

RADICAL ISLAMISM IN ALGERIA: EVOLUTION AND CURRENT SITUATION

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The Islamic militants that have been operating in Western Africa Sahara-Sahel during last years have their origins in the 1990s, in the context of the internal war that broke in Algeria. This north-African country has been the most affected by the violence of terrorism of the Islamic kind, a phenomenon that, even though spreading through most of the countries from Northern Africa and Middle East, had different impacts on each country. The Algerian case was deeply linked to the long civil war faced by this country and, since the beginning of the 21st century, turned into a residual element restrained to a few Algerian *wilayas* and expanded towards south, entering the Sahara. Being one of the most affected countries, with incidence throughout the rest of the region, it is necessary to explain how this problem evolved to become an issue of security to lots of nations in the region.

Internal antagonisms: the path to civil war

Thirty years after celebrating its independence of French colonialism (1962 - 1992), the Algerian nation broke into an armed conflict, a result of its economic difficulties, the exhaustion of the post-independence political model and the following state crisis, social pressures and the emergency of new political forces that had as its programmatic base the Islam. Under the presidency of Chadli Bendjedid (1979 - 1992), third president of the nation, the gravest tensions took place as a result of the destabilization of the state combined with the rise of Islamist movements. In 1985, the economic crisis had worsened due to the slump of oil prices in 1981, compromising the country's main source of foreign currency.

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In 1960 the Algerian population was composed by a total of 10 800 000 people and, as of 1985, this number had more than doubled: 21 990 000 inhabitants (Fayçal 1987, 42). This demographic growth added to the economic crisis caused the rise of social pressures. Describing the Algerian scenario of these years, Jason Burke states the following: “the grave economic problems caused and worsened by the growth of population, the massive migration towards cities, the inadequate and unplanned urban development, corruption and strikes, principally among university professors, slapped the faith in the nationalist and socialist ideology of the regime” (Burke 2004, 233). In 1988, the large street riots that took place destabilized the country². For these reasons the government, desperately seeking solutions to the domestic problems, had to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund and to reduce social expenditure (Gutiérrez Mendoza 2006-2007, 34-35).

Nonetheless, Bendjedid was reelected in 1984 and for the third time in 1988, for a five year period. It was in his last mandate that a shift took place in Algerian politics, with the beginning of the process of economic opening and the transition to a multi-party system, following the constitutional referendum of February 1989. As the single-party system of the National Liberation Front (FLN) – the party of the independence – ended, new political forces arose, such as the Islamic Front of Salvation (FIS), wearing the flag of political Islam in its different variants. The FIS, party of the Islamic opposition, was legalized on September 14, 1989, and stood ahead of the riots, reaching greater popular support. “They took on an important activism inside popular mosques (...) they offered a space of exchange and of debate that was absent in other ambits of society, supported its inhabitants in moments of natural catastrophes, which served to consolidated its leadership” (Rufins 1996, 87).

As part of this process of political changes, the first multi-party rallies. On June 12th, 1990, municipal elections gave FIS a victory with 54.25% of the votes counted, an achievement that would mark a tendency of support to the Islamic discourse. The FIS won the control, thus, of the majority of Algerian communes. The next year, on December 26th, there was the first round of legislative elections, in which the FIS reached a victory with 24.25% of the ballots against the FLN, with only 12.17%. The second round of legislative elections was suspended when Chadli Bendjedid resigned from the presidency, on January 11th of 1992, as the military intervened and cancelled the electoral process. Following the coup d’état, the power was given to the High State Committee, which gave the presidency to Mohamed Budief – killed by Islamists in June 29th of the same year.

2 The 1988 protests became known as the “couscous riot”, due to the excessive rise of food prices and the endemic poverty.

Following these developments the state of emergency was declared and, at the same time, FIS was considered illegal and its leaders arrested: Abbassi Madani and Ali Belhaj, respectively the President and Vice-President of FIS, were condemned to 12 years of jail. The refusal of the Islamist forces to accept their marginalization of the political process was their main reason for taking up arms against the army. The country turned from then on into a generalized theater of military operations. The moderate Islamists of FIS had lost the battle in trying to Islamize the Algerian state and, rapidly, were substituted by a new wave of violent extremists led by Afghan veterans. Jason Burke (2004) considers this process as the step from political Islamism towards more radical tendencies of Islamic activism.

The most important armed Islamic groups were the GIA and the EIS. The activities of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) date back to 1989 and its actions heightened due to the void caused by the arrests of the main leaders of FIS. This group was nourished by guerrilla fighters who were part of the anti-Soviet Islamist militias in Afghanistan, financed and trained by the CIA. As the war finished in 1989, many of these internationalist combatants for the “cause of Allah” came back to their countries of origin. It is estimated that 900 Algerian “Afghans”, as they were known, joined the rows of GIA, reinforcing the extremist ideology. They had in their agenda the aggressive re-Islamization of the Algerian society through coercion and the practice of *takfir*³, which would be used to justify the attacks against civil population. Primarily, the GIA conducted guerrilla warfare and right away adopted a terrorist approach against the Algerian army and population⁴. In early 1993, the group started its terror campaign, attacking military positions, as well as non-military objectives including foreigners, intellectuals, journalists and the common population.

The prohibition of FIS in 1992 produced a stalemate, in which its members who were not arrested or sent to camps in Sahara, started to organize. It was not until 1994 that the armed division of FIS appeared: the Islamic Armed of Salvation (EIS), presenting as an alternative to GIA extremists. The EIS claimed that the use of violence would force the government to undertake political changes and allow FIS to turn back to the political process; in

3 It was considered *takfir* any Algerian who did not join the fight alongside GIA, thus being an unfaithful who should be eliminated.

4 Abu Qutada, Jordan-Palestinian scholar, acted as official ulema for various radical groups, mostly in Algeria since 1994. He became known after stating his opinion regarding a fatwa from an Algerian clerk in 1994, in which he supported the idea that the killing of women and children in Algeria by the Islamic militants was justified. See in: Jason Burke 2004, 216. (Note of the translation: ulema is a term that refers to an expert in theology and religious law of Islam)

other words, the return to electoral process was conceived in their program, an aspect rejected by GIA leaders. The main support zone for EIS was the rural areas. The GIA had adherents among poor and rural young people but soon gathered influence also in Algiers and surroundings, gaining its main support from urban areas.

The methods employed by GIA were based in indiscriminate violence against civilians. In October 1994, Djamel Zitouni became the national emir of GIA. Under his leadership the group focused more in the struggle for power against EIS than in the opposition to the government (Harmon 2010, 14). Their operations therefore did not limit to Algerian lands. Djamel Zitouni and his fellows were the ones that undertook the hijacking of the Air France Airbus in 1994, the bombing in Paris' public transport of 1995, as well as the kidnapping and assassination of the catholic monks of Tibhirine, in 1996.

In January 31st, 1994, General Liamin Zerual, Minister of Defense, was appointed President of the Republic. Zerual's mandate's priority was to attain political dialogue with the Islamist opposition and to eradicate the violence that affected the whole country – objectives that were not attained. In November 16th, 1995, new presidential elections were held, giving the victory to Zerual, the indisputable candidate from the Armed Forces. With his election expired the mandate of the High State Committee, in power since the ousting of Bendjedid. In the national reconciliation process, the armed groups⁵ had to resign their weapons. While the president negotiated with the representatives of political parties and hoped for another moderated variant of Islamism, the FIS was still excluded from political dialogue⁶.

