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COIN doctrine for the 21st century GWOT: Improvements for battling Al Qaeda in the Western Sahel

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COIN doctrine for the 21st century GWOT: Improvements for battling AQIM in the Western Sahel



Caleb Archuleta
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5/14/2018

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The title photo is a photo of a Malian soldier in Inaloglog, Mali conducting an exercise with French soldiers in October of 2017, courtesy of The Atlantic

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The list of people I have acknowledged above is far from complete, but my attempt to show gratitude will always be much farther from adequate than I would like. I am privileged to have grown up in the greatest country in the world, to have been raised by a loving family in a state I love so much, to be surrounded by bright, loyal, upbeat friends, and to have stumbled upon so many fantastic people, places, opportunities, and experiences. In fact, I’m lucky to have made it this far at all. If I do anything in this life, it is my hope to do the belief of all these people justice, to protect those who are unable to

protect themselves, and to live and socialize with my fellow humankind, gain new experiences, and continually find personal challenge.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

A&D-Aerospace and Defense

AFRICOM-U.S. Africa Command

AQ-Al Qaeda

AQAP-Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

AQI-Al Qaeda in Iraq

AQIM-Al Qaeda in the Maghreb

AWG-Asymmetric Warfare Group

CA-Civil Affairs

CENTCOM-Central Command

CIA-Central Intelligence Agency

COIN-Counterinsurgency

CONUS-Continental United States

CORDS-Civil Operations Rural Development Support

CST-Cultural Support Teams

CYBERCOM-Cyber Command

DA-Direct Action

DHS-Department of Homeland Security

DIA-Defense Intelligence Agency

DNI-Director of National Intelligence

DOD-Department of Defense

EUCOM-European Command

EU-European Union

FARC-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army

FET-Female Engagement Teams

FID-Foreign Internal Defense

FOIA-Freedom of Information Act

FP-Foreign Policy

FYXX-Full year 20XX

GEOINT-Geospatial Intelligence

GIA-Armed Islamic Group

GSPC-Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

GWOT-Global War on Terror

HUMINT-Human Intelligence

IED-Improvised Explosive Device

IR-International Relations

ISAF-International Security Assistance Force

ISIS/ISIL-Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/al-Sham or the Levant

ISR-Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance

MENA-Middle East and North Africa

MIC-Military Industrial Complex

MINUSMA-Multidimensional Integrational Stabilization Mission in Mali

MNA-Algerian National Movement

MNLA-National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad

MTNM/ATNMC-Tuareg Movement of Northern Mali

MUJWA/MUJAO-Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa

NATO-North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGA/NGIA-National Geospatial Intelligence Agency

NGO-Non-governmental organization

NK-North Korea

NORTHCOM-Northern Command

NSA-National Security Agency

NSC-National Security Council

OCONUS-Outside of the Continental United States

OEF-Operation Enduring Freedom

ONI-Office of Naval Intelligence

OPSEC-Operational security

OSL/USL-Osama Bin Laden

PACOM-Pacific Command

PERSEC-Personnel security

POTUS-President of the United States

PSI-Pan-Sahel Initiative

PSYOP-Psychological Operations

R2P-Responsibility to Protect

Sahel-Arabic for “coast. Strategically valuable ecoclimatic and biogeographic zone between the Sahara Desert to the north and the Sudanian Savannah to the south. Stretches from West Africa in Senegal and Mauritania to East Africa in Eritrea. Includes portions of Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, South Sudan, Sudan, the CAR, Cameroon, and Ethiopia.

SF-Special Forces

SIGINT-Signals Intelligence

SOCOM-Special Operations Command

SOF-Special Operations Forces

SOUTHCOM-Southern Command

STRATCOM-Strategic Command

Takfiri-Pronouncement that an individual is an unbeliever and non-Muslim, especially for one who was previously a Muslim, commonly used to refer to “extremists” who do follow only certain exaggerated portions of Islam and who view the majority of Muslims as apostates.

TF-Task Force

TRANSCOM-Transportation Command

TSCTI/P-Trans Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative/Partnership

Tuareg-Ethnic Berber group native to the Western Sahara region, often marginalized in many countries

UK-United Kingdom

UNISOM-United Nation Operations in Somalia

UNITAF-Unified Task Force

UN-United Nations

USAF-United States Air Force

USAID-United States Office of Assistance and International Development

USSR-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

US-United States

UW-Unconventional Warfare

WMD-Weapon of Mass Destruction

Introduction

A Note on Personal Interest

I have always been interested in the military. I consider those who go out into the dark unknown where bullets whiz and rockets explode, who risk their own lives in order to keep civilians like myself and our liberties safe to be the greatest and most admirable group on this earth. In pursuit of my interest of security and military operations I also acquired a fondness for North Africa, Arabic, and Islamic studies. As an international business major, I become entranced with how money drives the world and a lack of proper distribution can cause severe hardship and conflict. In all of my travels, the most distinct similarity I have noticed is that those people unable to support those they love or follow their dreams, are by far and large the most unhappy and dangerous people in the world, often by little fault of their own. In starting an undergraduate thesis, I wanted it to improve the relevance and efficiency of the operations and wars of my countrymen and women in uniform while also improving the situation of those civilians trapped in dark, difficult situations around the world. Combining my interests, I began to focus on the Islamist movements that have raged across West Africa and represented to me a true failure to stop or contain the Global War in Terror.

Working at the Orlando Veterans Affairs hospital, I have seen how much this long war has asked and taken of our soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen/airwomen. I have also been fortunate enough to know several elite special operators, of whom this war has often asked the most. When in October of 2017, the news that four members of the U.S. Army Special Forces had been killed in the remote countryside of Niger, many Americans, myself included, had little idea why American forces were active there. The following research and paper is an attempt to do justice to the efforts and lives of these four individuals—Staff Sgt. Bryan Black, Sgt. La David Johnson, Staff Sgt. Dustin Wright, and Staff Sgt. Jeremiah Johnson. This thesis is written in honor of these men, and in honor of Johnny Michael Spann,

the first American killed in Afghanistan in combat operations in 2001. Dying in protection of our country, they lived “To Free the Oppressed” (De Oppresso Liber) and left behind families, futures, friends, and loved ones in doing so. It is my hope that this paper, if only a little bit, can aid in the contribution of winning the Global War on Terror, freeing the oppressed, and making sure the things asked of our troops are not asked in vain. While I have attempted to acknowledge and mitigate any biases, weed out incorrect data or facts in my research, and lend credit and cite parties wherever necessary, I take full responsibility for any flaws, errors, or biases in the following paper.

*“To those before us, to those amongst
us, to those we will see on the other side.
“Lord let me not prove unworthy of my
Brothers”*

Ambush

In October of 2017, news first broke that a group of U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets) had been killed while on a mission in Niger (Gibbons-Neff, Cooper, and Schmitt, 2018). Niger, a country of 21 million people in West Africa, is bordered by Algeria to the North, Mali to the West, Chad to the East, and several smaller African nations to its South. The story gained notoriety as word leaked that American President Donald Trump had been unable to remember the name of Sgt. La David Johnson on

a phone call with the Sgt.'s widow (Ibrahim, 2017). President Trump harshly rejected the narrative of the fallen soldier's wife and the ensuing media coverage caught the nation's attention.

But another story was stirring in the press, too: Why exactly is the U.S. engaged in military activity in Niger at all? To most Americans, the U.S. has no major tangible interests or concerns with Niger, especially in the realm of military and defense cooperation (Callimachi, Cooper, Schmitt, Blinder, & Gibbons-neff, 2018). In fact, few Americans could tell you the first thing about Niger, or even where to find it on a map. This made the story of the deaths an even bigger deal as people began to wonder: Where exactly is the U.S. fighting around the world? And if we have not even won in Afghanistan and Iraq, how are we equipped to deal with similar conflicts elsewhere?

What is the Global War on Terror?: U.S. National Security Interests and Trends

In the post-9/11 world, terrorism dominates the rhetoric of threats to national security. In 2016, the US saw 68 deaths from terrorism within its borders, while the UK saw 9. In terms of actual death toll, even in countries like Mali that are struggling more directly with an insurgency or terrorism problem, there were only 176 deaths from terrorism in 2016. But terrorism relies on "terror", and fear is an emotional thing that drives populations into extreme responses and characterizations of terrorism. Rarely are we able to look at the world in a purely logical manner. It is for this reason that terroristic disruptions of our idyllic spaces, like American movie theaters, British concerts, or Canadian tourist sites garner such public horror and fear. Gordon Adams, a national security expert, estimates that the U.S. spends over \$100 billion on counterterrorism every year (CNN Money). But in 2017, 2018, and the years going forward, should terrorism really be America's biggest worry?

This over-reaction to terrorism is one that can be logically refuted, however it is not only the fault of our politicians for this overreaction. Politicians after all, respond to public outcry and fear-driven demand for sharp rebukes to terrorism. Terrorism does not *really* threaten states, it is a tool of the

weak, and one that generally has little-no lasting effects (save for our recoil from it). But what does threaten our country's security then? Things like climate change, nuclear weapon proliferation, competition for resources, and biological pandemics certainly pose a much larger threat, but while these constitute an existential threat to the entirety of the human race, and it is in our best interest to stop it, I will limit this paper's examination of threats to national security to the tools of criminal organizations/insurgencies and its regional case study of Sahel Africa.

From first glance, America would seem to have little interest or care for the on-goings in Sahel Africa. Even Lindsey Graham, a prominent senator known for his interventionist stance was seemingly unaware of U.S. presence in Niger (Ibrahim, 2017). What could anything going on in the jungles of Niger have to do with the economic well-being, security situation, or political relationships of the United States? This is a fair and not easily answerable question. While one could make a minor and probably weak case for America's practical incentives for involvement in Niger, the fact is that America is *the* global hegemon and it sets a standard for foreign intervention. But America is still paranoid from the devastation it realized a few dedicated farmers from rural central Asia could cause if they set their minds to it. To most Americans in the summer of 2001, a few tribesmen in Afghanistan probably represented less of a threat than a bark beetle infestation in Colorado.

Now, America has an insurgency problem. Like most big organizations, America struggles with being delicate and quick in its responses. Racing to become a hegemon, the buildup of conventional forces was a key focus of the 20th century. Now in the 21st century America is encumbered by its size and hegemony and at war in more than seven countries (Liataud, 2018). The case could either be made that America needs to maintain its conventional might to maintain its hegemonic status or that America's conventional force maintenance is a waste of massive proportions promoted by the military industrial complex and self-interested politicians. This argument however, is neither here nor there. And the truth of the matter is that to a degree, both of these cases are to some degree, true. The topic of

this paper will be to discuss the tools America *currently* has at its disposal, and how it can more appropriately use those to respond to insurgent conflicts of interest.

Background

U.S. History of Fighting Insurgencies

Acting in the name of morals and principles is fantastic, but even these can be misguided. On September 11th, 2001—America was struck by the most devastating terrorist attack in its history. Around the world people gasped at the horror of America’s iconic Twin Towers in New York City collapsing to the ground. Just over two weeks later, a team of CIA and U.S. Special Forces soldiers were sent to Afghanistan to track down those responsible for the attack and overthrow the Taliban government responsible for supporting the terrorists responsible. In one of the most brilliant tactical maneuvers of all time, U.S. forces formed an alliance with and mobilized a tribal group in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance, to help achieve these objectives. In a few weeks, multiple major cities had been retaken, and within a month, more specialized U.S. units arrived to help drive out the remaining Taliban. These battles and their execution will be long studied as textbook examples of successful warfare campaigns. Their aftermath however, will be studied for quite another reason.

Having driven the Taliban and Al-Qaeda out (most left to neighboring Pakistan or fled into the mountains), the Taliban quickly reorganized and by 2003 announced an insurgency that would be waged against the U.S. and its allied forces who remained in Afghanistan. By now, many conventional units had arrived into Afghanistan, including units from nearly 21 countries, overseen by NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force). The goal here was to hold

Afghani towns that had been cleared and to engage in some sort of nation-building to turn Afghanistan into a friendly ally that bore some semblance to a developed country.

Fast forward sixteen years later, and Afghanistan, previously one of the world's most underdeveloped countries, remains one of the world's most underdeveloped countries. The Taliban insurgency continues to recapture cities and territories, terrorize the local populace, and with every political cycle the U.S. continues to change its approach to the War in Afghanistan (Simpson, 2015). Despite "highlights" such as finding and killing Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011, the war continues to show dismal results prolonged only by short-term victories, with no clear end or strategy in sight. It is well known that the U.S. has killed the number two's and three's of groups like AQ and ISIS multiple times, because each time they simply end of replaced. Costly endeavors that provide us with short-term relief but no long-term ebbing of the growth of existence of these organizations.

How can this be? How can the world's most highly trained and well-funded military backed by other global superpowers be locked in a sixteen-year struggle against farmers who often lack access to plumbing, clean water, and internet? The question is not isolated to Afghanistan's history of locking major superpowers into brutal guerilla warfare either. Across the world, from the U.S.'s failure to defeat or combat Mexican drug cartels to recent news of U.S. Special Forces soldiers killed in Niger, the U.S. seems to be involved in many insurgent conflicts with short-sighted strategy and short-term victories—all of which come at an extremely high cost (Savage, C., Schmitt, E., & Gibbons-Neff, 2018). The following paper will explore why America has such a problem fighting insurgencies, why it is involved with these insurgencies at all (and whether it should be), and in acknowledging the realities of the status quo, how to make our victories against them more lasting, more focused, and less draining on U.S. resources. By looking at case studies around the world drawing from America's wide-spread involvement with a variety of regional conflicts we will attempt to flush out just exactly went wrong, and how to apply these specifically to revitalizing America's approach to these problems in Sahel Africa.

Current Mindset in Fighting Insurgencies and Conflicting Interests & U.S.' Pivotal Moment

The current state of affairs across Africa and the Middle East with regards to U.S. security involvement looks something like that of the 1970's arcade game, Whack-A-Mole. For anyone unfamiliar, the game consists of a board with a number of holes in it, and at random moles "peek" their heads up. The player, armed with a hammer, is tasked with hitting moles on the head as they continually increase in speed and number until the user is overwhelmed knocking down the ever-returning moles. In countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria (to name a few) U.S. troops in the form of large military deployments (10,000 in Afghanistan) to small teams clandestinely inserted into countries like Libya, Somalia, and Niger, U.S. military members are sent to "whack the mole" of terrorist or insurgent groups (Kahn, 2017). Unfortunately the metaphor proves even more accurate in the sense that our military is often only able to only temporarily put down a group or terrorist leader (no matter how devastating the strikes or big the bombs). As soon as our forces leave or draw down, the enemy seems to rear its head exactly where it previously was "defeated", return in a newer, more dangerous manner, or simply becomes displaced and reappears elsewhere.

As mentioned earlier, with the invasion of Afghanistan, many of the Taliban and its Al-Qaeda affiliates simply fled into the Hindu Kush mountains and farther into Pakistan. As the U.S. spent trillions of dollars to keep hundreds of thousands of soldiers spread throughout Afghanistan, the Taliban simply bode its time and waged a passive insurgency from the mountains (it can only be assumed that rent for the Taliban in the mountains was much cheaper than the trillions it cost the U.S. to stay in the country). As the U.S. drew down its troops, the Taliban simply increased the intensity of its insurgency and regained ground at a much more cost-effective rate than the U.S. had. The same was seen in Iraq. While the WMD story and its supporting intelligence may have been faulty, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein was a brutal leader, guilty of grotesque human rights abuses. After a relatively successful

overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, it took only a few years for the power vacuum to be filled by the even more brutal rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. ISIL also filled a geographic power vacuum created by the Syrian civil war. Elsewhere in Libya, the NATO intervention and resulting overthrow of the Gaddafi regime by rival factions led to an ongoing civil war. ISIL itself was able to exploit this and gain an African foothold of its own in Libya. Across the MENA region, groups like AQ and ISIL have shifted to wherever poverty, conflict, and corruption reign, preying on Islamic ideals to mobilize followers and affiliates.

This is not to say that U.S. and Western intervention is solely responsible for the woes of the region. Brutal regimes tend to have a way of collapsing anyway. Insurgencies in countries like Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen have little historical origin with the U.S., yet these very conflicts have come to dominate Africa and the Middle East as a region (Chan, 2016). As the U.S. begins to up its involvement in these conflicts, our first instinct should be one of wariness. After all, even if our conventional military (the hammer) can do its job effectively (whack-a-mole), there are no winners in that game. What it is slightly less adept at doing is developing long-term/lasting solutions. This is for a few reasons. First and foremost, the military does not primarily plan in the long term, it exists to achieve brutal but necessary goals and however bureaucratic it may be, it remains a killing machine. Secondly, American security goals may try to "think" long-term, but by and large they end up being aimed at immediate results driven by short-term-sighted citizens. Think of the climate change example, a massive security threat to the whole world that should surely drive our national agenda. Yet the U.S. government's most riveting action to date has consisted of unratified treaties and the occasional passionate speech to Congress on CSPAN. Security approaches tend, after all, to address not just the most pressing and dangerous threats, but the most *visible* threats. And these are generally approached with the most *visible* and immediate solutions. Finally, the military, even when supplemented by the U.S. intelligence nexus, rarely thinks in terms of the needs of the local populace. While it may have some officers and units devoted to this

function, its primary focus remains and will remain doing violence that serves the interests of the United States. This means that U.S. military actions often have devastating effects on the livelihoods of the locals and that when the U.S. military leaves, U.S. and international development agencies and NGO's are left woefully underprepared and underinformed. This generally results in a long-term unpredictable security situation, and a woeful, "whack-a-mole" approach that dominates policy and action and leaves scorched earth in its path. Nor is this phenomenon limited to the Eastern Hemisphere. In Mexico and much of Central and South America, American law enforcement and foreign policy actors have taken on a similar approach.

It is not easy to advocate for military planners, strategists, or even policy-makers to create a more "considerate" approach that takes into account the "needs and wants of the local populace". This is because they would seemingly be less important than the primary goals of our own forces. The following research will serve to show precisely why America's insurgency problem and its dismal return on investment (ROI) from these engagements is a direct result of this type of thinking. If any investor looked at America's involvement with insurgencies around the world, they would quickly glean that the security benefits gained compared to the resources (time, money, soldiers, intelligence, investments, etc...) we put in are so poor that the only logical solution would be to remove ourselves altogether and reconsider our investment strategy. In Vietnam this was the case, in Afghanistan this was the case, and in Niger and elsewhere across Africa, it's happening all over again, and will continue to happen unless we reconsider what we invest, how we invest, and what we hope to get out of this all.

Why We Intervene: Historical Goals of U.S. National Security Policy

The first step in solving any insurgency, or even beginning to fight it, is to have an idea of what an ideal situation would look like in that country or region for U.S. interests, and then to reconcile this with the needs and wants of the local citizenry. The next step then is to look at previous interventions to

show what goals have driven what actions, and then thirdly to understand the varying levels of success in these cases. If these steps are not followed, then any advocated or implemented U.S. solutions or protected interests will quickly be undone.

In regard to Africa, the U.S. generally has two primary national security goals: the extraction of natural resources/the trade for these natural resources and the prevention of physical security threats to the U.S. (Abramovici & Stoker, 2004). Beyond this, the U.S. also has a somewhat “flexible” interest in humanitarian intervention. I use the term “flexible” as humanitarian intervention can vary in both how it is applied/acted upon and how it is defined. It can be included in the idealist-themed approach of former U.S. ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, who advocated for a “Responsibility to Protect” where countries have a human obligation borne of moral-agency to intervene in genocides or other brutal conflicts that affect civilians in a significant manner like civil wars or insurgencies. It can also be found in other more “realist” thoughts that take the approach that countries should only act in self-interest (sometimes countries can act to intervene to stop genocides simply out of their own interest). The debate on why people or countries act to help others, if it is to make ourselves feel or look better or actually out of the goodness of our hearts is an argument that has not been solved even in the philosophical world. In reality, countries tend to act somewhere in the middle, with action generally executed when humanitarian approach aligns with the interests of the intervening country or does not inconvenience them too much. Take for example the U.S. decision to “intervene” in Kuwait in 1991, hardly a humanitarian decision, the U.S. had clear interest in protecting its oil-providing ally. Yet when Darfur began to experience a brutal genocide in 2003, the U.S. could not be pressed to intervene. Additionally, those who intervene in a moral regard or out of humanitarian interest, without a regard to practicality and historical context often seem to make the situation worse (Thompson, 2008). Finally some countries view ALL intervention, regardless of the intent, as an affront to sovereignty (notably, China).

For the purpose of examining the U.S. role in intervening in Sahel Africa, it is important to note that we will not be using humanitarian intervention as a criterion, not due to lack of a moral prerogative, but simply based on a U.S. (and generally globally-established criterion) of not adhering to such a practice. It would be unrealistic, and thus inaccurate of us, to use this as a criterion for action. In fact, according to the Pearl Harbor Visitors Bureau, in 1939 after the start of WWII, 94% of Americans opposed joining the war against Hitler's Germany and the Axis forces—hardly a promising precedence (LoPronto, 2017).

This section instead will focus in on U.S. interests in Africa that have a *proven precedence* of prompting U.S. intervention. We will also observe and make inferences based off both U.S. official stances and the current status quo upon of U.S. military, political, and foreign policy actions in Sahel Africa. In Africa specifically, the history of foreign intervention is certainly longstanding. Since the Portuguese began to explore the coast of Africa in the mid-1400's, powers have vied for a chance at African resources. As Europe was decimated by the Black Plague, many African nations like Mali, Ethiopia, and Songhay were thriving as trade routed across the African continent spread African goods like gold, spices, salt, and slaves. Africa's thriving economic trade and tales of its riches inevitably spread outside of the African continent. By the late 1400's the Portuguese were engaged with steady trade with West Africa, and the rest of Europe soon followed.

The 17th and 18th century saw a major transatlantic slave trade emerge between Africa and the Americas. The Europeans began to explore inland to Africa in the late 18th century, and the 19th century saw a period of exploration as Africa became the worlds "last frontier". In the late 19th century the Europeans began to realize that with superior firepower and technology like railroads, guns, and medicines that they could gain much better trade "deals" by colonizing countries or supporting friendly, puppet rulers across the continent. Much of this colonization spiraled onward due to heavy competition amongst European powers. In 1884 however, the European leaders came together in what is known as

the Berlin Conference and opted to intentionally divide Africa amongst themselves instead of competing. This led to the systemic, organized extraction of African natural resources and the general exploitation of the African people (although some local elites were treated well by their European colonizers for the sake of maintaining control).

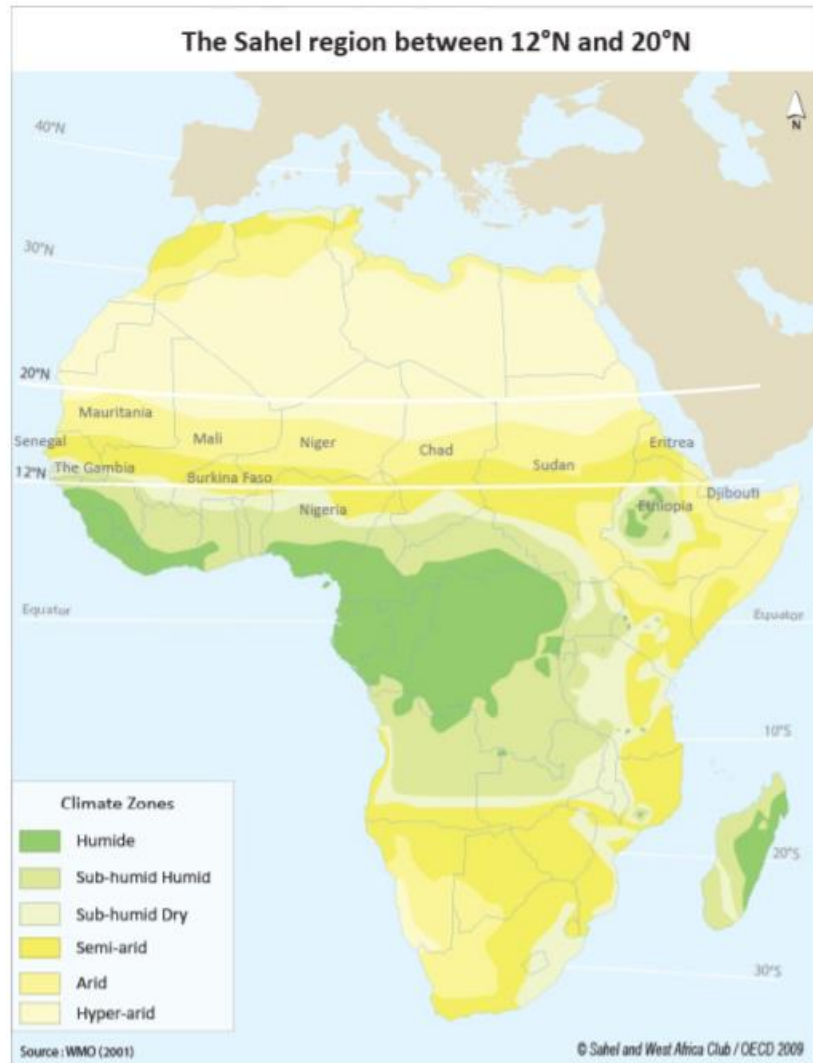
By the end of WWI the will and ability to continue the colonization in Africa began to fade. By the end of WWII Europe, and this will to colonize were completely devastated, just as the will for independence had risen across the African continent. The rising tide of self-determination and need for domestic rebuilding in Europe meant that many rebellions or cries for independence were met with little to no resistance from the colonizers. There were some drawn out struggles, especially in places whose colonizers considered their colonies to be a part of their own identity, such as France in Algeria, but overall the decolonization in Africa of WWII was a fairly rapid and little-resisted movement.

What decolonization lacked in immediate violence, slavery over the past few hundred years and colonization over the past century more than made up for. Redrawing state borders, propping up corrupt regimes, establishing poor local economic conditions, and the predatory extraction of resources were but a few of the consequences that systemically disabled much of the continent in economic, political, and social progress. Furthermore, the Cold War saw the U.S. and USSR waging a global struggle for power, using states from Asia to Africa and their people and governments as proxies to fight battles or win support (University of Groningen, 2012). This struggle only further hurt the continent, save for a few places where the leaders who were able to play both sides and extract some benefit such as with President Nasser of Egypt. Africa's status today as an often conflict-ridden and "troubled" continent is impossible to understand, or begin to fix, without this historical context.

Dividing Africa—Deciding on the AQIM

Africa, despite how it is commonly referenced in literature, is a massive continent. The contiguous U.S., most of Europe, India, and China *combined* are equivalent to the landmass of Africa. Yet we tend to easily discuss it in its entirety. Africa is extremely diverse in its religion, culture, ethnicities/races, and languages. Beyond its people, the geography, ecosystems, and climates also vary widely. So too do more “modern” or recently established/examined criterion such as GDP per capita, colonial ties, and current methods of government. For the purpose of constructive analysis, it is necessary to divide up Africa based on these criteria, or at the very least for comparing and contrasting. The UN divides up Africa into five regions: Northern, Western, Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa.

Climate wise, North and South/Central Africa are divided by a region called the Sahel. The Sahel separates the Sahara from the southern, more humid and jungle-dense Central and Southern African regions. Sahel Africa is also a strategically important region. In trade, conflict, and migration, the Sahel represents a region that is marred by a movement of people, goods, and ideas. Conflict in North Africa tends to have deep ties to religion and the Arab world at large (Libya, Egypt, Algeria, etc...), while that of the South has seen in recent decades much more ethnically or regionally-based conflict (Rwanda, South Africa, etc...). The Sahel then represents a region that is both on the farthest reaches of the Islamic world and more Central African ethnic divisions, susceptible to both trends of religious and ethnic and national/regional conflicts. From a security point of view the Sahel represents an important stopping point in regional conflicts, both in stopping the spread of Islamist conflict south and of ethnic and regional conflict north. It represents the chance to build a geographic and strategic center of stability in the “belt of Africa”. It will therefore be a region of focus for this paper.



A map of the Sahel according to its geographic definition, Sahl and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD)

Still, the Sahel, which in Arabic means something close to “coastal”, refers to a large region that stretches a length nearly equivalent of the length from Portugal to Iran. In popular reference it is used to describe much of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and sometimes Sudan on the coast of the Red Sea. In recent decades the Sahel has seen a heavy dose of conflict. The Sahel alone is still not a narrow enough region to focus our research. Chad and Eritrea have both been relatively conflict-free. Sudan however, has seen one of the world’s most violent multi-decade conflicts. But Sudan’s conflict is centered on an

ethnic civil war in between the Northern Muslim region, and the Southern Christian region and is relatively isolated from the Western half of the Sahel. While South Sudan gained independence in 2011, the two countries are still engaged in conflict due to the imperfect nature of the separation of the countries, as southern states of Sudan with the support of South Sudan continue to battle the Sudanese government. Chad has only experienced minor conflict because of spillover from Sudan. To the West however, is a completely different story.

The Western portion of the Sahel has seen a surge of conflict in recent years. And not only has it seen a surge in conflict, but a surge in conflict that is heavily interrelated. Much of the conflict originated with the global spread of Al Qaeda post the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda in the Maghreb, the regional branch of AQ, has its core footholds in southern Algeria and northern Mali, but has gained heavy influence in Mauritania and other neighboring Sahel countries as of late. The inability to contain this offshoot of Al Qaeda is dangerous for a number of reasons—it limits the inability of Nigeria and its allies to combat Boko Haram, generates revenue and followers for the global Al Qaeda network, and is located in a centrally strategic region that allows it to move and grow in nearly any direction, making it harder to combat. The dangers of AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Maghreb), and how to combat them in a manner that is appropriate to the local circumstances will be the main focus of this paper. Because America has shown a concern for this growing threat, because of AQ's constantly growing and shifting global presence, because of the strategic security value of the Western Sahel, and because of America's increasing difficulty in combating insurgencies and the Global War on Terror (in addition to its difficult history in combating insurgencies), the conflict in the Western Sahel will be the focus of this paper.



Drawn from the VOA, Department of State, and Reuters, the map shows countries around the world where AQ operates.

