice president for Research and Regional Initiatives at the Atlantic Council, as well as director of the Council's Africa Center. Prior to joining the council in 2011, Dr. Pham was a tenured associate professor of justice studies, political science, and Africana studies at James Madison University where he was director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs.

He is the author of more than 300 essays and books. He contributes to a number of a publications and regularly appears as a commentator on U.S. and international broadcasts and print media.

Dr. Pham served as head of Africa and Development Issues for the Presidential campaign of Senator McCain in 2008 and co-chair of the Africa Policy team for the Presidential campaign of Governor Romney in 2012. He currently serves as chair of the Africa Working Group of the John Hay Initiative.

Dr. Pham has been a trusted advisor to this committee, and has testified several times on critical security issues in Africa. Dr. Pham, it is great to have you back, and you are now recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF J. PETER PHAM, VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES, DIRECTOR FOR THE AFRICA CENTER, ATLANTIC COUNCIL**

Mr. PHAM. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I would like to begin by thanking you not only for the specific opportunity to testify before you today on the subject of terrorism in North Africa, but also for the sustained attention which the U.S. House of Representatives, and this panel in particular, has given to this challenge.

In its oversight capacity, you have been very much ahead of the curve over the course of the last decade-and-a-half, and it has been my singular privilege to have contributed, however modestly, to this important effort.

Since my esteemed colleagues will be delving deeply into the threat in North Africa posed by al-Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State and their affiliates, I will concentrate primarily on the threat from North Africa, focusing on the danger posed by these groups in and of themselves, as well as in their competition with each other.

The continuing threat posed by the various jihadist groups operating in the Sahel is the result of their exploitation of local conflicts, including socioeconomic and political marginalization, as well as the fragile condition of the many states affected.

In some cases, setbacks spur the extremists to adapt new strategies that result in renewed vigor. A good example being the fragmentation of AQIM's organization in the Sahel in the wake of the French-led intervention in Mali, and the subsequent multiplication

of factions, some of which are organized along ethnic lines, that facilitate both the members blending into local populations, and their making further inroads among them.

Arguably, the Sahel, rather than the Maghreb, where, with the exception of Libya, there are strong states that have shown their ability to resist al-Qaeda and ISIS encroachments, the Sahel is the region in Africa most at risk; especially if hordes of battle-hardened fighters return to the continent from the short-lived caliphate in the Levant and linked up with others of their ilk displaced from Sirte and other places on the Mediterranean littoral, and increasingly make their way into the Fezzan and other points south.

It is no accident that the Sahel is, if not the poorest, certainly one of the poorest majority Muslim regions in the world. It is also home to the largest expanse of contiguous ungoverned spaces on the African continent.

Many of the governments in the region are weak in their capacity to assert authority, much less provide real services beyond their capital cities and a smattering of urban centers is extremely limited.

These fragile states present the jihadist both a vulnerability to exploit in the short term and an opportunity to create a new hub for operations in the long term, a characteristic shared not only by ISIS-aligned groups in Africa, like Boko Haram, but also al-Qaeda affiliates on the continent like AQIM and further afield, Somalia's al-Shabaab, is their almost uncanny resilience founded in part on the flexibility with which they can put aside differences and join forces in ever shifting combinations.

Moreover, apparent splits among the extremist groups can perversely lead to increased violence, heightening the threat.

For example, the much-valued schism within Boko Haram, formally aligned with ISIS since early 2015, between those militants loyal to long-time leader Abubakar Shekau and those following Abu Musab al-Barnawi, whom ISIS appointed as the new Governor of its West Africa province last August may, as I saw in November when I traveled to the battle front in northeastern Nigeria with former AFRICOM commander General Carter Ham and others embedded within Nigerian armor units.

That this may be contributing to the intensification rather than the diminution of violence as both factions try to outdo each other in staging attacks, with al-Barnawi's faction gaining momentum, not only because of the defeats of Shekau's faction suffered at the hands of Nigerian forces, but also because of foreign fighters and other resources flowing in thanks to the ISIS affiliation.

A similar phenomenon may also be at work in the competition between al-Qaeda-linked groups and ISIS in the Sahel. In late October, for example, ISIS confirmed they had accepted the allegiance of Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, a one-time commander within AQIM's al-Murabitun, who along with a group of fighters pledged themselves to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who designated them his greater Sahara division.

What is interesting is that al-Sahrawi first made bay'a to the self-styled caliph more than a year ago, but his oath of fealty was only accepted after he carried out a string of attacks in the border lands of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

This broad survey permits us to draw a number of conclusions about U.S. response to terrorism in Africa and the possible threats posed to U.S. persons and interests abroad, as well as to the American homeland, especially from jihadists coming out of North Africa and penetrating Europe.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the subcommittee, there is no doubt that ISIS and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in the northern part of Africa are poised to wreak considerable havoc across the continent as they seek to regroup in the ungoverned spaces of the Sahel, threatening not only the countries immediately impacted, but also affecting the interests and security of the United States and its allies across the region.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the Members of the subcommittee for your attention. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Pham follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF J. PETER PHAM

MARCH 29, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Rice, distinguished Members of the subcommittee: I would like to begin by thanking you not only for the specific opportunity to testify before you today on the subject of terrorism in North Africa, but also for the sustained attention the U.S. House of Representatives has, in general, given to this challenge. In its oversight capacity, the House has been very much ahead of the curve over the course of the last decade-and-a-half and it has been my singular privilege to have contributed, however modestly, to this important effort.

It was at a 2005 briefing organized by the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation of the then-Committee on International Relations, that al-Shabaab was first mentioned as a threat not only to the security of Somalia, but also to the wider East Africa region and, indeed, the United States. The following year, a joint hearing of the same Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation and the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations was among the very first instances of public recognition by one of the two political branches of our government of the expanding crisis in the Horn of Africa occasioned by the takeover of Somalia by Islamist forces, including al-Shabaab.

And, of course, it was this Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism of the Committee on Homeland Security that, in 2011, convened the very first Congressional hearing on Boko Haram. I also had the privilege of testifying on that occasion when, once again, the Legislative branch used its oversight prerogatives to shine a light on what was then a poorly understood threat. At that time, Boko Haram was considered so obscure that the all the participants at the event, held to discuss a bipartisan report by the subcommittee staff on the threat posed by the militant group, could have convened in the proverbial broom closet. Sadly, our analysis proved prescient and, rather than fading away as some dismissively suggested that it would, Boko Haram went on to pose an even greater menace, not only to Nigeria and its people, but to their neighbors in West Africa as well as to international security writ large.

In each of these cases and, indeed, others that could be cited, there is a recurring trope that emerges time and again: Terrorism in Africa generally gets short shrift and, when attention is focused on specific groups or situations that appear to be emerging challenges, the threat is either dismissed entirely or minimized—until the “unthinkable” happens and tragedy strikes.

THE CONTEXT OF TERRORISM IN AFRICA AND THE THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES AND ITS INTERESTS

In considering the dynamic threat posed by al-Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), their various affiliates, and other jihadist groups in Africa, it is worth recalling that Africa had been a theater for terrorist operations, including those directed against the United States, long before the attacks of September 11, 2001, on the homeland focused attention on what had hitherto been regions seemingly peripheral

to the strategic landscape, at least as most American policy makers and analysts perceived it.

If one takes as a definition of terrorism the broadly accepted description offered by the United Nations General Assembly 1 year after the East Africa bombings—“criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes”—terrorism can be said to be wide-spread in Africa, although it has largely been a domestic, rather than transnational, affair. However, just because the majority of actors and the incidents they are responsible for are domestic to African countries does not mean that they cannot and do not evolve into international threats when, in fact, that is the trajectory many, if not most, aspire to and which quite a few have indeed succeeded in achieving in recent years.

The first post-9/11 iteration of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, released a year after the attacks on the American homeland, raised the specter that “weak states . . . can pose as great a danger to our National interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.”<sup>1</sup> Extremism, however, requires opportunity if it is to translate radical intentionality into terrorist effect. One leading African security analyst succinctly summarized the situation in the following manner:

“The opportunity targets presented by peacekeepers, aid and humanitarian workers, donors and Western NGO’s active in the continent are lucrative targets of sub-national terrorism and international terrorism. Africa is also replete with potentially much higher-value targets ranging from the massive oil investments (often by U.S. companies) in the Gulf of Guinea to the burgeoning tourist industry in South Africa.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus there is a very real terrorist risk to U.S. persons and interests—a risk that is increasing with time if one looks at its three constituent elements: Threat, the frequency or likelihood of adverse events; vulnerability, the likelihood of success of a particular threat category against a particular target; and cost, the total impact of a particular threat experienced by a vulnerable target, including both the “hard costs” of actual damages and the “soft costs” to production, the markets, reputation, etc. In short, the combination of these three factors—threat, vulnerability, and cost—ought to elevate not inconsiderably the overall risk assessment in Africa.

And this last point is not lost upon those who wish us harm. Dating back to at least the period when Osama bin Laden himself found refuge in Sudan, the leading strategists of Islamist terrorism have speculated about the potential opportunities to establish cells, recruit members, obtain financing, and find safe haven offered by the weak governance capacities and other vulnerabilities of African states. In fact, it has been noted that al-Qaeda’s first act against the United States came several years before the embassy bombings when it attempted to insert itself in the fight against the American-led humanitarian mission in Somalia. Moreover, one of the most systematic expositions of the particular allure of the continent to terrorists came from al-Qaeda’s on-line magazine, *Sada al-Jihad* (“Echo of Jihad”). The June 2006 issue of that publication featured an article by one Abu Azzam al-Ansari entitled “Al-Qaeda is Moving to Africa,” in which the author asserted:

“There is no doubt that al-Qaeda and the holy warriors appreciate the significance of the African regions for the military campaigns against the Crusaders. Many people sense that this continent has not yet found its proper and expected role and the next stages of the conflict will see Africa as the battlefield.”

<sup>1</sup> The most recent iteration of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, released February 6, 2015, by the previous administration couched U.S. strategic objectives in Africa largely in terms of broader development goals, rather than traditional security concerns which were emphasized in earlier documents: “Africa is rising. Many countries in Africa are making steady progress in growing their economies, improving democratic governance and rule of law, and supporting human rights and basic freedoms. Urbanization and a burgeoning youth population are changing the region’s demographics, and young people are increasingly making their voices heard. But there are still many countries where the transition to democracy is uneven and slow with some leaders clinging to power. Corruption is endemic and public health systems are broken in too many places. And too many governments are responding to the expansion of civil society and free press by passing laws and adopting policies that erode that progress. On-going conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic, as well as violent extremists fighting governments in Somalia, Nigeria, and across the Sahel all pose threats to innocent civilians, regional stability, and our National security.”

<sup>2</sup> Jakkie Cilliers, “Terrorism and Africa,” *African Security Review* 12, no. 4 (2003): 100.

With a certain analytical rigor, Abu Azzam then proceeded to enumerate and evaluate what he perceived to be significant advantages to al-Qaeda shifting terrorist operations to Africa, including: The fact that jihadist doctrines have already been spread within the Muslim communities of many African countries; the political and military weakness of African governments; the wide availability of weapons; the geographical position of Africa vis-a-vis international trade routes; the proximity to old conflicts against “Jews and Crusaders” in the Middle East as well as new ones like Darfur, where the author almost gleefully welcomed the possibility of Western intervention; the poverty of Africa which “will enable the holy warriors to provide some finance and welfare, thus, posting there some of their influential operatives”; the technical and scientific skills that potential African recruits would bring to the jihadist cause; the presence of large Muslim communities, including ones already embroiled conflict with Christians or adherents of traditional African religions; the links to Europe through North Africa “which facilitates the move from there to carry out attacks”; and the fact that Africa has a wealth of natural resources, including hydrocarbons and other raw materials, which are “very useful for the holy warriors in the intermediate and long term.” Abu Azzam concluded his assessment by sounding an ominous note:

“In general, this continent has an immense significance. Whoever looks at Africa can see that it does not enjoy the interest, efforts, and activity it deserves in the war against the Crusaders. This is a continent with many potential advantages and exploiting this potential will greatly advance the jihad. It will promote achieving the expected targets of Jihad. Africa is a fertile soil for the advance of jihad and the jihadi cause.”

While much has been made by some academics about the supposed lack of appeal which the jihadist ideology and approaches of al-Qaeda and ISIS exercise among different African peoples and communities, it is my contention that this analysis underestimates the attractive power of the reputation of these jihadist movements, especially when the extremist doctrine—for which years of ample propaganda by missionaries funded from abroad has prepared the terrain, however intentionally or unintentionally is associated with the apparent battlefield success—as was the case, for example, early on for ISIS—and harnessed to local grievances. In fact, the conflation of local concerns and global narratives has been an important milestone in the evolution of various African militant groups, providing the leaders with a platform whereupon to seek support and legitimacy above and beyond the confines of the struggle they had hitherto been engaged. This has clearly been the case with the transformation of the Algerian Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC, “Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat”) into al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)<sup>3</sup> and Boko Haram’s decision to pledge allegiance to ISIS and brand itself as Wilayat al Sudan al Gharbi (“[Islamic State] Province in the West Land of the Blacks,” or “Islamic State West Africa Province,” ISWAP).<sup>4</sup>

It was clearly a mistake for many a decade ago to have dismissed Abu Azzam’s analysis as devoid of operational effect and it would certainly be foolhardy to do so now. In fact, we are here today not only because this subcommittee has been commendably diligent in maintaining its vigilance, but because, in point of fact, Abu Azzam was very correct: Africa is indeed “fertile soil for the advance of jihad and the jihadi cause.”

#### THE CURRENT THREAT FROM NORTH AFRICA

Since my esteemed colleagues whom the subcommittee has invited will delve deeply into the threat in North Africa posed by al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the affiliates, I will concentrate primarily on the threat from North Africa, focusing on the danger posed by these groups in and of themselves as well as in their competition with each other.

With respect to North Africa itself, the Maghreb is home to some of the longest-running terrorist campaigns on the African continent, a situation that has become all the more combustible in recent years with the emergence of ISIS “provinces” amid the disintegration of Libya, alongside preexisting groups like AQIM and still other Islamist bands which emerged in the wake of the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi’s dictatorship. The presence of jihadist entities on the very shores of the

<sup>3</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 240–254; and idem, “The Dangerous ‘Pragmatism’ of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 2, no. 1 (January–June 2011): 15–29.

<sup>4</sup> See idem, “Boko Haram: The Strategic Evolution of the Islamic State’s West Africa Province,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 7, no. 1 (2016): 1–18.

Mediterranean Sea is not just happenstance but also serves to emphasize—as, no doubt, the terrorists intend to underscore—not only the threat posed to the vital, but narrow, sea lanes nearby, but also the proximity of the violence to Europe itself. It is certainly a point that America and the other top advanced economies, when they convene for the Group of Seven (G7) summit in May, which meeting is focused on Africa this year, would do well to recall—and not simply, as some of our European partners would like, discuss the challenges of migration.

Fortunately, commensurate with the challenges in this region, the international community also has solid allies with which to work on not just combatting terrorism, but countering its extremist roots. Notable among these partners is Morocco, a long-standing “major non-NATO ally” of the United States, whose aggressive, multi-pronged approach to countering radical ideology and terrorism has much to commend it as does the kingdom’s efforts to assist other countries in North and West Africa in the same fight. The potential of the U.S.-Morocco Framework for Cooperation, signed during the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in 2014 and aimed at developing Moroccan training experts as well as jointly training civilian security and counterterrorism forces with other partners in the Maghreb and the Sahel in recognizing a “triangular” approach, needs to be better appreciated and developed.

Beyond the Maghreb itself, the Sahel, the belt connecting North Africa and West Africa, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and straddling ancient trade and migration routes, is an almost ideal environment for extremist groups with transnational ambitions, whether ISIS fighters smarting from defeats on the battlefields of Iraq and Syria or al-Qaeda militants seeking to reassert the pre-eminence of the organization within the global jihadist movement. The region is strategically important for several reasons, including its role as a bridge between the Arab Maghreb and black Sub-Saharan Africa as well as its important energy reserves, both renewable and non-renewable, and other natural resources. Moreover, the Sahel touches several countries—including Algeria, Nigeria, and Sudan—with serious security challenges of their own that could easily spill over their borders. In fact, some scholars have argued that the Sahara and the Sahel form “a single space of movement” which, for purposes of the geography of terrorism, “should be considered as a continuum, something that the territorial approach of states and geopolitics prevents us from understanding”<sup>5</sup>—a point which policy makers and analysts would do well to take to heart. In point of fact, not only has the Sahel been for centuries literally the conduit over which arms, fighters, and ideologies have flowed back and forth across the Sahara, but it has clearly emerged in recent times as a battlespace in its own right.

The continuing threat posed by the various jihadist groups operating in the Sahel is the result of their exploitation of local conflicts, including social, economic, and political marginalization, as well as the fragile condition of many of the states affected, which is often manifested both in low capacity to resist overall and a tendency toward ham-fisted responses that aggravate grievances. In some cases, defeat spurs the extremists to adapt new strategies that result in renewed vigor, a good example being the fragmentation of AQIM’s organization in the Sahel in the wake of the French-led intervention in Mali and the subsequent multiplication of factions, some of which, like the ethnic-Fulani (or Peul) Macina Liberation Front which freed nearly a hundred detained militants in a jailbreak in early December, are organized along ethnic lines that facilitate both the members’ blending into local populations and their making further inroads among them.<sup>6</sup> In other instances, the manifest failure to achieve political settlements propel the resurgence of otherwise weakened militant groups.

Arguably the Sahel, rather than the Maghreb where, with the exception of Libya, there are strong states that have shown their ability to resist not only al-Qaeda, but also ISIS, encroachments, is the region in Africa most at risk, especially if hordes of battle-hardened fighters return to the continent from the short-lived “caliphate” in the Levant and link up with others of their ilk displaced from Sirte and other places on the Mediterranean littoral and increasingly making their way to the Fezzan and other points south.

It is no accident that the Sahel is, if not the poorest, certainly one of the poorest majority-Muslim regions in the world. It is also home to the largest expanse of contiguous ungoverned spaces on the African continent: Many of the governments in

<sup>5</sup> Olivier Walther and Denis Retaille, *Sahara or Sahel? The Fuzzy Geography of Terrorism in West Africa* (Luxembourg: CEPS/INSTEAD, 2010), 11.

<sup>6</sup> The rise in militancy among some Fulani is not limited to the Sahel proper. There is growing evidence of a significant acceleration in attacks in Nigeria’s Middle Belt. See *21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, Nigeria: Fractured and Forgotten* (2016), available at <http://www.standwithnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Nigeria-Fractured-and-Forgotten.pdf>.

the region are weak and their capacity to assert authority—much less provide real services—beyond their capital cities and a smattering of urban centers is extremely limited. These fragile states present the jihadists both a vulnerability to exploit in the short term and an opportunity to create a new hub for operations over the long term.

In Mali, for example, what started in late 2011 and early 2012 as a rebellion by the disaffected Tuareg population led to the overthrow of state authority in the country's three northernmost provinces with a combined territory the size of France and, following the marginalization of the ethnic separatists by their erstwhile allies from several jihadist groups, the entire area falling under the sway of AQIM. Only a timely French-led military intervention in early 2013 forestalled the total collapse of the Malian state, although again, the situation remains fragile as the fact that the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the country is the deadliest on-going blue-helmeted operation in the world underscores. Despite being mauled by Operation Serval and, subsequently, hounded by French and U.S. Special Operations Forces in the region, AQIM has bounced back to stage a series of deadly attacks last year, including spectacular hits on luxury hotels in two neighboring countries, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, that had previously not been hit by terrorists. Burkina Faso suffered another attack in mid-December, with 12 members of the country's special anti-terrorism unit killed in an assault on a military base near the Malian border. Even where they may not currently pose an existential threat to the states affected, these attacks from deep in the Sahel can nonetheless have a disproportionate impact on their fortunes. Côte d'Ivoire may be heralded as Africa's new economic powerhouse, with a diversified economy and growth in 2016 of 8.5 percent, the second-highest in the world, but more attacks like the one in last year by AQIM can still scare off foreign investors who are just beginning to discover the country's potential.

The stakes are even higher for country like Nigeria. Africa's most populous country slipped into recession last year, losing the distinction it gained only 3 years ago as the continent's biggest economy, and continued insecurity from jihadist threats certainly do not help. After years of ceding ground to Boko Haram, so much so that by 2014 the group had consolidated its hold over a territory larger than Belgium and proclaimed a self-styled "emirate," the Nigerian armed forces adopted a new strategy and began fighting back. While the counterattack began in the waning days of former President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, things really began to change after Muhammadu Buhari, a retired major-general and former military ruler, won a historic (and decisive) election victory over the incumbent in March 2015, in part by promising to defeat the militants. Cashiering his predecessor's military chiefs shortly after taking office, Buhari installed new commanders, including a chief of army staff, Lieutenant-General Tukur Yusuf Buratai, who is a native of Borno, the epicenter of the insurgency, and moved command headquarters close to the fighting. Since then, in concert with a multinational force from neighboring countries, the Nigerian military has pursued an aggressive strategy, combining an intensive air campaign with a surge of troops on the ground, that gradually pushed Boko Haram out of the towns it had previously occupied and, increasingly, in remote hideouts like "Camp Zero," the base in the remote Sambisa Forest that fell to government forces 2 days before Christmas last year.

Along the way, as I had the opportunity to witness first-hand last November when I toured the battlefield, the Nigerian army also took on the task of not only providing security to the populations it liberated from the militants' dominion, but also, until aid groups and development organizations returned, providing humanitarian relief, medical assistance, and even education and livelihood training. For example, the civil-military operations carried out by battalion I spent time with in Pulka, a key crossroads town just a few kilometers from what were at the time Boko Haram positions in the Sambisa Forest, were critical not only to the well-being of the community, but served to rally the population to support the government's push against the militant group.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the success of the military operations, Boko Haram remains a force to be reckoned with. In response to the military defeats it has suffered, the militants shifted tactics, expanding their use of suicide bombings, most of which have targeted the civilian population. Meanwhile, the schism within Boko Haram, formally aligned with ISIS since early 2015, between those loyal to long-time leader Abubakar Shekau and those following Abu Musab al-Barnawi, whom ISIS appointed as the new "Governor" (wali) of its "province" last August, may be contributing to the intensification, rather than diminution, of violence as both factions try to outdo each other in staging attacks. In fact, there are strong indications that Barnawi's faction may be gaining momentum, aided not only by the defeats Shekau's factions have suffered at the hands of Nigerian forces, but also by fighters



and other resources flowing to it thanks to the ISIS affiliation. Furthermore, to the extent that the militants have been weakened in Nigeria, they have spilled into neighboring countries, causing Cameroon and Niger, for example, to rise in the 2016 edition of the Global Terrorism Index to 13th place and 16th place, respectively.

A characteristic shared not only by ISIS-aligned groups in Africa like Boko Haram, but also al-Qaeda affiliates on the continent like AQIM and, further afield, Somalia's al-Shabaab, is their almost uncanny resilience, founded in part on the flexibility with which they can put aside differences and join forces in ever-shifting combinations. Just earlier this month, for example, several jihadist factions operating in Mali—Ansar Dine (“defenders of the faith”), the Sahara and al-Murabitun (“people of the garrison”) branches of AQIM, and the Macina Liberation Front—announced their merger and pledged their allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The new group, named Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (“group for the support of Islam and Muslims”), is to be headed by an “emir,” Iyad ag Ghaly, formerly leader of Ansar Dine and, before that, a leader in Tuareg rebellions against the Malian government going back to the 1980’s. A week later, al-Zawahiri issued a statement of “approval and blessing” on the new group and expressed his hope that it would constitute “an impregnable fortress against the enemies of Islam who have seen a reversal of the fortunes of the partisans of Islam and jihad.”