In November 1996 a new constitutional referendum was held, which produced the prohibition of Islamist and national berber parties. In the same year, it started the massacres appointed to GIA and, in May, the negotiations between the Algerian army, led by General Mohammed Boughaba and the EIS' emir, Madani Mezrag. These negotiations had a covert character and produced two important facts: the release of Abassi Madani in July 1997 and the unilateral ceasefire from the EIS, in October.

The divisions inside armed Islamism provoked an increase of violence and sharpened the Algerian crisis. The researcher Yohanelis Gutiérrez

5 Among the Islamist armed groups there were also the Islamic Front for Armed Jihad (FIDA) and the Movement of the Islamic State (MEI).

6 The political forces that took part of the National Conference summoned in September 1996 were represented by: the moderate Islamist faction from the Movement of the Islamic Society (MSI –HAMAS) and the Islamic Renaissance Movement (MRI – Ennahda); the ethnic berber-based opposition parties: the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD); and the opposition Party of Algerian Renewal (PRA). See: Rufins 1996, 88-90.

affirms that the violence had two different sources: the official power and the Islamist armed groups (Gutiérrez Mendoza 2006-2007, 49). The Arab Cause Solidarity Committee stated that proliferated denounces and testimonies claiming the direct involvement of the government in some of the most bloody episodes appointed to Islamist guerrillas and, also, in some of the disappearances and atrocities committed by security forces (Comité de Solidaridad con la Causa Árabe 2001, 4).

In January 1996 the GIA declared publicly the war on EIS and in this very same year the radical Antar Zouabri became the group's national emir, blaming the civil population of not supporting the jihad. Among the different Islamic factions fighting, the GIA gained prominence. The amount of deaths in the conflict rose to tens of thousands of people, when the GIA focused their attacks on "collaborator" civilians - an extremist approach that costed GIA the loss of popular support. The escalation of violence reached its zenith in August 1997⁷, being this year the most violent of the whole internal war, with more than forty massacres, most of it attributed to GIA.

In late 1990s, a series of factors had debilitated the GIA. Among them there were the successful governmental policy of eradication of extremist groups and the loss of the small public support they had before, due to its extremist policies and violent tactics. The army forces had to some extent controlled the Islamist militias. The principal leaders had fallen during combat⁸ or were captured, added to the many others that resigned their arms bearing in mind the effective national reconciliation policy of the government. The army's actions forced the GIA to establish in the southern part of the country, from where they could assure the provision of firearms and finance their fight. Terrorist activities became limited to specific areas of the country, especially in the rural ones such as the southern part of Algerian Sahara.

In September 1998, Zerual announced that he would leave the presidency and the celebration of presidential elections, in the next year. In April 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika⁹ was elected president, with 73.79% of the votes,

7 In August 28th, 1997, took place the massacre in Sidi Rais, a local in Algeria's south, where more than 300 people were killed, and it was known as the worst slaughtering of the year. In September a massacre in Sidi Youssef had also occurred.

8 The successive "national emirs" of the GIA Djamel Zitouni, Antar Zouabri (Abu Talha) and Rashid Abou Tourab were eliminated by the Algerian security forces.

9 He was born in March 2nd, 1937. In 1960, he was designed with a Commander rank to the Algeria's southern border to control the so-called "Mali's front", in order to avoid the division of the country intended by the French colonial power. In 1962, he was elected member of the Constituent Assembly and, after, appointed as Minister of Youth, Sports and Tourism of the first government of independent Algeria, led by Ahmed Ben Bella. In 1963, he was appointed as Foreign Ministry and, in 1964, was elected by the National Liberation Front Congress as

the support of the Military General Staff and a presence in the polls of 60.3% of the population. In June 27th, 1999, his government approved the project of the Law of Civilian Agreement, under which members of the demilitarized fundamentalist groups could be reintegrated in society. The GIA had announced its will to take part on the process if some requisites were followed: the incorporation of their men in the security forces and the release of its jailed members in Algeria and abroad (Gutiérrez Mendoza 2006-2007, 39) – demands which were not accepted.

In July the amnesty decree was signed to thousands of Islamists who had not taken part in crimes of blood and violation. As of September, the government submitted this project to referendum, which was accepted by 98.6% of a population exhausted by a civil war that already lasted seven years. Once the law was approved, almost all regretted Islamists were favored by the measures. Between 5 and 7 thousands of militants added to the amnesty process regardless of the crimes by them committed. As stated by Bouteflika himself, the death toll since 1992 surpassed the 100 thousands, and the material losses floated around the 20 billions of dollars (Khashana 2001, 84). It was not until 2002 that GIA – or, better, what was left of it, since it was deeply debilitated – accepted the law.

Foundation of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)

Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Algerian war against Islamists was changing from a general conflict to a low-intensity insurgency, as the Algiers' authorities had developed a series of military operations at the same time that managed the amnesty process of the detainees and arrested other Islamists. Most of Islamic militants, practically defeated, gradually departed from the radical vision represented by GIA. In general, the Islamist movement in Algeria was becoming more moderate, as they started to accept the electoral process. In this context, some of the main leaders of GIA decided to break with the organization. In 1998 emerged the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, splitting from the GIA also because of its bad leadership. The creation of this new group meant the disappearing of the first other (Ruiz Miguel 2010). In the formation of this armed organization played an essential role Hassan Hattab, Shaykh Abu al-Bara – considered the ideologue

member of the Central Committee of the Political Bureau. In 1974, Bouteflika was elected president of the 29th session of the UN General Assembly.

of the group – and Amari Saïfi¹⁰. These dissidents had criticized the group's policy of indiscriminately attacking the civilian population.

His disagreement regarding the civil slaughtering was the main reason for Hassan Hattab breaking up with the group. Among the principles of the new Islamist organization, there was the doctrine of attacking only security forces and governmental entities. In the first statement emitted by the group, in April 1999, Hassan Hattab declared that their enemy was the Algerian government and that the Muslim community should not fear GSPC's activities. He also rejected the doctrine exposed by GIA that a society by itself could be in a condition of apostasy, in turn reinforcing the doctrine shared by Al Qaeda which blamed the state for the population not following Salafist Islam (Gray and Stockham 2008, 93). With this approach, they expected to regain the popular support as it was in the years of FIS.

Even though they distanced themselves from the violent methods used till then, they were still a radical organization, which did not accept the peace process proposed by the authorities. Hattab's group refused to give up their weapons, counting with a number of members that oscillated between 800 and 1500 militants – as of 2002, nonetheless, they were reportedly 4000. The GSPC kept, as its main objective, fighting the secular Algerian government. Other targets were the agents that protected foreign employees who took part on enginery works and, also, military convoys. The clashes between Salafists and Algerian agents happened daily and, practically every week, there was the arresting of extremists or attacks in their bases, with a high number of casualties.

