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This report is based on the views expressed during, and short papers contributed by speakers at, a workshop organised by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service as part of its academic outreach program. Offered as a means to support ongoing discussion, the report does not constitute an analytical document, nor does it represent any formal position of the organisations involved. The workshop was conducted under the Chatham House rule; therefore no attributions are made and the identity of speakers and participants is not disclosed.

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TERRORISM IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

THE EXPANSION OF A REGIONAL THREAT?

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

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THE WORKSHOP AND ITS OBJECTIVES

On 14 October 2016, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) hosted a workshop to examine the security situation in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel region. Organised under the CSIS Academic Outreach (AO) program, the event sought to foster a greater understanding of threats arising from transnational jihadist groups operating through the region against Western interests.

Held under the Chatham House rule, the workshop was designed around the work of several researchers from North America, the Middle East and Europe. The event explored the local roots of groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the dynamics influencing the threat they pose. It examined the jihadists' relationship with local insurgencies and links to illicit cross-border trafficking, as well as their potential near-term prospects. The workshop also featured presentations on Daesh's emergence and potential to expand in Libya. The papers presented at the event form the basis of this report. The entirety of this report reflects the views of those independent experts, not those of CSIS.

The AO program at CSIS, established in 2008, aims to promote a dialogue between intelligence practitioners and leading specialists from a wide variety of disciplines and cultural backgrounds working in universities, think-tanks, business and other research institutions in Canada and abroad. It may be that some of our interlocutors hold ideas or promote findings that conflict with the views and analysis of the Service, but it is for this specific reason that there is value to engage in this kind of conversation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional vulnerability to terrorism

The countries of North and West Africa are linked by the Sahara Desert and the smaller but parallel Sahel region across the desert's southern extremity. Similar social, economic, structural and historical drivers have made them, to different degrees, vulnerable to insurgencies, criminal trafficking and religiously-inspired terrorism. Many of those countries have become theatres of conflict in which Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Daesh¹ challenge state authority and each other. The most violent confrontations between regional state authorities and terrorist organisations are taking place in Libya and Mali, while Mauritania, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia are also implicated because of their strategic location in the Sahara, Sahel or both.

The region has a long history of terrorism. Mujahedeen fighters returned from Afghanistan in the early 1990s, eventually forming the Salafist Group for Preaching and Jihad (GSPC)², one of the violent extremist groups resisting the Algerian government after the cancellation of elections in 1991. When the insurgency was defeated, they dispersed to other parts of the region. Extremists were also present in Libya before the 2011 revolution ousted Muammar Gaddafi.

The trajectories of AQIM and Daesh in the region are linked to their ability to exploit the vulnerabilities of the countries in which they attempt to embed themselves.

Libya has been divided between two rival government coalitions, and the recent attempt to install a Government of National Accord to implement the Libyan Political Agreement has only resulted in the creation of a third rival government. The fragmentation of political authority has made it easier for rival militias to seize power. Most of these militias represent local clan families, which were suppressed, not eliminated, under the Gaddafi regime. Al-Qaeda has successfully inserted itself into the Libyan conflict; Daesh has been driven from its last Libyan urban stronghold, Sirte.

The government of Mali is also weak, has neglected the northern part of the country, and excluded from power potentially important local interests. AQIM gained a significant foothold there, but the French military intervention of 2013 killed many fighters and scattered others to other parts of the region. Despite this setback, AQIM has increased its tempo of attacks and is now more entrenched than before. However, Daesh has not been able to establish a lasting territorial presence.

Contrasting terrorist strategies

The reason for the successes of AQIM and the defeats of Daesh can be attributed to those groups' different strategies for inserting themselves into local struggles.

Daesh has had great success until recently in Iraq and Syria because it represented a local Sunni reaction to Shia dominance in both countries. The magnetism of its extremist narrative, attention to communications and recruitment, as well as the drawing power of the grand idea of a 'caliphate' gave Daesh the capacity to recruit regional and international fighters.

However, the epochal narrative is not always relevant to extremists engaged in complex local struggles for power, and the brutality of Daesh alienates local populations and generates strong popular and military reactions.

Al-Qaeda (AQ) has adopted a different strategy, not only in North Africa and the Sahel, but everywhere. This is clearly illustrated in Syria, where Jabhat Al-Nusra (JAN) took care to distinguish itself from Daesh by working with local populations, providing necessary services and deliberately avoiding the kind of violence to opponents and local populations which Daesh celebrated and publicised. When JAN changed its name to Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham, and ostensibly ended its affiliation with Al-Qaeda, it was simply implementing a strategy that the latter is also using in Africa.

In Mali, Al-Qaeda has reestablished its influence by submerging its own AQ identity and embedding itself with local groups in the north with grievances against the government. Al-Qaeda operatives intermarry with local clans and leverage clan identity for their own benefit. As AQ becomes more powerful through this strategy, it becomes more indispensable to other groups, whether they are armed gangs or criminals who need to protect their access to Sahara-Sahel trafficking routes. Sharing criminal activities provides funding and support for social and religious activity. AQ has also established a reputation for dispensing justice and providing administrative capacity in the absence of state services. Through an embedding strategy Al-Qaeda becomes dominant, but invisible. For authorities, it is difficult to distinguish between nomads, rebels, criminals and jihadists.

The success of this strategy becomes clear through examining the conflicts in Libya and Mali. In Libya, Daesh tried but failed to establish a permanent presence in Derna and Benghazi. In both it was rejected as an alien entity by other militias. It finally found success in Sirte, by co-opting an isolated Ansar Al-Sharia branch and bringing in leaders and fighters. However, Daesh then followed its extremist vision by executing Coptic Christians, threatening to conquer Rome and trying to establish itself as a centre for global jihad. Its threatening behaviour and spectacular violence towards the population led to a successful drive by Misratan militias, backed by Western special forces and US air support, to push it out of the city. Its fighters, mostly francophone West Africans, not Arabs, are scattered, but not eliminated from Libya. Daesh's lack of lasting appeal can be attributed to its fanaticism, but also to its inability to be relevant to the complex rivalries within Libya.

By contrast, Al-Qaeda offshoot Ansar Al-Sharia has been an effective militia with the Misratan faction; sees itself as a revolutionary group with a Libyan—not a transnational—mission; and has appointed prominent Misratan jihadists to leadership positions.

In Mali, despite attempts to implant itself, there has been no room for Daesh. Al-Qaeda, through its surrogates, dominates the jihadist landscape and has widespread support. AQ works through groups

like Ansar Dine and is close to the Peul and Fulani peoples, both of which were disadvantaged under previous national and informal power-sharing arrangements. Working with Al-Qaeda changes local dynamics, so that weaker groups with AQ partners become dominant and in turn become indispensable partners for fighters and criminals alike. While AQIM took heavy casualties from French military action in 2013 and 2014, and had to pull out of the cities, the French threat, and the attempt by Daesh to establish itself, ultimately hardened AQIM as it developed new strategies and improved operational security. Attack levels are rising again, doubling from 2015 to 2016.

Conclusion

For foreign observers, the experience in North Africa and the Sahel offers conclusions which are applicable to the region and beyond:

- Daesh may become less visible as it loses territory, but as elsewhere this may lead to a new form of non-territorial terrorism, not defeat;
- Less visibility for Al-Qaeda may simply mean that the strategy of submersion in local organisations has been successful. Al-Qaeda will be more entrenched, more dangerous, but less obvious;
- The Sahara-Sahel is a unified transmission belt, with fighters, traffickers and weapons suppliers moving between countries in response to opportunity and military pressure;
- Terrorism begets more terrorism as regions become accustomed to violence and infrastructure supporting terrorism become entrenched;
- Even a regional lens may be too limited to understand the problem. Daesh in Libya has been active in pushing refugees out into the Mediterranean, part of the movement causing tensions across Europe;

- States must be realistic about the cost of the strategies they advocate. North Africa and the Sahel represent one theatre of many where terrorism is being confronted by national governments and the international community.

