



In Aménas Hostage Crisis

16-19 Jan 13

Updated Brief as at 25.01.13.

Key Points

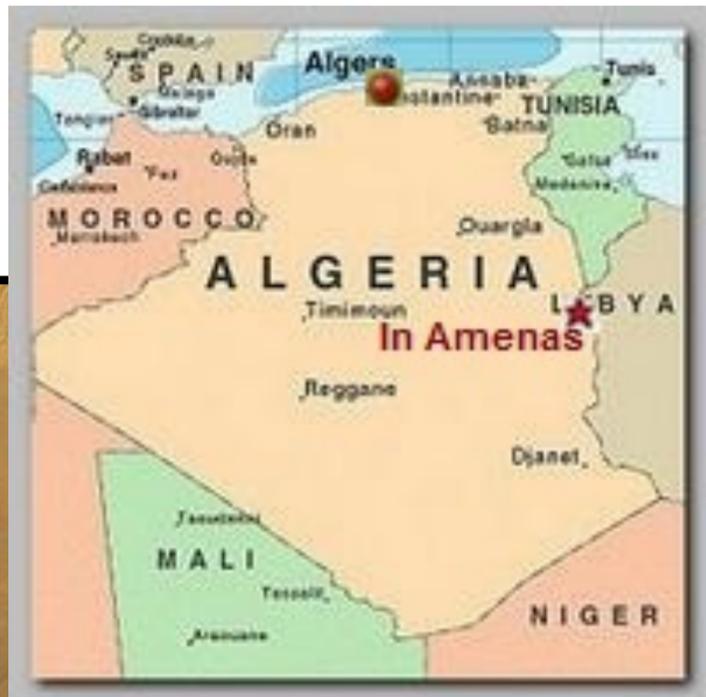
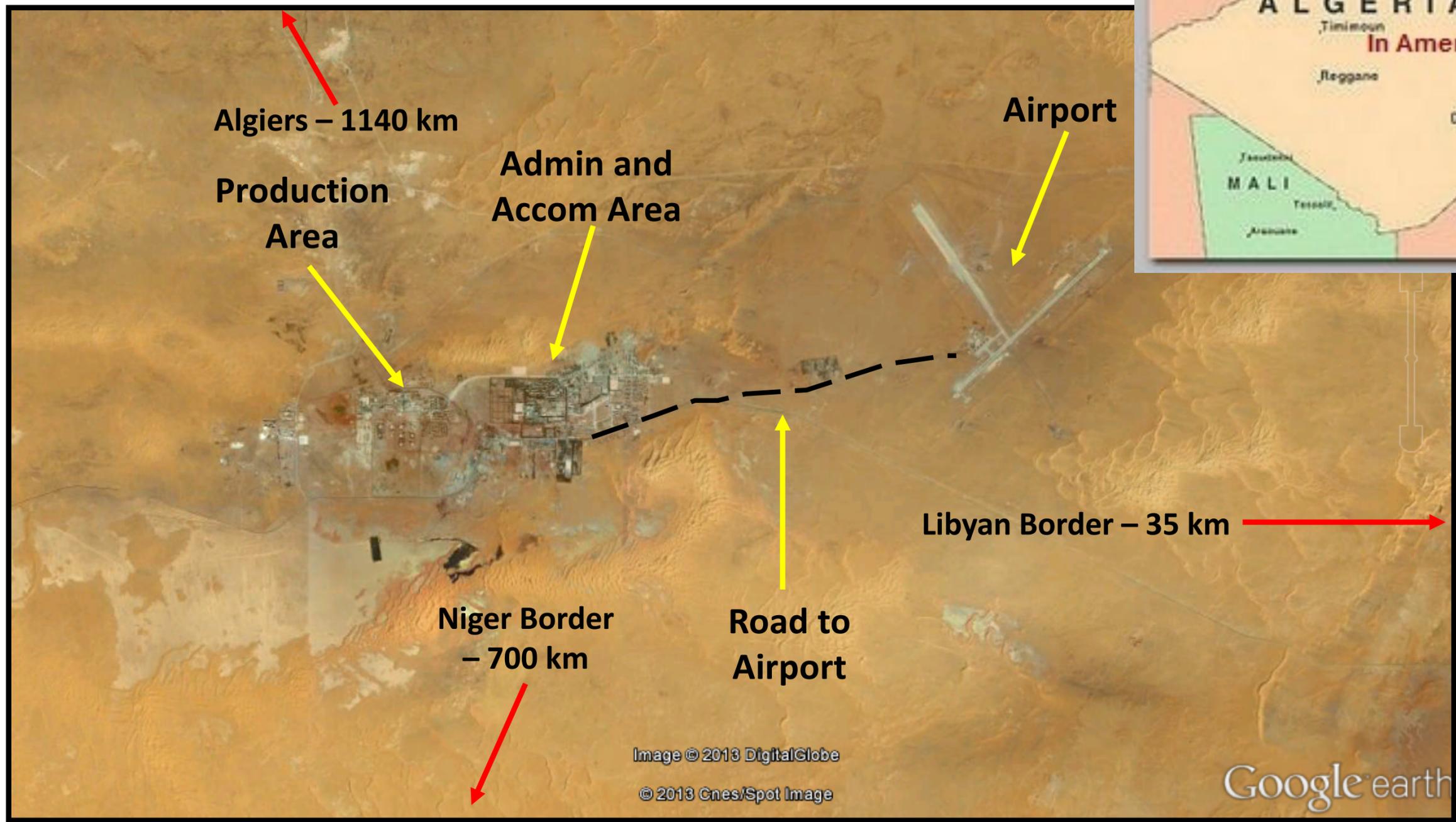
- Complex terrorist operation that took several months to plan.
- A propaganda coup, but could have been more drawn out if the terrorists had escaped into the desert with hostages.
- Algerian reaction robust, and in keeping with national policies.
- UK (and other) governments frustrated over level of communication from Algiers.
- Many workers escaped capture by going into hiding at the first sound of gunfire.
- Companies faced difficulties with information flow, but generally crisis management plans worked well.
- Reliance on media reports (and in at least one case, social media) caused some frustration.
- Very unlikely that western oil companies will leave Algeria.
- Security of sites in the region will need to be upgraded, including measures against “insider” threat.
- Security in region will improve, but further attacks, albeit on a smaller scale, can be expected. This will include possibility of attacks on mainland Europe.
- Western nations will pay more attention on Maghreb but unlikely to commit ground forces in any significant numbers. Military focus will be on supporting African forces with training, logistics, and intelligence.
- Terrorist have the advantage of local knowledge, and a vast area to hide in – it will be a long term problem.

