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**SUBJECT: "Al-Qaida in the Lands of Islamic Maghreb";
Current Operational Profile**

The following information was obtained in the course of the operational activities conducted by Russia's FSB against the "Al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb" (AQIM).

Currently, the leaders of the core "Al-Qaida" are trying to enlarge the scope of their influence by way of using the combat capability of the AQIM which has been posing ever increasing threat to the security of North African and Western European countries as well as to the entire African Continent.

It is commonly believed that the AQIM started to expand its activity upon Mali in 1996; during that year Mokhtar Belmokhtar (currently known as a leader of the AQIM's subsidiary group "Al-Mulatamun") settled down on the Malian territory in the area located between Arekcheheh, Tessalit and Boudjebeha in order to conduct smuggling operations from there.

Over the period of time from 1996 to 2004 the group of Belmokhtar had developed certain subversive capability including the logistical support base near Tigharghar in the north-western part of Mali. The strength of the group grew considerably after the indigenous Tuareg people had started joining its ranks.

Members of the "Al-Qaida" commenced the active infiltration into Mali after the antiterrorist campaign had started in Afghanistan in 2001. Initially the Malian north was selected as the "emergency landing ground" for the "Al-Qaida".

The strategic objectives of the AQIM (currently headed by Abdelmalek Droukdal, a.k.a. "Abou Moussab Abdel Wadoud") are the dissemination of the global jihadist ideology, consolidation of different extremist groups under the slogans of struggle against the United States and their Western European allies, forcible takeover of power and establishment of theocratic states governed by the Sharia' laws to be subsequently comprised within the so-called "Great Caliphate".

In February 2010 Droukdal stated his readiness to support the appeal of the senior leader of the "Al-Qaida" Ayman Al-Zawahiri to stir-up the militant jihad campaign, literally, "to sanitize Maghreb by way of cleaning it of Spanish and French infidels and eventually transfer the battle to the Iberian Peninsula". He specially stressed, that the AQIM will become "a hard bite on which crusaders and renegades would choke" as a result of increasing the scope of subversive activities in Spain, Italy, France, Britain and Germany, and also in Africa, that is Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Somalia and Kenya.

Within the nearest future terrorists will be focusing their main efforts on undermining the economic infrastructure of African countries and foreign companies, including critical pipeline networks, petrochemical and mining industries, R&D institutions and life support systems. Leaders of the AQIM proceed from the presumption that terrorist attacks and acts

of sabotage would inevitably bring about chaos into the everyday life of the society, diminishing the volumes of the investments in the economic development of North Africa by world's leading powers and growing public distrust in the government eventually provoking the change of the regime.

At present armed formations of the AQIM are structurally comprised within the "northern" and "southern" operational sectors. The "northern sector" encompasses Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, where the majority of terrorism-related incidents occur. On the territories of these countries extremists have set up a network of clandestine workshops for the production of remotely-operated IEDs. To proceed with the "mine warfare" against governmental institutions and security forces small groups of experienced saboteurs (5 to 9-man strong), including those who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, are formed.

Prospective plans of the AQIM leadership presume expanding the scope of operational activity at the expense of perpetrating terrorist attacks within the Mediterranean maritime domain. To meet this goal the so-called "Marine Unit" (ca. 60-man strong) was established; it comprises suicide operatives trained in different underwater sabotage techniques (such as planting improvised limpet mines under the hull of a ship) and use of small vessels (schooners) or fast crafts as strike-weapons ("floating bombs") against seaborne targets.

The AQIM is also reported to be seeking ways of developing its own biological weapons to be used for terrorist purposes. According to intelligence reports the laboratory works to that effect had been conducted at a base located in eastern Algeria. Terrorists tried to isolate the pathogenic culture of pneumonic plague (*Yersinia pestis*). However in 2009, after the contamination and death of around 40 militants caused by the improper hermetic conditions at the laboratory, the base was abandoned.

The "southern sector" of the AQIM encompasses remote areas of the Sahara desert (in the south of Algeria) as well as the northern parts of Niger, Mali and Mauritania, where Islamists have been closely collaborating with the armed groups of Tuareg separatists (making bids for the proclaiming of the independent state of Azawad with a prospect of secession from Mali). The AQIM's modus operandi within the "southern sector" includes the redeployment of militants, transfer of illegal migrants, smuggling in arms, ammunition and narcotic drugs, as well as the kidnapping and forcible retention of hostages who in some instances could be executed.

In order to find alternative sources of financing the AQIM maintains contacts with criminal associations. Being inspired by the Afghan terrorists' experience of profiting from heroin trade, Islamists established links with the drug cartels smuggling cocaine from Latin America into West Africa and widely using maritime transportation routes and unregistered private aircraft for that purpose. Through the AQIM's facilitation the drugs of Latin American origin are illegally transported to Western Europe and the United States via the territories of Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Morocco. According to expert assessments currently around 60 percent of cocaine supplies are transited to Europe via West Africa. Even so, the AQIM is making attempts to increase its interest in the profits from drug-trafficking. Extremists have also been gaining proceeds from other types of crime, such as robberies, racketeering, car thefts, burglaries, carding schemes etc.

Recruitment is an integral part of the AQIM strategy. The selection of candidate recruits, including potential suicide operatives, conducted in both Western Europe and Africa, is followed by the training of freshly-recruited militants and their subsequent redeployment to different areas of ongoing jihadist campaigns (Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan). The AQIM recruiters have been purposefully spotting their potential targets among the global jihad sympathizers within the Muslim communities of Europe.

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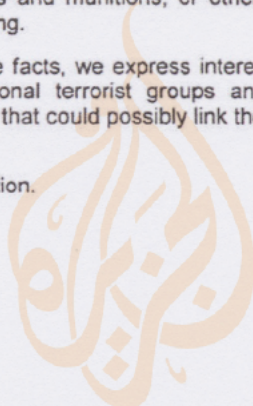
The growing number of socio-economic grievances in the majority of African countries is seen as a facilitating factor in the context of the AQIM's recruitment efforts. Apart from ideology candidate recruits are often driven by monetary incentives. Since recently the AQIM recruiters have been considering the population of the Sahara / Sahel zone (above all Mauritania, Mali and Niger) to be their primary "target group". In particular, Mauritians form the mainstay of the "southern sector". The prison population has also been in the focus of recruiters' attention. In this case the recruitment process takes considerably shorter time, given the typical state of morale and psychological conditions of inmates, who by the time of their release could become highly-motivated "readymade" terrorists.

In general, there is a steady trend of the AQIM transformation into the center of gravity for radicals of Islamist, separatist and criminal orientations who have the ambition to expand their influence far beyond the African Continent. It is expected that the AQIM will be trying to consolidate under its organizational umbrella all extremist outfits operating within an enormous territory of land stretching from Morocco and Guinea in the west to Sudan and Somalia in the east. The apparent inability of some African leaders to impose stricter control of the situation in their countries could be exploited to the benefits of the AQIM; in practical terms this could be done by way of setting up militant recruitment centers and training camps, stockpiling weapons and munitions, or otherwise, establishing channels of arms smuggling and drug-trafficking.

Given the sum of the above facts, we express interest in the joint operational targeting of the African-based international terrorist groups and organizations, as well as in the obtaining of any information that could possibly link them to the bandit militants still active in the North Caucasus.

Thank you for your cooperation.

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