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE
REGIONAL STRATEGY
OF AL-QAEDA IN THE
ISLAMIC MAGHREB

Terrorist groups can arise in response to the corruption and clientelism of the state. Algeria's cancellation of elections in 1991 led to the creation of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which spread extremism and criminality to Algeria's neighbours across the Sahel. Mali's neglect of its north created an opening for terrorist groups emulating the GSPC. To take advantage of territory, terrorist groups need money and local brokers, hence Al-Qaeda's strategy of marrying into families of local elites and enabling trafficking. French intervention temporarily compensated for the weakness of the Malian government, but the conditions stoking the insurgency have remained fundamentally the same.

Trying to understand the evolution of armed Islamist groups operating in Africa requires challenging some of the ideological assumptions we hold about the nature of the relationship between citizens and the state. In particular, these groups make us rethink the core premises of politics enshrined in the principle of state sovereignty, and the relationship between religion and state governance. We live in a world in which the state is the primary territorial organisation that the international community has agreed should wield the legitimate monopoly over the use of violent coercion. Groups that espouse radical forms and visions of Islam, seeking to enact violence as a way to achieve alternative systems of governance, present a direct challenge to how modern states conceive of politics.

This is especially important for any analysis of jihadist groups operating in northern Mali and elsewhere in the Sahel. We cannot understand groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)³ without understanding the way that these groups have practiced violence

against the regional states—Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso. Indeed, it was the violent coercion of an extremely militarised and oil-wealthy Algerian state and security apparatus that cancelled the results of democratic elections in Algeria in the early 1990s, sparking a violent civil war, and the creation of several armed groups that later infiltrated northern Mali and Niger—groups like the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)⁴, and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC⁵). Once in Mali, these Algerian groups found a fertile space in which to pursue recruitment, economic enrichment through criminal activities, and to develop strong social links with local Malian populations, precisely because of the clientelistic practices and general neglect of the Malian state for its northern territories and populations. Understanding armed Islamist groups, their identities, alliances, ruptures and practices requires assessing their nexus to the state and appreciating how violence is governed.

In addition to premising relations of violence between state and non-state actors, understanding the evolution of jihadist groups in the Sahel also requires placing local and regional contexts at the centre of analysis. Mali's north, for example, was never governed by the state in any Western sense of the word. Controlling territory at such a distance from Bamako was never considered possible, or a major priority. Revenue-generating activities for the state are concentrated in the country's southern agricultural and mining heartland. Nor has the Malian state ever developed significant infrastructure to furnish the north with social or market goods, leaving the populations of the north to 'get by' on their own, socially and economically. As a result, northern populations have relied on historical practices of regional exchange and the transmission-belt qualities of the Sahara itself to their distinct advantage. In other words, they have developed forms of governance at arm's length from Malian state institutions.

Mali's north was never governed by the state in any Western sense of the word.

Contrary to common security assumptions, these insights indicate that it makes little sense to attribute the north of Mali as an ‘ungoverned space’ for this very reason. Embedded in such a term is the assumption (most often erroneous) that groups living in these spaces are not connected to postcolonial centralised states, and are instead likely to engage in violent and illicit activities which are threatening to state institutions. What this view ignores is that instead of directly controlling state territory, many postcolonial states in Africa have governed sparsely populated territories through clientelistic forms of patronage via local power brokers and elites. In the case of northern Mali, local elites close to centres of power in Bamako received various support from government and military officials that ranged from tacit to direct, facilitating conditions that enabled illicit activities and the sidelining of competitors, even through violence. Such a governance dynamic lent itself to the implantation of armed Islamist groups in the Sahel, who developed social and economic links to local communities through limited forms of governance, alms giving, market interactions and by the demonstration of Islamic piety. Thus, the north of Mali was never a lawless zone of crime, terrorism and the like—it was and remains a zone in which laws and governance are enacted through a competing set of para-sovereigns, who blur the lines between state and non-state categories, and where social and economic practices erase the distinction between public and private actors.

Armed Islamist group implantation and socio-economic connections in northern Mali

AQIM’s presence in the Sahel is the result of the group’s ability to leverage its regional ties and to make and keep durable socio-economic connections. Although most accounts of the implantation of GSPC/AQIM elements in northern Mali mark 2003 as the definitive year, it is more likely that by 1999 Algerian jihadists began interacting with populations in the Timbuktu and Kidal regions, from whom they received water or bought goods like phones or gasoline. Other rumours regarding the presence of Algerian Islamists date from the onset of the Algerian war in 1992, when they reportedly established

contact with Malian rebel groups like the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad (FIAA)⁶, fighting against the Malian state.

Since 1999, AQIM and other jihadist groups have relied on their legitimacy as religiously-motivated actors to gain and leverage local support, and to recruit from religious communities in northern Mali. The focus of recruitment seems to have been within communities where Islamic knowledge has been prominent, especially among northern Mali's Tuareg, Arab and Peul communities. Nevertheless, the fact that jihadist groups seek to demonstrate and enhance their religious credibility does not make knowledge of Islam the silver bullet. It is only when combined with financial support and the ability to provide protection, as well as through the support of key local brokers that 'vet' armed Islamist groups that local populations have supported, or even joined themselves to armed jihadist groups. For example, prior to the 2012 rebellion in northern Mali, katibats led by Abou Zeid and Yahya Abou el-Hammam were successful in weaving social ties with notable Tuareg communities, especially the influential Ifoghas families that had served as key intermediaries under French colonial rule, and with the Malian state since 1960. AQIM also stretched its recruitment efforts through the Timbuktu region and into Mauritania, especially within Arab communities.

The infamous Mokhtar Belmokhtar also provides an important example. Hailing from the Saharan trading town of Ghardaia in Algeria, Belmokhtar was adept at regional travel, through which he forged socio-economic connections with communities in northern Mali, linking those established further afield in Algeria and Libya. Having gained experience as a member of the GIA early in the Algerian civil war (leaving the organisation for the GSPC in 1998), he used his networks to amass funds and to avoid the significant military presence in southern Algeria at the civil war's end. Such connections allowed Belmokhtar to root himself into local populations, especially through the strategy of pursuing marriage to local elite families. He instructed fighters loyal to him to do the same. His marriage ties to a prominent northern Malian Arab tribe, the Kounta—the traditional religious elites who claim significant experience in Islamic education abroad—

extended his informal power beyond northern Mali to Mauritania and southern Morocco, thereby enlarging his audience for recruitment.

By cultivating himself as an important node within the northern Malian Arab communities in Timbuktu, Belmokhtar then deepened his networks beyond this prominent group - notably through violence and illicit economic activities. These include various forms of smuggling (especially in cigarettes and weapons), and crucially in the kidnapping-for-ransom industry developing at the time in the Sahelo-Saharan band. Through these activities, Belmokhtar would develop extensive ties with Arab economic players based in the Tilemsi Valley (many of which are involved in drug trafficking) and the Tuareg elite clans of the Kidal region. Elites from these two groups, like the former mayor of Tarkint, Baba Ould Cheikh, and infamous Tuareg Ifoghas rebel turned Islamist Iyad Aghaly were themselves enmeshed in the severely clientelistic relations of the Malian state, acting as hostage negotiators for Belmokhtar and others AQIM leaders.

