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Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs

"Political, Economic, and Security Situation in Africa"

November 21, 2013

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Risch and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the security situation in North Africa. For more than a decade I have been closely tracking al Qaeda and associated movements. So, my testimony today will largely focus on the al Qaeda network in North and West Africa and how this network has evolved over time.

The Arab uprisings that began in late 2010 and early 2011 created new opportunities for millions of oppressed people. Unfortunately, the overthrow of several dictators also generated new space for al Qaeda and like-minded organizations to operate. How the political process will play out in any of these nations in the coming decades is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any prognosticator to say. But we do know this: The Arab revolutions not been the death knell for al Qaeda as some analysts claimed it would be.

Instead, al Qaeda and other ideologically-allied organizations have taken advantage of the security vacuums caused by the uprisings. In Mali, for instance, an al Qaeda branch that was once written off as nothing more than a "nuisance" to the residents of the countries in which it operated managed to take over a large swath of territory, thereby forcing the French to intervene.[1] Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allies imposed their harsh sharia law on the residents of Mali at gunpoint, destroying local Muslim traditions and practices until the jihadists could be dislodged from power. Even now, however, the al Qaeda-led alliance threatens Mali. Many of the jihadist fighters melted away into neighboring countries, where, free from the West's superior military might, they have regrouped and lived to fight another day.[2]

Al Qaeda did not overthrow the government in Mali, but, as was the case elsewhere, the international terror network took advantage of the situation. A *coup d'état* by Malian soldiers unseated the elected government and set in motion a chain of events that AQIM capitalized on. Armed with weapons formerly kept in Col. Muammar el Qaddafi's arsenals, al Qaeda, other jihadist groups and Tuareg tribesmen quickly ran roughshod over the Malian military.

The war in Mali is instructive because it shows how events throughout the region, including inside the countries we were asked to assess today, are interconnected. Qaddafi's weapons fueled the fight in Mali, but post-Qaddafi Libya's instability and porous borders have escalated the violence as well. Fighters who took part in the Libyan revolution returned to Mali with fresh combat experience. Al Qaeda and allied jihadists have established training camps inside Libya and newly-trained fighters have been able to move across Algeria into Mali.

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[1] "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): A Profile," A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress under an Interagency Agreement with the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office's Irregular Warfare Support Program, May 2012. The report's authors described AQIM and jihadists in general as "more a nuisance than an existential threat to the countries in which they operate." However, AQIM certainly became an existential threat to many Muslims in Mali in the months that followed the publication of this report.
[2] David Lewis and Laurent Prieur, "Insight: Revival of Islamists in Mali tests French, U.N. nerve," *Reuters*, November 14, 2013; http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/14/us-mali-islamists-insight-idUSBRE9AD0QC20131114.

The threat of terrorism inside Algeria has increased during the war in Mali. In January 2013, an al Qaeda commander named Mokhtar Belmokhtar laid siege to the In Amenas gas facility. Belmokhtar's forces have fought in Mali and operated inside Libya as well. Algerian authorities claim that some of the Egyptians who took part in the In Amenas operation also participated in the September 11, 2012 terrorist attack in Benghazi, Libya. Tunisian authorities have blamed veterans from Mali with links to AQIM for security problems along the border with Algeria.[3]

The war in Mali is tied, therefore, to broader regional security problems that stretch into and throughout all of North Africa. In fact, the terrorist threats in North Africa are tied to events that occur even farther away – in Syria, for example. Al Qaeda in Iraq drew many recruits from North Africa during the height of the Iraq War. With the Syrian war raging on, al Qaeda's two affiliates in Syria continue to draw fighters from North Africa's jihadist pool. These same fighters can pose threats to their home countries upon their return.

Key Points

This brief introduction is a way of saying that the terrorist threat emanating from North and West Africa is a dynamic problem set with no easy solutions. Still, the last several years have revealed to us certain key lessons. Any sound strategy for defeating al Qaeda and its allies should take the following into account:

- AQIM leads a network that operates in several countries. This network is comprised of not just individuals and brigades that are formally a part of AQIM, but also entities that are closely allied with the al Qaeda branch. If we are to defeat the AQIM network, then the West and its local allies must understand AQIM's order of battle -- that is, how all of these groups are operating in conjunction with one another. There are differences between some of these groups, but at the end of the day they are in the same trench. I discuss this further below.

