

## CONFERENCE REPORT



## PARTICIPATING SCHOLARS

CSIS would like to thank and acknowledge the experts who spoke at the conference. This group's rich and varied experience in government, policy research, and academia allowed us to consider issues from multiple points of view.

**Dr. Jon B. Alterman**  
CSIS Middle East Program

**Mr. Michael Braun**  
Spectre Group International

**Prof. Jean-Pierre Filiu**  
Sciences Po (Paris)

**Ambassador Robert Godec**  
U.S. Department of State

**Ambassador Vicki Huddleston**  
U.S. Department of Defense

**Mr. Haim Malka**  
CSIS Middle East Program

**Dr. Geoff Porter**  
Eurasia Group

**Ambassador Janet Sanderson**  
U.S. Department of State

**Mr. Craig Whitlock**  
*The Washington Post*

**Dr. Dov Zakheim**  
Former Undersecretary of Defense  
(Comptroller), and Senior Adviser, CSIS

## CSIS MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM

The CSIS Middle East Program covers all aspects of U.S. policy toward the region, concentrating especially on identifying new voices, framing emerging challenges, and developing opportunities for positive change in the Middle East.

## The Dynamics of North African Terrorism

## OVERVIEW

Terrorism has plagued the Maghreb for decades, long before the attacks of September 11 forced the United States to respond to al Qaeda. Before 2001, however, North African terrorism was largely contained and localized. Today Maghreb extremists have developed into complex organizations that combine religious ideology with criminal networks, operating both locally and globally. As extremism has evolved in North Africa, U.S. ties with the region have also changed. Today the United States has relations with every government in the Maghreb. This new dynamic presents an opportunity for the United States to work with its regional allies in the fight against terrorism, while also promoting interregional cooperation.

To better understand the nature of North African terrorism and to assess strategies for fighting extremism, the CSIS Middle East Program convened a one-day conference in Washington, D.C., on February 16, 2010. The conference brought together high-level U.S. government officials and leading experts in law enforcement, security, and social and political affairs.

## KEY POINTS

- Maghreb governments must lead the fight against extremism and terrorism, as any overt U.S. actions will likely exacerbate the problem.
- The fight against terrorism and extremism must also address economic development, by promoting jobs, education, economic growth, trade ties, and greater regional economic integration.
- Political divisions and the ongoing Western Sahara conflict limit regional cooperation.
- Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has essentially remained an Algerian organization. At the same time, it has pushed south into sub-Saharan states such as Mauritania, Niger, and Mali.
- AQIM engages in drug trafficking and kidnapping to support its operations and is now a hybrid terrorist-criminal organization. Personal relationships are developing between North African terrorist groups and international drug cartels, which can evolve into strategic alliances in the future.
- Most Maghreb countries continue to focus their efforts on countering the spread of extremist ideology by controlling religious discourse and education, rather than reforming violent extremists.

## TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM IN THE MAGHREB

Terrorism in North Africa threatens both local states and U.S. interests. Only a decade ago, the region was marginal to U.S. interests. Today the Maghreb is a key energy supplier, partner on counterterrorism, and growing market for U.S. exports. Its geographical position at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East means that trends in the region affect hundreds of millions of people across the globe. As the United States expands its cooperation with North African states, the potential threat from local extremists grows. North African terrorist groups have directly targeted French, British, Spanish, Italian, and even Chinese nationals. So far, the United States has been spared, but al Qaeda affiliates in North Africa are under increasing pressure from al Qaeda central to attack global and American targets. A successful strike against U.S. targets would likely be an important recruiting tool for extremists in the region—and a boost to al Qaeda. While local governments are vigilant in their fight against extremist organizations, terrorists continue to adapt and evolve.