In 2011, AQIM began to fragment, leading to the creation of the MUJAO. In October 2011, three European aid workers were kidnapped near the Polisario-controlled refugee camps in southern Algeria—an act MUJAO claimed shortly thereafter. While accounts differ, many experts explain the fragmentation of AQIM by MUJAO as the result of frustrations of non-Algerian AQIM members (like Hamada Ould Kheirou) regarding AQIM's leadership strategies and competing geopolitical visions. MUJAO leadership sought to expand its combat to include more regionalised sites while using northern Mali as a base of operations. As such, the group conducted suicide bombings in 2012 in southern Algeria. They also kidnapped seven Algerian diplomats in Gao during the rebel takeover of the north (killing one and eventually releasing the others). The group cunningly utilised ransom payments from the European hostages (reportedly €8 million), and began recruiting potential fighters in the Ménaka, Gao and Tillabéry borderlands, notably from the Peul and Arab Lamhar communities. Many youth in Gao were given large amounts of dispersed cash, usually euros, to exchange for West African francs in neighbouring Niger—for which they were paid a commission.

However, the strategy of supporting communities in Gao extended beyond cash payments. MUJAO fighters established protection circuits in the city in order to stop Tuareg nationalist rebels from ransacking local businesses and potentially raping women. This culminated in June 2012, when MUJAO fighters forced the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA)⁷ fighters out of the city, and subsequently from the neighbouring Ménaka area.

MUJAO consistently balanced its local flavour with regionalised symbols of religiosity by liaising with borderland communities in Gao. Along with Belmokhtar, MUJAO leaders met with the Gao region's religious elites, notably from the Peul and Songhai communities, petitioning the latter to assist in the establishment of Sharia law. This practice helped to boost the number of their supporters and fighters, and advanced their credibility as 'borderless' jihadists who purportedly paid no respect to the origin of their fighters (notwithstanding the fact that punishments for Islamic infractions were carried out exclusively on black individuals in Gao, but never on Arabs and Tuaregs). MUJAO's practices demonstrate the trend of seeking to develop local socio-economic connections, which then are followed by an outward orientation towards communities where religious knowledge is prominent, and which are distanced from or neglected by the Malian state.

The occupation of Timbuktu by AQIM (although nominally by Ansar Dine's Iyad Aghaly) and Gao by MUJAO was an experiment in governance. The administration of the towns was assigned to fighters with histories of strong relations with respective local populations. Inhabitants initially supported these new Islamist governors, MUJAO, for example, having eliminated taxes and customs duties, subsidising the cost of food, liaising with Islamic associations and NGOs in Bamako for the delivery of humanitarian aid, and even repairing generators, wells and other public goods and equipment. Most importantly is the support these groups received for having drastically reduced armed banditry and other forms of petty criminality, like motorcycle theft. As punishments for infractions intensified, notably in Gao, AQIM and MUJAO rule provoked public protests, and calls for a return to 'normal life'. Nevertheless, to this day, most accounts

of these group's governance of the north is understood as a time of relative calm, especially in contrast to the subsequent rocky return of the Malian state and military, or the constant insecurity characterised by the post-Algiers accord fighting between armed group signatories concentrated in the Kidal region.

Effects of international military interventions

The French military intervention severely fragmented armed Islamist groups in the north of Mali. At the same time, pressure from Mali's neighbouring military forces along its borders drove some Islamists to renounce affiliation to Islamist organisations. As a result, armed Islamist groups operating in the Sahelo-Saharan band are undergoing processes of simultaneous fracture and reconfiguration.

Operation Serval was extremely efficient. It is estimated that from roughly 3000 armed AQIM or MUJAO militants, only 500 to 800 remained by mid-2013. Several key leaders were killed, including Abou Zeid and Ould Hamaha. In 2015, French forces killed MUJAO co-founder Ahmed al-Tilemsi (Ahmed Ould Amer), as well as close Ansar Dine adviser Ibrahim Ag Inawalen (Ibrahim Bana) and the former head of AQIM's katibat al-Ansar, Abdelkrim el-Targui. Sanda Bouamana even turned himself in to Algerian authorities in 2013, and was subsequently extradited to Mauritania, but has since been released.

Others, like Belmokhtar and Ould Kheirou, however, have demonstrated their resilience in the face of international military intervention. In January 2013, Belmokhtar's Katibat al-Mulathimeen, aided by fighters from a southern Algerian armed group, the Movement of the Sons of the Sahara for Justice (MFSJ⁸), mounted the In Amenas gas facility attacks, killing 37 people, mostly foreign workers. In May 2013, Belmokhtar's group struck the military base of Agadez and the French-operated Arlit uranium mine, both in Niger. Both sites feature a substantial international presence, as both American and French special forces are based in Agadez. Later that year, the *Agence Noukchott d'Information* news outlet announced that Belmokhtar's katibat and MUJAO had merged to create a new armed

Islamist group, Al-Mourabitoun (later relabelled as Al-Qaeda in West Africa, pledging allegiance to Al-Qaeda Core's Ayman al-Zawahiri's leadership).

The establishment of Al-Mourabitoun should not necessarily be viewed as Belmokhtar's separation from AQIM, however. Doubtless, the In Amenas and northern Niger attacks illustrated the group's even more sophisticated planning capabilities and the success of the attacks resulted in a considerable increase in Belmokhtar's jihadist credibility and notoriety. These attacks, nevertheless, highlight his previous actions as a katibat commander for AQIM, notably the large-scale attacks perpetrated in Algeria in the mid-2000s under his command, and his ability to include fighters from diverse populations across his geographical range of influence—in other words his local and regional social connections. While his rival, the late Abou Zeid, was never able to leverage social connections as successfully as Belmokhtar, the combined weight and pertinence of these local and regional connections among groups living at arm's length from the state is originally what enabled the implantation and spread of AQIM across the Sahelo-Saharan band. Thus, while constituting loose organisations, often with well-delineated (albeit informal) rules, responsibilities and practices, these groups are nevertheless fragmentary, network-like and organisationally fluid. At any given time, individual participants in these groups share affinities and loyalties to multiple sources of social connection, all of which are subject to change during times of violent conflict.

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In 2015, Al-Mourabitoun claimed credit for several attacks against foreign targets within Mali: an attack on a hotel in Sévaré that regularly welcomes UN contractors; La Terrasse nightclub in Bamako; and finally the deadly and notorious attack on Bamako's Radisson Blu hotel in November 2015. The Radisson attack demonstrates the

reconfiguration of Islamist armed groups placed under international pressure, as it was jointly conducted with AQIM fighters. Shortly thereafter, al-Mourabitoun announced its merger with AQIM. Furthermore, al-Mourabitoun's attacks across West Africa (in Burkina Faso in January 2016, in Grand Bassam Côte d'Ivoire two months later, and potentially in Niger in October) have complemented AQIM's selected attacks on international forces in northern Mali, as well as on any individual or group in the north that appears to have collaborated with international forces, resulting in a stark increase in insecurity in the post-Operation Serval period.

Central Mali and the Tillabéry region of Niger have also been targets to newly formed jihadist groups. A local Peul imam named Amadou Kouffa leads the group now known as Ansar Dine Macina. Kouffa's forces, supported by his friend and patron, Iyad Aghaly, led the Islamist advance in late 2012 towards Mopti, triggering the French intervention. Since 2015, Ansar Dine Macina has conducted attacks across central Mali near Mopti, Sévaré, Tenenkou and Nampala. Ansar Dine Macina is reported to have capitalised on the recruitment of Peul fighters, many of whom fought under the leadership of Belmokhtar and Ould Kheirou in the Gao region in 2012. As noted, adherence to an armed Islamist group is multi-faceted. Fighters within Ansar Dine Macina have based their calls for jihad on the need to defend Peul communities (especially herders) from the reprisals and cattle theft perpetrated by returning Malian military units, a strategy best served through the extension of sharia. Once again, the activities of this group demonstrate the violent contestation against the Malian state, as it is formed by arguably the most vulnerable and marginalised population of the country: the Peul community. Ansar Dine Macina's limited efforts of governance and protection, however, have also been accompanied by significant intra-communal violence against those local Peul imams and village leaders that have historically been closely associated to Malian state clientelistic networks.

