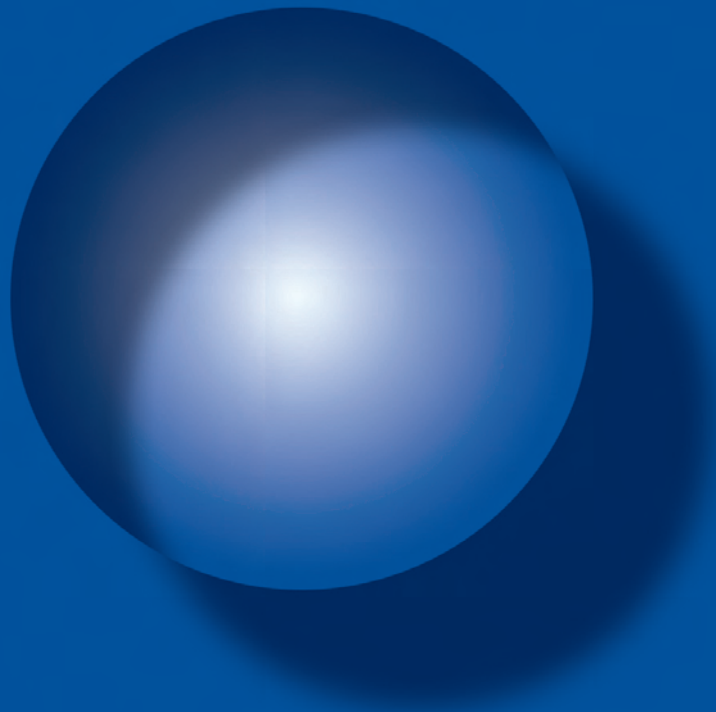


# **The Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative**

## The US War on Terrorism in North Africa

Toby Archer & Tihomir Popovic



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## The US War on Terrorism in Northwest Africa

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## Contents

Introduction.....	7
The regional situation 9	
The PSI states.....	11
Chad 11	
Niger 13	
Mali 15	
Mauritania 20	
Algeria: the key-state to regional security.....	24
Questions over the 2003 kidnapping 29	
The TSCTI periphery states.....	33
Morocco 33	
Tunisia 35	
Nigeria 37	
Senegal 40	
Why is the US in the Sahara?.....	42
Counter-terrorism and regional peace and security 42	
"It's all about the oil" 47	
The Bureaucratic Imperative 50	
Conclusion – the Securitization of the Sahara .....	57
Bibliography.....	60
References.....	68
List of abbreviations.....	80
Previously published in the series.....	81



*An anxious superpower, disaffected former rebels, aid-hungry African governments and a history of terrorism in Algeria going back over fifty years; it's a complex story...*

*"Secrets in the Sands" BBC World Service, August 2005.*



# Introduction

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States declared its “global war on terror” (GWOT). The first major ‘battle’ of this ‘war’ was the invasion of Afghanistan in the last months of 2001 and, more controversially, this was followed by the invasion of Iraq in February 2003. But with less global attention the US has been finding other ‘fronts’ in this war: from Yemen to the Philippines, from Uzbekistan to Djibouti the US military has made its presence felt.

This report focuses on one of these newly-declared ‘fronts’ in the global war on terror – the trans-Saharan region – but in many respects it could be any one of them; for ultimately what we are seeing is the way that international affairs are being conducted in a unipolar world. Virtually every country in the most disparate regions of the globe are realising that dealing with the sole remaining superpower – the United States of America – in one way or another, has become a necessity. The US’s economic, diplomatic, cultural and military might is such that it is very hard to ignore, no matter whether a state sees the US as an ally or a threat. States may seek to merely placate the US; others might try to co-opt it into helping them deal with their own internal problems or the problems of their region. Other states genuinely seek to be an ally, expecting advantages to come from being in that position. Very few attempt to directly oppose or resist it: even if the US is publicly struggling to control Iraq now, it still toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein with ease. Indeed, as we see in Iraq, resistance is generally left to non-state groups be they political, religious or ethnic; sub-national or trans-national. US military power has been premised on the idea of state-to-state confrontation, and as we have seen in the last four years, it has difficulty in engaging and defeating groups that do not have territory to defend and physical infrastructure to hit in the way that a state does. Because they



cannot be deterred, non-state terrorist groups are seen to present a more immediate threat to US security than state actors, and US security policy increasingly reflects this.

This trend is clearly visible in the US's involvement in the trans-Saharan region. The United States' Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), and its predecessor the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), is focused on non-state actors operating in the area, not on the activities of the states themselves that comprise that region. Yet the analysis of the situation is not straightforward: threats, including terrorist threats, are constructed – this is very different to saying that they are not real – in certain ways<sup>1</sup>, and those constructions have very real implications. This is clearly happening in the Sahara and Sahel. The US has identified a threat in that region in the form of jihadi terrorists, and in particular the *Groupe Salafiste de Prédication et Combat* (GSPC)<sup>1</sup>, and has set out to counter this threat, predominantly by military means. The construction of the threat in this way has very real implications for both US policy and the Saharan countries, and we aim to explore these.

Governments in the region have readily accepted US offers of military assistance, often with motives other than assisting in the ill-defined struggle against global terrorism. It is even possible that one country in particular, Algeria, is manipulating the terrorist events that the United States points to as the justification for its presence in the region. The US presence is also being exploited by radical non-state actors within the region, such as various Islamist groups, who oppose the US and use its counter-terrorism (CT) assistance as evidence supporting their anti-US claims.

The Saharan region is worthy of study in its own right: the PSI/TSCTI is impacting on the region in ways – both positively and negatively – that deserve the attention of the wider world. But the engagement of the US in this region as part of the War on Terror can also be used as a model; similar patterns of cause and effect are observable elsewhere in the world where the US is project-

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<sup>1</sup> In English the name of the group is the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, but internationally it is best known by its initials from the French. In January 2007 the GSPC announced to the world that it was renaming itself “the al Qaeda Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb” but we use the more known name in this publication. (See: “Algerian group joins al-Qaeda brand” Aljazeera.net 26 January 2007 <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/23E2EB3C-7B4F-4447-80CD-26EDAFE18E8.htm> accessed 22 Feb. 07.) Links between the GSPC and al-Qaeda are discussed in the following chapters.

ing its power in a predominantly military manner to counter the threat of what it describes as terrorism.

This report investigates the situation in the countries of the Sahara region through a critical study of the open source information available. Approaching all the information from a critical perspective is important because so much is contradictory, or based on hard-to-substantiate allegations, but we believe a picture can be pieced together from the diversity of sources available. After this, we then consider the two conflicting explanations for the US presence in the area most commonly presented, point to difficulties with both, and then suggest a third alternative explanation. These three explanations can be summarised as follows:

1 *The counter-terrorism and regional peace and security argument.* This is essentially what the US military is saying: that there are active terrorists within the region that threaten its stability and ultimately the United States, and that regions such as the Sahara that are not well controlled by states are potential ‘staging grounds’ for terrorists.

2 *The critical “it’s all about the oil” argument.* This argues that the US’s central foreign policy interest is gaining access to hydrocarbon deposits and that it will use its military to guarantee that access.

3 *The bureaucratic imperative argument.* Our argument is based on what we feel to be explanatory shortcomings in the above arguments. Rather, we suggest that the nature of the US military structure creates competitive regional commands that must prove their worth in the war on terrorism through being active. The command with the responsibility for most of Africa, EUCOM, had limited possibilities for doing this but one of those possibilities was in the Saharan/Sahel region.

## The regional situation

The Pan Sahel Initiative began in 2002 with a much less ambitious remit than the TSCTI. The word Sahel comes from the Arabic *sahil*, meaning shore or coast, and referred to the lands on the edge of the Sahara desert. From a geographical perspective the Sahel region runs across Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea:

**Picture 1:**

The Sahel region<sup>2</sup>



As will be explained in further detail below, the PSI was a programme controlled solely by one of the geographically divided US military commands; therefore it could only take place in the Sahel countries that the relevant command, EUCOM (United States European Command), had responsibility for. In the case of the PSI this meant Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Mali. The reason why the initiative was limited to these countries, and did not include the countries of the Eastern Sahel, was not a strategic decision but rather the result of bureaucratic rules. In the summer of 2005, the programme evolved into the much larger Trans-Saharan counter-terrorism initiative (TSCTI) taking in not only states north of the Sahara: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and even potentially Libya; but also two to the south of the original Sahel states: Senegal and Nigeria. The following chapters profile the security, political, social, and economic situations of these countries. They are divided as follows: chapter 1 covers the four original PSI states – Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad. Chapter 2 focuses on Algeria alone, for despite not being part of the original PSI, its violent history is central to the recent claims of terrorism in the Saharan/Sahel region. Chapter 3 briefly considers the other states that have joined the TSCTI – Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal. This does not imply that the security situation in these states is not of interest, but rather that they are part of TSCTI for political reasons. Chapter 4 looks at the competing explanations for why the US is involved in the region.

# The PSI states

## Chad

Chad is a flawed and unstable democracy. Its current President, Idriss Deby, came to power in a coup in 1991, but has been returned by election twice since. A referendum was passed to allow a constitutional change to enable him to run for a third term, although some claim the referendum was rigged,<sup>3</sup> and in May 2006 he won a third term despite a boycott of the poll by opposition parties<sup>4</sup>.

Chad has a border with Sudan to the east, and the north part of the country is in the Sahara desert. Both of these are problematic areas. From December 2005 the violence that has engulfed Sudan's western province of Darfur since 2003<sup>5</sup> spilled over into Chad. Previously the country had stayed out of the fighting in Darfur despite tribal groups involved in the Darfur conflict living on both sides of the border. Chad is also hosting hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees, although there were reports that the outbreak of fighting in Chad had led some of them to actually head back over the border into Darfur. The Sudanese government had accused Chad of supporting rebel groups in Darfur and in return the Chad government accused Sudan of backing disparate rebel groups that stood against the Deby regime. Fighting in eastern Chad broke out around Christmas 2005 but in April 2006 rebels known as the FUC, the French abbreviation for the "United Front for Change", made a sudden and rapid advance across the country toward N'Djamena where they were defeated by troops loyal to Deby with French support<sup>6</sup>. Despite this defeat and then the staging of elections, at the time of writing clearly large parts of Eastern Chad are beyond the government's control with fighting and attacks on civilians continuing, spilling over the border from Darfur.<sup>7</sup>

There is little stability within Chad. Some suggest that there is a threat from radical groups such as the GSPC infiltrating Chad

from Niger<sup>8</sup>, but more pressing issues result from the politics of religion that divide a population of just over 9 million almost in half between Islam and Christianity<sup>9</sup>. The issues are complex – the French imperial legacy is of a secular state: the Christian south sees this as a bulwark against domination by Muslims who form a slight majority in the country, whilst the Northern Muslim intellectual class sees secularism as specifically anti-Muslim and are very aware of issues such as the headscarf ban in France, which they see as proof of the accusation that secularism is anti-Islam<sup>10</sup>.

The Saharan region of Chad did see one of the major incidents take place that has since been regularly used to justify the US's view that there is a terrorism threat in the region, but closer analysis reveals a less certain situation. On 9 March 2004 there was a gun battle in Chad between GSPC fighters and troops from both Niger and Chad – backed up by US reconnaissance assets and Special Forces; 43 GSPC fighters were killed<sup>11</sup>. Despite some unexplained suggestions that there is “cooperation between Algerian extremist groups and Chadian ones”<sup>12</sup>, what Crisis Group research reveals is that amongst the dead fighters were people from Algeria, Mali, Niger and Nigeria but none from Chad itself<sup>13</sup>. The leader of the GSPC group, Ammari Saifi – better known as ‘Abderrazak el Para’ because of his earlier service in the Algerian military – escaped but was captured by a Chadian rebel group: the *Mouvement pour la Démocratie et la Justice Tchadien* (MDJT), who subsequently returned him to face trial in Algeria, reportedly via Libya with Qadhafi's government acting as go-between (although not all reports agree on Libyan involvement)<sup>14</sup>. Whether the MDJT handed him over because they are averse to seeing any GSPC presence in Chad (they are a leftist group, not religious<sup>15</sup>), or because they were threatened by the Libyan Government<sup>16</sup>, is not certain – but no matter which, the GSPC seems to be unable to gain support even from anti-government forces in Chad.

Ultimately, due to the internal politics and demographics of the country, US military involvement in Chad may not counter instability, but rather add to it. The globalisation of the media, particularly with satellite channels such as Aljazeera, means that the Muslim population of Chad (and indeed all the Sahel countries) is not unaware of the issues that face Muslim communities elsewhere around the world, and US presence in the country will be seen in that light. This does not mean that US training of the

Chadian military is necessarily a bad thing – journalistic accounts suggest they need it badly to operate more effectively<sup>17</sup> – but that it should be understood that military presence could lead to an increase in radicalism rather than a decrease. The Islamist opposition to Deby is already couching its attacks on the government in terms of good governance, or lack thereof. They accuse the government of corruption, arguing that Islamist political parties would be more honest because of their religious basis, and this is an attractive message<sup>18</sup>. The US military believes that through ‘engagement’ they can be the agent of positive change within regimes where commitment to norms such as respect for human rights and democracy are not total<sup>19</sup> such as in Chad. However, particularly since the Iraq war, the US military presence has become so contentious in certain regions that any stability they can actually impart via their training to military partners is out-balanced by the resentment and suspicion their presence causes in the wider population.

