Committee/Council: Security Council
Issue: The Question of Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)
Student Officer: Ellie Mainou
Position: Co-President

Introduction

Terrorism has always been a major issue in the Middle East. However, this problem has become of greater importance since the formation of Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb and Al-Qaeda to which AQIM claims allegiance. AQIM has also taken responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks in Mali, Mauritania and especially Algeria, which has been its initial target since the group's formation. The region affected by the organization's attacks has tried to tackle the issue. Moreover, the United Nations Security Council has put a lot of effort in resolving the matter by establishing the Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee. Currently, fears about AQIM's activity include the exploitation of the political turmoil in Mali to protect the organization's benefits.

Definition of Key-Terms

Islamic Maghreb: simply known as Maghreb is usually characterized as most of the region of Northwest Africa, west of Egypt. Traditionally, it is defined as the region including the Atlas Mountains and the coastal plains of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

Terrorism: it is mostly described as any act that systematic and causes terror, although there is no specific definition of the term in the international community. Targeted for a specific location and a distinct religious, political and ideological aim.

Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): an Islamist militia which initially aimed to overthrow the Algerian government and institute an Islamist state. Currently, it is engaged in an insurgent campaign.

Background Information

GSPC and development to AQIM

A domestic armed Islamist resistance movement was formed, disapproving of the Algerian government, when the elections of 1992 were canceled due to the Algerian government found that there was a possibility to lose the election. That movement later split into two groups; the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). During that time GSPC did not cause any dangers to people, but preached against the government. Later on, GSPC took responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks, announced its intentions to attack Western countries, such as Spain, France and the United States of America, and sent a squad of jihadis to Iraq.

In 2006 GSPC declared allegiance to Al-Qaeda However, collusion between AQIM and Al-Qaeda has been a long-standing phenomenon. According to a report by the Washington Institute of the Near East Policy, Osama Bin Laden provided funding for Algerian Islamists in the early 1990s and was involved in the GSPC's early formation**.** Many of the group's founding members trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. In 2007 GSPC changed its name to AQIM and ever since it has been responsible for a number of terrorist attacks, under the leadership of Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud. A number of conventional terrorist tactics are applied by AQIM. These include guerilla-style ambushes against military personnel and truck bombs against government targets. The group is currently thought to be lead by Au Musab Abdel Wadoud, a former university science student and infamous bomb-maker. He took over in 2004, though there are unconfirmed reports that he has since been toppled by internal rivals.

AQIM has expanded its region where it takes action, finding safety in Northern Mali and Mauritania. Nowadays AQIM is a major issue in four countries; Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali. Also, in the 1990s it numbered 30,000 members, whereas today they are under 1,000. Despite the decrease in AQIM’s membership there have been considerable indications that terrorism in North Africa is constantly rising and that AQIM is using the Iraq war and other undesirable methods employed by the Western world as a means of recruiting new members. In 2009 there was a surge of AQIM activity that had as a consequence the death of many people. This lead many American and European counter-terrorism officials to the conclusion that there was a flow North African fighters returning home from Iraq, who became members of the group. However, other officials believe that the outbreak of violence derives from AQIM subcommanders.

Goals

Originally, its aims included the overthrow of Algeria's secular military government and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, a theocracy based on Islamic law. In addition, AQIM has expressed its absolute support in Al Qaeda. The group offers Al Qaeda hundreds of experienced fighters and a potential connection to militants living in Europe. Over the past few years, suspects of North African origin have been arrested in Spain, France, Switzerland and Italy, although their connection to the Algerians is not always clear. According to the organization’s current leader Abdelmalek Droukdal; "Our general goals are the same goals of Al Qaeda the mother," as stated in a July 2008 interview with the New York Times. Counterterrorism experts, nevertheless, say the group's folding into the global al-Qaeda structure may indicate a widening of ambitions, pursuing a more global, sophisticated and better-financed direction. The region of Maghreb has been relatively peaceful since the end of the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s. However, not only the allegations of AQIM to be the local franchise of Al-Qaeda, but also its international threats have been a great concern to international officials. In Europe, the authorities are eyeing the Algerian group warily, but are not convinced that the group can strike outside Africa.

A photograph provided by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb depicts Abdelmalek Droukdal, third from right, an explosives expert and leader of one of the most potent Qaeda affiliates. The photograph's authenticity was verified by The New York Times.