Since mid-2014, France has regionalised its space of intervention in order to further seek out and eliminate dispersed elements of these jihadist groups (especially AQIM and MUJAO). The latter have proven extremely resilient precisely because of their ability to form socio-

economic nodes, responding inclusively to populations that have regularly been distanced from the patronage networks of the Malian state. AQIM commanders have been exceptionally well placed to provide economic and social goods, market opportunities and protection to mobile populations across the Sahel. These activities are underpinned by their religious credibility, which is recognised by communities that have adopted similar religious interpretations over the span of the last twenty years. Despite the rivalries that mark armed Islamist groups in the Sahel-Saharan region, they have nevertheless been able to serve as the interface between local populations across the region. While partially successful in their governance efforts throughout 2012, they still faced complex local political struggles, which put them at odds with notables who hold dominant sway in the north, especially in the Kidal region. While undergoing a period of reconfiguration, these groups have still undertaken successful operations and have since found a new safe haven in southern Libya, beyond Operation Barkhane's mandate, proving their adaptability and the enduring nature of their connections.

CHAPTER 2

HAS DAESH ALREADY
OVERREACHED IN LIBYA?

Instead of achieving a political settlement for Libya, the Government of National Accord has become a third faction in the country's civil war. Governance institutions are fragmented, preventing a coherent evaluation of Daesh's local campaign. Daesh has attempted to establish itself in eastern Libya in Derna, Benghazi and Sirte. The Daesh fighters pushed out of Sirte are predominantly experienced North and West Africans who fled to the surrounding regions. Their plans to support a territory-less Daesh are unknown and cannot be usefully assessed by Libya's intelligence services, whose attention is increasingly devoted to competing with each other.

Why Libya's civil war helped Daesh

Libya is in a state of war, with three competing governments and a failed UN-brokered peace process. The main task of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) was to implement the terms of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), an arrangement designed to bring about a settlement between the country's main warring factions. Set up in December 2015 as an interim body, it has failed to extend a peaceful reach over eastern and western Libya and to generate the support necessary to reconnect the central authorities with the fractured network of political, economic and security institutions that govern across the country. Although great efforts were made to ensure that the GNA's Presidential Council (PC) had significant political and tribal representation, this was to prove merely symbolic, as it enjoys only limited geographical reach, isolated in a corner of Tripoli's coastline.

And so the country remains divided pretty much as it was during the 2014-2015 civil war between Operation Dignity (based in eastern Libya) and Libya Dawn (based in the west).

The PC's failure to heal the rifts between competing military forces and stitch together a divided intelligence apparatus has left Libya dangerously vulnerable to Daesh⁹ and helped create an environment in which salafist-jihadists can flourish. The country is not only plagued by thousands of kilometres of porous borders but also by rival security forces that not only fail to communicate with one another but actively defame each other and expend the bulk of their resources on tribal and political activities not addressing the salafist-jihadist threat. As a result, Libya's political forces are effectively blind to the nature of the challenge that Daesh and related groups present, and their claims to be focused on fighting these groups are misleading.

Eastern Libya

Derna, Wilayat Barqa and Daesh

The growth of Daesh in Cyrenaica, Libya's eastern region, began six months into Operation Dignity in late 2014 with the establishment in Derna of the Majlis Shura Shabab Darna by returning salafist-jihadists from Syria and Iraq.

The Majlis Shura is a peculiar example of this salafist-jihadist milieu, and the reason for its growth and subsequent decline. It was primarily born of local feuds between older generations of retired and reformed jihadists and young fighters back from combat in Syria. The Bitar Brigade was a Libyan formation that fought in Syria in 2012 and 2013 and returned to Derna, eager to take control of the city. However, it was prevented from doing so by the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade (ASMB), a group of mainly retired, reformed or former Libyan jihadists joined by young Derna residents who picked up arms to fight against the former regime in 2011.

In late 2014 the situation in Derna deteriorated and civil war broke out in eastern Libya. The Bitar Brigade and local young jihadists, eager to buy into the caliphate project, set up the Islamic Youth

Council of Derna (ICYD), Libya's first Daesh affiliate and province in the country in late 2014. Abu Nabil al-Anbari, a high-level Daesh member and former governor in Iraq, was proclaimed the emir of Libya. ICYD created Islamic courts led by a Yemeni judge, as well as an Islamic police force and a *Diwan al-Hisba*¹⁰, mirroring caliphal political structures in Syria and Iraq.

... Derna's jihadist milieu is much more committed to fighting elements of the former regime and the likes of General Khalifa Haftar than they are about expanding a caliphate.

However, the ICYD were rejected on the grounds that they were troubled, angry youth who were disrespectful of their elders or because local jihadists refused to be ruled by a foreign caliph and governor in the person of al-Anbari.

Their presence gave Operation Dignity forces the pretext to attack the city, beginning in February 2015. However, they almost exclusively targeted ASMB or the city's infrastructure. In response, ASMB and its affiliates took up arms in December 2015 and expelled the ICYD with the help of local residents.

A stark reality in Derna's jihadist milieu is that they are much more committed to fighting elements of the former regime and the likes of General Khalifa Haftar¹¹ than they are about expanding a caliphate.

Benghazi: Daesh makes a new enemy

In Benghazi, Daesh has struggled to retain cohesion in an incredibly polarised milieu, one dominated by the self-styled revolutionaries and the would-be Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar.

The Dawn-affiliated Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council (BRSC) has effectively been fighting Khalifa Haftar's forces since July 2014. It consists of a military council composed of Islamist and jihadist

militias, some of which are tribally oriented (eg, the February 17th Brigade and the predominantly Benghazi-based Libya Shield, of Misratan origin) and Ansar al-Sharia (AAS), an Al-Qaeda offshoot accused of the attack against the local US diplomatic mission in 2012.

Ansar al-Sharia's affiliation to the BRSC can also be interpreted as an attempt to counter Daesh's move to take over their organisation. AAS have repeatedly replaced individuals who were murdered (including their leader Muhammaed al-Zahawi in 2015) with prominent jihadists of Misratan origin such as Abu Khaled al-Maadani. This strategy is designed to ensure that AAS fit the local profile of the BRSC leadership. A blow was sustained when a prominent AAS leader, Abu Abdallah al-Libi, defected to Daesh in early 2015 but he too was quickly replaced. Individual AAS fighters have defected to Daesh and small Daesh cells have emerged in Benghazi, conducting operations in the city.

AAS fighters are susceptible to defection as both it and Daesh share the same religiously-inspired ideology. Yet fundamental differences hinder Daesh's growth. AAS fighters do not share Daesh's transnational goals and see themselves primarily as a revolutionary group; this is particularly true for their Benghazi-based members. They feel part of the Libyan story and its civil war, with local and personal feuds dictating the fighting with the LNA dating back to 2012.

Daesh branches are relatively new to the Benghazi scene, established after the civil war began. The group has found it difficult to penetrate Benghazi's array of tribally-oriented groups and militias and to break down the complex narrative at the heart of the civil war. Its messaging has also failed to resonate with vulnerable groups and militias; its target audience and the BRSC has therefore remained largely indifferent to its presence.

In a February 2016 issue of its publication *Dabiq*, Daesh's former 'emir' slammed the BRSC and AAS for their reluctance to join Daesh. The presence of newly emerging coalitions such as the Benghazi Defence Brigade in April 2016—that specifically aim to target Daesh and Haftar's forces in Benghazi—demonstrates Daesh's inability to keep the peace with those groups that had otherwise been ambivalent to its growth.

Western Libya

Sirte: Wilayat Tarablus

The central coastal city of Sirte is perhaps Daesh's most successful project to date in Libya. Largely forgotten in post-revolution Libya, Sirte came under the control of a revolutionary jihadist battalion known as Katibat al-Faruq in 2012. It then became a franchise of AAS in 2013, but by late 2014, the group began to undergo a transformation. The death of its brigade's leader at the beginning of the civil war led to a crisis in decision-making. Cut off from Ansar al-Sharia that was fighting in Benghazi, it began to respond to the advances of Daesh dignitaries who had earmarked Sirte and the group.