In Aménas Gas Facility



- In Aménas is a major installation contributing 10% of Algeria's gas exports (US\$ 3Bn/year).
- Commissioned in 2006, it covers approximately 10 sq km.
- Multi-national plant (run by BP, Norway's Statoil, and Algeria's Sonatrach) with a workforce of over 800 staff drawn from some 25 countries.
- Starting point of the In Aménas-Haoud El Hamra oil pipeline and the In Aménas-Hassi Messaoud gas pipeline.
- Collects natural gas from gas fields in the region, which is then pumped to the coast for the European market.
- Situated in a remote area, close to the open border with Libya (35 km to the east).
- In Aménas represents a high profile target. Any attack on the site would get coverage in the international press and thus have a high propaganda value.

Location



Timeline of Crisis

- **16 Jan:**
 - At 0545 hours, terrorists in 4x4's in Sonatrach livery appear from the desert and attack two buses as they leave the In Amenas plant, killing two, including one Briton (an unarmed security manager).
 - Attackers fought off by Algerian security team. One bus goes to the safety of In Amenas town, second attempted to reach security of plant but crashes. Occupants flee to admin area on foot.
 - Terrorists then move to the facility's living quarters and admin area, seizing hostages.
 - Terrorist then move into the gas production area. Some workers manage to escape, others stay hidden in their accommodation and offices.
- **17 Jan:**
 - Terrorists try to move their hostages out of the complex in five 4x4s. Four of the vehicles are destroyed in an Algerian air strike. Majority of hostage deaths are attributed to this incident.
- **18 Jan:**
 - Stalemate as Algerian forces surround the gas plant where the remaining hostages are held.
- **19 Jan:**
 - Algerians launch final assault after reports that the terrorists were killing the remaining hostages.