- The AQIM network includes groups that are frequently identified as "local" jihadist organizations. It is widely believed that groups such as Ansar al-Dine and the Ansar al Sharia chapters are not really a part of the al Qaeda network in North and West Africa. But, as I explain, this view is based on a fundamental misreading of al Qaeda's objectives.

- Western analysts should be careful not to underestimate the current or future capabilities of al Qaeda's many branches. Prior to its takeover of much of Mali, the AQIM threat was widely viewed as a criminal problem. Kidnappings for ransom, contraband smuggling, and extortion

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[3] See: *Agence France Press*, "Jihadists hunted in Tunisia 'former Mali fighters'," May 10, 2013; http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130510/jihadists-hunted-tunisia-former-mali-fighters. Lambroschini, Antoine, "Two soldiers killed in Tunisia hunt for Qaeda-linked group," *Agence France Presse*, June 6, 2013; http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h_sUffq2sL8NuZjHiP_GA10-WOXA?docId=CNG.89440e74fb0ad05503b0e0f59380c91b.01&hl=en.

were and remain key AQIM operations. But the organization and its allies have now demonstrated a much more lethal capability. They have proven capable of taking and holding territory in the absence of effective central government control. Given that some of the governments in North Africa have only a tenuous grip on power, AQIM and its allies may have the opportunity to acquire additional territory in the future. They will continue to contest for control of parts of Mali, especially after the French withdraw their troops.

- There is always the potential for AQIM and allied groups to attempt a mass casualty attack in the West. For obvious reasons, most analysts downplay AQIM's capabilities and intent in this regard. Even though its predecessor organization targeted France as early as 1994, in more recent years the group has not successfully launched a mass casualty attack in the West. However, as we've seen with other al Qaeda branches, this does not mean that this will continue to be the case in the future. We've seen time and again how various parts of al Qaeda's global network have ended up attempting attacks on the U.S.[4] AQIM and allied organizations belong to a network that is loyal to al Qaeda's senior leadership and remains deeply hostile to the West. While most of their assets will be focused over there, in North and West Africa, there is always the potential for some of their resources and fighters to be deployed over here.

- In August, al Qaeda emir Ayman al Zawahiri appointed Nasir al Wuhayshi, the head of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), to the position of al Qaeda's general manager. Based on my reading of captured al Qaeda documents, the general manager's position is responsible for overseeing the operations of al Qaeda's many branches.[5] Wuhayshi has been in contact with AQIM's top leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel. However, AQIM's emir ignored some of Wuhayshi's advice in the past.[6] That may change now that Wuhayshi is technically Droukdel's superior. This is important because Wuhayshi has proven to be an effective manager capable of running insurgency operations at the same time that his henchmen have plotted attacks against the U.S.

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[4] Prior to the attempted Christmas Day 2009 bombing of Flight 253, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was perceived as mainly a threat to Western interests inside Yemen, not abroad. A few months later, in May 2010, a Pakistani Taliban operative attempted to detonate a car bomb in the middle of Times Square. Earlier this year, a plot targeting a commuter train traveling from New York City to Toronto was unraveled by Canadian authorities. The plotters were tied to al Qaeda's presence inside Iran. The Boston bombings in April show that young men who are drawn to the ideology of al Qaeda-associated groups in Chechnya and Dagestan can be a threat to the U.S.

[5] Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio, "AQAP's emir also serves as al Qaeda's general manager," *The Long War Journal*, August 6, 2013; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/aqap_emir_also_serve.php.

[6] Bill Roggio, "Wuhayshi imparted lessons of AQAP operations in Yemen to AQIM," *The Long War Journal*, August 12, 2013; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/wuhayshi_imparts_les.php.

The Al Qaeda Network in North Africa

In this section, I briefly outline the structure of al Qaeda's network in North Africa. The network is comprised of a clandestine apparatus, al Qaeda's official branch (joined by its allies), as well as the Ansar al Sharia chapters.