Constantly raided by the army, the GSPC had to retreat to two main places: the northwestern berber region of Cabilia and to the Algerian Sahara, in the southern part of the country. Their main subsidiary kept the fighting against state representations in Cabilia and in the mountains of the Tell Atlas, around 200km and 300km away from the capital. This region was where Algiers and the main urban centers were located. In the large extensions of Sahara and in the borderlands with Niger, Mali and Mauritania operated the Saharan branch. At a first moment, it was led by Amari Saïfi, with whom the links among Islamists and smuggling started.

Bearing in mind its structure, the organization was divided into zones, being the most actives ones only three of them: zones 2, 5 and 9. Each one was headed by an emir and divided in *katibas* or brigades, which, by their turn, contained from three to four *fassilas*, each of them with 12 or 18 men

¹⁰ He was known as El-Para, because served in an Algerian parachutist team. The elite forces of some African francophone countries are called "Paras".

(Botha 2009). Zone 2, which had Hassan Hattab as emir, included Algiers, Bourmerdes, Tizi Ouzou and Cabilia. Zone 5 focused its attention in the eastern part of Algeria, near the border with Tunisia, and its emir was Saïfi already since 1999. Zone 9, by its turn, acted in the southern borders of Algeria.

The period of Hattab's leadership was characterized by moderation in the group's actions, by a scarce propagandistic activity and for this above-mentioned geographic division of operation zones. The group was oriented to focus on the national jihad at the expenses of a more internationalist perspective, which produced several critics from colleagues. As the civil war extinguished, and the group suffered defeats, the local commanders felt frustrated by the way under which the organization was led. No military advances were being achieved. Amari Saïfi soon challenged Hassan Hattab's authority when, contradicting the instruction regarding attacks on civilians, managed the kidnapping of 32 European tourists.

This was the first action directed against foreign interests. The fact took place between mid-February to late March, 2003, when the tourists were driving with their off-road vehicles around the locations of Ouargala and Djanet, in the Algerian Sahara. Seventeen of them were set free in mid-May after a rescue operation undertook by the Algerian army in the region of Taman-rasse¹¹, and a second group was released after paying ransom¹².

Thus, the most radical elements inside GSPC's direction decide to depose Hassan Hattab. In September 2003 his leadership was over, with his substitution for Nabil Sahroui (Abou Ibrahim Mustafa), old GIA commander. The organization did not, however, have great advances in the military realm. Following the kidnapping organized by Saïfi, a capture plan was undertaken, involving the security forces of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad in a persecution through the Sahara. The action began when, returning to Algeria, Saïfi and his men were detected by the satellite surveillance of the United States.

In March 16th 2004, after several battles that spread through these countries, El Para – one of the remaining classic leaders of the Islamic insurgency – was captured with some of his followers by the Chadian opposition

11 Southern Algerian wilaya, whose capital is the homonym city of Tamanrasset. This city is placed in the middle of the Ahaggar region and maintains a certain tuareg atmosphere, where it is possible to see in the streets numerous tuareg men of the Kel Ahaggar confederation, dressed in their traditional way and even riding camels through the main street. Due to its altitude – almost 1.400 m –, its climate is not that hot.

12 The group of tourists was composed by a majority of Germans, 16, followed by 10 Austrians, 4 Swiss men, a Dutch and a Swedish. The German government was the one which paid the ransom of 5 million dollars. See: Algeria Watch 2008.

group Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad¹³. With the mediation of Libya, they were delivered to Algeria. In another military setback in June 2004, the emir himself fell on combat together with his three highest ranked lieutenants, during a clash with Algerian soldiers in the region of Béjaïa, Northeast Algeria –which represented a huge blow to the group. The capture of Amari Saïfi and the death of Nabil Sahraoui implied the strengthening of the figure of Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud, also called Abdelmalek Droukdel and who became in 2004 the “National Emir” of GSPC.

In the political realm, the year was marked by the reelection of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in April 8th, with 85% of the votes. In his second mandate, the need for stability in the country and for the end of violence was still one of the primary objectives of the government’s agenda. To attain these aims, a new phase of the peace process was launched under the Project of the Peace and National Reconciliation Charter. On November the 29th, 2005, the law project was submitted to popular consult and approved on February 27th of the next year. With these national reconciliation initiatives, the figure of President Bouteflika got stronger.

This governmental policy presented a challenge to the new leadership of Abdelmalek Droukdel. The obstacle was posed as the government’s actions were getting stronger against the small number of remaining militants and the amnesty gave them the possibility of rendition, translated in the desertion of the combatants. In fact the number of troops of GSPC had dropped from the assumed 4,000 in 2002 to less than 500 in 2006.

In order to adapt to these new circumstances the group had, under the leadership of Droukdel, to change their tactics, their structures and strategic guidance and also to undertake their operations in a transnational scope. The former operation zones in which the group was divided were also changed. With the new restructuration only 4 zones remained: the central zone (Algeria), East (bordering Tunisia), South (Sahara-Sahel) and West (Mauritania). Militants from other nationalities were increasingly incorporated to the group, giving it a regional scope. In other words, their area of activity did not limit to Algerian territory. Networks of logistic support were created. Suicide attacks came as a new tactic and the group resumed actions against civilians, on the other hand, the group incorporated in their strategy a bigger effort regarding media divulgation¹⁴.

13 Mouvement pour la Démocratie et la Justice au Tchad (MDJT) is a rebel Chadian group opposed to Idriss Déby’s government. Their most important actions were concentrated between 1998 and 2003. It was led by Youssouf Togoïmi, old Defense Minister, and acted in the region of Bourkou-Ennedi-Tibesti, Northern Chad.

14 The renovation of the group’s website had been approved (www.almedad/jama3a/) and

Mokhtar Belmokhtar surged as a new leader as he took the direction of the southern zone of the Sahara in January 2005, leading 300 to 500 militants. One factor that strengthened this group was its responsibility for trans-border smuggling. The group started to use the traditional illicit trade routes in order to obtain resources – an idea supported principally by Droukdel himself. Tobacco was the most smuggled basic product, whose business started to be administered by Belmokhtar.

On June the 4th, 2005, took place the armed attack of the Lemgheity garrison, in northern Mauritania, located near the border with Mali and Algeria and 400km from Western Sahara. This action was the first undertook outside Algerian territory, and in which 150 GSPC militants took part. The operation was led by Belmokhtar, causing the death of 15 Mauritanian soldiers and injuring 17 others. It put the Mauritanian army in alert, forcing it to reinforce the vigilance in this desert triangular area. These events were the result of the GSPC's expansion through the region. In what regards Mauritania, it is said that the presence of GSPC's cells was limited, but certainly there were Mauritians who started training the secret bases of the organization in the Algerian desert. Furthermore, there were Islamists involved in the coup attempts of 2003 and 2005 against Ould Taya and even in the successful coup that overthrew him in 2005.

In addition, the group established contact with other extremist groups of Maghreb countries. As stated by Stephen Harmon, the main organizations with which they related were the Tunisian Islamic Fighting Group and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and, according to the author, this connection with national jihadist movements strengthened GSPC's role in the region (Harmon 2010, 20-21). At the same time, as it got weaker inside Algeria, the GSPC started an infiltration process towards neighboring countries through the vast borders and the desert zones. Islamic extremism in Algeria spread through the region by the hand of the Salafist militants headed by Abdelmaled Droukdel. The pinnacle of the organization enabled a greater association with the leaders of the Islamist international movement, headed by Al Qaeda.