An Analysis of the AQIM Insurgency

History of AQIM

According to the Council for Foreign Relations, Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb can trace its beginnings back to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The GIA were a group of rebels in early 1990's Algeria who avidly opposed the secular Algerian government (Cassman, 2016). When the Islamic Salvation Group appeared to be winning the second round of parliamentary elections in 1992, the French-supported Algerian military allegedly cancelled elections for just this reason. After this cancelled election, the GIA began to wage a guerilla, and eventually insurgent campaign against the Algerian government. The group grew progressively more violent and was well-known for its gruesome beheadings. In 1998 however, a group

of GIA leaders who were either PR-conscious or suffering from a moral crisis, led a breakaway from the group over fear that current methods were decreasing their levels of civilian support (Chattopadhyay, 2015). This group was known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC, from its French acronym).

The GIA gradually dwindled as the GSPC grew, and was replaced in full by the GSPC within a few years. This, coupled with the GSPC's more "moderate violence" which did not focus (at least not completely) killing civilians, led to an uptick in public support for the group. The Algerian government moved to counter the group with a counterterrorism campaign and by offering asylum for group members. According to West Point's Center for Combatting Terrorism, the GSPC began to dip in popularity in the early 2000's. The GSPC found itself forced out of urban Algerian areas after this campaign due to low levels of public support and difficulty attracting sources of funding and new recruits. As no coincidence, while it is not known who initiated the partnership, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's overall second in command (now its leader), personally announced the partnership on September 11th, 2006. GSPC's PR-masters had engineered another coup. A few months later in January of 2007, GSPC announced that it had changed its name to the Organization of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The picture below is a 2014 image of AQIM fighters in Algeria, from the Voice of America.



Voice of America, Wikimedia Commons, a photo of AQIM fighters in Algeria

2007 was AQIM's (formerly the GSPC) most violent year yet. Devastating suicide attacks occurred throughout Algeria, and as Al-Qaeda was dwindling in some of its former havens like Iraq, experts began to speculate that Al-Qaeda could potentially find its next haven in the Maghreb. The Maghreb, meaning "Land of the West" or "Land where the Sun sets" is the Western-most edge of the Arab world, and refers to the Islamic region from Morocco to Libya. Somewhat confusingly, "Morocco" in Arabic is also known as "Al-Maghreb". In a shocking attack, both the UN regional headquarters and the Algerian Constitutional Court were bombed in Algiers by AQIM operatives, killing 33 people. This marked the beginning of a new period in the Maghreb's fight against terror, as it became clear that AQIM would not simply disappear on its own.

True to their name, since 2007, AQIM has made successful efforts to spread the group throughout the region, having over 30,000 members at its peak (DNI, 2018). Like a virus the group has spread West, South, and to the East. To the East, in Libya, Muammar Gaddafi ruled until the Arab Spring

washed over the Arab world in 2011. Rebel groups quickly formed in Libya and began to take land away from the military after brutal regime crackdowns on protests. The UN and NATO quickly voted to intervene and led an air campaign to support the rebel groups. In August of 2011, just six months after the start of the rebellion, Tripoli was overtaken by rebels. In October, the “last” battle against loyalist forces was fought in Sirte where Gaddafi was captured and killed.

Instability in Libya led to the notable attack on the U.S. Embassy and CIA facility in Benghazi, Libya in September of 2012. A notable strategic effect of the fall of Gaddafi’s government was that Gaddafi’s stockpile of arms and ammunition suddenly had no owner, and were thrust into a trade route that was as uncontrolled as it was historic (trade across the Sahara and through Libya has been a major trade route since the 8th century) (Höije, 2015). Insurgent, rebel, and terrorist groups from Egypt to Mauritania suddenly had access to a free flow of arms. In fact, one of the major reasons that the CIA had remained behind after the fall of the Gaddafi government was to monitor the sale and flow of these arms. Additionally, the vacuum of disorganization fed the fire of AQIM by focusing regional efforts elsewhere and taking away a powerful state that had previously held off AQIM to some degree, giving AQIM more room, time, and resources to grow.

United States officials have stated that they believe AQIM has relations with other regional groups such as Nigeria’s Boko Haram, Yemen’s Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), and Somalia’s Al-Shabaab. They have allegedly exchanged money, information, training, fighters, and weapons. General Ham, the former commander of US Africa Command, stated that the U.S. especially believes and worries about AQAP and Boko Haram exchanging explosives and funds (Doyle, 2012). According to the then-Secretary of State Clinton, the U.S. also believes AQAP may even have played a role in the Benghazi attack.

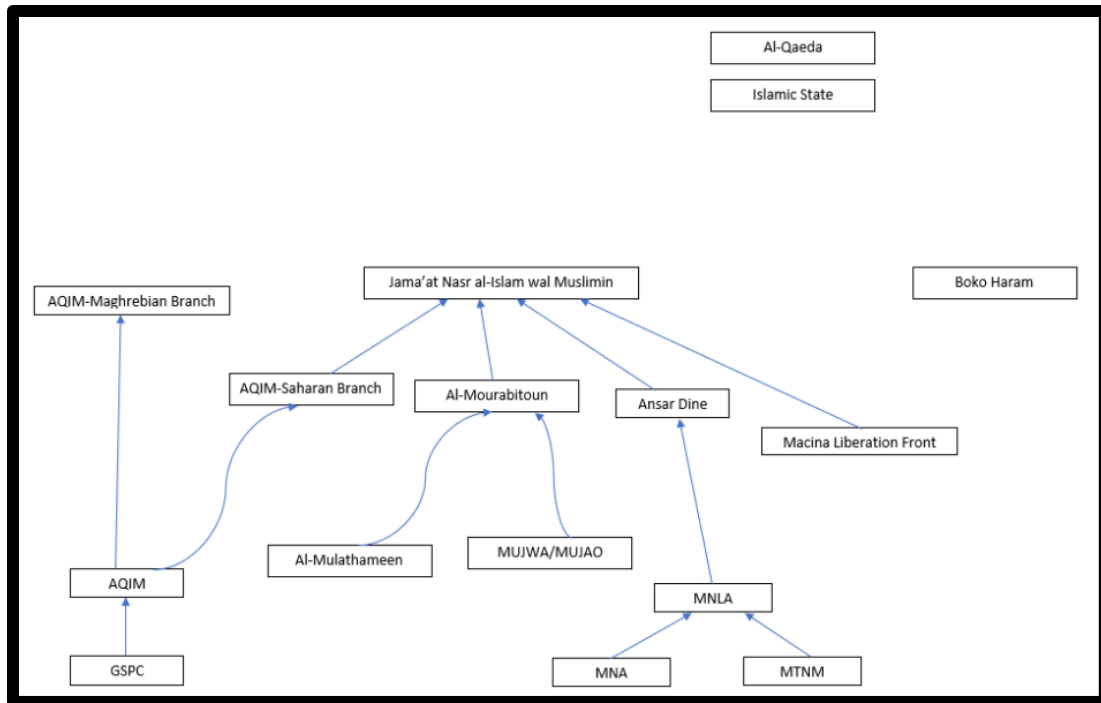
Elsewhere in the Sahel region, the Malian military rebelled against President Touré in 2012 after his poor handling of the insurgencies throughout Mali. The long dissatisfied ethnic-Tuareg group took advantage of this chaos by organizing against the Mali government in both Southern and Northern Mali. The Tuaregs however, quickly had their revolt overtaken by AQIM. French intervention did manage to take back most of the lands held by AQIM in Mali by early 2013, but not before AQIM had managed to establish sharia law and hold training camps in the territory they held. Both France and Algeria cracked down hard on the group and attempted to limit AQIM expansion, but as we will show later, these crackdowns have tended to backfire in the long run.

In the last three years, AQIM has wavered in international notoriety. Awash in a sea of many dangerous organizations in Africa and the Middle East, AQIM and all others are competing for the same headlines with death tolls and attacks in notable places. At the same time, Western and regional powers have difficulty concentrating, addressing, and solving these problems as they constantly wane, grow, or rise in new places. Notably in Africa, the Islamic State has taken and managed to hold land in Libya. But AQIM remains dangerous, its members killed U.S. peacekeepers outside of Timbuktu, Mali in 2015, took 100 people hostage and killed 19 in Bamako, Mali in 2015, laid siege to a hotel and restaurant in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso holding 126 hostages and killing 28 in 2016, and even took over a Malian military base in 2017, fleeing with military hostages, vehicles, and weapons.

The diversity of having multiple insurgent groups in the area has meant that success of a military or foreign military against one group tends to mean success for another group. As the militaries shift their focus (resources, time, soldiers, etc...) to one group, that necessarily means a shift of focus away from another insurgent group. Hence it is no coincidence that intervention against AQIM in 2013 occurred right around time that Boko Haram resurged in Nigeria by seizing territory and began to move into Chad and Niger where it also seized territory (Griffin, 2016). Boko Haram too was eventually pushed back by the Nigerian and Chad governments (although it is hard to tell how permanent this will be).

Between 2014 and 2016, Boko Haram controlled only a few villages on the borders of Nigeria, Chad, and Niger, and while its sporadic attacks continued, some African countries declared “victory” against Boko Haram in 2016 (Clotey, 2014).

In March of 2017, AQIM became even more complex. Four Islamist groups in the Sahara and Sahel region announced that they were merging—the Sahara branch of AQIM, Al Mourabitoun, Ansar Dine, and the Macina Liberation Front (The Counter Extremism Project, 2018). AQIM’s Saharan branch, based in Mali and Southern Algeria, which was likely the largest of the four groups, joined, leaving its larger older brother of AQIM in the upper Maghrebian portion of Algeria and Libya, intact. Mourabitoun is/was an organization of less than 100 fighters concentrated in and around northern Mali that was founded in 2013 and had begun to intertwine itself with AQIM as early as 2015. Ansar Dine, a heavily Islamist group, is/was made of mostly ethnic Tuaregs and was founded in 2013 by former members of the Tuareg Rebellion in Mali in the early 1990’s. The Macina Liberation Front is another Malian-based group that is made up mostly Fulani (another ethnic group in the region) peoples. The Macina Liberation was borne during the chaos that resulted as the result of the 2012 coup d’état in Mali and came to prominence after major attacks it committed in 2015 (Wing, 2017).



Above is a chart showing connections and formations between groups that make up the AQ and other insurgencies in the Western Sahel region. AQ shown in the top right, is the parent affiliate, although to link it in this form would indicate too much of a hierarchical structure. Boko Haram and the IS are also complex, multi-faceted organizations that at times serve as allies, enemies, or even work together to form groups or achieve mutual interests. IS, more than Boko Haram, also acts as a parent organization to many smaller groups, but is not analyzed in full like AQ because of it is not a primary parent actor in the Western Sahel region. Much of the data and mapping is drawn from the Counter Extremism Project, but the chart is a creation of the authors.

The new group “Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin”, which roughly translates to “The Organization for the Support/Victory of Islam and Muslims”, was the new conglomerate housing the four former organizations. It openly proclaims its allegiance to the current leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and is led by the Malian Tuareg and former leader of Ansar Dine, Iyag Ag Ghaly. The “new” AQIM to the north, after losing its southern half, was and is now lead by Abdelmalek Droukdel, a

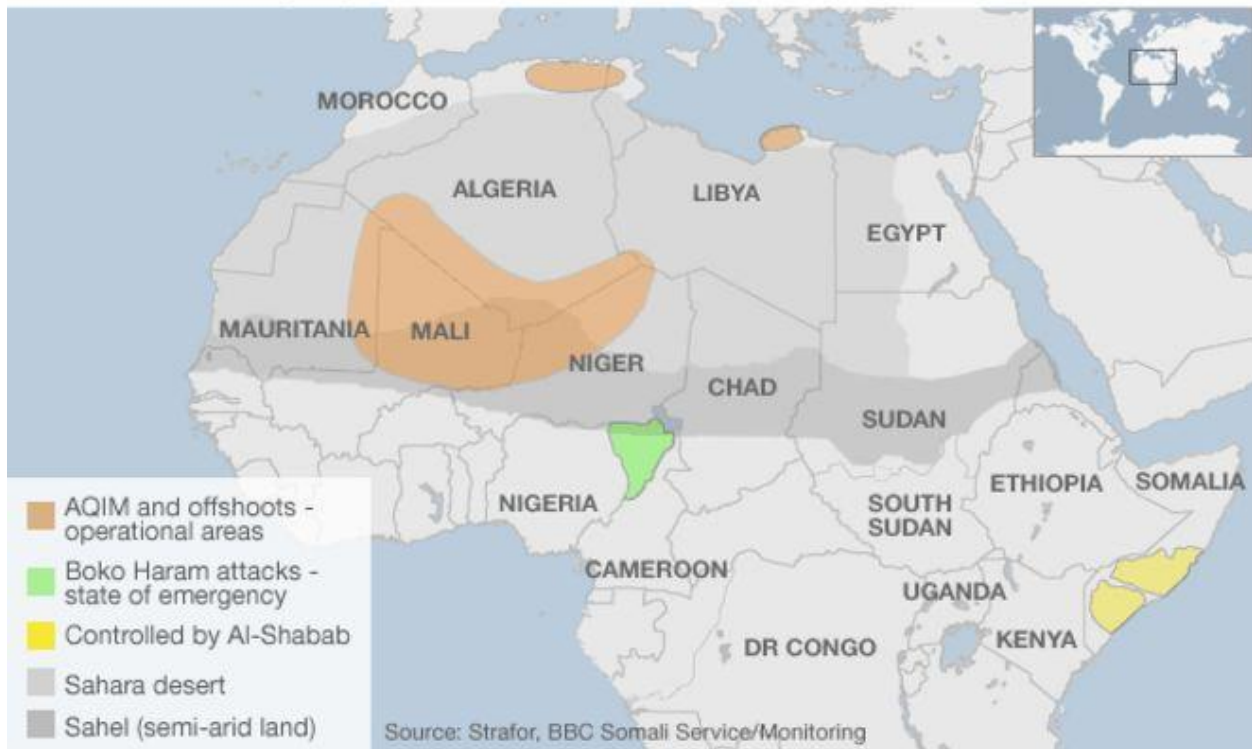
previous leader of GSPC. As of 2017 and now in early 2018 the security situation in the Sahel seems both difficult to define and therefore even more difficult to solve. Its complex relationships to many groups and conflicts makes it a problem with a number of roots engrained at different levels. Holding and giving up territory on a whim, splitting or merging groups, changing leaders, fluid movement of fighters, arms, and funds, a lack of border security, shared Islamist ideals, ethnic and social disparities, a desolate geographical location, and surrounding areas of instability and poverty make combating these groups incredibly difficult. The ability of the insurgents to change loyalties, disappear into the desert or local populations, share resources, and capitalize on instability in surrounding areas means that trying to grab ahold of the insurgents or root problem can be like trying to hold onto the Saharan sand itself.



Islamist attacks, year to October 31st 2016
 ● AQIM and affiliates; ISIS; Unidentified/unaffiliated ● Boko Haram
 Source: Africa Centre for Strategic Studies

Economist.com

Islamist militant groups and their areas of influence in Africa



- AQIM and offshoots - operational areas
- Boko Haram attacks - state of emergency
- Controlled by Al-Shabab
- Sahara desert
- Sahel (semi-arid land)

Source: Strafor, BBC Somali Service/Monitoring

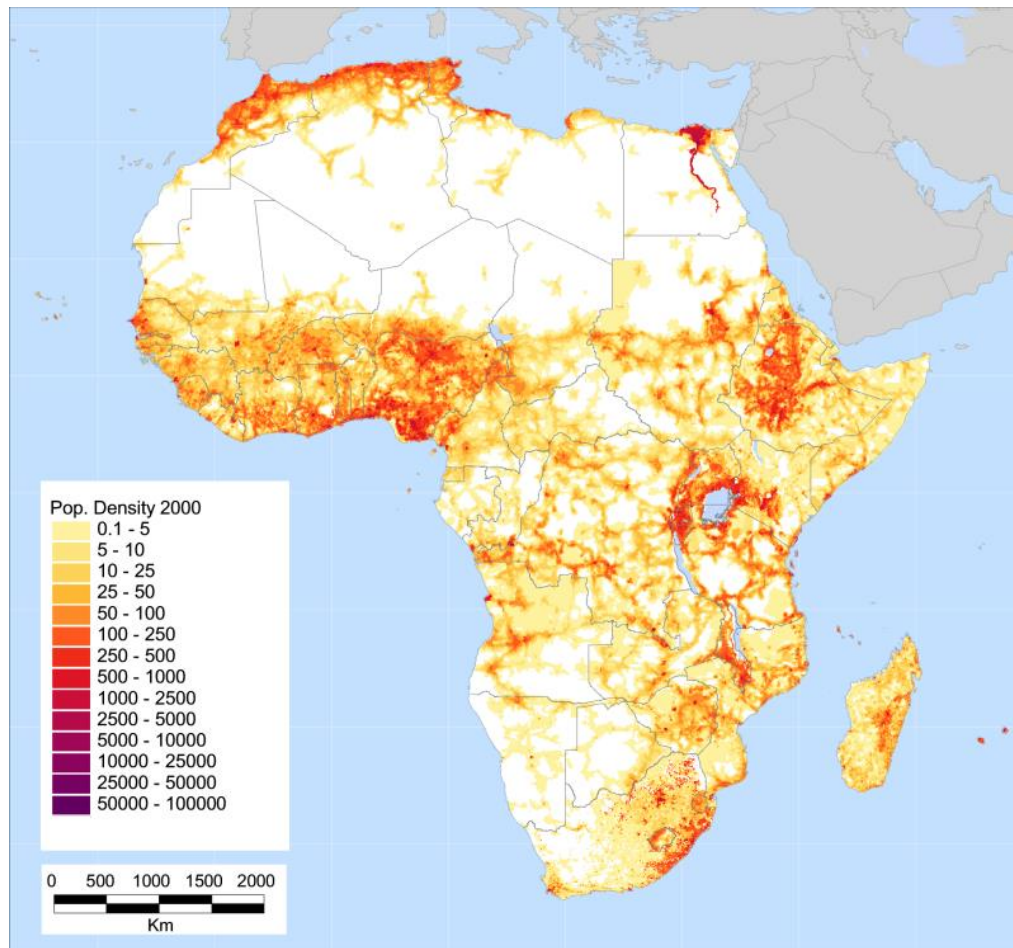
The above maps from the Economist, BBC, and Stratfor provide a more detailed examination of AQ in Africa and where it occurs, specifically what types of groups exist and the frequency of their attacks.

Western Sahel-Focused Operations: Dividing up AQIM: A Case for a Targeted Approach

It is important to distinguish between regions in the Maghreb/Sahel and between groups in the region. Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups would often love if we lumped them all together, making the threat appear larger than it is. As noted, it is this exact effect that leads to bloated and over-the-top counterterrorism responses that play into the enemy's hands. To avoid this and make our research more effective, it is imperative that we distinguish between the groups at hand. There is a reason the Maghreb is so culturally separated from the rest of Africa, and that is due to the world's largest desert—the Sahara. While most people know about and include in their discussions about the region the significance of the Sahara, it is hard to fathom the vastness and harshness of the landscape if one has not visited. As a result, people tend to discount its significance. The sand dunes that make up our laptop screensavers are much more imposing as they rise up hundreds of feet in real life. In the Sahara, temperatures in the winter plunge to freezing temperatures and in the summer average around 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The dryness of the land, complemented by whipping winds, sand, and a lack of ground water can leave one's lips chapped in minutes. Psychologically, the desert also takes a toll, as one gazes out as far as he or she can see and reaches the peak of a dune or mountain top only to see more desert for miles. The Saharan Desert could more than swallow the entire United States.

While we live in a time of technology and quick transportation, little has changed for this region. While some roads and towns may cut through the vastness, the glaring sun, massive landscape, lack of water, and harsh climate still take their toll, limiting human habitation. In the map below, one can see

the population density of Africa, and just how clearly mass groups of people are unable to exist in the Sahara.

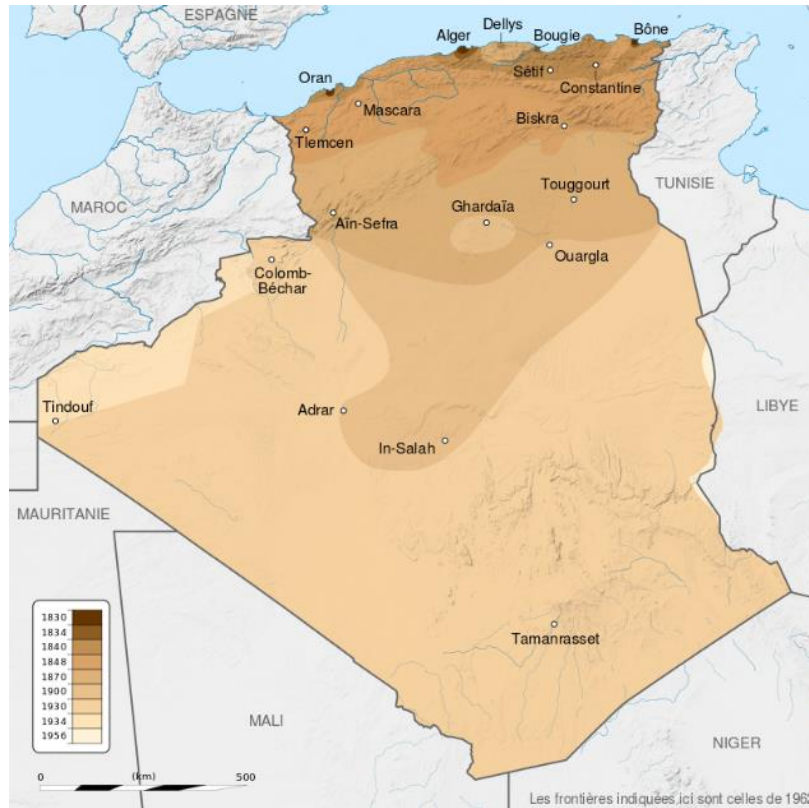


This image maps the population density of the African continent, importantly showing the lack of populace in the Saharan region.

Anyone who has lived in or is familiar with Algeria can tell you of the harsh reality of the Saharan Desert. After all, over 90% of Algeria's population lives in the northern coastal area. The remaining people live scattered across the oases in the South, subsisting off of the land however they can. At the time of their colonization the French were well familiar with the geographical intricacies of Algeria. France had high hopes for Algeria and saw it as the next frontier of "Frenchness". France believed

Algeria and subsequent control of it would cement France's role on the global stage. Although at first France difficulty justifying its commitment of such expenditures of people to and resources to Algeria, France benefitted from its close geographical to proximity to Algeria,. Similar to the United States' "Manifest Destiny" ideals in Westward Expansion, French citizens felt Algeria was not simply a colony, but a part of the heart of France. The French newspaper, Le Matin, even insisted that France "has two capitals, Paris and Algiers". European settlers poured in to inhabit Algeria and began developing this New France (Jackson, 2003).

Although France faced a good deal of difficulty in the form of resistance from the locals, France was pragmatic in its attempt to control the local population. While it was willing to deal with tribal disputes and attempt to colonize the northern region for its resources and potential development, it had little to no interest in the south; southern Algeria was seen by France as holding the exact *opposite* of potential. France's southernmost victory against Algerian guerillas was at the Battle of Tit against a Tuareg tribe in the Hoggar Mountains, but for the most part, France stayed away from southern Algeria. It did not consider southern Algeria to have any value and did not even include it in its mapping of French Algeria. The map below shows French-claimed territory in Algeria during its period of rule. The lightest regions in the south under France's claim in the 1900's are representative of the priorities France held in Algeria. It did not occupy the lightly shaded southern lands for long not because it was unable to, but largely because it had little desire to. Only well into its occupation did France dot lonely outposts across the south to hold French territory and support the oasis city of Tamanrasset.



The above is a map of French occupation/colonization of Algeria, shaded by which years France expanded its control throughout Algeria. (Courtesy of Wikipedia)

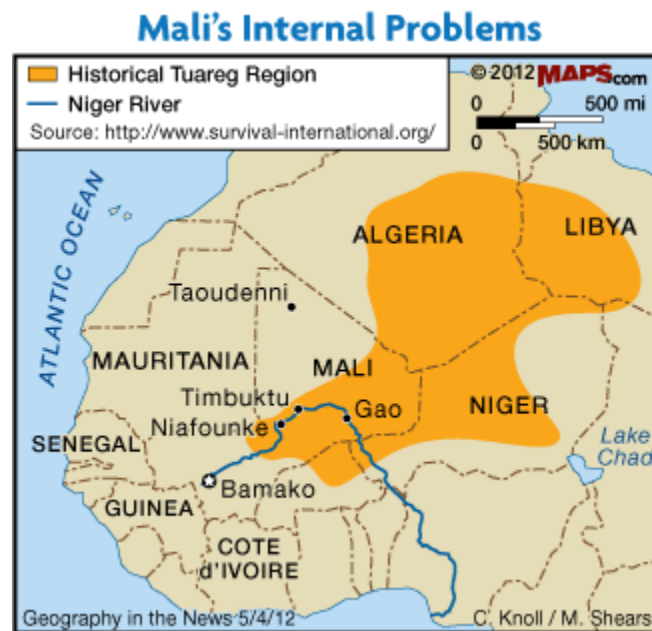
There is no doubt that the nomadic peoples of the Sahara (namely the Tuaregs) have a history of and continue to cross Saharan regions, but for the large part people in general (and this is a basic law of entropy) tend to stay put. In analyzing the Tuaregs, AQIM, and COIN operations it is imperative that we see not only how these groups are interconnected, but how they are distinct and unique as well. A glossy ethnic title, especially one we are unfamiliar with, tends to allow distant researchers the comfort of lumping peoples together. While we may lump a region such as northern Mali as relatively coherent, one may find themselves one may find themselves caught between multiple tribal groups completing violently or non-violently for political control or gain in a small local town in northern Mali, using Islamic justification or not (Sandor, 2017). Out of complacency or difficulty seeing differences in distant groups we forget or decline to pay attention to the intricacies amongst everyone from Native American tribes

conflicts (Simcox, 2014). For these reasons we will be focusing on the problem and solution primarily in the Western Sahel, focusing on AQIM in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Boko Haram will be covered only as a supporter/partner of the Western Sahel conflict, not a core participant. While Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria may have group branches, similarities in tactics or ideology, or shared ethnicities, due to their different local political goals, the vast uninhabited land in between, and lack of major personal movement between regions, the paper's focus will narrow accordingly to Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Importantly though, these strands and connections that fuel and enable groups are an important part of the problem that will be addressed in the "solution" portion of this paper. On the edge of the Islamic world, based largely in a sectarian/local conflict, and in a region that needs assistance in development and stabilization anyway, the case of the Western Sahel is an important step to win in combating a global insurgency (Diara, 2012). It holds many strategic lessons for our military, intelligence, diplomatic, development, and other communities with a stake in global security.

The Tuaregs—Social, Political, Economic, and Cultural issues of the Western Sahel

People of the Tuareg group reside throughout Algeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, Tunisia, Libya, and Mali. According to Central Intelligence Agency open-source information and other sources, the largest numbers reside in Niger, approximately 2,120,000 million Tuaregs (11% of the population), followed by 540,000 in Mali (3% of the population), 370,000 in Burkina Faso (2% of the population), 140,000 in Algeria (less than 1% of the population), 10,000 in Libya (less than 1% of the population), and 2,000 in Tunisia (less than 1% of the population) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Due to the fact that Tuaregs are historically nomadic, they are not technically "native" or indigenous to any specific subregion within the Sahara or Sahel. Their descentance from Berber people's makes them indigenous only to North Africa at large. Within these countries, the Tuareg ethnic group is concentrated more heavily within

certain regions, notably within most of northern Mali (nearly half the country), a corner of northeastern Burkina Faso, western Niger, southeastern Algeria, and western Libya.



The map above shows the historical Tuareg region inhabited in Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Algeria, and Libya, courtesy of Survival International.

While the Tuareg people do not hold a majority within any of the countries they inhabit, they tend to favor the regions of these countries that are most sparse and arid. Likely as a result of their nomadic Saharan history, they are able to survive and thrive in areas where most could not or choose not to. This region of their homeland, focused in Northern Mali, is referred to by the Tuaregs as the "Azawad". This also means that the Tuareg people tend to have greater dominance (politically, economically, socially, etc...) in the regions in the countries of which they inhabit. This inherently creates a disparity between their local, domestic, and regional representation at large. It is worth noting that this region in which the Tuaregs live, besides being mostly barren, houses significant amounts of oil and mineral reserves (especially uranium), although a great deal of this is untouched and much is believed to be undiscovered.

Similar to the problem of the Tuaregs is that of the different Amazigh peoples of Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria. At a local level, they hold a level of pride and cultural dominance. Domestically, most governments recognize their existence, but realistically it is difficult to provide any ethnic group in the region with extra benefits. This is because over time most of these historic ethnic groups have mixed with the local population and it represents a political risk that the state would have to provide unique benefits and recognition to each and every group that identifies itself. At regional level and the international level each region and group/organization tends to err on the side of support of larger state coherence over the recognition of ethnic groups to avoid having to give extra concessions to the groups located within one's own borders (or risk encouraging them to ask for such). But research shows that most African insurgencies are borne from two things—this exact political alienation and porous borders, something the Tuaregs have both of in abundance (Lobban & Dalton, 2017).

Conflict with Tuareg groups has been ongoing since France granted its African colonies independence in 1960, making their first move at independence for the Azawad region in 1962 (Lobban & Dalton, 2017). France and the European powers, as in most places, had drawn their original African colony borders in the 1800's with little knowledge or concern for the ethnic groups in the region. According to Paul William's analysis on conflict in Africa, the principal goals of the Tuareg groups since then however has NOT been focused on secession, but rather a greater share of revenues from mineral resources, more meaningful political participation in their existing states, and protection from encroachment and environmental degradation of their lands.