Clandestine Network

We must always be mindful that al Qaeda has maintained a clandestine global network since its inception. Of course, dismantling this network became the prime objective of American intelligence and counterterrorism officials after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Today, al Qaeda continues to maintain a covert network. We regularly find traces of it. This network operates in conjunction with groups that are quite open about their allegiance to al Qaeda.

In August 2012, a report ("Al Qaeda in Libya: A Profile"), prepared by the federal research division of the Library of Congress (LOC) in conjunction with the Defense Department's Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office, outlined the key actors who were secretly pushing al Qaeda's agenda forward inside Libya.[7]

Al Qaeda's senior leadership (AQSL) in Pakistan has overseen the effort, according to the report's authors. AQSL "issued strategic guidance to followers in Libya and elsewhere to take advantage of the Libyan rebellion." AQSL ordered its followers to "gather weapons," "establish training camps," "build a network in secret," "establish an Islamic state," and institute sharia law in Libya. "AQSL in Pakistan dispatched trusted senior operatives as emissaries and leaders who could supervise building a network," the report notes. They have been successful in establishing "a core network in Libya," but they still act in secret and refrain from using the al Qaeda name.

The chief "builder" of al Qaeda's secret endeavor in Libya was an alleged al Qaeda operative known as Abu Anas al Libi, according to the report's authors. Al Libi was captured by U.S. forces in Tripoli in October. Other al Qaeda actors are identified in the report and they presumably continue to operate in Libya.

It is likely that al Qaeda maintains covert operations inside the other North African nations as well. In Egypt, a longtime subordinate to Ayman al Zawahiri named Muhammad Jamal al Kashef was designated a terrorist by both the U.S. State Department and the United Nations in October.[8] Egyptian authorities found that Jamal was secretly in contact with Zawahiri while also working with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Jamal established training camps in the north Sinai and eastern Libya. And some of his

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[7] A copy of the report can be found online here: http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/aq-libya-loc.pdf.
[8] The State Department's announcement of Jamal's designation can be found here: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/10/215171.htm. The UN's designation page can be viewed here: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11154.doc.htm.

trainees went on to take part in the attack on the U.S. Mission in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012. Jamal is currently jailed inside Egypt, but his upstart branch of al Qaeda, commonly referred to as the "Muhammad Jamal Network," remains active. Jamal's network has even established ties to terrorists inside Europe.

Jamal's activities prior to his capture highlight the interconnectivity of al Qaeda's global network, including throughout North Africa and the Middle East, as well as the organization's desire for secrecy in some key respects. In addition to its official and unofficial branches, al Qaeda has also established and maintained terrorist cells. This has long been part of the organization's tradecraft.

Official Al Qaeda Branch and Allies

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, al Qaeda's formal branches have grown significantly. Al Qaeda's official branch, or affiliate, in North Africa is AQIM. While AQIM's predecessor organizations were already closely tied to al Qaeda, AQIM was officially recognized by Ayman al Zawahiri in late 2006. AQIM's main objectives have been to overthrow North African governments it said were ruled by apostates and to replace their rule with an Islamic state based on sharia law. The Arab uprisings removed the "infidel" governments, which initially surprised al Qaeda's ideologues because they did not expect, nor advocate, non-violent political change. But, in al Qaeda's view, the task remains unfinished because its harsh brand of sharia law has not been implemented.

Mali was the first instance in which AQIM attempted to govern a large amount of territory based on its sharia code. In taking over two-thirds of Mali, AQIM partnered with other organizations that shared its desire to see sharia implemented. Chief among these is Ansar al-Dine (AAD), which was added to the U.S. government's list of global terrorist organization in March 2013.[9] The State Department noted that AAD "cooperates closely" with AQIM and "has received support from AQIM since its inception in late 2011." AAD "continues to maintain close ties" to AQIM and "has received backing from AQIM in its fight against Malian and French forces." The UN's official designation page contains additional details concerning the relationship between AAD and AQIM.[10]

