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Country Report on Terrorism 2013 - Chapter 2 - Algeria

Overview: Algeria remained a key U.S. counterterrorism partner. Within Algeria, al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) remained the most active terrorist threat. AQIM attacked Algerian security forces, local government targets, and westerners in the Sahel, operating primarily in the mountainous areas east of Algiers and in the expansive desert regions near Algeria's southern border.

The security situation in neighboring countries, the threat of retaliatory attacks following the international military intervention in Mali, the proliferation of weapons smuggled out of Libya, low-intensity violence in the south central and northeast border zones and along the Algeria-Tunisia border all contributed to the terrorist threat to Algeria.

Once part of AQIM, the al-Mulathamun Battalion (AMB) became a separate organization in late 2012 and its sub-battalion, "Those Who Sign in Blood," led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, claimed responsibility for the January 16, 2013 attack against a gas facility near In Amenas, Algeria. In August 2013, the Mali-based Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and AMB announced that the two organizations merged and adopted the name al-Murabitoun.

Algeria has a long history of fighting terrorism, and continued its aggressive campaign against AQIM. In 2013, Algerian security forces decreased the number of successful terrorist attacks, sustained pressure on the group's Algeria-based leadership, seized equipment and arms caches, and further isolated AQIM in the north, in the area east of Algiers, and in the southeast. Press sources reported 27 terrorists surrendered under the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation in 2013, in exchange for amnesty measures.

Algeria's sustained military, security, and policing efforts undercut AQIM's capabilities in northern Algeria, largely limiting the group's operations to more rural areas. However, AQIM's Sahel-based battalions have increasingly taken advantage of regional instability to expand their areas of control and assert autonomy after long serving as support nodes for Algeria-based AQIM. The Algerian government sees AQIM and its affiliates as posing a threat comparable to violent criminal organizations, and has frequently cited links between AQIM and narco-traffickers in the Sahel.

The Government of Algeria maintains – and advocates that others also maintain – a strict “no concessions” policy with regard to individuals or groups holding its citizens hostage. Algeria played a leadership role in the Global Counterterrorism Forum's (GCTF's) efforts to raise awareness among governments to prevent the payment of ransoms to terrorist organizations.

2013 Terrorist Incidents: AQIM continued attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), bombings, false roadblocks, kidnappings, and ambushes in areas east and south of Algiers. The press reported at least 196

terrorist acts in 2013. As in years past, Algeria experienced a spike in terrorist incidents during Ramadan. In 2013, however, the Algerian government observed AQIM's yearly Ramadan offensive was significantly reduced relative to the past decade.

On January 16, AMB attacked the Tiguentourine gas facility (a joint venture among Algerian, British, and Norwegian companies) near In Amenas, in southeastern Algeria. Over 800 people were taken hostage for four days and the attackers killed 39 foreign hostages, including three U.S. citizens. The group's leader, Algerian national Mokhtar Belmokhtar, remains a threat and was at-large in the region, at year's end.

There is a high threat of kidnapping in isolated parts of Algeria. Although much lower profile than the kidnappings of westerners by AQIM in neighboring Mali, kidnappings of Algerian citizens continued to occur within the country's borders. In October, Foreign Minister Lamamra said the four Algerian diplomats kidnapped in April 2012 from the Algerian consulate in northern Mali are alive and that the government is fully mobilized to ensure the diplomats' release. MUJAO claimed responsibility for the kidnapping.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Algeria amended Article 87 of the Penal Code in 2013 to define terrorist acts in accordance with relevant international terrorism conventions. In 2013, Algeria made efforts to build the capacity of the National Gendarmerie's National Institute of Forensic Science and Criminology to eventually obtain International Organization for Standardization certification. Algeria also acquired the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation's Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) – a milestone in creating a platform for future sharing of DNA data with other Algerian and international partners.

The Government of Algeria has multiple law enforcement, intelligence, and security agencies with delineated responsibilities to address counterterrorism, counter-intelligence, media monitoring, investigations, border security, crisis response, and anti-corruption. These include the National Gendarmerie, the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) and the Department of National Security (DGSN). In 2013, the Algerian President reorganized parts of the DRS, removing some judicial police authority to units under the control of the Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of Staff.

The Government of Algeria has demonstrated that it has the will and capability to investigate and to disrupt terrorist and criminal activity. Since 2010, the Algerian government has increased the number of police officers from 166,348 to 200,000, and has worked to professionalize and modernize its police force.