The bonds of Algerian Islamists with Bin Laden: the creation of AQIM

The beginning of the internal war in Algeria, in the 1990s, coincided

the return of the periodic *Al-Jama'a*, whose last number was released in mid-2006. Its eight editions were published very irregularly. About the media activities of the group, see: Soriano 2010.

with the period after the end of the Afghan-Soviet war in 1989. This meant the victorious return of many mujahideens to their places of origin. The Algerian scenario was seen by these combatants as the ideal context to initiate the next great Islamic uprising. In the period between 1991 and 1996, Osama Bin Laden had set in Sudan¹⁵, presenting himself as an important leader of the Islamist movement. In Khartoum, there had representations of several Islamist groups, among them the GIA. Since, the links of Algerian closer to Bin Laden and the GIA's directions started. This was not an easy relationship and was affected by ups and downs.

According to Jason Burke (2004), there is little evidence that Bin Laden participated actively in GIA's activities, which does not mean that there was no relationship among them, as they had contact while in Khartoum. Nonetheless, the author states that

the Algerian security forces insist that Bin Laden helped GIA acquiring weapons in the beginning. However, this contradicts with declarations of former GIA combatants which said that their direction asked economic help from Bin Laden in 1994, but they did not like the ideological and operative control demanded by the Saudi as a condition (Burke 2004, 238).

Even though they did not consolidate formal bonds among leaderships, some Bin Laden's men did collaborate with GIA members, in a personal manner. Amari Saïfi, Bin Laden's brother-in-law, was sent to Algeria with 40 thousand dollars and the directives to support the Islamist faction that opposed the reconciliation with the government (Gray and Stockham 2008, 92). Saïfi was the director of a jihadist pension in Peshawar¹⁶ and leader of the Algerian contingent in Afghanistan, which allows us to believe he was a person trusted by Bin Laden. Regressing to Algerian he constituted the main core around which the GIA was formed. As the war advanced and GIA tactics became more violent and indiscriminate against civilians, the international rejection and from the Islamic world increased and, above all, from the Algerian population, exhausted by the situation. Other jihadist Arab groups, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, from Ayman al-Zawahiri¹⁷, and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, publicly broke with the GIA due to its excessive use

¹⁵ Due to the continuous presence of Islamic radicals in Khartoum, the US had included Sudan in its list of terrorist sponsors countries in 1993.

¹⁶ Western Pakistani city near the border with Afghanistan, where in 1988 Bin Laden organized, the first group of Islamists which would become Al Qaeda.

¹⁷ Born in Cairo in 1951, he was jailed and tortured during the repression that followed that assassination of Anwar Sadat. He fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, became Bin Laden's number two and currently is the head of Al Qaeda, following the death of Bin Laden.

of violence based on the takfir principle.

Amar Makhlulif, an Algerian who was trained in Al Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan, was one of the first to suggest to Hassan Hattab to part with the GIA (Harmon 2010, 15). This could be an evidence of Al Qaeda's role in trying to implode GIA from the inside. When the GSPC emerged, as it broke from GIA, Al Qaeda leaders welcomed the new group. The GSPC embraced Al Qaeda's ideology of global jihad, but Hattab was not eager to promise loyalty to Bin Laden and rather kept some distance. "(...) the GSPC, under Hattab's command, supported an alliance with Al Qaeda in which the organization would remain mostly independent while its members would be trained by Al Qaeda" (Botha 2009, 3)

Al Qaeda had supported Hattab because he represented an alternative to GIA, but soon showed its dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in Algeria in an important moment to the Islamist movement, as it was being attacked by the international coalition since 2001 in Afghanistan. To prove the existence of bonds among GSPC and Al Qaeda, Algerian authorities claimed that Imad ibn al-Wahid¹⁸, a Yemeni downed by the army near Batha in September 12th, 2002, was an emissary from Bin Laden in the Magreb and Sahel, which had recorded a message in which he affirmed Al Qaeda's approval of Algerian Salafism (Mellah and Rivoire 2005). In the year of 2002 Al Qaeda sent Abu Muhammad Al-Yamani to Algeria, but Amari Saïfi did not bother in presenting him to Hattab, whom he considered a just nominal emir (Gray and Stockham 2008, 93).

Bearing in mind the relation among Amari Saïfi and Bin Laden, Hattab's posture in distancing himself from the Saudi's direction is understandable. This attitude from Hattab and his fragile actuation in developing a more international and less nationalistic jihad, weighted on the decision of the other GSPC emirs in deposing him. So, when Sahraoui substituted Hattab, he defended a closer relationship with Bin Laden's organization. In September 11th, 2003, the anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center, Sahraoui submitted a letter to Bin Laden considered as an oath from the GSPC to Al Qaeda. However, this political maneuver did not have the expected results, at least during Sahraoui's short mandate, as there were still some doubts for the part of Bin Laden regarding the Algerian organization's real commitment towards the global jihad, which meant fighting the "distant enemy".

With Sahraoui's death in 2004, the new emir Abdelmalek Droukdel was the responsible for finally getting the organization into Al Qaeda's orbit,

¹⁸ Anneli Botha recalls this same fact but refers to the Yemeni as Emad Abdelwahid Ahmed Alwan. See: Botha 2009.

which is to say, to complete the integration process in the tactic and methodological realms among the two movements. The context of the new US invasion and allies in Iraq (or, as called by the Islamists, the “crusaders and the Zionists”), in 2003, was seized by Droukdel to sharpen these bonds. To do so, they set training camps for young recruits for the organization which would be sent to Iraq in order to fight the Western powers forces. According to Gray and Stockham, “Iraq constituted the first large-scale international participation of the Algerian jihadists since Afghanistan” (Gray and Stockham 2008, 94).

Droukdel also declared his support to Abu Musab al Zarqawi’s¹⁹ network, which admitted Algerians – principally the younger ones – willing to fight in Iraq. Moreover, a public letter from Droukdel to Al Zarqawi was released where the former recalled the necessity of attacking French soldiers and expressed his greetings about the murder of two Algerian diplomats in Baghdad²⁰. According to North-American military sources, 20% of the suicide attacks in Iraq had Algerian origin (Gray and Stockham 2008, 94). In 2006, the GSPC prepared to formalize its reorientation process towards Al Qaeda’s principles. Thus, in early 2007, the Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb was created, a date that was determined by the change of name of the organization²¹.

In January 2007, the group announced its new identity: “Al-Qaeda in Northern Islamic Africa”, which later would be changed to the official Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Since then, relations between Abdelmalek Droukdel leader of the GSPC, and Abu Obeida Youssef²², former chief of the group’s Council of Notables, deteriorated. The main reason for this was the announcement of GSPC’s affiliation to the international Al Qaeda’s network. The Council of Notables was dismissed, as it was not consulted in the creation of the new organization, and finally restructured by Droukdel, ratified as “National Emir”. It was recognized, thus, his capacity of leadership, to be reaffirmed in this post. From this date on, July 25th 2007, Ayman Al Zawahiri – Al Qaeda’s main strategist – began to assist this organization that exalted its

19 Leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

20 The assassination of two Algerian diplomats by jihadists in Iraqi, in July 2003, had a huge impact in the country. FIS’ number two, Ali Belhadj, who had been released in the same month after a 12 year imprisonment period, were detained on July 27th after being accused of supporting terrorism in some declarations regarding the killing, in the Qatari jail Al Jazeera.