While al-Qaeda-linked groups in the region have resisted ISIS incursions into territory they have long viewed as their own, there have been instances in which factions within the former have sought to align themselves with the latter. In late October 2016, for example, ISIS confirmed that it had accepted the allegiance of Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, a former commander within al-Murabitun, who, along with 40 of his fighters, pledged themselves to Abubakar al-Baghdadi, who designated them his “Greater Sahara” division. What is interesting is that al-Sahrawi first made bay’a to the self-styled caliph more than a year earlier, but his oath of fealty was only accepted after he carried out string of attacks in the borderlands of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Thus an increase in violence could be the result as al-Qaeda and ISIS literally compete to outdo each other in the Sahel in the hopes of attracting recruits and other resources.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE U.S. RESPONSE

This broad survey permits the drawing of several conclusions about the U.S. response to terrorism in Africa and the possible threats posed to U.S. persons and interests abroad as well as the American homeland, especially from jihadists coming out of North Africa.

First, time and again, the mistake has been made to underestimate—if not to discount entirely the threat faced. Part of this is attributable to an analytical bias to limit future possibilities to extrapolations from the past, a hermeneutical choice which ignores the dynamic potential which many terrorist organizations, especially in Africa, have exhibited time and again. Another part of the explanation is even more basic: The sheer lack of resources for Africa-related intelligence and analysis across the whole of the U.S. Government. Given the geopolitical, economic, and security stakes, the failure to invest more in dedicated institutions, personnel, training, and strategic focus as well as materiel and other resources is incredibly short-sighted.

Second, with the exception of the Department of Defense, across the U.S. Government there is an artificial division of the continent that, quite frankly, is rejected not only by Africans, but is also unhelpful, a point I have consistently made.<sup>7</sup> If one looks, for example, at the North African States which are usually grouped with those in the Near East, there are few compelling geopolitical, economic, or strategic reasons to do so except perhaps for Egypt. In point of fact, the overwhelming majority of the regional political, security, and commercial links extending to and from the other four countries of the Maghreb go north-south across the Sahara, not east-west toward the Levant. The adhesion of Morocco to the African Union earlier this year—itsself the culmination of a long-time diplomatic effort and economic engagement—as well as the kingdom’s request to join the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) further reinforce the case for treating Africa as a whole within the U.S. Government. The reorganization of the National Security Council in the current administration, with the transfer of responsibility for the Maghrebi countries to the senior director for Africa, is a commendable move that needs to be followed across the whole of government.

<sup>7</sup> See J. Peter Pham, *A Measured US Strategy for the New Africa*, with a foreword by James L. Jones, Jr. (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2016), available at <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/a-measured-us-strategy-for-the-new-africa>.

Third, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the geographic command responsible for implementing whatever military operations, including counterterrorism operations, are eventually deemed necessary on the African continent, whether by assisting African partners or taking direct action, has since its establishment been hampered to varying degrees by not-quite-adequate resources to carry out its ordinary assigned mission, to say nothing of extraordinary challenges which have arisen in recent years within its area of responsibility. While the successive AFRICOM commanders have stewarded what they had heroically, often adroitly juggling resources and priorities, clearly a more sustainable approach is required, even in the current challenging fiscal climate.

Fourth, even accepting the necessary economies in areas other than military and homeland security as signaled in the administration's recent budget blueprint, it is still nothing short of mind-boggling that in Nigeria there is no U.S. diplomatic presence north of the capital of Abuja, which is located in that country's geographical center. Thus, the northern part of the West African country, home to more than 90 million predominantly Muslim people who would, by themselves, constitute Africa's third-most-populous country—and in the middle of the geopolitically sensitive Sahel region at that—has been entirely bereft of U.S. diplomatic presence (and the ongoing intelligence and other monitoring capabilities that come with such a mission) ever since the consulate in Kaduna was closed in 1991, the exception being on those rare occasions when, with appropriate security assured, ad hoc forays from the embassy are authorized.

Fifth, closely related to terrorism is the danger posed by lack of effective sovereignty that bedevils many African governments. Often the challenge first manifests itself in criminality, whether in the form of piracy and other brigandage or in that of trafficking, human or material. Moreover, the Sahel has seen an explosion in narco-trafficking, both in terms of transshipments bound for Europe and other destinations and, even more worrisome, of deliveries for local consumption. For the United States, all this means that increasing vigilance against terrorism in Africa also requires greater investments in law enforcement capabilities focused on the continent, including enhanced analytical resources at home, more liaison personnel posted abroad, and stepping up efforts to build the capacity of our partners on the continent.

Sixth, as America's relationships—diplomatic, security, economic, and cultural—with Africa as a whole and the individual countries on the continent expand and deepen—a positive development to be sure—an unfortunate downside is that the potential risk to U.S. persons and interests as well as to the homeland necessarily increases. Quite simply, the threats are there and, by its very nature, more engagement also increases exposure and vulnerability. The answer is not to curtail engagement since there are clear strategic imperatives for seeking to build these links, but to ensure that adequate resources are mustered to cope with the meet the rising demand across a whole range of sectors from civil aviation to ports to customs and immigration, etc., for intelligence about and security against threats originating in this dynamic region.

Seventh, the challenge of African terrorism, especially out of North Africa, and any derivative threat to the United States cannot be addressed except in an integrated fashion, with solutions that embrace a broader notion of human security writ large—encompassing social, economic, and political development—which, often enough, also must transcend national and other artificial boundaries. This obviously is not and should not be a task for the United States alone, but is one which it is in America's strategic interest to play its part.

#### CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that ISIS—and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in the northern part of Africa are poised to wreak considerable havoc across the continent as they seek to regroup in the ungoverned spaces of the Sahel, threatening not only the countries immediately impacted, but also affecting the interests and security of the United States and its allies across the region.

Ironically, this comes at a time when the narrative on Africa in the United States has increasingly shifted toward a greater focus on the extraordinary opportunities on the continent. However, if this momentum is to be maintained and those opportunities grasped, the United States needs to redouble its own efforts and also work closely with its African partners to manage the challenges and overcome terrorism and other the threats to security which stand in the way to an incredibly promising future. As the President has repeatedly declared, halting the spread of radical Islamism and jihadist violence should be a cornerstone of the foreign policy of the

United States and that “all actions should be oriented around this goal, and any country which shares this goal will be our ally.”

Mr. KING. Dr. Pham, thank you once again for your testimony and very much appreciate it.

Now our second witness is Dr. Geoff Porter. Dr. Porter is the president of North Africa Risk Consulting, a political and security risk analysis firm specializing exclusively in North Africa.

From 2013 to 2016, Dr. Porter was an assistant professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He has made more than three dozen trips to Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, as well as multiple trips to Libya before and after the 2011 revolution that resulted in the overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi’s regime.

Dr. Porter has also briefed U.S. Ambassadors to Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya regarding political and security developments in those countries prior to assuming their posts.

Dr. Porter, welcome you today, and you are recognized for your testimony. Thank you very much.

**STATEMENT OF GEOFF D. PORTER, PRESIDENT, NORTH AFRICA RISK CONSULTING, INC.**

Mr. PORTER. Thank you, Chairman King.

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is an honor to share with you my analysis of the threat posed by North African terrorism to the homeland and to U.S. National interests overseas.

Terrorism in North Africa in recent years is entirely salafi jihadi in nature, or jihadi salafi in nature depending on how you want to define that term. The goal of these jihadi salafi organizations is to oust the political frameworks and leadership in the nation-states in which they operate.

In addition, they want to erode the influence of the United States and its European allies in North Africa. The persistence of jihadi salafi terrorist organizations in North Africa poses a direct threat to U.S. interests abroad and an indirect and longer term threat to the homeland here in the United States.

Jihadi salafi terrorist groups in North Africa can be divided into two large rubrics. There are those allied with al-Qaeda and those that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. For al-Qaeda-affiliated groups and the Islamic State allies alike, the United States remains the enemy.

With its on-going operations in Tunisia and its regroupment in the Sahara and the Sahel, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is now the strongest terrorist organization in North Africa and poses the greatest threat to U.S. National interests in the region.

The Islamic State suffered a severe setback in North Africa due to the loss of its bastion in Sirte, Libya. There reportedly have been fewer squatters from the Sirte offensive than anticipated. Those that did escape are dispersed throughout Libya and northern Niger. In addition, there are Islamic State sympathizers in Morocco and Mali.

Although North Africa and the Sahara are not strategic regions for the United States, jihadi salafi terrorist organizations threaten the United States in three ways. North African terrorist organiza-

tions will target the U.S. Government when they can. In addition to the U.S. diplomatic corps, the United States has soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen in North Africa who are high-value targets for jihadi salafi terrorists.

In addition to government personnel, jihadi salafi groups threaten U.S. citizens in North Africa. AQIM and the Islamic State's willingness to kill civilians is well-documented. It is due to a combination of vacationing patterns, limited U.S. foreign direct investment in North Africa, and sheer luck that more Americans have not been killed by salafi jihadi groups in North Africa.

The operations of U.S. companies in North Africa are also vulnerable to jihadi salafi terrorism. Numerous U.S. companies have investments and activities in North Africa, particularly in the oil and gas sector, but also in petrochemicals, telecoms, defense, pharmaceuticals, and renewables.

A terrorist attack, regardless of whether it directly targets a U.S. company or the private sector in general, disrupts commercial activity and erodes value of U.S. corporations.

Nevertheless, the threat posed by North African terrorist organizations to Europe is greater than the threat they pose to the United States because of geographic proximity, colonial legacies, linguistic facility, and the commonality of dual nationalities among European and North African countries.

Even so, like any other group around the globe, jihadi salafis are mobile. What this means is that even though jihadi salafi groups in North Africa may not pose a direct threat to the United States because they do not have the operational capacity to do so, or because it is not a strategic priority for them, individual North African jihadi salafis can contribute to the capabilities of other jihadi salafi groups outside North Africa that do have the capacity and the intention to target the United States.

Moreover, if groups are left unmolested, they will evolve to the—and their capacity to plan and train will grow, potentially to the point where attacking the U.S. homeland is not out of reach.

Since 2013, the United States has employed a new model for counterterrorism operations in North Africa that relies on logistical and ISR support to allies, BPC programs, and the limited use of SOF to advise, assist, and accompany local forces, and find, fix, and finish high-value targets.

This approach's constant pressure slows the evolution of terrorist groups and prevents them from gaining the capabilities that could ultimately allow them to target the homelands. Despite the new approach's advantages, military solutions never eliminate terrorism.

It is equally important to address the underlying conditions that lead to the emergence and continuation of terrorist organizations in North Africa. One of the fundamental drivers of jihadi salafi terrorism is the sense of injustice and the belief that the implementation of a salafi interpretation of Islam via jihad will ensure Muslim social justice.

There is a justifiable and a quantifiable perception that the playing field in North Africa, the Sahara, and the Sahel is uneven. If injustice fuels the jihadi salafi narrative, then that narrative burns bright in North Africa. Considering its historical commitment to

justice and good governance, the United States should work through aid and development programs to reduce North African deficits in those areas.

Removing terrorists from the battlefield downrange only retards the group's evolution. To truly secure the homelands, the United States must address the underlying causes of North African terrorism, chief among of them injustice and lack of rule of law. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Porter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GEOFF D. PORTER

MARCH 29, 2017

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Geoff Porter. I am the president of North Africa Risk Consulting, the political and security risk analysis firm specializing exclusively in North Africa. North Africa Risk Consulting provides analysis of evolving political and security contexts in Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia to private sector corporations and different U.S. Government agencies and departments. In addition, from 2013–2016, I was an assistant professor at the United States Military Academy at West Point in the Department of Social Sciences and an instructor with the Combating Terrorism Center. In my capacity as president of North Africa Risk Consulting and previously as a faculty member at West Point, I made more than three dozen trips to Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, as well as multiple trips to Libya before and after the 2011 revolution that resulted in the overthrow of Col. Muammar Qadhafi's regime. I have had the good fortune of having briefed U.S. Ambassadors to Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya regarding political and security developments in those countries prior to their assuming their posts. It is a privilege and an honor to share my analysis of the threat posed by terrorism in North Africa with you.

#### TERRORISM IN NORTH AFRICA

Terrorism in North Africa in recent years is entirely jihadi salafi in nature. Although there are differences among jihadi salafi terrorist organizations, they all stem from an interpretation of Islam that argues that there is a very narrow canon from which Islamic tenets and duties should be derived and that among those tenets and obligations is the duty to confront by any means necessary non-Muslims or Muslims that these organizations deem to be insufficiently religious. The goal of these jihadi salafi organizations is inherently political. They want to oust the political leadership in the nation-states in which they operate because that leadership does not share their same interpretation of how political systems should operate. In addition, they want to erode the influence of the United States and its European allies in areas in which they operate.

The persistence of jihadi salafi terrorist organizations in North Africa poses a direct threat to U.S. National interests overseas and an indirect and longer-term threat to the homeland. For al-Qaeda affiliated groups and Islamic State allies alike, the United States remains the enemy.

Jihadi salafi terrorist groups in North Africa can be divided into two large rubrics. There are those allied with al-Qaeda, which continues to be led by Ayman al-Zawahiri. And there are those who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Tactical disagreements and different loyalties keep these two groups apart, but there is slippage between them and individuals and affiliates move back and forth.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Defining North Africa*

The definition of North Africa can vary from one institution to another. For some U.S. agencies, North Africa includes not only the conventional Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia), but also Saharan and Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal). For the purposes of this examination of the threat posed by terrorism in North Africa, the definition of North Africa will be a hybrid of regional stakeholders' own definition of North Africa as "the Maghreb" and North African terrorist organizations' definition of their area of

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Dominique, "État islamique vs. Al-Qaïda : autopsie d'une lutte fratricide," *Politique étrangère*, N. 1, printemps 2016.

operations, which includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger.<sup>2</sup> This definition accommodates the cross-border, transnational nature of terrorist organizations and of the diplomatic and military approaches adopted to combat it by the United States, France, and regional governments.

#### *Al-Qaeda and Affiliated Groups*

In January 2017, al-Qaeda's regional affiliation, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, marked its 10th anniversary. AQIM emerged in moment of desperation out of a pre-existing salafi nationalist terrorist organization (the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, or GSPC) that was increasingly without a viable mission.<sup>3</sup> The GSPC was dedicated to fighting the Algerian government allegedly in order to restore the aborted 1991 legislative elections. By 2004, the government and the Algerian population had moved on and were focused on restoring peace and stability. The GSPC's leader in 2005, Abdelmalek Droukdel, initiated the process whereby the GSPC first became formally affiliated with al-Qaeda, and then in 2007 announced that it had become AQIM.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of the last 10 years, AQIM's strategy, tactics, and area of operations have evolved, responding to changes in the broader jihadi movement and to political and security developments in the region.

Droukdel remains the organization's leader, but it has expanded its operations beyond just Algeria to include a broad swath of North Africa. In fact, its operations in Algeria itself are curtailed and the group has struggled recently to remain relevant in the Algerian context. That being said, as evinced by the 18 March 2016 attack against the In Salah Gas asset at Krechba, AQIM retains some domestic support in Algeria and still has the capacity to carry out episodic strikes against high-value targets, especially far from urban centers where security measures are less rigorous.<sup>5</sup>

AQIM's evolution has not been seamless and the organization has experienced schisms and leadership fracture. In particular, in 2012 Droukdel quarreled with one of his commanders in northern Mali, and that commander, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, quit AQIM to form his own organization, al-Mourabitoun, made up of AQIM fighters as well as fighters from the Movement for Unity in Jihad in West Africa or MUJAO (Fr. Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest).<sup>6</sup> Four months after its formation, a heavily-armed platoon of al-Mourabitoun fighters attacked the Tigantourine Gas Plant at In Amenas in Algeria. The attackers originated in northern Mali, transited eastward across the country, passed through northeastern Niger, and entered southwestern Libya where they staged their operation. The attackers subsequently crossed Algeria's border and attacked the gas facility. More than 3 dozen expatriates were killed at the site, including 3 U.S. citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Following the In Amenas attack, al-Mourabitoun went to ground, possibly as a result of having lost so many men in the attack, but also because it was being doggedly hunted. From January 2013 to July 2014, France had deployed roughly 4,000 troops as part of Opération Serval whose objective was to stabilize northern Mali in the wake of a jihadi salafi offensive. The French presence on the ground and its assets in the air hindered Belmokhtar and al-Mourabitoun's movements.

In the aftermath of the 2011 Libyan revolution, AQIM also tried to make inroads among jihadi salafi groups in Libya, including with Ansar al-Sharia, the jihadi salafi group involved in the attack against the U.S. compound in Benghazi.<sup>8</sup> Belmokhtar was allegedly charged with initiating relations between AQIM and Ansar al-Sharia.<sup>9</sup> While Belmokhtar's overtures were likely well-received, they did not result in any operational coordination between AQIM and Ansar al-Sharia. Ansar al-Sharia itself has since been absorbed into other jihadi salafi organizations in Libya, including the Mujahids' Shura Council Darna and the Mujahids' Shura Council Benghazi.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.maghrebarabe.org/ar/>.

<sup>3</sup> Porter, Geoff D., "AQIM Ten Years On," *The Cipher Brief*, 12 January 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Tawil, Camille, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of al-Qa'ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: Saqi, 2011), trans. Robin Bray.

<sup>5</sup> Hadjer Guenanfa, "Attaque contre le site gazier de Krechba: la piste d'un terroriste de la région," *Tout sur l'Algérie*, 22 March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Ould Salem, Lamine, *Ben Laden du Sahara. Sur les traces du jihadiste Mokhtar Belmokhtar* (éd. de La Martinière, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Statoil, *In Amenas Investigation Report* (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Rogers, Mike, and Ruppertsberger, Dutch, *Investigative Report on the Terrorist Attacks on U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya*, September 11–12, 2012, U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, 21 November 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Rémi Carayol, "Mokhtar Belmokhtar, le parrain du Sahelistan," *Jeune Afrique*, 4 February 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Lacher, Wolfram, "Libya: A Jihadist Growth Market," in *Jihadism in Africa: local causes, regional expansion, international alliances*, Steinberg, Guido and Weber, Annette, eds. Stiftung

Libya's descent into civil war by late 2014 and the emergence of the Islamic State in Sirte in 2015 both undermined Ansar al-Sharia's on-going viability. As a result, AQIM does not have a sustained presence in northern Libya. It is likely, though, that al-Mourabitoun continue to have a limited presence in southwestern Libya.<sup>11</sup>

While AQIM failed to maintain a presence in Libya, it has had greater success with its Tunisian affiliate, the Uqba Ibn Nafi Brigade, which was established by an emissary who had been sent to Tunisia by Droukdel in 2011. The Uqba Ibn Nafi Brigade is contained in western Tunisia along the border with Algeria and it closely adheres to AQIM's tactics, techniques, and procedures, avoiding attacks on civilians and targeting Tunisian security services.

In November of 2015, al-Mourabitoun rejoined AQIM, although a faction of al-Mourabitoun led by Abu Walid al-Sahraoui had earlier pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and created the Islamic State of the Grand Sahara.<sup>12</sup> The return of al-Mourabitoun was a triumph for Droukdel and it reestablished AQIM's prominence as the leading jihadi salafi organization in North Africa, the Sahara, and the Sahel.

Droukdel has recently further consolidated AQIM's position in Saharan and Sahelian countries. A communique on 2 March 2017 announced the regrouping of disparate but related jihadi salafi groups in North Africa. The announcement was made by Iyad Ag Ghali, the leader of Ansar Dine, a local front for AQIM in Mali. Ag Ghali was accompanied by AQIM commander Yahya Abu Hammam, al-Mourabitoun second-in-command Hassan al-Ansari, Amadou Koufa, the leader of the Macina Brigade (Ansar Dine's Peul battalion), and Abderrahmane Sanhaji, an AQIM legal scholar.<sup>13</sup> Ag Ghali declared that the group was now "Islam and Muslims' Victory Group" and that it remained loyal to al-Qaeda's leader Ayman Zawahiri and AQIM's emir Abdelmalik Droukdel.<sup>14</sup> With the regrouping, AQIM is able to reestablish its unified presence in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Tunisia.<sup>15</sup>

#### *The Islamic State and Affiliated Groups*

In 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, sent a mission to Libya to assess the possibility of establishing an Islamic State presence in the country.<sup>16</sup> By 2014, a coalition of different jihadi salafi groups in Derna pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and by June 2015, the Islamic State controlled most of the central coastal city of Sirte.<sup>17</sup> Reports regarding the number of Islamic State fighters in Sirte varied considerably with some sources citing 3,000 fighters and others as many as 12,000.<sup>18</sup> While in control of Sirte, the Islamic State tried to impose its own perverse interpretation of Islamic law on the town's population, but the Islamic State in Libya was never self-sufficient and remained dependent upon the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria for financial support.<sup>19</sup>

The Islamic State had also attempted to make inroads elsewhere in North Africa. In September 2014, a new group, the Caliphate's Soldiers in the Land of Algeria, captured a French tourist in the mountains to the southeast of the capital Algiers. The group announced its allegiance with the Islamic State and declared that it would kill its hostage if its demands were not met. Algeria does not negotiate with terrorists and the group murdered the Frenchman. While Algeria has reckoned with AQIM for more than 10 years, it would not tolerate the emergence of an Islamic State ally within its borders. By December 2014, Algerian security services had largely eradicated the group, including eliminating its leader Khaled Abou Suleimane.<sup>20</sup> There have been intermittent attempts to carry out attacks in subse-

Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP-Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> "al-Barghathi; 'Daech' yu'amalu 'ala 'i'ada tajmu'a sufufahu wa tamarkazatahu fi janub libiya," *khabar libiya*, 4 March 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Mémier, Marc, "AQMI et al-Mourabitoun: Le djihad sahélien réunifié" *Études de l'Ifri*, January 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Mohamed Fall Oumère, "De la naissance d'un nouveau 'djihadistan' au Sahel," *Le Monde*, 10 March 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Amin Muhammad 'Amad, "ikhtiyar iyad agh ghali 'amiran li jam'a 'jam'a nusrah al-islam wa al-muslimin," *al-salam al-yum*, 4 March 2017.

<sup>15</sup> "iyad agh ghali 'mullah 'umar' mantiqah al-sahil wa al-sahra'," *al-akhbar al-mauritaniyah* 6 March 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Porter, Geoff D. "How Realistic is Libya as an Islamic State 'Fallback'" *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 9 Issue 3, March 2016.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Imene Brahimi, "RÉCIT. Abdelmalek El Gouri: trois mois de traque sans relâche," *Tout sur l'Algérie*, 23 December 2014.

quent years by individuals and cells claiming to be Islamic State members, but these have been largely unsuccessful. The most recent attack in the eastern Algerian city of Constantine was foiled.<sup>21</sup>

There was also an uneven attempt to establish an Islamic State group in Tunisia which labeled itself the Caliphate's Soldiers. In March 2015, three Islamic State gunmen attacked the Bardo Museum in Tunis.<sup>22</sup> The Islamic State also claimed responsibility for an attack carried out by a lone gunman in June 2015 near the resort town of Sousse and for an attack on the Presidential guard in Tunis, Tunisia.<sup>23</sup> In March 2016, there was a 3-day gun battle in the Tunisian border town of Ben Guerdane that seems to have been precipitated by the U.S. bombing of an Islamic State training camp in Sabratha, Libya.<sup>24</sup> Tunisian members of the Islamic State in Libya had been planning to capture and hold Ben Guerdane but may have accelerated their attack in the aftermath of the Sabratha bombing.