Algerian security forces, primarily the Gendarmerie under the Ministry of National Defense, continued to conduct periodic sweep operations in the Kabylie region southeast of the capital to capture AQIM fighters. Algerian law enforcement has been effective in protecting diplomatic missions and strengthening security assets when necessary.

Algerian security forces made a number of arrests in 2013. As of November, press reported that security forces arrested 545 individuals on terrorist charges, although it is difficult to confirm the accuracy of this number. As of mid-December, 220 terrorists were killed in 2013, according to the President of the Judicial Unit for the Application of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, a consultative body to the Algerian Office of the Presidency.

In 2013, Algerian law-enforcement personnel participated in a variety of U.S. Department of State Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program courses that were designed to enhance investigative and screening capacities, strengthen border security, prevent terrorist transit or operations, and build response capacity to critical incidents. The majority of these courses combined students from different ministries in an effort to promote inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination in law enforcement.

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program and the Algerian Gendarmerie Nationale focused on targeted capacity-building consultations and training in forensics, criminal investigation, and border security.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Algeria is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. In July 2013, Algeria was admitted as a member of the Egmont Group, an informal network of financial intelligence units. In October 2013, the FATF called on Algeria to continue working on its action plan and address its remaining deficiencies: adequately criminalizing terrorist financing and establishing and implementing an adequate legal framework for identifying, tracing, and freezing terrorist assets. Despite the FATF action in October, the Algerian government maintained that it had taken measures sufficient to meet international standards. Measures included building on 2012 legislation regarding the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing, and authorizing judges to freeze or seize funds belonging to terrorist organizations. Algeria has a cash-based economy and a vast informal sector that poses challenges to monitoring and regulating money and value transfer services. For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the 2014

International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume 2, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Regional and International Cooperation: Algeria is a founding member of the GCTF and co-chairs the group's Sahel Working Group (SWG), in which capacity it championed the development of the Algiers Memorandum on Good Practices on Preventing and Denying the Benefits of Kidnapping for Ransom by Terrorists. In September, the Governments of Algeria and Canada announced that they would seek to renew their terms as co-chairs until 2015. Algeria hosted the GCTF-SWG's second plenary meeting in June. Regional and international experts discussed donor coordination and programming in the Sahel and the evolution of local terrorism-related threats. Also in June, with the active support of the United States and the United Kingdom, the G-8 Summit expressed support for the principles contained in the Algiers Memorandum.

In September 2010, Algeria in collaboration with Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, formed the Comité d'État-Major Opérationnel Conjoint (CEMOC). Algeria participated in CEMOC meetings in March and November. Algeria is home to the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (CAERT) of the AU and CEMOC's Liaison and Fusion Center for information sharing. The Algerian government supported CAERT's Seventh Annual Focal Points Meeting in December that examined current and future CAERT Strategic Plans, terrorist threats in Africa, radicalization to violence and violent extremism, and terrorist financing.

Algeria also participates in the 5+5 Defense Initiative, which brings together five European and five North African countries to address security issues in the Western Mediterranean.

The Algerian Prime Minister and his Libyan and Tunisian counterparts met in January 2013 to enhance security along their common borders to reduce the flow of arms and drugs and organized crime. Measures included new joint checkpoints and patrols along the frontiers, which stretch for miles through sparsely-populated desert. In September, Algeria participated in a two-day workshop in Tripoli on enhancing operational land border security cooperation in the Sahel-Saharan region. In November in Rabat, Algeria participated in the second conference on regional border security with counterparts from the Sahel and Maghreb countries.

While Morocco and Algeria both participated in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and the GCTF, the level of their bilateral CT cooperation did not improve. Algeria and Morocco's political disagreement over the Western Sahara remained an impediment to bilateral and regional counterterrorism cooperation in 2013.

Countering Radicalization to Violence and Violent Extremism: Algeria's 2006 Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation offered amnesty to former terrorists who laid down their weapons and disavowed violence. Perpetrators of particularly egregious acts, such as rape and bombings, were excluded from this amnesty. The program was controversial but succeeded in demobilizing a number of former militants.

The Algerian government appoints, trains, and pays the salaries of imams. The penal code outlines strict punishments, including fines and prison sentences, for anyone other than a government-designated imam who preaches in a mosque. The Algerian government monitors mosques for possible security-related offenses and prohibits the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours. The government has the authority to pre-screen and approve sermons before they are delivered during Friday prayers, but more often it provides preapproved sermon topics prior to Friday prayers. In practice, each province and county employed religious officials to review sermon content. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' educational commission is responsible for establishing policies for hiring teachers at Quranic schools and ensuring that all imams are well qualified and follow governmental guidelines aimed at stemming violent extremism.