Perpetrators

- Attack has been claimed by an Al Qaeda linked group, “Al-Mulatahemeen” (Masked) Brigade (also called al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam (Those who Sign with Blood) Brigade.
- Group formed by Mokhtar Belmokhtar in 2012 following internal rifts in Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).
- This was the group’s first major operation.
- Group is multi-national with members from Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Mali, Niger, Canada, and Mauritania. Includes ethnic Arabs, and Tuaregs, as well as some citizens of western countries with North African family backgrounds.
 - At least one report of a terrorist speaking “excellent English”. Similar reports of a “French” speaker.
 - Canadian and French passports recovered from bodies of dead terrorists.
- Well armed, probably with weapons gained from looted Libyan arsenals after the fall of Gadhafi.

Mokhtar Belmokhtar



- Born in 1972, Mokhtar Belmokhtar is an experienced terrorist whose career started in the late 1980's in Afghanistan.
- After Afghanistan he joined the Islamist GSPC, taking part in the Algerian civil war.
- Moved to AQIM when the GSPC re-formed under the Al Qaeda banner. Had command of AQIM in Northern Mali.
- Known as a kidnapper and smuggler (drugs and cigarettes), the proceeds of which have been used to fund AQIM.
 - In 2003 his group kidnapped 32 European French, German, Austrian, and Swiss tourists in the Sahara. It is believed to have received a \$6.5 million ransom.
- Split from AQIM in late 2012 due to internal divisions, but maintained allegiance to Al Qaeda.
- He has married four local Northern Malian Arab and Tuareg women, cementing his ties in the region. He named a son Osama, after Bin Laden.

Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb

- Formed in 2007 from the Algerian group, Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).
- Forced from northern Algeria by the Algerian authorities, moved into the empty spaces of the Sahel in northern Mali and Niger.
- Predominantly Algerian, with some Moroccan and ethnic North Africans with western nationality.
- Well funded and well equipped:
 - Funding via drug running with links to South American drug groups, smuggling and kidnapping.
 - Major influx of looted weapons from Libyan armouries following collapse of Gadhafi regime.
 - Fall of Gadhafi also saw influx of Tuareg into the ranks of AQIM, as well as into other militant groups.
 - Strength probably in the order of 300 - 800.
 - Group was behind the 2004 Madrid train bombings.
- From 2011 internal divisions led to a number of groups breaking away, albeit staying under the Al Qaeda banner. This was mainly through ethnic divisions based along African south, and Arab/Berber north.

Insurgent Groups in Sahel

Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb: Operates in southern Algeria, northern Mali and parts of Mauritania.