Captured AQIM documents further illuminate the relationship between AQIM and AAD. In one "confidential letter" from Abdelmalek Droukdel (the emir of AQIM) to his fighters, Droukdel notes that his forces should be split two. Part of AQIM's forces would operate under AAD's

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[9] http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/03/206493.htm.
[10] http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE13513E.shtml

command in northern Mali while the other part should focus on "external activity," meaning terrorism elsewhere.[11]

Another AQIM-allied group is the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), which was formed by AQIM commanders who wanted to expand their operations. MUJAO was designated by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization in December 2012.[12] Still another al Qaeda-linked group was formed by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a former senior AQIM who, because of leadership disagreements, formed his own organization in late 2012. In August, Belmokhtar announced that his group, the al-Mulathameen Brigade, had merged with MUJAO.[13]

Despite disagreements between the leaders of these various al Qaeda-linked groups, they are all openly loyal to al Qaeda's senior leadership and they have all continued to work closely together in Mali and elsewhere. In addition, Boko Haram, which was also recently designated a terrorist organization, has joined this coalition and is "linked" to AQIM.[14]

Ansar al Sharia in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen

Two prominent chapters of Ansar al Sharia have risen in North Africa, one in Libya and the other in neighboring Tunisia. Some have argued that while these Ansar al Sharia chapters cooperate with al Qaeda they have fundamentally different goals. Ansar al Sharia is said to be focused on purely "local" matters, while al Qaeda is only interested in the global jihad. But this is simply not true. Al Qaeda's most senior leaders, including Ayman al Zawahiri, have repeatedly said that one of his organization's chief priorities is to implement sharia law as the foundation for an Islamic state. This is precisely Ansar al Sharia's goal. In addition, there are credible reports that the Ansar al Sharia chapters in both Libya and Tunisia have provided recruits for al Qaeda's affiliates and other jihadist organizations in Syria, the new epicenter for the global jihad.

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[11] Bill Roggio, "Al Qaeda in Mali sought to hide foreign designs," The Long War Journal, February 15, 2013; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/al_qaeda_in_mali_sou.php.

[12] http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/12/201660.htm

[13] Bill Roggio, "Al Qaeda group led by Belmokhtar, MUJAO unite to form al-Murabitoon," *Threat Matrix*, August 22, 2013; http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/08/al_qaeda_groups_lead_by_belmok.php.

[14] For details concerning how these various groups, and Boko Haram, have operated alongside one another, see: Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's International Connections," *CTC Sentinel*, January 14, 2013; http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/boko-harams-international-connections. See also: Bill Roggio, "US adds West African group, 2 leaders, to terrorism list," *The Long War Journal*, December, 7, 2012; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/12/us_adds_west_african.php. The designation for Boko Haram, noting it is "linked" to AQIM, can be found here: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/11/217509.htm. For more on Boko Haram's ties to the global al Qaeda network, see: Thomas Joscelyn, "A Well-Deserved Terrorist Designation," *The Weekly Standard*, November 13, 2013; http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/well-deserved-terrorist-designation_767037.html.

The very first Ansar al Sharia chapter was established in Yemen by AQAP. The U.S. Government recognizes Ansar al Sharia Yemen as simply an "alias" for AQAP.[15] Ansar al Sharia was part of AQAP's expansion into governance, which involved the implementation of sharia law.

An Ansar al Sharia chapter in Egypt has hardly concealed its loyalty to al Qaeda. Its founder, an extremist who has long been tied to al Qaeda's senior leadership, has said that he is "honored to be an extension of al Qaeda."[16] Ansar al Sharia Egypt was formed by members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), a terrorist organization headed by Ayman al Zawahiri that also merged with al Qaeda. Mohammed al Zawahiri, Ayman's younger brother, starred at Ansar al Sharia Egypt's events prior to his re-imprisonment. Ansar al Sharia Egypt's social media has consistently praised and advocated on behalf of al Qaeda.

