

Joint House-Senate Diplomatic Briefing on Security
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U.S House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

Verbal Remarks

Topic : “ Terrorism in Mali and the Sahel region”.

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to the United States

- Chairman Edward Royce, and Ranking Member Eliot Engel and members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,
- Honorable Rep. Christopher H. Smith and Rep. Karen Bass, Chairman and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations,

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss terrorism in Mali and the Sahel in the context of the global Islamist violence threat in the Sahel region.

I have been asked to examine the nature of Islamist violence in Africa and to explain the intensification of violent Islamist activity in the Sahel region.

A finely tuned understanding of al Qaeda and Muslim Brotherhood's agendas, and how they are reflected in action, is required to engage more meaningfully with the causes and manifestations of terrorism and jihadist violent groups threats in the Sahel region and Africa.

Recent developments in sub-Saharan Africa have reinforced a tendency to conceive of almost all violent Islamist groups as local manifestations of two, global Islamist network, Al-Qaeda and the Global Muslim Brotherhood.

I provide my answers to each of these questions in the following sections. But first, I will summarize my conclusions:

Terrorism Activities in the Sahel region

Al Qaeda's affiliated groups and the Muslim Brotherhood Activities

-Terrorism is an increasing concern in Africa's Sahel region and al Qaeda's affiliated groups threat is a global threat that will require a global response. The nature of this threat is highly varied : groups are structurally, politically, and empirically different, but not ideologically.

-The beginnings of all the religious terrorism that we are witnessing today were in the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology all those who worked with bin-Laden and al-Qaida went out under the mandate of the Muslim Brotherhood.

-The notion that violent Islamist groups are not operating towards a regional or globally coordinated jihad, does not exclude the evidence of their ideological unity and the transnational linkages and global orientation uniting them. The violent Islamist groups are the spawners of al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood, that have one common denominator: Death to infidels and world conquest.

-The al-Qaeda brand and the Global Muslim Brotherhood, are busily extending their franchises to other parts of the Muslim world where weak or dysfunctional governments allow it the space and opportunity to pursue its nefarious designs.

-Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the Global Muslim Brotherhood and the groups, even those formally affiliated with Al-Qaeda, operating within the local and national contexts of their origins, poses a growing danger to Africa and beyond. In fact, Boko Haram, Ansar Dine, Al Shabab, and others can position themselves strategically within a globalized discourse concerned with violent Islamist groups.

-The fall of the Egyptian president, Mohamed Mursi, demonstrates the weaknesses of political Islamist movements. Radical Islamism is wholly unsuited to dealing with a global economic and information revolution, and goes right back to medievalism against the whole thrust of modernity, so over time it's bound to fail".

Mali : The Military operation

-The analysis of more subtle but profoundly powerful forces contributing to the Malian crisis is not only more delicate and complex, but also stretches beyond the boundaries of the Republic of Mali, as we are well aware; this extended jihadist networks bringing with it a plethora of diverse, local issues.

-The military operation launched by France against the Islamists in Mali on January 12, 2013, was a last resort choice accepted by the international community. This military operation had a specific goal : to put a stop to the rampant and proliferating fundamentalist destabilization effort led by al-Qaeda in the Sahel region, whose virulent anti-Western approach is aimed at replacing existing regimes with Islamic autocracies ruled solely by Shari'a (Islamic law).

-The most realistic strategy that can flow from the French military operation is that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), may be able to :

- keep jihadist fighters on the move and prevent them from concentrating or consolidating their influence in any one area in the Sahel region.
- Stabilize the key population centres and support the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country

Sahel and Africa : Security situation

-The Sahel is different from other theatres in the War on Terror, which involve Muslim-majority Arab countries and non-Arab Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East.

- The Sahel states are not ideologically driven, so it should be easier to mobilize them against Islamic terrorism activities.
- ungoverned territories are assumed to provide a safe haven for extremism, and Africa is seen as set to become the new theatre in which violent Islam will flourish.
- The Sahel countries lack the necessary resources to fight terrorist activity, which surged when al-Qaida branches began to emerge in Africa. Therefore, external support is needed.
- Regional cooperation is likely a key to Sahel stability. Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria and others in the Sahel region can manage and contain the terrorism issue if they work together, and receive appropriate encouragement and support from the International community.
- The African ‘security apocalypse’ proposes that the futures of African states will resemble Mali if pre-emptive intervention is not undertaken. Nigeria, Niger, Mauritania, Kenya, Tanzania, and other states with islamist groups, who may or may not use some violence to promote these agendas, are considered ready and dangerous potential allies of the global Al-Qaeda-Muslim Brotherhood threat.

The International Community : Integrated Strategy for the Sahel

The International Community should :

- ensure a coherent, comprehensive and coordinated approach encompassing governance, security, humanitarian, human rights and developmental aspects to resolve the threats to peace and security across the Sahel region as well as to address the root causes of these challenges and to implement, in this regard, the development of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel as requested by its resolution 2056(2012) and the three strategic goals defining the strategy.
- pursue efforts in order to enhance trans- regional and interregional cooperation and international assistance toward the Sahel region.

USA : Rethinking the islamist terrorism

America remains al Qaeda's and other islamist violent groups main target.

It is true that al Qaeda’s affiliates and the Muslim Brotherhood allocate most of their resources fighting for territory against their “local” enemies. It is true also that the jihadi offshoot in the Maghreb used to be ranked as one of al Qaeda's weaker franchises.

And, in actual fact, these groups are of far less direct concern to the U.S. and their gains, while worrying, are not necessarily immediate threats to American national security.

But the gains made by the islamists over there in the Arab Maghreb and the Middle East can easily lead to a threat against Americans.

So USA and Western governments need to rethink both the drivers of this latest manifestation of terrorism and their own strategy.

The importance of good intelligence, a policing-led approach to interception, and proper international co-ordination has never been more important than it is now./.