The battle of Ben Guerdane, however, underscores an important aspect of the Islamic State threat in Tunisia: Almost all Islamic State activities in Tunisia have had a Libyan component. Since the Ben Guerdane assault and the Islamic State's subsequent loss of Sirte, Libya, the Islamic State's activities in Tunisia have been more sporadic and the group's capacity in Tunisia is diminished. Recent Islamic State attacks in Tunisia have focused on the Tunisian security services and Tunisia has not suffered a large-scale Islamic State attack in more than a year.

At the same time, however, the Islamic State has expanded southward, at least in name. In May 2015, a former MUJAO leader in Mali, Adnane Abou Walid el-Sahraoui, who had joined al-Mourabitoun, split with Belmokhtar, pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and formed the Islamic State in the Grand Sahara.<sup>25</sup> In the following months, el-Sahraoui was quiet, some suspecting he had been wounded in a clash with al-Mourabitoun loyalists.<sup>26</sup> El-Sahraoui re-emerged in May 2016, threatening to undertake attacks against Morocco and U.N. personnel stationed in the disputed territory of Western Sahara.<sup>27</sup> No such attack ever transpired and over the last 6 months el-Sahraoui's group has carried out only a handful of small-scale attacks against soft targets in Burkina Faso and Mali.

El-Sahraoui's inability to hit Morocco is all the more curious because there appears to be a deep well of sympathy for the Islamic State in Morocco. Moroccans constituted the third-largest nationality to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (smaller only than Saudi Arabia and Tunisia).<sup>28</sup> At home, Moroccan security services have disrupted an Islamic State plot or arrested an alleged Islamic State cell almost once a month, every month for the last 2 years. Why there is so much support for the Islamic State in Morocco may be due to the monarchy's overt effort to enforce a state version of Islam. Islamic State supporters bristle at a monarch who they view as corrupt claiming the mantle "Commander of the Faithful" and imposing an interpretation of Islam on them.<sup>29</sup> The Islamic State's Moroccan appeal extends beyond Morocco's borders into Europe. The November 2015 Paris attacks and the March 2016 Brussels attacks, both claimed by the Islamic State, each had Moroccan elements.<sup>30</sup>

#### ASSESSING THE THREAT

Jihadi salafi terrorist groups in North Africa undoubtedly pose a threat to U.S. National interests overseas and, even though they pose no immediate risk to U.S. homeland, they could threaten the homeland over the longer term. Importantly, as

<sup>21</sup> Fayçal Métaoui, "Attentat à Constantine: Le terroriste abattu," *El Watan*, 26 February 2017.

<sup>22</sup> "Tunisie: les terroristes auraient été formés par le groupe El en Libye," *RFI Afrique*, 20 March 2015.

<sup>23</sup> "L'Etat islamique revendique l'attentat contre la police en Tunisie," *Le Monde*, 25 November 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Declan Walsh, Ben Hubbard, and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Bombing in Libya Reveals Limits of Strategy Against ISIS," *The New York Times*, 19 February 2016.

<sup>25</sup> "Sahel: un chef d'Al-Mourabitoun prête allégeance à l'organisation de l'Etat islamique," *France24*, 15 May 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Aziz M., "Urgent: L'émir d'al-Mourabitoun gravement blessé dans des affrontements," *El Watan*, 17 June 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Imad Stitou, "Qui est Abou Walid as-Sahraoui qui menace de terroriser le Maroc," *Le Desk*, 4 May 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Dodwell, Brian, Milton, Daniel, & Rassler, Don, *The Caliphate's Global Workforce: An Inside Look at the Islamic State's Foreign Fighter Paper Trail*, The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, April 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Ilhem Rachidi, "Mohamed Tozy: 'Le Maroc a parié sur une sorte de salafisme implicite,'" *Le Desk*, 22 July 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Cruickshank, "The inside story of the Paris and Brussels attacks," *CNN*, 30 March 2016.



is true of all terrorist organizations, neither al-Qaeda allied groups nor Islamic State affiliates distinguish between civilian and official targets. U.S. Government personnel, U.S. citizens, and U.S. corporations are all seen as legitimate targets.

#### *The Threat to National Interests Overseas*

With its on-going operations in Algeria and Tunisia and its “regroupment” in the Sahara and Sahel, AQIM is now the strongest terrorist organization in North Africa with the biggest footprint and poses the greatest threat to U.S. National interests in the region. Its “regroupment” theoretically allows it to eliminate redundancies among formerly disparate groups, conserve and share resources, and coordinate training and planning.

In contrast, the Islamic State suffered a severe setback in North Africa due to the loss of its bastion in Sirte. There have reportedly been fewer “squirters” from the Sirte offensive than anticipated and smaller numbers of Islamic State fighters managed to escape the city than was expected. Those that did escape are dispersed throughout Libya and northern Niger. Their current capabilities are uncertain, but they lost or expended a large amount of materiel in their campaign to defend Sirte and in subsequent airstrikes against training camps and other locations.<sup>31</sup> In addition, it will take them time to establish networks in new local communities that will enable them to function more fluidly. That being said, there is no doubt that Islamic State fighters cling to jihadi salafi ideology and still harbor a desire to attack U.S. and U.S.-related targets. For the moment, though, Islamic State attacks in North Africa will be more opportunistic than calibrated.

Although North Africa and the Sahara are not strategic regions for the United States, there are three main categories where U.S. National interest can be endangered by terrorist organizations: U.S. Government personnel, U.S. private citizens, and U.S. businesses.

#### *U.S. Government Personnel*

In 2012, Ansar al-Sharia participated in an attack in Benghazi, Libya that resulted in the deaths of four U.S. Government personnel.<sup>32</sup> Although the circumstances around the attack are unlikely to be replicated elsewhere in North Africa, it was a sharp reminder that North African terrorist organizations will target the U.S. Government when they can. In addition to the U.S. diplomatic corps, the United States has soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen in North Africa who are high-value targets for jihadi salafi groups. The risks to U.S. service members were underscored in an episode in December 2015 during which a team of U.S. Special Forces was interdicted by a Libyan militia.<sup>33</sup> The militia was not a terrorist organization and the team exfiltrated the country without further incident, but the confrontation could have easily ended very differently. Further to the south in Niger, a U.S. soldier died while supporting Nigerien counterterrorism operations.<sup>34</sup>

#### *U.S. Citizens*

In addition to U.S. diplomats and members of the armed services, the on-going presence of jihadi salafi groups in North Africa threatens U.S. citizens in the region. AQIM and the Islamic State’s willingness to kill civilians is well-documented. In April 2011, a jihadi salafi bomber in Marrakech, Morocco killed 17 civilians, including 15 Europeans.<sup>35</sup> In January 2013, 37 expatriates were killed, including three U.S. citizens, when al-Mourabitoun attacked the Tigantourine Gas Facility at In Amenas, Algeria.<sup>36</sup> In January 2015, a U.S. citizen (and U.S. Marine veteran) was killed in an Islamic State attack in Tripoli, Libya.<sup>37</sup> In March 2015, Islamic State gunmen killed 22 civilians, including 21 from Europe, Japan, and Latin America, at the Bardo Museum in Tunis, Tunisia.<sup>38</sup> In June 2015, an Islamic State gunman killed 38 civilians and wounded 37 at Port El Kantaoui, Tunisia. The victims were predominantly from the United Kingdom.<sup>39</sup> On 20 November 2015, AQIM and al-

<sup>31</sup> North Africa Risk Consulting, *NARCO Analysis: Why the US bombed ISIS in Libya*, 19 January 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Op Cit., Ft. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Chris Stephen, “Secret US mission in Libya revealed after air force posted pictures,” *The Guardian*, 17 December 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Alex Horton, “Special Forces soldier dies in accident in Niger,” *Stars and Stripes*, 11 February 2017.

<sup>35</sup> “Attentat de Marrakech: au moins six Français tués” *Le Monde*, 29 April 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Porter, Geoff D., “The Eradicateurs” *Foreign Policy*, 18 January 2013.

<sup>37</sup> “RIP to a friend—MARSOC Marine” *SOCNET, The Special Operations Community Network*.

<sup>38</sup> Frida Dahmani, “Attentat du Bardo: le musée de l’horreur,” *Jeune Afrique*, 24 March 2015.

<sup>39</sup> *The Tunisia Inquests* (2017).

Mourabitoun attacked a hotel in Bamako, Mali, killing 20 civilians, including a U.S. citizen.<sup>40</sup> In January 2016, AQIM attacked a hotel and café in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, killing 30 civilians, including one U.S. citizen.<sup>41</sup> In March 2016, AQIM attacked a beachfront hotel in Grand-Bassam, Ivory Coast, killing 19 civilians.<sup>42</sup> It is due to a combination of vacationing patterns, limited U.S. foreign direct investment in the region, and luck that more U.S. citizens have not been killed by jihadi salafi organizations in North Africa over the last decade.

#### *U.S. Corporations*

The operations of U.S. companies in North Africa are also vulnerable to jihadi salafi terrorism.<sup>43</sup> Numerous U.S. companies have investments and activities in North Africa, particularly in the oil and gas sector. ExxonMobil has oil and gas assets in Libya and Chad. A consortium of three other prominent U.S. oil companies also operates in Libya.<sup>44</sup> Still other U.S. energy companies have assets in Algeria.<sup>45</sup> In addition, a U.S. energy company recently made a promising gas discovery in Mauritania.<sup>46</sup> U.S. companies are also involved in other sectors throughout North Africa, including petrochemicals, telecoms, defense, pharmaceuticals, and renewables.

Although the value of U.S. corporate activity in North Africa is dwarfed by that in Central America or South East Asia, North Africa is nonetheless an important market that creates value for American enterprises. A terrorist attack, regardless of whether it directly targets U.S. companies or the private sector in general, disrupts commercial activity and erodes value for U.S. corporations. There is the possibility of the loss of life and the destruction of hard assets. There are costs associated with lost productivity due to country evacuations in the wake of terrorist attack. Finally, the existence of a terrorist threat compels corporations to shoulder additional security and insurance costs. If the threat is deemed serious enough, costs become unsustainable and U.S. companies will abandon opportunities in North Africa.

#### *The Threat to the Homeland*

Threat posed by North African terrorist organizations to Europe is greater than the threat they pose to the United States. There are multiple reasons for this having to do with geographic proximity, colonial legacies, linguistic facility, and the commonality of dual-nationality among European and North African countries.<sup>47</sup>

No terrorist organization in North Africa currently has the capacity to undertake attacks in the United States. Jihadi salafi terrorist organizations in many senses are no different than any other organization, terrorist or otherwise. Jihadi salafi groups calculate the most effective ways to allocate finite resources with the greatest likelihood of success. In the case of North African terrorist organizations, this means that if they do intend to carry out attacks against targets outside their area of operations, then they are most likely to attempt attacks in Europe. In fact, given the target-rich environment in which they operate in North Africa and given the proximity of Europe, jihadi salafi terrorist organizations in North Africa are more likely to carry out attacks in North Africa and Europe than they are in the United States.

Because of the historical legacy of colonial occupation by France, North African jihadi salafis from Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia are likely to have greater familiarity with French than English and are more likely to be able to establish networks among North African diaspora communities in Europe than they are in the United States. In fact, in a communique commending the formation of “The Islam and Muslims’ Victory Group” earlier in March 2017, Abdelmalek Droukdel, the commander of AQIM, declared that “Muslims want to export war from their lands to France.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “L’attentat de Bamako réveille le spectre de ‘l’insaisissable’ Mokhtar Belmokhtar,” *France24* 23 November 2015.

<sup>41</sup> “Ce que l’on sait de l’attaque terroriste à Ouagadougou,” *Le Monde* 15 January 2016.

<sup>42</sup> “Côte d’Ivoire: Aqmi dévoile les objectifs de son attentat à Grand-Bassam,” *RFI*, 15 March 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Porter, Geoff D., “Terrorist Targeting of the Libyan Oil and Gas Sector,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 8, Issue 2, February 2015.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, Libya, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/country.cfm?iso=LBY>.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, Algeria, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/country.cfm?iso=DZA>.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Stothard, “Gas find on Mauritania-Senegal border comes with challenges,” *Financial Times*, 15 April 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Reinares, Fernando, “Avatares del terrorismo yihadista en España,” *Real Instituto Elcano*, 3 February 2017.

<sup>48</sup> “AQMI menace ‘d’exporter la guerre en France,” *alakhbar.info*, 17 March 2017.

Similarly, because of Italy's colonial presence in Libya and the subsequent U.K. presence after World War II, Libyan jihadi salafis are more likely to have familiarity with and potential networks in Italy and the United Kingdom rather than in the United States. Last, because of its geographic proximity and because of the size of the Moroccan diaspora population, Moroccan jihadi salafis are also more likely to privilege Spanish over American targets.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, like any other group around the globe, jihadi salafis are mobile. Individuals from one group in one region join another group in another region. The 2009 plot to explode an airplane over Detroit, Michigan was undertaken by a Nigerian from Kaduna who had joined al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and was being directed by the American Anwar al-Awlaki.<sup>50</sup> In 2012, Libyans who had traveled to Syria formed the Battar Brigade, which later pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. They subsequently traveled back to Libya where they were joined by an Islamic State delegation from Yemen and Saudi Arabia.<sup>51</sup> Later in 2015 and 2016, Iraqis and Saudis traveled to Libya to oversee the Islamic State's activities there.<sup>52</sup> A recent video from Abu Bakr Shekau, the embattled leader of Boko Haram in Nigeria, featured a French speaker in predominantly Anglophone Nigeria, suggesting that Boko Haram is recruiting in Francophone Sahelian countries.<sup>53</sup> What this means is that even though jihadi salafi groups in North Africa may not pose a direct threat to the United States because they do not have the operational capacity to hit the United States or because it is not a strategic priority for them, individual North African and Saharan jihadi salafis could contribute to the capabilities of other jihadi salafi groups outside North Africa that do have the capacity and the intention to target the United States.

Moreover, if groups are left unmolested, even if they do not presently pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland, they will evolve and their capacity to plan and train will grow, potentially to the point where attacking the U.S. homeland is no longer practically infeasible. This was the case with al-Qaeda and Usama bin Laden in Khartoum, Sudan in the 1990's and it is potentially the case today for al-Qaeda and Islamic State groups in North Africa, the Sahara, and the Sahel.<sup>54</sup>

#### CURRENT COUNTERTERRORISM APPROACHES

In counterterrorism, there is no "Mission Accomplished." There is only "continuing to accomplish the mission." There is no winning. There is only managing the risk to tolerable levels. Doing that is complicated, involving a continuum of military and non-military solutions.

##### *Military Counterterrorism Approaches in North Africa*

Since 2013, the United States has employed a new model for counterterrorism operations in North Africa and the Sahara and Sahel.<sup>55</sup> The model relies on logistical and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support to U.S. allies, building partner capacity (BPC) programs, and the limited use of U.S. Special Forces to advise, assist, and accompany local forces and pursue high-value targets (HVTs).<sup>56</sup> This approach has advantages and disadvantages.

Among its advantages, it is less costly than large scale military deployments; it limits U.S. personnel exposure to risks on the ground; it allows for the wider projection of U.S. power; and it is potentially less diplomatically disruptive to the pursuit of other U.S. National non-security related interests. By training local partners, it builds a more enduring counterterrorism presence in the region. Perhaps most importantly, this approach does not aim to eliminate terrorism or defeat terrorist groups in North Africa: Its objective is to degrade them. The constant pressure that results from this approach slows the evolution of terrorist groups and prevents them

<sup>49</sup> "Tres detenidos en Barcelona y Valencia en un Nuevo golpe contra el yihadismo," *El País*, 22 March 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Finn, "Al-Awlaki directed Christmas 'underwear bomber' plot, Justice Department memo says," *The Washington Post*, 10 February 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Wehrey, Frederic, Alrababa'h, Ala', "Rising Out of Chaos: The Islamic State in Libya," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 5 March 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Op. Cit. Ft. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Allain Jules, "Boko Haram: réapparition de Abubakar Shekau qui accuse le Cameroun de 'mensonge'," *mamaafrika.tv*, 17 March 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Wright, Lawrence, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Porter, Geoff D. and Sheehan, Michael, "The Future Role of US Counterterrorism Operations in Africa" *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, February 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Using Special Forces Against Terrorism, Trump Seeks to Avoid Big Ground Wars," *The New York Times*, 19 March 2017.

from gaining the capabilities that could ultimately allow them to target the homeland.

Nevertheless, there is no counterterrorism silver bullet and the new model is not without its shortcomings. Although over the long run leadership decapitation of terrorist groups and eliminating HVTs quantifiably shortens a group's life span, they also can have unintended consequences.<sup>57</sup> For example, removing the leader of one group can result in the merger of two groups that had previously been hostile to one another, thereby creating a new group that has greater capabilities than either of the two pre-existing groups.<sup>58</sup> Alternately, eliminating HVTs and leadership decapitation can result in schisms within terrorists organizations that can result in competition for prominence among factions, a phenomenon known as "outbidding."<sup>59</sup> One of the ways in which outbidding can manifest itself is through an increased pace of terrorist attacks or more "spectacular" terrorist attacks. In short, eliminating HVTs or leadership decapitation can inadvertently increase the lethality of a terrorist organization in the near term.

A second problem with the new approach to counterterrorism in North Africa is that BPC efforts need to be consistent and sustained in order for them to work. Ad hoc or intermittent training engagements with partner nations mean local forces retain some of the skills acquired through BPC programs for a period of time, but there is no long-term capacity improvement and the United States runs the risk of repeating efforts ad infinitum.<sup>60</sup>

Last, the United States needs to be mindful that political circumstances in partner countries may not be conducive to BPC. U.S. training of local militaries that have poor reputations in host countries or are politically problematic can contribute to broader animosity toward the United States and fuel the jihadi salafi anti-American narrative. For example, while U.S. efforts in Chad have increased Chadian forces counterterrorism capabilities, it has come at the cost of the United States being perceived as supporting President Idriss Déby's authoritarian regime.<sup>61</sup> In Niger's Diffa region, the local population blames the deterioration of the security environment as much on Boko Haram as on the abusive Nigerien forces combating the terrorist group.<sup>62</sup> The problem is more difficult in Libya where, in the absence of a functioning government, it is hard to even identify the proper military units to be trained.<sup>63</sup>

#### *Non-military Approaches to Countering Terrorism in North Africa*

Despite the new counterterrorism approach's advantages, military solutions are never enough to limit the threat that terrorism poses to U.S. National interest abroad and to the homeland. It is equally important to address the underlying conditions that lead to the emergence and continuation of terrorist organizations in North Africa. Because terrorism is by definition political and because jihadi salafi terrorism is about destroying and reshaping political structures in predominantly Muslim parts of the globe, it is critical to engage regional political institutions to ensure that they are upholding the obligations inherent in the state-society relationship. Misunderstanding the political dimension or ignoring it entirely does a disservice to counterterrorism efforts.

One of the fundamental drivers of jihadi salafi terrorism is the perception of injustice and the belief that the implementation of a salafi interpretation of Islam via jihad would ensure Muslims social justice.<sup>64</sup>

There is quantitative evidence that indicates that North African, Saharan, and Sahelian countries have a justice deficit. Excepting Tunisia, all the countries in the region fall in the bottom half of Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index 2016*.<sup>65</sup> Libya is ranked 170th of out 176 countries. Chad is 159th and Mali is 116. The World Justice Project's *Rule of Law Index 2016* ranked Tunisia 58th out

<sup>57</sup> Price, Bryan C., "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Spring 2012), pp. 9–46.

<sup>58</sup> Porter, Geoff D., "The Drone War Goes Awry in Africa," *Foreign Policy*, 20 January 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Porter, Geoff D., "Terrorist Outbidding: The In Amenas Attack," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 8, Issue 5 (May 2015).

<sup>60</sup> Powelson, Simon J., *Enduring Engagement Yes, Episodic Engagement No: Lessons for SOF from Mali*, Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Nickels, Benjamin P., and Shorey, Margot, "Chad: A Precarious Counterterrorism Partner," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 8, Issue 4 (April 2015).

<sup>62</sup> *Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency*, International Crisis Group, Report Number 245, 27 February 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Carla Babb, "Friend or Foe? Doubts Plague US Military in Libya Training," *Voice of America*, 18 May 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Turner, John A., *Religious Ideology and the Roots of Global Jihad: Salafi Jihadism and International Order* (New York: Springer, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> *Corruption Perceptions Index 2016*, Transparency International, 25 January 2017.

of 113 countries. Morocco was 60th, Burkina Faso 79th, and Nigeria 96th.<sup>66</sup> The 2016 *Ibrahim Index of African Governance* which ranks Africa's 54 countries also indicates inadequate governance and rule of law in North Africa.<sup>67</sup> For its "Overall Governance" ranking, Libya was ranked 51 out of 54 countries. Chad was 48, Niger 27, Mali 25, and Algeria 20. There is a justifiable and overwhelming perception that the playing field in North Africa, the Sahara, and Sahel is uneven. If injustice fuels the jihadi salafi narrative, then the narrative burns bright in North Africa and the Sahara.

There is also quantifiable evidence that North African and Saharan and Sahelian countries may not just be unwilling to ensure justice for their populations, but they may be unable to. Every country in the region is listed as being at risk according to the Fund for Peace's *Fragile States Index: Fragility in the World 2016*.<sup>68</sup> Even the most stable countries in the region—Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia—receive "Elevated Warnings." Chad's status is categorized as "Very High Alert," and Cameroon, Libya, Mali, and Niger are listed as "Alerts." When states are fragile or they fail, they no longer have the capacity to provide services ranging from education to security for their populations. The collapse of governance, let alone implementing of good governance, creates space for jihadi salafi terrorist groups to act.

Considering its historical commitment to justice and good governance, the United States should work to reduce North African deficits in those areas. Military approaches to counterterrorism can diminish existing threats but they cannot address the conditions that allow terrorist groups to emerge, sustain themselves, or revitalize themselves. Through aid and development programs, the United States can shore up fragile North African and Saharan States. Doing so is as vital a counterterrorism tool as are BPC programs and eliminating HVTs.

Mitigating the threat posed by North African jihadi salafi terrorists to U.S. interests abroad and to the homeland requires a nuanced combination of military and non-military approaches. North African terrorist organizations do not presently pose a threat to the homeland. However, removing terrorists from the battlefield downrange only slows their groups' evolution. To truly secure the homeland, the United States must address the underlying causes of North African terrorism, chief among them injustice and rule of law.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Dr. Porter.

Our next witness is Mr. Laith Alkhouri, who is a co-founder and director of counterterrorism research at Flashpoint, which is a business risk intelligence company. He directs Flashpoint's jihadist threat intelligence service and serves as the lead on all primary source research into deep and dark Web networks used by terrorist groups.

He has researched and translated thousands of jihadist documents and videos, analyzing jihadi terrorist activities across the Middle East, North Africa, and central and Southeast Asia. Mr. Alkhouri has presented his findings to several Cabinet agencies, the Council on Foreign Relations, the New York City Police Department, and a number of academic institutions.

Mr. Alkhouri, thank you for being here today, and you are recognized for your testimony. Thank you very much.

#### **STATEMENT OF LAITH ALKHOURI, CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, FLASHPOINT**

Mr. ALKHOURI. Thank you, Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished committee Members.

Today, both al-Qaeda and ISIS operate in major parts of North Africa and pose a significant threat. They also pose a significant threat to Western civilians and interests. Throughout the past dec-

<sup>66</sup> *World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2016*, The World Justice Project (2016). Algeria, Libya, Chad, Niger, and Mali were not included in the index because the World Justice Project was unable to conduct household polling.

<sup>67</sup> *A Decade of African Governance 2006–2015: 2016 Ibrahim Index of African Governance*, Mo Ibrahim Foundation (October 2016).