In many ways, the origins of modern terrorism and extremism in the Maghreb sprouted from the violent anticolonial struggles that convulsed the region in the twentieth century, most importantly in Algeria and Libya. More recently, North Africans returned from the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s and continued fighting, this time against their home governments and against the West. These returning North African “Afghans” found willing allies among graduates of Salafi schools funded by Gulf Arab states. The combination of seasoned fighters and puritanical religious ideology created an explosive environment for violence and extremism. In the 1990s, that volatile mix resulted in as many as 150,000 deaths from the Algerian government’s battle with Islamic insurgents. Even as President Abdelaziz Bouteflika largely stabilized the country, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) continued its campaign against the state, attacking government targets and security forces. Though the depth of Algeria’s experience with violence was unique, terrorism and extremism touched each country in the region.

In the shadow of September 11, massive bombings in Djerba, Tunisia, in 2002, and Casablanca, Morocco demonstrated that no country was immune to terrorism. While North African terrorism in the 1990s was largely locally directed, with the dawn of the new century it evolved into a global phenomenon that bled into Europe, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Beyond the Algerian networks, Moroccans perpetrated the

2004 Madrid train bombings, Tunisians actively fundraised for terror operations, and Libyans based in Afghanistan cooperated with al Qaeda.

More than any other development, the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq fueled extremist ideology and pushed North African terror beyond the region. The Iraq war provided jihadis with a new rallying cry and boosted recruitment. Many young jihadis from the Maghreb traveled to Iraq, and according to some estimates, between 2006 and 2007, nearly one third of foreign fighters in Iraq were North African.<sup>1</sup> Iraq created what Jean-Pierre Filiu, professor of Middle East studies at Sciences Po (Paris), described as a “fateful triangle” between North Africa, Europe, and Iraq. According to Filiu, “Iraq was the key to the metamorphosis of the

*“Iraq was the key to the metamorphosis of the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC),” and the GSPC became an asset for al Qaeda in Iraq, providing a stream of suicide bombers.—Professor Jean-Pierre Filiu*

GSPC” from a local organization into an international one. In turn, the GSPC became an asset for al Qaeda in Iraq, providing a stream of suicide bombers. Networks in France, Spain, and Italy provided logistics and fundraising for travel between North Africa and Iraq. But by 2007 the trend began to reverse. A combination of U.S. military successes against al Qaeda in Iraq and extensive border monitoring by regional governments sharply decreased the number of North Africans traveling to fight in Iraq.

### Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb

The defeat of al Qaeda in Iraq spurred another dramatic shift among North African terror groups. In early 2007 the Algerian GSPC swore allegiance to al Qaeda, renaming itself Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The creation of AQIM gave a number of declining organizations, such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and GSPC, a new cause. It also gave al Qaeda central an opportunity to expand its reach and opera-

1. Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, “Al-Qaeda’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., December 2007, p. 8, <http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf>.

tions. According to Ambassador Robert Godec, principal deputy coordinator for counterterrorism at the U.S. State Department, AQIM is “today, the biggest terrorist challenge facing the Maghreb...and in terms of statements, strategy, and tactics, AQIM’s behavior mimics that of al Qaeda generally.” AQIM operates, recruits, and plans in ungoverned spaces, launches attacks against both civilians and military targets, and kidnaps Westerners. In approving the creation of AQIM, al Qaeda’s central leadership hoped that Algeria would become another center of global jihad.

Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri approved the merger, yet the extent of al Qaeda’s influence over AQIM remains unclear. Filiu stated that al Qaeda kept the Algerian apparatus of the GSPC in place while pressing the organization to focus on global targets. Still, the actual links between the two organizations remain ambiguous, and according to Ambassador Janet Sanderson, deputy assistant secretary of state for Gulf and Maghreb affairs, “the U.S. government continues to grapple with the relationship between AQIM and al Qaeda.” To some observers, the question of the relationship is less important than their operational capabilities. Michael Braun, managing partner of Spectre Group International, argued that to some extent the nature of the relationship is “irrelevant as long as the kidnappings, bombings, and terror continue.”