First and foremost, it is key to note that it is difficult to differentiate between what is being kept from the Tuaregs, and what is being kept from the citizenry of the majority of the citizenry in many of these countries. Some of the demand of the Tuaregs may well be things the population at large wishes for from the government, or even unrealistic at all even if the government wished to concede in total. Secondly, the Tuaregs have been reluctant to acknowledge any sort of post-colonial leadership or

authority at all, making compromise seem fruitless. Finally, the Tuareg ethnicity is hardly unified. Splits within the Tuaregs have produced a number of groups and desires that make negotiations extremely difficult (Again we reference the tendency of scholars to lump Tuaregs together as one group). Most negotiations have ended in seemingly satisfied agreements that center on decentralization but ultimately fail to improve or satisfy the Tuareg situation. As a subset of this problem, the splits in Tuareg groups have produced several militias that often rebel or lash out with new demands due to a dissatisfaction with how THEIR group (as compared to the more dominant Tuareg group in talks with the government) fared in the most recent round of talks. Notably in Mali in 2006, Algeria brokered a deal between a Tuareg group and the Malian government that “granted special status to the Kidal region, created an interim regional council to oversee investment matters, set up military units recruited predominantly from the local Tuareg population, and transferred a number of the military garrisons to local forces.” While most groups were satisfied, by late 2007 another Tuareg group (the ATNMC) had already launched new attacks and reignited the battle between government and insurgents. Similarly, in Niger, concessions were granted in the Ouagadougou peace agreements of 1994 and 1995. The Tuaregs were given more public jobs and a bigger share of the profit from the local mining industry. While this stopped violence for a while, a new Tuareg group, the MNJ, launched a rebellion in the Agadaz region between 2007 and 2009 that was quieted only after a heavy government response. This has led to increasing government reluctance to deal with or compromise with any Tuareg requests or demands, seeing them as a hopelessly rebellious group.

Of course, on the flipside, the governments of these countries (mainly Niger and Mali, followed by Burkina Faso and Algeria, and then Tunisia and Libya) have also all had a distinct role in the determination and fate of their Tuareg citizenry. As developing countries, they have not necessarily been while equipped to deal with the complicated ethnic situations of post-colonial Africa that were thrust upon them after the European powers handed over independence in the mid 1900’s. Even the

world's most "developed" countries are still struggle with dealing with the rights and equality of their minority and ethnic groups, albeit to a smaller degree. As noted in earlier sections, Mali, while semi-democratic, struggles with many human rights issues and on top of this, has little economic wealth to distribute amongst its citizens. Focused heavily in the southern half of Mali, it is difficult for the Malian government to distribute resources into the barren Northern region and is often seen a poor investment as opposed to the more populated, fertile, and developed region of southern Mali (Diara, 2012). Niger on the other hand, faces a similar issue. Less democratic, though it has a president, the Nigerien military has a strong junta presence that drives much of Niger's policy. Both Niger and Mali would surely have been reluctant to share a larger cut of the mining profits with the Tuaregs than was absolutely necessary (governments tend to behave in this manner uniformly). Because of the militarization, poorly developed methods of ethnic integration, minimal counterinsurgent strategy, and economic difficulties, in the face of violent rebellions or attacks, Mali and Niger alike have tended to respond with brutal crackdowns in Tuareg regions or against Tuareg groups.

The OECD lists destabilizing factors amongst this region as the political failure of states (to include corruption and poor court justice) in the under-administered Sahel, a pattern of internal power struggles where marginal, rural groups oppose colonial-connected elite power circles, an increasing militarization borne of violence, funds, and weapons that are flowing into and through the region, population growth pressure, competition for natural resources like salt, gold, oil, iron, uranium, and rare earth minerals, a rise in a culture of insecurity, drug trafficking, migrants, and a rise in political Islam (SWAC/OECD). These problems are not only difficult to solve but represent issues that we have traditionally have depended on *many different* actors to solve (USAID, the DOD, Department of State, local governments, NGO's etc...). In order for us to eliminate these, we need not only to understand them, but to closely coordinate multi-level and multi-partner strategy and corresponding actions to solve them.

Takfiri Islam and the Tuaregs

Islam is prevalent throughout much of the world. This paper is not here to argue about the views of Islam on violence. The fact is that in much of the world Islam exists in a peaceful form, a 2011 Gallup poll showed that Muslim Americans were less likely to justify the killing and targeting of civilians than other Americans (Naurath, 2011). Islam was borne in the Arabian Peninsula and spread throughout the Middle East as its heartland, bringing largely nomadic and pastoral peoples into religion and civilization. North Africa and West Africa, geographically far from the Arabian Peninsula, took on the most unique versions of Arabic and Islam as they were spread during the conquests of the Ottoman Empire. While Islam and Arabic spread (just as Christianity did similarly) they merged with deeply rooted preexisting cultures. In this case, African and Berber traditions, languages, cultures, and beliefs. Further followed by European colonialization of the 19th and 20th century, the region has produced unique languages, ethnic divides, cultures, and forms of religions that are unique in and of themselves.

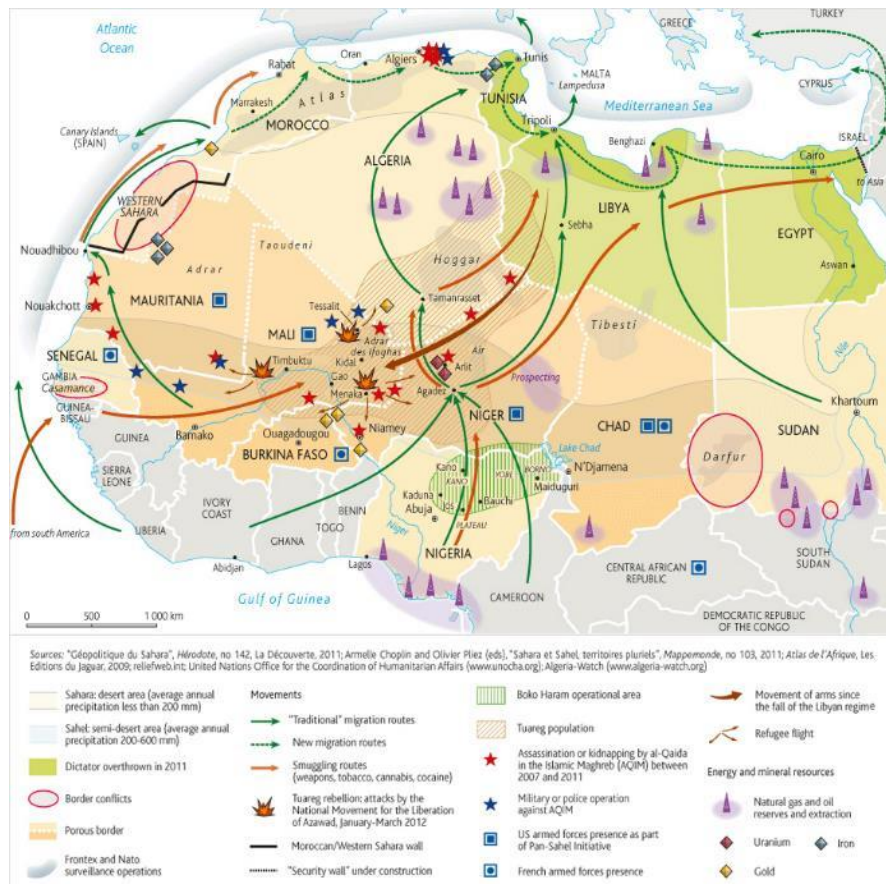
Insurgency too is no new concept. Groups divided for whatever reason, be it religious beliefs, ethnicity, or tribal feuds, have been fighting for rights, resources, or independence since the beginning of time. Many things influence who wins in an insurgency (between the government and the insurgent force)—the resources, tactics, popular leadership wills, supporters, size, and grievances of both sides are a few of the factors that help determine who emerges victorious. Insurgencies are natural, and as states and ideas settle they will likely continue to be fought. While we can hope and strive for more democratic decisions, peaceful struggles, and the emergence/dominance of human-right/minimal conflict COIN methods, the fact remains that insurgencies are often deeply interwoven into global and domestic politics. Since the defeat of insurgencies abroad by the U.S. does not generally entail the use of brutal crackdown-tactics, it necessarily includes the democratization of the population, which studies show requires the support of the political and economic elite—supporting our point above that the isolation

of the Tuareg's from the elites is a key factor in the continued fuel of the Tuareg insurgency (Carothers, 2002).

What events though, brought the grievances of the Tuaregs from those of minor rebel skirmishes to a full-blown insurgency that threatened to destabilize the region? In the section in which we reviewed the history of AQIM, we noted that 2007 was AQIM's most violent year to date. It is no coincidence that AQIM was formally announced as a branch of Al-Qaeda in January of 2007. David Kilcullen, in his book Counterinsurgency, theorizes that not only is the US and its allies are in fact in a Global War on Terror, and that Al-Qaeda seeks to spread its movement globally, especially by taking advantage of sectarian conflicts by stoking and supporting individuals and groups to take up its cause. Encouraging conflict and taking advantage of disparity around the world, Al-Qaeda both gains notoriety and sub-groups that provide it with a wider network of funds, followers, and other resources/opportunities; all while fueling conflict through the provision of weapons, training, funds, fighters, and other resources. What this does in turn is ignite traditional insurgencies and destabilize the processes of civil discourse, democratization, and the peaceful advancement of societies around the world.

When Al-Qaeda provided the Tuareg group with its support, this allowed the Tuaregs to become a much bigger threat than it previously had been. Additionally, the fall of Gaddafi's heavily armed regime let lose a stream of fighters (some of whom were Tuaregs) and weapons throughout Africa. The failed state of Libya, one of Africa's biggest countries, suddenly proved a haven for Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Competition between these two groups (ISIS and AQ) also helped push them apart, pushing AQ to shift its operations to places like Mali and AQ in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) (Hamming, 2017). Libya, being centrally located both in North Africa and on the Mediterranean and bordered by Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, and Egypt, meant that Al-Qaeda suddenly had a brand-new route by which it could fuel conflict (Shaw, 2013). The uncontrolled borders of Libya, easy access to

arms, unemployed fighters, language and religious ties to the region, and general lawlessness of the state allowed Al-Qaeda to use the chaos and lawlessness not only a base for weapons trafficking, human trafficking, illicit financing, a free flow of fighters, and other criminal activities but as a base by which it could more freely spread and support conflict throughout Africa (Duarte, 2011).



The above picture is a map of the routes commonly used for transporting people, weapons, and other resources across borders in North Africa courtesy of the journal Hérodote, and the article Géopolitique du Sahara from 2011.

The surge of Al-Qaeda support and Libyan anarchy allowed for what had been the sporadic attacks of dissatisfied and marginalized Tuaregs that could be handled by local governments to explode far beyond the control of the Nigerien or Malian governments on their own (Höjje, 2015). The Al-Qaeda

surge is no doubt a reason for the explosion of violence in both Niger and Mali in 2007 after a 12-year hiatus in the fighting even after the extremely progressive Algiers Accords of 2006 had initially seemed to be successful. The fall of Gaddafi also likely helped enable the unification of the MNA and the MTNM insurgent groups into the MNLA in 2011 in Mali as well as the subsequent overrunning of Malian army bases by MNLA rebels in Mali in 2012 (in Aguelhok, Gao, and Timbuktu). The expansion of AQ ultimately helped see alliances build between the MUJAO/MUJWA, Ansar Dine, and AQIM.

The in-country situations grew tense as a result, so tense that Malian army officers led a coup in 2012 in response to the poor security situation (Lineback & Lineback Gritzner, 2013). Additionally, the Tuaregs and more takfiri-based groups turned on one another, controlling different cities in Mali. This led to a French military operation called Operation Serval in 2013 after a request from the Malian government as well as a UN stabilization mission (MINUSMA) tasked with creating a quality government in the north and putting down the insurgency in the south. Since then, the attacks continue to rage, and Malian forces seem to show increasing dependence on Western or UN forces (Cummings, 2017).

There also appears a high likelihood that the government of Mali will emerge just as corrupt and all sides will want to share in the revenues generated by the trafficking that comes with a weak state—leaving little incentive for the building of a secure state. Niger too, has seen the leaking/regrowth of takfiri and insurgent forces into its country, and as mentioned previously, the killing of U.S. elite forces in 2017—hardly a positive sign.

An Examination of US and other International COIN

Operations against AQIM

History of Recent U.S. Government Intervention in Sahel Africa—Department of State

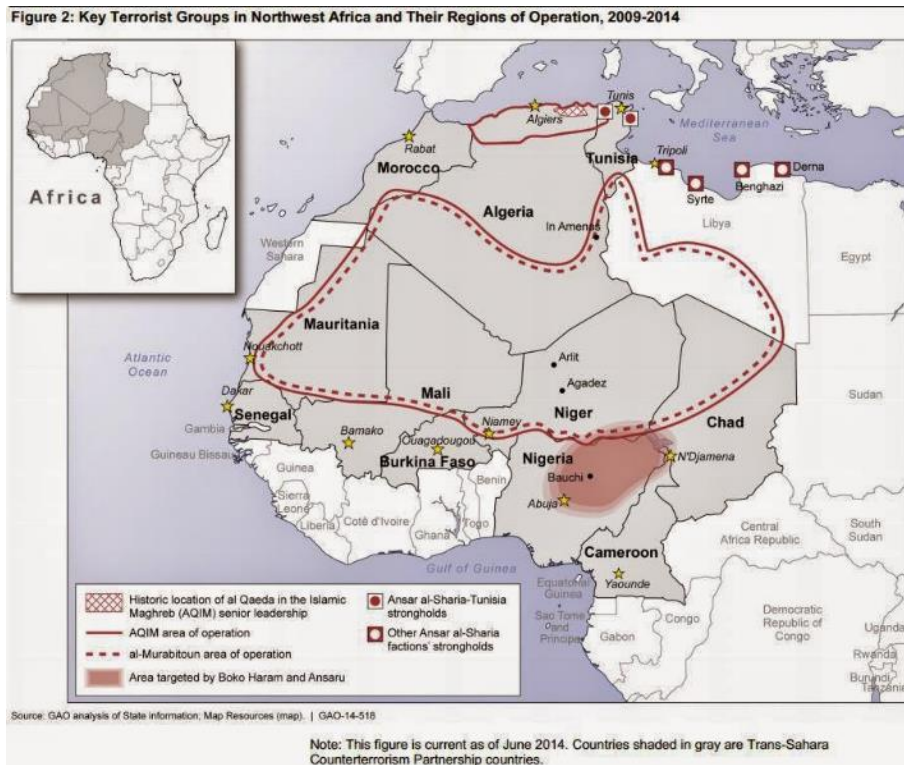
In November of 2002 the State Department announced a new security initiative in West Africa. The new program, designated the Pan Sahel Initiative, was “a State-led effort to assist Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania in detecting and responding to suspicious movement of people and goods across and within their borders through training, equipment and cooperation. Its goals supported two U.S. national security interests in Africa: waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security.” (PSI DoS, 2002)

While it is unknown when exactly the program started to come into interest, there is no doubt that the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) was largely a result of the post-9/11 initiated Global War on Terror (GWOT) (Pan Sahel Initiative, Office of Counterterrorism, DoS). According to the same State Department cable from which the above excerpt is drawn, State Department officials visited Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and Mali in October of 2002 to brief them on the new initiative. The program was announced to be conducting “technical assessments” to highlight areas of weakness upon which to focus training and “material support”. Its focus was to assist these countries in countering terrorist organizations. A major tactic in doing this was for the State Dept. and its PSI partners to place priority on stopping border incursions in this region to stop the trafficking of things such as people, weapons, drugs, and other goods. Ideally, it would bring together officials from the four countries to improve intraregional communication and partnership on these issues.

It is commonly assumed that the U.S. only helps its oil-providing friends in the Middle East and Africa, and even Stephen Ellis in his briefing on the PSI (Pan-Sahel Initiative) lists this as a major factor behind such intervention. Yet the U.S. obtains little of its oil from the countries in the Pan-Sahel Initiative (Niger, Mauritania, Mali, and Chad) and had shown little to no historical precedent or interest in these countries making up most of the Western Sahel (Schaefer, 2006). While oil and the security of critical natural resources is undoubtedly a major factor in U.S. foreign affairs (and that of many countries), we likely would have much more higher levels of trade and engagement with these PSI countries prior to 2002 if they were of actual strategic importance to America's oil dependence (Abramovici & Stoker, 2004). Nor either could the "support/protection of democracy" be a major factor here. At the time of the initiation of the PSI, Chad was ruled by a strong president and considered by some to be a failed state, Mauritania was ruled by a dictator and had a weak, but improving relationship with the United States. While Niger had a president at the time, its presidential office was and continues to be frequently intervened upon by a military junta and respective military regimes. Mali was actually a semi-democratic state, but failed to control much of its border activity and had severe troubles with human rights and corresponding activities like slavery, debt bondage, and human trafficking. And yet none of these seemed to spur much U.S. concern pre-9/11

Having concluded that these factors were not primary or even secondary reasons for intervention, the glaring fact of that matter is that the PSI likely began as a knee-jerk reaction as part of the wider GWOT. Eager to protect itself from any potential threat, America sent its representatives to every corner of the world it thought could pose a similar 9/11-type threat. Often this simply meant any Muslim region the U.S. had little engagement in knowledge of, or control of. It is the shadows that scare us most, for we do not know what lies in them. How many Americans, either pre or post-9/11., could place any of the four PSI countries on a map, and how many American government officials could make a case for their strategic importance to the United States?

In January of 2004, U.S. ambassadors of Algeria, Mali, Niger, Tunisia, and Morocco met to discuss the region’s vulnerability to terrorism (Warner, 2014). At this time, the U.S. was on high alert of the possibility of terrorism spreading or popping up nearly anywhere, and undoubtedly, smart U.S. officials could see that programs designated as “counterterrorist-oriented” in nature were conveniently receiving higher priority, more funding, and more access than other programs. These ambassadors decided a more inclusive regional approach, beyond simply military training and basic assistance was needed. Opting to create a program that increased the level of regional cooperation, added public diplomacy, and assisted in regional development, the group introduced the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) in January of 2005. This TSCTI quickly became the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) as a “program of record” with an allotted amount of funding and expanded to a larger group of countries of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia (Johnson, 2014).



GAO Watchblog 2014, Map of AQ locations and TSCTP countries

According to the U.S. government TSCTP information sheet, the TSCTP was “an extension of the successful Pan-Sahel Initiative”. Who or what criterion exactly deemed the PSI to be “successful” is not clear, but nonetheless, aided by the convenient addition of the label “Counter-Terrorism”, the program grew. Looking back on this initiative ten years later, whatever the criterion for “success” were they hardly seem to be met in the present day.

The TSCTP, being relatively low on both the focus of the U.S.’ foreign policy priorities and the focus of the U.S. public (far behind issues in Iraq, China, North Korea, Russia, the War on Drugs in Mexico, and Afghanistan), is not well-written on. Additionally, due to deliberately opaque operations, low levels of journalism and reporting in the region, a simple lack of public interest, and potentially even poorly developed long-term strategy, information about the TSCTP must be drawn piecemeal from a manner of sources, and analyzed largely post facto.

Lesley Warner of the think tank the CNA Corporation (Center for Naval Analyses), conducted the most thorough analysis and review of the TSCTP to date. Warner, amongst many sources, notably used both CNA interviews and personally conducted interviews with U.S. headquarters officials (at places like the Pentagon, National Defense University, and Dept. of State) and U.S. ground/mission-level officials at embassies who are directly involved in or located in the Sahel region.

Warner’s analysis flushes out six distinct sub-missions within the TSCTP:

- Military Capacity Building
- Law Enforcement Anti-Terrorism Capacity Building
- Justice Sector Counterterrorism Capacity Building
- Public Diplomacy and Information Operations
- Community Engagement

- Vocational Training

There are four main U.S. government agencies who are stakeholders in the TSCTP. Headed by the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Defense oversees military operations, USAID international development, and the Department of Justice legal and criminal justice affairs. While the State Department technically “headed” the TSCTP, it had no actual authority over its actors, and was more of a coordinator of the actions of all the stakeholders. Other TSCTP players are likely involved in planning and action such as the U.S. Department of Treasury, but official acknowledgement of each of the individual actors is difficult to obtain in many cases. According to Warner, the TSCTP proved exceptional in its track record. As far as multi-tiered regional security assistance programs go, the TSCTP, as of 2014, was still allegedly on the cutting edge of its kind. The TSCTP apparently increased the counterterrorism abilities of Sahel actors with its diverse training and methods of which it can combat terrorism.

With many cited examples of the TSCTP’s successes such as bolstered border security in Mauritania and Senegal, youth vocational training in Niger, closer Peace Corps partnerships with locals in Burkina Faso, and coordinated ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance)/ground combat efforts in Mauritania, it is hard to differentiate what is simply correlation and what is the result of actual causation. One major question mark about the TSCTP is how the TSCTP hopes to account for the deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel region in recent years. While the TSCTP may not be designed to address the structural causes of instability in the region, even if TSCTP in its minor goals is deemed “successful”, it inherently becomes a waste of money if its positive outcomes cannot be sustained.

History of Recent U.S. Government Intervention in Sahel Africa— Department of Defense

Prior to 2007, U.S. military operations in Africa were shared between the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM). The three units doled out responsibility based on predetermined regions in Africa. EUCOM was responsible for most of the African continent, while CENTCOM oversaw the region surrounding the Horn of Africa, and PACOM had responsibility for islands like Mauritius and Madagascar off of East Africa as well as the Indian Ocean.

This distribution is indicative of both the strategic value and military complexity with which the U.S. military has traditionally viewed the African continent and its countries. North America (NORCOM) has its own command, as does South America (SOUTHCOM), Europe/Russia (EUCOM), Central Asia and the Middle East (USCENTCOM), and Pacific/Southeast Asia and Australia (PACOM). Additionally, within the U.S. unified combatant command there is a Special Operations Command (SOCOM), Strategic Command (STRATCOM), and Transportation Command (TRANSCOM).

While these individual commands may not show much beyond simple geographic ordering, there is much to be learned about U.S. strategic priorities from the creation of these commands. It is no surprise that the first of these commands, PACOM, was formed in 1947. Merely six years after Japanese Forces attacked Pearl Harbor, PACOM was formed to organize the United States forces that had been fighting the Japanese military in the Pacific. EUCOM too was formed in 1954 to deal with post-WWII demobilization, the end of occupation of Germany, and defense against the Soviet Union. While there was a Caribbean Command established closer to the time of PACOM, it was of little importance until the rise of the Cold War and the need to protect South America and U.S. influence there in the event of a global war. Additionally, protection of the Panama Canal and growing foreign military assistance were rising in priorities so in 1963 the name and focus was changed to the U.S. Southern Command

(SOUTHCOM) to emphasize its prioritization of South and Central America instead of simply the Caribbean (U.S. Southern Command, 2018).

Oil crises in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made Central Asia and the Middle East grow in strategic importance to the United States. As a result Jimmy Carter created a Joint Task Force in 1981 designed to cover the region until a full combatant command could be organized. Central Command (CENTCOM) was then activated in 1983. Operation Eagle Claw in 1980, the failed Department of Defense rescue effort of U.S. hostages at the Iranian Embassy, showed the lack of communication and organization between special operations groups. Massive public and government backlash led to investigations, of which it was concluded that special operations forces, long-resisted and put-down by conventional leaders, needed a new, central chain of command. It took a number of years to try to found a chain of command, as political disagreements and military officials argued and made counterpropositions over who should be in control. Finally, in April of 1987 the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) was activated.

In WWII, the Korean, and Vietnam War's the United States military had a difficult time coordinating its logistics and transportation systems. Poor coordination between military branches, lack of authority, and little organization between civilian and military transportation groups proved especially devastating in a 1978 command post exercise named "Nifty Nugget". While a Joint Deployment Agency was established afterwards it had neither the clout nor authority to handle such a task. Luckily, the 1986 Department of Defense (DOD) Reorganization Act enabled massive reforms to the DOD. Seeing this opportunity, President Ronald Reagan created the United Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) in 1987 with significantly more overreach and authority in the transportation coordination of all branches. Its goal was to provide global sea, land, and air transportation to meet national security needs, and shortly after with the massive deployment of the Persian and Gulf Wars it was able to prove its worth.

Nuclear deterrence and nuclear option management increased in focus in the Cold War. Coupled with the above mentioned 1986 DOD Reorganization Act and the rising Digital Age led to the need for another command. The Strategic Air Command (oversight of long-range strikes) and Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff (oversight of nuclear forces in wartime) were consolidated into the US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) in 1992. The need to operate the DOD's Global Information Grid (including things like electronic warfare, cyber capabilities, and space-based operations) led to the more modern STRATCOM that was reestablished in 2002. Not surprisingly, also in 2002 in response to the 9/11 attacks that caught the U.S. defense forces off guard, was the creation of the United States Northern Command (NORCOM). NORCOM's responsibility includes the protection and defense of the United States, Mexico, Canada, Alaska, and the Caribbean. Its responsibility also grew with natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina where it was granted some authority to provide emergency military assistance to civil authorities.

Studying the creation of the each of these eight commands reveals that distinct political and military conditions are necessary for the creation of each command. Indeed, events that show their necessity are often required in order to prompt the Department of Defense, the Executive Office, or Congress to make such changes. Additionally, the functional commands either find a chance to prove themselves in military operations (TRANSCOM in the Gulf War) or make themselves more relevant through the accumulation of authority to prove their worth (STRATCOM and its embracing of its subordinate, the US Cyber Command).

The creation of unified combatant commands also generally foreshadows a regional shift for a certain amount of time. This is generally due to the fact that for a unified combatant command to be created both Pentagon leadership and Legislative leadership have to come to an agreement. It also means that these groups must be willing to get the preexisting commands to cede some authority or resources—not an easy task. Generally, this is most achievable when whatever command is ceding

authority actually feels overwhelmed by new wars, conflicts, or other priorities that have arisen given the limits on its current manpower, funds, or other resource. This can be observed with SOUTHCOM and a strategic American shift to South America in the 1960's and 1970's and CENTCOM and America's strategic shift to the Middle East (notably Somalia, Iran/Iraq, Kuwait, etc...) in the 1990's (source: U.S. Southern Command and U.S. Central Command, 2018).

Considering these things, the absence of an AFRICOM in the decades leading up to 2007 and the subsequent creation of AFRICOM in 2007 are both strategically revealing decisions in and of themselves. First and foremost, the decision of the Department of Defense NOT to have a command for Africa reveals the low priority Africa has traditionally held in U.S. military operations. The military represents a major arm of foreign policy and is often involved in soft-power operations like civil affairs, foreign internal defense, and military training and sales. This means that Africa in general has held low strategic priority for the U.S. not only in a conventional military sense, but in general, since at least the 1950's when central commands started being organized. It is not difficult to see why however, as post-WWII the U.S. military was largely based in Europe and the Pacific.

While Asia was a strategic asset after WWII largely due to heavy U.S. investment in the rebuilding of Japan and shaping of China, Asia continued to grow in importance throughout the Cold War. Mao's Communist Party took power in China it announced support of Soviet Russia and this region only further grew as what appeared to the United States as an existential threat. In clandestine operations or more overt military operations, America was dragged into conflicts in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Korea (to name a few) from the 1950's through the 1980's. The Middle East and some of North Africa, was a strategic priority largely only for its oil. This region saw the U.S. involved in proxy battles in countries like Iran and Afghanistan and heavily supporting its new ally, Israel. South America, in the United States' own backyard, remained an integral part of U.S. control of the Western Hemisphere, and thus a strategic priority. This was a historical precedent set by James Monroe's

Monroe Doctrine of 1823, opposing any Old World or European colonialism in the Americas. This left Sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel, in addition to Antarctica, as some of the most disregarded and strategically discounted regions on earth.

For most of the mid to late 20th century, military operations in Africa were generally limited to peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and evacuations. While decolonization had seen some conflict and military operation, the United States generally had little to do with Africa during this period, as European powers were the primary colonizers. Even in the Cold War as the United States and Soviet Union battled across the world for dominance with economic, military, and political actions, Africa was still not taken very seriously. Both the USSR and United States were generally underinformed and disinterested in African cultures, needs, and histories. With resources that were difficult to access, these heavily underdeveloped countries in sub-Saharan Africa, far from with both the USSR and United States, with seemingly little global geographical important and minimal development, were not seen as worth much competing over. While there was some military assistance or funding in conflicts such as in Angola and Ethiopia to support friendly rebels or regimes, the Cold War superpowers generally paid little heed to the region (Broich, 2017). Indeed, different parts of Africa frequently switched between U.S. Atlantic Command, EUCOM, and CENTOM. In fact, EUCOM, who was the primary overseer of most of sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, was *not even formally assigned responsibility for the region until 1983*. This means until this point, that EUCOM had essentially been dealing with Africa as an extraneous, or “secondary” priority.

The conventional generals and military mindset of WWII followed through Vietnam. The Cold War was simply posturing of these massive conventional forces. It brought into the fold an emphasis on economic/industrial competition and clandestine, proxy fights around the globe using less-developed countries as battlegrounds. When airplanes hijacked by Al-Qaeda representatives brought down the iconic American Twin Towers in New York City on September 11th, 2001, this all changed in an instant.

Suddenly America could be hit from anywhere, anytime. While the big hulking conventional forces of competitors like China and Russia were a *strategic* threat, suddenly it seemed that the unseen shadows in the dark could hurt us where we were unprepared. Radical farmers or youth in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, or the Philippines were now the most feared enemies of America—because they were enemies we were not used to fighting. They were enemies who did not play by the rules, enemies who only made themselves apparent when it was too late. Disjointed and disorganized, their best asset was their ability to catch America off guard, not because of superior planning, but because of the disconnect in which they operated. Unlike China and Russia, who had much to lose by attacking and were therefore unlikely to do so, these new enemies did not have such restraints.

In response America put what it knew how to use, to use. Over the course of the early 2000's, America deployed all it had and could. Intelligence agencies monitored the cell phone transmissions of thousands of people who might be of interest to the U.S., Predator Drones far out of view watched terrorist meetings from above, and conventional forces trained and patrolled in a wide range of countries. Special operations forces conducted night raids against terrorist leaders, prisoners were held and transported around the world outside of the reach of the U.S. Constitution, and every agency or department who could make a case for its efforts to combat or reduce terrorism had money poured into its pockets. We shone a light in the darkness that scared us so, and only saw more shadows. The might of the American military was deployed to every region of the world in a desperate attempt to prevent any ineffectually-governed region or failed state from being able to surprise us again.

