



Casablanca and Algiers Terrorism that strikes against all of us

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Introduction

The death of four suicide bombers in Casablanca on April 10th, and the bomb attacks in Algiers on the following day, perpetrated by three suicide bombers, must be considered as one more step in the unstoppable surge that the Salafist Jihadist threat means for all us, regardless of who provides the victims every time. (When we finished writing this analysis, the tally was 33 casualties and 200 injured).

Many fall into the typical temptation of believing that those attacks are not against us just because they happen in the Arab-Islamic world, showing disregard for how close they are to Spain, in geographic terms, and allowing the Jihadists to keep the criminal enterprising running smoothly. It's about time that we come to understand that the casualties of terrorist acts, like the police officer in Casablanca,

state officials and civilians in Algiers, are as much our casualties as the ones killed on 3/11 or by ETA - just remember 9/11/2001 in the United States, 3/16/2003 in Casablanca, 3/11/2004 in Madrid or 7/7/2005 in London, besides the attacks in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam a decade ago or in Baghdad everyday, among many other scenarios.

"al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb" and terrorism in and from the Maghreb

The labeling of the old Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) as "al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb", in January 2007, does not necessarily represent a turning point in the terrorist prominence of this murderous group that used to kill daily inside and outside Algeria, but it does encourage and stimulate the GSPC and it also symbolizes

its commitment to follow the orders and *modus operandi* of the active network of networks.

In Algeria, the GSPC has been murdering people in uniform and without it since it evolved from a split in the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) – in fact a wide smorgasbord of groups and political organizations operating under the umbrella of that acronym – during the first half of 1998.

This split took place because of direct intervention by Osama Bin Laden who never disliked the massacres executed by the GIA – like the one in 1995, the first suicide attack in the Maghreb, when a truck loaded with explosives was detonated in front of the Central Police station of Algiers, in the Amirouche boulevard, causing approximately fifty casualties – but in those days, he wanted to rationalize his universal battle, *i.e.* make it more lethally effective, and for that purpose, he created at the same time the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders.

In its beginnings, the GSPC made off with important GIA elements within Algeria as well as with a considerable amount of the networks woven by the terrorist group in Europe, something of a fundamental added benefit seen from bin Laden's perspective, the one of an economist and a great organizer. The numerous police operations undertaken during this group's 10-year existence in other European countries illustrate the validity of the threat and his obsession with Europe to attract and indoctrinate members, to get financing through diverse illicit activities, to find havens to rest and hide away, to funnel some members to other places to carry out terrorist activities like Iraq or Afghanistan as well as any other instance when and where required. In recent years, Spanish,

Italian, French and British security forces and others have actually been successful aborting plans for different kinds of terrorist attacks in European soil.

Many wonder why this group is still relevant in a country like Algeria that had practically won the war on terror – years before the United States had to declare its own “War on Terror” after the deplorable terrorist attacks on the 11th of September – and also why the GSPC has settled not only in Algerian soil during recent years, but it is also extending its tentacles to neighboring countries in the Maghreb and the African Sahel.

Its presence in Algerian soil is explained by the nature of the group and because it wants to go all the way until reaching its primary objective: To destroy the apostate and tyrant (*taghout*) State and all who keep it in place, and – like the GIA used to do – that means including all the state officials and a big chunk of the rest of society. Thus, for the GIA in the 90's, then for the GSPC and now for “al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb” the great priority is to eliminate the apostates and to lead the Algerian society back towards what they consider the real Islam: For that reason, they savagely murdered not only state officials, but also journalists, teachers, women, babies and also foreigners whose presence and work in Algeria contributed to strengthen the tyrants' regime, according to the Salafist Jihadist s.

In terms of domestic policy, Islamist terrorism in Algeria was largely defeated, but not completely as it would happen later in Afghanistan in 2002, in the late 90's due to the efforts of the Algerian state and society as a whole. This effort and a first amnesty offered by President Liamine Zeroual - the Rahma Law (clemency) - had served to

disband one of the groups, the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the terrorist arm of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) while the GIA survived, though weaker, and one could see the emergence of the GSPC.

The Law on Civil Concord (1999) and the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (2005) constitute two legal instruments that during the presidency of Abdelaziz Bouteflika have granted two ample amnesties to those who wanted to be under their aegis. Although legal and legitimate - because both were approved by referendum - their application has been rejected by the GSPC because it does not accept the State's proposals, and since it is a Salafist Jihadist group pursuing its adversary's total defeat, the terrorists have misread it as a sign of their enemy's weakness and that has emboldened their will to fight.