A new and potentially destabilising factor in Chad is the recent inflow of oil money. Despite “strict anti-corruption and poverty-reduction measures [that] were to guarantee that Chad’s oil wealth would be earmarked for health, education, and other vital public infrastructures”<sup>20</sup>, there are suggestions that these have not yet been successful, with money being spent on arms and perks for ministers<sup>21</sup>. Chad’s oil production is also at a level where historical analysis suggests it is more likely to cause problems than aid development<sup>22</sup>. If Chad’s oil wealth is only seen to benefit the government, the US should consider how its military training for the government’s forces will be perceived by the dispossessed in that country – particularly with the central involvement of two US oil companies, ExxonMobil and Chevron, in the consortium that is exploiting Chad’s oil. Chad’s main oil field is the Doba Basin field in the far south of the country<sup>23</sup>, and this may further threaten stability: the division between Muslim and Christian communities in the country is predominantly north-south, with the Muslim population being in the north, away from the oil wealth.

## Niger

Niger is another desperately poor state that ranked last in the UN’s 2005 human development index. In 2005, its already numerous

problems were compounded by a drought and the after-effects of a locust plague the year before and this has led to famine, with the WFP estimating that 1.2 million Nigeriens are relying on food aid<sup>24</sup>. The extent of this crisis has been questioned by some, including Niger's President Tandja<sup>25</sup>, and different explanations are given for why it happened – including the assertion that IMF conditions of aid led the Nigerien government to stop stockpiling food – but the crisis shows the inherent weaknesses of a desperately poor country. The relevance of the famine to this analysis, as a US State Department spokesman bluntly put it, is that: “fortunately, or unfortunately, starving people aren't the ones who join up with terrorist organisations”<sup>26</sup>.

Nevertheless, Niger faces political and security problems in both its north and to its south. In terms of religious extremism leading to possible violence, analysts believe Niger's most significant problems are across its border with Nigeria to the south. 80% of Niger's population is Muslim<sup>27</sup>, and the implementation of Islamic religious law (Shari'a) in northern Nigeria could spill over into Niger and upset its secular traditions, and endanger its tolerant policy towards religious worship<sup>28</sup>. For now, the situation is relatively stable with seemingly no spread of radicalism over the border, but recent events in Nigeria (see Nigeria section below) mean that the Nigerien government must continue to assertively implement sensible and at times tough policies to prevent the effects of its increasingly unstable neighbourhood impacting negatively on Niger<sup>ii</sup>.

Niger has also had limited problems in the north with the GSPC. Government troops clashed with the members of the GSPC on the border with Chad in 2004, which resulted in the Nigerien army demanding better means to fight terrorism<sup>29</sup>. Some speculate that the GSPC presence is linked to older problems with the Tuareg tribes<sup>30</sup> (there was a Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s) that are yet to be resolved and need to be addressed adequately before they

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<sup>ii</sup> Niger's government have proved their ability to do this in the case of preventing Polio. In northern Nigeria Imams spread rumours that the vaccine was a western plot to sterilize Muslims, leading to a large drop-off in the vaccinations and to the re-emergence of the disease in the area. Not only was there a concerted effort in 2004 to vaccinate all children under five, but the Nigerien government even imprisoned overnight those Imams who spread the Nigerian rumours on the basis that they were threatening public health. See Crisis Group (2005) “Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?” Dakar/Brussels: International Crisis Group Africa Report No. 92 (p. 21); Bullington, J. (2004) “Letter from Niger: April 2004” American Diplomacy.org ([http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives\\_roll/2004\\_04-06/bullington\\_0404/bullington\\_0404.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives_roll/2004_04-06/bullington_0404/bullington_0404.html) accessed 20 Oct. 05).

escalate into something bigger<sup>31</sup>. However, it is unclear whether more far-reaching powers for the military to act in the name of terrorism will help diffuse the situation, indeed the Niger Tuareg are said to be fearful of inadvertently becoming part of the ‘War on Terror’<sup>32</sup>. The Tuaregs in Niger are demanding greater regional autonomy and more money for regional projects<sup>33</sup>, in particular they claim to deserve more support because the uranium mining that makes a significant contribution to the national economy takes place on their traditional lands<sup>34</sup>.

The scale of the Tuareg problem appears to be local, rather than regional. Nevertheless the Nigerien government should seek to resolve it because the GSPC is taking an active interest in the area and could fill the gaps that the government leaves open, making it more challenging to solve later: Nigerien Major Moussa Salou Barmou told a journalist that: “the rebels settle in our border towns in the desert and marry locals so that they become invisible, so that you don’t know who you are to fight.”<sup>35</sup>

## Mali

Mali is seen by many as the most stable country in the region. It is one of the rare examples of a country that is both Islamic and democratic<sup>36</sup>. Despite 90% of the population being Muslim<sup>37</sup> there appears to be no support for an Islamic state despite pressure coming from outside, such as via Saudi-funded mosques and proselytising by fundamentalist groups<sup>38</sup>.

Despite its current stability, many analysts see Mali as the country with the greatest risk of terrorist activity in the region<sup>39</sup>. The geographic location of Mali plays a major role in this belief. Not only is the north part of the country in the Sahara desert, meaning that it is sparsely populated and could potentially play host to terrorists seeking to set up a training camp, but Mali also borders Algeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso (with which it had a short war), and the increasingly troubled Mauritania, making it clear why it could get dragged into regional conflicts.

Currently the issues that are attracting US attention to Mali in particular are: the presence of fundamentalist preachers of the Tablighi movement – a group who appear to be specifically targeting local minority political leaders for conversion; the reported presence of the Algerian GSPC<sup>40</sup> in the north; and armed groups



of indeterminable political and religious affiliation who are involved in the profitable trans-Saharan smuggling industry. Mali has a rich history of Sufi Islam, which is very different from the Tablighi form of Islam – locally known as al-Da'wa – founded in British India in 1926<sup>41</sup>. Sufi Islam is often described in the west as 'peaceful' and 'tolerant', although the reality is more complex. Historically the Sahel has seen great military leaders who also came from the Sufi tradition, but what is more important is how Sufi Islam in the Sahel negotiated the colonial experience. The Crisis Group argues that the various "Sufi brotherhoods have often steered clear of overt involvement in politics but they have also exerted a strong influence on it from behind the scenes."<sup>42</sup> This allowed the indigenous Islamic practices to coexist within the modern nation states of the region more easily than has been the case in many other countries around the world with Muslim populations.

The arrival of the Tablighi in Mali, predominantly in the form of itinerant Pakistani preachers, has therefore raised suspicions: their very different form of Islam could potentially upset the co-existence of 'church and state' that is currently visible in Mali. No local sources claim that the Tablighi are preaching a violent, jihadi message, but what concerns some is that in Mali, particularly in the town of Kidal that was the seat of the "Second Tuareg rebellion" (June 1990 – January 1991)<sup>43</sup>, they are focusing on the leaders of the Tuareg community and in particular those who were involved in the 1990 rebellion; one Tuareg community leader reporting twice weekly approaches by relatives who are now Tablighi members<sup>44</sup>. The Tablighi is politically quietist, focusing on personal piety rather than political organisation, but some western and African intelligence agencies worry about how some individuals move rapidly through the movement towards more violent expressions of the faith. This is believed to have happened particularly in the prominent cases of certain westerners like Richard Reid (the "shoe bomber"), John Walker Lindh (the "American Taliban"), and Jose Padilla (the alleged US "dirty bomber") amongst others<sup>45</sup>. Some Malian Islamic scholars note with anger that their country (and in particular Timbuktu) has been a centre of Islamic learning since the faith's earliest days and they do not need foreigners coming to tell them how to pray<sup>46</sup>. Traditionally the Tablighi movement has a reputation

for preaching to Muslim communities that are minorities in wider non-Muslim populations and are therefore seen as being more likely to move away from the ‘true faith’. Indeed some Malians say that Tablighi came to Mali via Malian immigrants in France who had joined the movement<sup>47</sup>, which, if true, is an interesting example of how an ideology or a theology can alter and develop amongst minority communities away from what can be called ‘the Muslim world’ and then feed back into those Muslim majority countries.

Why the Tablighi are targeting the Tuareg in general, and the former rebels in particular, is not clear. The most probable explanation is that although Mali is a Muslim majority country, the Tuaregs represent a marginalized community within the wider population, making them more open to the Tablighi message of fundamentalism. The Crisis Group also suggest that internal politics may be at work, with different Tuareg leaders using their newly found piety to make claims of being better Muslims than their rivals<sup>48</sup>. BBC interviews with Tuaregs in Kidal and Gao suggest that they are predominantly concerned about the lack of economic opportunities, and an associated lack of interest from the central government in the capital Bamako, to the extent that some in Kidal are willing to express the thinly veiled threat of ‘if we have jobs we can ensure peace’<sup>49</sup>. These two factors – the success of an external religious ideology aimed traditionally at marginalized communities, and vocal suggestions that without economic opportunity there will not be stability – are worrying and suggest that the impact of the TSCTI could be negative for Mali’s future. This is for two reasons: firstly, international ideological factors were amongst the catalysts for the Tuareg rebellion of 1990; and secondly, because of the current importance of trans-Saharan illegal trade for the Tuareg due to the lack of other economic opportunities – and because the US has vowed to stop this trade for fear that it supports terrorism.

*International ideological influences:* The Tuareg rebellion of 1990 resulted from an environment of economic difficulties, drought, and perceived central government disinterest, mixed with an international catalyst in the form of returning Tuareg veterans, some of whom had joined the Libyan army and others who, it is said, fought in the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, Colonel Qadhafi set up the Failaq al-Islamiyya (Islamic

Legion), “a force of Arabs, Tuareg and West Africans”<sup>50</sup>, which was used by Libya as a proxy army to invade Chad (1980-87<sup>51</sup>), but at least one source claims that some of its members were sent to fight in Afghanistan<sup>52</sup>. If some Tuareg did fight in Afghanistan, it is possible that some involved in the 1990 rebellion had an ideological affiliation with the GSPC (the GSPC was a breakaway group from the Algerian GIA, or *Groupe Islamique Armé*, that was formed by many Algerian Afghan veterans<sup>53</sup>) and indeed, as noted above, some Malians were amongst the GSPC dead from the March 2004 battle in Chad. This ideological affiliation is circumstantial – but US presence in the region may actually push some Malians towards the GSPC and its ideology. In a globalized world that includes even the deserts of Mali, the same cynicism over the US’s motive for being there should be expected as is seen elsewhere in the Islamic world<sup>54</sup>.

*Trans-Saharan Smuggling*: The second threat to stability in northern Mali resulting from the TSCTI is more immediate. The US aims to stop smuggling in the region, but because Mali and Algeria have no trade agreement, in effect all goods crossing the border are technically being smuggled. The BBC reported that virtually everything on sale in Kidal’s market is Algerian in origin, and locals say without the Algerian products people simply could not survive, both because they cannot buy the products anywhere else and because many Tuareg make their living from the trans-Saharan trade/smuggling. Major General Thomas Csrnko, commander of EUCOM’s Special Operations Command, accepts that it might be the livelihood of many in the region, but insists nevertheless: “smuggling is an activity that contributes to supporting terrorist organisations” and therefore must be stopped. When pressed that taking away the livelihood of people in that area might push them towards extremism and violence, he suggests that is something “to be resolved by national leadership”<sup>55</sup>. The US claims are not without some merit, as it would appear that the GSPC is either involved in smuggling itself, or that it ‘taxes’ those who are. Much of the confusion arises due to uncertainty around the figure of the Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar<sup>56</sup>. Those who take their information from local sources in the Sahara, tend to say that although he is a former rebel (and also an Afghan veteran), he works for himself and is interested in making money<sup>57</sup>, but at times he has also been named as a leader of the GSPC and

linked by US and French intelligence to al-Qaeda<sup>58</sup>. It appears that the US State Department and particularly the embassy in Mali did not agree with this assessment believing that Belmokhtar's activity was arming the Kunta Arabs (a tribe that lives in northwest Mali) and who were fighting with other desert tribes<sup>59</sup>, and not the GSPC. Reportedly the State department fought with EUCOM over plans EUCOM had drawn up in 2002 to launch air attacks on Belmokhtar: the former US Ambassador to Mali, Vicki Huddleston, would not answer directly questions on this argument but told a journalist that:

*If you're correct that we discouraged [the Defense Department], it was a good thing. If we had bombed a bunch of Kuntas, I think the whole place would have gone crazy. They're certainly not terrorists.*<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless Belmokhtar is personally designated as a terrorist by both the UN Security Council and the US government, and hence under financial sanctions<sup>61</sup>. Ultimately, how closely the GSPC is involved in trans-Saharan smuggling is beside the point, if the US is going to stop (or give its local government allies the ability to stop) the trade, there will be severe repercussions. This is not to argue that smuggling should be ignored. Firstly, the prevalence of smuggling is being linked by locals to a rise in lawlessness in Northern Mali, and it appears that Tuaregs are now willing to countenance the presence of Malian military posts again if it helps to combat this<sup>62</sup>. Secondly, people are now one of the major 'commodities' smuggled across the Sahara. The trafficking of sub-Saharan Africans across the desert to the north African states, for them to then attempt to reach Europe, is a brutal trade in human misery and one that results in many deaths<sup>63</sup>. Whilst poverty and conflict remain endemic in Africa it seems unlikely that this flow will stop, but better law and order in the Sahel countries may improve the chances of migrants surviving the Sahara, even if some are then returned to their home countries.