Founding AFRICOM: The U.S. Mindset

Outside of the State Department, the most-instant and obvious use of force projection, and the United States most “hands on” foreign policy actor, is that by the Department of Defense. The Department of Defense, referencing such concerns covered in the previous section, began to note the

military security needs of Africa. With the newfound concern over lawless or Islamist regions posing a threat to America as Afghanistan had, suddenly America began to place a great deal more focus on Africa. Africa's previous decades of insurgencies and conflicts had seen only minimal U.S. intervention, as these were often viewed as "not America's problem". At the time it was difficult to make a case for how exactly coup d'états or internal civil wars were of much concern to America's national security (Emerson, 1962).

The 1950's and 1960's characterized a period of decolonization in Africa, while the late 1960's and 1970's saw the Cold War in full steam. This meant a larger U.S. presence in Africa, albeit in the form of more clandestine support. The Soviet Union and United States battled for ideological dominance, and in Africa this generally meant propping up whatever government supported them (regardless of how well they implemented democratic or communist ideals in their own countries). In the 1980's as the Soviet Union's weaknesses began to show it was no longer able to commit to such a global ideological "Cold War" and its involvement around the globe began to shrink. Consequently, America saw little point of sustaining its expensive (and strategically unimportant) involvement in Africa as well, and in the 1980's, America's role was a dying involvement in the support of friendly governments (dictators and non-dictators alike).

There was also a new phenomenon playing out around the world. As the lone post-Cold War hegemonic power, America was beginning to explore its new role in the world. The rise of globalization also meant an increase in the impact on the significance of foreign affairs. In 1991, the same year the Cold War ended, not coincidentally, Somalia's government was overthrown. Somalia, a major African ally of the U.S. during the Cold War, had built up the largest army in Africa due to heavy U.S. support. As the state government was overthrown and civil factions began to fight, a major humanitarian crisis ensued, resulting in 500,000 dead and over 1.5 million displaced. The United Nations initiated the United Nation Operations in Somalia I (UNISOM I), but its 50 peacekeepers proved woefully ineffective.

For a variety of reasons: due to the humanitarian crisis, an underutilized post-Cold War military, Somalia's previous close relationship to the U.S., and because of the ineffectiveness of the UN intervention, the U.S. initiated a military operation to intervene in Somalia, named Unified Task Force (UNITAF). UNITAF, which later developed into the second round of UN intervention, UNISOM II.

Mohamed Farrah Aidid, one of the major targets of UNISOM II, was a Somalian warlord who headed the Somalian National Alliance and was vying for the presidency of Somalia. He also led a large militia and was closely affiliated with Al-Qaeda. On October 3rd, 1993, the United States launched Operation Gothic Serpent led by Task Force Ranger with the goal of capturing two of Aidid's lieutenants. The infamous raid (known as the Battle of Mogadishu) captured in the book and film "Black Hawk Down", went terribly wrong, and 19 American special operations troops were killed with 73 American operators wounded. The massively publicized raid, while ultimately successful, caused massive public backlash that eventually led to the withdrawal of American troops from Somalia. While the U.S. intervened elsewhere, such as with the Gulf War where U.S. and Coalition troops drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, the Battle of Mogadishu had a major effect on the American public and military psyches. America developed cold feet for any intervention in Somalia and much of Africa as a result.

So, while the U.S. continued to explore military, political, and economic intervention and involvement around the world in the 1990's, the same did not hold true for Africa. In subsequent years, the U.S. scaled down humanitarian actions in Africa, and allegedly even declined to intervene in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide due to fear of a similar incident. Looking through patterns of U.S. intervention, a policy of erring on the side of small scale involvement, only when absolutely necessary, becomes clear. Examples include the evacuation of American citizens, protection of U.S. embassies, or other case-by-case decisions to protect direct U.S. interests. Specifically the minor transport and evacuation into/from Zaire in 1991, the evacuation from Sierra Leone in 1992, security in Liberia in 1996, and enhanced security for potential evacuation in the Congo and Gabon in 1997. These efforts were easily handled by

the respective central U.S. Department of Defense commands of CENTCOM, PACOM, and mostly, EUCOM.

After 9/11 this all started to change. America's renewed sense of danger at what could harm it sparked massive U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. These of course largely fell under the burden of USCENTOM and held the focus of much of the Department of Defense. Over the course of the early 2000's the Global War in Terror continued to spread in scope, as Islamist groups seemed to pose a threat anywhere from the Philippines to Morocco. Around the same time as the State Department was adjusting its diplomatic approach and security posture to Africa, especially in the Sahel, the Department of Defense too got to work. Starting in 2002 the DOD under EUCOM began to establish Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) and Cooperative Security Locations (CSLs) in places like Morocco, Tunisia, Gabon, Djibouti, Senegal, and Uganda from which they could stage and operate troops from. As part of the larger War on Terror, Operation Enduring Freedom (the DoD campaign against Islamist extremist) was being conducted globally, and so EUCOM also created Task Forces starting in 2005 to conduct the African portions of Operation Enduring Freedom (Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans Sahara and Operation Enduring Freedom—Horn of Africa).

While it is unclear what level of cooperation there was between the State Department and Department of Defense, there is no doubt that the activities of both were a result of shared escalating priorities and pressures in the U.S. government of the need to manage security risks in Africa. The Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) was subsumed by the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative/Partnership (TSCTI/TSCTP) of 2004/2005, the overarching U.S. security program for the Sahel region with both military and non-military components (Ibrahim, 2017). The TSCTP therefore has/had some level of oversight over the military component of the GWOT, Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara section.

A major reflection of the shift towards a priority of Africa to the United States in national security policy was the creation of a unified combatant command for Africa in 2007. In 2006, the Department of Defense under the Bush Administration announced its plan to create a unified African command. The increased number of operations in Africa, due to a larger priority on Africa (for reasons varied from terrorism to competition from China for natural resources) meant that the United States could no longer pawn the continent off on EUCOM and CENTCOM (RT, 2015). The Africa Command (AFRICOM) was formally established in 2008, based near Stuttgart, Germany, with nearly 2,000 troops, contractors, and employees under its command. AFRICOM oversees the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps components of Africa, as well as a SOCOM component and an East Africa-focused “Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa” (United States Africa Command, 2018). It oversees a number of operations such as Operation Ocean Shield (anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean), Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya, Operation Onward Liberty in Liberia, and Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans Sahara and Operation Enduring Freedom—Horn of Africa. It is worth noting that these operations frequently change names and there is a “stickiness” to their public knowledge, especially to specific missions, units, locations, and intentions (Schmitt, 2018). The above list does not necessarily encompass the complete current or former state of operations.

Nearly 10 years after the activation of AFRICOM, in a 2018 posture review before Congress by AFRICOM Commander General Thomas D. Waldhauser announced that AFRICOM has over 7,200 troops, civilians, and DOD contractors working on national security goals in Africa (Waldhauser, 2018). The area of AFRICOM extends over 53 countries, and the U.S. has at least a small contingent of troops in many, if not most, of these countries. The mission of the command is: “U.S. Africa Command, with partners, strengthens security forces, counters transnational threats, and conducts crisis response in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity”. Especially popular are SOCOM troops, known for their ability to thrive in and operate in the “gray zone” between

war and peace, which defines most conflicts in Africa according to Brigadier General Donald Broduc, the former commander of Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA). This is the reason why of all U.S. troops across Africa, at any time, 1,500 to 1,700 of them are special operators, and they are the most likely to be engaging with or closest to the enemy (Turse, 2016).

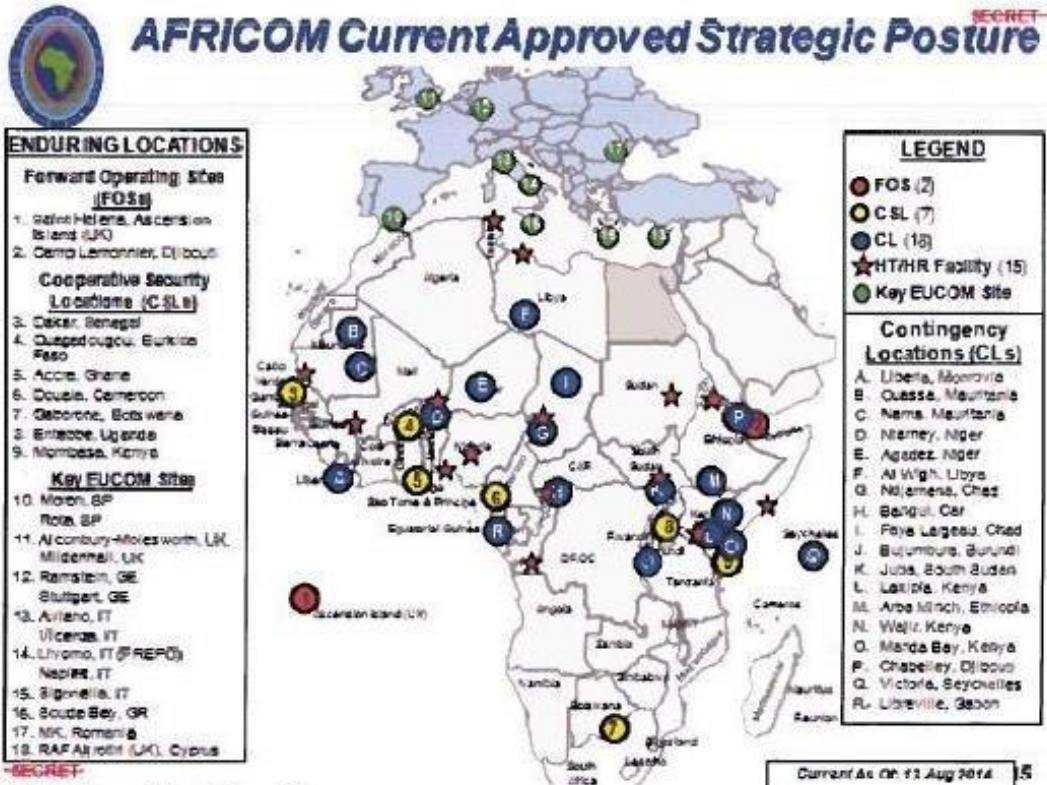
Currently, the largest contingent of U.S. troops in Africa is based out of the only permanent base on the African continent in Djibouti. Roughly 4,000 troops are based at Camp Lemonnoir in Djibouti at any given time, which has grown from 88 acres of base in 2002 to 400 acres at present. Djibouti acts as a refueling, reconnaissance/intelligence, and mission launch point for much of eastern Africa. The second largest contingent of troops is in Niger. President Obama initially placed 100 troops there in 2013, but the number has since expanded to nearly 800 troops (Bearak, 2017). Originally placed for intelligence-gathering purposes, their mission appears to have grown in scope as well with the capture/kill “advising” mission that led to the death of four U.S. Army Special Forces operators in late 2017. After Niger comes Somalia with approximately 400 U.S. troops and Cameroon with around 100 troops (Watson, 2017). The U.S. has not only its Forward Operating Sites (FOS), but its Cooperative Security Locations (CSL’s), and Contingency Locations (CL’s). The two FOSs, UK-owned Ascension Island (which lies roughly halfway between Brazil’s easternmost tip and Angola’s west coast) and Djibouti are the most-often referenced as more long-term American installations. But CSLs and CLs too allow the U.S. to more clandestinely open, close, increase usage at, or decrease usage at posts across Africa, giving America the ability to rapidly respond to shifting conflicts. Of the CSLs, defined as “temporary locales capable of being scaled up for larger operations”, there are roughly 11 currently; they exist in countries like Niger, Uganda, Botswana, Gabon, Senegal, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Kenya. CLs, defined as non-enduring locations, are likely the most adaptable and covert of spots, highly-prized in the GWOT (Turse, 2017). There are roughly 23 CLs in Africa, in places like South Sudan, the Central African Republic, remote southern Libya, Niger, Mali, Uganda, Mauritania, the Seychelles, Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, and

Liberia (Turse, 2017). According to AFRICOM there are over 46 locations of which AFRICOM utilizes in Africa, of which 15 are “enduring locations”, but these numbers seems to waver constantly, as does the number of operations and personnel across the continent, leaving us to do our best to estimate the size and scale of operations in Africa.

According to Freedom of Information Act requests from multiple journalistic sources, the military has rebranded many of its GWOT operations as “Shield” operations. Operation Enduring Freedom in West and North Africa has become Operation Juniper Shield, OEF in East Africa Operation Octave Shield, Spartan Shield in the Middle East, and Gladiator Shield in the realm of cyber-defense against terrorism. The mission of AFRICOM is no easy one, each of the 53 countries it oversees has different problems, solutions, U.S.-relations, foreign dependencies, and strategic priorities. In Mali for example, France has the primary role as the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency advisor, and the U.S. acts mainly to support and assist their operations (Schmitt, 2017). Here the U.S.’s “Operation Juniper Micron” provides intelligence, logistical, and reconnaissance support to French and UN troops (Trevithick, 2016).

The current state of Operation Juniper Shield has seen AFRICOM announce the building of an “expeditionary, contingent support location” as an ISR base in Agadez, Niger. Niger will also host the multi-national training exercise Operation Flintlock in 2018. Other bases undoubtedly exist throughout the sub-region of the Sahel, some of which are public and others not. For example, an Intercept article in 2016 highlighted a secretive U.S. drone base in Garoua, Cameroon (Hammer, 2016). The following map is a formerly Secret U.S. document, released by journalist Nick Turse of Tom Dispatch after a FOIA request, showing and listing at least some U.S. locations on the continent.

SECRET

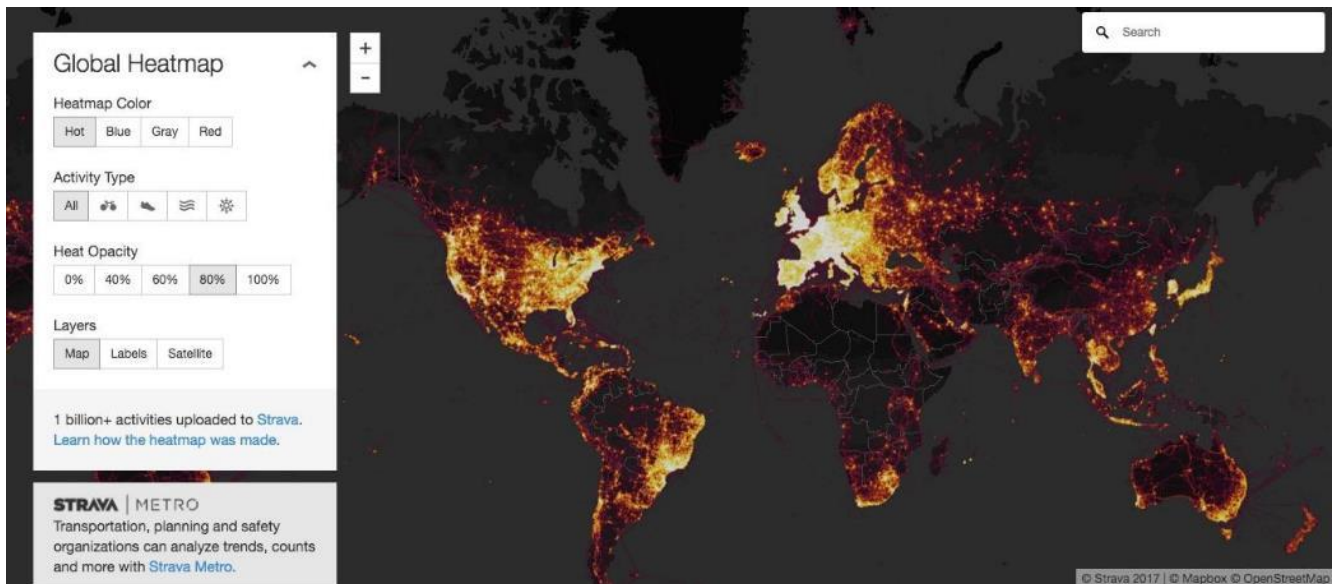


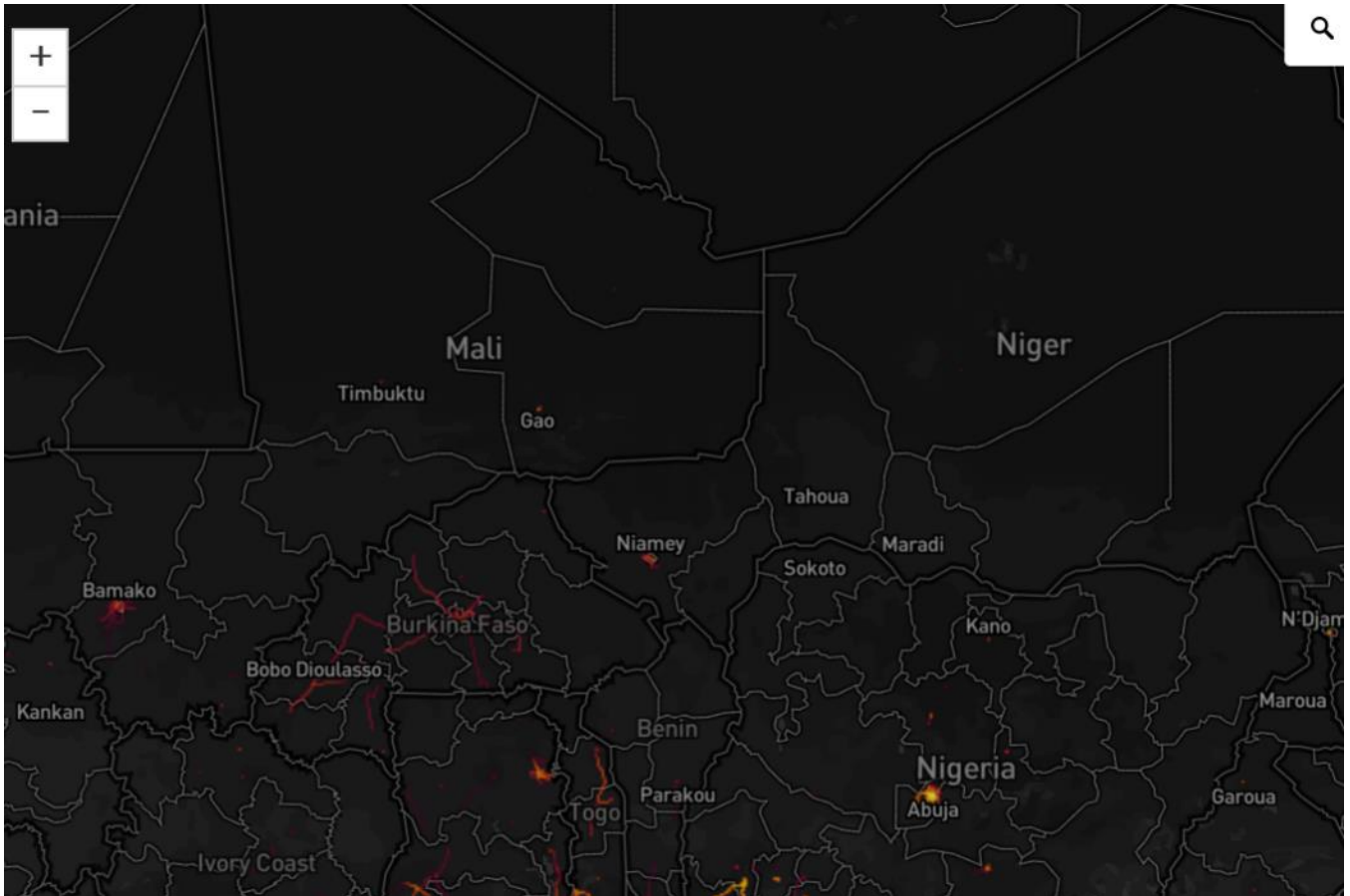
Nick Turse/TomDispatch

A formerly classified U.S. DoD document showing U.S. bases and their significance across Africa.

In a massive breach of Operational and Personnel Security (OPSEC and PERSEC) an Australian international security-focused undergrad discovered that publicly available Strava heat maps (a fitness tracker website and application) showed movements around the world (Goggin, 2018). It is not a big deal when Central Park lights up with runners, but the student realized that small sites in the Syrian desert matched alleged reports of U.S. bases. While not all sites that light up from Strava fitness tracking in the MENA region are that of secret military bases (many belong to UN sites, embassies, consulates,

aid/development centers, private compounds, private citizens in metropolitan areas, or publicly-acknowledged bases), it is not difficult to determine with some research and reports of on the ground activity where some clandestine U.S. bases are (and even more dangerously, the routes of personnel movement around them). The following is a screen capture of the Strava global heatmap and then a magnified portion of the heatmap showing parts of Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo, and the Ivory Coast (more detailed routes, more remote locations, and less heavily travelled sites can be seen upon further magnification that goes all the way to street level).





The above images are screenshots of the Strava Heatmap available on its website as of March of 2018

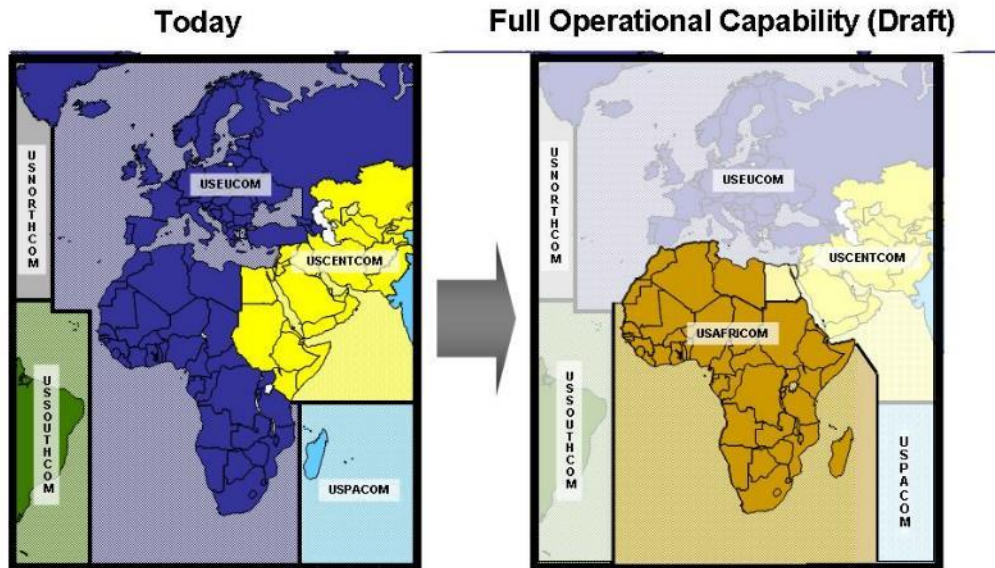
Importantly, AFRICOM has acknowledged (if not necessarily succeeded in focusing on) in its 2018 posture review the role of local grievances, poor governance, imported ideology, corruption, and poor human rights records in West African conflict. The goal of AFRICOM in West Africa is to “build the capacities” of four Lake Chad Region countries—Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria by providing advisors, training, equipment, and intelligence. This approach seems quite similar to tried and failed techniques elsewhere in the GWOT, and there is little consensus on how to determine if these countries are stable enough, ready for, or able to take advantage of the training and assistance the U.S. is providing. Since the founding of AFRICOM, Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) exercises which are usually sparsely used globally by the DOD have become the norm in Africa. It seems as if the desire for

the U.S. is to have its troops sharpened by real battles, trained with foreign counterparts, and familiar with regional conflicts more so than it is to train the local forces. There would likely be more questions about the larger implications of training forces of an unstable government if this were the case. The U.S. may be continuing a training pattern that has a poor record of success (according to a Pentagon commissioned RAND study) in light of the apparent relief of gained operational readiness for our own troops (Turse, 2017). Conflicts burn throughout the continent while the U.S. does little to help the image of it as an imperializer after its own interests that fuels extremist recruitment globally. But in *all* countries, the U.S. must be careful who it assists and trains, as happened in Niger in 2012 when the U.S. trained officer Amadou Sanogo, overthrew the democratically-elected government. The approach also makes no mention of implications, relationships, and training with Mali directly to the West and Libya to the north (Turse, 2017).

The conversation about the U.S. in the Western Sahel first became mainstream after the deaths of the four SF operators in 2017. Journalists were quick to “break the news” that the U.S. was doing far more than advising, when in reality most individuals familiar with military operations are well aware that “advising” is often politically-sensitive word that the military uses in limited operational roles to prevent itself from losing domestic support. Advising, well not necessarily a bad thing, can very easily turn into full on conflict when U.S. forces fight alongside their foreign counterparts. The effect of mission/scope creep is very prevalent in Africa and produces unclear strategy, goals, and timelines – risking the success of U.S. endeavors. “Advising” is a word that makes the public and politicians sit comfortably, but the risks that come with it and the increasing demands of such advising-related missions are something soldiers are very aware of. Examples of this are true ranging from the hunt for Pablo Escobar in the 1990’s to the initial invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.



Draft Area of Responsibility



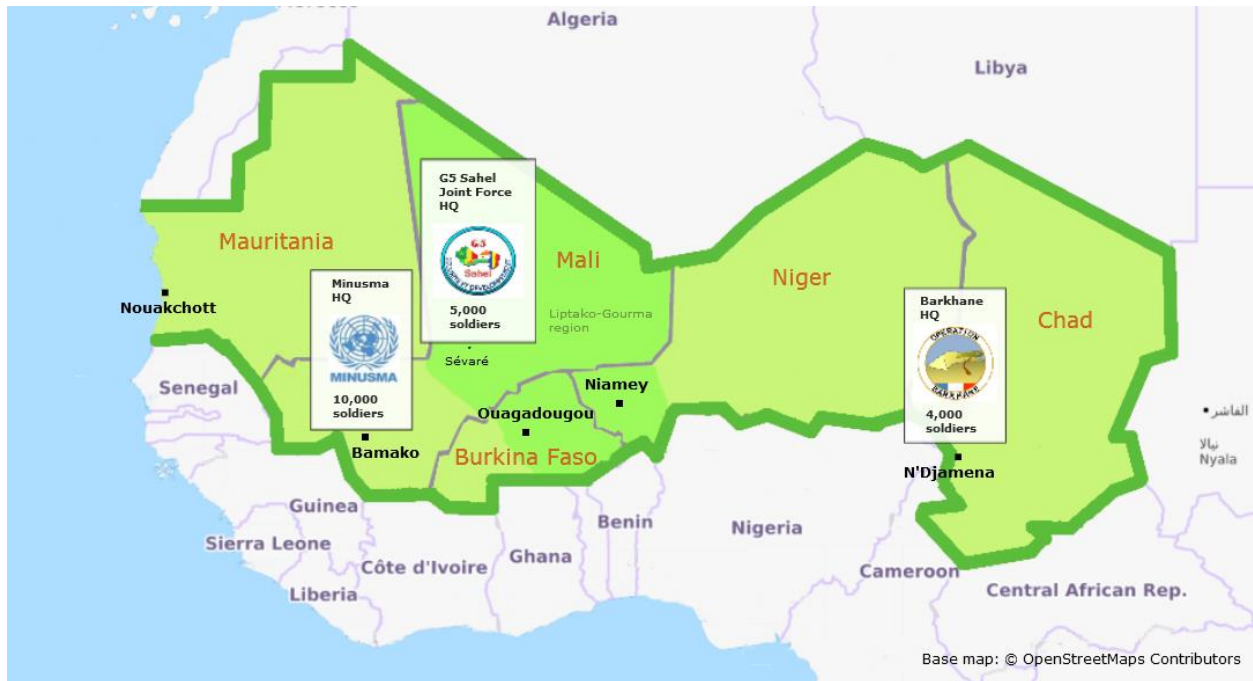
Draft Pre-decisional Working Papers, not subject to FOIA Requirements

5

This map shows the shift in operational distribution from the pre-AFRICOM era to now (DoD).

International Partners in Western Sahel COIN Operations

In February of 2014, a group of five of the Sahel countries gathered in Nouakchott, Mauritania to form the G5 Sahel (Prieur, Flynn, & Lyon, 2014). The G5 Sahel, a framework for coordination in both economic development and security policy, consists of Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In a coordinated manner, France transitioned its Operation Serval to Operation Barkhane, a counterterrorism/anti-insurgent operation (Latorraca, 2016). Operation Barkhane, consisting of a force of 3,000 soldiers, is spread across all five countries and tasked with assisting the G5 Sahel in its security operations (Ministère de la Défense, 2017).



A map of the G5 and its key UN, international HQ, or UN locations

Thus far four permanent bases have been established: an intelligence base in Niger’s capital Niamey (300 men), a regional base in Gao of northern Mali (3,000 men), a special forces base in Burkina Faso’s capital Ouagadougou, and an HQ/air force base in Chad’s capital of N’Djamena for a total of about 4,000 French soldiers in the region.

Since the establishment of this task force, France has made notable headway against AQIM. Notably, it’s early phase Operation Serval retook much of the insurgent held land in Northern Mali (Hémez, 2017). Featured below is the territory AQIM held in its “land-control” phase. Notably, many would see the retaken military control of this land as a success and a step towards defeating AQIM. It is important to note that unlike military forces, insurgent forces easily morph and adapt to the situation at hand, only hiding in the shadows while the opposition’s military holds the upper ground. While leading the intervention against AQIM, France is increasingly asking for help from allies and working to spread the costs amongst the new G5 Sahel organization (Irish, Stewart, 2017).

Current State of AQIM in the Western Sahel



The map above shows AQIM attacks and territory held at the height of its land-holding phase in 2013.

