

North and West Africa Targetted For Protracted, Deadly Conflict

by Douglas DeGroot

Jan. 21—In early January, warlord-led narcotrafficking and kidnapping gangs, which last year took control of the sparsely populated northern two-thirds of the Sahara desert portion of Mali, moved south in the country toward Mopty, the gateway to the capital, Bamako, and the nearby strategic international airport of Sévaré. On Jan. 16, the deadly assault on the Algerian BP gas production facility, at In Aménas, was carried out by a specific narcotrafficking component of the same criminal networks, with the aid of British intelligence.

The combination of these two operations will spur to a higher level the process to set up protracted conflicts in Islamic North Africa and the Sahel Desert that will rapidly expand into the rest of West Africa by means of the same British-allied Saudi and Qatari-run Salafist criminal networks, creating conflicts which will result in wiping out, by the most barbarous methods, the nation-states in the region.

Algeria is the most important target in this British-Saudi-Qatar offensive, being the last big, Arabic-speaking, non-monarchical state in the Middle East-North Africa region that has not yet been destabilized since the British empire-run Arab Spring upheaval began. Algeria successfully avoided being drawn into a long, drawn-out hostage-negotiation scenario in In Aménas, during which pressure would have been put on the state, as hostages could have been killed one by one.

But the British intelligence-facilitated operation exposed Algeria's vulnerability: Although development and creation of jobs from its hydrocarbon-generated income has so far allowed Algeria to avoid attempts to whip up unrest, more such attacks could shake international confidence in its ability to maintain production, and could leave Algeria open to instability.

In Mali, the sudden French military intervention on Jan. 11 against the three jihadist groups—al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar al-Dine—has stalled their drive south, and they have retreated to northern Mali, according to reports, near the Algerian

border. Classic guerrilla warfare, with hit-and-run attacks, after which the fighters retreat across borders into neighboring countries, is expected to create turmoil in the region.

France, the former colonial power in the region, wants to maintain its influence in West Africa, but will not succeed by fighting the jihadis, unless it exposes the dirty role of the British, Saudi, and Qatari monarchies. In Syria, France is supporting Qatar's effort, with the British and Saudis, to overthrow the Assad government.

As one retired French intelligence official put it: "We are fighting against the Islamist groups in Mali and Algeria that we support in Syria."