Accordingly with what they did in the past, regardless of the acronym of the moment, the Jihadist terrorists continue operating in Algeria today. Out of the numerous examples that could be quoted, it's pertinent to point out in order to come to understand the different battlefronts, the recent murders of 9 Algerian servicemen ambushed in the region of Aïn-Defla (160 kilometers from Algiers) on April 7th, or operations that remind us of the Iraqi theater like the two truck bombs that exploded in front of 2 police stations in Algiers last November, the attacks against foreigners in December, against a Halliburton bus used by the American company's workers, and in February against another workers' bus belonging to a Russian oil company.

As far as its expansion to bordering countries, it is being successful because of three main factors:

First, because the now renamed GSPC is Salafist Jihadist and therefore universalist, being unable to constrain the fight to national borders because they reject that notion from start. Let's have in mind that al-Qaeda has contempt for the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad because, according to the terrorist network's leaders and ideologists, those groups have the pitiable objective of creating a state confined only to historic Palestine. The terrorist activity observed during the two last years in Egypt, with special emphasis in the Sinai Peninsula and the "al-Qaeda-Palestine, Jihad Brigades in the Border Land" shows the desire of the al-Qaeda leadership to seize the Palestinian battlefield traditionally in the hands of al-Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The second factor has to do with the absence of a stable cooperation among Maghrebian countries, a fact that has made easier the correlation among terrorist groups belonging to the five countries that constitute the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) since February 1989. It is peculiar to observe that whereas the authorities of Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia are still not capable of going beyond their old distrusts to advance towards healthy sub regional cooperation initiatives, the terrorists born in these five countries have gone ahead advancing quickly towards coordination. Among numerous examples, we could point out the presence of a man from Tangiers in the GSPC's Majlis or training in mobile camps that the renamed GSPC terrorists organize to welcome terrorists from other Maghrebian and Sahelian countries.

The third factor, as important as the previous ones, is the direct invitation from al-Qaeda to do it, a holy mission that has come directly commanded by the network's leadership and that the Maghrebian terrorist activists are following to the letter. The GSPC is Salafist Jihadist since its very beginnings and before that, the GIA had already been globalizing its activities but there is no doubt that now, with bin Laden's direct authorization and motivation, "al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb" is called to much more ambitious deeds.

The issues surrounding the most conspicuous solutions to the threat

In perspective, Maghrebians, Europeans and Americans have combat experience against Salafist Jihadist terrorism, a kind of terrorism that in the Maghreb has been very important in terms of recruitment, improving its training techniques as in executing its criminal activities on the ground and as an export product to places like Europe, the Sahel, Iraq or Afghanistan. Before making some remarks about the anti-terrorist war fought by each one of the three key players or blocks of players, it is convenient to indicate that "the real threat" definition has not yet been made by all of the players in spite of having experienced so many fateful days (9/11, 3/16, 3/11, 7/7 and others) and other slaughterous events like the ones in Algeria, Iraq or Afghanistan.

The Salafist Jihadist terrorism is global and has global objectives; it is a threat to all of us, no matter where it strikes because it does against all of us. As it already happened in Spain after pondering an idea that concluded in the approval of the successful Political Parties Law, terrorist ac-

tivity is the sum of very diverse activities: executing the attack is the most visible part, but the propaganda and its development are also terrorism as well as its political implementation and endorsement, the recruitment of terrorists, the financing aspects, and many other activities that contribute to the terrorist enterprise. Those who contribute to the terrorist enterprise in Algeria, Chechnya, Iraq or any other world spot should not enjoy the freedoms that democracies offer.

It is not a matter of restricting freedom but a matter of not allowing the benefit of these liberties to those trying to destroy them: The European Court of Human Rights, a Council of Europe institution well known for its extremely rigorous monitoring of these rights, rendered an important judgment in favor of Turkey in the case to dissolve the Prosperity Party; Spain put these measures into practice outlawing Batasuna, thus painting ETA into a corner; Germany did the same with Naziphile parties; Europe and the rest of the West should do the same confronting parties or individuals that continue having leeway hiding behind certain causes to nurture terrorism.

Salafist Jihadist terrorism does not pursue either freedom or social justice with its deeds in places like Palestine, Chechnya or Iraq; neither just being good neighbors nor reaching regional cooperation; terrorism does not speak for the world's poor and underprivileged against exploitation. This ideology is clear and transparent: To impose its biased vision of Islam on everybody, at first in the Islamic world eradicating the *bad* Muslims, with the sword if necessary, and in parallel, coercing the rest of humanity to embrace such pseudo-religious manipulation, also by force. Those who do not believe this description,

just listen and see “The Voice of the Caliphate”, al-Qaeda’s bizarre newscast.