Al-Mulatahemeen: Small group based in northern Mali. Links with MOJWA

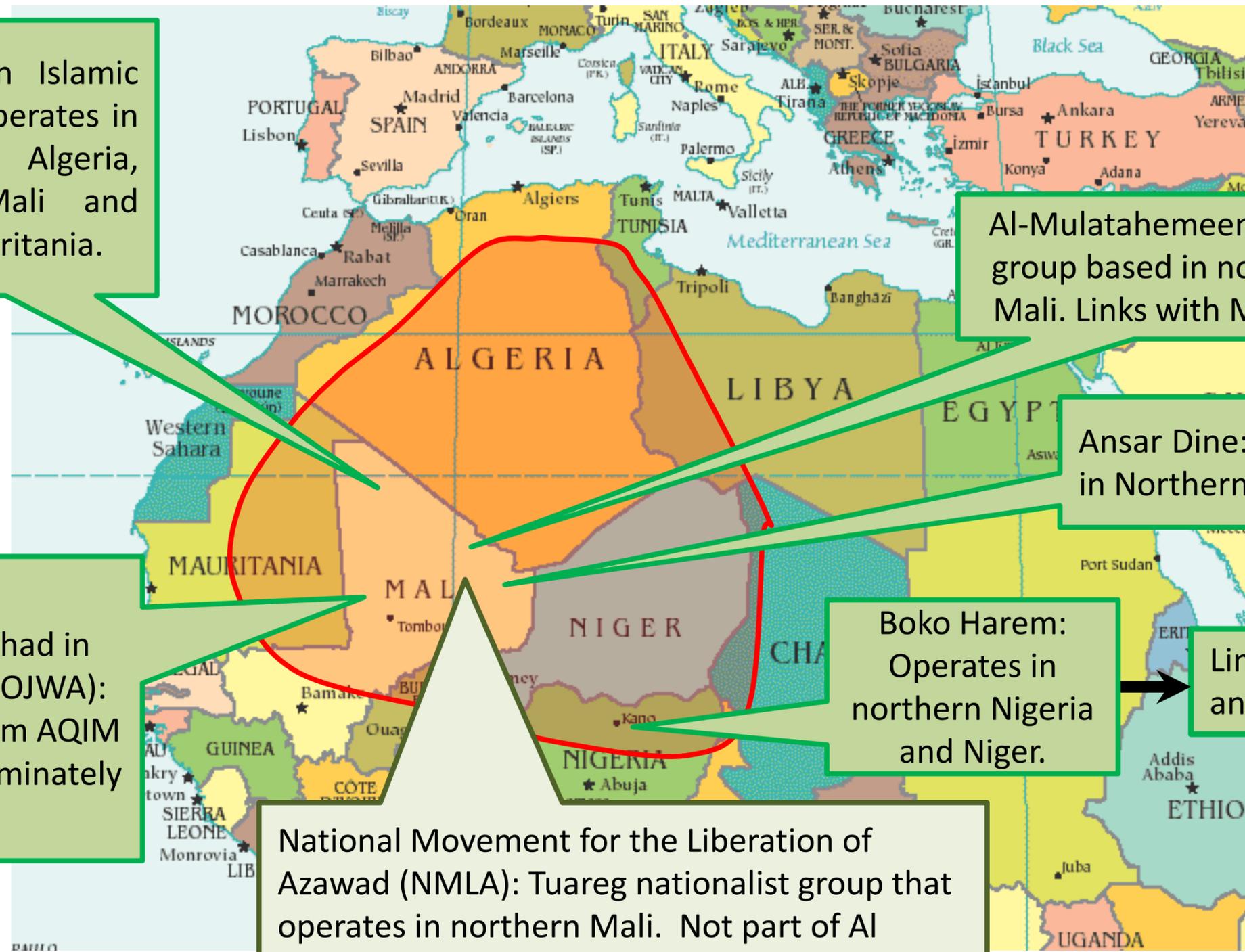
Ansar Dine: Operates in Northern Mali

Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA): Broke away from AQIM in 2011. Predominately African.

Boko Haram: Operates in northern Nigeria and Niger.

Links to AQAP and Al Shabaab

National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (NMLA): Tuareg nationalist group that operates in northern Mali. Not part of Al Qaeda. Was linked with Ansar Dine, now open to negotiations with Malian government.



Motive for Attack

- Although claimed to be in response to French intervention in Mali the previous week, the operation was complex and would have required several months of planning, pre-dating the French operation.
- Probable that Belmokhtar was aware that events in Mali would lead to intervention by Paris in its former colony and had In Aménas as a contingency.
- Operation well planned:
 - Probability that terrorists had access to “insider knowledge.”
 - Belmokhtar has a reputation for skilled collection and exploitation of intelligence.
 - The plant at In Aménas has a high profile in Algeria and thus a high propaganda value, a commodity that from the terrorist perspective, should be exploited.
 - First attack for Belmokhtar’s new group.
- Motive assessed to be a combination of:
 - Putting the new group on the Jihadi map.
 - Grabbing the headlines as a major propaganda coup.
 - Placing the new group at the top of the Al Qaeda hierarchy in the Maghreb.
 - Act a recruiting tool for would be Jihadists.