<sup>68</sup> Messner, J.J., and Haken, Nate, et al. *Fragile States Index 2016: The Book* (June 2016).

ade, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has kidnapped and killed Westerners and attacked Western economic interests.

Its record is heavy with such incidents starting as early as 2007, including at least 16 incidents of kidnapping Westerners at gunpoint, a number of whom were executed in Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and other countries.

AQIM poses a significant threat to gas and oil facilities and hotels, among other Western economic interests. The most notable example is the group's January 2013 hostage crisis at the Tigantourine gas and oil extraction facility in Algeria's In Amenas town where 3 Americans and over 2 dozen other Western nationals employed there were killed. Other attacks targeted hotels and killed Westerners in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast in 2016.

Al-Qaeda has exponentially grown in North Africa and the Sahel. This March, AQIM unified jihadi factions in north Mali under its banner, effectively inflating its ranks across the Sahel and Sahara at a time when many believe that it has largely been diminished.

The emergence and rise of ISIS, arguably today's most significant global threat, has amplified the pre-existing sense of insecurity and instability. ISIS has captured significant territory and aggressively expanded across Sirte, has heavily operated in Derna, Benghazi, Tripoli, Misrata, and other cities amid a political turmoil in Libya.

ISIS operates not only in Libya, but also in Algeria and Tunisia, and it has killed dozens of tourists. It has set up camps in Algeria in 2014 and networked with jihadist cells in Tunisia, dispatching operatives to kill tourists in Tunisia. Two of these attacks killed over 40 Westerners combined in March and June 2015. It has recently launched its first suicide bombing in Algeria.

ISIS has orchestrated and inspired attacks in the West. It directed major terror attacks in Paris and Brussels and inspired the worst mass shooting in U.S. history at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

Part of its M.O. is, yes, launching suicide bombing against security forces, but importantly, its leadership's explicit threats to and orchestration of attacks in Europe and the United States are part of its branch in Libya's agenda.

Its branch in Libya has verbalized threats to the United States. It not only expressed threats to attack beyond the Mediterranean, but also vowed attacks in Washington and New York in its official propaganda.

ISIS has exerted influence among jihadists in the West and incited them to launch attacks. The group has influenced radicals in the United States and Europe, who are encouraged to attack in their home countries instead of actually join the group on the ground. This has been explicitly encouraged by ISIS leaders in official propaganda.

Libya is poised to become a launching pad for operations in the West. As ISIS struggles to maintain control of its territory in Iraq and Syria, it will likely up the ante in inciting and plotting external operations in the West.

Its branch in Libya is poised to welcome many of its foreign fighters already in its ranks in the Middle East, which might turn Libya into the biggest ISIS camp for foreign fighters outside of Iraq

and Syria. Fighters from at least 10 nationalities so far have been fighting with ISIS in Libya, featured in its propaganda.

Both groups seek to dominate the jihadi landscape with mutual focus on Westerners. AQIM and ISIS oppose each other. ISIS' emergence has not only exacerbated the terror threats but also polarized the jihadi movement in the region, effectively creating a competitive landscape that raises the threat prospects against the West.

AQIM has concentrated on condemning France. Each group seeks to reassert itself as the main jihadi leader in the region, and both groups see Westerners as enemy No. 1.

ISIS has a more powerful recruitment strategy than AQIM. While both groups pose a threat to the West, ISIS appears to have developed a stronger radicalization and indoctrination agenda than its competitor.

ISIS' external operations facilitators appear to have developed a more inclusive and aggressive call to launch attacks by all means necessary, unlike AQIM, which has not heavily focused on calls for external attacks overseas.

The returnees to the United States and Europe, those who have gained experience in militant tactics in ISIS camps, as well as self-radicalized individuals, likely pose the most significant jihadist threat to the West today. Thank you so much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Alkhouri follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LAITH ALKHOURI

MARCH 29, 2017

INTRODUCTION

North Africa has conventionally been the backyard of major al-Qaeda terror activity, predominantly al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—and to this day the group poses a significant threat to the region and to Western civilians and interests. The terror threats have created a sense of insecurity in major parts of the region, and AQIM has been the primary perpetrator. Indeed, it has a long record of bombing and kidnapping attacks against Westerners, extending its reach from Algeria to Tunisia, Mali, and other countries.

The region has also witnessed the emergence of The Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL), further amplifying the preexisting sense of insecurity and instability, particularly in light of its seizure of a major territory in Libya. It has played the role of a de facto governing body in Libya's Sirte City, affording it a comfortable launching pad for attacks across other Libyan cities, and transnationally in Algeria and Tunisia—and potentially in the West.

ISIS and AQIM are highly adversarial toward the West in general and the United States in particular. They possess a long track record of issuing threats and carrying out attacks aimed at Western civilians and economic interests. Albeit both upholding the jihadist ideology, AQIM and ISIS are highly oppositional toward each other. Their potential competition for dominance drives each group to reassert its influence over the jihadi landscape in North Africa, which significantly raises the threat prospects against Westerners.

In addition, these groups thrive on being in the spotlight, and targeting Westerners brings them considerable PR value. Looking at today's jihadi landscape in North Africa and the record of these groups, I believe that they will continue to pose a significant threat to the West in the future, regionally and internationally.

PICTURE OF THE THREAT

On March 6, 2017, al-Zalaqa Media Foundation, a jihadi media unit affiliated with al-Qaeda, released a video featuring the leaders of the Mali-based jihadi groups Ansar al-Dine, al-Murabitoune, Macina Liberation Front, and the Sahara Region. In the video, Iyad Ag Ghali, the top leader of Ansar al-Dine, announced the creation of "The Group for Support of Islam and Muslims," a new jihadi collective encom-

passing the aforementioned groups, declaring the new collective's allegiance to al-Qaeda's top leader Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Henceforth, these groups will be operating under the umbrella of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the terror group's North Africa and Sahel faction.

On March 19, al-Qaeda Central Command issued a statement accepting the pledge of allegiance, indicating that the new collective is:

an extension to what Qaida't al-Jihad [al-Qaeda] has taken as approach since its inception, in uniting the Islamic Ummah, unifying its ranks, to seek the establishment of Allah's Sharia, upholding justice, and fighting injustice and tyranny; Allah has graced our brothers in the jihadi groups in Mali to unite under the banner of one group.<sup>1</sup>

The latest announcement constitutes a new milestone in the growth of al-Qaeda's presence and operations at a time when the group behind the 9/11 attacks appears to have been significantly diminished. Although al-Qaeda has been mostly decimated in large parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen, its North Africa and Sahel networks appear to have exponentially grown, increasing their tempo of terror attacks and establishing links in North and West Africa.

Throughout most of its existence, AQIM operated in central-east and northern Algeria, but in the past several years it has expanded its operations to Tunisia and Mali, making AQIM one of the most active al-Qaeda branches. In Tunisia, the group's faction "Uqba bin Nafae' Brigade"—designated a terrorist group by the Tunisian government—has carried out a number of attacks against security forces, most notably in the Chaambi Mountains, which overlook Kasserine City in west-central Tunisia. In Mali, its faction al-Murabitoune—a group affiliated with the notorious Mukhtar Belmokhtar's "Signatories in Blood Brigade," responsible for the 2013 hostage crisis in In Amenas, Algeria—as well as other jihadi groups, have merged under its leadership. On multiple occasions, al-Murabitoune has kidnapped Westerners and targeted Western economic interests.

AQIM has demonstrated its will and intent to target Western nationals and interests. It has kidnapped and killed European and American civilians, and targeted Western gas and oil extraction plants. A number of the group's hostage operations were kidnap-for-ransom, and reportedly brought the group significant sums of money.

Over the past 3 years, North Africa has witnessed the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL), most notably in Libya's Sirte City, and to a lesser extent in the cities of Darna and Benghazi in northeastern Libya. ISIS has also established a small branch in Algeria and connected with jihadists in Tunisia. Unlike AQIM, whose attacks mostly consist of hit-and-runs, kidnappings, and bombing operations, ISIS has been able to capture territory and implement its form of governance in Sirte, recruiting from the population under its rule, and conducting beheadings in the large-ly arid Fezzan region in central Libya.

ISIS in North Africa continues to operate mostly in Libya. Security forces have only recently succeeded in pushing the group to the outskirts of Sirte and recapturing many of its vital sites. However, recent reports suggest that ISIS is regrouping, and possibly gaining enough manpower to recapture Sirte.<sup>2</sup>

Both AQIM and ISIS's Libya faction have launched significant operations in the past 2 years; such attacks garnered global attention and positioned both groups as leaders of global jihad. AQIM fighters have targeted multiple hotels and killed Western tourists and locals alike in Mali, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. Meanwhile, ISIS has focused on targeting government forces and Christian laborers; it has conducted gruesome beheadings of Egyptian Coptic and Ethiopian workers, as well as multiple bombings in Tripoli. I believe that both groups pose a threat to the West: AQIM's threat is directed at Western nationals and interests in its primary operational territories, rarely, if ever, targeting Western countries, while ISIS's threat to Western homelands is significantly higher, via orchestrated and inspired attacks.

#### WILL AND INTENT TO TARGET THE WEST

Al-Qaeda's top leader Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri has indicated that al-Qaeda's main focus remains targeting the United States—most notably in his 2013 manifesto, "General Guidelines for Jihadi Work."<sup>3</sup> Zawahiri's manifesto laid out the military agenda for all al-Qaeda affiliates—indeed, all jihadists—around the world. In other

<sup>1</sup> <https://justpaste.it/14mlp>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/21/world/africa/libya-isis.html>.

<sup>3</sup> [https://ia800408.us.archive.org/27/items/tawjeh\\_ayman/tawjeh\\_ayman.pdf](https://ia800408.us.archive.org/27/items/tawjeh_ayman/tawjeh_ayman.pdf).



words, his document dictated the priorities jihadi groups are meant to follow, placing the United States at the top of al-Qaeda's military targets. The document stated:

The military work is to target firstly the head of global infidels America, and her ally Israel, and then her local allies who rule our countries. Targeting America aims at exhausting and hemorrhaging it, in order for it to end like the Soviet Union did, and isolate itself due to its military, human, and economic losses, and subsequently ease its grip on our countries, and its allies to begin falling one after another.

ISIS leaders regularly and vocally urge the group's followers to target the United States and Europe. Since 2014, the group has released a range of missives and videos urging jihadists in the West to kill Americans and Europeans. ISIS's late spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, made this a focal point of his speeches:

If you can kill a disbelieving American or European—especially the spiteful and filthy French—or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah and kill him in any manner or way.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, ISIS features individuals in its propaganda who represent and parrot the group's threats to the West and suggest that their goal is to strike beyond North Africa, to “conquer Rumiya,” in reference to Europe and North America. In a February 2015 video released by ISIS media in Libya, an English-speaking masked man threatened:

The sea you have hidden Sheikh Osama bin Laden's body in, we swear to Allah, we will mix it with your blood.<sup>5</sup>

ISIS has inspired a number of attacks in the West—and capitalized on these attacks with its official propaganda releases designed to inspire even more attacks—including the Pulse Nightclub massacre in Orlando, Florida. Furthermore, ISIS has orchestrated a number of deadly attacks in Europe, including the November 2015 attacks at the Bataclan theatre and the Stade de France in Paris, and the March 2016 attack at Brussels' Zaventem Airport, among others.

#### ISIS AND AQIM ARE DIFFERENT

There are differences, however, between AQIM and ISIS, the most obvious of which is their proclaimed ideological differences—especially after Zawahiri disowned ISIS in February 2014. Organizationally, AQIM is more decentralized in its approach and sees North Africa and the Sahel as the primary geographic region for its operations. Quite rarely does the group invite foreign fighters or recruits from outside the Maghreb and Sahel regions into its ranks. Its political statements have largely focused on “tyrannical” regimes in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Mali and its aims are very much North Africa-centric.

ISIS, on the other hand, including its branch in Libya, has specifically called on Muslims to migrate to territories under its control. Its ranks in Libya have swelled with the arrival of fighters from Sudan, Somalia, Ghana, and Mali, among other countries. It has operated in a more centralized fashion, consistently adhering to the language and methodology of ISIS central command in Iraq and Syria. Its messages mostly ignore the politics of North African countries, instead concentrating on illustrating jihad in North Africa as part of the overall structure of the proclaimed “Caliphate,” as provinces under ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's rule. These messages specifically urge jihadists to pledge allegiance to ISIS. When ISIS's propaganda has focused on North and West Africa, it invites jihadists who are operating in al-Qaeda's backyard to pledge allegiance to Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed “Caliph” of the Islamic State.

AQIM's rhetoric has largely focused on France as its primary nemesis, referring to the French invasion of Mali and France's historical interest in North Africa. Meanwhile, ISIS's enemies are lumped into one—what is referred to as “Fustat al-Kufr,” or “the party of infidels.”

#### AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM)

AQIM was formally established in February 2007. Its predecessor, “The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat” (GSPC), formally pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-urges-more-attacks-on-western-disbelievers-9749512.html>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/19/africa/libya-isis-executions-ethiopian-christians/>.

on September 11, 2006;<sup>6</sup> it has sought the establishment of Islamic Sharia governance and the targeting of Western nationals and interests.

GSPC's declaration of allegiance to al-Qaeda not only appears to have transpired for the sake of relevancy; affiliating with al-Qaeda effectively placed the group in the spotlight as the leader of jihadi efforts across North Africa and the Sahel region. More importantly, GSPC declared that its allegiance to Usama bin Laden was "part of the international jihad"<sup>7</sup>—in reference to al-Qaeda's 1998 declaration of war on the United States. In other words, GSPC adhered to the ideology of al-Qaeda, positioned itself as part of the global jihadi movement, and as no longer exclusive to Algeria.

Though it operates mostly in Algeria, AQIM portrayed itself as the top jihadi group for North African jihadists—a point that it addressed in numerous audio and video recordings. Led by Algerian national Abdulmalik Droukdel (also known as Abu MUSAAB Abdulwadoud), many of AQIM's operations have specifically targeted Western nationals and interests, to include the kidnapping and killing of numerous Western victims.

AQIM views North African governments as "an extension" of Western powers and interests. The group believes that there is a new type of imperialistic, "Crusader" campaign that aims at fighting and uprooting Islam. Thus, for AQIM, targeting the governments of Algeria and neighboring countries is in line with targeting U.S. and European interests. The West, according to AQIM, must be confronted—and if not directly, then through the targeting of its citizens and interests.

In a 2009 audio release titled "A Message to Our Ummah in the Islamic Maghreb," Abdulwadoud discussed these points, stating:

I return briefly to show the danger of the new imperialistic attack, which is an extension to the old campaign, which aims to target our Ummah in its dearest of spiritual components and even its existential principles, and the principles of its continuity, and also to show the dirty role of these apostate and traitor regimes in our Maghreb countries for the interests of the countries that have imperialistic goals and expansionist interests like America, the European Union, and Israel, so perhaps that our Ummah would get ready and prepare to fight its inevitable existential battle, that, if it does not fight today, will inevitably fight it tomorrow.<sup>8</sup>

AQIM claims to fight the Algerian government because it views it as "part of the declared Crusader campaign," in reference to the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In a 2010 video, AQIM indicated that the "evil government" of Algeria is a direct participant in the "Crusader war," because it:

confessed to occupying Iraq via diplomatic representation; [by] imprisoning and torturing the Muslim youths who join their brothers in Iraq, [and] participating in the war on Somalia by sending military supply aircraft in support of its Crusader masters . . . to appease the American master.<sup>9</sup>

Zawahiri later underscored these points in his "General Guidelines for Jihadi Work" manifesto, stating:

In Algeria, where the American presence is small and unnoticeable, the struggle against the regime is for the sake of weakening it and to spread the jihadi influence across the Islamic Maghreb, the West African Sahel, and South Saharan countries, and in these regions the signs of [mujahideen] confrontation with the Americans and their allies have started . . . [sic] All the mujahideen brothers should consider targeting the Western Crusader Zionist coalition's interests in any location in the world the most important of their duties, and to seek it to the best of their ability.<sup>10</sup>

Zawahiri sees Algeria, and North Africa in general, as a new front to weaken the United States, but not necessarily a launching pad for operations in the West. This is important because it underscores AQIM's methodology: it is easier to target the West in AQIM's operational reach than to train and dispatch operatives overseas.

#### TARGETING WESTERN CIVILIANS AND INTERESTS

Although AQIM has not yet claimed responsibility for terrorist operations in the West, it has underscored that one of its goals is to target Western citizens and inter-

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\\_business/committees/house\\_of\\_representatives\\_committees?url=pjcis/aqap\\_6%20terrorist%20orgs/report/appendix%20e.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=pjcis/aqap_6%20terrorist%20orgs/report/appendix%20e.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\\_business/committees/house\\_of\\_representatives\\_committees?url=pjcis/aqap\\_6%20terrorist%20orgs/report/appendix%20e.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=pjcis/aqap_6%20terrorist%20orgs/report/appendix%20e.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> <https://archive.org/details/Archive-to-almagreb-mojahdeen>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://archive.org/details/badrmagrib>.

<sup>10</sup> [https://ia800408.us.archive.org/27/items/tawjeh\\_ayman/tawjeh\\_ayman.pdf](https://ia800408.us.archive.org/27/items/tawjeh_ayman/tawjeh_ayman.pdf).

ests. Its narrative includes grievances such as the “French invasion of Mali,” which the group sees as part of the new “Crusader imperialism.” Indeed, of all the Western nations, France is AQIM’s primary adversary, a theme deeply rooted in North Africa’s history—and AQIM has expressed its grievances against France’s stance in North Africa since the group’s inception. AQIM’s rhetoric, nonetheless, is confrontational toward the West at large, as it views Western and “Zionist” influence as having negatively impacted Muslims, portraying them as persecuted, threatened, and targeted. Therefore, its selection of targets is not limited to nationalistic borders, and its threat is not limited to French citizens and interests.

AQIM sees its fight against the West as part of a larger battle; this point is highlighted in a number of its communiqués. In March 2016, AQIM claimed responsibility for the armed assault on the Grand Bassam Hotel in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, which killed a number of Westerners, including German and French nationals. In its claim of responsibility, released after the attack,<sup>11</sup> the group said:

The goal from these [operations] include a reminder to the Crusaders that their continuous crimes against the Muslims and their Mujahideen brothers will beg a response of targeting the leaders of their crimes and their interests. Our message to the Western populaces is that our actions are a response to the crimes of your armies and governments against our Ummah in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Mali, and Central Africa . . . you either leave us safe in our homelands, or we will spill your security and the security of your citizens.<sup>12</sup>

#### A THREAT TO ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Furthermore, AQIM poses a significant threat to Western economic interests, most notably gas and oil plants and facilities. In January 2013, Mukhtar Belmokhtar’s Signatories in Blood Brigade (also known as al-Mulathamini) attacked the Tigantourine gas extraction facility in In Amenas town, eastern Algeria, which is jointly operated by an Algerian national company and BP/Statoil. The ensuing hostage crisis lasted for over a day, and concluded with the death of over 30 hostages, including American, British, Norwegian, and French nationals, among others. Reports indicated that a number of the hostage-takers were Libyan and Malian fighters, suggesting a higher level of transnational coordination between AQIM’s affiliates.

A few months later, Belmokhtar’s group attacked the French Uranium mine Areva and nearby military barracks in Arlit town, in Niger’s northwestern city of Agadez. A spokesman for the group explained, “[we] attacked France, [as well as] Niger because of its cooperation with France,” further underscoring AQIM’s focus on targeting French interests.<sup>13</sup>

AQIM’s threat to Western gas and oil companies was further underscored in the March 2016 rocket attack on BP/Statoil facilities in Algeria’s In Saleh region. The group’s statement referenced the In Amenas attack 3 years earlier, and stated its will and intent to target Western interests in the future, saying:

We chose the British Petroleum base in In Saleh area, and it is the same company that we targeted at Tigantourine compound, to send, through this operation, a number of messages . . . We announce to all the Western companies that are investing in rock gas that we will target you directly, and we will use every ability to repel you from these projects that harm our environment, rejected in our society.<sup>14</sup>

AQIM’s fixation on France came further into focus on March 17, 2017, when Abdulwadoud released an audio message in which he accepted the allegiance from “The Group for Support of Islam and Muslims” and addressed France, suggesting that the mujahideen will seek to strike in France:

[France’s] injustice and aggression against the populaces and tribes of the Sahel and Sahara will only increase these tribes’ brotherhood, coalescence, and unity . . . [they will] be determined to wage jihad and resist against the aggressors, and this will only add to the determination of Muslims to transfer the war from our land to her land and from our cities to her cities so it can live in fear that our people in the occupied lands are living.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa\\_35798502](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa_35798502).

<sup>12</sup> [https://telegram.me/Al\\_Andalus](https://telegram.me/Al_Andalus).

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa\\_22637084](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa_22637084).

<sup>14</sup> [https://justpaste.it/Algeria\\_AQMI\\_2016](https://justpaste.it/Algeria_AQMI_2016).

<sup>15</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/user-903507653/8cg8ayogbe4v>.

AQIM's primary source of funding and influence is the kidnapping of Westerners, going as far back as 2007. Kidnapping operations not only provide major propaganda value, but also reportedly earn the group significant sums of money, which it uses to finance various other operations.

The incomplete list of AQIM kidnapping operations provided below clearly demonstrates that the group is constantly pursuing Western nationals. Since its inception, AQIM has kidnapped Westerners in Mauritania, Niger, and Mali. The group has reportedly, at times, negotiated with foreign governments to release hostages in exchange for ransom sums. Some estimates indicate that by 2012, AQIM was making about \$3 million USD per hostage released.<sup>21</sup> In other instances, the group has demanded the release of militants from prison—a tactic that has likely helped swell its ranks.

- On December 24, 2007, four French nationals were killed in Mauritania. The Mauritanian government charged and sentenced three AQIM members to death.
- On February 22, 2008, Austrian citizens Wolfgang Ebner and Andrea Kloiber were kidnapped in Tunisia and transferred to an unknown location in Mali. They were reportedly released after a ransom was paid.
- On December 14, 2008, Canadian diplomats Robert Fowler and Louis Guay were kidnapped in Niger, and later released on April 22, 2010.
- On January 22, 2009, Edwin Dyer, Marianne Petzold, Gabriella Greitner, and Werner Greiner were kidnapped in Mali near the Niger border. AQIM killed Dyer on May 31 while reportedly releasing the others after alleged AQIM members were released from prison.
- In June 2009, U.S. national Christopher Leggett was murdered in Nouakchott, Mauritania.
- On November 14, 2009, AQIM attempted to kidnap U.S. embassy personnel in Tahoua, Niger.
- On November 25, 2009, French citizen Pierre Camatte was kidnapped in Mali near the Niger border. Mali released four AQIM militants while AQIM released Camatte in return.
- On November 29, 2009, Spanish citizens Albert Vilalta, Roque Pascual, and Alicia Gamez were kidnapped near Nouadhibou, Mauritania. AQIM later released Gamez after the Spanish government allegedly paid a ransom. AQIM released Vilalta and Pascual on August 22, 2010.
- On December 18, 2009, Italian citizens Nicola Cicala and Philomen Kabouree were kidnapped in Mauritania. AQIM later released Cicala and Kabouree; it remains unclear whether a ransom was paid.
- On April 19, 2010, French citizen Michel Germaneau was kidnapped in northern Niger and then moved to Mali. AQIM demanded the release of its members from prison. French and Mauritanian security forces raided AQIM members in Mali, killing six of them. AQIM announced it had killed Germaneau on July 25.
- In September 2010, five French nationals were kidnapped in northern Niger. AQIM still holds them hostage to this day.
- In January 2011, French aid worker Antoine De Leocour and French citizen Vincent Delory were kidnapped in Niger. De Leocour and Delory were killed during a rescue attempt.
- In 2011, AQIM kidnapped Swedish national Johan Gustaffson and South African national Stephen McGowan. In 2012, they were featured in an AQIM video with another hostage, Dutch national Sjaak Rijke, who has since been rescued. In June 2015, the two other hostages appeared in an AQIM video in which a British-accented militant informed them that their governments were not negotiating for their release.
- In December 2015, Swiss nun Beatrice Stockley was kidnapped from her residence in Timbuktu, Mali. Stockley was previously kidnapped and released in 2012, but upon her return to Mali, AQIM militants from the Sahara faction took her hostage and accused her of conducting missionary campaigns.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2011/0119/AQIM-kidnapping-and-murder-a-brief-history>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/01/aqim-takes-australian-couple-hostage-in-northern-burkina-faso.php>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.gcat.org/analysis/29-ranoc/236-the-forgotten-three-the-fate-of-aqim-timbuktu-hostages-and-their-captor-belkacemzouadi.html>.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/al-qaeda/11693716/New-British-front-man-for-jihadist-videos-revealed.html>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://af.reuters.com/article/maliNews/idAFL8N1500DA>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/mali-al-qaeda-islamic-maghrebs-ransom-revenue>.