The group defected to Daesh in early 2015 and quickly set about creating the very same institutions present in Derna. With no rival power-brokers and brigades in their way in Sirte, they were able to establish full control over the city.

Baathism gone wrong

Sirte is really where the apocalyptic jihadist vision in Libya can be best observed. Daesh launched large-scale executions and beheadings of Coptic Christians, threatened to conquer Rome from the shores of Libya and invited jihadists from all over the world to join them.

Sirte is really where the apocalyptic jihadist vision in Libya can be best observed.

The Sirte project yielded mixed results. While they were able to recruit fighters from nearby Tunisia as well as East and West African countries, they failed to expand in Libya. Daesh was largely stunted by its inability to capture the narrative in post-revolution Libya.

Whereas Daesh was able to use the deep sectarian divides in Syria and Iraq for recruitment purposes, it has been unable to enmesh itself in the country's tribal relations or manipulate tribal rivalries to its own advantage in spite of sending delegations throughout 2015 to gain adherents. Its failure is particularly telling when one considers

that it was unable to expand into Jufra, a community neighbouring Sirte that shares a similar tribal make-up and degree of disillusionment with the failed revolution.

Daesh also failed to conclude a pact with elements of the former regime, as it had successfully done with Baathists in Iraq. From the moment of its arrival in Sirte, it informed the general population that it would not tolerate dissidence or opposition. They rounded up members of Gaddafi's former security apparatus still present in the city and ordered them to repent and join the group's ranks. Those who failed to do so were imprisoned or killed. They went so far as to violently repress a pro-Gaddafi demonstration in mid-2015.

Operation Buryan Al-Marsoos: The limits of military engagement and Daesh's hidden strength

On the surface, military engagement seems to have been effective against Daesh in Sirte. Since April 2016, a largely Misratan force under the banner of the GNA's operation Buryan Al-Marsoos (BAM) has been fighting Daesh. They controlled almost 95 per cent of Sirte as of mid-October 2016 and could be close to capturing the entire city. They have also successfully targeted the leader, the Libyan Hassan Karami, and followed a 'deck of cards' approach, seeking to eliminate the Syrians and Iraqis sent to lead Daesh's efforts.

Operationally, however, it is Daesh's discrete middle tier that is perhaps its most lethal component, and its most neglected feature. This middle tier is considerably different from the rest of the organisation in that it is not sent to govern, but to fight. It is dominated by battle-hardened fighters and military operatives mainly from Mauritania, Senegal, Mali and Tunisia.

This middle tier bears little resemblance to Daesh as a group. While the Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan and Tunisian leadership communicate within the ranks in Arabic, and communicate through the group's magazine *Dabiq* and videos in English and Arabic, the middle cohort of the affiliated group in Libya is French-speaking. They make up the military engine of the organisation. They are experienced in combat

and insurgencies. They are defectors of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb-linked groups, such as Al-Murabitun, and veterans of long-standing rebellions and conflict in the Sahel.

According to sources within BAM, a significant number fled in the weeks leading up to Operation Buryan Al-Marsoos. They can now be found in Ubari close to the Algerian border, south of Sirte in the village of Hneywa and have created a small cell close to Sabha.

Having lost Sirte, Daesh has been downgraded as a force in Libya and is now without territory. However, one should be concerned by the lack of effort by Libyan authorities and international forces to focus on this middle cadre as a fighting force. Given the chaotic situation in the country with the ongoing civil war, which the international community is no longer actively trying to resolve, this could provide Daesh with a springboard for further action.

CHAPTER 3

WILL AL-QAEDA IN
THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB
CONTINUE TO PROSPER?

Following the French military operations in the Sahel from 2013 on, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) altered its strategy, submerging its identity in existing anti-government forces and ethnic groups. These measures permitted AQIM to increase its tempo of attacks, while becoming indispensable to regional rebels and traffickers. Attempts by Daesh to implant itself locally have been frustrated as AQIM dominates jihadist activity in the region. But AQIM's only sure geographic sanctuary is northern Mali.

Resurgence of AQIM in the Sahel

Opinions diverge on the threat posed in the Sahel by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The French military considers Operations Serval and Barkhane to have been effective, based on the high number of fighters killed and the fairly successful disruption of this terrorist group's communication lines between Mali and Libya. However, this assessment ought to be tempered by a more realistic view of the situation.

Although several major French operations were carried out in Niger in 2013 and 2014 against the convoys of Al-Murabitoun and Ansar Dine, the presence of Operation Barkhane in Madama, Niger, failed to sever the ties of operational cooperation between the jihad zones in Mali and Libya, which use Niger as a transit corridor. Algeria, the other corridor, is also being used by militants, making it impossible for the French to intervene without a "right of pursuit" into Algerian territory.

In terms of attacks committed, AQIM is a greater threat than ever. Despite declining significantly before the start of 2014, the number of attacks involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide

attacks is now at a record high. The number of IED attacks in the first half of 2016 was twice as high as during the same period in 2015.

AQIM's resurgence reflects its success in overcoming the two main challenges it has faced since 2013: the launch of Operation Serval in January 2013, and the influence of Daesh¹² in the Sahel. In response, AQIM has intensified its attacks, modernised its communication network, and gathered all of the smaller terrorist groups (Ansar Dine, Al-Murabitoun) under the AQIM label.

The fight against AQIM, which is being led primarily by France, seems to be hampered by the classic constraints of asymmetrical warfare. Even though several hundred fighters for AQIM, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO¹³) and Ansar Dine have been "neutralised" since 2013, the projection capability of these groups has nevertheless grown continuously over that same period, both within Mali and more broadly across West Africa. In addition to the 2013 attacks in Agadez and Niamey, Niger, the nebulous AQIM has also claimed responsibility for attacks in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire. In Mali, the organisation has extended its capability for action south, with the attacks on the Radisson Blu hotel and in the Sikasso region (Misseni and Fakola) in 2015. Its powers have not been affected by the loss of katiba leaders (Abou Zeid, Omar Ould Hamaha, Ahmed el Tilemsi, Abdelkrim al-Targui). At most, these losses may have played a role in uniting the various groups under AQIM.

Losing control over the cities of Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao, where AQIM had installed an administration, in no way diminished this terrorist organisation's influence or capability for action, contrary to what has been seen in other theatres of conflict: in Yemen with the withdrawal of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) from Mukalla in April 2016; in Somalia with the retaking of Kismayo; and in northern Nigeria with the withdrawal of Boko Haram from major Borno towns. In Mali, the various terrorist organisations have adapted their methods of operation to the French presence by drastically reinforcing operational security; increasing suicide attacks and now

complex attacks (tactical operations combined with suicide attacks), which require planning capabilities and knowledge of the territory that would be impossible without support from the local population; and propagating jihad locally to make inroads with local residents.

What is the future of AQIM in the Sahel?

The deepening local character of jihad

Jihad has easily taken root in the region since 2013, primarily because it is striking a chord with the population. The trend continues and may intensify. This dynamic is making the fight against the terrorist organisation much more complex by blurring the lines between nomads, rebel fights and jihadists.

A steadily increasing number of locals have gone to swell the ranks of the terrorist organisation since 2013 as huge numbers of foreigners (particularly Tunisians and Algerians) have left northern Mali for Libya. This is part of a strategy that was established (and designed by Al-Qaeda) to entrust the AQIM project to its local groups, via two Tuareg katibas (Youssef Ibn Tachfin and Al-Ansar), and that now revolves around Ansar Dine, a local organisation whose organic link with AQIM is known but not emphasised. The same is true for Al-Shabaab, which has always maintained a certain distance from Al-Qaeda, and more recently for Jabhat Al-Nusra, now known as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, which split organically from Al-Qaeda in order to boost local recruitment. These forms of autonomy have been personally endorsed by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

This dynamic has had grave results in Mali. Entire territories in northern Mali are under the control of certain tribal factions operating on behalf of AQIM. A particularly clear example is the Al-Wasra Arab tribe in the Taoudeni region. Though it originally had no influence within the Arab community, this tribe has grown extremely prominent thanks to the power conferred on it by AQIM. Local entrenchment is significantly affecting the Fulani community in the Gao and Mopti regions, which are known to be overrepresented among AQIM's ranks.