While the war in Iraq helped launch AQIM, the battle shifted just as the organization was crystallizing. The U.S. military surge and the opposition of Sunni tribes to al Qaeda in places like Anbar province sapped the movement of fighters. Simultaneously North African governments helped stem the flow of young extremists to Iraq. The collapse of the North African pipeline to Iraq hurt AQIM’s recruitment efforts among North Africans within the region and Europe. In addition, it created ongoing tension between AQIM and al Qaeda central over tactics, strategies, and achievements.

Most importantly, the collapse of AQIM’s international operations harmed the group’s efforts to become a regional and global force, and to integrate extremists from all of North Africa into a single organization. Instead of expanding throughout the region, AQIM was forced to shift its operations and recruitment to the ungoverned spaces of the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, ensuring that AQIM essentially remained an Algerian organization with a Saharan branch.

AQIM’s southern focus is problematic for both al Qaeda and AQIM. According to Filiu, “Al Qaeda is an Arab outfit and al Qaeda has a very deep racial problem...incorporating people who are non-Arabs.” He pointed out that

while North Africans were willing to fight in Iraq - an Arab country - they are not willing to fight in large numbers for non-Arab causes in places such as Afghanistan or Nigeria, where Christian-Muslim violence has intensified. “It’s a dirty little secret of al Qaeda,” he said. The “ethnic racial dimension is underplayed, but it is at the root of jihadi dynamics including within AQIM.”

AQIM also failed in its efforts to launch attacks in the northern Mediterranean and Europe, especially against the declared enemies of al Qaeda central such as France, Spain, and Italy. Instead, AQIM fell back on “going global” in a local environment, essentially attacking international targets on Algerian soil. The most notable example was the double suicide bombing of the UN headquarters in Algiers in 2007, which killed more than 30 people. Pressure within Algeria on AQIM also forced the movement to seek Western targets in the Sahara, for example, targeting the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in 2008. According to Filiu, as operations were pushed down into the Sahara and Sahel, the trend of higher-profile jihadi violence within Algeria began to decline.<sup>2</sup> In 2009 for example, there was only one reported suicide attack in Algeria, though there has been an increase in improvised explosive device (IED) attacks. While violence continues in Algeria, it is primarily concentrated in the area known as the “triangle of death” between Tizi Ouzo, Boumerdès, and Bouira provinces.

Despite some “successes,” al Qaeda is generally disappointed with AQIM’s failure to project regional and global terrorism. Tension has mounted, leading al Qaeda central

*“[AQIM] is the biggest terrorist challenge facing the Maghreb today...and in terms of statements, strategy, and tactics, AQIM’s behavior mimics that of al Qaeda generally.”—Ambassador Robert Godec*

to periodically pressure AQIM to step up attacks against Western and global targets. One area where AQIM has been able to strike Western targets is through kidnapping. Kidnapping has been an ongoing industry in the region for more than a decade, and European hostages have been pe-

2. According to the Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (WITS), the number of casualties as a result of terrorist attacks in Algeria has declined from 892 in 2007 to 411 in 2008 and to 208 in 2009. While casualties have declined, recorded incidents in 2009 increased to approximately 60 compared to 50 in 2008. See <http://wits.nctc.gov/Main.do>.

riodically kidnapped in the Sahara region. Most were released in exchange for ransom payments.

In mid-2009, AQIM spread the message throughout the Sahara region that they would buy Western hostages. Within several days, local criminal groups captured and sold three sets of Western hostages to AQIM, all abducted in Mauritania and Mali. Most of the kidnapping in this area is committed by local tribes who sell their captives to AQIM. One such incident led to AQIM's killing of a British hostage in Mali after pressure from al Qaeda central to prove AQIM's commitment to the global agenda and killing Westerners.<sup>3</sup> On another occasion AQIM launched a failed attack against the French embassy in Mauritania after Ayman al-Zawahri

*AQIM's Saharan branch is "a criminal organization with an attachment to al Qaeda."*

—Ambassador Vicki Huddleston

denounced France as an eternal enemy of Islam. The tension between the local and global objectives continues, and AQIM has both released hostages for ransom and killed them as al Qaeda central prefers.<sup>4</sup>