- In January 2016, an Australian couple—a doctor and his wife—was kidnapped by AQIM militants following the terror group's attack on a hotel in Burkina Faso. They were reportedly kidnapped in the country's north and brought into Mali across the border.

#### UQBA BIN NAFAE' BRIGADE IN TUNISIA

AQIM's affiliate in Tunisia appears to have begun operating in the country in the summer of 2014. The group's operations have primarily targeted security forces, namely in Kasserine City. In September 2014, 2 months after Uqba bin Nafae' militants targeted security forces in Hanshir at-Talla in the Chaambi Mountains in west central Tunisia, a spokesman for the group threatened the Tunisian government in a video, stating:

Without introductions . . . O tyrants of Tunisia, await glad tidings of what harm you, as the silence of the mujahideen of Uqba bin Nafae' Brigade before your crimes will not last long.<sup>22</sup>

The group has since carried out a range of attacks against police and army units. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest a higher level of coordination between Tunisian and Algerian AQIM fighters. AQIM recently released the bio of one of its since-killed Algerian commanders who purportedly traveled between Tunisia and Algeria to coordinate with the group's affiliates.

Although the Chaambi Mountains appear to be the group's main hideout, a jihadi media unit known as Efrigia Media released a statement in April 2015 indicating that Uqba bin Nafae' Brigade has:

cells and its soldiers are present on all the Tunisian soil and in its various provinces, and has history in jihadi work and in training a big number of Muslim youths and supplying weapons.<sup>23</sup>

Uqba bin Nafae' Brigade poses a serious threat to Tunisia's stability, and should be considered a threat to Western nationals traveling through inadequately governed areas of western Tunisia near the Algerian border.

#### THE ISLAMIC STATE (ISIS/ISIL) IN LIBYA<sup>24</sup>

Previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is the evolution of what was once known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). After expanding into Syria and rebelling against al-Qaeda, ISIS shocked the world with scenes of brutality, including the videotaped beheadings of at least three Americans. The global terror group seized Raqqa, Syria and shortly thereafter took control of Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. Over the course of several months, the group seized control of cities, towns, and villages in several Syrian and Iraqi provinces, and quickly expanded into the schismatic political atmosphere of Libya.

In the spring of 2015, ISIS captured the city of Sirte, effectively establishing a North African stronghold where it is able to host fighters from other countries.<sup>25</sup> The group established strong fighting fronts in Darna and Benghazi and launched attacks targeting Libyan Forces and rival rebel factions, as well as government buildings in Tripoli and Misrata. Moreover, ISIS attempted and temporarily succeeded in laying control over gas and oil plants.

ISIS's branch in Libya—comprising “Tripoli, Barqa and Fezzan” provinces<sup>27</sup>—is arguably one of its strongest and most reliable factions. The post-Qaddafi political turmoil in Libya has afforded ISIS a more flexible environment in which to operate, especially prior to the creation of the Government of National Accord (GAN) in De-

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDuXDnoeJLc&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=235486>.

<sup>24</sup> It is worth mentioning that this report does not discuss ISIS in Egypt. ISIS's branch in Egypt's North Sinai is a highly active group, and it has operated in that region for over five years (previously allegiant to al-Qaeda). Most of its attacks have targeted Israeli territories and Egyptian security forces. While the group does not appear to have hosted foreign fighters or dispatched operatives to the West, its targeting and downing of the Russian Metrojet Airliner in October 2015 spotlighted the group as a serious threat to tourists and the aviation industry. It is unlikely that ISIS in Egypt will be the next destination for fighters from the West; however, Western tourists and interests—especially in the North Sinai—are at risk from potential attacks in the future.

<sup>25</sup> [https://ia600405.us.archive.org/35/items/jamalalqudsy\\_yahoo\\_20160530\\_1211/](https://ia600405.us.archive.org/35/items/jamalalqudsy_yahoo_20160530_1211/) [ . . . ] .gov.

<sup>26</sup> [https://ia801504.us.archive.org/28/items/rs\\_ta/r11.mp4](https://ia801504.us.archive.org/28/items/rs_ta/r11.mp4).

<sup>27</sup> Areas of ISIS operations in Libya: Fezzan (Phazania) region in south west Libya is mostly a desert region. Barqa (Cyrenaica) Province includes the cities of Darna and Benghazi. Tripoli denotes the capital Tripoli, Sirte, and Misrata.

ember 2015. Libyan Forces recently scored victories against ISIS in Sirte, but the group is quickly regrouping and maintains a wide network of operatives and large caches of weapons.

#### THE WEST AS ADVERSARY

ISIS in Libya has not just been adversarial toward the Libyan Forces; it has sent a direct message to the “Crusaders” with its release of footage showing the grisly beheadings of 21 Egyptian laborers in southwestern Libya. Released in February 2015, the video featured an English-speaking masked militant whose message echoes ISIS’s will and intent to strike beyond North Africa:

You have seen us on the hills of al-Sham and on Dabiq’s plains, chopping off the heads of those carrying the cross who have been living a long time, filled with spite against Islam and Muslims. And today, we’re in the south of Rome, on the land of Islam, Libya, sending another message. O Crusaders, safety for you will be only wishes, especially when you’re fighting us altogether. Therefore, we will fight you altogether.<sup>28</sup>

In April 2015, the same English-speaking fighter appears in a video featuring the executions of two groups of Ethiopian Christian workers, directing a message to the “nations of the Cross,” in reference to the West. His message was similar to the earlier one:

To the nations of the Cross, we’re back again on the sands where the companions of the Prophet have stepped on before, telling you Muslim blood that was shed under the hands of your religion is not cheap. In fact, their blood is the purest blood because there is a nation behind them inherits revenge. And we swear to Allah . . . you will not have safety even in your dreams until you embrace Islam.<sup>29</sup>

Such threats to the West are in lieu of ISIS’s main external operations goals: To strike in the United States and Europe—goals that its leaders verbalized the intent to accomplish on multiple occasions. ISIS in Libya as an entity, however, does not appear to have succeeded in orchestrating attacks in Western countries—at least not yet. However, its operatives have targeted Western tourists, namely in Tunisia.

Unlike AQIM, however, which operates in a more decentralized fashion, ISIS is highly centralized and the goals of its Libyan faction are not confined to North Africa. On a number of occasions, ISIS fighters have appeared in videos to threaten (or even celebrate) an attack and name other cities they wish to target. After the November 2015 attacks in Paris, ISIS in Libya released a video, titled “From Barqa to Paris,” featuring fighters who vowed more attacks against “Crusaders” in the future. One foreign fighter, whose country of origin was not specified, threatened:

France was the beginning, and tomorrow it will be in Washington, New York, and Moscow . . . you will have no haven from our guns, bullets, and explosives; we will come to you.<sup>30</sup>

ISIS’s targeting of Christians—whom ISIS deems a part of the global “Crusade”—is directly addressing the West and challenging Western countries to intervene. If ISIS’s operatives are unable to strike overseas, the group appears to be urging Western armies to bring to it a ground war—an action that would afford ISIS significant attention and amplify its recruitment efforts. ISIS has used this rhetoric since the U.S.-led coalition began its aerial campaign against the group in Iraq and Syria.

#### ISIS IN LIBYA RECRUITS FOREIGN NATIONALS

ISIS has reportedly recruited from more than 80 countries around the world.<sup>31</sup> Its branch in Libya brought in fighters from north, west, and east Africa, and from across the Sahel region. ISIS in Libya has featured fighters urging others to join its ranks, including those from Mali, Somalia, Ghana, Mali, Tunisia, Nigeria, Egypt, and Sudan. The group has also featured English-speakers, although their countries of origin remain unknown.

In a video from its media office in Tripoli, ISIS featured fighters who addressed Muslims across Africa, urging them to pledge allegiance and join ISIS:

<sup>28</sup> <http://justpaste.it/jfg4>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://dump.to/albayyinah>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://archive.org/details/WilayatBarqahFromBarqahToParis>.

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/world/middleeast/thousands-enter-syria-to-join-isis-despite-global-efforts.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/world/middleeast/thousands-enter-syria-to-join-isis-despite-global-efforts.html?_r=0).

Brothers, it is time to pledge allegiance to the state of the Caliphate; I say to the youths, jihad is obligatory in our current time, and I urge those from my brothers who have no excuse to depart for jihad.<sup>32</sup>

Another fighter delivered a message to “my brothers and sister everywhere: we are now in the Islamic State, and I call upon you to migrate to it.” He called upon the Tuareg tribe in North Mali—the tribe one of AQIM’s most senior leaders, Iyad Ag Ghali, belongs to—to “migrate to the Islamic State.”

Nonetheless, for ISIS, it has remained of critical importance to strike in the West while simultaneously recruiting fighters to its ranks. ISIS leadership believes that inspiring so-called “lone wolves” to strike in the United States and Europe will generate higher propaganda value. For ISIS, attacks in the West are preferable; they turn the attention away from its losses in Iraq and Syria while maintaining the spotlight on the group. Abu Muhammad al-Adnani addressed this point in a May 2016 speech, in which he called on jihadists in the West to launch operations in their home cities rather than migrate to ISIS territory:

Open in their faces the door of jihad and return their deeds against them in regret, and the smallest action you carry out in their homelands is better and more favored by us from the biggest of actions in our midst; it is more successful for us and more brutalizing to them. And if one of you wishes and seeks to reach the Islamic State [i.e. here in the Middle East], one of us wishes to be in your location [i.e. in the West] to brutalize the Crusaders.<sup>33</sup>

To justify the targeting of civilians, Adnani added:

We’ve heard that some of you cannot work [i.e. to attack] for being unable to reach military targets, and is hesitant from targeting the so-called civilians, avoiding them because he doubts the permissibility and legitimacy. Know that in the heart of the warring Crusaders’ lands there is no immunity of blood and no presence to the so-called innocents . . . at least from the notion of treating others in the same way; their aircraft do not distinguish between our armed or unarmed, man and woman. Know that targeting so-called civilians is more beloved to us . . . more brutalizing and painful to them and more repulsing.

#### ISIS’S RESURGENCE IN ALGERIA

ISIS established a faction under the initial name of “Jund al-Khilafah in Algeria” in September 2014, now called “Algeria Province.” A week after declaring allegiance to Baghdadi, the faction kidnapped and beheaded a French national. The group is believed to be comprised of a few dozen members, and for the past 2 years it has remained mostly inactive. That changed on March 2, 2017, when the group launched its first suicide attack, targeting a police station in Bab el-Kantara area of Constantine City in northeastern Algeria.

Although the faction remains in a fragile state and lacks organizational support and a programmatic agenda, ISIS fighters in Algeria—operating mostly in the vicinity of Tizi Ouzou—will likely attempt to strike again, as they appear to be re-organizing their ranks. The likely targets will continue to be security forces; however, Western nationals traveling in certain parts of northern and eastern Algeria could be easy targets for kidnapping operations.

#### ISIS OPERATIONS IN TUNISIA A MAIN CONCERN

ISIS has failed to seize territory and establish a strong fighting front in Tunisia, though it has attracted many Tunisians to its ranks in Iraq and Syria. This is partly due to the Tunisian government’s crackdown on jihadists, even those who have no allegiance to any specific group, such as Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, which has been designated a terrorist group by the government.

Two significant ISIS attacks in Tunisia that targeted Westerners took place in 2015; in March, two ISIS operatives attacked tourists outside the Bardo Museum in Tunis City, killing a total of 22 people, including Italian, French, Spanish, British, and Belgian nationals, among others. The attacker, according to the Tunisian government, trained with ISIS’s branch in Libya, underscoring the threat ISIS in Libya poses to Western nationals. Three months later, an ISIS operative using an

<sup>32</sup> [https://ia601301.us.archive.org/5/items/CopyOf001\\_20150910/Copy%20of%20001%20-%20\[sic\].ogv](https://ia601301.us.archive.org/5/items/CopyOf001_20150910/Copy%20of%20001%20-%20[sic].ogv).

<sup>33</sup> <https://archive.org/download/KalemtSHabaan/kalemt%20SHa%60baan.mp3>.

automatic rifle killed over 35 tourists, most of them British, at a resort beach hotel in Port al-Kantaoui, north of Sousse City.<sup>34</sup>

While fairly infrequent, these operations generate significant media attention for the terror group; as ISIS continues to face challenges in its Middle Eastern strongholds, ISIS-orchestrated attacks against Westerners in Tunisia may be more likely in the future.

#### TACKLING THE JIHADIST THREAT IN NORTH AFRICA

According to various media reports, the emphasis of U.S. and European counterterrorism operations in North Africa and the Sahel has been limited. U.S. special forces have reportedly conducted a number of air strikes and other operations against jihadists in Libya.

Part of the issue appears to be that the United States is preoccupied with fighting ISIS in its main strongholds in Iraq and Syria, likely viewing ISIS's Libya branch as a lesser threat vis-à-vis Western nationals and interests. Another reason may be that U.S. and European security forces see the greatest threat from ISIS to the West as directly emerging from its Iraqi and Syrian strongholds—where the group's top leadership is in hideout.

In other words, the conventional wisdom seems to be that ISIS directs external operations from Iraq and Syria. While that might be true today, there is a high likelihood that the group will decentralize its command-and-control in the future, and its branch in Libya is poised to become the main destination where many of its fighters will end up. There is a higher likelihood that ISIS in Libya will fund and direct external operations as its Syrian and Iraqi branches are under immense pressure to defend what remains of the territory under their control.

For AQIM, its affiliates in North Mali have recently coalesced into one group; one of the new collective's key goals is to continue fighting French forces in Gao and other places.

AQIM's Algeria faction—where its top leader Abdulwadoud is believed to be hiding—has faced a number of setbacks over the past 2 years, and its operations have been highly subdued. This is part of the reason for the increased activity from its factions in Mali and Tunisia. It is thus imperative that Western governments provide further military and intelligence support to Tunisian, Algerian, and Malian forces as they tackle the jihadist activity in their respective countries.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Given AQIM and ISIS's respective records of targeting Westerners, it is clear that both groups pose a significant threat. AQIM's focus continues to be on targeting Western citizens and economic interests mainly in North Africa and the Sahel regions. There is a significant focus on France and its influence in North and West Africa, which may be a driving force for North African jihadists in France to launch attacks in the country on behalf of AQIM.

Gas and oil facilities have been AQIM's primary economic targets, especially given that many Westerners work at these plants. AQIM's preferred methods of attack against such sites will involve suicide bombers, hostage taking, and rocket attacks. Though France appears to be AQIM's primary adversary, the terror group has targeted various Western nationals, and, while the viability of AQIM attacks in the United States is low, its interest in targeting the U.S. homeland is high—especially given that al-Qaeda's leadership has designated the United States as al-Qaeda's primary target.

Notorious AQIM commander Mukhtar Belmokhtar—who was reported to have been killed several times over the past 4 years—was confirmed killed by senior al-Qaeda Central leader Hussam Abdulra'ooof in an October 2015 recording.<sup>35</sup> Various reports indicate that he may have been killed as early as June 2015 in Libya.<sup>36</sup> His reported presence in Libya is further indicative of transnational cooperation between AQIM affiliates across North Africa.

AQIM never confirmed Belmokhtar's death, but it is safe to say that the commander left behind a powerful faction in the Sahel capable of conducting attacks against Westerners for years to come.

It is worth noting that al-Qaeda and ISIS oppose each other—not only ideologically, but also in their geographic areas of interest. This does not mean, however, that jihadists allegiant to both groups do not have room for cooperation. Indeed,

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33304897>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://twitter.com/menastream/status/651179105832955905>.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/11674616/The-Uncatchable-one-eyed-jihadi-MokhtarBelmokhtar.html>.



there is evidence to suggest that jihadists who are specifically inspired by both groups might find a cooperative environment provided they have the same enemy. The January 2015 attacks in Paris, France at the offices of the magazine Charlie Hebdo by pro al-Qaeda operatives, and at a Kosher deli by a pro-ISIS jihadist, pointed to some level of cooperation between the perpetrators, particularly in obtaining weapons.

In light of the wave of ISIS-inspired and orchestrated attacks in the United States and Europe in 2015 and 2016, and given the on-going U.S.-led military mission in Iraq and Syria, the likelihood is that ISIS will continue to incite, inspire, and plot similar attacks against civilians and soft targets. Stabbing, ramming, armed assault, and bombing attacks will likely continue to be the methods of choice for future attackers.

ISIS's strongholds in Iraq and Syria are under siege. The group has lost significant territory and in the coming months, it is poised to lose Mosul and most of its control in Aleppo. Foreign fighters, including those from the West who may not wish to go home, may end up connecting with ISIS's faction in Libya, invigorating the group's North Africa ranks. Fighters from at least ten nationalities so far have been fighting with ISIS in Libya.

Given Libya's close proximity to Europe, ISIS fighters in Libya who wish to target the West may travel to European countries instead of the United States.

Furthermore, ISIS has expressed on multiple occasions its will and intent to orchestrate attacks in the West, and its operations in Paris and Brussels denote the group's ability to dispatch skilled fighters with the know-how to plot and strike. The group has also exerted influence among jihadists in the United States and Europe who are encouraged to attack in their countries on behalf of the group, rather than join ISIS's ranks.

Westerners traveling or residing in insecure areas of Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria will likely continue to face threats from ISIS-inspired and directed attacks.

ISIS appears to have a more powerful recruitment and indoctrination strategy in the West than AQIM. ISIS's external operations facilitators appear to have developed a more inclusive and aggressive call to target the West by all means necessary—unlike AQIM, which has not focused on calls for external attacks overseas.

Returnees to the United States and Europe—those who have gained experience in militant tactics in ISIS camps—as well as self-radicalized individuals, likely pose the most significant jihadist threat to the West.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Mr. Alkhouri.

Our final witness is Dr. Frederic Wehrey. He is a senior fellow in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He specializes in post-conflict transitions, armed groups, and identity politics with a focus on Libya, North Africa, and the Gulf.

His commentary and articles appeared in numerous publications. He routinely briefs U.S. and European government officials on Middle East affairs. Dr. Wehrey is a 21-year veteran of the active and reserve components of the U.S. Air Force, with tours across the Middle East and North Africa.

Dr. Wehrey, you are recognized for your testimony. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF FREDERIC WEHREY, SENIOR FELLOW, MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

Mr. WEHREY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, committee Members, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak with you today about the extremist threat from North Africa. The challenge here is especially dire given the numbers of fighters who fought abroad with ISIS and al-Qaeda and who are now returning.

But beyond the threat of returning jihadists, it is the weakness of states in the region that is the most important driver of extremism. Many states here are increasingly unable to meet the de-

mands of their citizens and are facing mounting economic pressures in an era of low oil prices.

Faced with rising, expectations and diminished futures, some youth in the region have fallen prey to the appeal of jihad peddled by ISIS and al-Qaeda. Critiques of corruption, social injustice, and police abuses feature prominently in the jihadists' appeal.

Heavy-handed policies by North African governments have often fueled the very radicalism they purport to quash. Added to this are the region's ungoverned spaces and porous borders where extremists have negotiated access with marginalized tribes or co-opted smuggling networks.

Finally, a key enabler of jihadism is the outbreak of armed conflict. Any time there is an insurgency or civil war, we can expect to see transnational jihadists arrive, often with superior motivation, funding, and firepower.

I will focus my remarks on Libya, a country that embodies many of these afflictions and that I visited repeatedly over the past several years, including Sirte last year. It is a failed state that presents the most immediate extremist challenge.

Despite the successful Libyan-led campaign against ISIS in Sirte and other successes in the west and the east last year, the country remains at risk. Scattered ISIS members are regrouping in Sabratha near the Tunisian border, in cells in and around the capital of Tripoli, and in the south where they have easy transit into the Sahel.

Also, some al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters who defected to ISIS are now returning back to a reconstituted and expanded al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. But more importantly, I want to emphasize that it is Libya's worsening political crisis that has pushed it to the brink of open conflict, and this could create a vacuum for terrorists to reemerge.

The recent campaign against ISIS has helped embolden General Khalifa Haftar and his forces in the east to push for national domination, capturing oil facilities, and threatening to topple the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli. If this were to happen, it would invariably throw the country into civil war, creating yet another vacuum for ISIS, al-Qaeda, or some new permutation of jihadism to emerge.

It is a looming danger, Mr. Chairman, that demands a redoubling of diplomatic engagement by the United States. This could entail several efforts; first, deterring moves toward escalation by exerting pressure on the warring parties to include the threat of sanctions; second, brokering a dialog among regional and concerned states with interests in Libya.

But beyond the task of forging a new political compact in Libya, the United States must stand ready to assist the capacity of whatever Libyan government emerges.

This should focus on the following areas: Rationalizing the oil-driven economy and diversifying to other sources of income; training the army and police; reforming defense institutions; and especially promoting the rule of law, especially in prisons, which we know are incubators of violent extremism.

The United States also has an opportunity to re-engage with Libya society in areas like municipal governance, civil society orga-

nizations, media, and education. But proposed cuts to American foreign aid programs on this front would deprive us of this opportunity. So, too, would a ban on Libyan visitors to the States.

Counterterrorism efforts in Libya, whether ISR, border control, direct action, or training and equipping of local forces must always reinforce the building of inclusive, durable governance.

The United States must also ensure that any counterterrorism engagement with local Libyan groups does not inadvertently worsen conflict by privileging one faction over another.

Mr. Chairman, committee Members, my travels to Libya have left me with a strong appreciation for Libyans' resilience. The political fissures that wrack the country are not unbridgeable.

Contrary to some alarmist accounts, Libya has not fallen to extremism. But the United States needs to act now to avert a looming crisis that could have far-reaching effects for its interests beyond the country's borders.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you here today.  
[The prepared statement of Dr. Wehrey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FREDERIC WEHREY

MARCH 29, 2017

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, committee Members, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak with you today about the extremist threat from North Africa.

At the intersection of the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, the countries of North Africa and the Maghreb comprise a vitally important region that casts a long shadow on surrounding areas and, especially, on the security of the Mediterranean basin. The extremist challenge from this region is especially dire given the numbers of fighters who went to Iraq and Syria to fight with the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda and who are now returning.

But beyond the threat of returning jihadists, it is the weakness of states in the region that presents the most significant and long-term driver of extremism. Since the Arab uprisings in 2011, most states in the region are now significantly weaker, unable to meet the basic demands of their citizens, and facing mounting economic pressures in an era of sustained low oil prices.