Making progress to restore the political life and the economy to normal standards for Palestinians or Iraqis does not mean the end of terrorism. We should contribute to that normalization as a moral obligation, and because of political and security needs, but always with the knowledge that a free and democratic Palestine, in good terms with neighboring Israel, or a stable Iraq without Coalition troops, will still be in the Salafist Jihadist s agenda because they find those scenarios as despicable as what they are today.

With respect to the Maghrebian countries, the anti-terrorist war is just a national issue, international cooperation is conspicuous by its absence in all the sub regional area and there is no doubt that it would be of great help. With its epicenter in Algeria, that during most of the 90’s had to fight on its own against terrorism because it did not find allies that understood the true dimension of the threat, the kind of terrorism that operates today in the Maghreb feels more at ease because it takes advantage of the existing political and diplomatic contradictions, being the most evident and regrettable one, the distrust between Algeria and Morocco, with one border closed since 1994 and with extremely few extraditions of well-settled terrorists in both countries.

It is desirable that the pitiable attacks like the one perpetrated by the GSPC in Mauritania on June 2005 where the group killed seventeen soldiers in Lemgheity; the training of terrorists coming from of all the Maghreb countries by the GSPC/“al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb” in mobile desert camps; or the clashes in the capital and surrounding areas between

Tunisian terrorists equipped with weapons of war and Tunisian security forces last December and January that concluded with about twenty casualties, can bring past inertias to an end.

Some European countries have been developing bilateral ties with Maghrebian countries to face terrorism – it is significant that Spain and Morocco waited until the terrorist attacks in Casablanca on March 16th and, specially, 3/11 to reinforce that cooperation with different tools – and at the same time they have played the role of messengers or brokers for Maghrebian countries to ease that constraint.

The European countries considered themselves as mere terrorism rearguards that operated abroad, particularly in Algeria, and were unable to decipher the Jihadist evident messages like the GIA terrorist attacks on French soil between 1994 and 1996; besides hijacking an Air France Airbus in Algiers to crash it in Paris; in December 2004, the GIA attacked public transport vehicles in Paris, got involved in illegal arms trafficking, distributed unbearable videos showing the “execution” of soldiers, police officers and journalists, and nurtured from Europe the Jihad warrior in Bosnia and Chechnya, among other destinations.

It is important to remember that France had to fight more than ten years to obtain Rachid Ramda’s extradition, an Algerian citizen accused of helping in the GIA terrorist attack against Saint Michel subway station, in Paris, which claimed 10 lives and injured many more. To this day, if one just takes Spain into consideration, around 200 radical Islamists can be found in Spanish jails showing the size of the threat – something one could see directly demonstrated on 3/11 and, before that, the free

movement on Spanish soil enjoyed by some of the persons involved in 9/11 – making the expansive waves of the explosions in Casablanca and Algiers felt right here at home.

In the end, it is important to emphasize the recent arrival – just 5 years ago – of a distant player, the United States, that has discovered the significance that the Maghreb and the Sahel have as an al-Qaeda redeployment zone and a reserve of Jihadist terrorists that have been playing an active role in areas like Afghanistan and Iraq where there is direct American intervention. After launching in late 2002 the so-called Pan-Sahelian Initiative –that until 2004 trained military and law enforcement units within the four participating nations, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – in 2005, Washington developed the Trans Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) designed to provide organic and logistics support under the U.S. European command with its headquarters in Stuttgart.

With a 500-million dollar budget, 100 million per year, it already includes, besides the four participating Sahelian nations, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia. The first military exercise on the ground under the TSCTI command took place from June 6th until June 26th, 2005 and it was called “Flintlock-2005”, counting with the participation of up to 1,000 American Special Forces troops.

The TSCTI carries out daily training activities by American Special Forces troops for

the participating countries' armed forces; much needed intelligence work considering the existence of mobile training camps belonging to “al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb” in the middle of the desert and also other activities that will doubtlessly be boosted after the creation of the United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM), sixth in the military organization chart, after an executive order signed by George W. Bush on February 8th, 2007.

It is about time that Maghrebians, Europeans and Americans work together as one against the threat affecting us all. It will be necessary that the five Maghrebian countries cooperate, or that their partners and Western supporters exhort them to do so; that the Europeans really act in a coordinated manner, forgetting those anachronistic ideas like that those who support the terrorists in Algeria or Chechnya can do so protected by freedom of speech – just remember Londonistan, or that the struggle against the occupying forces in Iraq is legitimate, just remember the verdict of an Italian judge in a process against a terrorist network that used to funnel terrorists to that Arab country; and that Maghrebians and Europeans cooperate with the United States, taking advantage of the positive aspects that Washington's interest could have in the region at a moment so critical in the fight against a threat that sees itself more daring and emboldened than ever.

Recommended literature by the author of this article, useful for further analysis

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