### Criminalization of AQIM

The ongoing tension between AQIM and al Qaeda over tactics and strategies raises serious questions regarding AQIM's commitment to the global jihadi ideology al Qaeda espouses. AQIM is increasingly involved in criminal activity and drug trafficking, leading one observer to describe it as a "hybrid terrorist-criminal organization." AQIM's Saharan branch in particular has essentially become a criminal organization with a veneer of religious ideology, or as Ambassador Vicki Huddleston, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Africa, described it, "a criminal organization with an attachment to al Qaeda." This criminal activity provides jobs and appeals to marginalized populations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. While raising questions about its ideology, drug trafficking does not necessarily negate AQIM's commitment to jihad.

The growing nexus of drug trafficking and terrorism is not unique to North Africa; it is a global trend. It is estimated

3. "Al Qaeda kills British hostage in Mali," Reuters, June 3, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5521HO20090603>.

4. "French ex-hostage transferred to Mali capital," Reuters, February 24, 2010, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJO-E61N0H520100224>.

that over half of the organizations designated by the State Department as terrorist organizations are connected to the global drug trade. Braun assessed that the 2004 Madrid train bombings, which killed nearly 250 people, were funded "almost entirely by the hashish trade." Terrorist organizations that in the past were funded by state sponsors of terrorism have been forced to fund themselves, driving the nexus between terrorism and criminal activity. This has been driven in large measure by international cooperation to shut down terrorist financing.

The strategic threat, according to Braun, is that terrorist organizations like AQIM are "operating in the same time and in the same space as powerful drug cartels" and sharing lessons learned. He added, "The personal relationships that are being developed will undoubtedly evolve into strategic alliances or inter-organizational alliances in the future."

### STRATEGIES FOR DE-RADICALIZATION AND COUNTER-RADICALIZATION

While effective counterterrorism efforts have diminished the immediate threat of AQIM terrorism in most of the Maghreb, the spread of extremist ideology remains a growing challenge throughout the region. Security services have remained vigilant, and policing and counterterrorism strategies have been effective in breaking up and arresting cells of terror suspects. But states are aware that heavy-handed tactics can backfire. Instead of de-radicalizing, they can push potential extremists outside the state's purview and pose even greater threats. Governments, however, have had less success in treating extremist thought and the root causes fueling extremism, including unemployment, marginalization, and lack of social mobility.

One of the key problems for regional governments is the spread of Salafi ideology, a socially conservative and literal interpretation of Islamic law promoted by the Saudi state. Though Salafi thought has been present in North Africa for at least 150 years, it occasionally manifests itself

*Terrorist organizations like AQIM are "operating in the same time and in the same space as powerful drug cartels...and the personal relationships that are being developed will undoubtedly evolve into strategic alliances or inter-organizational alliances in the future."*

—Mr. Michael Braun

as Salafi-jihadi ideology, which espouses violence against state authority. According to Geoff Porter, director for the Middle East and North Africa at Eurasia Group, regional governments view Salafi thought as a precursor to violent extremism and Salafi-jihadi ideology. Once someone embraces jihadi ideology and plots or commits terror attacks, regional governments have few tools beyond police action to neutralize them. States tend to focus on either counter-radicalization aimed at preventing the spread of extremist ideology or de-radicalization aimed at treating radicals.

Libya's approach to de-radicalization is perhaps the clearest in the region. Under the direction of the Gaddafi Organization of International Charities, the Libyan government has worked with religious scholars and members of the Libyan Islamic Fight Group to redefine jihad. The Libyan government has engaged in a scriptural debate with militants, publishing a book and asking questions such as when and what is the proper way to wage jihad. In the short term, many former members of the LIFG have publicly disavowed the violent tenets of the organization, which no longer threatens the state. But it is unlikely that a majority of extremists and militants will allow the state to dictate an acceptable context for jihad.