Beset by fraying social contracts, the dashed hopes of the Arab Spring, and diminished opportunities for employment, some youth of the region have fallen prey to the appeal of jihad peddled by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. The jihadists' critiques of state-led corruption and the abuses of the judiciary and police have also resonated strongly; heavy-handed government policies have often fueled the very radicalism they purport to quash. Added to this are broad swathes of ungoverned land and porous borders, where extremists have established logistical hubs and training camps, often negotiating access with marginalized tribal communities or co-opting existing smuggling networks.

Finally, a key enabler of jihadism is state collapse and the outbreak of open armed conflict. Anywhere there is an established insurgency or civil war, we can expect the emergence of transnational jihadists who insert themselves among and within the warring parties and often recruit combatants to their ranks through superior funding, ideological motivation, and firepower.

I will focus my remarks on Libya, a failed state that embodies a witches' brew of these afflictions and that poses the most immediate extremist challenge. Despite the successful Libyan-led campaign against the ISIS stronghold in Sirte, along with other successes by different Libyan armed groups against ISIS pockets in the West and East, the country remains at risk. Scattered ISIS members are regrouping and al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters who defected to ISIS are now returning back to al-Qaeda-linked groups, more experienced and battle-hardened. Vast portions of its southern deserts remain a thoroughfare for the movement of fighters and arms to the Sahel and beyond.

But more importantly, Libya's worsening political conflict, fueled in part by regional meddling and a contest for oil resources, has pushed it to the brink of civil war. This disastrous outcome would provide yet another opening for ISIS, al-Qaeda, or some new permutation to arise.

To prevent such a scenario, Mr. Chairman, it is important the United States, working in tandem with the Europeans and regional states, redouble its diplomatic efforts to find a durable and inclusive political solution to Libya's conflict. At the same time, it should be ready to assist on a broad array of functions, to include the rebuilding the security sector, diversifying Libya's economy, advancing the rule of law, and supporting civil society. Any near-term counterterrorism (CT) actions inside Libya should reinforce the longer-term goals of political unity and inclusive governance, and great care should be taken to ensure that CT engagement does not inadvertently worsen factional conflict by privileging one group over another.

My remarks draw from visits to Libya over last 2 years to areas of conflict marked by a jihadist presence: Sirte, Benghazi, Sabratha, Tripoli, and southern Libya.

#### HOW JIHADISM GREW IN LIBYA

Libya has a long-standing tradition of jihadism stretching back to the Qadhafi era that saw waves of volunteers going to Afghanistan and then Iraq, where some developed ties to al-Qaeda and what would later become al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and ISIS. These migrations belie the popular notion that Qadhafi kept a lid on extremism: To the contrary, economic neglect and repression at home helped fuel radicalization among certain neighborhoods and communities, whose participation in jihad on foreign battlefields was in some sense a transference of their frustrations against the regime.

In 2011 and 2012, scores of Libyan youths went to Syria and Iraq, some of whom returned to establish the nucleus of the Islamic State in the eastern city of Derna, displacing existing Islamist armed groups. From there, the group spread to the city of Sirte, in the oil-rich center of Libya and established cells in Sabratha to the west, Tripoli, as well as attaching itself to existing Islamist and jihadist combatants in Benghazi. It then set about implementing the draconian style of governance it had practiced in Raqqa and Mosul, assaulting oil facilities to hasten the demise of the State, and attacking the facilities of police and militias who posed a threat. The Islamic State's leadership soon directed foreign aspirates to proceed directly to its North African outpost rather than Syria and Iraq. Foreigners played a crucial role in its expansion in Libya, especially jihadists from Tunisia (some of whom arrived to train for subsequent attacks against their homeland), the Mahreb and the Sahel, and military and governance advisors from Iraq and the Gulf.

It is important to note two dynamics about the rise of ISIS in Libya that have strong implications for the future of jihadism in Libya.

First, Islamist and jihadist communities after the 2011 revolution engaged in a series of fierce debates about strategies and priorities, to include whether to affiliate themselves with the post-Qadhafi State and to participate in elections, and whether and when to use violence. Developments in neighboring states, namely the closing of political space and military-led crackdown on political Islamists in Egypt, strongly influenced the outcomes of those debates in favor of more anti-state and radical actors. At home, a number of developments swayed the debate as well. The most important of these was the outbreak of open armed conflict in Libya in 2014 between the so-called Dawn and Dignity camp, abetted by opposing blocs of regional states (Turkey and Qatar for the former; Egypt, the UAE, and Jordan for the latter) provided further space for the rise of radical jihadists, especially the Islamic State, to expand. For nearly 2 years, the two opposing Dawn and Dignity factions were more focused on fighting each other than on dealing with the extremist menace that gathered in their midst.

Second, the Islamic State in Libya won support among communities and tribes that had been politically marginalized in the post-Qadhafi political order or threatened by local rivals. This was especially apparent in Sirte, a city that had suffered after the revolution because of its affiliation with the Qadhafi regime. Here, members of historically loyalist tribes, the Warfalla and Qadhadhafa, welcomed the Islamic State as a form of self-protection against abuses from the neighboring city of Misrata, which had assaulted Sirte at the end of the revolution and exacted revenge against its inhabitants. Similarly, some local Islamist militias in Benghazi cooperated with the Islamic State on the battlefield because they faced a shared enemy, the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) forces of General Khalifa Hifter.

Finally, jihadists from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other groups based in the Sahel have exploited weak governance and dire economic conditions in Tuerg tribal areas of southern Libya for logistics and training. Their fighters draw upon a long history of local knowledge stretching back to Sahelian insurgencies of the 1990's and Algeria's civil war. After the revolution, these groups established links with local armed groups and jihadists in the north, particularly the northeast in Benghazi, Derna, and Ajdabiya. Ansar al-Sharia trained fighters loyal to the sea-

soned Algerian jihadist Mukhtar Belmokhtar, prior to their January 2013 attack on the Tiguentourine gas facility in Amenas, Algeria.

Local sympathizers and collaborators in southwestern Libya have facilitated some of this transnational presence and movement. That said, the Tuaregs' political and communal opponents in Libya have often exaggerated the depth and scope of extremist penetration, particularly in town of Ubari and farther west. The jihadist presence is mostly logistical and the result of weak administrative and police control in the south, rather than wide-spread support. Where jihadi relationships exist with local armed groups and smugglers, it is often transactional, resulting from a shared interest in keeping borders uncontrolled. Aside from this presence, the penetration of radical ideology into Libyan Tuareg communities or into the south's social fabric more broadly is minimal.

Taken in sum, these three dynamics underscore the fact that the radical jihadist current in Libya is neither constant nor immutable. It ebbs or expands according to the local economic and political conditions, government capacity, and conflict in the country. This is why American engagement with a broad range of tools is so important in denying jihadists the chance to reemerge.

#### RISKS OF RENEWED CONFLICT AND RESURGENT JIHADISM

Last fall, Libyan forces loosely affiliated to a U.N.-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, backed by American airpower and Western special operations, scored a hard-won victory against the ISIS stronghold in the central city of Sirte. Elsewhere across the country, Libyans ejected ISIS cells and fighters from Derna and Benghazi in the east, from Tripoli, and from the town of Sabratha near the Tunisian border.

Today, ISIS is no longer a territorial force in Libya in any meaningful sense. That said, its demise presents a number of dangers.

First, remnants of ISIS could still reconstitute themselves and sow trouble. Already, fighters have fled to the desert valleys south of Sirte, where they've tried to regroup in small encampments like the one the United States bombed on January 18 of this year. The group is said to have a residual presence around the western town of Sabratha, a long-time hub for Tunisian jihadists, and its clandestine cells are still capable of attacking in and around the Tripoli, already wracked by intra-militia fighting. This poses a potential danger for the return of foreign embassies and businesses to the capital.

Beyond these specific threats, Libya remains an attractive host to jihadism, whether from ISIS, al-Qaeda, or some new variant. The conditions are ripe: A long legacy of jihad, economic despair, a governance vacuum, and worsening polarization that could leave some communities feeling as if they have no recourse but violence. Some tribes in Sirte, such as the Qadhadhafa and Warfalla, see the Misratan-led victory against ISIS as less of a liberation and more of a conquest—and it was their grievances against Misratan domination that gave ISIS its opening in the first place.

Most importantly, though, the struggle against the Islamic State has given way to a renewed National-level conflict. Western diplomats had hoped that fighting ISIS could serve as a springboard for political unity among these warring camps.

In fact, the opposite has happened.

Local campaigns against ISIS across the country were pell-mell and carried out by disparate and hostile armed groups without any unifying government authority. For example, rival jihadists in Derna ejected the Islamic State, and in the western coastal town of Sabratha, local militias involved in migrant trafficking helped lead the campaign. In Sirte, the militias from the powerful city of Misrata that defeated ISIS were only loosely tethered to the GNA in Tripoli—and many in fact fiercely opposed it. Now that ISIS is gone, some have turned their guns on the GNA.

In Benghazi, Hifter's LNA has largely defeated ISIS and other jihadist groups but, in the process, it severely ruptured the city's social fabric, displacing thousands of families and unleashing exclusionary forces such as tribalism and ultraconservative Salafism. Across the east, Hifter has replaced elected municipal councils with military governments and cracked down on civil society and freedom of the press. Disturbing evidence has surfaced of war crimes committed by soldiers under his command, such as the exhumation and abuse of enemy corpses and summary executions of both combatant prisoners and civilians. None of this is a recipe for enduring stability or success against radicalism. And indeed, Islamists evicted by his campaign have already waged attacks against his forces outside of Benghazi and in the oil crescent.

Most ominously, though, the campaign against ISIS has helped embolden Hifter and his supporters to make a renewed push for National domination with the cap-

ture of major oil facilities in Sirte (though not uncontested) and repeated threats to invade Tripoli.

This looming danger, Mr. Chairman, demands immediate engagement from the United States. Having expended considerable military effort in helping Libyan forces wrest territory from the Islamic State last year, the United States should now turn its attention to ensuring the country does not slip into civil war and building a cohesive government, while at the same time dealing with residual and emerging jihadist pockets.

#### WHAT CAN THE UNITED STATES DO?

Sticking to the mantra of supporting the GNA in Tripoli, as Washington and Western governments have done over the past year, is no longer a viable option. But neither is the seemingly easy solution of backing a military strongman such as Hifter.

Hifter has no realistic prospect of stabilizing Libya through military rule. His Libyan National Army is neither national nor an army. Even in the east, the bulk of the LNA's forces are drawn from civilian fighters—militias of varying backgrounds that are increasingly disguised as formal army units. In the west and south, the LNA units have a distinctly tribal composition, provoking suspicion among neighboring communities that view them as little more than tribal militias. Because of their geographic concentration in the east, they are not useful partners in tackling the flow of migrant smuggling, which is mostly based along a western strip of coast stretching from Misrata to the Tunisian border.

The idea that Hifter's forces could take over Tripoli and rebuild the Libyan State is thus highly implausible. Indeed, encouraging Hifter to expand his reach toward Tripoli risks triggering a war over the capital that could drag on for years. With a third of the country's population living in the greater Tripoli area, such a conflict could cause displacement and humanitarian suffering on a scale not seen to date in Libya. It would also offer opportunities for jihadist mobilization. Non-Islamist armed groups in Tripoli would join forces with Islamist-leaning fighters to confront Hifter. As in the case of Benghazi, the most extreme and irreconcilable jihadist elements would invariably rise to the fore.

Even if Hifter were able to establish control over Tripoli, his rule would cause more, not less, radicalization. Like Egypt's al-Sisi, Hifter makes no distinction between ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Muslim Brotherhood (whose Libyan branch has supported the GNA's formation). His stated goal of killing, jailing, or exiling Islamists of all types risks provoking moderate, pro-state Islamists into going underground and allying themselves with radical jihadists. Meanwhile, doctrinaire Salafis promoted and encouraged by Hifter—who preach absolute loyalty to a sitting ruler—would further extend their influence, and enforce their harsh interpretation of Sharia law more widely.

In sum, unification through military action is not realistic in Libya. Instead, the United States, in conjunction with regional states, should support a renewed push for a political settlement. This requires a number of things.

First, it necessitates the deterrence of any moves toward military escalation by exerting credible pressure on the warring parties, to include the threat of sanctions and exclusion from any future security assistance.

Second, it requires rebuilding the negotiating architecture, with regional states taking the lead. The challenge will be brokering a common platform for dialog among states with vested interests in Libya. How to deal with an increasingly assertive Russia will pose a particular difficulty. Recent initiatives by regional states like Tunisia and Algeria should be encouraged, but they need to be transferred into a more coherent framework. A small group of states, closely coordinating with each other, could act as mediators and, eventually, witnesses and guarantors to an agreement.

The U.S. role in such a process could be to provide strong and explicit support for the mediating consortium. Most importantly, it would require putting pressure on the regional states still backing Hifter like the Emirates and Egypt and, more recently, Russia. Every effort should be made to broker a deal that includes the general within the framework of a civilian-controlled military. But if Hifter proves recalcitrant, the United States must be willing to push his regional and international backers to end their support.

Beyond the Herculean task of forging a political compact, the United States faces the enormous task of helping whatever new Libyan government emerges to succeed by delivering on basic services, security, and, especially, economic growth.

An immediate priority is securing the capital of Tripoli, which means reaching an agreement among militias to remove their forces and heavy weaponry outside civil-

ian areas, and to make way for a protection force that can be built up over time with training and support from the outside. Another imperative is safeguarding key strategic assets like oil facilities, airports, and ports from factional conflict. Here, a number of options could be explored such as an agreement for de-militarization or protection by a neutral, third-party force.

The new Libyan government will need enormous help on the economic front, in setting up an equitable and rational system for the dispersal of oil revenues to employees and to municipalities, while working to diversify to other sectors. The development of alternative livelihood sources is especially important in countering migrant smuggling, especially in the south, where young men are drawn into smuggling networks because of the absence of alternatives.

The judicial sector is another key area of assistance, along with prisons, particularly with regard to captured Islamic State fighters and jihadists returning from abroad. Many are currently incarcerated in militia-run prisons with little or no judicial oversight, where they are reportedly tortured or subjected to religious rehabilitation programs that, by themselves do not prevent recidivism. Local communities and, especially, meaningful opportunities for employment or education provide the best hopes for post-prison reintegration.

The challenge of rebuilding Libya's police and army will likely be a multi-year and even decades-long investment, given the decrepit state of the regular army under Qadhafi's long reign and the plethora of armed groups today. A training effort in 2013–14 by the United States, Britain, Turkey, and Italy to build a national army—the so-called general purpose force—failed in part because the Libyan government was divided among itself, with some factions favoring militias and because there was no unified military structure or institutions for recruits to join. Those recruits that did complete the training returned to Libya and were either put on leave or melted back into militias.

Future training programs risk repeating these mistakes, unless the new government agrees on a roadmap for building a unified and professional military, delineating its geographic divisions and functions, while at the same time formulating strategy for demobilizing and re-integrating militias. This requires a degree of political consensus, which Libya has hitherto lacked. Once that is reached, the United States can assist in helping Libyan defense institutions in such areas as planning, payroll, and logistics through an intense advisory effort, possibly under the auspices of an expanded Defense Institution Reform Initiative (DIRI).

Mr. Chairman, the United States also has an enormous opportunity to re-engage with Libyan society through assistance on municipal level governance, civil society, media, and education. These sorts of programs are an important corollary to the development of formal political, security, and economic institutions which, given their decrepit condition under Qadhafi, is likely to be a generational endeavor. And Libya possesses enormous human capital that could benefit from such engagement, itself a cause for guarded optimism: A literate and educated population, small in size, geographically concentrated, and largely lacking in the stark and sometimes existential ethnic, sectarian, and linguistic divides that afflict other Middle Eastern states. But proposed cuts to American foreign aid programs on this front would deprive us of this opportunity, with likely damaging results for future stability.

On a similar note, I would like to add that the ban on the travel of Libyan citizens to the United States is not only morally reprehensible, but self-defeating with regard to goals in the country. It deprives the United States to opportunities for important engagements and exchanges with visiting scholars, students, officials, and citizens—engagements that are all the more important since Libya is closed off to American diplomats. But more importantly, it represents a profound betrayal of American values and of the hopes ordinary Libyans attached to America ever since the 2011 intervention.

Mr. Chairman, in my repeated travels to Libya I've enjoyed the hospitality and protection of countless Libyans. In Sirte, Sabratha, Tripoli, and Benghazi, I've seen first-hand the sacrifices Libyan young men made in battling the Islamic State. Despite popular depictions, the vast majority of Libyans have rejected extremism in all of its forms. I therefore urge the immediate repeal of this law, for Libya and the other affected countries.

Mr. Chairman, committee Members, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Dr. Wehrey. Appreciate it very much.

I will begin with my questioning. Which of the groups do you think represents the most dangerous, long-term threat to the United States between ISIS and al-Qaeda?

Dr. Porter.

Mr. PORTER. I have asked this question multiple times, and I also asked it to my cadets when I was teaching at West Point, and it comes down to the different strategies that the different groups employ, whether it is the Islamic State or its affiliates around the world or al-Qaeda.

In my opinion, while the Islamic State is burning very brightly, it is also burning very quickly. Al-Qaeda has employed a more conservative, longer-term strategy and is likely to be more enduring of an organization than the Islamic State will be.

It is more likely—Mr. Alkhouri mentions that there is a less rigorous recruiting process for al-Qaeda. I would argue that it is less aggressive in its recruiting because it is more selective in its recruiting. The membership of al-Qaeda, I think, is more capable than the membership of the Islamic State over the longer term.

So in North Africa, the more enduring threat to the United States and to U.S. National interests overseas is without a doubt al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and not the Islamic State.

Mr. KING. Dr. Pham.

Mr. PHAM. I would pick up where my friend, Dr. Porter, left off and say that I would agree with him. In the Sahel and parts south, what we see is al-Qaeda embedding itself within, picking up local grievances, local groups and multiplying, where necessary, local front groups that the identities shift.

For example, the Peul or Fulani peoples of the region, who straddle the entire region, have increasingly seen and witnessed an al-Qaeda-linked group emerge, the Macina Liberation Front, which has now merged into this group that you cited earlier, Mr. Chairman, this group for the support of Islam and Muslims, but still also operates independently at times when convenient.

Attacks not only in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, but we are seeing increasingly attacks in Nigeria and even parts farther south than the Boko Haram have, targeting largely predominately Christian communities in Nigeria.

Mr. KING. Mr. Alkhouri.

Mr. ALKHOURI. I believe both of them pose a significant threat. I think, though, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb poses a bigger threat to Western civilians and interests in the region, meaning in North Africa, the Sahel, and the Sahara. But I believe in the long term, ISIS' message has really been extremely disseminated across the West a lot, a much more powerful message than AQIM.

In 2015 alone, ISIS released between 750 to 800 videos, unlike AQIM which released only a couple of dozen of them. These videos have largely concentrated on indoctrinating individuals in the West and inciting them. These videos will continue to be a recruitment tool, an indoctrination tool for Westerners for decades to come.

So I believe that ISIS, in the long term, its message is a lot more aggressive in targeting the West than al-Qaeda's.

Mr. KING. Dr. Wehrey.

Mr. WEHREY. Well, just to second what was said, I think AQIM poses the more enduring threat, I think because of its focus on embedding in societies in this region and its focus on governance. But I would just caution that much of this is transactional. So, again,



I think its maneuverability is somewhat limited on what kind of groups it can co-opt.

Certainly, it is a threat to American interests in the Sahel in West Africa. In Libya, at least, I would argue ISIS could try to stage a comeback through spectacular attacks, especially if there is any return of Western embassies or the United Nations to the capital. ISIS could try to make its presence known through attacks there.

Mr. KING. Thank you.

Again, I would ask the four of you, how significant is the recruiting on-line propaganda in this region? How would you compare what al-Qaeda is doing there and ISIS compared to on-line in the rest of the world, you know, as far as targeting?

Mr. Alkhouri.

Mr. ALKHOURI. I believe, as I mentioned earlier, ISIS has a much more aggressive call for attacks, and its operations on-line, essentially, I would say, when looking at AQIM's operations on-line, it has only two channels that operate on-line. Their followers are only in the low hundreds.

When I look at ISIS channels on-line, they have over 50 of them, and they operate, you know, across encrypted-messaging platforms as well as the deep, dark web.

I have been following ISIS' operations on-line since its inception. I would say that it has really dominated the internet, not only in its dissemination of propaganda, but actually its use of technology to incite others, provide them with advice on how to evade scrutiny and essentially operate very comfortably in the West.

So I would say ISIS has a much more dominating presence on-line than al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Mr. KING. Anybody else want to comment?

Dr. Pham.

Mr. PHAM. I would agree with Mr. Alkhouri that on-line, but I would caution the subcommittee that on-line is just one dimension of media. Where al-Qaeda perhaps has an advantage as an ideology and its ideological roots is the fact that it is built on a matrix that has been developed over years of foreign money, foreign influence, mosques, and social networks.

So in many respects, this is an area where on-line is one thing, but we have very low literacy rates as well. So access to the internet is lower and so there are other ways of social messaging that we should be aware of.

Mr. KING. Dr. Porter.

Mr. PORTER. In fact, Dr. Pham took the words right out of my mouth. I think, you know, when we think about the on-line recruitment among Islamic State or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in North Africa, we have to bear in mind that internet penetration rates in the Sahel, and particularly in Niger, Chad, Mali, and especially in northern Mali and northern Niger, are low.

That is going to be a natural or inherent barrier for Islamic State or al-Qaeda on-line recruitment methods in those regions. As Dr. Pham also pointed out, there are other mechanisms on the ground that these organizations can use to generate followers.

Now conversely, internet penetration rates, despite the instability and turmoil in Libya, are fairly good. Likewise, internet pen-

etration rates in Morocco are also very good, which comes part and parcel of Morocco's economic development.

So it poses a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you have economic opportunities generated by telecommunications developments, but on the other hand, you know, you have the risk posed by on-line communications and on-line recruitment. Thank you, sir.

Mr. KING. OK.

Dr. Wehrey.

Mr. WEHREY. Just to echo what was said, I think the, you know, on-line penetration and also, you know, media in general can sort of sensitize people. But I think the ultimate recruitment, and this is stemming from a lot of the interviews I have done in Libya, is really based on social groups and sort of neighborhood influences.

You look at al-Qaeda groups like Ansar al-Sharia, they were very effective in promoting a certain culture with youth camps, social works, and from there it was an easy path to armed jihad.

Mr. KING. Thanks.

Miss Rice.

Miss RICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Porter, I would just like to start with you. You had said in your testimony that the greatest threat in North Africa is injustice and the lack of rule of law, or, you know, or commitment to justice and the rule of law are foundations of any properly functioning government.

All last year we heard a lot of America first, America first, and it has yet to be seen how that is going to translate from a campaign slogan to a governing party. But what effect is that going to have on how receptive people in North Africa are going to be to our intervention there in the various different ways that we intervene?

Mr. PORTER. Thank you, ma'am. It is a very pertinent and, to be frank, difficult question. I think depending on the types of programs that the United States initiates overseas in, and particularly in North Africa, which is the subject of today's subcommittee hearing, for the most part, U.S. engagement in the region is positively received.

It is received well by the Chadian armed forces, the Nigerian armed forces, the Malian armed forces. So military aid is welcomed by those host countries, and I think that has yielded dividends in counterterrorism campaigns in North Africa and the Sahel.

In addition, parallel to that, the United States aid programs and development programs through USAID and through State Department are also well-received. They pay dividends in a different way.

I think, you know, one of the things that we should emphasize here today, and speaking more broadly about the current budgetary environments on the current foreign policy environment in Washington, is that, as I said in my testimony, there is no strictly military solution to counterterrorism. That removing terrorists from the battlefield only slows the group's evolution. It does not eliminate the group.