21 In June 2007, the leader of AQIM said that the organization “was created to extol God’s word and of the Quran, and to free Maghreb’s people of the hand of corrupts, tyrants and traitors, rebuilding the society in the grounds of justice, religion and morality, which will lead to spiritual, geographic and political unity, ending divisions and divergences”. See: Reinares 2010.

22 “Abu Obeida Youssef” or “Youssef the Annabi” were the alias of Yassid Embarek.

position as Al Qaeda representative in the Maghreb.

According to a report from the German secret services of 2009, related to the development of Al Qaeda's networks around the world, Oscar López Fonseca states that Al Qaeda – its main network – is increasingly less a hierarchical terrorist organization and more a cloudy amount of jihadist groups. Moreover, it has been showing a tendency regarding the tactic formation of affiliated groups, in which it impelled local organizations and cells in the attacks, leaving to them the whole planning and execution of the terrorist acts²³.

To some researchers, the adoption of Al Qaeda's brand was a strategy of GSPC due to its recent operational debility. Anneli Botha (2009) affirms that Al Qaeda would be an ideological reference and, by its turn, could increase its influence in the Maghreb zone. Alternatively, Gray and Stockham (2008) see the name changing as the culmination of an evolution of several years from the Algerian uprising to its full integration to Al Qaeda, rather than a propaganda act or an act of desperation. Both stances have valid elements, as it is a step of advance towards a farer-reaching entity.

For his part, Ronan Farrell points that “the association with Al Qaeda seems to be at a large extent rhetoric, in the tactical as well as in the strategic realm, as the AQIM had adopted the speech, the techniques and the long-term objectives of Bin Laden's organization, without having much evidence of a logistic or financial relations between the two” (Farrell 2012). To say that the existence of direct financial and logistic links among central Al Qaeda and AQIM can't be proven, is not the same as to say the latter can't be placed in the orbit of the international Islamist movement led at the time by Bin Laden, and at the same time to maintain its own autonomy and structure.

Terrorist Incidents in Algeria

The International Center for Terrorism Studies of Washington DC, USA, and the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies of Virginia, released a series of four reports²⁴ whose responsible was Yonah Alexander, in which the

23 According to the referred German secret services report about the many Al Qaeda ramifications, of 2009, in Africa there were at least six groups that maintained links with the network run by Bin Laden. The largest of the six is AQIM, being the rest of them: the racial Islamic militia Al Shabbab, which fights the Somali government; the Egyptian Al Gamaa Al Islamiya; the Sudanese Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Niles; the self-entitled Nigerian Talibans (Boko Haram), some members of which had shown their will in incorporating to AQIM and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (GICL). See: López Fonseca 2009.

24 The four reports, made under Yonah Alexander's coordination, are: Maghreb & Sahel Terrorism: Addressing the Rising Threat from al-Qaeda & other Terrorists in North & West/Cen-

terrorist incidents produced in Maghreb and Sahel between 2001 and 2012 were listed. These papers contained the terrorist acts notified by different local media vehicles, such as *El Watan* and *Magharebia*, in chronological order. Looking at these reports, it is perceivable that they were elaborated following Western patterns and were directed towards North-American interests. In one of the recommendations given by the 2012 report, it is said that the USA should expand its anti-terrorist technical assistance through the region, and that they should dismantle the refugee camps of the Polisario Front in Tindouf so that they could no longer serve as a recruitment base for terrorist and smugglers (Alexander 2012, 6-7).

Reading the information compiled by these documents regarding three Western Sahel countries, Mauritania, Mali and Niger, some contradictory aspects in this investigation is perceived regarding their classification of terrorists. Following its descriptions, these institutes defined as terrorist attacks the actions of the *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice* inside Niger. In this organization Nigerien tuaregs that fight against Niamey's government for their political and economic rights were included. In Mali's case, most of the facts regarded as terrorists between 2007 and 2009 are attributed to tuareg militias which during these years held another of their historic rebellions against Bamako. These examples show the political and ideological stances of its authors.

The first action claimed by AQIM in Niger did not happen until December 18th, 2008, when they kidnapped the UN special envoy altogether with his assistant; in Mali, the first report of tourist kidnapping undertaken by AQIM members was in 2009. It was in this year that their actions started in the northern part of Mali: on July 11th, 2009, they murdered the intelligence official Lamana Ould Cheikh at his home in Timbuktu, following orders by the cells under Abou Zeid responsibility. This action provoked the response from the army, in which about 26 Islamists were detained near the border with Algerian. On January 5th, a grenade exploded in the French embassy in Bamako. In Mauritania, the first action with reportedly AQIM participation was on December 26th, 2007, when a military patrol was attacked. On February the 1st, 2008, an armed man opened fire against the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott. In 2009 a North-American was murdered in this same capital and, also, a suicide bomber exploded near the French embassy in the country.

The rest of the attacks in these three countries relate, fundamentally,

tral Africa of January 2010; The Consequences of Terrorism: An Update on al-Qaeda and other Terrorist Threats in the Sahel & Maghreb of 2011; Special Update Report Terrorism in North, West, & Central Africa: From 9/11 to the Arab Spring; Terrorism in North Africa & the Sahel in 2012: Global Reach & Implications, of 2013.

to the kidnapping of Western people as it can be seen in annex 13. Despite their approach, these reports were of great use as they enabled the use of the same data to get other results. In the reports, just the following table (Alexander 2013, 20) appears as processed information, where are displayed the set of attacks considered by its authors as terrorists.

Data Table - Terrorism Incidents in Maghreb & Sahel since Sept. 11, 2001

TIMELINE	YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
NORTH & WEST/CENTRAL AFRICA NATIONS	Totals: 1,332 attacks	21 attacks	55 attacks	31 attacks	44 attacks	104 attacks	153 attacks	161 attacks	152 attacks	204 attacks	178 attacks	185 attacks	144 attacks
ALGERIA	1,234 attacks	20	54	28	39	93	120	110	121	185	168	164	132
CHAD	58 attacks				3	6	28	14	6		1		
LIBYA	7 attack						1						6
MALI	54 attacks			1	1	2	3	10	11	9	4	8	5
MAURITANIA	27 attacks				1	3		4	4	6	2	7	
MOROCCO	9 attacks			2				5				2	
NIGER	39 attacks						1	18	9	4	3	3	1
TUNISIA	4 attacks	1	1						1			1	

Undoubtedly, Algeria has been the country that suffered the most with AQIM terrorist acts, which was why the information given by the reports was quite ample, enabling the processing of data from each of the Algerian press offices. To this research 23 variables were extracted as a result of computing the 1234 attacks notified by the Algerian press. With a more detailed analysis of each of these incidents, the following tables and charts were elaborated:

Table I - Algeria: Victims of Terrorist Attacks														
Indicators/Year		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Civil Victims	Killed	55	183	57	67	101	69	130	53	60	53	49	26	903
	Injured	68	115	36	29	75	98	591	139	48	113	90	55	1457
Subtotal		123	298	93	96	176	167	721	192	108	166	139	81	2360
Military Victims	Killed	9	29	67	66	141	75	105	130	179	84	87	36	1008
	Injured	4	16	13	106	52	105	135	195	219	218	181	151	1395
Subtotal		13	45	80	172	193	180	240	325	398	302	268	187	2403
Total		136	343	173	268	369	347	961	517	506	468	407	268	4763
Kidnappings	Nationals	2	6	5	2	16	23	4	6	23	22	18	14	141
	Foreigners			32				3			1	4	3	43