Algeria's national reconciliation process, which offered amnesty to fighters of the GSPC and other armed groups, is another important example of de-radicalization. An estimated 7,000 Algerians accepted government amnesty over the last decade. According to Craig Whitlock, staff writer for the Washington Post, the amnesties were fiercely debated in Algeria among average citizens, the military, and extremists. "The fact remains that although these reconciliation programs have brought people back into the fold," he said, "they have hit a wall, and the insurgency continues." Whitlock cautioned that some extremists are motivated solely by ideology and therefore unlikely to seriously consider amnesty programs.

Porter offered another perspective on Algeria's amnesty program, claiming it is less about de-radicalization and more about de-criminalization. Amnesty, in the Algerian case, focuses on changing actions, not changing the ideology or beliefs driving violence. Militants that have accepted the government's amnesty see it as a way to avert the state's repression rather than a change of heart. Whitlock largely agreed and cited the case of Abdel-Haq el-Ayadiah, a founder of one of Algeria's most violent terrorist organizations, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), as an example of the limits of amnesty. El-Ayadiah accepted the government's amnesty and was released from prison after serving nearly a decade, but he had few regrets about his past ac-

tions. He was still very much religiously and ideologically motivated to his previous extremist goals, although he no longer called for violence. Participants questioned whether changing actions rather than extremist beliefs was sufficient or whether under the current environment it was the best that could be hoped for.

Other models of de-radicalization beyond North Africa take a more holistic approach. Saudi Arabia for example, runs several de-radicalization programs aimed at rehabilitating, reeducating, and reintegrating terrorists. According to Saudi statistics over 4,000 prisoners, including those arrested in Iraq and Afghanistan have graduated from the program. Unlike the Saudi programs, efforts to reintegrate jihadis into mainstream society in North Africa are rare. Instead regional governments focus primarily on counter-radicalization, which attempts to prevent people from embracing Salafi Islam, partly by promoting state-sanctioned interpretations of Islam rooted in North African traditions. Rather than treatment, North African states tend toward prevention of extremism.

While de-radicalization programs based on the Saudi model do not exist in North Africa, there is evidence that Maghreb governments are working proactively to prevent the spread of Salafi Islam, which they see as a precursor to Salafi-jihadi ideology and violence. States are attempting to define and control an acceptable interpretation of Islam by controlling religious education and the production of religious scholars.

*"The fact remains that although these reconciliation programs have brought people back into the fold, they have hit a wall, and the insurgency continues."*

—Mr. Craig Whitlock

Throughout the region, governments are increasingly dictating curricula of Islamic studies departments in universities, in the hope that graduates will promote a state-sanctioned interpretation of Islam. This approach also has its limitations, and as Porter noted, "educated people may choose not to adhere to the states' guidelines."

According to Ambassador Huddleston, Morocco has taken the "most comprehensive approach" to counterterrorism. Morocco has regulated preaching and the appointment of imams and has promoted social reforms, prison reform programs, education, and religious outreach to Moroccans living in Europe. Another approach taken by both Morocco and Algeria is to promote Sufi brotherhoods as a counter-

weight to Salafi thought. The brotherhoods have been part of religious life in the Maghreb for centuries and are once again embraced by the states in the region. This approach also presents challenges and threatens to discredit the brotherhoods.

Though the threats facing North African countries vary, the governments of the region all take the threat of AQIM seriously. Each government has pursued its own unique strategy for fighting the spread of extremism and terrorism. According to Ambassador Huddleston, there doesn't appear to be a right or wrong strategy, "but rather a comprehensive strategy and a need for cooperation and interaction among the states and their allies outside the region." Striking the right balance of regime involvement in the religious sphere will be difficult. Too much overt government interference in shaping religious messages can not only prove ineffective but could also backfire, leading to a backlash against regional governments.

## U.S.-MAGHREB COOPERATION

Although common threats of terrorism did not spur U.S. cooperation with Maghreb states, they deepened those relations. Remarkably, the United States now has friendly relations with every state in the Maghreb, and cooperation on a wide range of issues is likely to expand. According to Ambassador Godec, though AQIM has not historically targeted Americans, "it is a real and immediate threat to American citizens and Westerners in North Africa." Moreover, the failed Christmas Day operation on Northwest Airlines Flight 253, carried out by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), raises new questions regarding the nature of the threat to the United States posed by al Qaeda affiliates.