The reasons for this entrenchment can be found by looking to the governments. Radicalisation works by feeding off endogenous dynamics: widespread injustice, suppression of Islam, marginalisation of certain Islamic sects, unemployment, and development of activities deemed forbidden, etc. These factors are rarely, if ever, seen in any Sahara-Sahel societies. This means that AQIM has the ability to penetrate these areas, but its staying power will largely depend on the level of control exerted by the governments. This variable broadly explains why AQIM has never been able to truly take root in Niger, where the nomadic networks, including fighters, remain attached to the central government.

In the event of a profound territorial crisis, as may occur in Côte d'Ivoire in 2020, AQIM could attempt to seek sanctuary by exploiting the governmental void and conflict dynamics. As long as governments remain essentially in control of their territories, AQIM's influence will be limited to clandestine cells capable of carrying out attacks against governmental or Western targets.

Closer ties with armed groups

The West will be present in the Sahel for years to come. Jihadist groups are experiencing a corresponding long-term effect on their freedom of movement, forcing them to rely on more mobile partners. As soon as a distinction is established between signatory armed groups and jihadist armed groups, since the former are essentially shielded from any international armed intervention, it is in the interest of the latter to hide behind them. This trend will therefore continue. In the worst-case scenario, there could be a recurrence of a rebellion in which the rebels and jihadists are so intermingled that it would be futile for the West to intervene, as in January 2013.

As long as governments remain essentially in control of their territories, AQIM's influence will be limited to clandestine cells capable of carrying out attacks against governmental or Western targets.

However, it is important to understand the motivations driving armed groups to ally with jihadist groups. First of all, the armed groups need to deal with the dominant power. For them, it is a condition for holding onto the territory they need to control trafficking routes. Second, given the extremely high tensions between platform groups and the Coordination of Movements for Azawad (CMA), it is essential to be under the protection of jihadist groups. Lastly, the jihadist groups are so deeply entrenched in northern Mali that it would be suicidal for an armed group to take on a jihadist group, even if the armed group has the support of international forces to do so. This situation is not expected to change in the short or medium term. The only factor that could alter this dynamic of collusion would be an inversion in the balance of military power between the rebel and jihadist armed groups.

In any case, alliances are widespread. The two branches of the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA¹⁴) based in the Ber area operate as AQIM subcontractors, providing supply logistics and carrying out operational missions. The MAA supporting the Platform of Self-Defence Movements¹⁵ in the Tilemsi has integral, organic ties to Al-Murabitoun. The same goes for the Fulani front in central Mali. Some Fulani fighters are working for Ansar Dine via the new Macina katiba, but the rallying of ANSIPRJ¹⁶ (non-jihadist) to this Fulani front has diluted the jihadist dimension of the movement. That is how the attack on Nampala in July 2016 should be understood, as ANSIPRJ claimed responsibility even though the actual perpetrators were Ansar Dine fighters. Lastly, the dual membership of young Ifoghas fighters in the High Council for the Azawad (HCUA¹⁷) and in Ansar Dine is beyond question.

How can the threat be reduced?

More pressure on neighbouring nations

Part of AQIM's strength lies in the role played by the governments of the nations adjacent to Mali, particularly Algeria and Mauritania. In the interests of their own domestic security, these two governments

are hosting, sponsoring and protecting Malian rebels or jihadists, who in return promise to spare the territories of their host countries.

The case of Iyad Ag Ghaly, a militant under Algerian protection, leaves no room for doubt. Although Algeria has, under international pressure, promised to “give up” Iyad Ag Ghaly, as reported by well-informed Western sources, it apparently has yet to do so. In view of the numerous interests that the Algerians have in holding onto Iyad Ag Ghaly—if only as a bargaining chip for negotiations with France—there is reason to doubt that this will ever occur without a major French concession in return. At the very least, greater pressure jointly exerted by France and the United States should weaken the position of the Algerian networks that continue to rely on Iyad Ag Ghaly.

The situation is slightly different in Mauritania. While the Mauritanian government is not sheltering jihadist elements, it maintains close ties with Malian rebels whose proximity to AQIM is common knowledge. This proximity gives the rebels a rear base and political protection, thus indirectly strengthening AQIM, particularly with regard to supply logistics.

The consequences of this transboundary support are far from negligible. Besides providing a sanctuary or even a safe haven from threats, as Algeria is providing to Iyad Ag Ghaly, the territories of Mauritania and Algeria are vital to the supply networks of the terrorist groups in northern Mali. Niger is in a similar situation, as it is also a transit corridor. An effective regional antiterrorism policy requires a disruption of the supply lines conveying food, fuel, weapon components or weapons.

Expansion of military efforts in northern Mali

At the same time as increased pressure is placed on the governments of Mali’s neighbours, it would be wise to expand military efforts in northern Mali in order to dissuade both local residents and armed groups from collaborating with AQIM.

The regionalisation of the fight against terrorism—which began with Operation Barkhane and is now led by the five African nations that make up the Sahel G5¹⁸—is justified because of the permeability of borders in the Sahel, but it should not come at the expense of military efforts in Mali. Northern (and now central) Mali is the only place in the Sahel-Sahara region where AQIM can truly claim sanctuary. The Adrar region of Mauritania and northern Niger are more or less under the control of the national governments, while in southern Libya, the strength of the Toubou and Tuareg militias is considerably reducing AQIM's ability to penetrate the social fabric, even though AQIM has some cells there and is relatively free to move around. Expanding efforts in northern Mali would make it possible to oust AQIM from its only sanctuary and thus significantly reduce the subregional threat level. It is worth bearing in mind that the attacks in Agadez-Arlit in 2013 and in Grand Bassam and Ouagadougou in 2016 were all planned and orchestrated from Mali.

Uprooting AQIM

AQIM's strength continues to lie in its entrenchment among local residents in northern Mali. Far from being affected by the occupation, as was reported by the media, AQIM's roots only deepened. During AQIM's occupation and administration of the towns, insecurity plummeted, impartial Islamic justice was restored, and common consumer goods became cheaper (and were sometimes given away for free), particularly in Timbuktu and Gao. Since then, many individuals have begun to view jihadist groups in both northern and central Mali as a means of restoring a more impartial justice than the government is capable of providing, including through jihad, and as a way to break free of the bonds of society or custom (particularly among certain communities in central Mali) and thus improve their situation.

In this context, it will be impossible to eradicate AQIM through military intervention alone. Military intervention is undoubtedly indispensable, as we have seen, but it is not sufficient on its own. Fighting AQIM also requires helping local, traditional or national authorities reinforce their control over their territory in a firm yet

positive manner (through their ability to restore impartial justice, deliver fundamental services, and effectively combat insecurity). Helping the government return to northern Mali in a gradual and negotiated way is therefore a key mission, but it must be done in a collaborative manner, not imposed.

CHAPTER 4

THE EVOLVING FIGHT
AGAINST JIHADISM
IN NORTH AFRICA
AND THE SAHEL

The level of terrorist activity in regional states is in part determined by structural factors. Countries in North and West Africa are vulnerable to terrorist groups because of ineffective government, the exclusion of important groups from political power, the presence of a radical Islamic tradition and the long history of regional terrorism. Daesh and Al-Qaeda in the Islamist Maghreb (AQIM) strategies fully exploit local vulnerabilities. Terrorist activity interferes with national development strategies and stimulates terrorism infrastructure, such as the small arms market. For national actors and external supporters, the impacts of economic strategies are long-term, not immediate.