Table 2 - Algeria - Terrorist Incidents

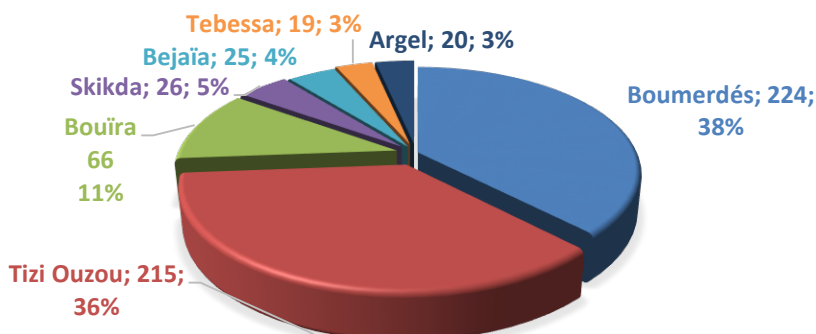
Indicators/Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Bomb explosions	3	18	5	14	30	34	50	49	91	94	84	72	544
Car bombs				1			2	5	1	1	1	2	13
Suicidal						1	3	10	1	2	7	2	26
Road bombs			1				1	9	13	9	12	6	51
Homemade bombs		7	1	3	1	3	7	6	26	13	3	5	75
Defused bombs		2		1	1	1	4	17	21	21	31	8	107
Ambushes		4	4	5	2	5	4	4	8	3			39
Attacks to public places		9		2	3	7	5	1	1		6	1	35
Simultaneous Attacks							9	6	3		7	2	27
Muslim Casualties		1				5	48	21		3			78
Muslims arrested								25					25

Table 3 - Algeria - Regions most affected by terrorist incidents

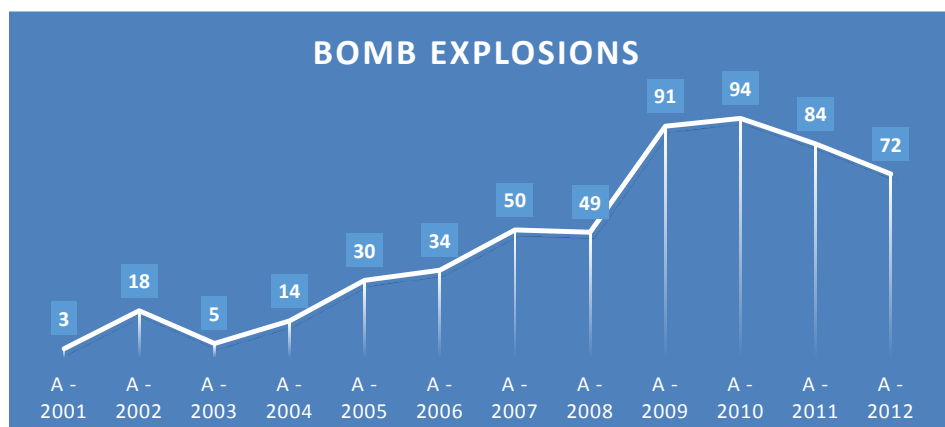
Indicators/Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Boumerdés			1	16	32	22	21	32	28	42	30	224
Tizi Ouzou	2	3	1	8	12	17	24	42	35	42	29	215
Bouïra	1		2	2	4	6	9	5	9	16	12	66
Skikda			2	4	5	2	6	3	2		2	26
Béjaïa			1			1	2	7	11	1	2	25
Tebessa								11			8	19
Argel	3	3	4	1		2	4	3				20

One of the variables used was the one of “attacks attributed to: GIA, GSPC and AQIM”. The result showed that of these attacks only 13 were attributed to GIA between 2001 and 2003; a total of 74 to the GSPC between 2001 and 2006; and 49 to the AQIM, between 2007 and 2012. These numbers express a methodological problem, as they solely point the amount of actions which these organizations claimed as theirs. Most of the reports, between 2007 and 2012, did not specify which of these groups claimed the attacks. The majority of the terrorist actions in this same period took place in the provinces of Boumerdés, Tizi Ouzou and Bouira, which are part of the mountain region of Cabilia, where AQIM has its main base. This allows us to say that most of the attacks reported were undertaken by members or recruits from the AQIM, the organization which has the military capacity to hold this kind of action in the region. More than 70% of the registered attacks took place in the Boumerdés and Tizi Ouzou provinces, as it can be seen by the following chart.

Algeria: Regions Most Affected by Terrorist Actions

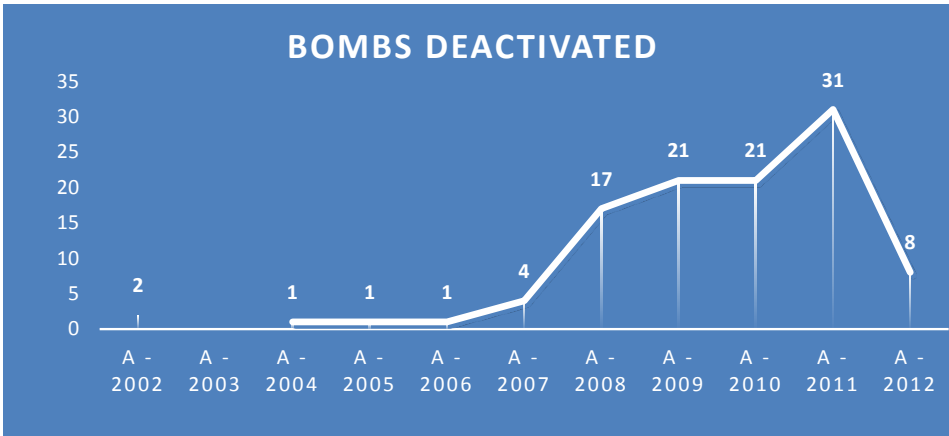


Different types of attacks were compiled in Table II. The use of explosives has been the most used method by the AQIM inside urban zones in Algeria. Inside this variable, there are diverse variations such as car-bombs, road bombs, homemade bombs or improvised explosive devices (IED), mine explosions, remote control bombs or cell phone bombs, the use of fanatics who suicide in public places or that exploded cars against public facilities such as police offices, simultaneous explosions and bombs hid inside police patrols or even inside corpses. The use of these artifacts, which in most of the cases were roughly fabricated, increased significantly until 2009 and 2010.