AQIM’s attacks

The gunfights with Algerian forces have grown into suicide truck bombings of iconic sites like the United Nations offices in Algiers. They have also kidnapped and killed European tourists as their reach expands throughout northern Africa. For example, thirty-two European tourists were kidnapped while traveling in the Algerian Sahara in February 2003. The ransom paid for their release is unknown but estimated to be from $5 million to $10 million. In December 2006, the group attacked two buses carrying contractors near Algiers, wounding several foreign nationals. Four months later, the group killed twenty-three people with twin bombings in Algiers. AQIM has even targeted the United Nations. In December 2007, the group was behind a double suicide bombing in Algeria that killed forty-one people, including seventeen UN staff members. These attacks, combined with the June 2008 twin suicide bombing of an army outpost, suggest the group is relying more on suicide attacks as its preferred method. Moreover, in December 2008, militants from al-Qaeda in North Africa abducted the United Nations special envoy, Robert Fowler, and his assistant near Niger's capital, Niamey. They were released in April 2009. In February 2008, AQIM militants kidnapped two Austrian tourists in Tunisia and listed el-Para's release, who was one of the

group's leaders, as one of their demands. Algerian courts recently sentenced him to death, though the last execution in the country occurred in 1993. Most of AQIM activities used to take place along Algeria's Mediterranean coast. Nevertheless, security measures taken by the Algerian military have forced the group to the extensively ungoverned desert area of Mali. AQIM depends a lot on local communities. It is an undisputed fact that local elders of communities have acted as intermediaries in talks resulting in the release of hostages.

Foreign workers are among those taken hostage by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Funding

The lack of police control in the borders of the Sahara region constitute the transportation of smuggling vehicles, cigarettes, drugs and arms particularly easy. Therefore, a considerable source of income derives from smuggling and minor crimes. Apart from that, French and Italian police forces reported to Europol in 2008 that Europe-based cells provide funds to AQIM through counterfeiting money, other illegal activities and drug dealing. The UN is particularly worried about the involvement of AQIM in cocaine trade. It is believed that it contributes to the organization's finances. The UN is mostly concerned about the way these funds are used (financing attacks, purchase of arms). Finally, self-financing through ransom has provided a huge income to AQIM, which may have been used to purchase surface-to-air-missiles, heavy machine guns, mortars and satellite-positioning equipment.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Algeria: AQIM's original goal was to tackle the Algerian government. It regards AQIM at both as terrorist organization and a great threat to its civilians. As a consequence, Algeria has implemented a huge anti-terrorism policy to prevent attacks. Due to its international action Algeria does not consider AQIM a major political threat, even though it remains careful for attacks. Despite this, Algeria is a main target for AQIM. Attacks on military personnel, government employees and ordinary people, who are regarded as accomplices of the government are an every-day phenomenon. In the past few years Algeria has managed to deal more effectively with AQIM. A characteristic example is the fact that in 2011 the Algerian government killed or captured approximately 1,100 nearly double the number in 2006, as stated by the State Department.

Mauritania: AQIM members reside in the country.Mauritania has shown ample criticism to Mali for the way it dealt with hostage situations.

Mali: The pressure imposed to AQIM by Algeria had as a consequence Mali becoming a major target to AQIM due to its political turmoil. It is no coincidence that all of AQIM recent hostages have been held in remote areas of the Sahara desert in Mali. Apart from that, AQIM has attacked Mali's supply cars. However, AQIM's base in Mali can definitely not be characterized as a safe haven. For example, in June 2009, Malian security forces murdered seventeen militants during a raid on an AQIM base near the town of Timetrine. Even though it is trying hard to cope with the situation both Algeria and Mauritania are under the impression that Mali is a weak link in their regional. Mali has received a lot of criticism about not being able to prevent attacks and not efficiently imposing sanctions on AQIM. Finally, it is believed that it has unsuccessfully dealt with hostage situations, such as the release of four AQIM prisoners in exchange for the release on hostages.

Niger: Niger is facing an extremely low standard of living and many of its citizens live in poverty. Consequently, many of Nigerian people choose to become members of AQIM as a way of escaping from poverty. Additionally, Nigerian soldiers have been killed by AQIM during an attack in military posts. Niger has tried to deal with the situation by cooperating with neighboring nations and enforcing strict sanctions against AQIM.