Over the course of 2014 and 2015, the main story in the region was the inroads made by Daesh¹⁹. According to Janes IHS data, the group was responsible for 298 attacks in the region²⁰ between September 2015 and August 2016, while Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) and Ansar al-Sharia were responsible for only four each. Similarly, Daesh was responsible for over 1,100 deaths with Ansar al-Sharia responsible for only 55 and AQIM seven.

These figures demonstrate the significant impact Daesh has had on the states along the southern Mediterranean over the course of the last year. The vast majority of the Daesh attacks were in Egypt or Libya, with the notable exceptions of the 2015 and 2016 cross-border attacks into Tunisia. The AQIM attacks took place in Libya and Algeria.

The inroads by Daesh have come at the expense of other groups—including AQIM and Ansar al-Sharia. Nevertheless, these groups have not gone away. AQIM, which could have collapsed completely under the strain of French intervention in Mali, continued pressure from Algerian counter-terrorism operations, and the advent of Daesh, has

nevertheless continued to have a clear presence and attract adherents. This may be due to the skill, experience and networks of its leaders.

AQIM has continued to have a clear presence and attract adherents.

Daesh's most significant inroads have been into Libya, with US intelligence officials estimating publicly that over 5,000 were present in February 2016. Many of these were presumed at the time to be located in the town of Sirte, along the central Libyan coast. Others formed in cells around the country, including Derna, Benghazi, Ajdabiyah, Tripoli and Sabratha.

Over the summer of 2016, however, Misratan militias, backed by small numbers of Western special forces and US airpower, managed to push Daesh out of Sirte. This came as a surprise to many observers who doubted that Misratan forces would have the capacity or will to conduct such an operation.

The Daesh fighters in Sirte, many of whom were formerly members of Ansar al-Sharia, are now likely more widely dispersed around the country. Many appear to have fled to Libya's southern provinces. While the destruction of Daesh's safe haven in Sirte is an important step forward, major counter-terrorism challenges remain for the country as well as for the region.

The spread of Daesh and similar groups is clearly a significant threat to the region. As long as these groups are active, they will continue to pose a threat to the local population while impeding progress on state-building, economic development and other key objectives. Although Europe has yet to experience a terrorist attack originating from North Africa, the possibility is not remote if regional trends continue along their current trajectory. The presence of Daesh in Libya in particular has facilitated migrant flows through the central European route, significantly exacerbating this security challenge for Europe in an already troubled time.

The nature of the problem

A basic question in social science research is whether structure or agency is more important in shaping social phenomena. For those scholars who focus on structural factors, social conditions, power relations, institutional design and other structural features of the systems are the key to understanding social outcomes, such as the trajectory of terrorist groups. For other scholars, however, structural factors are less important than agents in shaping phenomena. For these scholars, individual states, social groups, or even single human beings are what matter most.

To understand the nature of violent extremism in North Africa, we need to draw on both traditions. Clearly, structural factors play an important role in creating a context in North Africa where violent extremist groups have proliferated in recent years.

- Structural conditions for violent extremism are strong where lower levels of economic development, limited opportunities for employment and social advancement, political exclusion and conservative Islamic traditions combine.
- Such conditions exist in the Sinai, parts of Libya, such as Derna and Sirte, towns in inland Tunisia, such as in the Kasserine Governorate, as well as parts of Algeria, Morocco, Mali, and Niger.
- These conditions are exacerbated by political exclusion or in the case of Libya, Northern Mali, and arguably parts of Tunisia and the Sinai by the limited presence or quasi absence of the state.

At the same time, however, agency and conjuncture have also played a role. Violent extremist organisations have existed in this region for a quarter century.

- In the 1990s, mujahedeen returning from Afghanistan played a key role in the genesis of the extremist movement in Algeria, later going on to form the Salafist Group for Preaching and Jihad (GSPC²²) and, in 2006, AQIM.

- Similarly, the eastern Libyan town of Derna, which was overrun temporarily by Daesh affiliates in 2014, was once the single largest contributor of foreign fighters to Al-Qaeda in Iraq's 2006 insurgency.

Nevertheless, the growth of violent extremist groups in North Africa has been accelerated—and the threat from those groups much intensified—due to conscious efforts by Daesh and other extremist organisations, who have sought to take advantage of the ripe context for extremism to build their ranks.

The recent experience of Libya is an excellent example of these dynamics. Political, economic and social conditions in that country were conducive to violent extremism well before the Arab uprisings. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was active from the 1990s in eastern Libya until its violent suppression by Muammar Qaddafi. However, in the wake of Libya's 2011 collapse, extremist groups have actively targeted Libya with the intent of benefiting from those structural conditions.

- For example, in Benghazi, especially in the months following the September 2012 attacks on the US diplomatic facility there, groups from outside Libya likely took advantage of the absence of state control to make inroads. These external groups likely worked and overlapped with groups of domestic origin such as Ansar al-Sharia.
- An even more poignant case, however, is that of Daesh's 2014-2015 expansion into Libya. When the so-called Battar Battalion pledged allegiance to Daesh in October of 2014 in Derna, Daesh's leadership in Raqqa quickly sought to take advantage of this development by sending emissaries to provide leadership and organisational skills, and potentially also offering financial support.
- Yet another example of the role of agency in spreading violent extremist views can be found in Tunisia in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. In the initial period following the 2011 revolt, the loss of state control—positive in so many

ways—also meant the proliferation of unofficial places of worship. These gatherings made easy targets for extremist preachers from outside Tunisia to spread violent extremist doctrines.

Finally, in addition to structure and agency, there is an element of path dependency that has worsened the problem of violent extremism in North Africa. In other words, the growth of extremism, to date, has had compounding effects. There are several reasons for this.

- For one, there is the demonstration effect, which is witnessed around the world, and exists in North Africa as well. In the context of radicalisation, the demonstration effect simply means that examples of terrorist acts and radical groups erode existing social norms and other social barriers to what would normally be considered transgressive behaviour. In other words, examples of radical groups help to legitimise radicalisation. They offer hope to the would-be radical while also offering concrete examples of the benefits in terms of power and status that membership in a radical group promises.
- Path dependency also plays a role in shaping the broader environment. Radical groups clearly contribute to economic hardship and overall statelessness in countries like Libya, where they are active belligerents in the ongoing civil war, thus perpetuating conditions conducive to radicalisation. They also contribute to the development of a market for the tools of violent extremism, such as small and light arms, and expertise in munitions, especially improvised explosive devices.
- Not least of all, path dependency is strengthened when a sub-region or whole country becomes a ‘hotspot’ for violent extremists, as was the case in Libya in later 2015 and early 2016, when thousands of foreign fighters from Tunisia, Nigeria, Egypt, the Gulf and beyond flocked to Sirte to join what appeared to be the next front in Daesh’s drive to establish a far-reaching caliphate. Indeed, certain parts of Libya have become a veritable ‘terrorists bazaar’.

Outlook

In dealing with such a complex and deep-rooted problem, policy tools are limited. The ability of the United States, Canada and Europe to provide solutions to the structural factors that contribute to extremism is limited in the near to medium term. For example, one of the most important structural factors contributing to violent extremist movements, as has been widely recognised, is economic exclusion. Even if it is not the only factor—and there are cases of radicalisation in which economic exclusion did not play a significant role—it seems clear that inclusive economic development in many of the vulnerable towns and regions in North Africa would do a great deal to reduce the phenomenon of radicalisation. Inclusive economic development, however, is a process measured in decades or even generations. This does not mean that it should not be an objective, much less that development efforts of Canada and its major allies are unworthy. But it does mean that such efforts are unlikely to have a big impact on radicalisation in North Africa at least in the short to medium term.