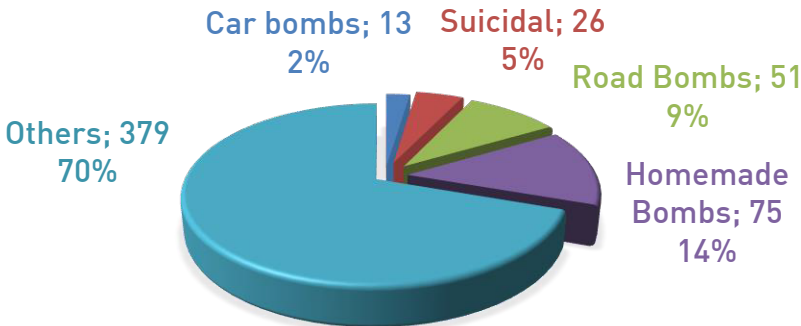
The actions undertaken by the Algerian army and special forces towards the dismantling of explosive devices reduced the effectiveness of this kind of attack in Algeria. Observing the periods between 2010 and 2011 in the charts the numbers indicate an inverse relation among the increase of bomb

deactivation and the significant diminution of the explosions. The 2012 bomb detonations resulted much less effective about the number of affected people. A great part of the attacks in this year did not produce a large number of mortal victims, which were also reduced by these actions.



In this chart AQIM's capacity in installing bombs in Algeria is displayed. The 70% of bombs set that were detonated, were not classified by the press in any of the pointed categories. Among the kind of devices used, stand out the roughly produced and handmade ones. If we add the total of detonated bombs with the amount of devices dismantled by the army, it can be affirmed that the explosive power in the hands of Islamist cells has been much bigger.

Bomb Explosions: 2001-2012



The second kind of action employed by part of AQIM in Algeria has been ambushes. Included in this variable were ambushes against police pa-

trols, military convoys and the installation of fake controls in highways by using uniforms of the Algerian army. The rest of the attacks were done through skirmishes or shootings among moderate Islamists and official forces, attacks against control posts, army garrisons and the kidnapping of military personnel. On January 17th, 2002, Mohamed Laid Khelfi, security chief of the Ilizi region, was kidnapped near the border with Libya.

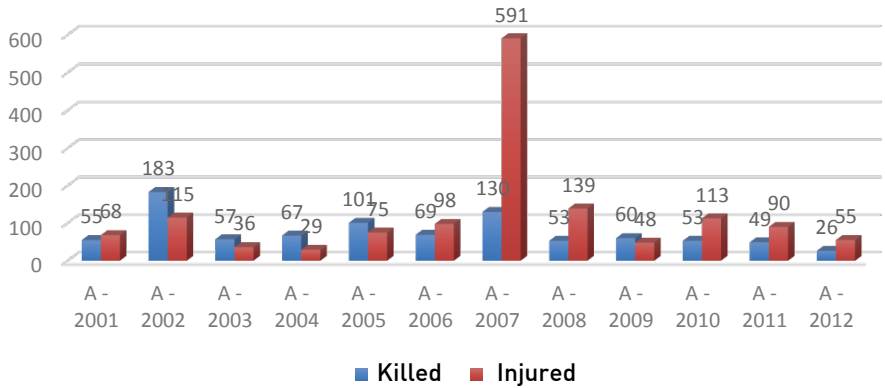
The attacks in public locations are referred to in a broad variety of actions in which are included armed attacks to cafeterias, explosions in cinemas and stadiums, hijacking of passenger buses and simple but mortal attacks in funerals or weddings. The explosion of lots of car bombs during small periods of time has been a mode of simultaneous attack equally employed. Its level of impact in society is much bigger due to the high number of victims it can provoke, among which are not only the people who were in the place, but also the ones who had gone there to help the wounded.

Another group of attacks focused against apartment complexes and in the assassination of students or government figures as members of the parliament, regional political leaders or local authorities. Between 2006 and 2012 at least 29 political figures were killed, pertaining to different levels inside state apparatus. These killings were also directed against people suspected of collaboration with security services, government whistleblowers or Islamists included in the amnesty process, the so-called deserters of the Islamist cause. In 2011, at least five “regretted” terrorist were physically eliminated by AQIM. They have undertaken, moreover, sabotages in economic facilities of the country, such as the pipelines of the National Gas Company.

About Table I, the one referring to victims of terrorist attacks, it is necessary to acknowledge that these numbers express an estimate minimum of the amount of people affected and, also, who had been noted in the very same moment of the terrorist act. All reports indicate the immediate victims, and none of the cases consulted affirmed how many of the wounded, for example, died after. An additional problem is that in some of the reports it was not specified the exact number of deaths and wounds, rather attributing an indeterminate sum. In other cases a concrete number was given, but without defining how much of it corresponded to military forces and how much to civilians. This means that the real number of victims is much bigger than these numbers recognize. Nonetheless, lots of interpretations could be done with the data gathered, as well as to point some general tendencies.

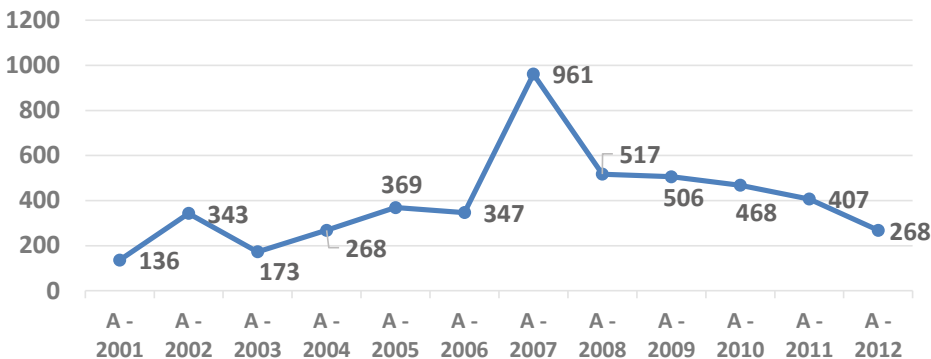
A first observation to be done at first sight is that the year of 2007 was undoubtedly the most violent inside Algeria. This date coincides with the year of creation and adoption of the new fight conceptions inside AQIM. The civilian victims were considerable.

Civilian Victims



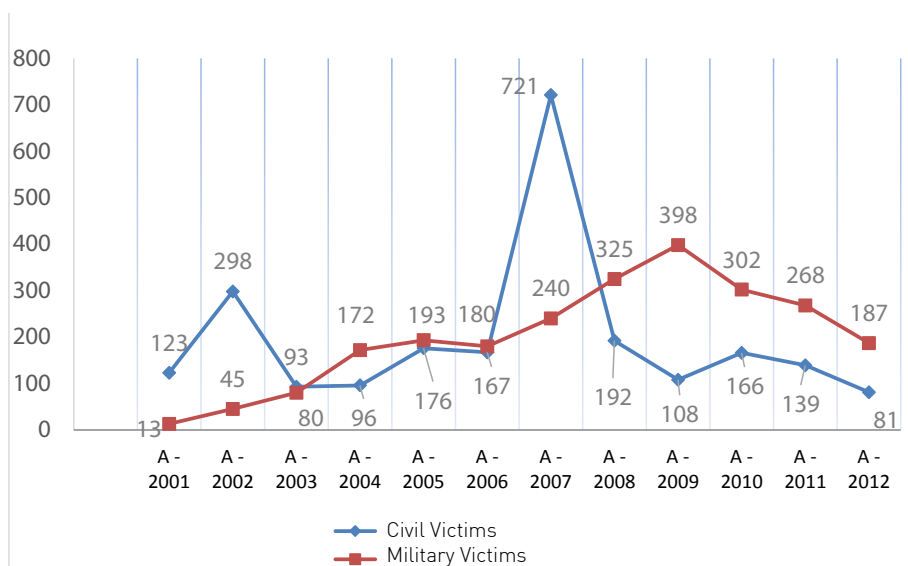
In the 2007-2012 period the amount of victims decreased more than three times than the one in 2007, falling to 961 from a former amount of 268. From 2007 on the general tendency was of a permanent decline of the number of victims – including civilian and military. This was due to the work done by the security forces in neutralizing the terrorist actions, a factor related to the rising tendency in deactivating bombs set by the Islamists, as it is shown in the chart related to this variable, which was explained above.