In this context, it is hardly surprising to find that the Ansar al Sharia chapters in Libya and Tunisia behave much like their counterparts. In October, Tunisian Prime Minister Ali Larayedh told *Reuters*, "There is a relation between leaders of Ansar al Sharia [Tunisia], al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar al Sharia in Libya. We are coordinating with our neighbors over that."[17] Tunisian officials have repeatedly alleged that Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia is closely tied to AQIM, and even that they have discovered a handwritten allegiance pact between the emirs of the two organizations. Ansar al Sharia Tunisia responded to these allegations by confirming its "loyalty" to al Qaeda while claiming that it remains organizationally independent – a claim that is contradicted by other evidence.[18]

Some of Ansar al Sharia Tunisia's most senior leaders have known al Qaeda ties, and at least two of them previously served as important al Qaeda operatives in Europe.[19] The group's leadership openly praises al Qaeda. And the organization's social media is littered with pro-al Qaeda messages. AQIM leaders have repeatedly praised and offered advice to Ansar al Sharia Tunisia.

Similarly, Ansar al Sharia Libya's leaders are openly pro-al Qaeda. The group has denounced the Libyan government for allowing American forces to capture Abu Anas al Libi, a top al Qaeda

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[15] Thomas Joscelyn, "State Department: Ansar al Sharia an alias for AQAP," *The Long War Journal*, October 4, 2012; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/state_department_ans.php.

[16] Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Egypt founder 'honored to be an extension of al Qaeda,'" *The Long War Journal*, November 27, 2012; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/ansar_al_sharia_egyp.php.

[17] Patrick Markey and Tarek Amara, "Tunisia sees Islamist militants exploiting Libya chaos," *Reuters*, October 20, 2013; http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-10-20/news/sns-rt-us-tunisia-20131020_1_islamist-militants-ansar-al-sharia-libya. It should be noted that one year earlier, during interviews on CNN and Fox News in October 2012, Mike Rogers, the Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, made similar claims. Rogers said that Ansar al Sharia Tunisia is "probably" an al Qaeda affiliate and that the Ansar al Sharias in Tunisia and Libya are the "same organization."

[18] Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia responds to Tunisian government," *The Long War Journal*, September 3, 2013; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/09/ansar_al_sharia_tuni_6.php.

[19] Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda ally orchestrated assault on US Embassy in Tunisia," *The Long War Journal*, October 2, 2012; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/al_qaeda_ally_orches.php. See also: Thomas Joscelyn, "From al Qaeda in Italy to Ansar al Sharia Tunisia," *The Long War Journal*, November 21, 2012; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/from_al_qaeda_in_ita.php.

operative. Ansar al Sharia has even been running a charity campaign on al Libi's behalf. The authors of "Al Qaeda in Libya: A Profile," the Library of Congress report published in August 2012, concluded that Ansar al Sharia Libya "has increasingly embodied al Qaeda's presence in Libya." And Sufian Ben Qumu, a former Guantanamo detainee who is now an Ansar al Sharia leader based in Derna, Libya, has longstanding ties to al Qaeda. A leaked Joint Task Force Guantánamo (JTF-GTMO) threat assessment describes Ben Qumu as an "associate" of Osama bin Laden. JTF-GTMO found that Ben Qumu worked as a driver for a company owned by bin Laden in the Sudan, fought alongside al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and maintained ties to several other well-known al Qaeda leaders. Ben Qumu's alias was reportedly found on the laptop of an al Qaeda operative responsible for overseeing the finances for the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The information on the laptop indicated that Ben Qumu was an al Qaeda "member receiving family support."[20]

The weight of the evidence makes it far more likely than not that the Ansar al Sharia chapters in Libya and Tunisia are part of al Qaeda's network in North Africa. This has important policy ramifications because both groups have been involved in violence, with Ansar al Sharia Libya taking part in the Benghazi terrorist attack and Ansar al Sharia Tunisia sacking the U.S. Embassy in Tunis three days later. The Tunisian government has also blamed Ansar al Sharia for a failed suicide attack, the first inside Tunisia in years. While both chapters have been involved in violence, they have also been working hard to earn new recruits for their organizations and al Qaeda's ideology. The Arab uprisings created a unique opportunity for them to proselytize.

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[20] The leaked JTF-GTMO threat assessment can be found on *The New York Times* web site: http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/detainees/557-abu-sufian-ibrahim-ahmed-hamuda-bin-qumu/documents/11.