Other tools, however, can be more effective. State-building, for example, in Libya or in parts of Tunisia, is possible. The idea of nation-building is out of vogue—if it ever was in vogue. Despite the negative connotation of the term, however, it is possible to strengthen states that are administratively or institutionally weak. The transfer of technology and knowledge, combined with skillfully managed political and diplomatic incentives has and could continue to have a positive effect in Libya and Tunisia.

There is an understandable tendency to focus on programs that could have an immediate, pragmatic effect. European focus on border security in Tunisia (and previously Libya) is one such example. The UK's focus on tourism security in Tunisia is another. These efforts are potentially valuable, although they must be realistically resourced.

Programs designed to counter violent extremism (CVE) may also offer benefits, although our knowledge about what does and does not work in this field is still very limited. More research is needed

to establish credible theories of intervention. Moreover, the benefits of CVE programs when they do work are primarily preventative—aimed at controlling the growth of the problem—instead of reducing it.

Military and security measures can be controversial, but they are sometimes necessary to lay the foundation of security for effective state-building programs. The post-revolutionary experience of Libya underscores this point. Libya after Qaddafi faced comparatively rosy prospects for stabilisation, but lack of security made progress on all other state-building fronts nearly impossible. If Libya is to get off of its current path, it will likely require at least some form of outside security assistance at some point. Tunisia may not need foreign boots on the ground, but it needs the continued support of foreign security services in the form of train and equip programs to strengthen its ability for direct action against extremist groups there, for effective responses to terrorist attacks, and to ensure that its internal security practices do not exacerbate its domestic radicalisation problem, which is severe. Reforming Tunisia's interior ministry is a major challenge.

To complicate matters in Libya, several foreign actors are now engaged on the ground. In 2015, Italy developed a plan for intervention in favour of the Government of National Accord that would have involved the deployment of a brigade-sized force to Tripoli to help ensure the security of that government. When the government itself under-performed due to the reticence of eastern commander General Khalifa Hiftar, the Italians backed down. In the meantime, operations of French, UK, and US special forces units were widely reported on the ground—on both sides of Libya's conflict, east and west. The presence of these forces is clearly aimed at counter-terrorism operations and might be beneficial in brokering ceasefire agreements between the sides in the civil war. However, it also complicates the picture because it risks the appearance of favouritism, undermining Western authority with the UN brokered government. Meanwhile, Egypt, with the tacit backing of Gulf states, continues to support General Hiftar, complicating efforts to force him to recognise and accept the UN-backed government. Without an agreed strategy and end-state for Libya from outside powers, it will be even more difficult to resolve the conflict.

Finally, in dealing with groups like Ansar al-Sharia, Daesh, and AQIM, direct military action will continue to have a role to play. The French experience in Mali demonstrates that military forces, including foreign military forces, can, under certain conditions, be a powerful counterforce to the path dependency of violent extremism. The judicious use of airstrikes against such groups also clearly can help, as demonstrated by the dramatic advances of Misratan militias against Daesh in Sirte over the course of the summer of 2016. However, those same airstrikes were controversial within the Libyan political system, demonstrating that the benefits of such operations must always be weighed against their political costs—although these can be difficult to judge in advance.

Ultimately, Western powers will need to determine whether a strategy of containment of the problems emanating from Libya is sufficient to protect their interests. The costs of such a strategy can be underestimated, but the resources for more aggressive strategies are in high demand thanks to crises elsewhere in the world, most notably in the Levant. If a containment strategy is the most desirable, it will be crucial to define the goals of that strategy and understand its resource requirements.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.
- 2 *Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat.*
- 3 *Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest.*
- 4 *Groupe Islamique Armé.*
- 5 *Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat.*
- 6 *Front islamique arabe de l'Azawad.*
- 7 *Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad.*
- 8 *Mouvement des fils du Sahara pour la Justice.*
- 9 Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.
- 10 The *Diwan al-Hisba* is a ministry responsible for matters related to Islamic law and its enforcement.
- 11 General Haftar is a former military commander under Muammar Gaddafi who joined the ranks of the 2011 revolution. He is considered by some as the most important warlord of the country and commands the self-styled Libyan National Army, aligned with Operation Dignity.
- 12 The Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.
- 13 *Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest.*
- 14 *Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad.*
- 15 Alliance of pro-government Malian armed groups.
- 16 *Alliance nationale pour la sauvegarde de l'identité peule et la restauration de la justice.*
- 17 *Haut conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad.*
- 18 Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad.
- 19 Daesh is defined in this context as all groups that have pledged allegiance to the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.
- 20 Covering Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.
- 21 *Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat.*

APPENDIX A

WORKSHOP AGENDA

TERRORISM IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

THE EXPANSION OF A REGIONAL THREAT?

A WORKSHOP OF THE ACADEMIC OUTREACH PROGRAM OF THE
CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (CSIS)

14 OCTOBER 2016
CSIS NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS, OTTAWA

PROGRAM

- 13:00 – 13:15 Objectives and structure of the workshop
- 13:15 – 14:45 **Module 1 - Al-Qaeda and Daesh in Africa Today:
Localised opportunism or transnational ambition?**
- Understanding the regional strategy of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
 - Has Daesh already overreached in Libya?
- 14:45 – 15:00 Break
- 15:00 – 16:30 **Module 2 - Future prospects for violent
extremism in North Africa and the Sahel**
- Will Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb continue to prosper? Implications for counter-terrorism in the Sahel
 - The evolving fight against jihadism in North Africa and the Sahel
- 16:30 Adjourn

APPENDIX B

ACADEMIC OUTREACH AT CSIS

Intelligence in a shifting world

It has become a truism to say that the world today is changing at an ever faster pace. Analysts, commentators, researchers and citizens from all backgrounds—in and outside government—may well recognise the value of this cliché, but most are only beginning to appreciate the very tangible implications of what otherwise remains an abstract statement.

The global security environment, which refers to the various threats to geopolitical, regional and national stability and prosperity, has changed profoundly since the fall of Communism, marking the end of a bipolar world organised around the ambitions of, and military tensions between, the United States and the former USSR. Quickly dispelling the tempting end of history theory of the 1990s, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, as well as subsequent events of a related nature in different countries, have since further affected our understanding of security.

Globalisation, the rapid development of technology and the associated sophistication of information and communications have influenced the work and nature of governments, including intelligence services. In addition to traditional state-to-state conflict, there now exist a wide array of security challenges that cross national boundaries, involve non-state actors and sometimes even non-human factors. Those range from terrorism, illicit networks and global diseases to energy security, international competition for resources, and the security consequences of a deteriorating natural environment globally. The elements of national and global security have therefore grown more complex and increasingly interdependent.

What we do

It is to understand those current and emerging issues that CSIS launched, in September 2008, its academic outreach program. By drawing regularly on knowledge from experts and taking a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach in doing so, the Service plays an active role in fostering a contextual understanding of security

issues for the benefit of its own experts, as well as the researchers and specialists we engage. Our activities aim to shed light on current security issues, to develop a long-term view of various security trends and problems, to challenge our own assumptions and cultural bias, as well as to sharpen our research and analytical capacities.

To do so, we aim to:

- Tap into networks of experts from various disciplines and sectors, including government, think-tanks, research institutes, universities, private business and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Canada and abroad. Where those networks do not exist, we may create them in partnership with various organisations;
- Stimulate the study of issues related to Canadian security and the country's security and intelligence apparatus, while contributing to an informed public discussion about the history, function and future of intelligence in Canada.

The Service's academic outreach program resorts to a number of vehicles. It supports, designs, plans and/or hosts several activities, including conferences, seminars, presentations and round-table discussions.

While the academic outreach program does not take positions on particular issues, the results of some of its activities are released on the CSIS web site (<http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca>). By publicising the ideas emerging from its activities, the program seeks to stimulate debate and encourage the flow of views and perspectives between the Service, organisations and individual thinkers.