Algeria: Civilian Victims of Terrorist Attacks



Nonetheless, if a comparative analysis is made having in mind the military and civilian victims in separate, it follows the conclusion that the majority of the affected people between 2007 and 2012 pertains to the military sector – soldiers, security personnel, police and officials.

Algeria Victims of Terrorist Attacks

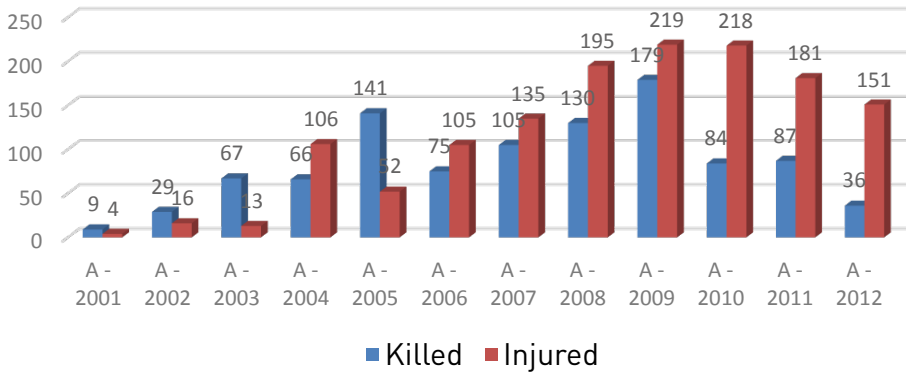


In 2007, when AQIM was created, the organization broke with the principle instituted by Hassan Hattab of not focusing the attacks against civilians. Just in 2007 the numbers cited above of civil deaths and wounds were produced. This was not due to an abandonment of this method by part of the group's leaders, but rather because they were increasingly surrounded by the army. Most of civilians were wounded in the indiscriminate explosive attacks when they were trapped in crossfire or trying to rescue an injured.

Regarding the kidnappings, activity for which the AQIM became known internationally, the numbers indicate that in Algeria's case the ones directed against Algerians themselves were more numerous than against foreigners, tourists and workers. The most widely known case was the one of 2003, when the GSPC kidnapped 32 European tourists. In 2007, AQIM kidnapped three Chinese workers. The actions against foreigners in the country were very marginal. This is an example that shows that the most affected by attacks and kidnappings undertaken by Islamic terrorist, were the Muslims,

rather than Westerners.

Military Victims



Recent Developments (2013-2014)

The “Arab Spring”, triggered in Northern Africa, provoked disturbances and political change in Tunisia and Egypt, while in other scenarios it was used as a pretext to depose legitimate governments as the one of Libya. In particular, the disarticulation of the Libyan state, as a result of the NATO invasion, provoked widespread destabilization in the Sahel region, in which the main example was the Islamist offensive against Bamako and the following French-African military intervention in Mali. The situation described was identified as a direct menace to Algeria’s security, as all of its borders in east, south and southwest flanks were under military pressure. This was the favorable context for the AQIM Islamists to reactivate their actions inside Algeria.

The most significant example was the attack against a gas facility in In Amenas, in eastern Algeria, which pertained to British Petroleum. This fact happened on January 16th, 2013, five days after the French intervention in Mali. The action was claimed by Belmokhtar’s group, which had split up from AQIM in December 2012 (Oumar 2013). This action was a response to the developments in Mali and a means to show AQIM its capacity to conduct large-scale operations. They seized 792 hostages, among Algerian and foreign workers, executing 23 of them of British, French and North-American nationalities. This fact became known as the hostage crisis and provoked a strong military response from the Algerian army.

According to the fifth report of the Inter-University for Terrorism Studies, during the rest of 2013 terrorist actions showed a tendency of reduction. Besides the In Amenas attack, just 26 cases of civil victims were reported, most of them injuries, while the military was still the most affected sector, with almost 60 deaths and 14 injuries – still, comparing with former years, the number was way smaller. The same tendency was shown regarding the amount of bomb explosions: in comparison with 2012, with 72 cases, 2013 had only 27, far less than half of the former. About the geographic distribution of the actions, these were still concentrated in the Cabilia region: in Bouira (8 attacks), Tizi Ouzou (7) and Boumerdés (4) (Alexander 2014). So, in comparison with 2012, the attacks as well as the victims from terrorist attacks diminished to less than half.

In the regard of terrorist groups' actions, the most important fact of 2014 at an international level, was the rise of the self-entitled "Islamic State" (IS) and of its caliphate created between Syria and Iraq. Its emergency had an impact on the rest of the former Al Qaeda followers around the world, causing important ruptures among its affiliate groups which, till then, led the global jihad and was displaced by the new group. This influence also was felt inside AQIM, whose command center is in Algeria. The contradictions among the two groups started in July 2014, when the IS demanded AQIM's loyalty for its "caliphate". The leader of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel, rejected the request and restated his fidelity to Al Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's successor in Al Qaeda. Groups such as Ansar al-Sharia (The Supporters of the Sharia) in Tunisia and Libya had expressed their loyalty to Al Baghdadi, Islamic State's "caliph", even raising the possibility of creating a group called Islamic State of the Islamic Maghreb (ISIM).

In Algeria's case, the separation did not linger and, in September 2014, emerged the organization called *Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria*. The militia is headed by Gouri Abdelmalek²⁵, known as Jaled Abu Suleiman, who declared his loyalty to the Islamic State. Obviously it is a small cell without great possibilities of development, but that complicates even more the relations among Algerian Islamist radicals. These fragmentations are an example of their debilities in Algeria. Also they show that: Algeria terrorist cells are increasingly disarticulated; they do not have popular support at all; their actions concentrate on increasingly less points of national geography, mostly in the isolated mountains of Cabilia and in some determined places of Sahara; and, at last, the Algerian state and armed forces have a solid and radical strategy to

25 Gouri Abdelmalek was AQIM's chief in the central region of Algeria. Known as Jaled Abu Suleiman, he is 36 and known as comes from the city of Boumerdés. He had been condemned to death for his involvement in the death attacks against a commissary in Thenia of 2008, and spent some years in Tizi Ouzou's jail.

completely eliminate these remaining terrorists and guarantee the security of Algeria's citizens, contributing, with their experience, to the antiterrorist fight in the Sahel region.

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ABSTRACT

The present article addresses radical Islamism in Algeria, encompassing the period between the rise and radicalization of the first Islamist groups, during the Civil War (1992-2002), and their activities in recent years. The study analyses aspects such as the tactics used by them, the rise of new groups and the fall of the old ones, as well as the impacts of these developments on the political scenario of Algeria.

KEYWORDS

Algeria; Islamism; Terrorism.

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