In recent years AQIM has morphed, and channeled its efforts into attacks, indicating not only its health, but the continued existence of the insurgency, even if it does not “hold” (in a military sense) as much land as before. Major attacks against civilians in recent years include:

-November 2015 attack in Bamako, the Malian capital in the Radisson Blu Hotel (120 hostages taken, 20 killed)

-January 2016 Ouagadougou attacks in the Burkina Faso's capital (176 hostages released, 30 killed, 56 wounded)

-January 2017 suicide vehicle bombing of a military base in Gao, Mali (77 killed, 115 injured)

-June 2017 attack on a luxury resort east of Bamako, Mali (5 killed)

-August 2017 attack in Ouagadougou (19 killed, 25 injured)

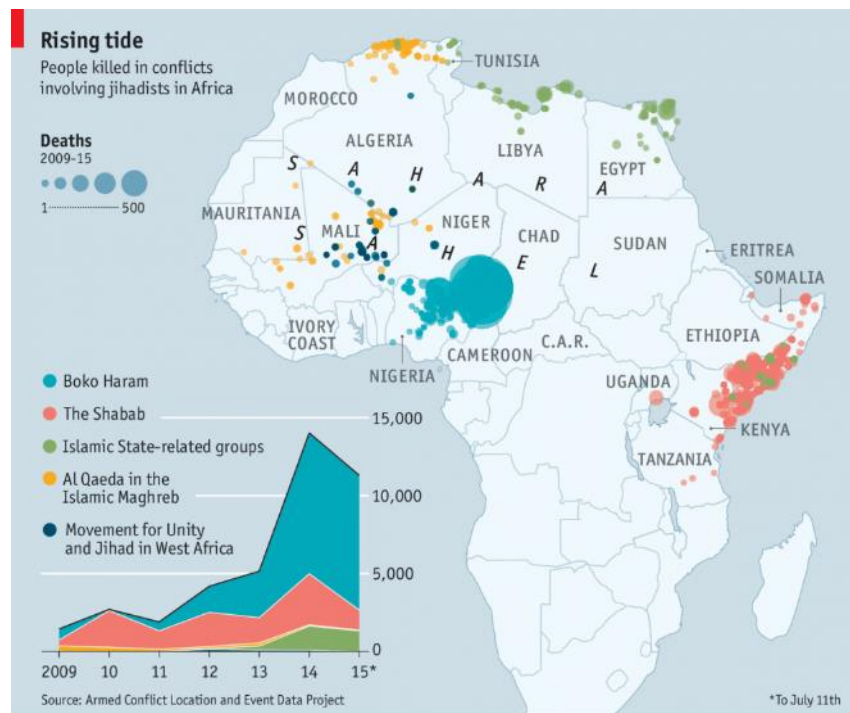
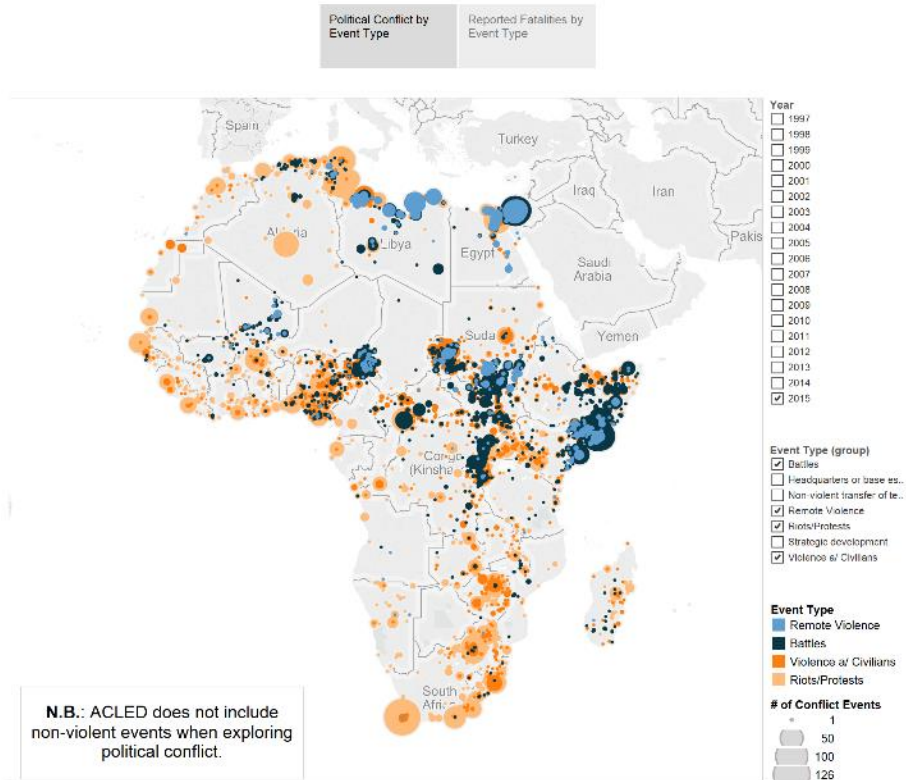
-March 2018 attacks against key sites (including French Embassy) in Ouagadougou (30 killed, 85 wounded)

This list does not necessarily include attacks against soldiers or battles, nor does it include attacks in neighboring countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Nigeria (one of, if not the most frequently afflicted country).

The first map below shows the *frequency* of attacks in Africa in 2015, while the second map below shows the *size/damage* of the attacks in Africa between 2011 and 2015.

Political Conflict in Africa

(Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data [ACLED] Project)



The above are detailed density maps of attacks and types of violence in the areas discussed from ACLED and the Economist—they use the same data but are mapped in different formats.

The situation in the West Sahel may feel calm, but it is far from so. We seem to be making the same mistake we (the US and our Coalition allies) made in Iraq and Afghanistan. Pushing troops into the region simply puts a cork on the issue that makes us feel better. We see today a mirror of the previous Surge in Afghanistan and efforts to rebuild local governments led by the State Department and private contractors. The well-intended, but insufficient efforts of constructive initiatives like the PSI and defensive initiatives like the deployment of U.S. forces and advisors and for ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) will likely only be swept away the minute the cork is removed.

Transnational Threats and Network of AQIM

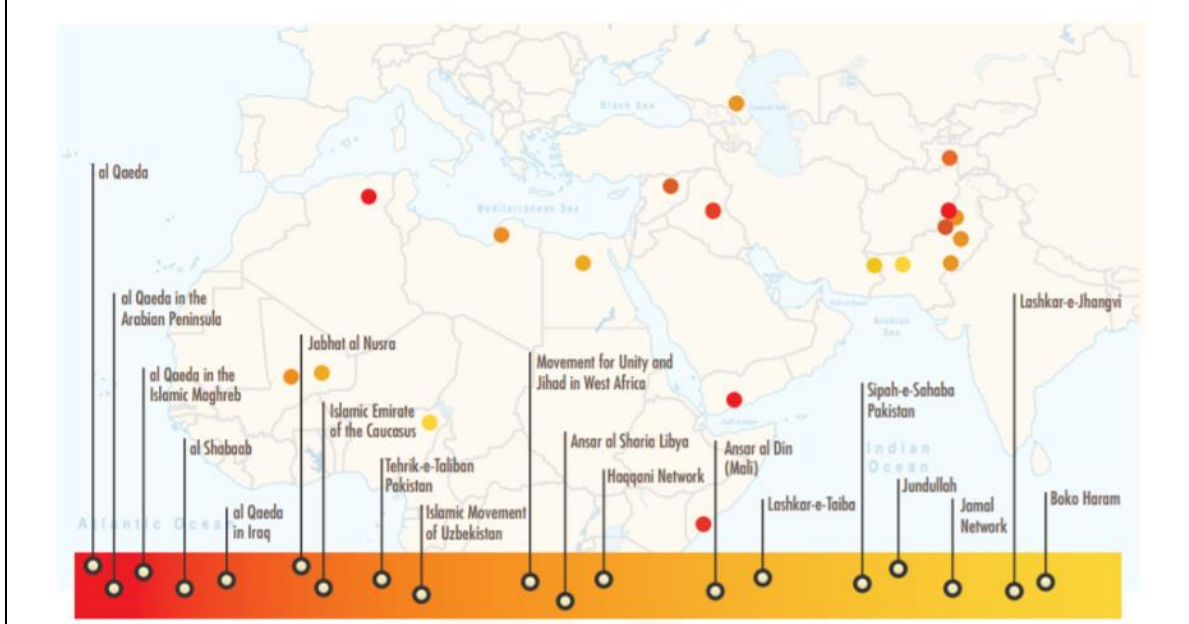
Arguably the thing that makes Al Qaeda so resilient, far more than ISIS, is the horizontal orientation of the network structure it is able to maintain (Zimmerman, 2013). Al Qaeda held its major base in Afghanistan, and the United States certainly disrupted this base between 2001-2011, but what the United States did not manage to do, was stop the spread of the network. As a country with a Western democratic government and a mostly free, capitalistic private society, we are used to seeing organizations and governments in a natural vertical hierarchical structure. In this sense it is completely logical to go after the leadership and headquarters of a group.

Al Qaeda however, has truly embraced its guerrilla nature, and remained humble enough to not completely depend on a single core base or location. Instead, Al Qaeda has managed to essentially “franchise” itself out around the globe. In exchange for a local conflict group pledging their allegiance or “bayat”, to Al Qaeda core and its emir (based in Afghanistan and Pakistan), and its ideology and leadership, Al Qaeda allows the group to become a former regional representative or “affiliate” of Al Qaeda. This is not an unfamiliar tactic, and should not be in American capitalistic society. One of

Mexico's most notorious and successful drug cartels, Los Zetas, uses this tactic by choosing gangs in different towns to be its representative, who then pay a cut to the Los Zetas headquarters in return for support, training, etc...

Once a group embraces Al Qaeda, and Al Qaeda chooses to recognize them, the group can latch onto the notoriety of Al Qaeda—a massively valuable tool for recruitment, regional standing, and international press coverage. Al Qaeda and its local affiliates also share training, tactics, financial resources, weapons, communication, and fighters. AQ also has “associates”. For some reason or another, some groups may share ideology, resources, or leadership with the AQ parents group, albeit more loosely, and yet not necessarily choose to identify with AQ directly (or AQ may choose not to appoint them as affiliates). Nonetheless, these groups still represent a valuable part of the AQ network. The following map, from scholar Katherine Zimmerman, shows how closely tied different groups are within the core AQ parent.

FIGURE 3
SPECTRUM OF AFFILIATION TO THE AL QAEDA NETWORK

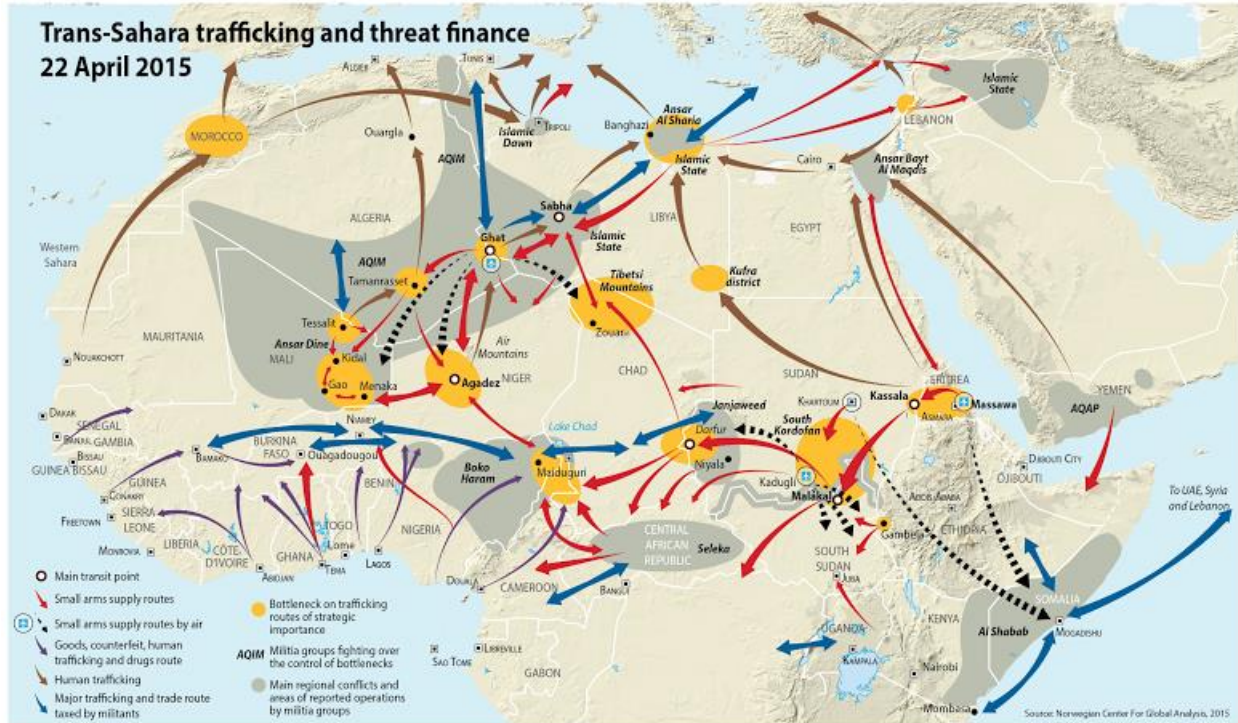


The following is a spectrum chart from Katherine Zimmerman of CriticalThreats.org analyzing the AQ network. The chart shows the affiliation and closeness of groups to the Al-Qaeda network. They are grouped in three categories, the al Qaeda core to the left, affiliates who are publicly recognized and share similar tactics, networks, and other characteristics in the middle (orange), and associates who are more loosely functionally or ideologically aligned with Al-Qaeda but unrecognized by the parent group to the right. There are only six affiliates, and they range from AQAP to the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus on the chart.

The exact methods by which these groups communicate and share resources is constantly varying. Using a hodgepodge of methods that include advanced, modern technological tools, longstanding family and local networks, and millennia old Islamic and Arab tactics, Al Qaeda manages to nimbly outstep governments and those who would wish to see it fail. Al Qaeda, being a

guerilla/insurgent group thrives in areas of poor governance. Primarily, AQ can more easily provide for and gain the support of the local population, but additionally, this poor governance allows AQ to conduct activities and be more productive than it otherwise would be able to. Luckily for AQ, North Africa and the Middle East are plagued with regions like this. Where there is no government/security whoever holds the AK-47 suddenly has the say; and where no basic services are provided, suddenly even sharia law seems at the very least stable. This lack of governance means that making money out of whatever economic activity you want (licit or illicit) becomes much easier, and transporting goods or people no longer requires pesky government oversight, taxes or tariffs, police checks, or passport stamps.

The map below shows how criminals, insurgent groups, and terror networks alike have exploited the poorly governed regions of North Africa. Libya, in a state of virtual constant tribal warfare after the fall of Gaddafi, has become a major hub for migrants and human trafficking to Europe and an open black market for weapons. The poorly patrolled regions of southern Algeria, northern Mali, and north and west Niger have directly helped allow access, support, and free movement for AQIM. In some cases, regions are so poorly developed/governed that AQIM may be able to provide more for the citizenry than the government can (or even wants to). West Africa, from Senegal to Ghana, has become notorious for its role in drug trafficking from South America through Africa, to the Middle East and Africa. Furthermore, small arms and migrants travel freely from Nigeria to any conflict in Central Africa, finding haven or interfered passage in Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia. In all of this, AQ and other groups are easily able to buy/sell weapons, raise money from illicit activities, traffic goods/drugs/humans/weapons, share tactics and information, send money, and gain access to fighters with experience in other regions.



Map of Trans-Saharan trafficking and supply routes, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2015

Some of the more difficult aspects of fighting terrorism in Islamic regions have to do with penetrating extremely tight knit tribal groups that have priorities that are difficult to align with U.S. or allied interests. While some allegiances may be gained, they are rarely ever long-term, a mistake frequently made by U.S. planners. In Afghanistan a common saying goes “You cannot buy an Afghan, but you can rent him.” Islam as a religion gained success out of its ability to unite Arab tribes together and spread to be most popular amongst regions that were vast and filled with frequently contested, tribal/nomadic lands. Even looking today we see that the regions where Islam is most dominant, ranging from Morocco to Afghanistan, have a history of tribal and nomadic relations, if not a current state of one.

In much of the Middle East and North Africa, there is a method of payment/money transfer method called “Hawala”. Hawala is an informal method of transferring money often used when a person

or group wishes to avoid traditional methods for a variety of reasons (convenient for the transfer of illicit funds). If Person X in Agadez, Niger wishes to send money to Person Y in Tripoli, Libya, then Person X approaches a Hawala banker in Agadez, Niger with the funds Person X wishes to send to Person Y. The Hawala banker in Agadez then reaches out to a Hawala banker he/she knows and does business with in Tripoli and communicates the sum, recipient, and generally some sort of code or confirmation word. Person X alerts Person Y that they can obtain their money from the specific Hawala banker in Tripoli, and gives Person Y the code or confirmation word. Person Y then visits their local Hawala banker who pays out the sum in return for a small cut. Over time, the Hawala accounts are naturally balanced, and anything not balanced can be settled via other networks or methods or if necessary, a small physical payment. This means that even if millions of dollars are exchanged across networks, to the outside eye there is no physical or even technological changing of money. At year end, a small payment of \$8,000 from one banker to another may be all that shows up to watching eyes via more conventional methods. Payments are enforced through the honor code, which tends to be very strict in many tribal regions. Without the trust that comes with this honor code, one would simply go out of business in a business where trust and communication is everything.

This goes beyond finance, and other services like couriers, tribal debts/allegiances, remittances, migrants in European countries connected to family abroad, and the use of madrassas as “sacred” spaces for teachings have utilized Islamic and Arab traditions that very few Westerners understand. These tactics are coupled with more modern tactics such as the use of WhatsApp, the dark web, YouTube, social media spamming, email drop boxes, online publishing of newsletters, Google Translate, crude drones, and remote-detonated IED’s (Brachman, 2006). In all, the global AQ network with its use of longstanding Arab networks and techniques, ability to thrive in vast, poorly governed, tribal regions, and utilization of new technologies especially has proved an adaptable, global threat that the U.S. has struggled to counter (Brachman, 2006).

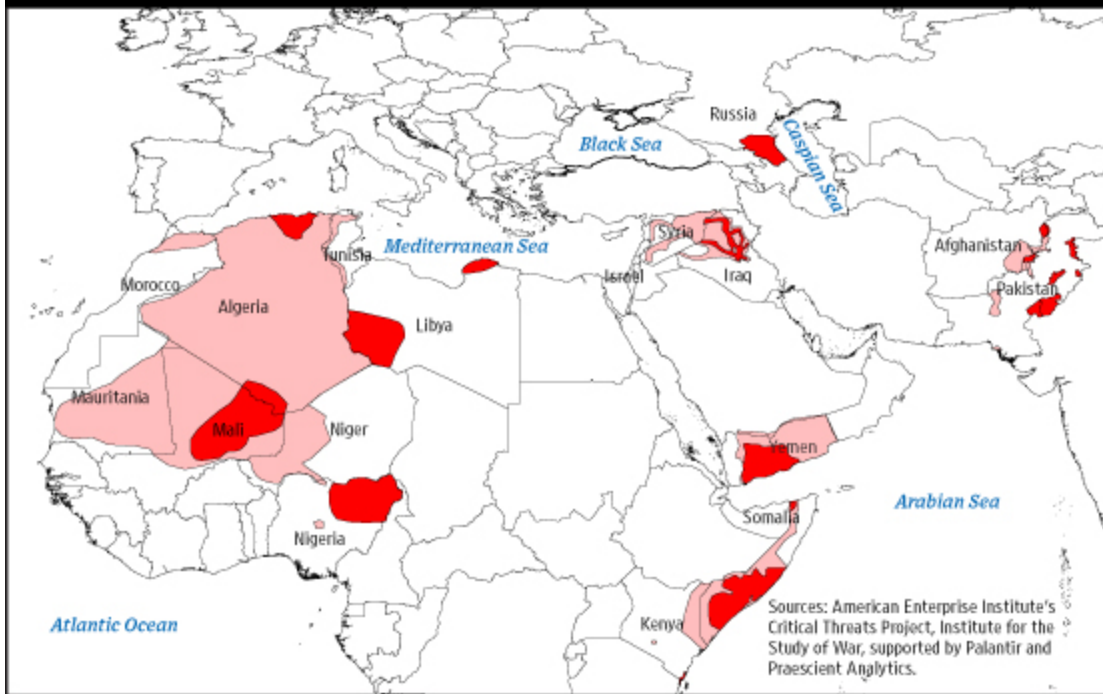
In 2013 AQIM established and maintained a training camp in the captured Malian city of Timbuktu (Blair, 2013). For nearly nine months it trained individuals from Nigeria's Boko Haram, Mauritians, Algerians, and even Pakistanis. In 2009 the DEA arrested and extradited three Malians in Ghana who were working to coordinate with the Colombian FARC group to smuggle cocaine through the Sahel into Spain via Morocco on behalf of AQIM—the first time AQ affiliates had been charged with narcoterrorism (DEA, 2009 and the New Yorker, 2015). This trafficking route continues to be a major moneymaker for AQIM despite this 2009 DEA disruption. Another example of terror partnerships is produced by Nigeria's national security advisor who alleges that Nigeria has evidence of meetings of Boko Haram leadership with other extremist group leadership outside of the country, to include North Africa (Blair, 2013). General Carter Ham, then the commander of AFRICOM, stated that of all African insurgent groups (to include Somalia's Al Shabaab), the links between Boko Haram and AQIM were the most dangerous due to indications they are sharing "funds, training, and explosive materials". And this is saying something, considering that AFRICOM is battling approximately 46 illicit groups, according to its own measure (Turse, 2015). David Luna of the U.S. State Department, a specialist on transnational crime, states that "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb engages in illegal taxation in its areas of control, ISIS in Libya is active in human and narcotics trafficking, and Boko Haram generates significant revenues from trade in cocaine and heroin," (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2017). Another report shows that Boko Haram has even partnered with AQIM for raids in Mali, notably against the Algerian Embassy in Gao and acted to reinforce other attacks (Zenn, 2013). Mechanisms for deterrence are also weak and allow such crimes to rise easily. In examining other crimes throughout the region that help us see how effective the regional justice systems are, a pattern of poor justice becomes clear. According to OECD, the conviction rate for rhino poaching in 2016 was less than 5 percent and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime found that "40 percent of countries recorded few or no convictions for human traffickers."

A captured document from the U.S. Abbottabad raid on Osama Bin Laden's compound revealed a document in which OBL gave concrete instructions to AQIM to provide Younis al-Mauretani—a senior AQ official from Mauritania who helped unite AQIM and AQ and acted as AQIM's liaison to AQ, with funding of 200,000 euros for the purpose of greater AQ business, specifically for using to help AQAP plan attacks on Western targets (Jocelyn and Roggio, 2013). OBL also asked for more information on Mauretani, and provided him with instructions to begin using AQIM to plan attacks on Western targets directly (Cruickshank, Lister, and Robertson, 2013). Humorously, OBL also instructs the group to use a different name for "al-Mauretani", as in Arabic this literally means "the Mauritanian", giving foreign intelligence agencies an easy head start in hunting him down.

Documents note that in the wake of changing geopolitical events, AQ, and AQIM especially, have proved very adaptive (Chivvis & Liepman, 2013). As the AQ stronghold in Afghanistan was dismantled, horizontal ties between affiliates and associates have strengthened. AQ took advantage of the 2011 Arab Spring as branches split off and started new organizations across the MENA region where governments were weakened.

Al Qaeda and Its Associated Movements, March 2013

Areas of operation (dark shade) and safe havens (lighter shade)



The above map shows AQ operations in March of 2013, the timeline being discussed

An AQIM branch was spun off in Libya by a senior leader, Abou Zeid, and another cell was established elsewhere in Libya by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an even more senior AQIM leader, likely to take advantage of high potential dysfunction in Libya. In 2012 AQIM had developed training camps in Libya. The reach of such actions was seen as Libyan weapons were recovered (and continue to be so) across the Sahel region, a result of AQIM taking advantage of the windfall of unclaimed weapons (Duarte, 2011). A militia has also emerged in Tunisia, the Uqba bin Nafi Brigade, alleged by the Tunisian government to be a local branch of AQIM. Indeed, documents captured show explosives planning and tunnels in Tunisia that AQIM may be using as a transit zone or safe haven. Letters were also recovered from the emir of AQAP, advising the emir of AQIM on utilizing the local conflict in Mali and Ansar al Dine as AQAP had done with Ansar al Sharia. Evidence later revealed that AQIM had provided Ansar al Dine with a 400,000-euro payment and logistical support. AQAP advised that "Providing basic services and fulfilling daily needs,

like food and water, will generate support, counsels Wahayshi. The enforcement of sharia also needs to be taken gradually.” Further writings of Bin Laden’s reveal instructions to one of his subordinates to arrange secure lines of communication between AQAP, AQIM, and Mauretani (CTC, 2012).

The evidence does not paint a pretty picture. While the specifics are murky and often uncovered post de facto, the fact remains that AQ manages to thrive by moving, striking, and choosing to go wherever its opponent (organized government) is weakest. Organized governments can be tied down and harassed in regional conflicts (Afghanistan, Yemen, Mali, Iraq, etc...) while AQ branches elsewhere are prepped, trained, funded, and instructed.

Justifying Intervention, a Foundation for the GWOT, and the Strategic Case against Western Sahel’s AQIM

Updating COIN Strategy for a New Era

In discussing an updated American counterinsurgent (COIN) strategy and its resulting operations, we will look at a few different factors. First and foremost, it is critical to understand the backgrounds and histories of American COIN operations, the regions and groups with which we plan to intervene, and of the general trends of American political, military, and economic foreign involvement. The first half of this paper in analyzing such trends and regional backgrounds, has set us up to make better recommendations. In making recommendations, we will compare and contrast historical and longstanding COIN policy across the globe as well as more modern/recent COIN trends and policy to flush out the most effective and strategies for our case.

After doing this, we will further our background on relevant American COIN operations by looking at America’s specific errors, lessons, and successes in its War in Terror to date. In doing so, we will “Americanize” the most effective COIN strategies. This is critical, because some COIN strategies

work in different times and situations, and it is critical to tailor them to the intervening country and its overarching strategy for foreign policy and the region in question. Additionally, and more obviously, COIN operations must be tailored to the region on which they are being implemented—likely the most frequent reason for all COIN failures. For this reason, we will further advance our regional analytics of the Sahel and AQIM to uniquely tailor American COIN operations for maximum success.

Throughout its history, American interests and her overarching strategies have been presented in a jumbled and constantly shifting manner due to the world events and context in which they take place. This is very important to understand, and there are world events that influence countries much more than countries influence them. But certain longstanding trends and ideals become clear across the examination of these events. Understanding the role of global powers and major events/time periods such as the Industrial Revolution, WWII, and post-Cold War provides us with a great deal of context and reason behind the actions of many countries, the US included.

But merely looking at a state's backgrounds does not do justice to the *intentional* strategy of these states however. It is easy to believe that states are simply reacting to the problems presented to them, when in reality, states have far more complex and deliberate strategies and external approaches. In our COIN recommendation section we will not jump straight into suggested improved methods at the tactical level. Instead our examination and recommendation will be grouped into three different categories, consisting of:

1. Strategy
2. Policy
3. COIN operations/Tactical

The reason for this is that tactical COIN steps are dependent on regional policy and goals, which in turn depend on a long-term geopolitical strategy. To develop the strategy of the U.S. it is necessary to

draw from geopolitical events, backgrounds, and IR theories to examine how the U.S. could possibly be looking at the world and in a specific manner, the AQIM/insurgent problem in the Western Sahel. We will examine the United States' long-term strategic interests and goals, acknowledging that their prioritization will inevitably be different amongst individuals, organizations, and administrations. Secondly, within policy, we will examine the concrete regional strategies, international partnerships, and consensus U.S. government approach to the region and Sahel issue at hand. This step is critical as it is formed directly by strategy, and directly determines and/or creates the COIN operations at hand. The final step of COIN operations and their execution will provide recommendations, suggestions, and steps for the maximum effectiveness of policy achievement.

While it was touched on at the beginning of the background section, one of the major difficulties and flaws with COIN operations is their disconnect with policy, and even more so, strategy. The U.S. soldier in a Malian village trying to decide if a villager yelling at him is friend or foe is far removed from the comfortable think-tank executive looking at a 30-year regional plan in Washington D.C. The less communication and understanding there is between all three levels, the more the goals of each tend to drift apart. This phenomenon is known as "Practical Drift", when soldiers and development workers lose faith in their plans and leadership while strategic and political leaders grow frustrated, develop unrealistic ideas, and get further from their on-the-ground actors (Snook, 2002).

In order for COIN operations to be successful, all parties involved must be on as close to the same page as possible to ensure strategy makes policy, that policy dictates operations, that policy responds/adapts/listens to operations, and that policy has some influence on strategy and keeps the strategic-level realistic of options and outcomes. This is precisely why we will dedicate such a significant portion of our section to careful examination, explanation, and clarification of strategy, policy, and operations. Because counterinsurgency is less about brute force than it is about applying the right amount of force, to the right place, at the right time—all while alleviating pressure, strengthening ties

with the populace, and solving problems while this force is being applied, careful consideration is especially necessary. Neither force nor the development aspect of COIN operations can thrive or even exist without the other. Force alone becomes warfare, and assistance/ties alone is simply humanitarian aid, neither of which will solve our problem.

The U.S. and most large bodies (governments and corporations alike) like to respond with maximum effort. To no fault of their own, that is how they are programmed. Corporations throw money at problems and governments, soldiers. The biggest reactions come from the biggest actors who generally have the “biggest problems”. But history has shown that even in the days of massive conventional battles, when troops were marched at each other in a masse v. masse manner, the commander with the insight to use his forces in the most appropriate or effective manner (think the first Pincer movement) gains far more value than any other. In a delicate situation like counterinsurgency, this tendency of reaction must be avoided. For all intents and purposes these mass, blanket responses must be avoided with extensive pre-operational work (strategy and policy formation) and constant forward-thinking communication between COIN operators, policy makers, and strategy “overseers” to continually align and adapt operations. Our operations must be strategically-aligned, operationally adaptable, and tactically effective.