### Counterterrorism Assistance

There are a number of tools the United States is providing to assist regional allies in the fight against terrorism, and cooperation has expanded to include intelligence sharing, law enforcement and border security, information operations, and efforts to address the local socioeconomic conditions that terrorists seek to exploit. The most notable program is the multiagency Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). The Defense Department, AFRICOM, State Department, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) all participate in the TSCTP with the aim of strengthening the military capabilities of Sahel states and facilitating cooperation between those states and Maghreb governments in the fight against terrorism. While the State Department and USAID focus on development and educa-

tion, the Defense Department, led by AFRICOM, is coordinating Operation Enduring Freedom: Trans-Sahara. The project provides training and equipment to Malian and Mauritanian security forces (and Chadian ones to a lesser degree) in order to strengthen their capabilities to confront

*There doesn't appear to be a right or wrong strategy to fighting the spread of extremism and terrorism, "but rather a comprehensive strategy and a need for co-operation and interaction among the states and their allies outside the region."*

—Ambassador Vicki Huddleston

militant groups and AQIM in their territory. In addition, the U.S. military is supporting the NATO-led Operation Active Endeavour, a Mediterranean naval operation aimed at preventing the movement of terrorists and weapons between North Africa and Europe.

Beyond multilateral efforts, the United States also has ongoing bilateral programs with regional governments. The Antiterrorism Assistance Program (ATA) provides counterterrorism training to police forces, and according to Ambassador Godec, the United States spent over \$500,000 in specialized training for nearly 90 Moroccan and Libyan police officers in the last fiscal year. The Defense Department is also using "1206 funding" authorized in the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act to "help other countries build capacity within their national military forces," by providing military equipment and hardware.

### Prospects for Broader Regional Cooperation

Although U.S. counterterrorism assistance has successfully aided regional governments in stemming the spread of violence, it has done little to aid in the fight against extremist ideology. A more comprehensive approach is clearly needed beyond counterterrorism to address the high unemployment and massive youth bulge that create an ideal environment for the proliferation of extremist ideologies and terrorist recruitment in North Africa. Though each state has a unique society and religious tradition, shared traditions and common threats could provide a basis and opportunity for greater interregional cooperation on counter-radicalization.

U.S. government participants agreed that the United States

is ready to provide tools in the fight against terrorism and extremism, but the lead must come from countries in the region working together. Any overt U.S. counterterrorism presence or attempts to promote a particular interpretation of Islam will only exacerbate the problem. While all countries acknowledge the need to cooperate, the level of cooperation remains insufficient. Moreover, “the lack of a resolution of the Western Sahara question blocks the cooperation and integration the region needs. For the region to achieve real success, the key differences must be resolved or at least bridged,” stated Ambassador Godec. There are good reasons for the countries of the region to come together, he said, “for together, the countries and people of the Maghreb are far better able to address their problems.”

## KEY UNCERTAINTIES

While conference participants agreed on many issues, they also acknowledged that the complexity of current trends and developments raises many unanswered questions. A number of these issues require more in-depth analysis and discussion.

### ■ How does al Qaeda central influence AQIM?

The U.S. government is grappling with this very question, especially as signs of tension between the two groups continue to emerge. How that tension evolves will have a significant impact on how the threat of AQIM evolves.

### ■ How committed is AQIM to jihadi ideology?

The organization remains primarily focused on a local agenda, which includes kidnapping for ransom and drug trafficking, with only a façade of religious ideology. This potential decline in religious ideology could play an important role in rooting out and undermining the organization in the future.

### ■ Are there practical benchmarks to assess the success of counter-radicalization strategies?

Changing perceptions of and support for extremist ideology is a long-term and multifaceted process. There is no one formula for counter-radicalization, and each government must strike an effective and practical balance between law enforcement and efforts to redefine and moderate religious discourse.