It should be noted that various blogs and online sources make reference to a planned attack on the US Embassy in Bamako in 2002 – normally as part of the 'evidence' of al-Qaeda activity in the region<sup>64</sup>. The first story appeared on the website of the US network, ABC (but has since been removed), with the network quoting "foreign security sources"; the second was in the Bamako

daily *Le Republicain*. US officials stated that they had no information to substantiate the claims and neither the State Department nor the Pentagon said that there had been any change in the security status of the Bamako embassy; most noteworthy was that they told journalists off the record that they believed the stories had been concocted by the Malian authorities, who were anxious to gain US military support.<sup>65</sup>

## Mauritania

In the eyes of many, this is the most troubled country of the Sahel<sup>66</sup>. It has less than 3 million people and economically it is the wealthiest of the four Sahelian states. Recently, modest oil resources have been discovered offshore. As in the case of Chad, it remains to be seen whether oil will ultimately prove beneficial to Mauritania or not, although it has similar production projections per head of population to Chad, but without the defence against corruption measure that Chad has put in place, it seems that the oil may only exacerbate social tensions in Mauritania<sup>67</sup>.

The concerns of Mauritania-watchers were proved correct when on 3 August 2005 President Maaouiya Ould Taya was overthrown in a bloodless coup. The President was not in the country at the time and has remained in exile. The international community, led by the African Union, condemned the act, but reactions moved towards neutrality as it became clear that there was significant public support for the overthrow of Ould Taya (who came to power himself via a coup in 1984) and that the new rulers did not intend to significantly change the policies that had given Ould Taya some credibility abroad, even if he lacked it at home. The country gained its independence from France in 1960, but has always faced significant challenges to national unity due to ethnic divisions between the Moors and Black African populations, and division within the Moors into competing clans. Governments have been built around clan loyalties – excluding others from power – and these tensions have been exacerbated by rampant corruption and poverty<sup>68</sup>.

Mauritania is officially an Islamic state, to all intents and purposes for two reasons: firstly the Ould Taya regime used it as a way of attracting support from oil-rich Middle Eastern countries<sup>69</sup>, and secondly to attempt to gain some legitimacy internally<sup>70</sup>. His

leadership was opportunistic in the extreme. Mauritania was one of Saddam Hussein's closest allies but by the end of the 1990s he turned to Washington for support and by 1999 Mauritania became only one of three Arab League members to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>71</sup> Once allied to the US, the Ould Taya regime, despite being at least nominally the government of an Islamic state, denounced all the opposition it faced as "Islamist" and since the beginning of the PSI and US CT support in 2002, they also began to claim that opponents were linked to the GSPC<sup>72</sup> and even al-Qaeda although those claims are treated sceptically by most<sup>73</sup>. That Ould Taya faced internal threats is not in dispute, there was a serious coup attempt in June 2003 which took three days of fighting to quell, and two further attempts in August and September 2004, but these were on the whole connected to factions within the military. Nevertheless Ould Taya had suppressed Islamist parties from the early 1990s when he introduced democratic elections – clearly seeing the political Islamists as potential serious competitors<sup>74</sup>. The suppression of Islamism has also led to a radicalisation; a number of Mauritians were arrested for attempting to train in preparation for going to Iraq – local journalists said that they were petty criminals prone to violence before becoming attracted to a militant form of Islam<sup>75</sup>. A number of events in the spring of 2005 increased the pressure within the country that ultimately led to the coup. These included very heavy restrictions on what could be said in Mosques on either politics or religion, the arrests of many opposition figures both secular and religious, and a visit by the Israeli foreign minister which angered Islamist groups<sup>76</sup>.

The new President – Ely Ould Mohamed Vall – has pledged to create "favourable conditions for an open and transparent democratic system on which civil society and political players will be able to give their opinions freely"<sup>77</sup>, and adopted a series of policies that will maintain support from western governments<sup>78</sup> and, most pertinently for this paper, "counter-terrorism cooperation between the US and Mauritania is alive and well"<sup>79</sup>.

To what extent this CT cooperation is really needed is not clear. From 6 to 26 June 2005, the US marked the move from the PSI to the bigger TSCTI programme with military training missions in Algeria, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad under the name of Flintlock 2005<sup>80</sup>. Two days before the Flintlock

exercise began, a remote military army outpost in the town of Lemgheiti, near the Algerian and Malian borders, was attacked and 15 Mauritanian troops killed and 17 injured. Responsibility for the attack was quickly claimed by the GSPC, and there were claims that between 100 and 150 GSPC fighters were involved, as well as Mokhtar Belmokhtar.<sup>81</sup> The government in Nouakchott held a press conference where they claimed to show a vehicle licence registration document found after the attack in Belmokhtar's name<sup>82</sup>, but this immediately raised questions in Algeria. Algerian journalists noted that not only was the date of birth wrong, but that the document had been granted at a time when Belmokhtar was supposedly being hunted everywhere by Algerian forces<sup>83</sup>. Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere, editor of *La Tribune* in Nouakchott, said that Mauritanian journalists were not allowed access to the soldiers who had been injured, nor were they given the names of those killed; additionally he said he could not understand how 150 attackers using 27 vehicles (the government's figures) and who must have crossed hundreds of kilometres of desert to reach the attacked outpost, had not been spotted by either Algerian or US planes or by satellites<sup>84</sup>. Dr. Jeremy Keenan, an anthropologist who has studied the Sahara for a number of decades, told the BBC that he simply could not believe that the GSPC was responsible, citing the same reasons as Ould Oumere, and blaming Algerian intelligence. Moussa Ould Ham, editor of *Le Calame* – another Nouakchott newspaper, gave an alternative explanation, saying he did believe that the GSPC was responsible but saying he felt that they attacked Mauritanian interests for the first time because of the arrival of US forces in the country with Flintlock 2005. He argued that it was the US military presence that had transformed a predominantly nationally focused group (on Algeria) into an organisation that will target any country that is seen as allied to the US.<sup>85</sup>

Central to the differing perspectives on the Mauritania attack is whether one believes the claims on the GSPC website or not. The GSPC claimed the attack with pride<sup>86</sup>, and the London-based newspaper Al-Hayat quoted Algerian intelligence sources arguing that it was important for the GSPC to launch such a raid timed to pre-empt the Flintlock exercise because the GSPC had been losing credibility with al-Qaeda due to informants within the Algerian group having revealed information to the authorities, including

enough to thwart an al-Qaeda attack in Tunisia<sup>87</sup>. The critics such as Keenan and Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere say, regardless of what the GSPC claim, only the Algerian security forces themselves (or GSPC fighters under the control of Algerian intelligence) were capable of launching that attack<sup>88</sup>. The truth may never be known, but this paper argues that “the truth” is actually rather immaterial. Within days of the attack, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s group, al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers (Iraq) – which despite Zarqawi’s subsequent death remains perhaps the most influential and important jihadist group worldwide – had issued a statement congratulating the GSPC on their raid<sup>89</sup>. It served the vested interests of important actors both domestically and abroad for Mauritania, just days before Operation Flintlock, to have become a victim of a “terrorist attack”. For the oppressive regime in Nouakchott it provided an excuse to crack down on its internal Islamist opposition whilst getting military aid from the world’s superpower. For the United States itself, and particularly for EUCOM, it provided further evidence to support the need for CT military engagement in the region and a justification for the increase in budget from the PSI, costing approximately USD 7 million, to the TSCTI that will cost approximately USD 100 million<sup>90</sup>. For the trans-national jihadist such as al-Zarqawi’s al-Qaeda in Iraq, the attack showed that those who cooperate with the American military, wherever that may be, will have to fear the international mujahideen. Finally, for the Algerian government the presence of dangerous jihadi terrorists on their territory, attacking neighbouring countries, increases the willingness of the US to cooperate militarily with them despite human rights objections.



## Algeria: the key state to regional security

Algeria was not covered under the original PSI, but is now part of the TSCTI. It is central to the regional security complex and arguably the cause of the terrorism in the wider Saharan region. Its inclusion in the TSCTI is therefore logical but US military involvement in the country may be a double-edged sword.

Algeria has a large population of 33 million (99 percent of whom are Muslim), extensive ties to Europe, a very large hydrocarbons sector (it is the second biggest exporter of natural gas in the world)<sup>91</sup> and is in many ways the most important and influential state in the region. Of particular importance to this report is the fact that its brutal civil war has been fought since the early 1990s against radical Islamist and jihadist groups, and it is the legacy of this that has drawn the US to the Saharan region and led to the destabilisation of the area.

A history of the Algerian Civil War goes beyond the realm of this paper<sup>92</sup>, but essentially the GSPC is a legacy of the brutality of that war. The war culminated in horrendous massacres of civilians in the late 1990s, blamed on the GIA but the real nature of which is still not fully understood<sup>93</sup>. In the history of modern Islamist militancy, the concept of *takfir*, or excommunication, has been central. For most jihadis following the writings of ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb, it was the state – the government and its agencies – that was considered the target of *takfir*. In pronouncing the state apostate, the jihadis were justified in attacking it: this ideology – essentially nationally oriented – was the original jihad, predating the war in Afghanistan<sup>94</sup>. The assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981 was the ultimate example of this targeting to the state, but the agents of the state – police, the army – were also justifiable targets. What made the brutality of the GIA unique is their position of

*takfir al-mujtama'*, the excommunication of the whole of a society in addition to the state. This made all civilians justifiable targets of their jihad, for they believed that the people and not just the state had rejected Islam and the penalty was death. Hundreds of thousands were killed, entire villages massacred in a single night, often by very brutal methods. There is still much debate as to how much of a role in these atrocities was played by *agent provocateurs* of the Algerian military who had infiltrated the GIA. There are still some who claim that the Algerian military were complicit in these crimes – either in not protecting villages they knew would be attacked by the GIA, or even directly by ordering their infiltrators in the organisation to carry out the massacres.<sup>95</sup> The Algerian government used the massacres to remove virtually all support for rebel groups and to force those Islamist groups who were not as extreme as the GIA into seeking a negotiated end to the conflict.

The GSPC broke away from the GIA in 1998 under the leadership of Hassan Hattab. There is considerable evidence that bin Laden himself played a role in this, perhaps even providing Hattab with funds to assist in setting up the new group<sup>96</sup>. The brutality of the GIA was impacting negatively on perceptions of the jihadi cause worldwide. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the former head of Egyptian Islamic jihad and now often described as 'al-Qaeda's second in command', publicly criticised the GIA on a number of occasions in the late 1990s. This is likely to be one of the reasons why bin Laden supported the group, but he may well have been involved in what Jason Burke describes as "a subtle form of entryism"<sup>97</sup>: by supporting the training of GIA and then GSPC members in his camps in Afghanistan in the late 1990s and 2000/2001, he slowly built up people within the organisations who owed some loyalty to him as well as to their Algerian leaders. Hassan Hattab has since said that bin Laden's increasing influence caused rifts within the GSPC<sup>98</sup>, and it may have been these tensions that led bin Laden to send an envoy, Emad Abdelwahid Ahmed Alwan – also known as Abu Mohamed, through the Sahel and eventually to Algeria where he wanted to make contact with Hattab to urge him to internationalise his terrorist operations. Hattab refused to meet Abu Mohamed, suggesting that he was not interested in making the GSPC into a global terrorist organisation and wanted to maintain its focus on Algeria. The Algerian security forces subsequently killed Abu Mohamed.<sup>99</sup> If Hattab seemed unwilling to get close

to al-Qaeda, this was not true for the leaders who replaced him. Hattab's first successor as emir of the GSPC, Nabil Sahraoui, made a public statement that "we strongly and fully support Osama bin Laden's jihad against the heretic America as well as we support our brothers in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Chechnya"<sup>100</sup>. It is possible, but unclear, that this statement was more connected to internal power plays within the GSPC caused by Hattab's disappearance, than a true pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda. Nevertheless, Sahraoui's successor, Abu Musab Abdelouadoud, still refers to bin Laden as "our Commander" and has spoken warmly of "all the beloved courageous brothers from al-Qaida's Committee in Mesopotamia along with their commander Abu Musab al-Zarqawi"<sup>101</sup>. Despite these clear statements of ideological affinity (which should come as no surprise at all considering the background of the groups) it is still hard to be certain from open source information to what extent there is operational cooperation between al-Qaeda and the GSPC. EUCOM has claimed that of over 400 foreign fighters captured in Iraq (by the summer of 2005), 25 percent are from northern and sub-Saharan Africa, but whilst this was disclosed as part of a public relations campaign for the TSCTI, EUCOM's representatives did not say whether they could link these approximately 100 Africans to the GSPC or other African terrorists groups.<sup>102</sup> Hence operational links remain far from clear, as RAND analyst Sarah Daly writes: "The GSPC has not conducted an anti-U.S. attack as a group, but individual GSPC members have participated in al-Qaeda attacks against U.S. and Western targets."<sup>103</sup> There clearly are "links" between the two organisations, but what this means in practice is far from clear.