This three-part approach is nothing novel, modern military theory, especially as used by the U.S. military, breaks down the theater of war into three parts (USAF, College of Aerospace Doctrine, Air and Space Power Mentoring Guide, 1997). The three parts are :

1. Strategic
2. Operational
3. Tactical

The three parts, while slightly different in their goals and intentions, offer us valuable lessons. Even beyond that they offer us insight into how the military is organized and therefore how it thinks, approaches tasks, and responds to new events.

International Relations Schools of Thought

Within the field of International Relations, there are three major schools of thought: Liberalism, Realism, and Constructivism. The following analysis below is based off of Foreign Policy articles and other readings that outlines and covers some of the works of thinkers like Hans Morgenthau, John Mearsheimer, and Alexander Wendt. Other theories such as Marxism and Feminist Theory will be paid due credit within the analysis of these three fields.

Liberalism can be best summed up with the belief that “democracies do not fight other democracies”. Liberalism was borne of idealism, which believes that a state’s domestic political philosophies should determine its foreign policy and that state capabilities do not determine a state’s behavior but instead its preferences. It also believes economic cooperation and interdependence are key in global security. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, while often presented as a witch hunt for WMD’s, was largely the result of a simple distaste for the Baathist Regime of Saddam Hussein. The regime was no friend of the United States’, guilty of brutal civilian repression, and by no means a democracy. U.S. forces had stopped short of removing Saddam from power during the Gulf War as he posed no imminent threat once his invasion was repelled. But in the post 9/11 thirst for blood, practically flew to the wind, and liberalism’s quest for the instillation of democracy allowed the itchy policy makers and generals to finally go after Saddam (Snyder, 2006).

While liberalism advocates for democracy as a means to peace/global stability, it does not necessarily do so in a manner than encourages the democracy to be instilled or forced upon others by outside forces. In this sense of the Western Sahel problem, liberalism could advocate for the forcible

invasion of problem regions to install a democracy, the gentle economic support of democratic ideals, parties, and initiatives, or the encouragement of international institution partnerships to solve the problem. Irrespective, it would advocate for democratic promotion and eventually, the instillation of such.

The school of realist thought is one that believes that the international system is anarchic, of each country for itself, and is dominated by states (leaving little/no room for international institutions or other non-state organizations). It advocates that security revolves largely around obtaining material power as well. Neorealist theorists have only adapted to clarify that a state's power come from its combined capabilities, beyond simply its military capabilities, and have further discussed the distribution of capabilities/number of powers in the system. Long standing as the most dominant of all three theories, it is advocated as being the most "practical" of all the theories. Realism tends to be a bit negative in its world views. A prime example of this is the United States change in support for the democratic Iranian government in the early 1950's. Due to a combination of fear of communist influence in Iran and the nationalization of Iranian oil, the United States decided to shift its support to help overthrow the elected prime minister Mosaddegh and bring the Shah Pavlani to full power.

In intervention in the Western Sahel the realist school would primarily examine the United States own interests in intervening. This would mean not only listing, but also prioritizing the different interests the US has in the region. These interests would be the safety/security of U.S. citizenry and domestic interests, followed by U.S. hegemonic maintenance, then economic interests (oil, rare earth elements, etc...) Far last on the list of concerns to U.S. strategy in a realist sense (if at all) would be any localized troubles such as the killing of civilians, type of government, economic services, etc...

Just as there are differences in execution of the liberal field, so too is there in the realist field. Realism could be used promote the colonial-esque takeover of the region—brutal and immediately self-

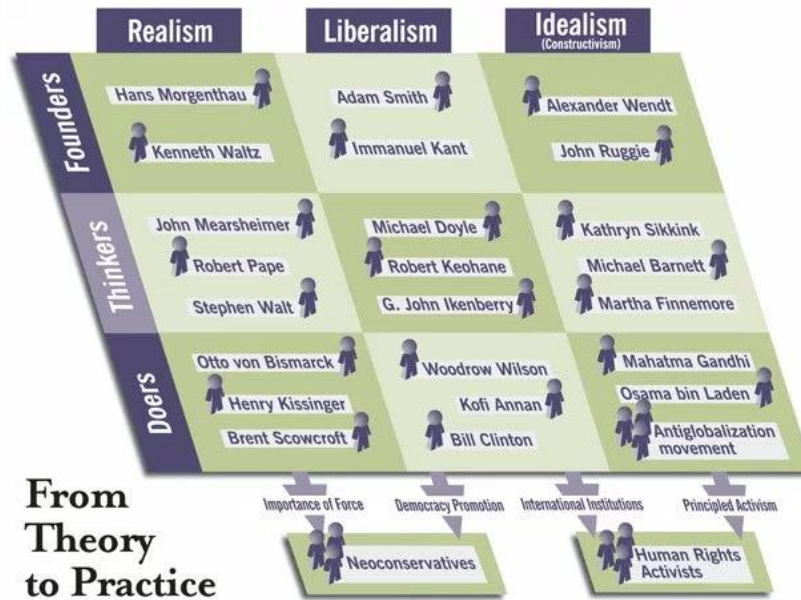
interested, it could be used to advocate for putting in a strongman dictator who is friendly to U.S. interests, that U.S. efforts should be used to counter rising Chinese influence, or even that the region is of little importance to the U.S. and any effort beyond the bare necessities would be a waste of resources.

Constructivism believes that international relations and decisions are socially and historically constructed. The world is much what people make it, and ideas (goals, identities, threats, etc...), cultures, and social movements all come to influence and determine perceptions and decisions. A major issue with the Global War on Terror can be analyzed using constructivist thought. The most significant attack on American soil in 50 years, knocked down America's most iconic towers in the heart of its most iconic city, and naturally struck fear across our nation of a seemingly unexpected attack. The resulting response became a heavily emotional one and has found troops fighting "terrorists" from Africa to Asia in a quest to avoid another 9/11 at any cost. Are the battles all rational or necessary? No. But is it easy to understand how America became so obsessed with stopping terrorism after seeing women and children jump from tumbling skyscrapers? Absolutely.

Constructivist analysis of the Western Sahel problem would present the widest range of questions and strategic issues. The analysis would begin to wonder if the insurgency in the region actually poses a threat to the United States, and if so, what level of this threat was conflated by fear. It would also promote the idea that the United States is inherently biased towards free and liberal states, and that in intervening in the governance and security of the Western Sahel, it should consider the needs and wants of the local populace to form the most effective and productive government. Constructivism offers helpful ideals in analyzing the insurgencies themselves. It would look at the social aspects of the insurgencies and involved communities, consisting of language, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic statuses and their fault lines. It also would examine the dominant narratives of extremist Islamist groups, local governments, tribal leaders, common religious leaders, traditional norms, foreign

influencers (both current and those of previous colonizers), and at the familial level. Constructivist suggestions would aim to help guide policy and strategy by ethical and legal standards, more effectively done by recognizing social needs and constructs.

The following charts, produced by Foreign Policy in 2014, aim to explain the theories, their thinkers, and explanations, in the following charts:



The Leading Brands

Theories:	Realism	Liberalism	Idealism <small>(Constructivism)</small>
Core Beliefs	Self-interested states compete for power and security	Spread of democracy, global economic ties, and international organizations will strengthen peace	International politics is shaped by persuasive ideas, collective values, culture, and social identities
Key Actors in International Relations	States, which behave similarly regardless of their type of government	States, international institutions, and commercial interests	Promoters of new ideas, transnational activist networks, and nongovernmental organizations
Main Instruments	Military power and state diplomacy	International institutions and global commerce	Ideas and values
Theory's Intellectual Blind Spots	Doesn't account for progress and change in international relations or understanding that legitimacy can be a source of military power	Fails to understand that democratic regimes survive only if they safeguard military power and security; some liberals forget that transitions to democracy are sometimes violent	Does not explain which power structures and social conditions allow for changes in values
What the Theory Explains About the Post-9/11 World	Why the United States responded aggressively to terrorist attacks, the inability of international institutions to restrain military superiority	Why spreading democracy has become such an integral part of current U.S. international security strategy	The increasing role of polemics about values, the importance of transnational political networks (whether terrorists or human rights advocates)
What the Theory Fails to Explain About the Post-9/11 World	The failure of smaller powers to militarily balance the United States; the importance of non-state actors such as al Qaeda; the intense U.S. focus on democratization	Why the United States has failed to work with other democracies through international organizations	Why human rights abuses continue, despite intense activism for humanitarian norms and efforts for international justice

The images above illustrate some of the key beliefs of each major field of IR, and its leading thinkers, Snyder 2009

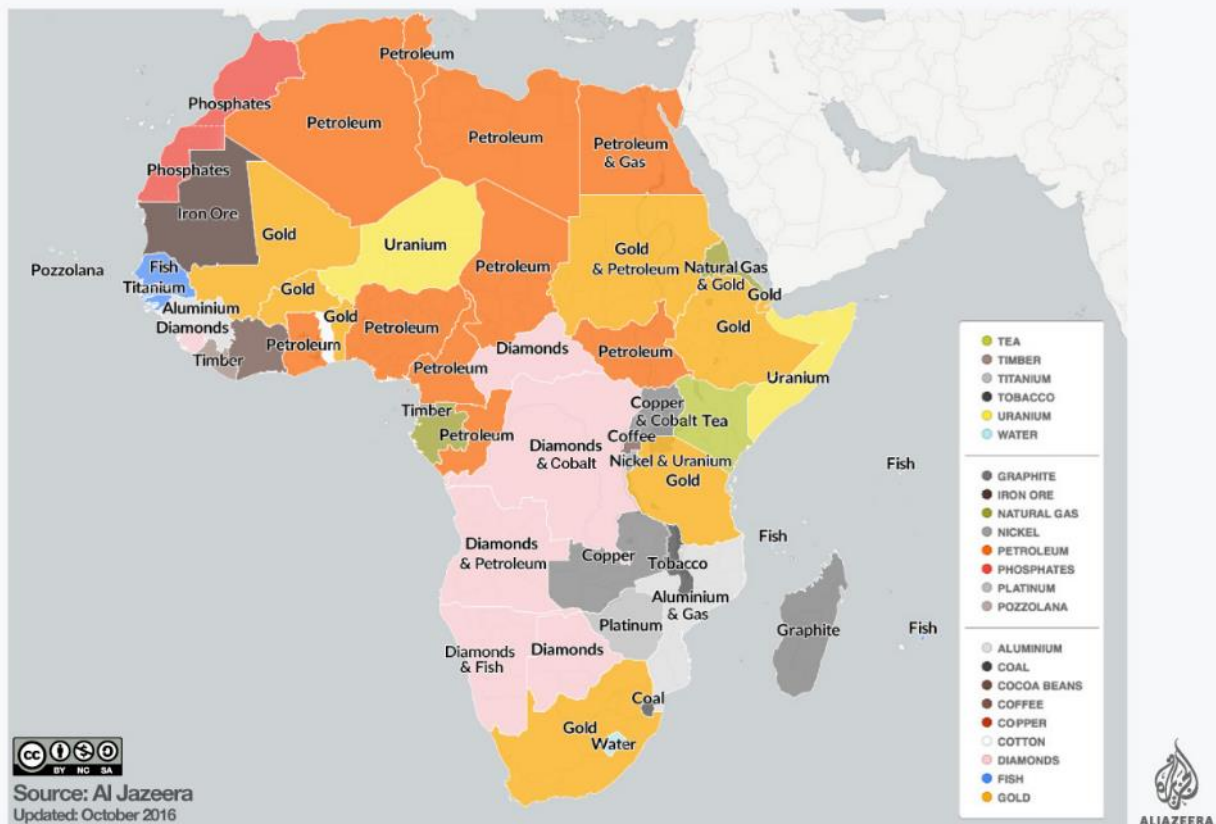
Other smaller schools of thought still hold their own levels of influence. Marxism focuses on economic and material gains and believes that the economic advancement of social classes is the primary motivation of IR actions. Feminist theory is one borne out of the idea that women are not properly given credit for their influence on IR actions. It focuses on how masculinity influences IR decisions, the differing gender needs/wants of different groups, and the unaccounted effects of certain actions/policies on women.

For effective COIN policies, the U.S. must prioritize and order its strategies. A soldier or diplomat on the ground can never succeed if U.S. strategic-thinkers cannot agree on what their strategic desires are. Yet in modern day politics, rarely does one successfully subscribe to a single school of thought. In

practice the world is complex enough that each of these schools of thoughts helps highlight and solve different problems, and finds some issues fit certain schools of thought better than the other.

In looking at the Western Sahel insurgent problem, we must be cognizant of all of these major schools. Our main takeaways from the realist school are that of direct American interests in the region—natural resources especially. Secondary interests are those such as security threats in the region and economic trade partners or interests. Realists may say we should be more selective with our focus and efforts, and channel more resources to more pressing priorities like China. Liberalist interests would be the protection and promotion of democratic governments, especially as it stands to establish reliable economic and political partners. Constructivist interests would urge the avoidance of knee-jerk reactions and involvement in the region, advocating for the development of a strong, long-term strategy before implementing policy or operations. These same constructivist interests would take a careful look at the underlying issues that led to and maintain the insurgent base in the region and amongst the local population.

Mapping Africa's natural resources



The above is a map of Africa with each country's most valuable natural resource, sourced from Al Jazeera

A Note on Imperialism

To progress with this paper, it is imperative that we address the issue of "imperialism". While this tangent may be digressive in nature and more philosophical than the topic of the paper may seem to require, it is necessary to provide both a justification to American involvement abroad and support the legitimacy and effectivity of our proposed plans to overcome insurgencies abroad. It also, as we will show later, will allow us to dismantle and dissect some of flawed aspects of America's current approach to fighting these insurgencies.

In modern-day political thought, the label of “imperialism” is often attached to anything that conjures ideas of 19th century European colonialism into Africa and the rest of the world. The brutal extraction of resources and economic enslavement of local populations by European powers had devastating effects on the places it took root, effects that are still seen to this day. It makes sense then, that in an era of (more) self-reflection, we begin to reconsider and criticize selfishly-motivated actions abroad that prop up our current situation while contributing to the decline or demise of a foreign country.

It is important to note though, that imperialism is relatively natural. Governments are made up of people, and people are intrinsically self-interested, hence the self-interest of governments. Religions, countries, ethnicities, and cultures alike have always attempted to “imperialize” by overtaking others, spreading their own ideas, and seeking power or resources outside of one’s own territory. It is a matter of fact that there are world/global powers, regional powers, and local powers. In fact, there are powers in every job or role we hold, our bosses and family members all hold different powers, and this is not something that is likely to change anytime soon.

As noted above, there are a variety of schools of thought as to what the U.S.’s role is in global security. Should it act to secure only its own borders? The world’s? The Western Hemisphere’s? Wherever it has interests? And how should it do that, should it install democracies all around the world, respect every country’s right to self-determination, participate only in humanitarian intervention, avoid even genocide intervention, make allies with and support strongmen the world over to secure American economic interests, do what it needs to do to check Chinese and Russian expansionism?

I will not take a position on these questions, for they are too divisive, and I am only smart enough to know that I do not have an answer to these questions. Even if I were to say that I would respect the right of self-determination of all, what does THAT mean? Is self-determination even

achievable without education and democracy? What are we to do about contested regions like Sudan, Palestine, and the Western Sahara? What about a small group of people who cry out about an injustice, who is to say if they are simply whining, or if they have an actual case? Who do we choose to side with then? And borders are another matter altogether. Not a single border on this earth is natural, humans were all created together, and every border, boundary, or territory can be debated on unjust historical actions, conquest, war, or colonization.

What we CAN do as the U.S. however, is wield the power and responsibility we have wisely, with proper moral consideration for our brothers and sisters around the world. This means constant debate and deliberation, for we can never be “right enough”. It also means being willing to take stands, stands such as the following: under no circumstances should Al Qaeda be considered a legitimate government or organization. Al Qaeda’s tactics, ideology, and goals are perverse, inhuman, and downright evil. I will not lend credence to their existence by failing to address them nor giving them the benefit of passive support by failing to stand up to their actions. The U.S. has its flaws, of that there is no doubt. The U.S. has committed human rights violations and made missteps along the way, but never as a fundamental part of its existence, ideology, or end goal. Al Qaeda is the result of disillusioned populations, and it certainly strikes a chord with people that those fighting it should pay attention to. Al Qaeda and its affiliates are not representative of Islam, they pervert and subvert the teachings of Muhammad, and are disavowed by the large majority of Muslims around the world. If anything, Al Qaeda and other extremist groups gross definitions of what makes a “real Muslim” has led to the deaths of far more Muslims than any other religious group. The war and battles against it will not be perfect and they will never be pretty. But as Americans, as humans, and as believers in liberty and fundamental human rights it is in both our interest and moral code defeat Al Qaeda and the circumstances that brought it into being such that we as humankind can continue to progress into a more unified, peaceful, and sustainable existence. While

we can certainly (and should) argue how they should be defeated and what role the U.S. should play in such a defeat, that defeating Al-Qaeda is a goal should not be in question.

The Role of the US and Profit: The United States Hegemonic Position and the Role of the Industrial Military Complex

Examination of the U.S.' role in global politics over the course of its relatively short-existence is critical to understanding the U.S. current role (and resulting policy mindset and actions in the present day). In the 18th century, the U.S. was little more than a proxy war between dominant European powers, as the UK fought to keep its colony while France helped the colonies in their fight for independence. America's establishment was revolutionary in terms of the history of democracy, but America's role in global politics was hardly more than that of a side note. Gradually over the 19th century America grew more organized and settled into its role as a country of its own with the Louisiana Purchase, the acquisition of the American Southwest, and the Westward Expansion with the Oregon Trail. In the 19th century, America began to learn to harness its natural resources—canals and railroads were built, electricity was discovered, oil and gold rushes dominated decades, farming, factory, and production methods were enhanced, and inventions such as the telegraph and telephone spurred progress. Despite this, America had little-to-no foreign involvement, maintaining a policy of isolationism well into the early 20th century.

While the 19th century saw America's domestic production and organization increase, the 20th century finally saw America grow into a global power. Post-Civil War, America's rising cities and urban life, a fast pace of industrial growth, and a newfound involvement in foreign affairs with America's declaration of a Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine under Theodore Roosevelt all helped America increase its "weight" on the global stage. WWI as a global conflict was the first major opportunity for the U.S. to bear this weight, and the U.S. did just that. The U.S. government mobilized

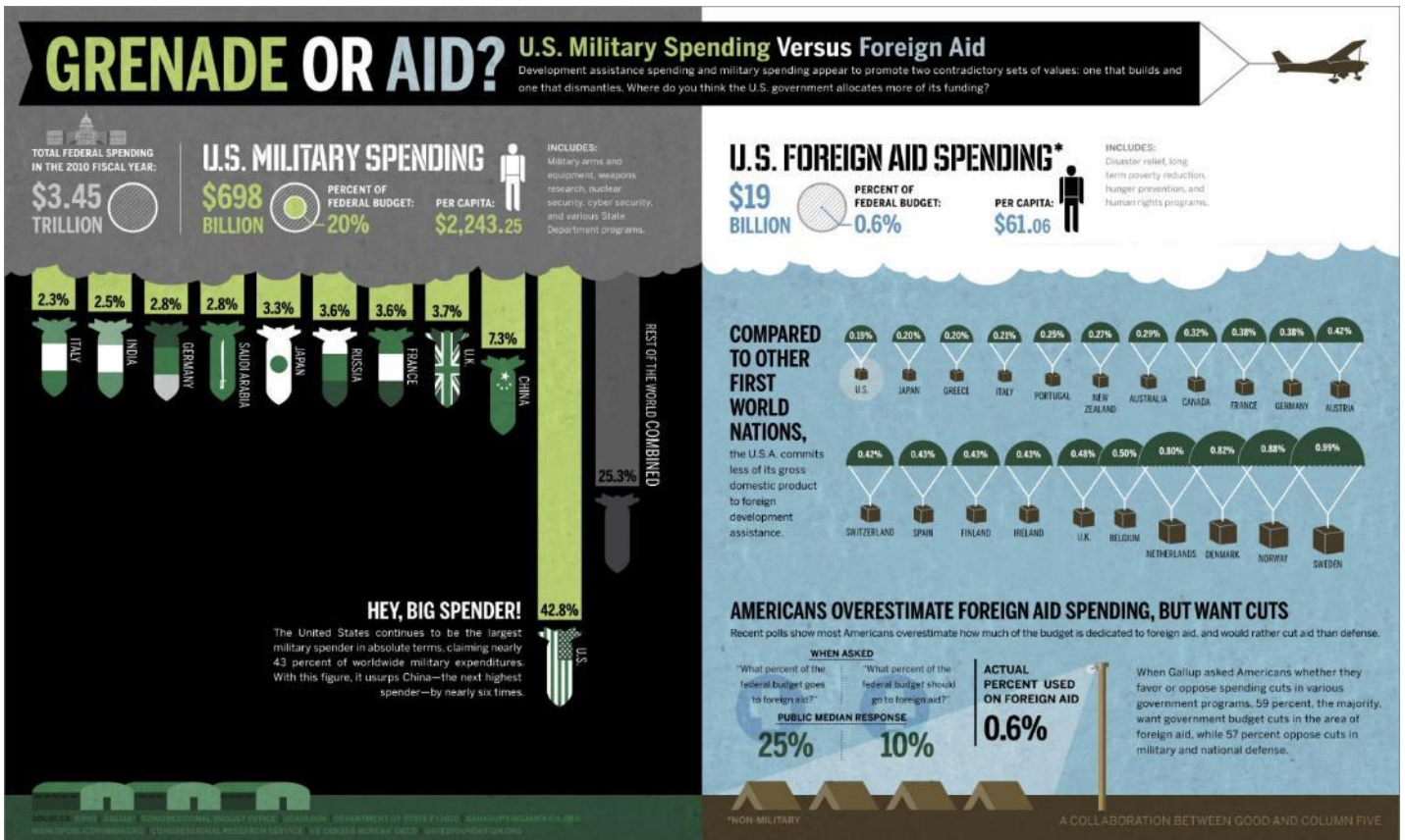
resources and grew in an unprecedented manner. The U.S. became involved itself in WWI in an effort to help bring democracy to (and shape) the future of Europe. Much the same occurred with WWII, and the victors that emerged could cement their global status even more. The victors, such as the Soviet Union, U.S., U.K., and China, were all able to shape their respective regions and the world to their liking in a post-WWII world by forming economies/trade, militaries, foreign policy, and governments to their liking.

The Cold War, as a global struggle between the U.S. and Soviet Union, of Western Democracy v. Communism, saw proxy wars, battles over control/intelligence, and competition for allies (AKA ownership) which saw the world caught in a global game of tug-o-war. Both the U.S. and Soviet Union were engaged in fierce competition in quite nearly every way—from increasing the production of tanks and deployment of intelligence officers to racing to the moon, battling over domestic bread supply, and competing for control in remote Africa nations, no realm was free from this “Cold War”. The U.S.’ eventual triumph with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw America finally cement its status as the global hegemon. It is this world which we exist in today.

As the hegemon of global politics the U.S., by choice or not, has found itself in the center of conflicts, economies, and international diplomacy in countries ranging from Sweden to Suriname. As the world’s largest military power too, the United States has found itself embedded in nearly every possible military activity such as conventional warfare, naval patrols, military advising/training, space and ballistic operations, intelligence, and drone strikes/surveillance. There are several reasons for this which we have covered above such as the promotion of liberalism, protection of capitalistic ideals, and the projection of hegemonic influence. But one specific aspect that tends to explain the overinvolvement of the U.S. military (in number of conflicts, size of conflicts, and timeframes) is that the United States has a massive domestic industrial military complex. Many politicians and national security leaders believe that having a near-monopoly on domestic military production capabilities is essential to protecting American dominance and self-reliance. This belief shares many similar origins as that of the American 2nd

Amendment, which allows all American citizens to “bear arms”. Born of British oppression and the need to prevent foreign occupation and government overreach, the 2nd Amendment remains in place to this day largely because of this belief. The need for America to be able to supply and produce for its own military originated during the American Revolution, as American forces were forced to depend on foreign allies or stolen British weapons to supply a rag-tag force of farmers and cobblers. This mindset only further increased during the need for American production with WWI and WWII. The Cold War further saw a massive battle in production, and the U.S. and Soviet Union competed to supply foreign allies or proxies with their own weapons or military products. When the U.S. finally triumphed, it is not difficult to see how it had become engrained that it was key to the United States’ dominance to be able to product the most and highest quality military goods.

While this paper is not an examination of the U.S. military industrial complex, there are a wide range of repercussions that result from the massive military industrial complex that affect the strategy of U.S. of foreign policy and how we fight insurgencies. It is not an academic nor advanced psychological concept that when we have tools, we want to use them so badly that we often find an excuse to use them, even unnecessarily. Think on a personal level—of a new garden tool, fancy outfit, car, or waffle iron. The same thinking applies to the military industrial complex. If the U.S. has a new bomber or specialized counterterrorism unit, whatever the purpose behind, intention, or need for such an item/group at the time of its origin, it is hard to always use appropriately use such a new “tool”. Suddenly the new bomber or counterterrorism unit becomes the “solution” to any new problem, regardless of its complexity, scale, or the repercussions of such intervention.



A comparison of U.S. military spending to U.S. foreign aid, Column Five, 2011

Another major way in which the military industrial complex affects military operations and foreign policy is that in order to sustain such high levels of production outside of massive world wars and conflicts, the U.S. government must both subsidize the companies themselves and foreign allies who agree to buy American-made goods. This leads to a massive amount of foreign dependency on U.S. weapons and further ties the U.S. into military engagements around the world as weapons sales inevitably correlate with military advising and support, joint operations, etc... Finally, on the industry side, lobbyists from these companies, have massive weight over policymakers—from senators to the President himself. The aerospace and defense (A&D) industry directly employees over 1.2 million people directly, and 3.2 million people indirectly or in support of operations. The defense and national security sector of the A&D industry had sales of over \$204 billion in 2015. This directly translates into massive

lobbying power. Our military's direct reliance on this industry, the belief that this domestic industrial capability is key to national security, and the lobbying power of the industry create a massive force in policy creation. Often times the U.S. is informally encouraged or pressured to put this industry to "work" by engaging in conflict that may or may not be necessary, using the industry's products in missions or operations, selling the products to foreign governments, and solving problems (or creating and solving them post de facto) using the industry's products. The phenomenon and inherent bias/factor in U.S. government decision-making born of America's status as a global hegemon and as the dominant military industrial power is something critical to understanding American action and inaction. As a result, we will note, observe, and address its effects in our proposed solutions further on.

Our Global War on Terror: Why It Is Not All That Wrong

The US and its allies have been in a sort of Global War on Terror even before 9/11 made the war well-known and well-supported. In the 1990's the CIA was hunting down terror leaders like Carlos the Jackal and Osama Bin Laden in Sudan, launching missile strikes against terror factories and training sites, and making covert efforts to stop terrorist hosts like Gaddafi after the bombing of the Glasgow airline. Other events like the bombing of the U.S. barracks in Kuwaiti/Saudi Arabia, in Lebanon in the 1980's, and the Iranian hostage crisis meant that this war had been coming for some time.

In 2001, the U.S. was very effective at knocking back AQ and Taliban strongholds in Afghanistan. Joint CIA, Special Forces teams lead one of the most successful military operations of modern day. But the question in 2002 was "What to do now?" From the beginning the mission scope was very poorly defined, which led to troops being poured in to Afghanistan with differing instructions, unclear end goals, and contradictory actions by successive leaders at the civilian and military level. As we noted in our introduction, a similar thing occurred in Iraq: an actually fairly well justified invasion with initially efficient and effective military operations was followed by a general destabilization and creeping growth

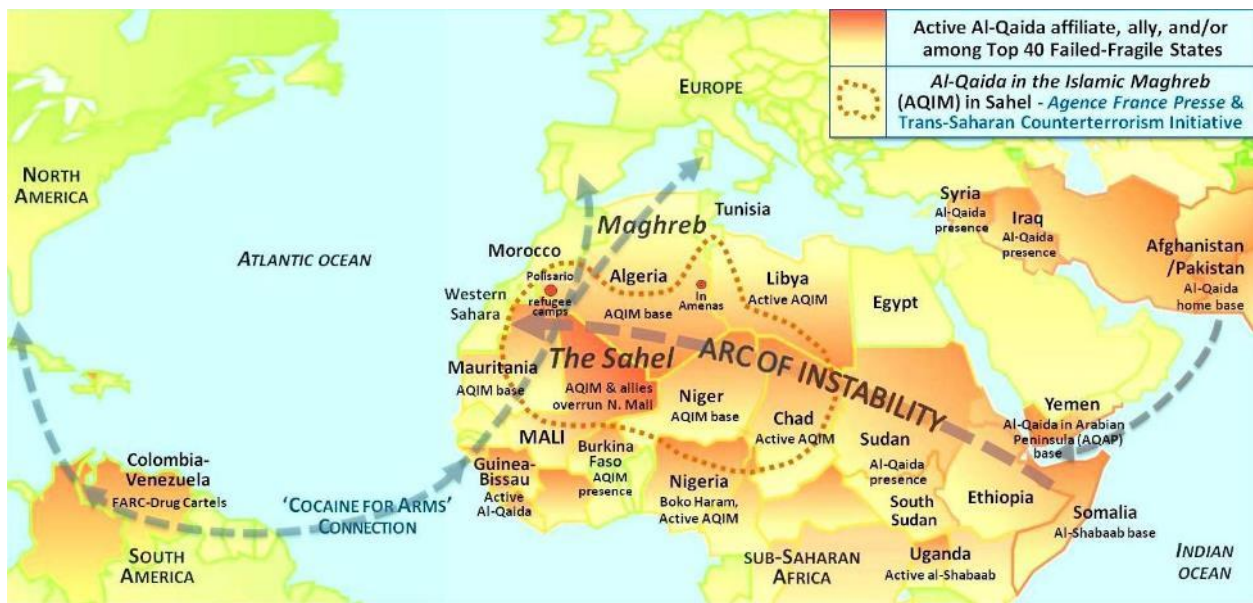
of mission scope that resulted in a dragged-out insurgency. After the start these respective wars, the U.S. jumped from hotbed to hotbed, to Yemen, to Pakistan, to Somalia, to Syria, back to Iraq, to Libya, and to a host of others.