Insider Threat?

- Following the incident there have been unconfirmed reports that the terrorist had insider knowledge.
 - Knowledge of layout could have easily be obtained by:
 - Local workforce, including former employees of those employed during the building of the plant.
 - Norwegian press report that one of the terrorists had been employed as a driver at the plant before leaving one year ago.
 - Via family/tribal contacts.
 - Observation.
 - Terrorist knew when to strike the buses.
 - Unsubstantiated claims or weapons and equipment being pre-positioned in the plant.
- Whatever the accuracy of these reports, they highlight an area of vulnerability in security.

The Hostages

- **The Captives:**

- Site is home to 685 Algerian workers, and 150 expatriate staff from at least 25 countries.
- Terrorists actively sought out western expatriate workers, allowing many Algerians to leave.
- Terrorists captured approximately 40 western hostages, and an unknown number of Algerians.
- Captured hostages used as bait to lure those in hiding into captivity.
- Explosive necklaces placed around the necks of western hostages.
- Hostages killed in first Algerian assault, or were executed by terrorists.

- **The Escapees:**

- Some managed to escape initial terrorist assault.
- Others went into hiding, escaping over the following two nights.
- Hiding places included false ceilings, store rooms, under beds and tables.
- Some Algerian staff assisted foreign co-workers in hiding and escape.



Algerian Government Response

- Algerian government has a history of taking a hard un-compromising line with AQIM and its affiliates.
 - Scale of attack unprecedented.
 - Risk of losing prestige and credibility in favour of Belmokhtar.
 - From onset, Algeria imposed tight reporting restrictions.
 - Focus of Algerian response was in destroying the terrorists, not negotiating the release of hostages.
- Algerian Prime Minister, Abdelmalek Sellal faced with dealing with a major incident in a remote part of the country, at an installation of high economic importance.
- Complicated by being operated by multi-national entities.
 - With sub-contractors from different countries.
 - Workers from at least 25 nations , plus Algerian nationals.
- News releases, especially any identification of western nationals could have led to security implications and provided the terrorists with useful information.
 - News releases had to pass through the Algerian military and the Ministry of Information, slowing the process.

Algerian Military Response

- Algerian military have long experience of dealing with Al Qaeda linked groups.
- Confronted by a well armed and motivated enemy armed with assault rifles, sniper rifles, machine guns, light mortars, anti-tank weapons, mines and explosives.
 - It was not a “police” action.
 - Legacy of Libya has been the availability of weapons in the region – a trade in which Belmokhtar was closely involved with through his links with the the Tuareg.
- Complex operation:
 - High risk of terrorists taking hostages into desert, prompting a need to act quickly in order to contain and control the incident.
 - High risk of terrorists destroying the plant and killing hostages, once again prompting the need to act quickly.
 - Foreign assistance including advisors would have taken time to arrive and set up, risking passing the initiative to the terrorists.
 - Installation very complex – a labyrinth of engineering plant with a high risk of causing explosions or fire.
- Notwithstanding casualties, the incident was contained by the Algerian forces.
 - Attempts by the terrorists to break away were thwarted.
 - Containment prevented terrorists from blowing up the plant.
 - Majority of hostage casualties occurred when the terrorists executed them.

Operating Companies - Response

- Western companies reliant on information coming from a remote area.
- Algerian authorities strictly controlled information and communications.
- This led to an unclear picture on their employees' status, some of whom had remained hidden and out of contact.
- Any information they released on their personnel ran the risk of aiding the terrorists.
- Unable to move personnel to the area to manage their response due to military 'lock-down.'
- From the available reporting BP and Statoil were quick in contacting families and keeping them informed as best as possible.
 - This included bringing immediate family members together, and involved senior management.
 - Statoil set up a family reception centre at Stavanger airport (where released personnel returned to Norway).
 - Senior BP executives were in personal contact with families.
- Not without difficulties:
 - No clear information of the status of their staff.
 - Multi-national staff with families spread across the world (including time zone differences).
 - Postings on social media such as Facebook circumvented official reporting mechanisms.
 - Need to account for/deal with staff from sub-contractors.