The status of the GSPC in recent years has become very murky and even harder to analyse than is normally the case with other insurgent and terrorists groups. A number of dynamics seem to be at work. Firstly, in 1999 President Abdelaziz Bouteflika came to power and the military became less prominent in political life. Bouteflika saw through a law on Civil Concord in 1999 and an amnesty pardon in 2000. Many of the Islamist groups that had been fighting the state took advantage of this and ended their struggle, but it did not cover the GSPC.<sup>104</sup> In 2003, Hattab disappeared: it seems that while in hiding he has been campaigning for an end to the armed struggle and to gain an amnesty for himself and his followers<sup>105</sup>. Secondly, with Hattab not leading the group,

the GSPC seemed to fragment. There appear to be groups in differing parts of northern Algeria, potentially a group in southern Saharan Algeria, and then networks spread through Europe and also possibly Canada that all use the name “GSPC”. What this actually means, particularly for the overseas networks and southern groups, is considered in more detail below.

The overseas networks are interesting but a full analysis of them goes beyond this paper’s aims. In brief, many Algerians fled the country with the outbreak of the civil war, particularly to France, but a significant number also ended up in the UK. The GIA had supporters who fundraised for the organisation and engaged in media and propaganda work. In the late 1990s many of these networks were taken over by the GSPC with the gradual demise of the GIA. Yet by that time these Algerian activists in Europe, plus non-Algerians who worked with them, were increasingly focused on the ‘Global Jihad’ rather than on fighting the Algerian government. There was reportedly much al-Qaeda involvement in these groups but it is not clear whether al-Qaeda supported the creation of the GSPC in part to gain access to pre-existing GIA/GSPC networks in the west, or rather whether, as these activists became more globally focused living away from their homeland, they started to be more attracted to al-Qaeda and in particular at that time (the late 1990s) to the training camps that al-Qaeda had in Afghanistan<sup>106</sup>. Some analysts believe that many using the GSPC name in Europe really had nothing or very little to do with groups in Algeria, and were often involved in either simple petty crime or more globalised al-Qaeda plots<sup>107</sup>.

What has been happening to the GSPC within Algeria is also difficult to analyse with any degree of certainty, but it appears that Hattab and the GSPC were based in the northern coastal mountainous region of Algeria known as Kabylie. Oxford Analytica’s experts believed in early 2004 that there were actually three separate groups in Kabylie, but these were under centralised control, and that the GSPC’s fighting strength was down to 400 men<sup>108</sup>. The army was looking for Hattab not far from Algiers (in the Tizi Ouzou province) in May 2004<sup>109</sup>. The leader that replaced Hattab after he dropped out of view, Sahraoui (killed June 2004), was also based in Kabylie, as is his successor Abu Musab Abdelouadoud (who became “emir” on 6 September 2004) who is said to be still operating in the mountains of the Akfadou region of Bejaïa

province<sup>110</sup>. When Abdelouadoud became the leader in 2004, he issued a communiqué promising attacks in the major cities such as Algiers. There was an intensification of attacks attributed to the GSPC between August and October of that year, with attacks taking place in the regions to the west, east and south of Algiers and one gunfight in Algiers itself but not on the scale that the GSPC emir threatened<sup>111</sup>. There was an upsurge of violence attributed to the GSPC again in northern Algeria (Ain Defla, Saida, and Boumerdes provinces) in the run up to, and following, the referendum in September 2005 on whether the government should grant an amnesty to the civil war combatants<sup>112</sup>. In October 2006 they claimed a roadside bombing of a bus carrying foreign oil workers and then struck again in February 2007, using seven simultaneous car bombs to target police stations in the Kabylie.<sup>113</sup>

Yet whilst so much activity attributed to the GSPC has taken place, and continues to take place, in northern Algeria (predominantly within 300 kilometres of Algiers), the events that the US uses to justify the PSI/TSCCTI have been happening thousands of kilometres to the south: to give a sense of scale, London is approximately the same distance from Algiers as Tamanrasset, the main town of the Algerian Sahara, is. Virtually all of the activities claimed to be the result of the GSPC in Saharan Algeria are linked to two men, Mokhtar Belmokhtar (see Mali chapter) and Ammari Saifi – alias Abderrazak el Para (see Chad chapter). Both of these men have, at various times in different media sources, been called: the GSPC leader, a GSPC leader, the GSPC second-in-command, and both have been described as each other's deputy. El Para's name has appeared in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of news reports, predominantly relating to the kidnapping of 32 European tourists in southern Algeria in February 2003. What happened in 2003 is still far from clear, despite much media attention, but what El Para was doing before then is even less clear and generally ignored by media focusing on the kidnappings. A number of sources mention that he was based in northeastern Algeria<sup>114</sup> (with one UK Government document saying Batna province in particular<sup>115</sup>) until early 2003, and then "relocated" to the south<sup>116</sup>. Why is not clear, although it is claimed that he led an attack in Batna province, about 430 kilometres south-east of Algiers in January 2003 that killed 43 Algerian soldiers and greatly angered the Algerian military<sup>117</sup> and if true, the timing of his flight to the Sahara

seems more than coincidental. Jeremy Keenan reports a rumour circulating in Algeria that El Para was actually captured by the Algerian military responding to this attack, and was subsequently ‘turned’ by Algerian intelligence<sup>118</sup>. This fits Keenan’s hypothesis that is discussed below.

### Questions over the 2003 kidnapping

The kidnapping of the tourists in 2003 remains a very contentious issue. This is odd, because all but one of the tourists were released (one died of heatstroke during the multi-month kidnapping) and hence there is much first-hand testimony of what took place. The kidnapping has been referred to numerous times by the US military as part of the justification for US involvement in the region, and is often used as the prime piece of evidence for al-Qaeda presence in the Sahara, particularly by US commentators who uncritically accept that El Para is a GSPC leader, and in turn that the GSPC is actively linked to al-Qaeda<sup>119</sup>. There is very little English-language analysis that has looked in-depth at what really happened in 2003 with the kidnapping. A number of reasons may account for this. Firstly – language: the tourists were almost all from German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) and hence the press coverage and interviews with the kidnap victims have been predominantly in the German language media. Additionally, the Sahara/Sahel region is peripheral to the international media generally, so beyond the German media covering the kidnap events, the only other media to consistently cover the region is French, in particular *Radio France Internationale*. The way the story was covered in English-language media was correspondingly superficial and assertions about who the kidnappers were, and what they wanted, were made predominantly by government spokespersons or representatives, especially from Algeria<sup>120</sup> and the US military. Secondly, the idea of “al-Qaeda in the desert” fits well in the story told by many: “Terrorism analysis” has become a boom-industry since 9/11<sup>121</sup>, but standards are very variable, ranging from thorough academic research to patently partisan journalism. From US perspectives, the idea of a worldwide terrorist network of al-Qaeda affiliates fits perfectly with the concept of a “Global War on Terrorism”. The idea of al-Qaeda having a Saharan presence does not merely fit the agenda of those analysts and

journalists who are sympathetic to the idea of the GWOT, it is also used by those who oppose the Bush administration and claim that the war in Iraq has been a distraction from the 'real' war against al-Qaeda – the group who continue to be the most immediate threat to US security. There clearly is evidence of links between the GSPC and al-Qaeda (see above), but "link" is currently the most abused word in the global discourse on terrorism. Many analysts do not consider the nature of the claimed links, or the reliability of the information that leads us to draw them; they accept claims of links at face value. Hence 'reality' becomes: El Para is a GSPC leader, and the GSPC are part of al-Qaeda.

Jeremy Keenan of the University of East Anglia has looked at the issue of the kidnapping in greater depth than any other open source. His conclusion is controversial: that the terrorism in Sahel/Sahara is the product of the Algerian intelligence service in an attempt to gain further US political and military support, and that the US willingly connives with the Algerians, he argues, for reasons of strategic and economic interest – in particular to gain access to the oil and gas resources of the region.<sup>122</sup> This paper will put forward an alternative explanation for the imperative that has led to US military presence in the region, but Keenan's analysis of the holes and flaws in the officially disseminated story of the El Para/GSPC kidnapping of the European tourists is convincing. A number of different groups of tourists were kidnapped between 22 February and 23 March 2003. Seventeen of the hostages were rescued in May (some of the hostages claim this was faked and the kidnappers left them safely for the army to find, then slipped away, whilst others felt very scared due to exchanges of fire between the kidnappers and the army) and the remaining 15 released by the kidnappers in Mali in August of that year, reportedly after the German, Swiss and Austrian governments paid EUR 5 million<sup>123</sup>. The latter group estimated that their journey from the area where they were taken to where they were released in Mali was around 3000 kilometres (Keenan suspects that it was slightly less in reality) and took about 45 days. This journey is central to much of the suspicion of some kind of Algerian military involvement because it would not have been possible without the supply dumps that the kidnappers used for fuel and spare parts which they found via GPS coordinates. Their convoy was made up of numerous vehicles carrying the 15 hostages and a large number of kidnappers (the

hostages believed there to be 64 men with them).<sup>124</sup> It is very hard to understand how a group this big could not have been under near constant surveillance by US satellites<sup>iii</sup>. Keenan also notes that according to his contacts in European intelligence agencies, the US had been monitoring the radio traffic of kidnappers through the entire episode.<sup>125</sup>

It is of course possible that some sort of deal had been struck between the Algerian government and the kidnappers: that the Algerian Army would aid the kidnappers in leaving Algeria and entering Mali in exchange for the safe release of the hostages, but this makes the “rescue” (as claimed by the Algerian military) of the first hostages seem harder to explain. Additionally, the events that followed this are also very hard to understand. Keenan describes it as beginning with: “a ‘break-out’ by *El Para* from his alleged base(s) in Northern Mali, with possible sorties into Mauritania, followed by an almost desperado-like sweep across Niger and on into the Tibesti mountains of Chad – a journey of some 4000 km.” Not only is the distance huge – only slightly less than the distance between New York and Los Angeles in the opposite corners of the continental United States – it also includes some of the most remote and harshest terrain on earth and many of the better known passages that cross national borders in the Sahara and Sahel are mined due to conflicts. Media reports even claimed they were being tracked by US satellites and pursued by US Special Forces – although this seems fanciful unless the US specifically did not want to stop them, only to follow them. Keenan argues that this huge journey would not have been possible without support – predominantly because the only places where fuel is available would be military facilities or the hidden supplies of the smugglers and bandits who operate in the region.<sup>126</sup> Once *El Para* and his accomplices were finally captured (see Chad chapter), the process by which the Chadian rebel group, the MDJT, handed over their captives also seems very strange. The MDJT representatives in France negotiated *El Para*’s handover with Algerian military-intelligence who alternated between keenness and disinterest in taking him into custody<sup>127</sup>. Keenan believes that the evidence points towards

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<sup>iii</sup> It took this writer approximately one minute to find his own car using the commercial satellite imagery available through “Google Earth”. Presumably the US military has the ability to find a large number of people and vehicles in an area as open and barren as the Sahara!



El Para being an Algerian provocateur and that his escapades across the Sahel were arranged by Algerian security services in order to provide their new allies, the US, with convenient justification for their presence in the region and for arms sales to Algeria, a country that the US government was previously reluctant to support due to human rights abuses.

Dr. Hugh Roberts told the House of Commons foreign affairs committee that GSPC's sudden activity in the Sahara was "a very remarkable and unprecedented development"<sup>128</sup>. This is because the image that the Algerian government is now projecting outside of the country is very different from the image of terrorism that is projected internally. Natalia Sancha identifies these conflicting images as "residual terrorism vs. potential terrorism"<sup>129</sup>. The Algerian government has, since 1999 or thereabouts, been claiming to have won the civil war against the Islamist and Jihadi insurgents. All action taken by groups since then has been dismissed as residual terrorism that should not alter the path the government has chosen to bring the civil war period to a close (including an amnesty for all actions taken by the military). Yet since 2001, Algeria has portrayed the same terrorism to the international community as a potential threat and argued they need support (particularly military equipment) from other countries to defeat it.