What eliminates the group is changing the conditions on the ground. The military does not do that, and nor should they. It is not their job. That job falls to State Department. I think this is as important a component of counterterrorism as the military is. Thank you very much, ma'am.

Miss RICE. So that leads to my next question, that the Trump administration has proposed a 28 percent cut to the State Department, which would devastate foreign aid programs. What say you about that? I mean what effect is that going to have on the non-military programs that you were just talking about?

Mr. PORTER. A negative one.

Miss RICE. How do we address that? How do we make the point that—I mean there are members of the administration, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, who have talked about this. In what ways, how is this being received, if at all, by the countries that you are talking about that rely on foreign aid from the United States? What is their take on this?

Mr. PORTER. To the best of my knowledge, ma'am, there is a sense of anxiety among North African capitals about what the retreat of U.S. State Department programs, USAID programs in their countries will have. In particular, there are concerns in Tunisia about the good governance programs that the United States is supporting there.

There are concerns in Morocco. Morocco does have a constant battle against Islamic State supporters within their own borders. To Morocco's credit, it is doing a very good job on the counterterrorism front, but it needs help on rule of law and good governance issues. Likewise, Algeria, and then the Sahel states even more so.

So this will have a deleterious effect on the good governance rule of law environment, and I think it will aggravate the sense of social injustice that upon which salafi jihadi groups feed. Thank you, ma'am.

Miss RICE. Thank you.

Dr. Wehrey, a question for you. How valuable is a strong European Union, right? We are talking today about the threat not just to the United States, to the terrorism that is going on and growing in North Africa, but also to Europe. In your opinion, how important is a strong European Union? Or is it not to kind of combatting, doing their part to combat terrorism in the North African region?

Mr. WEHREY. Thank you, ma'am. I think it is, you know, absolutely essential and especially in a place like Libya where the United States can't bear the burden on its own. I mean, after the 2011 revolution, the European countries had a number of, you know, programs to address various aspects of Libya's governance and security. They are now engaged on the border issue.

But I think, and this speaks to your previous question, I think they do require some U.S. leadership behind them. So the United States can lend certain capabilities here, which is why, to echo what Dr. Porter said, it is so important that we stay involved. But, no, I mean the European Union is absolutely essential.

Miss RICE. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. KING. Mr. Keating from Massachusetts.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You had mentioned before that this is more of a direct threat to Europe. Could you comment particularly on threats to Europe directly from this area, particularly southern Europe, where countries like Italy, most of the migration is coming from Northern Africa?

Could you really, any of you, or all of you hopefully, comment on what the nature of those threats are? What the United States and what our allies there can do to try and counter that?

Mr. PORTER. Sir, thank you. Thank you for your question. As I said in my oral testimony, the threat posed by jihadi salafi organizations in North Africa to Europe is much greater than that posed to the United States simply because of geographic proximity.

You know, when I brief the FBI or ICE, a couple throwaway facts, you know, the Strait of Gibraltar separating Morocco from southern Spain at its narrowest is 8 kilometers wide. A flight from Algiers, the capital of Algeria, to Marseille, which is the second largest French city, is about the same length and time as the New York-D.C. shuttle.

So North Africa is in Europe's backyard. That poses a grave concern for European countries, especially those on the shores of the Mediterranean.

I do want to address what I think is a red herring, which is the fear that salafi jihadi terrorists will embed themselves with refugees or immigrants trying to cross the Mediterranean and illegally penetrate Europe's borders.

You know, on the one hand, Islamic State and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have sufficient resources not to have to throw themselves into a rickety dinghy and try and cross the Mediterranean. They can easily buy a plane ticket with a clean passport from a third-party country. There is no need to take the risk of trying to cross the Mediterranean.

In addition, Islamic State and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have likely supporters in Europe. Many of those supporters, as we have seen in the case of the Paris attacks, the Brussels attacks, the Nice attacks, have connections to the North African diaspora in Europe.

So the threat, I think, is substantial, even with the fluid movement of peoples back and forth across the Mediterranean, but not necessarily through illegal channels and more and more likely through legal channels such as airplane tickets, ferries, and car crossings. Thank you, sir.

Mr. KEATING. Anyone else want to comment on that threat in Europe?

Mr. PHAM. Sir, thank you for your question. I would add to what Dr. Porter said, also, highlight the threat to European interests and personnel, including military and diplomatic personnel throughout this region in the region itself.

In particular, France has—our allies there have a tremendous network of business and other contacts in the region that are there. The French lead the peacekeeping efforts in Mali.

There are German units, even Swedish units in Mali, which has turned into the bloodiest U.N. peacekeeping operation anywhere, the deadliest because of the on-going instability in the northern part of the country.

So I would add that there is the threat there. Many of the victims in the al-Qaeda-linked attacks in Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali were European citizens. So there is a threat to Europeans in that area.

One other low note I would add to that is there is the downside of the North African diaspora in Europe, but there is also the upside that some of the North African countries, Morocco in particular, have extraordinarily capable, not only counterterrorism but counter-radicalization programs driven not just by security services but by religious leaders and social networks, that help not only in their own country, but throughout this region, and increasingly, even reaching back to Europe as well.

Mr. KEATING. OK. Just a comment that yesterday in the Foreign Affairs Committee we had a hearing regarding the budget, the foreign aid budget. I share a very optimistic view that the present budget will not be the budget that we will endorse or support here in the House. That is a bipartisan statement yesterday, and a very strong one.

But what about the role with our kind of assistance on empowering women in these regions to a greater extent? We have found in many areas that that is more successful, the money gets where it should, goes to the health and goes toward children. Does anyone want to comment on how spearheading some of those funds empowering women to be more involved in that area could be successful?

Mr. PORTER. I think it should be duly noted that you are asking a question about empowering women to an all-male panel. But—

Mr. KEATING. Well—

Mr. PORTER [continuing]. I will do my best.

Mr. KEATING. Well, maybe that is part of the problem that—

Mr. PORTER. Roger that, sir.

Mr. KEATING [continuing]. That we should be better prepared to answer those things as men. But go ahead.

Mr. PORTER. Or there should be more women sitting on this side of the table. But, sir, thank you very much for your question.

Yes, I think it is 100 percent correct, and I saw some information yesterday that there is a quantifiable decreased likelihood of terrorist attacks or the emergence of jihadi salafi groups in countries in which women are more fully integrated into the economic and public and government life of the country. I can get you further statistics to support that.

Mr. KEATING. OK.

Mr. PORTER. I just don't have off the top of my head, sir.

Mr. KEATING. Yes. We have some and I would appreciate any more.

Yes, sir.

Mr. PHAM. Just in the case of Libya, our support to women's civil society groups after the revolution, and the support of other countries, I think, was absolutely essential in creating a sort of momentum against armed groups and a counterweight to violence.

So you see a lot of the civil protests against militias, not necessarily against—against extremists, too, but against—militias were, in fact, led by women's groups. So I think it is tremendously empowering.

The other dimension is in a lot of these marginalized communities, especially in the south where young men fall prey to extremism or get involved in smuggling, I mean women's, you know, roles can be incredibly useful, I think, in sort of curtailing that impulse.

Again, with returning jihadists, we can't just throw them all in prison. There has to be some sort of integration program into their communities after justice is served. So there again I think women's groups can play an essential role here.

Mr. KEATING. I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. KING. The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Hurd.

Mr. HURD. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you all for being here. This is an important topic. I actually only have one question, and it is a 30,000-foot view question, and I would love to hear everybody's opinion on it.

Dr. Pham, maybe we start with you and just go down the line? When it comes specifically to terrorism in North Africa, what day do we celebrate? What day do we get to raise our hands and say we won?

Can we imprison and kill everyone? I don't think so. So help me understand what is that end-point, that end-state that if we achieve we are going to say we solved the problem? Is that a fair question?

Dr. Wehrey, you want to? It seemed like you are ready to answer. We can maybe start with you and go down the other way.

Mr. WEHREY. Sure. I think it is an excellent question. I think we need to be very surgical and discrete in terms of identifying, you know, what groups really pose a threat to us because I think in a lot of these countries, you have traditions of religious conservatism. You have militancy. This has been going back decades. Now on top of that, you have these named terrorist groups, ISIS and al-Qaeda.

You know, the question is these groups are very good at marbling into one another, and the question is how do we defeat those groups that matter to us? I think, you know, the question really is have we eliminated groups that have both the will and the capacity to threaten the interests of our allies, the economic interests, the personnel of our allies?

Now, are we going to defeat, "extremism" in places like eastern Libya? We are not. Or are we going to completely, you know, eliminate illiberal extremist ideology in some of these places? We are not.

So again, I don't think there is ever going to be a day where we are going to declare, you know, victory. We shouldn't widen the circle to the extent that we are involved in this sort of never-ending war.

Mr. ALKHOURI. Thank you for the question. The question is whether we are tackling terrorist groups and the word terrorism, or are we talking about extremism, because I believe extremism is a much bigger issue.

I think that terrorist groups really capitalize on the issue of extremism that they have a lot of people have been bred up with, you know, for many years, and it doesn't take him long to get that extremism up and get these individuals to actually carry out acts of terrorism.

But I think part of the solution, or at least the way I see it, that economic opportunities are a major part of the solution. I think that the region, North Africa and the Sahel at large, there is a high unemployment rate in many of these places, especially in Libya.

If we look at de-radicalization programs, they essentially do not exist. We are not only talking about de-radicalization programs, meaning individuals who have already been radicalized and you put them through programs, but also we are talking about the necessity for anti-radicalization programs, programs that should exist prior to individuals actually having gone to the, you know, off that threshold.

We are also talking about society building, and I think that is extremely important because they don't want to just see programs dedicated to, you know, to potential radical individuals, but also the society at large.

If we are missing vital, you know, basic necessities in certain societies, then specific groups can capitalize on that, provide these necessities or these basic needs to the individuals in this society, and then, you know, take advantage of that, indoctrinate them and so on.

Finally, I would say a major part of cutting off these groups is cutting off their finances. I think that the United States has succeeded in large part in cutting off the finances of al-Qaeda and ISIS.

But also this is a problem that we keep seeing as individuals are dealing with digital currency, as individuals are still taking advantage of the banking system and taking advantage of fraud. We are seeing a nexus between jihadist terrorist groups and cyber-criminal groups. So that would be essential to tackle that problem.

Mr. PORTER. Sir, thank you for your question. You know, as I said in my written testimony, you know, in counterterrorism there is no mission accomplished. There is just continuing to accomplish the mission. There is no winning. There is just mitigating the risk to what we consider to be a tolerable level. That is it.

I mean, combatting terrorism is hard. Counterterrorism is hard. The solutions exist along a continuum of military approaches and non-military approaches. You know, I think, you know, we have seen some progress in some North African countries. The threat is not uniform across North Africa.

I don't think any country, and I don't mean to be facetious or to treat your question glibly, but I don't think any country, despite the successes that it is making in combatting terrorism, ever celebrates. I think a prime example of this is Algeria, which has struggled with terrorism since the 1990's.

During the 1990's, terrorism was an egregious and horrible problem that left more than 150,000 dead. Today, when you travel to Algeria, especially in and around the capital, but also along the coast, you rarely think about terrorism.

Now, is that celebratory, or is that cause for a celebration? No, but it is a satisfactory outcome. Does terrorism still exist in Algeria? Yes, to a severely mitigated extent.

So I think, you know, it is a continuous and on-going and difficult process where there is no victory. There is just a satisfactory outcome. Thank you, sir, for your question.

Mr. PHAM. Just very briefly, sir, I would make two points. First, I think we are not going to have success, as my colleagues have said, but what we can do successfully is to lower the risk by lowering first the threat, the frequency and likelihood of these events,

the vulnerability, the likelihood that when these events occur, they will be successful and lowering the costs of each event, even if successful, exerts.

We can do that by helping our allies, which leads me to my second point, which is that I think one measure of a successful policy in the region is the extent to which we can have governments in place that are legitimate in the eyes of their people.

Legitimacy does not mean necessarily, although it is often expressed as such, but not necessarily electoral, winning majorities at the ballot box.

It is governments that are accepted by their people that provide basic security and services and can exert control to a large measure across their National territory. It is a long road to that, but it is certainly a significant step toward de-risking.

Mr. KING. Mr. Gallagher.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to all our panelists for joining us today. One question that has come up with increasing frequency is the question of whether or not we designate the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as part of a broader strategy of getting tougher on terrorism.

Obviously, the Muslim Brotherhood is not a monolithic organization, but it has goals that are antithetical to our own foreign policy. It espouses the establishment of a global caliphate. Its charter says that death in the way of Allah is the ultimate end for its members.

Help us think through, sort-of, the second and third order effects of designation. Would that enhance our counterterrorism effort in Egypt and more broadly across North Africa and indeed the Middle East as well? For the entire panel?

Mr. PORTER. Well, thank you for your question. Just to begin quite simply, if you increase the number of terrorists by designating people that were not previously terrorists, then you make your counterterrorism problem more difficult.

But I think a more nuanced answer is that I am not entirely convinced that the threshold for designating a group a terrorist group is that they are antithetical to the U.S. foreign policy overseas. In addition, there is, as you also mentioned, the Muslim Brotherhood is a nuanced group that does embrace a range of ideologies and is engaged in a range of activities throughout North Africa.

In terms of second and third order effects of designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization, I was speaking with a client yesterday, and I was speaking with another client last week who have businesses. These are U.S. companies with businesses in North Africa that employ foreign nationals on their staff and to whom they pay salaries.

It is guaranteed in our conversations with these representatives of these companies, it is guaranteed that among their staff overseas are members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Designating the Muslim Brotherhood as an FTO would then leave these U.S. corporations vulnerable to accusations of material support for terrorism.

In addition, it would raise the bar extensively for U.S. corporations doing business overseas in terms of KYC, again, running the risk of exposing U.S. corporations to material support for terrorism.



So I think the implications, particularly for U.S. foreign direction overseas are enormous, in addition to the fact that I don't think the Muslim Brotherhood genuinely qualifies as a foreign terrorist organization. But thank you, sir, for your question.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you.

Can I go to Dr. Wehrey just because we had many a productive debate and discussion when I was but a lowly staffer on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tunisia and Libya? So I would be interested in your thoughts on the topic.

Mr. WEHREY. Well, I think the second- and third-order effects I think would be, quite frankly, catastrophic, especially in a place like Libya where the Muslim Brotherhood is backing the U.N.-backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli, through which we are working to counter ISIS.

I think designating it would create a whole new class of political losers in Libya, people that are shut out of the political process, and that is a prime recruiting pool for ISIS. So I think it would actually widen the circle of terrorists that we are trying to combat.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you.

Dr. Pham, quickly since my time is expiring and since I apologize for being late to the hearing, given your extensive work in Africa and given some conversations we have had at, you know, putting Africa in the front view versus the rearview mirror, has there anything that hasn't been discussed today about terrorism in Africa, or an area that we are not paying enough attention to that you think we should pay more attention to on this subcommittee?

Mr. PHAM. Thank you very much, Mr. Gallagher, for that question. I think two things that we need to pay more attention to. One is the seamless nature and throughout this hearing, my fellow panelists and I have discussed how things have moved north-south from the Mediterranean shore down into Africa.

Department of Defense treats all of Africa as a whole. Since 20 of January, so does the National Security Council. It makes sense. Threats move north-south. Economics works in the same direction, but the rest of the whole of government still draws a line and a lot falls through that chasm in the middle.

The second point I would make is that we would do well to work with partners. We have got effective partners in the region, but we don't always work and coordinate.

Morocco, for example, has a highly effective counter-radicalization program. Mr. Keating earlier asked about women. Morocco trained—it is the only Muslim country that requires the training of a quota of women religious leaders and scholars.

It has agreements with countries throughout the region to train imams in moderate forms of Islam as a counter to the Muslim Brotherhood or more radical forms. So working with them should be a part of our agenda.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you.

Thank you, gentlemen. Appreciate your time.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Mr. Gallagher.

Let me thank all the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the Members for their questions. The Members of this subcommittee may have some additional questions to the witnesses. I will ask you to respond to those in writing.

Miss Rice, do you have any—

Miss RICE. No.

Mr. KING. OK. Pursuant to committee rule VII(D), the hearing record will be held open for 10 days. Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:09 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

## APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR J. PETER PHAM

*Question 1a.* Economic and political insecurity seems to be a common occurrence across North Africa. In your opinion, how does this regional and state fragmentation pose long-term challenges for the United States?

*Question 1b.* How can the United States and its allies in the region disrupt the recruiting efforts of local al-Qaeda and the Islamic State affiliates that take advantage of this turmoil?

Answer. The Maghreb and the adjacent Sahel are textbook examples of the threat that weak states can present to the international community in general and, more specifically, to the interests of United States and its allies. The region is an almost ideal environment for extremist groups with transnational ambitions, whether ISIS fighters smarting from defeats on the battlefields of Iraq and Syria or al-Qaeda militants seeking to reassert the preeminence of their organization within the global jihadist movement. The challenge posed by the various militant groups operating in the Sahel is directly linked to their ability to exploit myriad local conflicts, including social, economic, and political marginalization, as well as the fragile condition of many of the states in the region.

As I noted in my prepared statement, the challenge posed by these jihadist groups and their efforts to recruit in this region cannot be countered except in an integrated fashion, with solutions that embrace a broader notion of human security writ large, encompassing social, economic, and political development. Moreover, to be effective, these solutions also must transcend national and other artificial boundaries that cut across the region. Obviously, this is not—and should not be—a task just for the United States, but is one which it is in America's strategic interest to play its part and, indeed lead.

*Question 2.* In your opinion, what is the most important base of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in North Africa?

Answer. The Sahel, rather than the Maghreb—where, with the exception of Libya, there are strong states that have shown their ability to resist not only al-Qaeda, but also ISIS, encroachments—is the most promising base for affiliates of both the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda, especially as fighters return to Africa from the Levant and link up with others of their ilk displaced from Sirte and other places on the Mediterranean littoral and make their way to the Fezzan and other points south.

*Question 3.* How would you measure the extent of Islamic State and al-Qaeda fighters that have fled fighting zones in the Middle East to North Africa?

Answer. The countries of the Maghreb, especially Tunisia, have contributed foreign fighters to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq at higher rates per capita than almost any others. Thus one can expect that the defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq will lead many of those militants who survive to make their way back to Africa and many of these will, in turn, find the Sahel a particularly opportune environment. The Sahel is one of the poorest majority-Muslim regions in the world. It is also home to the largest expanse of contiguous ungoverned spaces on the African continent: Many of the governments in the region are weak and their capacity to assert authority—much less provide real services—beyond their capital cities and a smattering of urban centers is extremely limited at best. These fragile states present the returning jihadists both a tempting vulnerability to exploit in the short term and a tantalizing opportunity to create a new hub for operations over the long term.

*Question 4.* The United States spends a great deal on training and equipment for allies to help combat terrorism. In your opinion, which countries in the region should the United States be focusing most of its efforts on?

*Question 4a.* Is this a more cost-effective option than deploying U.S. forces and limit the need for future U.S. intervention?

Answer. While compelling cases can be made for U.S. cooperation with almost every country in the region, two stand out for their strategic significance. Given its population (the largest in Africa, including both the continent's largest Muslim and Christian communities) and its economic importance (the second-largest economy on the continent, having lost the No. 1 slot to South Africa last year due to a recession), Nigeria is without a doubt a pivotal country on whose security and stability not only the Sahel, but much of West Africa depends.

Also important is Morocco, a long-standing "major non-NATO ally" of the United States. Morocco's whose aggressive, multi-pronged approach to countering radical ideology and terrorism has much to commend it as does the kingdom's efforts to assist other countries in North and West Africa in the same fight. The potential of the U.S.-Morocco Framework for Cooperation, signed during the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in 2014 and aimed at developing Moroccan training experts as well as jointly training civilian security and counterterrorism forces with other partners in the Maghreb and the Sahel in recognizing a "triangular" approach, needs to be better appreciated and developed. The North African country is an instance of where some resources can have a multiplier effect.

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER KATHLEEN M. RICE FOR J. PETER PHAM

*Question 1.* What are your opinions on the President's travel ban and its potential effects in North Africa?

Answer. The only North African country affected by the travel ban is Libya, where the practical effects may be somewhat limited at the current time: The country has three self-styled "governments" competing for power as well as numerous other factions, without even counting the jihadist groups linked to ISIS or al-Qaeda. Even apart from the advisability or not of the travel ban as a policy, one question that needs to be asked is how in the very constrained circumstances of a country like that the consular functions, including the vetting of potential travelers, can even be carried out effectively enough to assure that anyone granted entry into the United States does not, in fact, pose a threat to our citizens and homeland. Much of the work done by the dedicated men and women of the Foreign Service is art, not science. And I wonder whether they have the access necessary to form correct judgments in cases where security limits their access to the community.

*Question 2.* On March 9, 2017, General Thomas D. Waldhauser, head of U.S. Africa Command, acknowledged in his testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee that there have been signs of Russian security and political interference inside of Libya. In your opinion, how does this affect U.S.-led and U.S.-backed operations currently in Libya?

Answer. I do not have access to the information that General Waldhauser has at his disposal, but clearly security and military interference by Russia—or any outside country not allied with us—further complicates an already fraught situation and, potentially, undermines both the leverage that the United States and our partners have as well as our overall strategic objectives.

QUESTIONS FROM REPRESENTATIVE MIKE GALLAGHER FOR J. PETER PHAM

*Question 1a.* Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is our largest permanent military installation in Africa and is critical to our counterterrorism operations throughout Africa, as well as the Middle East. Just a few miles away, a Chinese naval base is being constructed and is slated for completion this summer. Publicly, Chinese officials maintain this base is strictly to aid their anti-piracy missions and is not a base, but rather a "logistical support facility." During a briefing with reporters on March 27, AFRICOM Commander and Marine Corps Gen. Thomas Waldhauser said, "There are some very significant operational security concerns," in response to a question about the new Chinese base. This is China's first permanent overseas military outpost, which carries added significance. How can this new proximity to the Chinese affect our CT missions in the region?

*Question 1b.* How will their foreign policy goals conflict with our own?

Answer. Not only do I share General Waldhauser's preoccupation about what he described diplomatically as "some very significant operational security concerns" about the Chinese "logistical support facility," but I would go a step further and say that the placement of mainland China's first overseas military base in Djibouti represents a strategic revolution in the country's military posture in the region. Not only will the proximity of Chinese forces permit them to have a literal front-row seat to our counterterrorism and other operations out of Camp Lemonnier—and those of our French allies nearby as well as the anti-piracy efforts of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, also based in the vicinity—but the location also affords them significant advantages in the region. Consider, for example, the Shaanxi Y-8, the work-

horse reconnaissance aircraft deployed by Chinese forces, has an effective range of approximately 2,500 kilometers without refueling; from Djibouti, Chinese planes can cover the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula, almost to the Syrian and Iraqi borders with Turkey, to the northeast; all of Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, and most of eastern Libya, to the northwest; half of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west and all the way to the Mozambique Channel to the south; and most of the western Indian Ocean to the east.

*Question 2a.* AFRICOM has been partnering with Tunisian military and intelligence assets to improve their CT&I capabilities and help secure their borders. However, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, somewhere between 6,000–7,000 Tunisians have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join rebel and terrorist groups in those conflict zones. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that “As many as 15,000 others have been barred from international travel because Tunisia’s government suspects them of planning to follow suit.” Another report, citing a U.S. CT official in Tunisia, says as many as 1,000 Tunisians are under domestic surveillance within the country. Given these numbers, how can we expect the Tunisians to adequately address these issues and implement a successful CT strategy?

*Question 2b.* What more can we do to implement and improve upon AFRICOM’s existing partnership with Tunisia?