AQIM affiliates and key bases labelled with their popular nomenclature.

But the GWOT is not necessarily “wrong”. It may be being waged in a poor manner without an overarching or long-term strategy, but the motive behind it may be correct. Al Qaeda has supported local conflicts around the world and enabled them to flourish. It has destabilized many countries in the MENA region and taps into very legitimate socioeconomic, ethnic, or other grievances in order to lash out against governments and other institutions that threaten “the caliphate of Islam”. In doing so, it creates worse situations for millions of people around the world. In the interest of human rights, economic development, peace, and good governance this spread of the global takfiri network does need to be combated. The U.S. is not alone in this fight either, countries around the world with active insurgent bases like the Philippines, India, China, Russia, and Libya (to name a few) also have interests in combating this network, as do countries affected by terrorist attacks such as Morocco, Canada, the UK.,

Spain, Senegal, etc... But if more conventional troops do not seem to be having a permanent effect on the GWOT, what does it need? It needs more coordination, a heavier emphasis on delinking the takfiri network (to let regional conflicts stabilize), a long-term focus, strategy, and goals, a more efficient use of modern resources (and available resources), and a realistic view of these insurgencies void of the fear and overreactions that accompany terrorism. The United States may not need to view terrorism or AQ as much of a threat to its economic hegemony as it may China, but in the interest of international security, human and moral decency, and economic interests, the U.S. would do well to win the war. The following is a compilation of suggestions at multiple levels to current U.S. policy in winning the war against AQ in the Western Sahel region, the case study of this paper.



A map showing trends of instability that have a global effect on other regions ranging from Pakistan to Colombia, with our focused region, the Sahel, in the middle.

Local Grievances and the Conditions that Fuel Insurgencies: Why Force is Only Part of the Solution

Before we embark on a major analysis and the provision of improved techniques to combat these takfiri insurgencies, it is critical that we address the base of what creates insurgencies, as too often we focus solely on extremism as “spreading and causing insurgencies”. A major aspect of most insurgencies that is historically overlooked is the conditions that drive them. Terrorism and insurgency generally appear as a result of certain social, political, or economic conditions. Of course, certain things can lead to a higher or lower propensity for violence such as cultural factors, access to weapons, and government oversight. Overall however, history has shown time and time again that the strength of an insurgency is directly correlated to amount of popular support the insurgent group has amongst the local community. Grievances that people feel to be legitimate give insurgencies a staying power that is difficult to counter with military force. Indeed, it is difficult to “kill out” an entire insurgency unless one is willing to resort to the use of mass genocide or severe human rights abuses against its insurgent opponents (Fall, 1998). This is a fairly easy path to resort to. Monomaniacal leaders are known for resorting to this kind of technique in battling insurgencies; Hitler’s SS was known to kill entire villages they suspected of hiding single resistance members in occupied countries. But even democratic countries struggle to avoid these techniques. Battling insurgencies in an inherently difficult and taxing struggle, one that creates paranoid soldiers unable to tell who their enemies are. The US has seen this with its famous Abu Ghraib interrogation scandal in Iraq, the FOB Ramrod Kill Team scandal in which US soldiers murdered innocent Iraqi citizens and collected their body parts as trophies, and multiple other murky situations between US/Coalition soldiers and the local population/insurgents alike.

But presuming that in our case most intervening countries are not willing to or do not believe in such mass human rights violations to defeat an insurgency, the fact remains that the United States and its allies must find a way to succeed without such actions. Military actions against an insurgency are

inherently defensive. Insurgents are recruited largely from the local population, garner most of their support and resources from the local population, and most importantly—are difficult to distinguish from the local population. An insurgent rarely wears uniforms, often lives amongst civilians, and may not even brandish a weapon or show signs of aggression until it is too late for his/her opponent to notice. Since we have established that the military will not resort to mass-extirmination, the military cannot hunt down all of these insurgents (being as they change sides and to kill all of them would mean killing an inordinate amount of civilians), no matter how hard it may try. And since the support of insurgents involves a battle of the support for the local population, any actions on behalf of the military that hurt, embarrass, or otherwise negatively interfere with the lives of the locals serve to benefit the insurgents. Additionally, if the insurgency exists as the result of worthwhile or long-standing grievances, then the military cannot simply “kill” this idea (Lang, 2006).

Sometimes these ideas or grievances die over time. Sometimes social conditions change, governments turn over, or economic situations naturally improve, but this is not the case for most insurgencies driven by social conditions. Most insurgencies require active intervention. Militaries then, do not have the primary role of the changing or improvement of social conditions (Fall, 1998). What they do have the ability to do first and foremost in a security sense, is to stabilize and protect the local population. This must be the focus of the security forces.

Improvements to COIN Operations and Doctrine against AQIM

in the Western Sahel

Strategic Improvements

First and foremost, in achieving any goal, you actually need to have a goal. It must be clearly defined, achievable, and have a timeline. This is a basic tenement in everything from life coaching to military actions. It is quite literally impossible to achieve success if there is no goal. The 9/11 attacks got us (the United States) into a war we had not really planned on. Beyond achievable goals, we must also as academics remember the highest price that is inherent in engaging in warfare—the loss of human life. The following is a story that was told by George W Bush’s press secretary, Dana Perino, in 2016 of one of George W. Bush’s visits to see a dying soldier of at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center:

“One mom and dad of a dying soldier from the Caribbean were devastated, the mom beside herself with grief. She yelled at the president, wanting to know why it was her child and not his who lay in that hospital bed. Her husband tried to calm her, and I noticed the president wasn't in a hurry to leave — he tried offering comfort but then just stood and took it, like he expected and needed to hear the anguish, to try to soak up some of her suffering if he could.

Later, as we rode back on Marine One to the White House, no one spoke.

But as the helicopter took off, the president looked at me and said, "That mama sure was mad at me." Then he turned to look out the window of the helicopter. "And I don't blame her a bit."

One tear slipped out the side of his eye and down his face. He didn't wipe it away, and we flew back to the White House”

This story is not academic, but it is a stark reminder of two things. The first of these is that war, no matter where it is, how large in scale it may be, how long it lasts, or the tools used to fight it, is a terrible and nasty thing that requires many to pay the ultimate sacrifice. As such, it should never be entered into lightly or without the proper justification and intentions.

Secondly, this story is a reminder that the War on Terror was an unplanned one. George W. Bush was no Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected during wartime, nor was he a Dwight Eisenhower, having spent his career rising in the ranks of the military. George W. Bush in January of 2001 did not expect to be a wartime president, nor for that matter did most of the American citizens expect to be engaged in any sort of war. Yet as soon as airlines piloted by Al-Qaeda members struck the Twin Towers, he became a wartime president, elected by a citizenry who was now angry, shocked, and wanted answers.

The purpose of this paper is not to dispute or even go into a detailed examination of the reasons for entering into the War in Afghanistan and the War in Iraq. The fact remains that the United States and its allies entered both countries, for differing reasons and with different objectives, but in both cases ended up bogged down fighting extremely adaptable insurgent campaigns. The dragging on of these wars led to an unhappy public, the eventual drawdown of forces, and what can be considered by many to be lost wars. The legitimacy of a Global War on Terror (GWOT) and extremist fighters however, has led the United States and its allies to continue the GWOT across the globe, fighting campaigns from Mali and the Philippines to Yemen and Syria. After these initial major losing campaigns, learning from these and winning our new campaigns is especially important.

If we are to win this Global War on Terror, we must not only have a coherent goal in mind but also an agreed upon overarching strategy across political divides, administrations, military commands, and government agencies (probably the most difficult part of such a campaign). Over 16 years after the 9/11 attacks most of the public is still confused as to what exactly the goals of the U.S. are in the GWOT. Administrations change troop locations and focus every four years, plans are announced and backpaddled on, the land hard won by our troops is abandoned a year after it is won, and our troops are in firefights in countries many of our citizens have no idea U.S. forces are based in.

The FY19 Budget request from the Department of Defense and Trump Administration shows just how indecisive the current strategy is. To be fair, the Obama and Bush administrations were not terribly decisive either, and their budget requests show similar inconsistencies, but the Trump Administration thus far has bloated the indecisiveness to previously unheard levels. First off in foreign policy, "America First" is a wild notion. There is no clear definition on just what this means. Does this mean a strictly isolationist policy? The defense of our allies and interests around the world? An economic revival of to renew America's competitiveness? An emphasis on the globalization and modernization of our military and economy to turn it into a global participant in all senses?

National Security Strategy

- **Respond to growing political, economic, military, information competitions**
 - Revisionist powers such as China and Russia
 - Regional dictators such as Iran and North Korea
 - Transnational threats, including jihadist terrorists and transnational criminal organizations
- **Protect four vital national interests**
 - Protect the American people, homeland, and way of life
 - Promote American prosperity
 - Preserve peace through strength
 - Advance American Influence

A Strategy of Principled Realism

1

U.S. Fiscal DoD FY19 Request, U.S. DoD priorities, Comptroller (CFO)

Under the section “Respond to growing political, economic, military, and information competitions”, the three sections are vastly different. Seeing revisionist powers (China and Russia), regional dictatorships (Iran and NK), and transnational threats (terrorists and global criminal networks) all as equal threats means holding three different world views simultaneously and being prepared to be competitive in multiple different senses (Stares, 2017). Fighting an insurgency in Mali, dealing with cyber and military aggression from Russian retrenchment, and diplomatic action against or with Iran all require three very different preparations. How are these priorities to be balanced? What problems will get what amount of our focus?

One thing we can take away from this, is that a necessary emphasis of our forces (political, military, economic, etc...) must be on their ability to do battle in the 3.0 era of globalization—they must be agile, technologically advanced, able to adapt quickly, have the capability to partner with other

agencies or units easily, and move across borders with less resistance. If we wish to attack the global links and networks of the takfiri networks, these are skills that will come in handy and are relevant in the 21st century in *any* of our battles. Keeping insurgencies localized and contained so they can be dealt with appropriately by local forces is also a key aspect to winning this fight. Just as the US began to economically outsource manufacturing to countries that held a competitive advantage in such, and focus on services, especially in the realm of corporations and technology, we must do similarly with our military strategy. Our militaries must be equipped and trained to face the most modern and pressing threats, while enabling partners and allies to deal with other threats in which they *hold the competitive advantage*, ultimately working together to dissect and destroy the enemy. There is a famous example that even if Tiger Woods were the world's best lawn mower, to choose to mow his own lawn would be a waste of time, as the effort used could be much more cost and time effective in playing golf and hiring someone to mow his own lawn.

We must have an overarching political ideology or "strategy". America has always succeeded most when it has united behind a common set of ideals and goal with which to implement these deals internationally. We are undoubtedly entering a new stage in the role of America in geopolitics. We can only fight so many wars and achieve so many goals at once. Just as we only have so many dollars in our budget and can only buy so many things, so too can we only maintain so many priorities. Especially when it comes to counterinsurgencies, which require massive amounts of strategic coordination, resources, and long-term approaches, efficiency is a must. Fighting multiple counterinsurgencies at once, by anyone's definition, is more than foolish. Some believe that our conventional forces are most valuable, and that their size should be increased, that we are the fighting arm of NATO while our EU allies are the peacekeeping arm, and that large conventional forces maintain U.S. strength and hegemony while fending off rivals. Some believe that special operations troops are the future, and that these special operations combined with robust intelligence gathering should be prized over the days of

tanks in massive land battles. Others still, believe that we need to pivot to the Pacific Rim, maintaining economically, militarily, and politically focus our hegemonic competition on China, making our forces more technologically advanced but smaller in numbers and engagements to put money elsewhere. Whatever one believes, is fighting, and leading the GWOT, part of that strategy? Should we act out of ideals or a more self-interested sense? Do we accept that terrorist groups will generally exist on their own in response to local political conflicts, and that we hurt ourselves more by simply intervening at all? Do we believe that the GWOT is a waste of energy, with few benefits to the United States even if we succeed, and that we should focus our efforts elsewhere?

I do not have an answer to this question, I may have opinions on the matter, but an answer, ANY answer requires more consensus than is available in American strategic leadership at the present moment. The current state of division only weakens the effectiveness of our actions and viability of our goals. Wavering and divided political will has made America more vulnerable to threats, more unable to combat threats and achieve goals, and slow to seize opportunities. If this pattern continues, it will wreak havoc on America's world standing, and can only be stopped if the American people express their dissatisfaction with lack of political consensus on foreign policy at a much greater level.

At the strategic level America must decide where it wants to go in the sphere of global politics. Since the end of the Cold War it has indecisively undertaken campaigns across the world that do not fit any single narrative, goal, or ideal. Whatever our strategy is chosen to be, we must have a unified one. Whether or not the GWOT is a part of it, or to what extent, is a moot point. There are valid arguments for a variety of outlooks on the U.S. in the GWOT, for both an escalation and a de-escalation. But NO unified strategy on such an issue means *guaranteed* failure. Winning the GWOT is achievable and a potentially very beneficial move, as is the alternative: choosing to conserve resources, withdraw troops, and pivot efforts elsewhere. The status quo however, sees us half-heartedly fighting a never-ending war, in multiple locations, with no clear dedicated goal, bleeding money and American lives, seeing America's

status decline in the eyes of the world, and only growing more vulnerable to threats to American geopolitical leadership. What the following proposes is a status quo approach to a more successful counterinsurgency in the Western Sahel under three assumptions:

1. The United States has decided that one of its major national security goals is defeating global takfiri networks.
2. The United States is acting with the current military, intelligence, diplomatic, and other defensive tools it currently has in the status quo.
3. The United States finds it in its operational priorities, a need to increase the security of the Western Sahel and disrupt takfiri networks in this region.

The purpose of this is to make the recommendations realistic, to provide concrete tangible suggestions, and work within the existing framework of how the U.S. is currently operating. Under these assumptions, the following suggestions to strategic, operational, and tactical methodologies are aimed at more effectively and efficiently disrupting and eliminating the capabilities of a global takfiri network, aimed specifically at the Western Sahelian regional level. The suggestions below are based off of extensive reading and examination of U.S. history, modern counterinsurgency theory, international relations theory, a range of African political and cultural relations, Western Sahelian history, successful and unsuccessful counterinsurgency campaigns, and an examination of the United States actions against terrorism in its post 9/11 Global War on Terror.

Strategic Tip #1: Not a War on Islam

An emphasis of this War on Terror must be that it is *not a war on Muslims*. Both in practice and in media, the government must make it astutely clear that its actions are not targeting Muslims, that this war is one on takfirism (those who distort and pervert Islam) not Muslims. We must refrain from using the term “jihad”, as this is a key tenet of Islam which means “to struggle/fight against sin” and only

legitimizes takfiris and isolates the Muslim community. This war must be discriminatory and as accurate as possible, but most importantly, constantly affirmed by our leadership as to what is our intent and what is not our intent.

Strategic Tip #2: Do Not Focus on Solving Age-Old Conflicts

America is engaged in the GWOT for a variety of reasons—to provide regional security, protect its borders, etc... It is not in it to solve age-old disputes. The GWOT has often seen America trying to solve century or millennia-old conflicts. Mitigating tribal relationships in Iraq, dealing with the Tuaregs in Mali, and dealing with the Pashtuns and Taliban in Afghanistan are all examples of this. One of the most effective and frankly, impressive methodologies of Al-Qaeda is their ability to tap into divisions, poverty, and perceived injustices around the world and exploit them using takfiri methodology and takfiri networks. The United States and its allies do not have to solve century or millennia-old conflicts, we simply have to return them to a state of normalcy that enables them to be dealt with in a localized and appropriate manner. Access to takfiri ideals and resources has enabled these local conflicts to unify in a disease-like manner that fuels their expansion and makes combating them extremely difficult. As a result, we must be careful to avoid getting overly bogged down in local conflicts unnecessarily or trying to solve problems outside of our interest or scope, as getting spread too thin or having unrealistic goals is the surest way to defeat. The U.S. and its allies not only must focus on destabilizing major AQ home bases like Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Libya but also target the links between these regional conflicts and the AQ parent organization such as funding, communications, travel/border movement, fighter movement, and weapons trafficking.

Strategic Tip #3: The Supremo Role

An effective aspect of nearly all COIN operations is the role of a “Supremo” that coordinates the COIN actions. In any localized counterinsurgency program there must be an organization, individual, or group who decides on actions, strategy, and dictates goals and actions to the operational level leaders. At the international level, with partners and across the world in a global war this is rather difficult. Organizations like the UN tend to be slow and ineffective and the United States would tend to lack legitimacy in trying to lead a global war all my itself.

While this is a difficult task, the United States has in fact done this with counterterrorism, especially domestically. The Department of Homeland Security and Director of National Intelligence were created with exactly this in mind, of centralizing the strategy and leadership behind counterterrorism. The United States must first coordinate its counterinsurgency strategy and operations in a Supremo manner-making sure that the strategy and its directives are understood at every level and in every aspect of COIN (from military to economic development) to ensure that COIN work is both aligned and productive.

Even on a global level, we have seen the world drop its typical sovereign boundaries and lack of military/security cooperation in interest of counterterrorism. The Russians with their difficulties in Chechnya, the Chinese and the Uighurs, Dutch dealing with Moroccan takfiris, India and its hunt after Pakistani takfiri bombers, etc... all have come to learn the benefit of shared counterterrorism operations (intelligence, partnered direct action raids, conferences on tactics, and other coordination). Most of the world’s countries have done an extremely impressive job putting aside other regional difficulties like the invasion of Ukraine, South China Sea dispute, or trade difficulties in a shared interest of counterterrorism. If the world can achieve this, while counterinsurgency involves slightly more intricate sovereign-impacting operations and cooperation, the creation of a global Supremo partnership and

alignment is certainly achievable. Each country has unique specialties and local knowledge necessary to defeating different aspects of the entrenched, complex global Takfiri network. This coordination at the global level has been necessary to win all world wars, and while this is not a world war in the conventional sense, if the Global Takfiri network is to be beaten, we must do it again here.

Strategic Tip #4: Regional Patrons

In the sense of a Supremo role, a final aspect of strategic improvement necessary to succeed at this level realm is the need to identify regional patrons. This is a bifocal strategy. It entails both the necessity of developing a strategy and approach for each region and then having primary actors and focuses within each region. In developing a strategy for a region, this entails a vision which the United States has (and should be able to sell) for a region, its future, and what role it can best play in helping that region succeed. In battling AQIM, the US will create an ideal “vision” and its resulting strategy from its own interests. This is simply the realistic truth, not a “colonization” approach. All sovereign states create some sort of goal or vision for global events, and some players have more sway than others in how they turn out. But to succeed this regional vision must also be one that is developed in tangent with local patrons. As much as it would be nice, the fact remains that the US will disagree on its vision with some states. Therefore, to succeed the U.S. must have a vision in which it picks and chooses strategically which countries it wants to directly confront, which countries it wants to work with, and which ones it is willing to compromise with. Indeed, states rampant with corrupt dictators or egregious pattern of human rights violations may not want to change, but should, both in a humanitarian interest and that of taking away the fuel of these insurgencies. While some may strategically be left in place or “helped” to change over time, the US and other major players in world affairs will have to make these decisions on a case by case basis. However, for the US to be successful, it must craft a vision that has buy-in from allies and is developed with the local expertise and self-determination of regional patrons. If the vision is not

one that has global or mostly global buy-in (like Paris Climate Change global accords, first 5 years of the War in Afghanistan) it will be unable to separate the global insurgent network which *does* have global buy in amongst many takfiri groups. Too much confrontation and U.S. leadership will be wholesomely rejected.

The second bifocal aspect is that each region and subregion should have primary actors responsible for assisting in the counterinsurgency of our partners—not just the U.S. Notably in the Sahel region, France, as a previous colonial occupier, should be deferred to as the lead COIN advisor in that region, and while overarching strategy should already have been coordinated, the U.S.'s role here with lesser expertise, is to assist and support French-led operations. The same will be true in regions around the world such as Chechnya, the Philippines, and Yemen where the U.S. plays more of a supporting role. Certain partners are better equipped due to certain military skillsets, language/cultural skillsets, relationships, or histories to better assist states fighting insurgencies. With each partner and at a global level, the US must insist on a shift from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency. We must be honest about our strengths and weaknesses, and focus on fighting in those arenas where winning is most achievable. The game of “Whack-a-mole” is not a game we are winning and shifting the narrative to one of counter-insurgency is something that will allow us to get ahead of the global insurgent network, move local conflicts from hot to simmer, and more effectively end the surface level “terrorist” attacks that afflict us around the world.

Operational Improvements

The operational level is where we start to apply, especially in regional theatres. Specific missions are assigned and resources are distributed accordingly. In suggesting improvements here, we focus on coordinating tactics and battles to achieve a larger goal and changes in the region. Suggestions here

begin to shift away from the political arena more towards military officer and development official leadership.

Operational Tip #1: Improved Measures of Effectiveness

The first improvement needed is more widespread measures of effectiveness. Against insurgents, the classical measures used in warfare such as strategic positions held or enemies killed are not nearly as useful. These were the measures used in Vietnam, something the prominent Indochina expert Bernard Fall argued against. He showed in his 1965 paper “The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency”, that number of village chiefs assassinated, rate of tax compliance, and acceptance of civil assistance were better measurements of insurgency.

In crafting accurate measures of effectiveness, they must be specific to the needs, goals, and histories of each specific region. To assist a COIN operation that adapts to outpace the enemy, the measures of effectiveness must continually adapt as well (Fall, 1998). According to David Kilcullen, on his measures of effectiveness in this modern COIN against the Global takfiri networks, they should measure a combination of factors in economic activity, spontaneous intelligence (volunteered intelligence), moderate Muslim voices, and initiative, and which side is initiating the most action at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. In short, most of the indicators must revolve around the health and activity of the society-at-large. If the civil society is not satisfied, effective, able to be provided for/provide for itself, safe, and participating in moderate dialogue, it is most likely not on your side, or will not be in the long-term, meaning that the insurgency, even if not visible, is still alive and well.

Operational Tip #2: Knowing Local Partners & Interoperability

The strategic improvements section noted the importance of partners at the international level. At a regional and local level, this is also critical to the success of the overall mission. Any COIN operation

must be supporting some side in a conflict. Crafting a coherent, communicated global strategy will help in determining which partners are to be supported. Choosing local patrons is no easy task—the role of competing global powers using groups as proxies and choosing between dictatorial regimes, democratic parties, and rebel groups depending on their political and religious stances are a few of the options that must be weighed in choosing local patrons. This is never a clear-cut task.

Some would say that dictators should never be supported, others only when they do not commit atrocities, and some, when they support and align with the United States. If the Taliban have democratic support in Afghanistan, then who is the U.S. to stop them from ruling? This is an argument equal parts as ideological and pragmatic. The hope is however, that crafting an overarching strategy will allow for a fairly uniform and consistent selection of partners across the globe. Nonetheless, success will necessarily require levels of compromise meaning the potential support of partners who are undemocratic, have shady pasts, or are only somewhat friendly to the United States. The perfect partner, one who is democratic, has interest identical to its American partners, free of corruption, has no religious or ethnic biases, commits to human rights errors, and is reliable in political and military operations is simply nonexistent. What can be aimed for, is a net positive that leaves regions and the world in general, in a better state than the present.

Once a local partner is selected, the United States must do a great deal of work to ensure proper interoperability. At an operational level the United States must devote strict levels of its intelligence and training functions to understanding the ins and outs of its partners. It must know their histories, ethnic tensions, biases, what drives and motivates them, their strengths and weaknesses in government services, conceptions of the world, and military knowledge and expectations. It must know their short-term and long-term goals, both what they tell you and what they do not. You must do work to find out about them outside of what they tell you, from sources such as former partners, locals, and learned knowledge as a result of time spent alongside them. Everything from their meal times and the

agricultural capabilities to the foreign movies they like and intricacies of tribal feuds can be used to help succeed. Notably, in Afghanistan, after reported civilian casualties the United States regional command issued new directives urging “courageous restraint” of violence to avoid any unpopular violence in an effort to continue winning “hearts and minds”. What the leadership failed to comprehend was that the local Pashtuns in the region where the directives were focused are a tough people, familiar with the harsh realities of war. As a result, they have a great deal of patience when it comes to civilian casualties. In fact, the US directives quickly backfired, as US troops were then seen by the Pashtun locals as weak and ineffective (Bolger, 2014). Their “courageous restraint” was seen as a lack of ability and they lost respect. US troops also lost faith in their own leadership to back them up and understand the reality on the ground, such that the directive was quickly reversed. Nonetheless, it is an example of how understanding locals and partners can have great effect on the success of a COIN campaign.

Operational Tip #3: A New Approach to Winning Hearts and Minds

The “Hearts and Minds” strategy is a notorious one in the world of counterinsurgency. Many civilians can tell you that forces in wars in recent years have focused on winning the “Hearts and Minds” of civilians. The term was first used by a French general Lyautey in an Indochina rebellion suppression in the 1890’s, made more popular during the British handling of the Malayan Emergency in the mid-1900’s, and then became a household term as it was used by the US during the Vietnam War.

While popularized in recent years, Stathis Kalyvas, a professor of political science at Yale University, examined this assumption: that insurgent movements are strongest where people support the insurgents’ ideology and governments are strong where people have a positive view of them. Upon conducting extensive research from the point of view of the third actor in an insurgency, the noncombatant local population, he reached a startling conclusion: people support either the

government or insurgents where they are strongest (or rather, stronger). As phrased by Kilcullen “support follows strength”, not the other way around.

This has profound implications for COIN operations. It puts our hearts and minds campaign in a new light. Think from a personal perspective, citizens rarely have any particular affinity for a government. They may have an affinity for a country or ideals, but largely, people are self-interested. If a politician or political group does them well (or they believe it will), then they support it. Their support, faith in, and how favorably they look at a government or leader depends on how they feel treated—how the job market is, if food is affordable, cities are safe, society feels unified, etc... An insurgency therefore is a competition in governance. Whoever can outgovern the other, the insurgents or the government, *by standards of the locals*, wins. This makes sense when we think about Mali. Northern Mali is much more desolate than Southern Mali, where the government is based. Government efforts and economic activity are focused on Southern Mali, hence much of Northern Mali’s tendency to support the insurgents who provide more for many of them.

This new fact also points out that corruption and injustice are major issues that need to be addressed in fighting an insurgency. Corruption and injustice divert the basic functions of government away from the citizenry, preventing them from achieving even their basic daily functions. Rarely are corrupt governments effective, making the local populace long or look for a more effective system of governance. In fact, a German study done by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung institute in the Northern Malian towns of Gao, Kidal, and Menaka found that citizens in ranking which issues needed tackling, listed corruption and injustice at the top, above the need for even reconciliation and insecurity. Another crucial example of this is the Hamid Karzai administration in Afghanistan. Notorious for its corruption, it was a recipe for disaster when the US and its allies pulled out as the citizenry lost faith in the Hamid Karzai, leading to the citizenry choosing the Taliban governance instead, and therefore, a Taliban resurgence.

So, whether or not a citizenry likes you, it is fruitless to try and win their hearts and minds if you cannot govern them well or if they do not feel governed fairly, and lack access to the basic goods and services they crave. And if a citizenry does not love you right away? That's alright. If you can govern them better than the insurgents can, and you look like you will be there for some time, they'll come around. Locals need to support the stronger side in the interest of their survival, but plain and simple, people the world around appreciate fair and justice governance, low unemployment rates, and safety. In Mali this must be an improvement as should the eradication of corruption and injustice from the government. We often forget government improvements in favor of battling the enemy, but let us be certain, corruption and ineffective governance are the enemy just as much. If we only train local fighters, they'll only be able to hold off the insurgents in the short-term at best.

Insurgents also govern differently from government. They are inherently "grassroots" and tend to provide fluid systems of localized rules, economies, and work within social networks. It unfortunately means that they are adaptable and exist very much in the fabric of societies, reacting to the changes and the rise and fall of needs. It enables them to provide for needs of local populations where the government is not by reading discontent and interrupting the government's efforts at the ground level.

Governments then, must also be rapid and adaptable in their responses (Fall, 1998). As the solutions of each local COIN effort are tailored to each subregion, they must then also be *continually* tailored. The needs and wants of citizens are notoriously fickle, but insurgents will also speed this process up by changing the playing field to better suit them. The government and its foreign partners must have operational-level committees and leadership that are ready to change direction, focus, and dictate new orders as the mission requires. This must be two-way, the ground level forces must report up frequently and be able to shift missions on a dime, just as their leadership must be able to take feedback of on-the-ground situation (needs, failures, and successes) to rework operational plans or strategies and continue to outwork and outpace the insurgent forces.

Operational Tip #4: Attack Links and Energy Flows

If any case can be made as to why we must fight a “Global War on Terror”, it is that these takfiri groups have “aggregated” and linked preexisting conflicts and taking advantage of grievances, undereducation, poor economic status, and other injustices around the world. Linking them creates a threat that is resilient, adaptive, and difficult to deal with from the point of view of cumbersome governments used to conventional battles. These governments, for all the talk of globalization, are also far from completely globalized, and thus the takfiri network thrives in its connections where states remain in a state of sovereignty (see also the case for regional patrons, a supremo, and partners).

The operational level needs to see these links and the “aggregation” targeted, instead of a focus on solving or pacifying every single conflict that is linked. According to David Kilcullen this means “Interdicting links between Islamist theatres, denying sanctuary areas in theatres, interdicting flows of information, personnel, finance, and technology”, denying regional and global actors the ability to link/exploit local actors, isolating Islamists from local populations, disrupting inputs from the sources of Islamism, preventing/ameliorating local communal and sectarian conflicts that jihadist systems prey upon.” The theory of disaggregation he proposes strongly stresses achieving delinking over solving local conflicts. In reality, whatever balance between disaggregation or local conflict-solution is chosen, disaggregation should be of greater operational importance as it deprives both the parent network of fuel and branches, and the local conflict of external support.