Again, as we argued in the Mauritania chapter, the "truth" of what has really been happening in the Algerian Sahara and beyond with regard to El Para is, to a certain degree, beside the point and may never be known. The threat has duly been constructed, and the various actors are now responding to that construction. Keenan's fear is that ultimately it is the people of the Sahara and Sahel who will suffer. The main industry of the Algerian Sahara, tourism, has already been severely dented by the effects of the El Para kidnapping episode<sup>130</sup>. He argues that there is growing anti-Americanism and an anti-national government sentiment harboured by people in the region – particularly amongst the Tuaregs who feel they are being provoked not only in Algeria, but also in Mali and Niger. Ultimately this actually increases the chance that locals will support radical Islamist groups rather than reject them.

# The TSCTI periphery states

The states beyond Algeria that became part of the TSCTI in 2005 fall into two groups: the Maghreb states of Morocco and Tunisia and the sub-Saharan states of Nigeria and Senegal. All of these states are important regional partners for the US and are therefore important for the completeness of the TSCTI project. These states can be considered periphery states to the initiative because they have not so far been involved in the GSPC terrorism that the US military points to as justifying the project. Nevertheless there is clearly merit to the argument that if cross-border cooperation is central to the TSCTI, it must cover those countries peripheral to where the problems currently exist, in order to avoid displacing this current terrorist activity to surrounding states.

## **Morocco**

Morocco has undergone important changes since the beginning of the 1990s and, whilst it is not yet a full democracy, it has made significant progress away from autocracy and oppressive government<sup>131</sup>. But despite both this and Morocco's position at the far western edge of the Arab and Muslim world, it still shares a similar experience to many other Arab nations: a non-democratic regime since independence, with Islamism being the most attractive and long-lasting opposition ideology. In part due to the King claiming direct descent from the Prophet, and in part due to repressive and effective security services, the Moroccan government managed for decades to contain and co-opt the Islamists, and Morocco saw very little Islamist or Jihadi violence. The Casablanca bombings of May 2003 demonstrated that this was clearly no longer the case and now a number of events such as Moroccan links to the Madrid Bombings of 2004, Moroccan immigrants to Europe being implicated in a number of foiled plots, Moroccans reportedly

carrying out a significant number of suicide attacks in Iraq, and even the murder of Theo Van Gogh by a Dutchman of Moroccan descent (although there are no claims that his family's background are anything but incidental to his crime) have all made Morocco look increasingly important to jihadi terrorism worldwide.<sup>132</sup> The Moroccan government now cooperates very closely with the US in the 'GWOT' and this has led to it being classified a "major non-NATO ally" in June 2004 in, as a US spokesman put it, "appreciation for Morocco's steadfast support in the global war on terror"<sup>133</sup>.

It is debatable to what extent these international plots and attacks involving Moroccans are linked to violence that has taken place inside the country: in addition to the 2003 Casablanca bombings it was reported that in 2002 alone, 166 people were murdered for being 'bad Muslims'<sup>134</sup>. Prof. George Joffé argues that international attacks such as that which took place in Madrid "form part of a much wider movement amongst North African communities in Europe, which also adhere to similar values and similar ideas and do not necessarily reflect origins inside their countries of origin"<sup>135</sup>. The idea of radicalisation in the diaspora is not new, and seems similar to the Algerian groups that have taken the GSPC name in Europe and Canada, whilst not having clear operational links to Algeria.

Within Morocco there is a long history of more radical and political interpretations of Islam than the rulers have been comfortable with, but these activists have traditionally focused on non-violent political change. The violence of this decade emerges from specific circumstances: the Moroccan government tried to counter the influence of political Islamism (particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran) by opening up the country to Saudi, Wahhabi preachers. At the time this very conservative and puritanical version of Islam was seen as having the advantage of also being apolitical, but particularly after the 1991 Gulf War, many of the Wahhabi-influence religious leaders developed a radical anti-regime (and anti-Western) position. Extremist preachers have found fertile ground in the expanding slums of Moroccan cities (resulting from attempts at economic reforms in the 1990s) that have been virtually ignored by the government in terms of infrastructure and social services and where poverty is extreme. A number of activists had also gone to Afghanistan in the 1980s

and returned with fighting experience and links to other jihadi groups around the region. Indeed the numbers of Moroccans had been relatively small in Afghanistan so they trained in the camp of the Libyan Fighting Group (LFG).<sup>136</sup> This mixture of committed jihadi ideologues and activists (some with military experience) and poverty including large numbers of unemployed, uneducated young men seems to have produced the environment that resulted in the Casablanca bombings.

Morocco's relations with the US are particularly close; hence its inclusion in the TSCTI is to be expected. Nevertheless, none of Morocco's problems with terrorism seem to be connected to the countries to its south or to the Saharan region, but rather they are internal or linked to Europe or even Iraq. Notably, the jihadi groups of Algeria do not seem to have created any operable links to the Moroccan jihadi groups: the violence that shook Algeria through the 1990s clearly was of great concern to the Moroccan authorities and, as a result, the security services did their best to insulate the country – including closing the border completely in 1994 and breaking diplomatic relations with Algeria<sup>137</sup>, along with the imprisonment of many Islamist activists in the 1990s. Recent news reports (admittedly based on Moroccan intelligence sources) suggest that if there is coordination going on between North African groups, it is now taking place in Iraq, and not in Africa at all, and this coordination includes activists who are based in Europe<sup>138</sup>, although it may be that the arrests that led to this information being revealed will have “dismantled [the] terrorist structure as it was being formed” as Moroccan officials have said<sup>139</sup>.

## Tunisia

Tunisia's inclusion in the TSCTI is in many ways similar to Morocco's: along with the obvious aim of trying to create regional counter-terrorism cooperation in northwestern Africa, it is also a close ally of the United States. There are many Tunisian connections to international terrorism, but at the same time there are no close links to the claimed GSPC terrorism in the Sahara that has been central to the justification of the programme. Nevertheless, the State Department notes that: “The United States and Tunisia have an active schedule of joint military exercises. U.S. security assistance historically has played an important role in cementing

relations<sup>140</sup>. The TSCTI plays multiple roles – as well as strengthening regional cooperation, particularly on counter-terrorism, it is also a way of cementing relations with longstanding allies.

Tunisia has experienced jihadi violence in recent years, but this has predominantly been linked to Tunisian exile groups. The country was the site of the first post-9/11 al-Qaeda attack outside of Afghanistan, when on 11 April 2002 a suicide bomber called Nizar Ben Mohammed Nasr Nawar blew himself up using a truck bomb outside the historic synagogue in Djerba. The attack killed 15 people, the majority of whom were German tourists, but interestingly the attack at Djerba was conceived and planned outside of Tunisia: the bomber had been living in Lyon, France, and his last calls were to the al-Qaeda operations mastermind Khalid Sheik Mohammed in Pakistan and to a Polish Muslim convert who lives in Germany and who has been linked to other terrorist acts. Nawar was also linked to radical Tunisian/Algerian circles in Montreal, Canada, from a period of time he had spent there.<sup>141</sup> Nawar may have been a member of the Tunisian Fighting Group (TFG)<sup>142</sup>, a group that seems to be a predominantly expatriate phenomenon operating in Europe and in Afghanistan prior to the US invasion<sup>143</sup>. Tunisians have been linked to a number of prominent incidents, but all of these have been living outside of the country. The suicide bombers who murdered Ahmad Shah Masoud, leader of the Afghan Northern Alliance, two days before the 9/11 attacks on Washington and New York, were Tunisian but based in Brussels<sup>144</sup>. Another prominent case is that of the former professional football player Nizar Trabelsi who was sentenced in 2003 to ten years for a plan to bomb a NATO airbase, Kleine Brogel, in Belgium and was connected to various other plots in Europe. Trabelsi moved to Europe to play football in Germany and it was only after drug and alcohol problems that he seems to have become interested in radical versions of Islam<sup>145</sup>.

An explanation for this can be found in Tunisia's overt secularism in the post-independence era: Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's first president after independence had received a French education and was strongly secularist. He had led a lengthy struggle to gain Tunisia its independence, and this gave him extensive political legitimacy despite his secularist stance<sup>146</sup>. Bourguiba destroyed the traditional power and influence of the domestic *Ulema*, the Islamic scholars and clerics, post-independence; this had the un-

intended consequence of clearing the ground for more radical interpretations of Islam to enter the country in the 1970s. In turn, these new Islamist ideologies began to threaten the government's legitimacy so it responded by repressing the Islamists severely<sup>147</sup>. This is a habit that the government (now under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who deposed Bourguiba in 1987) still continues, and in recent years there have been concerns that now under the rubric of the Global War on Terrorism, it is imprisoning even more suspected Islamists<sup>148</sup>.

Tunisia has suffered once from the Jihadi violence stemming from the Algerian civil war: in 1995 the GIA attacked a Tunisian border post and killed 6 border guards. The attack was claimed to be a joint operation between the GIA and the Tunisian Islamic Front (FIT from its name in French), members of whom were said to be training in GIA camps. The FIT also warned all foreigners to leave Tunisia or face death, a threat that was never carried out, and also allegedly murdered a number of Tunisian police officers although the government never confirmed that the FIT was to blame.<sup>149</sup> The British Government holds that the TFG (mentioned above) was formed out of the FIT in about 2000, and that both can be linked to al-Qaeda<sup>150</sup>.

## Nigeria

Nigeria is probably the second most influential country in Africa after South Africa, but it is included in the TSCTI for essentially political reasons – reflecting its centrality to the region rather than because it is linked to the terrorism that has been used to justify the PSI/TSCTI.

Nigeria has a population of over 130 million, approximately half of whom are Muslim, 40% Christian, with the other 10% following various indigenous beliefs<sup>151</sup>. Nigeria is not politically stable: it has a complex history of ethnic tensions and was ranked in 2005 by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt countries in the world<sup>152</sup>. This corruption is in part the product of large oil reserves, which signify great wealth for a few and falling living standards for the majority<sup>153</sup> and, when added to the ethnic, religious and other tensions, make the country highly unstable.

Due to its size and economic importance to all of West Africa, Nigerian internal problems have implications for the wider

region. There are serious concerns that extremist forms of Islam are gaining ground in the country, that this is exacerbating pre-existing social and regional conflicts, and that there is evidence that Nigerians are involved in jihadi terrorist groups beyond their own country<sup>154</sup>. Even Osama bin Laden himself, in 2003, identified Nigeria as a country that is ready for “liberation”<sup>155</sup>. Nevertheless, from open sources there is little evidence of international terrorist activity taking place in Nigeria. Prof. Peter Lewis notes that there has for a long time been a fringe of Nigerian Muslims who are attracted to extremist versions of the faith and therefore there is nothing new about radical Islam in this part of Africa; although he did additionally note that these activists had generally avoided the use of violence and focused instead on social and missionary work<sup>156</sup>. Recent years have seen the emergence of the “Nigerian Taliban” (according to their self-proclaimed leader, this title was bestowed upon them not chosen – he prefers “Mujahideen”<sup>157</sup>) who have been involved in cross-border activities into both Niger and Cameroon and have been very violent<sup>158</sup>, but there is very little evidence to point to them being more than a local phenomenon. They are believed to be a group of middle-class university graduates from two of Nigeria’s northern (Muslim majority) states who wanted to declare an independent Islamic state in the north. This group was never numerous to begin with – estimated to be around 200 at the time of their first attacks in December 2003, this number had fallen to around 60 during their subsequent attacks in September 2004, during which 28 were reportedly killed<sup>159</sup>. Their actions have been both condemned and ridiculed by religious leaders in Kano state: Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabar, a leader of the Qadiriyya order of Sufi Islam (which is overwhelmingly predominant in Nigeria) from the northern city of Kano said that their resorting to violence was a result of their ideas gaining no traction with local Muslims<sup>160</sup>.

The activities of the “Nigerian Taliban” include the sporadic Christian-Muslim rioting that has killed thousands in various parts of the country, connected in part to the introduction of Sharia law in some of the Muslim-majority states of Nigeria since 2000 (most famous internationally, although less bloody than other episodes of violence, was the rioting in connection with the Miss World pageant of 2002). Coupled with this and contributing to the image of a country on the verge of anarchy is the non-religious

violent separatism that rumbles on in the oil-rich Niger delta region – often targeting foreign-owned oil installations and ex-pat workers. But to what extent this is really related to modern jihadi terrorism as typified by al-Qaeda is very much in question. David McCormack from the Center for Security Policy in Washington D.C. has carefully outlined the history and extent of international support (predominantly Saudi) for African Islamist groups<sup>161</sup>, but he continues to argue that: “African Islamism also poses a direct threat to Western interests. An atmosphere permeated with radical Islamic thought has, not surprisingly, begun to create a hospitable environment for terrorists with an international agenda”<sup>162</sup>. This is a popular conjecture amongst commentators on the region although there is little evidence to show that it is coming true. A second question is why should money coming from the Middle East be seen as an immediate security threat? Although the figures being discussed are in millions of US dollars, this pales into insignificance in comparison to the billions that the Western donor community has sunk into sub-Saharan African states since independence. This money does not seem to have ensured regimes that are conducive with “Western Interests” (be that defined as either democracy and good governance or the neo-liberal “Washington Consensus”), so what basis is there to fear that relatively small amounts of Saudi money are likely to create radical Islamist regimes in Northwest Africa? This begs a third question – does Saudi money going to Islamist African groups really create an environment conducive to international terrorism? There certainly is a relationship between these two phenomena but it is not as clear-cut as some make out. It ignores the fact that the jihadi worldview that motivates al-Qaeda, and possibly but less obviously the GSPC, is not necessarily in line with either political Islamist groups or Wahhabi or Wahhabi-influenced religious institutions. The Saudi form of Islam, known as Wahhabism<sup>163</sup>, has traditionally developed in close association with the House of Saud, and Wahhabi clerics justify and support the right of the Saudis to rule Saudi Arabia and lead the Muslim world and, hence, stand diametrically opposed to bin Laden and al-Qaeda, who see the Saudis as apostates. This means much of the charitable money being targeted at Africa, whilst promoting a conservative and possibly intolerant form of Islam, does not necessarily mean that it will lead to supporting terrorism.