Answer. Not only has Tunisia sent more fighters to join the so-called Islamic State than any other country, but Tunisians have also gone abroad to join al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other jihadist groups. Moreover, these fighters have already begun to focus their attacks on their own homeland, with the country being hit by more than 50 terrorist attacks in the last 3 years, many coming from militants operating in Libya. While the Africa Command has been trying to build up the capabilities of our Tunisian partners, who were designated a “major non-NATO ally” in 2015, the military effort alone will not suffice for the scale of the challenge faced. The country’s police forces and judicial system also need strengthening. The government also lacks a comprehensive counter-radicalization program, to say nothing of mechanisms for deradicalization and reintegration. Here Tunisia may benefit from help from neighbors like Morocco, which have much more mature efforts in this regard.

*Question 3.* The Libya-Italy migrant route was described in late 2016 as the major migrant route into Europe, surpassing the notorious path from Turkey to Greece that was used by approximately 850,000 migrants in 2015. In light of this, what is your assessment of the threat of ISIS or other extremists exploiting this heavily-used migrant route by blending in with the hundreds of thousands of refugees crossing the Mediterranean, and either launching an attack in Europe or travelling to the United States?

Answer. While I would not rule out the possibility that migrant routes, especially the Libya-Italy passage where the overwhelmed Italian authorities seem to have taken a laissez-faire attitude of passing the challenge onward, may be exploited by ISIS and other jihadist groups to infiltrate terrorists into Europe and beyond, I would be much more concerned about the reach that these extremists already enjoy in diaspora communities in Europe, from whence they have already recruited and to which fighters may be returning.

*Question 4.* President Trump’s proposed budget includes significant cuts to the State Department as well as USAID. In his posture statement in early March before the Senate Armed Services Committee, AFRICOM commander Gen. Waldhauser specifically praised these two arms of our non-military foreign policy, saying, “Diplomacy and development are key efforts, and our partnership with the Department of State and USAID is key to achieve enduring success.” As it specifically relates to North Africa, what programs have these two agencies put in place to aid our CT efforts in that region?

Answer. Once again, General Waldhauser has succinctly made the point. While AFRICOM certainly needs adequate resources to meet the extraordinary challenges which have arisen in recent years within its area of responsibility, it can only do so as part of a whole-of-government approach with both diplomatic and development components. For example, as I noted in my prepared statement, it is still nothing short of mind-boggling that in Nigeria there is no U.S. diplomatic presence north of the capital of Abuja, thus leaving the northern part of the country—an area that is home to more than 90 million predominantly Muslim people who would, by themselves, constitute Africa’s third most-populous country—entirely without of an American diplomatic presence (and the on-going intelligence and other monitoring capabilities that come with such a mission).

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QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR LAITH ALKHOURI

*Question 1a.* Economic and political insecurity seems to be a common occurrence across North Africa. In your opinion, how does this regional and state fragmentation pose long-term challenges for the United States?

Answer. Socioeconomic and political insecurities contribute to the marginalization of many individuals in North Africa; regional and state fragmentation adds extra layers of uncertainty and creates mistrust between locals and governing bodies. Terror groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS have capitalized on these factors, in many ways offering a sense of belonging to individuals who have suffered socioeconomic struggles and political marginalization. The concepts of brotherhood and connectedness around one goal are powerful images that ISIS exploits to recruit individuals who feel they do not have a purpose. When terror-affiliated networks take control of towns—running schools, traffic, and prisons—they are able to conduct grassroots indoctrination. ISIS’s Libya faction acted for 2 years as a de facto governing body until the recent victories of the Libyan government.

*Question 1b.* How can the United States and its allies in the region disrupt the recruiting efforts of local al-Qaeda and the Islamic State affiliates that take advantage of this turmoil?

Answer. The approach of the United States and its allies toward counter-terrorism in North Africa has largely relied upon regional governments with minimal direct intervention; however, it is not clear whether the current policy will pivot towards militarily addressing ISIS affiliates outside Iraq and Syria. On April 26, 2017, the United States conducted an operation against ISIS positions in Afghanistan, in which two U.S. soldiers were killed. The operation came 2 weeks after the United States dropped the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) on ISIS positions in the same district, Achin, in Nangarhar Province. This denotes a potential increase in operations against ISIS outside its Middle East territory. It remains to be seen whether this targeting might expand to include North Africa and the Sahel.

Animosity toward the United States is at the epicenter of the terror groups’ campaigns in North Africa and the Sahel. Many among the youth that ISIS governed are at great risk of becoming extremists and committing violence against the United States or its interests abroad. Furthermore, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) poses a great threat regionally, especially towards soft targets.

*Question 2.* In your opinion, what is the most important base of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in North Africa?

Answer. As ISIS has been struggling to maintain control over territory—having already lost several key cities, with more poised to fall—its central operations command likely moved to more secure territory. ISIS’s top spokesman, for example, was killed in Aleppo, Syria, while top aides to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were killed in Raqqa, Syria and Anbar, Iraq, among other places. Today, ISIS’s so-called “Euphrates Province”—the group’s only transnational territory, spanning from al-Bukamal in eastern Syria to al-Qa’im in western Iraq—is a main route for fighter and weapons smuggling. It is likely that ISIS commanders, and possibly leadership, are present in that area.

*Question 3.* How would you measure the extent of Islamic State and al-Qaeda fighters that have fled fighting zones in the Middle East to North Africa?

Answer. It is likely that hundreds of ISIS foreign fighters have changed their positions, been killed in battle, or attempted—with a number possibly succeeding—to return home. North Africa has produced thousands of fighters for ISIS; some returnees, in my opinion, pose a significant risk to National security. The United States has a more sophisticated tracking system of potential returnees than many other countries; in a number of cases, U.S. law enforcement has prevented individuals who were in the process of joining ISIS from doing so. For example, in 2015, U.S. authorities stopped two men from a three-man cell in New York, namely Akhror Saidakhmetov and Abdurasul Juraboev, from joining ISIS prior to their departure. The higher risk stems from individuals who specifically return home with plans to fundraise, organize, or execute terrorist attacks.

*Question 4a.* The United States spends a great deal on training and equipment for allies to help combat terrorism. In your opinion, which countries in the region should the United States be focusing most of its efforts on?

Answer. In my opinion, the United States should dedicate critical counter-terrorism aid to Libya, Mali, and Nigeria. These countries have struggled with the persistent threat of terror groups, which have, at various points, captured and controlled territory in these countries.

*Question 4b.* Is this a more cost-effective option than deploying U.S. forces and limit the need for future U.S. intervention?

Answer. While cost-effective analysis of interventionist engagement is outside my field of expertise, I'd add that U.S. military intervention in North Africa can and will create significant backlash from the regional populaces, which could in turn highly jeopardize U.S. relations with allies in North Africa. Joint intelligence and military tactics are avenues to better address certain terrorist threats, and incorporating anti-radicalization strategies may help diminish the effect of jihadist propaganda and lessen its influence.

*Question 5.* In your testimony, you stated that the Islamic State has not been able to establish a strong presence in Tunisia due to the government cracking down on terrorist activity. In your opinion, what is Tunisia doing that could be equally applied to other countries in North Africa to deter and defeat the terror threat?

Answer. After two ISIS attacks took place in Tunisia in 2015, killing and wounding dozens of tourists, the Tunisian government adopted a new strategy that aims to significantly diminish the threat of terrorism. This strategy involves prevention through intelligence gathering, amplification of the security and law enforcement apparatuses, and implementing a judicial process to swiftly prosecute suspected terrorists. In addition, al-Qaeda's militants in the Chaambi Mountains appear to have been forced to significantly reduce the number of their attacks, given their confinement to a small area in central-west Tunisia. Although the long-term effects of the government's strategy remain to be seen, in the short term, the country has experienced fewer terrorist plots and attacks from 2016 until today; for now, this framework appears to be working for Tunisia. In theory, Tunisia's counter-terrorism strategy could be applied to other countries in the region; however, schismatic political environments, such as that in Libya, will create obstacles to implementing an effective strategy.

#### QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER KATHLEEN M. RICE FOR LAITH ALKHOURI

*Question 1.* What are your opinions on the President's travel ban and its potential effects in North Africa?

Answer. President Trump's travel ban, in my opinion, does not have a positive effect on countering the threat of terrorism at home or abroad. In more ways than one, the ban has likely created regional distrust toward the United States as a world leader, and has likely contributed to the marginalization of regional governments who highly depend on U.S. leadership in foreign policy and military engagements. The ban sends a message of divisiveness to populaces who view—or once viewed—the United States as the country of immigrants, tolerance, and human rights. The ban can only add to the gap between the United States and regional countries and their populaces. Bridging this gap would require a tremendous leadership role by the current administration.

*Question 2.* Several countries in North Africa have an abundance of resources such as oil reserves. Over the years, there have been reports of terror groups controlling oil fields and kidnapping or extorting engineers across the region. What security recommendations would you make to the United States and its allies to better protect foreign workers and economic interests from this common terror method?

Answer. There are a number of procedures and measures that would likely contribute to countering the terror threat against foreign employees and economic interests in North Africa. I recommend the following:

- Intelligence gathering and coordination with local and State security apparatuses. Information regarding the terror landscape in certain cities and towns, particularly in remote areas in which a number of gas and oil plants are located, is crucial to understanding which groups operate in which areas, and what their ideologies and goals are. This includes identifying gaps in pre-existing security measures—whether increasing the number of guards, equipping security forces with new technology, and/or amplifying the number of confidential human intelligence sources. The latter is critical in gathering information on the plans and movements of terror networks.
- Increase coordination with embassies and consulates in host countries. Coordinating with regional governments in regards to security gaps is imperative; it offers country representatives an idea of what sort of aid and military assistance regional forces need in order to prevent any potential attacks.



- Empowering and enhancing the capabilities of regional governments' quick response teams—or Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs)—is essential to addressing terror incidents. There will likely be a lag time in U.S. security forces responding to terror incidents where Americans might be at risk. As such, local forces must be empowered and enabled to tackle terror incidents as they unfold, setting the stage for American and allied forces to swiftly intervene.

It is vital to create trust, or bridge the trust gap, with locals and regional forces; in many ways, this can help QRFs in obtaining critical information prior to and in the early stages of terror incidents.

#### QUESTIONS FROM REPRESENTATIVE MIKE GALLAGHER FOR LAITH ALKHOURI

*Question 1a.* Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is our largest permanent military installation in Africa and is critical to our counterterrorism operations throughout Africa, as well as the Middle East. Just a few miles away, a Chinese naval base is being constructed and is slated for completion this summer. Publicly, Chinese officials maintain this base is strictly to aid their anti-piracy missions and is not a base, but rather a “logistical support facility.” During a briefing with reporters on March 27, AFRICOM Commander and Marine Corps Gen. Thomas Waldhauser said, “There are some very significant operational security concerns,” in response to a question about the new Chinese base. This is China’s first permanent overseas military outpost, which carries added significance. How can this new proximity to the Chinese affect our CT missions in the region?

Answer. China’s construction of its first naval base overseas suggests that its goals revolve around protecting its current and future economic interests; China has heavily invested in Africa at large, and thousands of Chinese workers are employed across North Africa and the Sahel region. The security concerns here revolve around intelligence gathering and military responses toward issues and incidents concerning both the United States and China, i.e., responding to incidents taking place in locations where American and Chinese workers might be present. This is a potential scenario in which conflicts may arise; however, looking at the larger picture, the likelihood is that U.S. counter-terrorism missions in the regions will not be impacted by the presence of the Chinese base, at least in the short term. The U.S. mission is more entrenched in the region due to its longer presence. In other words, the proximity to the Chinese will have very little to no effect on the U.S. mission at this time.

*Question 1b.* How will their foreign policy goals conflict with our own?

Answer. The new Chinese base is likely not the country’s last in the region. China’s military expansion in an area that is critical to the interests of the United States is somewhat disconcerting; it begs the question of whether Beijing aims to assert and advance Chinese military prowess in the region, and whether this could potentially overshadow U.S. missions. It also presents the question of whether the Chinese mission will in any way conduct counterintelligence and spy activities that might affect, or directly target, the U.S. mission.

*Question 2a.* AFRICOM has been partnering with Tunisian military and intelligence assets to improve their CT&I capabilities and help secure their borders. However, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, somewhere between 6,000–7,000 Tunisians have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join rebel and terrorist groups in those conflict zones. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that “As many as 15,000 others have been barred from international travel because Tunisia’s government suspects them of planning to follow suit.” Another report, citing a U.S. CT official in Tunisia, says as many as 1,000 Tunisians are under domestic surveillance within the country. Given these numbers, how can we expect the Tunisians to adequately address these issues and implement a successful CT strategy?

*Question 2b.* What more can we do to implement and improve upon AFRICOM’s existing partnership with Tunisia?

Answer. Tunisia’s counter-terrorism procedures since mid-2016 appear to have been successful at subduing the rise of jihadism and diminishing the number of terror plots and attacks. The terrorism threat facing Tunisia from jihadi returnees is likely going to be the country’s primary security concern over the next 6 months, due to both the high number of Tunisians who joined ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as well as the potential deployment of Tunisian terror operatives who joined ISIS in Libya back home. We can expect that terror suspects will slip through the cracks and possibly plot attacks in Tunisia. We should advise the Tunisian government to have the following steps in place to adequately address the terror concerns:

- Coordination with regional governments whose borders have been used as travel routes or crossing points into Iraq and Syria, such as Turkey, and soliciting updates on any Tunisian nationals traveling in and out of Turkey.
- Enhancing border and customs apparatuses to intercept Tunisians who have spent considerable periods of time in Iraq and Syria and investigating the purpose of their trips; monitoring the activities of individuals inside Tunisia who have connected with Tunisians in Iraq and Syria; and legislation that would lead to the arrests and prosecution of suspects found to be providing material support to terrorist groups.
- Coordination with North African governments, particularly Algeria and Libya, to secure borders through which terror suspects and operatives might cross.

*Question 3.* The Libya-Italy migrant route was described in late 2016 as the major migrant route into Europe, surpassing the notorious path from Turkey to Greece that was used by approximately 850,000 migrants in 2015. In light of this, what is your assessment of the threat of ISIS or other extremists exploiting this heavily-used migrant route by blending in with the hundreds of thousands of refugees crossing the Mediterranean, and either launching an attack in Europe or travelling to the United States?

Answer. Migrant routes are of immense interest to terror groups, but the threat from terror group operatives and extremists posing as migrants has been minimal. Part of the reason is that it takes a long period of time for migrants to prepare their papers, and they must pass through a stringent process before they can settle in Western countries. Terror groups do not appear to have developed such a nuanced strategy, instead relying on ad hoc attacks and self-radicalized individuals. This, however, does not mean that ISIS might not exploit these routes in the future. Reasonably, terror operatives might pass into the West undetected and potentially plot an attack, but the degree to which these routes could be exploited is insignificant when compared to ISIS-orchestrated and inspired attacks that partly rely on communication between ISIS apparatuses in the Middle East and potential Western radicals at home. The threat from the latter scenario is significantly higher.

*Question 4.* President Trump's proposed budget includes significant cuts to the State Department as well as USAID. In his posture statement in early March before the Senate Armed Services Committee, AFRICOM commander Gen. Waldhauser specifically praised these two arms of our non-military foreign policy, saying, "Diplomacy and development are key efforts, and our partnership with the Department of State and USAID is key to achieve enduring success." As it specifically relates to North Africa, what programs have these two agencies put in place to aid our CT efforts in that region?

Answer. One of USAID's main counterterrorism policies is the "The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency," which aims at identifying and tackling conduits of violent extremism. This policy includes educational programs, women and youth empowerment, and working with local communities to address approaches to better governance, among others. Part of the program is the Maghreb-Sahel Capacity Building for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which in many ways helps in grassroots anti-radicalization efforts. USAID's efforts will prove critical in areas where violent extremists have become entrenched; helping the local populations understand and ultimately reject violent extremist ideologies is critical.

#### QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR FREDERIC WEHREY

*Question 1.* In your testimony, you noted that the Islamic State in Libya no longer remains a territorial force, however, you believe that this presents us with many challenges. Can you further explain those challenges and how the Islamic State can still create acts of terror in Libya? How should the United States respond?

Answer. The self-proclaimed Islamic State in Libya has dispersed to scattered "pools" of militants in the country's desert interior and in several Western cities. The possibility of these networks regrouping into operational cells and conducting attacks remains high. Specifically, the Islamic State may seek to demonstrate its continued presence and viability through a high-visibility attack. Such an attack would likely be aimed at eroding the already weak authority of the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, either by attacking the Government itself or a commercial entity. Police and military facilities, oil and energy infrastructure, and foreign commercial interests are all possible targets. Should Western diplomats and multilateral organizations return to the capital, those too would be at risk. Presently, the best strategy for disruption of such attacks by clandestine networks is one rooted in intelligence and investigation. The United States and its Western allies should provide assistance and training to GNA-controlled policing bodies. In tandem, robust and persistent surveillance of Libya's vast interior and potential ter-

rorist lines of supply or encampments can prevent the Islamic State from regrouping and reconstituting itself.

*Question 2a.* Economic and political insecurity seems to be a common occurrence across North Africa. In your opinion, how does regional and state fragmentation pose long-term challenges for the United States?

Answer. The United States should continue to adopt a holistic, whole-of-Government approach to counterterrorism that addresses the social and economic grievances fueling jihadism. A huge part of the jihadist appeal focuses on state-led corruption and abuses in the judicial sector—these areas need to be part of the United States and allied assistance effort. Train-and-equip programs and border security are only one part of the broader challenge.

*Question 2b.* How can the United States and its allies in the region disrupt the recruiting efforts of local al-Qaeda and the Islamic State affiliates that take advantage of this turmoil?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 3.* In your opinion, what is the most important base of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in North Africa?

Answer. The most important base for al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb remains the southwest corner of Libya, Algeria, and Niger. This uncontrolled region has long offered the group a logistics pipeline, safe haven, and a space to train. The Islamic State's North African presence was significantly degraded after the Libyan-led campaign last summer and fall and the U.S. strike outside of Sirte in January 2017. That said, Libya offers the Islamic State the most promising space to regroup.

*Question 4.* How would you measure the extent of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda fighters that have fled fighting zones in the Middle East to North Africa?

Answer. In key countries, my estimates based on official, host-country estimates and reliable open source reporting indicates roughly 200–500 returnees for Morocco and Libya and up to 1,000–1,500 for Tunisia alone. The number from Algeria is small—63 according to a 2015 Algerian government figure. I would assess the number of total returnees to be about 2,000–2,500 in total for the Maghreb, excluding Egypt.

*Question 5a.* The United States spends a great deal on training and equipment for allies to help combat terrorism. In your opinion, which countries in the region should the United States be focusing most of its efforts on?

Answer. Tunisia should be a focus given the numbers of Tunisian youth who have joined the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. In tandem, counterterrorism assistance to the Sahelian countries to the south—namely Chad and Niger—remains vital. This remains a cost-effective strategy, provided it is accompanied by broader efforts to reform host-nation institutions, rule-of-law, and especially address the economic and social grievances that fuel jihadism. Simply providing unit-level training and more weapons to local partners will not be enough: These states have serious problems at the level of ministries, interoperability, prisons, judiciaries, and, especially, in meeting the aspirations of their increasingly restive youth populations.

*Question 5b.* Is this a more cost-effective option than deploying U.S. forces and limit the need for future U.S. intervention?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

#### QUESTION FROM RANKING MEMBER KATHLEEN M. RICE FOR FREDERIC WEHREY

*Question.* What are your opinions on the President's travel ban and its potential effects in North Africa?

Answer. Any attempt to ban travelers to the United States using blanket criteria such as country of origin or religion, or via excessive and intrusive vetting will have a counter-productive effect on the broader fight against terrorism. It deprives the United States access to vital sources of influence and information—the people of the region. It also plays into the hands of the jihadists' narrative of an anti-Islamic West.

#### QUESTIONS FROM REPRESENTATIVE MIKE GALLAGHER FOR FREDERIC WEHREY

*Question 1a.* Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is our largest permanent military installation in Africa and is critical to our counterterrorism operations throughout Africa, as well as the Middle East. Just a few miles away, a Chinese naval base is being constructed and is slated for completion this summer. Publicly, Chinese officials maintain this base is strictly to aid their anti-piracy missions and is not a base, but rather a “logistical support facility.” During a briefing with reporters on March 27, AFRICOM Commander and Marine Corps Gen. Thomas Waldhauser said, “There are some very significant operational security concerns,” in response to a question about the new Chinese base. This is China's first permanent overseas military out-

post, which carries added significance. How can this new proximity to the Chinese affect our CT missions in the region?

*Question 1b.* How will their foreign policy goals conflict with our own?

Answer. The Chinese facility does not pose an immediate threat to American counterterrorism partnerships and missions in Africa, aside from operational security challenges. Insofar as the base represents another step in China's expanding presence in Africa, it adds to growing concerns about Beijing's mercantilist, blank-check support for authoritarian rulers on the continent, which runs counter to the United State's aim of promoting the rule of law, transparency, and accountability—all important facets of a holistic counterterrorism strategy.

*Question 2a.* AFRICOM has been partnering with Tunisian military and intelligence assets to improve their CT&I capabilities and help secure their borders. However, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, somewhere between 6,000–7,000 Tunisians have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join rebel and terrorist groups in those conflict zones. The Wall Street Journal reports that “As many as 15,000 others have been barred from international travel because Tunisia's government suspects them of planning to follow suit.” Another report, citing a U.S. CT official in Tunisia, says as many as 1,000 Tunisians are under domestic surveillance within the country.

Given these numbers, how can we expect the Tunisians to adequately address these issues and implement a successful CT strategy?

*Question 2b.* What more can we do to implement and improve upon AFRICOM's existing partnership with Tunisia?

Answer. Tunisia desperately needs a broad-based strategy for addressing these returnees, which includes freeing up space in prisons and more importantly devising a rehabilitation program that relies on community influencers, family, and vocational training. AFRICOM's existing programs have focused on five lines of effort: Air-ground capacity, counterterrorism, intelligence, border security, and defense institution building, to include the development of a National military strategy. Tunisia still needs more assistance in terms of joint cooperation among the different services, intelligence fusion, and de-confliction between the ministries of defense and interior. AFRICOM's assistance should be closely synchronized with those of other agencies, whether under the framework of the Security Governance Initiative (SGI) or some revised, whole-of-Government framework.

*Question 3.* The Libya-Italy migrant route was described in late 2016 as the major migrant route into Europe, surpassing the notorious path from Turkey to Greece that was used by approximately 850,000 migrants in 2015. In light of this, what is your assessment of the threat ISIS or other extremists exploiting this heavily-used migrant route by blending in with the hundreds of thousands of refugees crossing the Mediterranean, and either launching an attack in Europe or travelling to the United States?

Answer. I believe it is unlikely that the Islamic State or other extremists will try to infiltrate the flow of migrants traversing the Mediterranean because of the extreme risks of the crossing and because most of their attacks in Europe and America have been conducted by home-grown extremists.

*Question 4.* President Trump's proposed budget includes significant cuts to the State Department as well as USAID. In his posture statement in early March before the Senate Armed Services Committee, AFRICOM commander Gen. Waldhauser specifically praised these two arms of our non-military foreign policy, saying “Diplomacy and development are key efforts, and our partnership with the Department of State and USAID is key to achieve enduring success.” As it specifically related to North Africa, what programs have these two agencies put in place to aid out CT efforts in that region?

Answer. USAID's jobs training and matching program has been an effective tool addressing radicalization in Tunisia. Similar community-level outreach programs have been effective in Libya, especially municipal-level aid, entrepreneurship, and small-business development. Broader support to civil society forms an important deterrent and counterweight to the jihadists' narrative and appeal.