### ■ How should the efficacy of amnesty and de-radicalization programs be measured?

Algeria’s amnesty program has succeeded in stabilizing the country, but violence and extremism continue. In many cas-

es amnesties give extremists the opportunity to cease their violent acts, yet do not treat the root causes of extremism or change the ideology of extremists. How to set practical and measurable benchmarks for success remains a challenge for societies struggling with ending violent conflict.

### ■ How have strong counterterrorism efforts in North Africa affected AQIM’s potential threat in sub-Saharan Africa?

The success of Maghreb governments in fighting terrorism has pushed North African extremist groups south into sub-Saharan Africa, where they can exploit ungoverned spaces and work with local criminal networks. How the U.S. and North African governments work to strengthen the rule of law and counterterrorism capabilities in sub-Saharan Africa will likely affect the ability of AQIM and other militant groups to operate in those areas.

### ■ How can North African counter-radicalization strategies provide lessons for other conflicts?

North African states have a long history of fighting terrorism stretching back to Algeria’s “black decade” in the 1990s. Amnesty and reconciliation plans as well as multifaceted counter-radicalization strategies pursued by Morocco can provide lessons for other conflict-ridden societies, especially in Afghanistan.

### ■ What is the long-term sustainability of U.S. aid programs and counterterrorism assistance?

The United States is supporting a wide range of security and development programs in North Africa to help build the capacity of local governments to fight terrorism. Programs like the TSCTP have successfully improved U.S. bilateral ties and cooperation with regional states, but uncertainty over the long-term sustainability of U.S. counterterrorism aid raises questions about the future capabilities of those states to combat terrorism over the long term.

## CONCLUSION

Terrorism remains a defining problem for the Maghreb. While significant progress has been made, the threat of AQIM continues to challenge North African governments. The region still provides a source of recruits, logistics, and financing for terrorist operations, both locally and globally. The United States remains actively involved in combating these challenges. According to Ambassador Godec, “the United States has wide-ranging and important ties to the Maghreb. And the administration of President Obama in-

tends to remain engaged. We are actively looking for opportunities to cooperate with our partners in the Maghreb to advance our common interests.”

Beyond bilateral counterterrorism cooperation with the United States and multilateral efforts, some regional governments are pursuing a wider range of counter-radicalization strategies, aimed at preventing the spread of extremist ideology. Those efforts are important and should be expanded. Yet, they must also address the root problems of extremism, including economic development, job creation, and giving marginalized communities a stake in their societies.

For the last decade, counterterrorism formed the foundation of growing U.S.-Maghreb cooperation. But the future looks more complex. Looking forward, Ambassador Sanderson noted that “we will only be successful in the Maghreb if we build a network of relationships that spans all of our

*“The United States has wide-ranging and important ties to the Maghreb. And the administration of President Obama intends to remain engaged. We are actively looking for opportunities to cooperate with our partners in the Maghreb to advance our common interests.”—*  
Ambassador Robert Godec

interests, including counterterrorism.” Designing such a comprehensive strategy provides both challenges and opportunities. But only by embarking on such a project will the United States and the Maghreb enter a new phase of cooperation and work together toward greater regional stability and security. ■ HM

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CSIS would like to thank the numerous North African officials that encouraged our work on this conference, as well as Mr. Ahmed Charai, CSIS International Advisory Board member and chairman of Maroc Telamatique media group.

This conference summary is produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a private, tax-exempt institution focusing on international public policy issues. Its research is nonpartisan and nonproprietary. CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2010 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

### CSIS MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM

**Jon B. Alterman**  
Director

**Haim Malka**  
Deputy Director

**Michael Dziuban**  
Research Assistant

**Allison Hutchings**  
Program Coordinator/Research Assistant

**Whitney Purdum**  
**Kellye Steindel**  
**Brandon Borovoy**  
Interns

Please visit our Web site at [www.csis.org/mideast](http://www.csis.org/mideast) to learn more about the program’s work.