There are clearly people who are concerned about the poverty and problems of Nigeria, for example the former US Ambassador to Nigeria, Princeton Lyman, who has been a prominent critic of current US policy towards Nigeria, which he sees as short-sighted and under-resourced<sup>164</sup>. But linking disparate issues such as extreme poverty, underdevelopment, poor governance and problematic colonial legacies to terrorism, as Ambassador Lyman does, whilst clearly being one way to attract Western policymakers' attention post-9/11, also involves dangers. As argued in the above chapters, the construction of terrorism in this region has been predominantly in a military frame. There are risks that in militarising these issues the results might actually be the opposite of those intended<sup>165</sup> – that US military involvement, particularly when not backed up with development aid and diplomatic initiatives, will lead to increased radicalisation and will necessitate further intervention.

The events that have been used to justify the TSCTI are all the legacy of the Algerian Civil War, even if they have taken place in countries to the south. Nigeria is linked to this by the most tenuous of threads, and in that sense it could be said not to be part of the Maghreb/Saharan security complex. Its membership of the TSCTI reflects the importance that the US places on maintaining close relations with Nigeria, due to its oil resources and the influence it has in the region, rather than because the TSCTI has a major role to play in preventing the emergence of terrorism threats because of the Nigerian internal situation.

## Senegal

Senegal gained independence from France in 1960. The country occupies the western-most part of Africa and has a border with Mauritania to the north, and Mali to the east. Senegal is widely praised as one of the most stable and democratic countries in Africa, as well as the most progress orientated. 94% of the population is Muslim, while 5% is Christian in this country of just over 11 million inhabitants<sup>166</sup>. Its current President, Abdoulaye Wade, came to power in democratic elections held in May 2000 after 40 years of rule by the Senegal Socialist Party. There have been two decades of political violence in the country, connected to a separatist movement in the southern Casamance region, which has

killed around 3,500 people<sup>167</sup>, but the situation has been improving since a peace deal was signed in 2001. Apart from one incident involving foreigners connected to this violence, there have been no reports of any type of international terrorism in Senegal.<sup>168</sup>

US-Senegal relations are described as “excellent” with much development assistance coming from the US to Senegal<sup>169</sup>. Senegal’s military has traditionally received support from the US, and its involvement in TSCTI can be seen as another way of continuing this relationship. From the other side, the US is keen to work with Senegal because of the country’s positive image in Africa, and to benefit from having reliable long-term partners in the region.

# Why is the US in the Sahara?

Why then did the US choose to begin focusing on the Sahara/Sahel region in 2002 – despite the lack of a clear international terrorist link? Explanations offered generally fall under two categories: a genuine concern with terrorism or potential terrorism in the region that could threaten US and international security; and, secondly, that it is a US attempt to control African oil and gas resources. A third possible explanation, one that is rarely suggested but which we argue for, is that the project results from the imperatives created by the current US military bureaucratic structures.

## **Counter-terrorism and regional peace and security**

This explanation essentially takes the US government and military statements at face value. As the original PSI press release says, the initiative will: “support two U.S. national security interests in Africa: waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security.”<sup>170</sup> A number of questions can be raised on this point though. Firstly, what evidence linked the four original PSI states to international terrorism when it was first announced in 2002? The answer is very little: despite there being numerous links between international terrorist networks and expatriate citizens of the Maghreb countries (see discussion in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia chapters), these states were not involved in the original PSI. A Congressional Research Service report titled *Africa and the War on Terrorism* from January 2002 does not mention any of the four countries<sup>171</sup>, nor are any of them mentioned in the 2001 Patterns of Global Terrorism report published by the State Department<sup>172</sup>, the first Patterns of Global Terrorism published after the 9/11 attacks. In 2002 the only obvious connection between any of the PSI countries and al-Qaeda was one senior al-Qaeda figure, Abu Hafs al-Mauritani<sup>173</sup>. Abu Hafs “the Mau-

ritanian” is said to be a spiritual advisor to bin Laden and the US believes that he was central to the planning of the attacks on the US embassies in Africa. It is now thought that he is in Iran, possibly in Iranian detention.<sup>174</sup> But even Abu Hafs himself seemed in no hurry to bring the jihad home: when he spoke to al-Jazeera in November 2001 and was specifically asked about why he was not involved in a jihad in Mauritania, he said: “Mauritania is part of the Islamic world, and the fact that I come from there does not advance it, in my eyes, in the Islamic order of priorities... When conditions are right for Jihad in Mauritania or any other country, we, Allah willing, will be prepared for this Jihad.”<sup>175</sup> Additionally, one other Mauritanian is known to be in US custody at Guantanamo Bay; Mohammadou Ould Slahi is said to have acted as a messenger between bin Laden and the al-Qaeda core in Afghanistan and the Hamburg cell during the planning of 9/11<sup>176</sup>.

In this light it is easy to see why the hostage crisis in the Algerian and Malian Sahara, and the subsequent ‘pursuit’ of the supposed GSPC terrorists through Niger and Chad that took place in 2003-2004 has been endlessly cited by senior EUCOM commanders as a justification for the PSI/TSCTI, as before this there was essentially no open-source information linking the region to the war on terror. Even from the highest levels of the US government the message can sometimes conflict with EUCOM’s normal assessment – in 2005 General Csrnko said that the US is monitoring preaching in African mosques and teaching in Islamic schools (he does not specify where) and says there is none of the radicalisation that is expressed in messages seen in the Middle East and South East Asia<sup>177</sup>. Even former Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said in Morocco in 2006 that due to the way they manage their internal affairs, it is “an extremely low possibility” that al-Qaeda-related terrorists could base themselves in Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco<sup>178</sup>. In this Rumsfeld seems to be echoing the Algerian policy of describing terrorism in Algeria to Algerians as “residual” – an annoyance left over from the civil war – whilst alerting international audiences to the supposed great dangers of the same terrorists.

Secondly, there is the issue of the initiative’s scale: as the Crisis Group points out, both the PSI’s supporters and critics have grossly overestimated the initiative’s size and therefore its potential

impact, noting that General Wald, the Deputy Commander of EUCOM, has skilfully used the media to create a high profile for a relatively small operation<sup>179</sup>. As late as April 2004, the Pentagon's West Africa Country Director, Colonel Vic Nelson, was trying to scrape together USD 800,000 to be able to send trainers to Niger and Chad<sup>180</sup>. The overall budget for the two years of the PSI was only about USD 7.75 million<sup>iv</sup>, and as Col. Nelson himself put it:

*Let's face it. We will have trained six motorized infantry companies to monitor the borders in an area as large as the United States. So you could say, 'give me a break. Is this a joke?' But it opens the door, fosters cooperation, opens the door to future programs. If it goes well, the test case, well, let's expand, let's do it some more.*<sup>181</sup>

Admittedly, the size of the TSCTI is considerably greater than the PSI, and seems to confirm Col. Nelson's projection of expansion. The TSCTI has a yearly budget of USD 100 million for five years<sup>182</sup>, a huge increase from the funding level of the PSI. Yet even with this greatly increased financing, it is still possible to question how seriously the US is taking the region. The US government clearly accepts that there is not a military-only solution to extremism and terrorism in the region and the TSCTI aims to be "a more comprehensive approach to regional security"<sup>183</sup>, with other parts of the US government playing a role. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs Theresa Whelan has said that: "the U.S. Agency for International Development, for example, will address educational initiatives; the State Department, airport security; and the Department of Treasury, efforts to tighten up money-handling controls in the region."<sup>184</sup> With these kinds of ambitions the amounts of money no longer look so large, but it is also not apparent how supportive other parts of the government are of the project. A search of the Treasury Department's website and that of USAID returns no mention of the programme<sup>185</sup>, and USAID representatives seem very nervous about being involved: one report notes a senior adviser with the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation at USAID, Sharon Morris, said "she did

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<sup>iv</sup> By way of comparison, New York City says that USD 10 million would buy 23 new fire engines (the city has 205) hence spending on the PSI over two years equates roughly to 17 new fire engines. See: IBO New York City (2005) *Understanding New York City's Budget: A Guide* NYC: Independent Budget Office NYC (p. 6).

not want her organization being associated with ‘anti-terrorism’ which has a militaristic ring” and further “when we talk about coordination, we’re not talking about bundling stuff together, because people are suspicious of the U.S. military, especially in these areas.”<sup>186</sup>

The US does have a valid point that regional peace and security could be enhanced. Numerous problems feed into a general regional instability: the huge issue of poverty for all of the countries involved; the personalised nature of African politics; the numerous overlapping pre-existing regional bodies with differing mandates; the willingness of some regimes to use proxy sub-state groups to destabilize neighbouring states and so on<sup>187</sup>. Despite some of the TSCTI states having close relationships with the US, they do not all have good bilateral relations amongst themselves. For example there is tension between Morocco and Algeria over the Western Sahara question, with Algeria supporting the Polisario Front, which is fighting Morocco for an independent Western Sahara. The same issue has caused many difficulties between Mauritania and Morocco as well. Other problems of cooperation stem purely from the lack of resources, even when intentions are good. For example, poor or non-existent communication links between neighbouring militaries makes patrolling borders effectively very difficult, particularly if one country’s forces pursue a group that then heads for another country. Despite the US playing down its role in the interception and gunfight with El Para’s group in Chad, they were clearly effective in getting the Nigerien and Chadian armies to cooperate successfully.

Perhaps the most superficially attractive argument that the US military puts forward is that it is taking pre-emptive action: as Afghanistan demonstrates, ungoverned spaces can be exploited by terrorists groups, and as terrorists/insurgents are pushed out of Afghanistan and Iraq they will look for new refuges. Major-General Csrnko has said that there is the potential “for terrorist camps in the Sahara comparable to those once run by al-Qaeda in Afghanistan”<sup>188</sup>. Yet this is fallacious: the idea that terrorist groups are attracted to ungoverned areas or failed states is problematic. It is more likely that what attracted al-Qaeda to Afghanistan was that it was not a completely failed state and that the group could co-opt the de facto state power, the Taliban. For a number of

years through the 1990s it was quasi-recognition of the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan that gave al-Qaeda some protection. Only after the East Africa bombings was the US willing to violate the sovereignty of Afghanistan and attack al-Qaeda and even then in only a limited way. Compare this to the experience of the Somali jihadi group al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya, who have been attacked on a number of occasions and who had their limited training infrastructure destroyed by the Ethiopian Army, who felt no compunction about entering Somali territory to safeguard Ethiopia's security<sup>189</sup>. With Somalia having no government, Ethiopia did not need to treat it as a sovereign state. US surveillance and intelligence assets should have no problem identifying terrorist training facilities in a region like the Sahara<sup>v</sup>, and it is therefore hard to understand why any of the governments in the region would not strike against them to maintain sovereign control in their own territory. The Sahelian countries might have severely under-policed areas but since the end of the Tuareg uprisings in Niger and Mali there are no areas which are completely beyond the reach of the governments, even if they would need US support or funding to launch such operations. Terrorism is fundamentally an urban phenomenon, where terrorists use proximity to civilians to hide and remain undetected. These limitations on US power are demonstrated by the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iraq urban areas mean that US forces cannot confront insurgents with huge firepower without causing large numbers of civilian deaths and hence losing yet more support. In Afghanistan it is the very mountainous terrain of the Afghanistan/Pakistan border that limits the mobility of the American military – particularly as US ground forces are not able to cross the Pakistan border. The Sahel/Saharan region is in this respect very different and any fixed terrorist infrastructure would either need to be so small as to present very little threat, or would be very vulnerable to air-strikes or attack by forces trained and perhaps supported by the US.

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<sup>v</sup> Col. Nelson made the point strongly that the US had no people on the ground involved in gathering the information that led to the battle with the GSPC in Chad. This fits with the reports that a US Orion P3 reconnaissance plane was involved along with, presumably, satellite imagery. Col. Nelson claimed human assets were not necessary: "...it's a big open place. If you're looking for X numbers of Toyotas, and they're all there, it's like, OK. Either they're our guys, or they're other bandits or smugglers, or Tuaregs, or something." ("Stripes' Q&A on DOD's Pan Sahel Initiative" Stars and Stripes Online 5 April 2004 (<http://www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=20669&archive=true> accessed 16 June 05.)