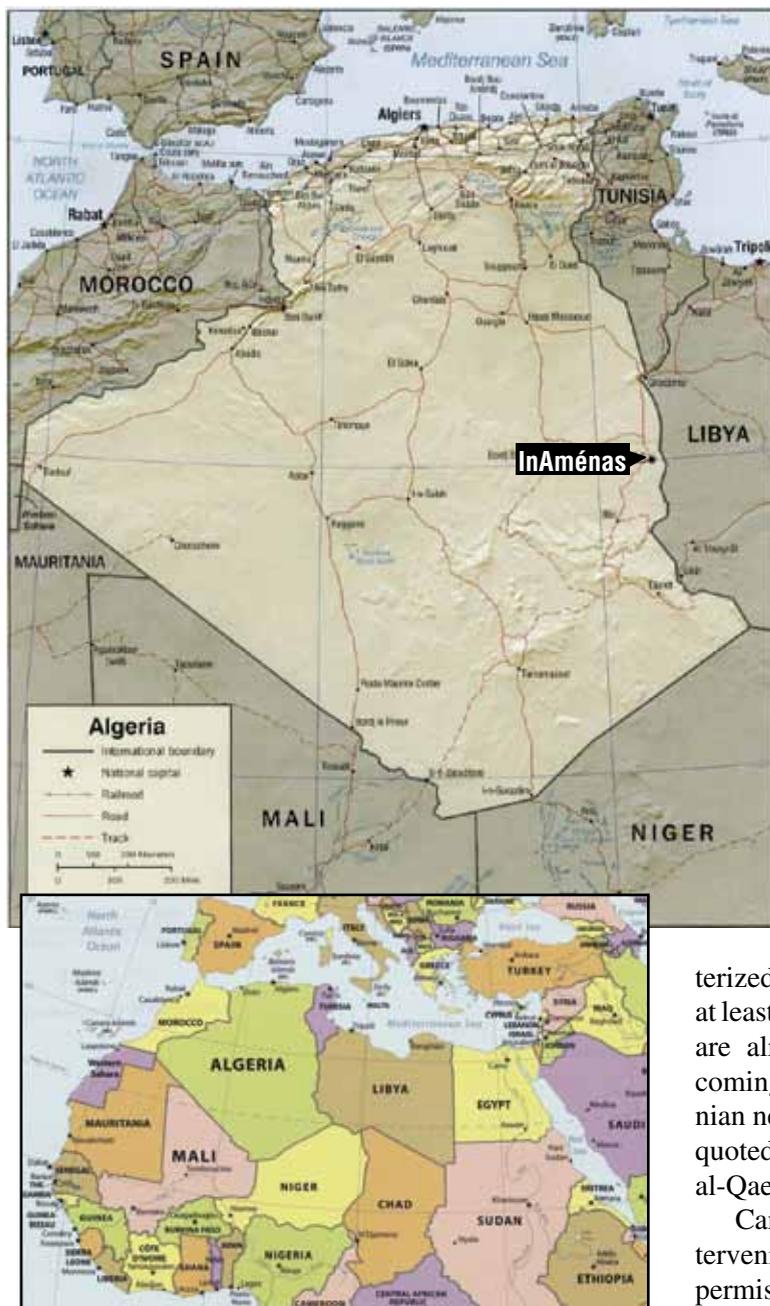
British Duplicity

Details about the long and careful preparations for the murderous operation at the Amenas BP (British Petroleum) plant, well before the Jan. 11 French intervention in Mali, are now coming to light, exposing the British intelligence hand.

The leader of the Jan. 16 commando assault by jihadis from several countries on the Algerian gas facility, Mohamed-Lamine Bouchneb, had family connections with a trucking contractor for BP at the gas production site, and was therefore ideally suited to know the security and logistical layout of the facility, according to a report yesterday in the Algerian daily, *Liberté*. Bouchneb, who was killed during the abortive attempt to move the foreign hostages to Libya for what was intended to be a protracted hostage-release negotiation, was considered the business manager of the drug cartel smuggling networks from the Sahara to and through Libya for Mokhtar Belmokhtar.

According to the *Liberté* report, Bouchneb arranged for members of his family to be employed by the Ghediri family trucking business, which was contracted by BP. Ghediri is a brother of Abou Zeid [Abdelmalek Droukdel], the head of AQIM, and former associate of Belmokhtar. The firm had a fleet of 30 tractor trailers,

FIGURE 1



and had been active in In Aménas and elsewhere in the region, for at least three years. Since observers saw the attackers arrive on only three 4x4s, obviously, the substantial arsenal (reported to have been obtained in Libya) used by the attackers, and many of the attackers themselves, were already on site before the attack on the BP facility began. The number of attackers was estimated at 40. They were positioned to intercept a bus that was to take many of the foreign workers to an air-

port. The report indicated that BP had been alerted to the potential problems of the Ghediri trucking company, but had done nothing about it.

Belmokhtar, who is linked to the Qatari-Saudi networks in Libya, is being promoted as the mastermind of the assault to deliberately make him the recognized top jihadi among the Saharan narcotraffickers, or as *Liberté* put it, “the Emir of the Sahara,” taking that role away from the present emir of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel. After he failed to take it over, Belmokhtar was expelled from AQIM last November. Droukdel was too focused on drug profits; an international jihadi was needed.

By building up Belmokhtar as the champion of the attack on the Algeria gas plant, he, with the new organization he is acquiring from the slain Bouchneb, will be billed as a resurgent al-Qaeda leader in Africa, a new poster boy to give credibility to the stories being circulated about the resurgence of al-Qaeda in the arc from Somalia to Mauritania, and to make him a credible target against which to mobilize the decades-long war that British Prime Minister David Cameron is calling for.

With the slain Bouchneb’s group, Belmokhtar’s new organization will be characterized as more like the original al-Qaeda than AQIM, at least for Cameron, and for public consumption: There are already reports of jihadists from across Africa coming into Mali. A video aired on the private Mauritanian news outlet ANI after the Algerian hostage-taking quoted Belmokhtar boasting about the attack: “We in al-Qaeda announce this blessed operation.”

Cameron, who initially scolded the Algerians for intervening against the narcoterrorists without getting permission from the British (who wanted a bloody, drawn-out hostage negotiation scenario), has now gone for the British fallback option: He was quoted widely in the British press Jan. 19, the day the crisis ended, warning that there will be a years-long war against the “al-Qaeda extremists.”

“This is a global threat and it will require a global response,” he said. “It will require a response that is about years, even decades, rather than months.”

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