Al-Qaeda: AQIM has announced allegiance with Al-Qaeda, which has been a great influence to the organization, leading it to become an international terrorist organization with targets in the western countries. Moreover, Al-Qaeda was declared a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. Department of State. It constantly attacks western countries and is mostly known for the claim of its responsibility for the 9/11/2001 attack in the United States.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1992	An Islamist group is formed to overthrow the Algerian government
1998	The Islamist group is split in two groups: The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).
October, 6th 2001	GSPC listed as being associated with Al-Qaeda by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1267.
2006	GSPC declares allegiance to Al-Qaeda
2007	GSPC alters its name to AQIM
December 2007	A double suicide bombing kills 17 UN officials and 24 persons
2008	AQIM is accused of illegal acts by European Authorities
December 2009	The United Nations Security Council criminalizes any

	payments to listed terrorist individuals and organizations including ransom money.
March 2010	Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania and Niger all meet in Algiers to discuss the issue of terrorism in their region.
April 2010	The military leaders of the above-mentioned countries meet.
2010	Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali create a Joint Military Command for an operation against AQIM in the Algerian city Tamanrasset.

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

The UN, worried about the general increase of terrorist acts in a global scale, has authored numerous resolutions referring to threats to international peace and security including;

- S/RES/1267
- S/RES/1373
- S/RES/1452
- S/RES/1455
- S/RES/1526
- S/RES/1566
- S/RES/1617
- S/RES/1624
- S/RES/1735
- S/RES/1822
- S/RES/1904
- S/RES/1963
- S/RES/1988
- S/RES/1989
- Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of terrorism in Africa (composed by the Africa Union)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali have realized that they are facing a reciprocal problem. For this reason they have tried to cooperate, by increasing the information sharing on the issue. There have also been attempts to pursue terrorist in the boarders of the above mentioned nations. The response to AQIM by the four countries is expected to have fruitful results in the fight against the problem.

Algeria has managed to decrease the number of terrorist members during the 1990s by enforcing not only a government amnesty program, but also a consistent antiterrorist campaign by the country's army. The result of this policy was the fact that AQIM's membership was almost 30,000 in the 1990s, whereas nowadays is in the hundreds.

The United Nations have been particularly active in the issue. Its concern about the way AQIM uses the funds derived from cocaine trading has lead to imposing sanctions to AQIM. One of the most important measures is the freezing of its assets. The truth is, however, that the sanctions implemented have not had a beneficial effect, because AQIM continue to have an income from illegal drug trade.

The United Nations Security Council has formed a special committee to deal with both individuals and groups related to Al-Qaeda named the Security Council Committee established pursuant to paragraph six of resolution 1267, or most commonly known as the Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee. The Committee implements three different sanctions on individuals and groups; travel ban, arms embargo and assets freeze. This means that all nations are obliged by the Security Council to forbidden all the individuals or groups associated with Al-Qaeda to travel either from or to their country, to prevent the purchase or transfer of arms and to freeze all the financial assets that belong to those individuals.

One of the most effective measures to combat terrorism in the region is the Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa authored by the African Union. This plan contains all the necessary measures that have to be taken in order to combat terrorism in the area. Given that poverty is a driving factor that leads many citizens to join the group, it states clearly the need to reduce poverty as well as to enforce the current laws.

The group's most audacious attack came last December when suicide bombers struck the United Nations and court offices in Algiers, killing 41 people and injuring 170 others.

Possible Solutions

The matter of terrorist organizations has always been difficult to solve. The terrorists' major objective is to cause fear to governments for their citizens. For this reason it is of outmost importance that all governments stop negotiating with terrorists. This can be primarily achieved by refusing to pay ransom money. Even though the governments allege that they have not done so, investigations prove the exact opposite. Moreover, there have been incidents in which AQIM asked for the release of its member who were held as prisoners in exchange for the release of hostages. When orders were not executed the victims were killed. Despite this the truth is that such behavior is strongly encouraged by governments' reactions giving AQIM the impression that its policy has fruitful results.

Another measure that could lead to the decrease of AQIM's power is the strengthening of the cooperation among the United Nations, Interpol and the four affected countries. This aims to the more careful allocation of resources as a means of combating terrorism.

Taken into consideration that poverty is an essential reason for which citizens choose to join AQIM, countries in collusion in collusion with international humanitarian organizations should make an effort and alleviate the burden of poor so that they will not be forced to join AQIM to survive.

It is important that nations cooperate more efficiently as a region. Since political turmoil and conflicts among nations enable terrorist organizations' action, countries need to increase trade and strengthen bilateral and multilateral agreements with each other to promote peace and development. Apart from that, it is an imperative need that nations share a common counterterrorism policy so as not to be lead to conflict that would compromise peace.

More police controls and stricter legislation concerning terrorism could be a factor that would prevent and ultimately reduce terrorist attacks.

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