If terrorist infiltration into the region is unlikely (at least in any great numbers) and relatively controllable if it did happen, what other reasons could there be for the US presence in the Sahara?

### **“It’s all about the oil”**

Control of natural resources – most notably oil – is an oft-cited reason for US military involvement anywhere in the world, and the more critical the commentator is of the US, the more expansive these claims tend to be. “No blood for oil” was seen on millions of placards and banners around the world in the run-up to the Iraq war, but some have argued that the Afghanistan war was also about controlling natural resources (the argument usually made was that Afghanistan is central in getting Caspian and Central Asian oil and natural gas to a deep-sea port in Pakistan for export to the US), and some on the far left and right even argued that the NATO Kosovo intervention was also about Caspian oil<sup>90</sup>.

What evidence is there that natural resources are the ultimate aim of the US presence in northwest Africa? Jeremy Keenan argues that this is exactly the case<sup>vi</sup>. ExxonMobil’s recent presence

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<sup>vi</sup> Keenan, Jeremy (2004[1]) “Terror in the Sahara: the Implications of US Imperialism for North and West Africa” *Review of African Political Economy* No. 101 Vol. 31. (pp. 478-481). Keenan uses the term “intelligence-media services” when describing what he claims to be planted stories in compliant newspapers, particularly in Algeria, and then the willingness for international news organisations to report these uncritically. But he is also rather uncritical of some of his own sources. On supposed US basing plans in the area both he and Mustafa Barth’s earlier article in ROAPE, which Keenan cites as his source a number of times on the matter, rely in many important cases on a publication called WorldTribune.com. WorldTribune.com followed the development of the ‘terrorist’ story in Algeria very closely through 2003 with virtually all their Africa “exclusives” being on the terrorism in that country (see: [http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2003/exclusives\\_2003.html](http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2003/exclusives_2003.html)). Some of these stories include statements that are now known to be simply wrong, whilst many others included statements by undisclosed sources, particularly from security services – a journalistic habit that Keenan himself criticises. WorldTribune.com began as a hobby and continues to be run as a side-project by its editor and contributors (who are rarely named). WorldTribune.com cites two recommendations on its website: from the prominent rightwing talk show host Rush Limbaugh to his listeners and secondly from the then Deputy Secretary for Defence Paul Wolfowitz to the Senate Armed Services Committee. Despite this (or perhaps because of it!) the *New Yorker* magazine still wrote that: “World Tribune.com more fairly qualifies as something between a newspaper and a rumour-mongering blog... In this sense, it is part of a loose network of mostly conservative sites – WorldNetDaily, Dr. Koontz’s National Security Message Board, Debka File (produced by a pair of Jerusalem-based journalists thought to have moles in Israeli intelligence) – whose dispatches sometimes serve as the journalistic equivalent of trial balloons: a story may not be based on knowable facts, but it nevertheless may occasionally turn out to be right” (See WorldTribune.com and McGrath, Ben “Fit to Print?” *The New Yorker* 8 Sept. 03). Overall, this does not lend much credence to Keenan or Barth’s argument.



in Chad has been linked to the US's newly-found enthusiasm for military involvement in Africa by one blogger<sup>191</sup>. Another writer notes that Nigeria is now the fifth largest source of US-imported oil and US companies have already invested USD 10 billion in that country; and that Algeria is also becoming increasingly important in the hydrocarbon market with 30 US companies involved<sup>192</sup>. In Mauritania's territorial waters there have also been recent discoveries of significant reserves of oil<sup>193</sup>. In a joint article two former US ambassadors to South Africa and Nigeria writing on "The Terrorist Threat in Africa" in *Foreign Affairs* seem quite willing to mix the dangers of instability (but not "terrorism" in the sense that the term is commonly used in the US discourse) in the Nigerian delta region – the centre of that country's oil production – with Islamic extremism elsewhere on the continent<sup>194</sup>. The writers clearly state, with new oil reserves being discovered off West Africa, that by "2015, West Africa may provide a quarter of US oil and is likely to acquire an increasingly high strategic profile." Further they note that West Africa "is home to 130 million Muslims, yet it exhibits little grass-roots support for terrorism. And Middle Eastern issues do not color relationships with the United States to the same extent as they do in countries such as Nigeria and South Africa... [t]wo West African Muslim countries, Senegal and Mauritania, even enjoy diplomatic relations with Israel"<sup>195</sup>. Another writer notes that currently there is a: "marked enthusiasm for African oil in some circles in Washington... [resulting from] a wish in the current US government to reduce dependence on the Middle East"<sup>196</sup>, and that this is in particular being lobbied for by a working group called the African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG), set up by the Israeli-American think-tank the Institute for Advanced Strategic & Political Studies (IASPS)<sup>197</sup>. The AOPIG have attracted bipartisan support from the House of Representatives, particularly the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Africa Subcommittee<sup>198</sup>.

So there is no doubt that African oil is significant to US energy needs, but how is the PSI/TSCTI related to this? We believe – at best – tangentially. The PSI/TSCTI aims at stability and security in the region and of course this means that it is easier for energy companies to do business; but if that can be considered a grab for the region's natural resources it would seem that any Western development assistance or diplomatic initiatives can be accused

of the same nefarious intentions. Another problem for this explanation is that the TSCTI is not attempting to set up US bases in the area<sup>vii</sup>. Oxford Analytica notes that the US does not currently intend to have any permanently garrisoned base (known as MOBs – main operating bases) in Africa. Nor is EUCOM in its “Area of Responsibility” (AOR) in Africa looking to set up any Forward Operating Sites (FOS): lightly but permanently manned bases such as the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa’s (CJTF-HOA) base in Djibouti. What EUCOM is establishing is “Cooperative Security Locations” (CSL), unmanned locations that are brought up to the US operating standard for runways, fuel storage and the like. These are normally co-located with civil or military facilities of the host nation, and allow for deployment of troops or other assets if necessary.<sup>199</sup> Nevertheless the establishment of these CSLs is not directly linked to the TSCTI and could well have happened without them. The currently established CSL sites are in African countries that are not part of the TSCTI except for Senegal<sup>200</sup>.

The main focus of the TSCTI/PSI – the Sahara itself – is not particularly important to the gas and oil industries of the countries around it. Keenan, for example, claims that controlling the Sahara/Sahel is vital to securing access to oil – but he does not clearly explain why. He suggests that the US fears that instability relating to terrorism could spread north or south from the Sahara/Sahel region and have negative impacts on the oil and gas producing regions<sup>201</sup> – yet elsewhere in his articles he is suggesting that the US is complicit in the production of the Sahara terrorism

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<sup>vii</sup> Barth and Keenan disagree on this and it does appear that according to one writer who received cooperation from EUCOM to visit the area, there are U.S. forces based at least temporarily near Tamanrasset in southern Algeria (Hunt, Emily (2007) *Islamist Terrorism in Northwestern Africa: A ‘Thorn in the Neck’ of the United States?* *Policy focus* #65, February 2007. Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy p. 15). One other writer also makes the claim that “the US has also established military bases in the north of Mali, although these are not official and few people are willing or feel able to speak openly about them” but gives no further information such as where or what size these bases are. Daniel, Patricia (2006) “Mali: everyone’s favourite destination” *Open Democracy* ([http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa\\_democracy/mali\\_3531.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa_democracy/mali_3531.jsp) accessed 15 May 2006). Presumably for the training of Malian armed forces carried out by US forces as part of the PSI and TSCTI some sort of base must have been established temporarily, but it should be noted that a reporter for the *New Republic* found US special forces soldiers comfortably quartered in a hotel in Timbuktu! (See: Hammer, Joshua “Desert Storm” *New Republic* 6 March 2006 p. 11.) It should be stressed that the US presence in Mali as part of these programmes has never been denied, and in many ways EUCOM has actively advertised to the media as a search of their website shows (see: [www.eucom.mil](http://www.eucom.mil)).

myths. If there is no threat, there is no need for a military presence; so why would the US invent a threat to justify a presence?

Ultimately, the exploitation of hydrocarbons is vital to the economies of Algeria, Nigeria and increasingly for Chad and Mauritania, and drilling for these resources was happening before the TSCTI and will continue after the programme is finished. It is also far from evident that even if the GSPC was organised and active in the Sahara whether that would have any effect on oil and gas production taking place to the north, south and west.

The 'oil' argument tends to rest on the assumption that the US needs military forces nearby to ensure the smooth flow of oil. The US Ambassador to Senegal Richard Roth asked the question that if this is the case, why do no other countries need military forces to secure supplies of oil for their economic growth and way of life?<sup>202</sup> If oil is the underlying motive for US foreign policy, why are the foreign policies of China<sup>viii</sup>, India and the EU so different? Surely they would have to take similar steps to secure their access to oil and gas?

To conclude: the TSCTI is too small, incorrectly positioned, and not designed in the right manner to be anything more than minimally useful in securing US access to northwest African hydrocarbon resources. At best it builds relationships with governments in the area, particularly military-to-military contacts, but the same could be said for all other diplomatic and military-cooperation initiatives, and many of the governments involved have no natural resources to sell to the US.

## The Bureaucratic Imperative

Our alternative explanation for US motivations is that the TSCTI is the result of bureaucratic competition within the US military and other parts of the US government. The Crisis Group quotes an unnamed US analyst who follows the US government's activities in West Africa closely:

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<sup>viii</sup> It should be noted that China's involvement in oil drilling in Sudan has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism from western media and NGOs in recent years. The central claim is that China is uncaring or even complicit in the Sudanese regime's mass human rights violations in order to access Sudanese oil. See for example Goodman, Peter S. "China Invests Heavily In Sudan's Oil Industry: Beijing Supplies Arms Used on Villagers" *Washington Post* 23 December 2004 p. A1.

*After 9/11, Rummy [former Defence Secretary Rumsfeld] told all his commanders to go out and find terrorists. So [Gen. Charles F. “Chuck”] Wald [deputy commander of EUCOM] went out and found some in the Sahara.*<sup>203</sup>

It has become a cliché that 9/11 changed everything, but in the case of the US government it is true. All diplomatic, intelligence and military efforts have been reoriented because of the terrorist attacks. It was therefore important for all parts of the military and government to be playing their part, and to be seen to be playing their part, in the war on terrorism. Various sources that spoke to Raffi Khatchadourian make exactly this point. In his article for the *Village Voice* he writes:

*[I]n Washington... a number of people said that European Command had a bureaucratic imperative to cast militant Islam in the region as an impending danger. A retired CIA specialist in counterterrorism told me that European Command had its ‘nose out of joint’ because the main theaters of the war on terrorism fell under Central Command, the division responsible for American forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. A former U.S. diplomat who worked closely with the Defense Department said, ‘I mean, for European Command, when they tore down the Berlin Wall, a lot of their missions evaporated—so it’s a matter of having resources [allocated by Congress] and then trying to find missions to justify them.’ A State Department official familiar with the military’s Saharan strategy called it “a hammer looking for a nail.”*<sup>204</sup>

It is important to understand that the African continent is subdivided between two of the United States regional military commands; Central Command (CENTCOM) based at MacDill air force base, Tampa, Florida and EUCOM based at Patch Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany<sup>ix</sup>. This division of responsibility is important in understanding why the PSI/TSCTI has taken place in the region that it has. CENTCOM’s AOR is what is increasingly known as “the Greater Middle East”. It extends from Kazakhstan in the northeast, to Sudan in the southwest, and includes the following countries in Africa: Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia. EUCOM’s AOR extends from the North Cape

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<sup>ix</sup> Madagascar comes under a third – Pacific Command.

of Norway to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and includes all of Africa except those countries noted above for whom CENTCOM is responsible. Whilst the PSI focused on threats – or emerging threats – in the Sahel, CENTCOM established the CJTF-HOA to play a similar role in their area of responsibility in eastern Africa. The CJTF-HOA is based at a former French Foreign Legion base in Djibouti.<sup>205</sup> The division of these anti-terrorism initiatives between two regional commands does not come from an analysis pointing to two separate and distinct regional terrorist problems, but is simply due to military bureaucracy.

US fears of jihadi terrorism in East Africa go back to the Somalia intervention in the early 1990s and were reinforced by the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. CENTCOM had no difficulty in justifying their creation of CJTF. CENTCOM is also the command responsible for the war in Iraq and continuing military operations in Afghanistan. Hence CENTCOM has become central to the GWOT, and CENTCOM's commander at the time, General Tommy Franks<sup>206</sup> correspondingly became an internationally recognised figure. In comparison, EUCOM's role has been significantly less prominent, particularly when compared to the Cold War and the 1990s when US involvement in the Balkans put it in the spotlight – as Katchadourian's sources allude to above. Despite EUCOM's AOR being huge, spanning all of Russia (but not central Asia), Europe and most of Africa, it does not correspond to large areas of the Muslim World that are now seen as being central to the GWOT. When looking for "terrorists" post 9/11, CENTCOM had very few prospects besides North Africa. The only other significant threats of jihadi terrorism within its AOR are in Chechnya and from groups based in Europe – but the governments of Russia and the various west European countries concerned are hardly likely to invite the US military to become involved in the counter-terrorism policing for varying but obvious reasons. General Wald of EUCOM himself has written: "EUCOM currently has no military areas of operations, no Afghanistans or Iraqs, where kinetic military actions are appropriate. Thus it *must seek more innovative ways* of using its assets to fight the terrorist threat"<sup>207</sup> (emphasis added).