Links between theatres differ heavily (for example they are different between AQAP and AQIM and Chechnya and AQ in Afghanistan). One may be connected by family ties between founders and share fighters and coordinate attacks while other groups may simply share online support for one another. While it may seem daunting to combat these many links, when tapped into, they provide a wealth of information. Targeting critical links can also wreak havoc on groups, and these links can also

be used to provide misinformation, manipulate groups, spy upon, and sow distrust. The same benefit that links provide for the groups can be used against them. Increasing the workability of global partners can enable intelligence sharing of say, information on an attack in the UK discovered in a safehouse in Pakistan or evidence of a financial transfer from a West African group to a Central American drug cartel, which in turn can be used to attack and exploit both sides of these relationships. This is done in the Western Sahel by examining, targeting, and exploiting ideological links, linguistic/cultural links, personal and tribal/family relationships, financial ties/transfers, operational and planning links, propaganda, doctrine, techniques, and procedures, and weapons purchases, individual travel, and training camp ties.

The tangibility of links that can be targeted can be divided into communication channels (internet, messaging, couriers, etc...), causal links (links that are related to one another in cause/effect), and demographic and geographic links (ethnic connections or physical movement). Targeting only the nodes (separate groups) or “boundary interactions”/day-to-day events of an insurgency is much like trying to put band-aids on a patient with internal bleeding. It is critical that the links be targeted to degrade the global insurgency’s strength, ability to adapt, freedom to shift and transfer resources, and resiliency that results from global links. Targeting these links may well be what finally enables states to get ahead of insurgencies, rather than shifting from one war to another (Afghanistan, Yemen, etc...) while insurgent groups that have the pressure taken from them can prepare for their turn to wear down the state actors. Delinking allows us to “normalize” local situations, depriving each of the situations, be it in Mali or the Philippines of the ideological, financial, and other fuel from the global parent network.

Operational Tip #5: A Revitalized CORDS Program and Humanitarian Assistance

The Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Program was easily one of the most successful and revolutionary counterinsurgency programs of our time. A joint military-civilian program to pacify rural regions of South Vietnam led by the United States and first started in 1967, the program

was largely lost in history due to its involvement with the controversial Phoenix Program, its chronological proximity to the Tet Offensive, and the American people's rapidly decreasing support for the Vietnam War (Hunt, 1995).



Where it all began, the CORDS office of MACV in Vietnam

The CORDS program was successful largely because it had so many previously the failed pacification programs that had been tried thus far to learn from. The program managed to turn the situation of 93% of the rural population of South Vietnam into "relatively secure" living situations. What was notable about the CORDS program, was that the military insisted it was the institution that had the manpower to pacify the rural population (it was, and still today would be right), despite the vocal discord brought forth by civilian agencies who saw they as their, not the military's, primary mission. Robert Komer, a member of Lyndon B. Johnson's National Security Council, proposed the difficult task of

bringing together the military, USAID, State Department, and CIA to the job of pacification—something they all opposed. Luckily with LBJ's support, Komer's approval was given the green light and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was given the leadership position. MACV, led by a General Westmoreland, constructed a joint civilian and military leadership group under the leadership of Westmoreland. General Westmoreland, initially skeptical, got onboard. He ensured for cooperation that each aspect of the program had either a civilian or military leader, and if it was a civilian leader, then they had a military deputy and if the program had a military leader, that leader had a civilian deputy. In 1968 CORDS had 8,327 personnel and was working across 44 provinces. Its aimed to consolidate the numerous civil affairs and pacification programs that had grown wildly separate in both action and intent. It had local Vietnamese representatives had each level and employed a wide number of U.S. advisors. Its primary focuses were on security, centralized planning, and operations against the Viet Cong (of which the controversial Phoenix Program focused on destroying Viet Cong leadership and infrastructure).

The program led to a massive increase in the number of Viet Cong defectors, a decrease in refugees (from 220,000 to under 35,000), an increase in local crop production, daytime security in travel across provincial regions, an increase in communication/partnership with the South Vietnamese government, a greater role for South Vietnam in leading offensives, a slight shift in focus amongst the South Vietnamese to remove corrupt officials, and a growth in the local police forces (note the measures of effectiveness measured earlier). It notably also enabled the U.S. to shrink the size of the resources needed via decreased waste out of the centralized coordination of the CORDS program, all while increasing successes as it trained and integrated more locals and the local government into operations, needing only 2,372 personnel by 1969 (Stewart, 2006). Unfortunately, the Vietnam War suffered the hard-to-avoid fate of mission creep and after many bloody years a small, well-defined mission was forgotten. The CORDS program had "significantly pacified" (although not completely) the southern

Vietnam insurgency by the time U.S. troops withdrew, which was what had prompted the U.S. to intervene in the first place. But the lack of a clear mission or ability to sustain domestic support for a long time, as well as innate difficulties with an unpopular and corrupt South Vietnamese government meant that no matter how well CORDS played, it could not win. Unfortunately, due to the shameful nature of the Vietnam War in U.S. history, we have avoided much study of the positive steps and innovations amongst it. While there may have been flaws amongst this program, it should provide valuable lessons to scholars and leaders of modern U.S. COIN operations.

Tactical Improvements

The following are suggestions improvements at the tactical level that have been developed as a result of the analysis of recent United States COIN and counterterrorism operations, an examination of the situation in Mali, and an understanding of the necessary shifts in winning a global war against Takfiri insurgency.

Tactical Tip #1: Cultural and Linguistic Training and Competencies

It was covered in the operational section that leadership must have advanced knowledge of our partners and enemies alike. This is incredibly important at the unit and individual level as well. If the battle is one of out-governance and to better support the local population, it is crucial to realize that the insurgents already have a head start. To start, your local partners will always be the best teaching resource on the local population, as they are the experts. On the other hand, they also are clearly failing in some aspect of their governance, which as an outside partner, it is your role to help them rectify. Your tactical level units must understand the local culture and the needs, wants, and perceptions of the locals, to better address the problems at hand.

As we have noted, COIN operations are not simply battles, and as a restructuring of America's entire military is near impossible, it is more appropriate to train troops in basic language skills, religious customs and history, local tensions, and appropriate social skills. These are all skills that can be integrated into pre-deployment training, especially being that COIN operations require fewer troops than full-scale invasions. It is ideal that each 6-8 man unit have not simply a translator, but someone with significant cultural knowledge to assist and guide the unit's actions.

Tactical Tip #2: Bottom-Up Feedback and Tailored Operations.

No matter how well prepared and informed members of the strategic and operational levels are, realities are always different on the ground. Troops on the ground will be the first to notice the effect of operations, the attitudes or sympathies of local populations, and tend to have the most apt suggestions about what techniques are working or not and how to fix them. It is critical that there be "bottom up" channels for troops to communicate ideas to leadership that tailor operations to the zone in which they are working.

Any person can tell that people's attitudes and habits differ widely from state to state and city to city. In this sense, an operation will better adapt over time as troops report differences and the operational leadership can better shift its strategy. It will also enable leadership to be more adaptable in its responses—both in reacting to insurgent activity and being proactive on its own accord, one of the key recommended improvements at the operational level. A famous example of this is Cpt. Travis Patriquin's led Anbar-Awakening in the Iraqi province of Anbar in 2006 and 2007 in which he united approximately 30 tribes and their sheikhs to form a coalition known as the "Sons of Iraq", which successfully pushed AQ out of most of the Anbar province—a nearly wholly tactical level initiative that accomplished what those at the operational level had failed to do for three years (Doyle, 2012). Patriquin was known to smoke cigarettes and break bread with tribal chiefs, spending long afternoons

sitting with them. Over months he would use his troops and connections with other forces and units to protect, assist, and partner with tribal leaders. In a notable even he even rallied U.S. forces (a combination of conventional and special operations forces, both air and ground support) to defend a village being assaulted by Al-Qaeda after a tribal chief called him on his personal cell phone. Earning the trust of these chiefs, the chiefs organized to partner with and defend the Anbar province against AQ incursions.

A primary strength of insurgencies is their adaptability and ability to shift to where conventional forces are weak. While conventional forces will likely never be able to be altogether more adaptive than local insurgents, they can strive to close the gap. In being able to increase the ability of operational strategists to respond to insurgent strategy and make better decisions, it is critical that there are advanced, open, responsive, and formal channels from the ground patrol level to provide feedback to operational commanders (Fall, 1998). These will also ensure that failing tactics are not continued for an unnecessary amount of time, and that the momentum of successful programs, like Patriquin's Anbar Awakening, can be quickly seized upon, supported, and replicated (Doyle, 2012).

Tactical Tip #3: Overreliance on Special Operations Forces.

We have been training conventional forces to be more like special operations forces and have even changed the way they dress in an attempt to replicate the success of SOF in a fascination with these elite units. Indeed, special operations forces (SOF) are highly effective at what they do, seen as elite killers. There is a reason the U.S. Special Forces are referred to as "Snake Eaters" and the Navy SEALs "Men with Green Faces". But our fascination with SOF sometimes leads us dangerously astray. Many SOF are good at what they do, killing (direct action), but battling complex Islamist insurgencies is rarely about killing. As shown above, the problem in these insurgencies has not been finding enemies to kill, but to stop making people who *need* to be killed and mitigate the threats or reasons for the U.S. to

be in-region at all (whether that means forming a friendly government, empowering local civilians/erasing local support for terrorist group, or negotiating peace deals).

The overdependence on SOF is dangerous. It requires high operational tempo, is draining to “special operators” and their families, and overutilizes these forces to the point where they cannot fully focus on or achieve a single mission at a time. On the opposite side, this also results in the underutilization of conventional forces. Not forced to adapt, conventional forces become bulkier, have much less engagement and experience than SOF, and have a tough time coordinating their activities or learning from their SOF brethren.

While there is no doubt that our SOF are some of the world’s most elite forces, America’s conventional forces are too. If America is to win wars, each aspect of our military (and other foreign action arms like the State Department) must grow in hand. Forces are so called “conventional” because their tasks make up the main and most *conventional* tasks the military needs them to perform. The reality now is that COIN may very well be one of the most conventional tasks facing America’s military today. The case can be made that America, and most of the world’s need for massive WWII style militaries to battle on the front lines may have died with the Gulf War. The Gulf War was the pinnacle of a massive logistical war in which conventional troops from the United States were pitted against the conventional troops of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. The Gulf War was a massive success for the United States. The United States effectively and efficiently brought about a quick and decisive victory against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, driving his forces all the way back to Baghdad. But it is the destiny of militaries to become complacent in victory, often deciding that the techniques that worked for them in victory demonstrate the correctness of their strategy, abilities, superiority, or innate capabilities for the future.

Bolger’s [Why We Lost](#) and other analyses of the Gulf War are quick to point out that the United States massive army and technological capabilities had little difficulty besting Saddam’s ancient tanks

and poorly trained forces that were quick to scatter at the first sign of conflict. Many strategists consider the United States lucky, not that they won the battle, but that Saddam chose to fight a conventional war at all. Whether it was delusion, pride, or poor intelligence that made him choose to do so, Saddam was not equipped to fight a conventional war against the United States. Only in the post-Saddam era did we see the Iraqi's fight in a manner in which they were equipped to win battles against the United States—using insurgency and guerilla warfare. The devastation which Iraqi insurgents were able to afflict on American and Coalition Forces took a massive toll. American forces had to deploy in massive numbers to be able to counter the flighty and difficult-to-find insurgents, grew paranoid from security threats such as IED's and suicide attacks, could not separate the civilians from the insurgents, and had a hard time working with or meeting the needs of the local population to “win their hearts and minds”. Even massive deployments of our conventional forces failed to contain a difficult to control populace (a shock to those generals who had seen this technique succeed for decades).

According to a United States Joint Special Operations Task Force publication, SOF “perform two types of activities. First, they perform tasks that no other forces in DOD conduct and second, they perform tasks that are conducted by DOD forces, but do so to a unique set of conditions and standards, normally using equipment and tactics, techniques, and procedures not utilized by conventional forces.” While the activities they perform like direct action/man-hunting and unconventional warfare maintain necessarily special operations due to the need of their execution by small, highly-trained, extremely tough teams, other activities are not (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2017). Things like psychological operations (PSYOP), civil affairs in support of special operations, and even foreign internal defense must not be limited to the sphere of special operations. If counterinsurgency was a rare thing, then they could be, such as when Army Special Forces are sent to remote locations in support of foreign partners. But as we have established, if COIN operations must be ramped up or down, they COIN operations like these (PSYOP, CA, and FID) must no longer be solely placed on the overburdened and wide-tasked SOF.

Tactical Tip #4: Using Conventional Forces for Counterinsurgency

The US and other advanced militaries like it have certain advanced capabilities that can be deployed to fight insurgencies. In this sense, the military often utilizes scalpels instead of hammers. But scalpels too require the use of care, for the wrong slash of a scalpel can just as quickly kill a patient as a hammer. Special operations are those defined by NATO as “military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces, manned with selected personnel, using unconventional tactics, techniques, and modes of employment”. The actions they engage in include things such as direct action, foreign internal defense, long-range reconnaissance, intelligence operations, and unconventional warfare (Atkinson, 2015).

Modern warfare, which more often requires sensitive, small-unit forces performing delicate operations, rather than the conventional force battles of the 20th century, has increasingly called on special operations forces. This is not really a recent trend though, the past several hundred years have seen an increase in an emphasis on quality over quantity of troops. Troops today need to perform high-skilled operations like flying multi-million-dollar aircraft, sneaking behind enemy lines for a raid, psychological operations campaigns, and cyber-defense, far different from the cannon-fodder-esque warfare of WWI. The usefulness of these SOF in modern warfare has resulted in an increasing reliance on them, something that is certainly indicative of their relevance. What has NOT kept pace is the training and skillsets of our conventional forces. This has resulted in a heavy dependence on SOF, and an outdated of our conventional forces.

A remedy to this is to both acknowledge the limitations of our special operations forces and the potential of our conventional forces. Special operations forces, like any force, need rest and down time, but they also need specialties. Giving them too many tasks under the umbrella of “special operations” strains their abilities and skillsets. Admittedly, the Army has taken some steps forward in doing things

like creating the Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG). The mission of the AWG is to provide operational advisory support and develop rapid operational solutions to the Army and joint Forces to defeat current and emerging threats, enhance combat effectiveness, and inform Army future requirements" (United States Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2017). Activated in 2006 and born of the Global War on Terror, the AWG provides operational advisement and has the capability to rapidly develop solutions to problems at the operational level. Dealing with asymmetric warfare, literally war of different sized of shaped opponents (most almost always the United States being the stronger, more conventionally trained forces), they often advise and assist US combatant commands in fighting insurgencies and the unique problems that arise in a certain area. Many AWG warriors are drawn from the U.S. Army Special Forces, experts in unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense, key tenets of insurgency and counterinsurgency alike.

Our conventional forces, not necessarily all, but some, need to specialize in counterinsurgency skills of special operations. "Special Operations Capable" is a term that has been generally used exclusively by Marine Corps units trained to assist or participate in certain special operations units. Rarely, has it ever been used in terms of counterinsurgent warfare or foreign internal defense. Many divisions in the U.S. military have areas of expertise, such as the 10th Mountain Warfare's expertise in mountain warfare, the 101st Airborne Division's expertise in Airborne operations, and the 29th Infantry Division's expertise in training and simulations. A division should be outfitted and trained to specialize in counterinsurgency and foreign internal defense, such that it can be deployed as experts in this field to counterinsurgent conflicts the U.S. chooses to engage in, a priority that is one listed of the DoD. Just as the DoD has divisions to handle other priorities like the 1st Infantry Division for Korean conflict, it should have those born and made for COIN operations, also if necessary, branded "Special Operations Capable".

The U.S. military is massive, made up of approximately 1.2 million active duty servicemembers and another 800,000 in the reserves. While services like our Army may be divided into major divisions like Cavalry, Intelligence, Infantry, etc... it is time to step up the trend of specialization, training individual battalions and units to perform specific missions relevant to today's conflict. Examples like the AWG mentioned above are exactly the type of specialization units need to be delving into. Army SF are uniquely equipped to deal with insurgencies, and while they cannot be mass-produced (a hard rule of SOF), there is no reason that SF cannot be utilized to partner with conventional forces more and even train and assist conventional forces in their approach to the local conflict. In fact, there is no reason that some (not all) of the tactics and training that make SF so effective, such as a heavy emphasis on local partnerships or extensive pre-mission studying of local culture, cannot be used as a model for more units in Armed Forces at large. While airborne troops are certainly still necessary, today sees a greater use and need for development specialists, counterinsurgency experts, healthcare trainers, corruption and governance advisors, human intelligence specialists, and foreign liaison officers.

Tactical Tip #5: Geography Matters: Understanding Social Clusters/Networks

Playing along with the theme of necessary cultural and linguistic skills, the geographical area in which units operate matters significantly. US forces had significant difficulty in mapping and coming to understand the complexities of Afghanistan in the years following 9/11. One reason for this was the lack of embassy in Afghanistan, although embassies and U.S. intelligence services can only provide so much information. We learned the hard way what village tensions were and where the tribal lines were drawn or where forces tended to retreat to. Only after the war was well underway did we begin to realize that information from the Soviet and British invasions of Afghanistan that was easily available could have

saved us much of the trouble and provided us with this information ahead of time, saving critical resources of lives, time, and money (it turned out little had changed in the past few hundred years).

Intelligence from embassies too tends to focus on directed human intelligence and signals intelligence for policy purposes. Cultural intelligence is rarely combined with the above. The U.S. government does have the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which provides geospatial intelligence (GEOINT), intelligence about human activity produced from analysis of imagery and geospatial information. The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, or NGA, is not only one of 16 members of the U.S. Intelligence Community, but also one of eight Department of Defense Combat Support Agencies (along with the Defense Contract Management Agency, Defense Health Agency, Defense Information Systems Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Defense Logistics Agency, Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and the National Security Agency). As an exception, the National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC), a part of the Army Intelligence and Security Command, “provides all source and geospatial intelligence on foreign ground force capabilities and related military technologies”. Although it is somewhat unclear how big this center is, how much it coordinates with other agencies, and exactly what its forward mission is as specific information about most intelligence agencies is either classified, difficult to confirm, or rarely talked about. The DIA also works to coordinate major DoD intel projects, although faces major separation and competition between branches.



Above, the NSA headquarters in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Paglen, 2014

What the NSA, DIA, and NGIC do not necessarily provide, which is necessary for the defeat of insurgencies, is the complex geospatial analysis combined with information about the peoples, namely civilians, that inhabit them. Understandably due to a conventional focus, geospatial imagery has been used simply for battle movements. Famously, the NSA was used to construct a mock-up of Osama bin Laden's compound for the 2011 raid in which he was killed by U.S. forces. The creation of the Office of the Director for National Intelligence after 9/11, which was meant to coordinate intelligence activities and minimize previously high levels of competition that had resulted in a lack of cooperation and intelligence-sharing, has resulted in renewed levels of interoperability. But this is still difficult in the traditionally heavily-segregated military branches and units. While elite JSOC or SOCOM units may be able to overcome these walls, for much of the conventional forces any intelligence gathering or

coordination is next to impossible. The newfound counterinsurgent movement must take advantage of this. Leveraging GEOINT capabilities, we must become intimately familiar with the terrain, ethnicities, religion, languages, politics, economies, wealth distribution, and histories of subregions in the areas we intend to operate and win in. For our tactical level units to succeed, they must have intricate, accurate knowledge of the conditions in which they are operating, the problems plaguing the people they will be working with, what land and social conditions the enemy will attempt to exploit, and what aspects of the cultural and physical geography we can use against them. This information should be less classified and presented more as essential warfare preparation and less as “optional (unnecessary) reading. Those on the ground need access to all these tools and information to become familiar with their enemies and the people they hope to gain the support of, especially in COIN operations. If strategic and operational knowledge of local conditions is either A. not gathered/prioritized or B. Not centralized/shared/made easily accessible to lower level tactical units, they will not be equipped or informed enough to achieve stability or success to their specific mission taskings.

Tactical Tip #6: Military Civic Action and Cultural Support Teams

The skill of civic action, currently designated as a “special operation” task, is one that must be designated as a conventional skill and further integrated into conventional units at the tactical level. In a 21st era of globalization, brute-force conventional forces will not achieve the victory we seek. Our takfiri nemesis is oft underestimated and able to exploit the slightest cultural of misunderstandings. In the areas we deem strategically and operationally key to success, we must prioritize education of our troops on all aspects of culture. Language training, religious education, customs and norms, historical studies, philosophies of violence, and tribal and local relationships are just as important as time on the range with a rifle.

Specifically, units designated to deal with tricky situations, such as violence originating in a mosque, interrogating women, and helping oversee the administration of local justice are integral. Being that insurgencies are in a battle with the government over “governance”, and as we have established earlier, justice and fairness are key to creating support amongst the local population. In fact, studies have shown that many contested populations value predictable, fair, non-corrupt governance over even getting out of poverty. The success of a Team Lioness in Afghanistan and Iraq, made up of women soldiers to help search and interrogate women in 2003 and 2004, led to further expansions of programs that involved women in stability operations (Ricks, 2015). Cultural Support Teams (CSTs) and Female Engagement Teams (FETs) were created to support SOCOM operations (Lemmon, 2015). Elite, highly trained women were sent as a means of intelligence gathering and civilian interfacing (especially with women and children) on missions with Navy SEALs, Army Special Forces, and Army Rangers (Neville, 2015). The success of these operations should be not only replicated, but integrated on a full-scale basis into units engaged in counterinsurgency. Troops and teams skilled in civilian interaction, meeting the needs of locals, who understand motivations and intentions, and who can work in culturally precarious situations are critical in turning the tide against the insurgents with a home field advantage. While it is critical that the operational leadership prioritize their creation, the tactical actors must integrate these features and units to maximize tactical success and train the CSTs or FETs to maximize their effectiveness as well. Beyond CSTs and FETs, the tactical units must be effective in engaging with the local population and meeting their needs—ranging from healthcare and governance to crop growth and mediation.



Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Claire E. Ballante, assigned to the Female Engagement Team (FET), holds a child during a patrol with 1st Battalion 2d Marines in Musa Qa'leh, Afghanistan. J.L. Barry, Columbia University

Tactical Tip #7: The Safety of the Citizenry, a Protection Focus

Something we learned in Vietnam, that has not completely taken effect in our GWOT, is the ineffectiveness of a “search and destroy” campaign. There are merits to such, as it disrupts the enemy, focusing on its leadership can bring about valuable intelligence and keeps the enemy guessing. But a FOCUS on such a program leaves the roots of an insurgency well intact and only serves a dangerous game of “whack a mole”. Resisting this temptation is difficult for warriors naturally seek out the fight. And America’s warriors are by and large the best the world has who stick to an infantry mantra: “close in, engage with, and kill the enemy”.

In conventional battles this is well and good, but in insurgencies at the tactical level the focus must be on protecting the populace. As forces engage in civil affairs, development, and the establishment of governance, military force’s *primary* focus must be to protect the populace of town

and the programs designed at bringing governance and stability to the town. If these programs fail, or are not adequately protecting the populace, you are back to square one. For example, if town A is the location we are currently focusing on developing and gaining strength in, going out to engage with the guerillas in town B or hunt leadership near town C allows the guerillas base to flourish while giving your own forces a false (or at least inflated) sense of progress. If we have the forces to adequately support and develop town A and protect its citizenry, then we can move forth to taking town B (assuming we have the forces ready to do the above in town B). Likely, special operations teams will still be sent to engage enemy leadership in hunt and destroy raids, but that is okay. So long as town by town we can provide governance, protection, and support for the citizenry in a protective tactical focus, we will be able to erode and chip away at the recruitment and support base the guerilla base thrives off of. Without this, the guerilla group begins to wither away.

Engagements have proven that this tactic results in the guerilla coming out to you, and desperate movements are those in which the insurgency leaves its more rural, safe havens to try to force you out. This is a positive sign, and one much more valuable (as the battles are fought on your protection territory) than going out raiding and patrolling in the rural, safe havens, hard as this may be to resist. Unfortunately, the trend is to chase the next enemy safe haven, ignoring the regrowth of the enemy in the safe haven you just cleared and left behind. This is especially devastating for veterans and military servicemembers who watch towns they saw fellow servicemembers die to gain control of simply being given back to the enemy. They often also worked closely with locals who risked their lives to assist the Americans, something that will not go unpunished as their town is retaken. In the Western Sahel struggle, AQIM has been able to use the rural lands of Algeria and Libya as temporary safe haven when it is attacked and has to retreat (not an ideal spot for long term existence) (Atkinson, 2015). One way or another, either the insurgents or the counterinsurgents are waiting the other out, playing a winning strategy that requires the losing side to desperately engage, and it is always preferred it be the one with

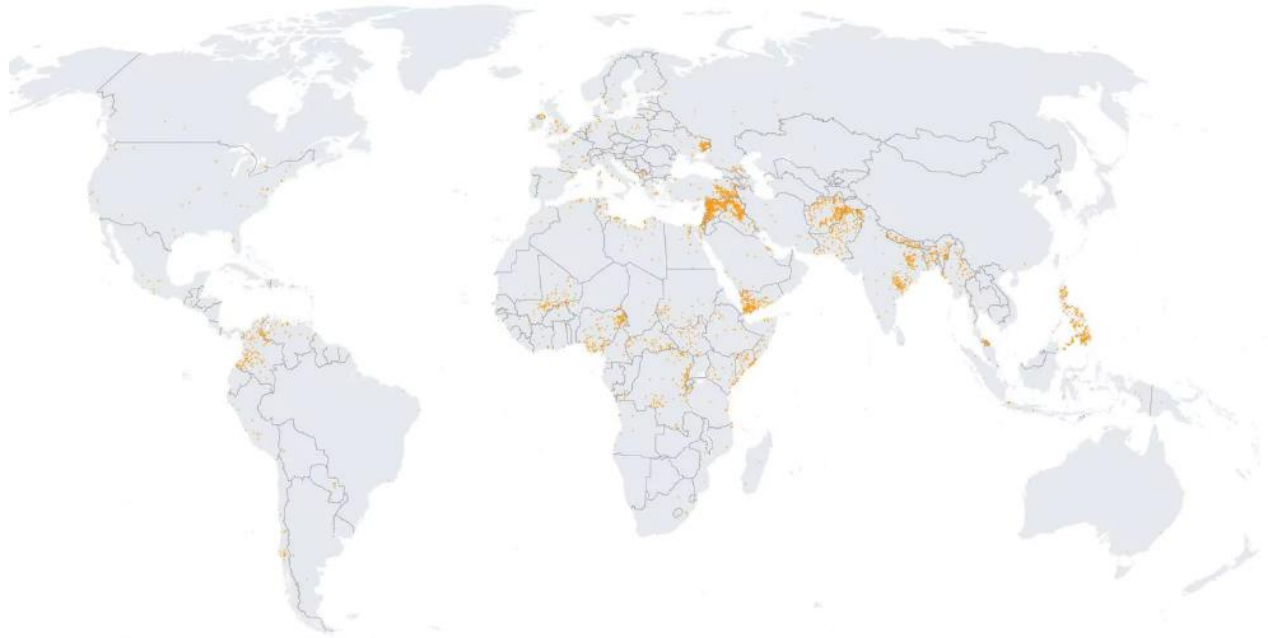
time on your side. By holding and villages firmly and making slower, but more deeply engrained progress, we become the one waiting, while the guerillas grow more desperate.

Conclusion

What we have taken away from our study of the GWOT is that it cannot continue on its current trajectory. The GWOT is creating more enemies than it is killing, costing American lives and resources at a rapidly inefficient rate, and it is weakening America's international standing. To correct this, we need a coherent long-term strategy, one that clearly outlines where it prioritizes global takfiri insurgencies against other priorities like nuclear, cyber, or economic threats from China, Russia, Iran, or NK. The GWOT can though, be fought in such a manner that the U.S., our allies, and the countries in which these Islamist insurgencies are fought come out better than before. The benefits include regional and local stability and security, increased economic output, reduced terrorism incidents, and more positive geopolitical relationships. But on the current path we will only be killing more of our own troops, making more enemies, spreading the conflict, and entrenching ourselves further into an unwinnable battle.

The battle for the Western Sahel represents a strategically symbolic position and pivot point in the U.S. role in the GWOT. The U.S. must be able to decide and then demonstrate what its strategy is, what its priorities are, how it will delegate jobs and tasks, who it will partner with and support, and what it is willing to sacrifice to achieve these goals. The choices ahead are many and complex, but on the edge of the Sahara, with no immediately apparent American interest, the world is watching and listening to see what the U.S. will do and why. America is approaching its 20th anniversary in the War on Terror, and the American people must decide, what exactly are we trying to achieve? As the self-proclaimed leader of the free, democratic world, America must decide what it wants to achieve, in Niger and Mali, at home, and around the world.

At any level of global involvement, save for a policy of complete isolationism, the United States for the sake of its global role and own national security, will find itself battling this global takfiri insurgent network. COIN operations are never easy, but through reform at the strategic, operational, and tactical level, America and its allies can achieve their goals. The tasks ahead loom large, they require close coordination of civilian and military institutions, bipartisan compromise, and international cooperation. Our leadership must develop and communicate a clear long-term strategy for American global leadership and closely partner with allies across the world to achieve our goals and shape regions as we desire. They must also outline our priorities in a wide-sphere of security issues facing the nation. Conventional troops must modernize and become culturally adept to skillfully provide for the needs of contested peoples, their feedback must be taken seriously and integrated into policy, and they must use atypical measures of effectiveness to determine their own standing and that of the enemy. We must dedicate ourselves to delinking these local conflicts, not in an anti-globalization manner, but in one that links these conflicts to healthier, productive, peaceful, and democratic groups. As a public we must heed and seek belief in a steady course, not be discouraged or swayed by terrorist attacks no matter the fear they may cause, nor easily question our strategy the moment our soldiers face difficulties or danger. The world continues to develop forward into a more peaceful, secure, productive existence, no matter the actions of those who would do it or each other harm. People live longer, travel further, and achieve more today than ever before. So that more of our children are brought into a safe, free world, and in honor of those who have gone before to ensure so, this is an enemy we must outwit, outlast, and overcome.



Terrorist attacks in 2017

Includes acts of terrorism, insurgency, and politically- or ideologically- motivated violence by non-state actors.

Source: Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre (JTIC) at IHS Markit

THE WASHINGTON POST

Erickson and Karklis, A map of all terrorist attacks worldwide in 2017

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