UK Government Response



- COBRA crisis management process appropriate due to:
 - Major UK Company involved.
 - Number of UK citizens.
 - Need to keep UK public and media informed.
 - Need to consider UK military options.
- Clear that UK government was frustrated over Algerian level of information sharing.
 - Reliant on media reporting in the absence of official information.
 - At times this led to the government being behind the information loop.
- But it is assessed that Algiers responded at a level that was appropriate to them, and was based on their experience.
- UK has little experience of the Sahel and AQIM (France and Spain are better equipped to understand the region). This lack of experience was reflected in some of the statements from the government.
- FCO were quick in sending consular teams to Algeria to support repatriation – in line with current planning procedures.

Casualties

- Hostages:
 - Algeria: 1 reported dead, final figure not released.
 - Colombia: 1 missing.
 - France: 1 dead.
 - UK: 3 dead, 3 missing.
 - Japan: 10 dead.
 - Philippines: 6 dead, 4 missing.
 - Romania: 2 dead.
 - US: 3 dead.
 - Norway: 5 missing.
- Note: Those missing are presumed dead.

- Terrorists:
 - 29 killed
 - 3 captured.



North-Africa - Unstable Region

- Arab Spring of 2011 witnessed overthrow of dictatorships in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.
 - Political tension in Egypt.
 - Continued unrest in Libya.
 - Libyan armouries looted during overthrow of Gadhafi flooding area with weapons.
 - Tuareg mercenaries in Gadhafi's army flee to Sahel, taking stockpiles of weapons with them.
 - On 24 Jan Western governments advised its nationals to leave Libyan city of Tripoli due to substantive terrorist threat.
- Empty spaces of Sahel exploited as safe havens for Al Qaeda linked groups.
- Mali coup of 2012 allowed Tuareg and Islamists insurgents to takeover northern half of the country (roughly the size of Spain).
 - Resulted in French intervention of Jan 13.
- Extant terrorist/insurgent threat throughout region.
 - Links between Al Qaeda groups extend to Al Shabaab in Somalia, and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsular in Yemen.

Threat to Oil and Gas Industry

- There is a risk that In Aménas will inspire other Al Qaeda groups to emulate the attack.
- However, incident will lead to increased security making attacks more difficult.
- Due to the economic importance, and involvement of western (infidel) countries, the industry will remain a very attractive target. Potential methods of attack include:
 - Attacks on pipelines and other exposed infrastructure
 - Attacks on personnel in transit including kidnap.
 - Suicide bomb attacks against entrances.
 - Attempts to penetrate domestic areas in order to directly target westerners.
 - Stand-off attacks against major infrastructure.
- Need to review and update security, including:
 - Perimeter security, including entry points, perimeter and counter-mobility options.
 - Need to consider “insider threat” including terrorists having access to information about sites.
 - Critical incident drills.
 - Movement security.

Future

- It is very unlikely that the attack will see BP or Statoil leave the area.
 - Economically too important.
 - Oil companies are used to operating in high risk environments.
 - Algeria is the third-largest gas exporter to Europe.
- There will be improvements in security making similar attacks more difficult.
 - Deflect attention away to more vulnerable targets.
 - Belmokhtar's group will need time to recover from this operation.
 - Al Qaeda linked groups in North Africa can be expected to attempt to follow this example.
- Attacks by the group in UK considered unlikely, however:
 - Attacks in France, Spain, considered likely due to historic connections (Madrid train bombings conducted by AQIM).
 - Greater threat to UK from Pakistani, Somali, and Nigerian based groups due to historic connections, and pan-Islamic nature of Al Qaeda linked groups.
- Western nations now 'aware' of threat from Maghreb and will focus resources on the area.
 - France will be the lead nation due to historical legacy.
 - UK expected to focus on intelligence, training, and other non-combat support.

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