Even in North Africa, EUCOM's possibilities were limited. Co-operation with the Algerian government was originally limited by human rights concerns, and apart from the requests for US

weapons and equipment, the Algerian Army had no need for US military assistance in the fight against jihadi groups in the north of the country. In Morocco and Tunisia, jihadi groups have remained essentially a policing issue rather than one requiring military confrontation, as has been the case in Algeria. Therefore, the idea of terrorists in the Sahara must have been appealing to EUCOM. Geographically it is a huge and wild area where US strengths in signals intelligence would be an advantage, unlike urban terrorism where human intelligence remains vital – something that the US has not been good at in the post-Cold War world particularly in the Arab and wider Muslim world. Secondly it fitted the post-Afghanistan paradigm of terrorists using ungoverned spaces (despite the weaknesses of this argument pointed out above). The idea of terrorists on the run from their former bases in Afghanistan, looking for new sites of operation in ungoverned, or under-governed parts of the world is one that EUCOM has put forward numerous times, despite little evidence of this happening and many reasons why it is unlikely to happen. It is also an area of the world with lots of governments willing and politically able to cooperate with the US in return for the equipment, training and funds that EUCOM has to offer.

Outside of the military, there are also bureaucratic imperatives that would have supported the PSI/TSCTI. Lyman and Morrison (2004) argue that the US government at the highest level tends to instinctively see problems in Africa as humanitarian issues and therefore not of the highest importance<sup>208</sup>, warning that not to see the security risk emanating from the continent is short-sighted. This fits with the Crisis Group's suggestion that amongst Africa specialists within the US government, the most obvious way to attract the previously scant attention of Congress and the Administration is to raise the terrorist issue<sup>209</sup>, in effect turning the Sahel/Saharan region from a development and diplomacy issue into a security issue.

Bureaucracies, both military and civilian, are competitive entities. The competition is for limited resources and the method of getting them is by demonstrating your importance vis-à-vis other sections of the bureaucracy. Since 9/11, an organisation's importance within the US government system has to a great extent been determined by its contribution to GWOT. For example, Rear Admiral Hamlin B. Tallent, Director of the European Plans

and Operations Center of EUCOM, testified before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee On International Terrorism And Non-proliferation in 2005. When discussing EUCOM's role and importance, the very first thing he said was: *Our history of bringing stability to areas plagued by ethnic and cultural conflict has prepared us to extend our focus to the east and south. Checking the spread of radical fundamentalism in the largely ungoverned spaces in the Caucasus, and Northern and Western Africa will require patience and sustained effort.*

The first line of his strategic assessment was: "Instability in Africa and the Caucasus shapes the direction of EUCOM's Global War on Terrorism efforts."<sup>210</sup>

EUCOM's interest in Africa is something that even its commander would accept as a relatively new thing: General James L. Jones, said in 2003 that "We don't pay enough attention to Africa, but I think we're going to have to in the 21st century"<sup>211</sup>. EUCOM does not have to just compete for resources within the competitive unified command structure, but has also had to resist calls for it to lose responsibility for Africa, with either the setting up of a separate Africa Command or by forming a sub-regional command under CENTCOM. The majority of Africa has only been EUCOM's responsibility since 1983 and was only allocated thus because of the relations that EUCOM's European NATO allies had with much of Africa due to the legacy of imperialism<sup>212</sup>. Hence EUCOM will be cognisant that there is no 'natural' reason why most of Africa is their responsibility. Pre-9/11, the calls for a separate command or sub-command were mainly made on the grounds that the artificial division between CENTCOM and EUCOM made humanitarian and peacekeeping operations unnecessarily complex and this meant that commanders of both regional commands tended to ignore Africa until a crisis arose, leading to US policy in the region only being reactive<sup>213</sup>. After 9/11 there were some suggestions that, as countering jihadi-terrorism is becoming the central mission of the US military worldwide, it would be better for sub-Saharan Africa to be transferred to CENTCOM's AOR. For example, Carafano and Gardiner of the Heritage Foundation write:

*Today's geostrategic realities suggest that Africa shares interests with the countries in the Middle and Near East that are aligned with the*

*U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). In matters of transnational threats and economic issues like energy (specifically oil) and trade, not to mention the significant Islamic populations in Africa, there are good reasons to view Africa and the Middle East as an appropriate grouping for U.S. security interests.*<sup>214</sup>

In late 2006 and early 2007 there was increased public discussion on the formation of a unified African Regional Command. It was reported that one of Donald Rumsfeld's last acts as Secretary of defense before resigning in November 2006 was to urge the President to form an African Command<sup>215</sup>. The probable creation of an African Command was noted in a Congressional Research Service report for Congress dated 20 December 2006<sup>216</sup>, and according to a Pentagon spokesman quoted by the American Forces Press Service on 6 December 2006, discussions were taking place over how this new command should be structured<sup>217</sup>. Finally on 6 February 2007 the new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, announced to Congress that Africa Command would be formed. Details remain scarce at the time of writing but the transition team will be based at Kelley Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany, reflecting that the majority of Africa is currently an EUCOM responsibility. It is planned that eventually "AFRICOM" will become headquartered in Africa but currently there has been no decision on where this might be.<sup>218</sup>

Calls for separating Africa from EUCOM's area of responsibility have refused to go away over the space of at least a decade. To counter these and simply to justify its normal budget and allocation of forces to it amongst the constraints that the Iraq war is placing on the wider US military and defence budget, EUCOM knows that it has to be seen to be actively countering terrorism within its AOR. Hence the TSCTI has become central to EUCOM's proffered contribution to the GWOT, and looks set to become equally important for the new AFRICOM. The authors of this report are not cynical about EUCOM and the United States' intentions in general in the way that those who support the 'oil' explanation tend to be. To argue that hydrocarbons are the 'real' reason for the US presence in NW Africa is to suggest that all discussion of terrorism is merely cover. Rather, we believe that EUCOM is genuine in its belief that the TSCTI is countering current terrorist activity in the Sahara, whilst ensuring that other terrorists cannot



begin to operate in the area. Our argument is that their focus was forced upon them by the necessity of bureaucratic competition, not by careful analysis, and that the securitization of the Sahara carries with it important risks in itself. An Africa command will only increase the bureaucratic pressures on that part of the US military to carry out counter-terrorism operations in Africa, and this is likely to further the securitization of the Saharan region, as we discuss below.

## Conclusion – the Securitization of the Sahara

A counter-argument has been made, from within the US military, that a unified command for Africa as discussed above, would do nothing to address the fundamental problems facing the continent – namely weak states – and that the military is the wrong agency to lead US policy on this. Lt. Col. John E. Campbell writes that: “such a command might actually hinder the process [of state building] by placing too much emphasis on the military and diverting attention and resources from nation-building”<sup>219</sup>.

His argument is essentially that instability in Africa due to weak states should not be securitized, a process described by Ole Wæver (1995) thus:

*If a problem is ‘securitized’, the act tends to lead to specific ways of addressing it: threat, defence, and often state centred solutions.*<sup>220</sup>

Even before the creation of AFRICOM the securitization of Africa was happening as a result of programmes such as the PSI/TSCTI. The central question that has not been answered is: do the positive benefits that the United States Military can bring to the area, in terms of training and support for local forces in controlling their own territory and cooperating with neighbouring militaries, balance the negative impacts, such as suspicions that the activities arouse in local populations, particularly those that are marginalised within the countries concerned?

These problems and suspicions do not necessarily arise from any activities that EUCOM is carrying out in the Saharan region, but rather from global perceptions of the United States and its current foreign policy, particularly in the Muslim world. Indeed EUCOM’s programmes under the TSCTI may only be bringing benefits to immediate communities in which they are taking place

(healthcare provision, provision of wells etc.), but locals and critical outsiders assess the US military's presence in the region not by these activities, but rather through the prism of the Iraq invasion and the continuing war in Afghanistan. Colonel Thomas Dempsey, Director of African Studies at the Department of National Security and Strategy, US Army War College, writes that: "A final problem with direct military action [for counter-terrorism] involves the status that it confers on the terrorists who become military targets. Treating the terrorists as belligerents and applying the international law of war to their pursuit and destruction legitimizes, in a very real and concrete way, their status under international law and in the eyes of the international community."<sup>221</sup> In the case of the TSCIT, the military seems to be avoiding questions of international law by working with the legitimate forces of the sovereign powers of the states concerned, but Col. Dempsey's point about international opinion is very valid. Particularly for those in the Saharan region, the belief, no matter how inaccurate, is that the United States' actions around the world have some darker motives and this tends to be supported by the prominence of the military within US foreign policy.

The suggestion that the primacy of the military in the GWOT is problematic is not particularly controversial even within US policy-making circles. *Foreign Policy Magazine* and the Center for American Progress have gathered the opinions of over 100 US experts on terrorism from across the political spectrum. The "Terrorism Index" shows considerable agreement on many issues – 84 percent believe the US is losing the war on terrorism, but most interesting for this study was the sense that: "the war requires more emphasis on a victory of ideas, not just guns. That is hardly surprising, considering that nearly 80 percent believe a widespread rejection of radical ideologies in the Islamic world is a critical element to victory."<sup>222</sup> As a reflection of this, 87 percent (including 72 percent of conservatives) believed that the State Department needs more funding.<sup>223</sup>

The countries of the Saharan region, and in particular the Sahel states are amongst the poorest in the world. There is no doubt that they need more help from the developed world, and unsurprisingly they will take any offered – but serious questions remain as to whether the US military is the right institution for this. EUCOM has consistently overplayed the threat of al-Qaeda-related terror-

ists in the Sahara to justify its importance to the “Global War on Terrorism”. Unfortunately this only adds – arguably unnecessarily – to the sense of fear many in the West have of terrorism. The US military presence may well be an agent of instability in northwest Africa, exacerbating pre-existing tensions between minorities and national governments, and creating more anti-Americanism in a part of the Muslim world that previously was not inclined against the US. There is a danger that military counter-terrorism in the Sahara is a self-fulfilling prophecy: that a previously peripheral and small group – the GSPC, which is probably somewhere between a jihadi-terrorist group and a common criminal gang (and may well be being manipulated by the intelligence services of the regional power), is being given a status and importance that it does not deserve. It could even become the locus of resistance to what some in the region see as US imperialism. The securitization of the Sahara may bring some benefits, particularly for the governments of the region, but it also involves many costs that do not currently seem either well understood or admitted to by the commanders of EUCOM.

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64 E.g. see Dan Darling at Winds of Change.Net (<http://www.windsofchange.net/archives/004795.php>); Josh Lefkowitz at the National Review Online ([http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/lefkowitz\\_200310160834.asp](http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/lefkowitz_200310160834.asp)) and Randall Parker at ParaPundit (<http://www.parapundit.com/archives/001978.html>). Two of the aforementioned blogs link as their source the ABC online news story which has now been removed from the ABC website, but which implicated the seemingly irrepressible Mokhtar Belmokhtar according to the blogs that used the removed ABC story. A *New York Times* news story from 2004 offers an alternative possibility – that it was Emad Abdelwahid Ahmed Alwan, supposedly bin Laden's personal emissary to the GSPC who was planning the attack. The writer does not mention his source for this information, although they appear to be from the US military (Smith, Craig "U.S. Training African Forces to Uproot Terrorists" *New York Times* 11 May 2004 (p. 1)).

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66 Interview with Alex Wines, Head of Africa Programme at Chatham House, London, 25 May 2005.

67 Myers, Keith (June 2005) *op. cit.* (p. 5).

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71 "An awkward friend for America" *The Economist* 3 Sept. 05 (p. 40).

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## The Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative

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## The Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative

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## List of Abbreviations

AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AOPIG	African Oil Policy Initiative Group
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJTF-HOA	Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa
CSL	Cooperative Security Locations
CT	counter-terrorism
DOD	United States Department of Defense
EUCOM	United States European Command
FIT	Front Islamique Tunisien Tunisian Islamic Front
FOS	Forward Operating Sites
FUC	Forces Unies pour le Changement United Front for Change (Chad)
GIA	Groupe Islamique Armé Armed Islamic Group
GPS	Global Positioning System
GSPC	Groupe Salafiste de Prédication et Combat The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Algeria/international)
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IASPS	Institute for Advanced Strategic & Political Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDJT	Mouvement pour la Démocratie et la Justice Tchadien The Chadian Movement for Democracy and Justice
MOB	Main Operating Base
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PSI	Pan-Sahel Initiative
TFG	Tunisian Fighting Group
TSCTI	Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

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