



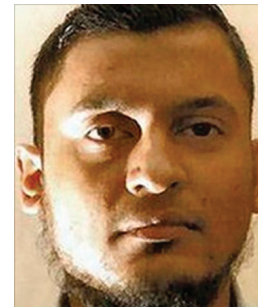
# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Rajib Karim

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## GAMA’A AL-ISLAMIYA LEADER SAYS EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION BELONGS “ONLY TO THOSE WHO IGNITED IT”

An ideological leader of former Egyptian militant group al-Gama’a al-Islamiya (GI - The Islamic Group) recently told a pan-Arab daily that the revolution in Egypt belonged not to the Islamists, but to the “youths of Facebook” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 11). Based in Alexandria, Dr. Najih Ibrahim describes himself as “an Islamic thinker or a preacher calling for Islam,” adding that he is not a politician, nor does he wish to be. Shaykh Ibrahim spent two decades in Egyptian prisons on charges related to the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat.

Ibrahim insisted that the Islamist movement’s role in the revolution had been small and movements such as his own could take little credit for the events that brought down President Mubarak: “This revolution belongs only to those that ignited it. These are the “youths of Facebook”. They called for it, sacrificed for it, and achieved victory. All the others without exception came to the Al-Tahrir Square after the police had left.” In the past, Shaykh Ibrahim has warned of the dangers of the internet, noting the presence of “scattered individuals” who do not take religious instruction from shaykhs, mosques or reputable Islamic groups, finding inspiration instead on the internet, which is now “not only a source of extremist ideology, but also information on how to implement such ideology, providing information on how to manufacture a car bomb or turn normal chemicals into explosives...” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 15).



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According to Ibrahim, the Islamic Group's involvement was limited largely to helping provide security at Tahrir Square and guarding public and private property. "We do not wish to take credit for a victory that we did not achieve or to hijack the efforts of others." On the question of renegeing on the 2003 peace initiative that ended his movement's violence against the state, Ibrahim replied that such a suggestion was "absolutely out of the question. We are committed to the initiative to stop violence regardless of what the coming regime will be."

In his assessment of how the revolution succeeded in rapidly creating conditions in which the resignation of the president became inevitable, Ibrahim noted how demonstrators remained focused on a single message that had broad appeal across a spectrum of political opinions and religious beliefs:

As soon as it erupted, [the revolution] did not raise a religious slogan in order not to be aborted and not to be rejected by many forces in society. It did also did not raise any political slogan in order not to cause differences among the political forces participating in it. It also did not discuss foreign policy. It did not chant against the United States and Israel and did not ask for the abrogation of the Camp David Accords. All this neutralized the foreign forces [that might have supported Mubarak].

Ibrahim's assessment of the revolution contrasted his earlier remarks made on February 3, when the shaykh insisted protests should end as President Mubarak had granted 90% of the demonstrators' demands: "What do we want after that? Do we need chaos or to humiliate the president? This man fought for Egypt for 30 years. I am saying this though I was jailed under his rule with the brothers in the Gama'a Islamiya for more than two decades" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 3).

In viewing Mubarak's rule, Ibrahim credits the ex-president with keeping Egypt out of any major conflicts during his term, particularly avoiding U.S. pressure to participate in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Mubarak had also agreed to the 2003 *sulh* (truce) that resulted in the release of 12,000 Islamist detainees, many of whom had spent more than a decade in prison without trial.

On the other hand, the GI ideologue pointed to the more than 100 Islamists executed by Mubarak's regime, claiming their dispute with the government could have

been solved in a simpler way: "Despite this, we do not absolve some Islamic movements that adopted violence against him of some responsibility."

Ibrahim went on to remark that Mubarak's tenure was "characterized by stagnation and inflexibility in the political, economic, social and religious domains. Mubarak excluded everyone; that is, all the political current... There was a kind of marriage between the regime and the wealth that generated corruption and bribery... Mubarak's regime adopted the policy of suppression and oppression, particularly of the Islamists, for long periods of time. The only exception is the initiative to renounce violence that was a smart model in solving the problems between the state and the Islamists."

#### DEMONSTRATIONS ERUPT IN MOGADISHU AGAINST AL-SHABAAB AND THE TRANSITIONAL FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Following the lead of demonstrators in Egypt and Tunisia, hundreds of Somali youth took to the streets of South Mogadishu on February 13 to denounce both the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad and the Islamist militant movement al-Shabaab, their opponent in the struggle for Somalia's capital.

Under the watchful eye of African Union peacekeepers, the protestors waved Somali flags, chanted slogans expressing their unwillingness to be recruited by either al-Shabaab or the TFG and vowed to continue daily demonstrations "until we achieve our anti-war goals" (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], February 14; Shabelle Media Network, February 13). TFG security forces tried to abort the demonstration by arresting seven organizers a day earlier, but the march occurred as planned.

Mogadishu civilians suffered greater losses in the battle for the city than either of the contesting groups of gunmen. The protest did not appear to have any effect on the warring parties; more than nine civilians were reported killed and 35 injured the next day in the deadly daily crossfire in Mogadishu. There are reports that leaflets condemning both the TFG and al-Shabaab have begun appearing in parts of the city (Radio Gaalkacyo, February 13).

Perhaps confusing a pro-government demonstration for another anti-TFG/al-Shabaab march, a pickup truck full of TFG troops wheeled up to a pro-TFG

rally the following day (February 15) and opened fire on a crowd of hundreds of people carrying pro-government banners, killing four and wounding at least 17 more. The rally had been organized by the Banaadir regional administration and the mayor of Mogadishu, Muhammad Ahmad Tarsan (Mareeg.com, February 15; Somaliweyn, February 15).

The TFG's mandate is set to expire in August without having established its writ over any area larger than a few neighborhoods of Mogadishu, but the Somali parliament has taken a unilateral decision (without consultation of its international partners and supporters) to extend the government's mandate for another three years (Mareeg.com, February 12).

A press release from the Somali Affairs Desk of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi said parliament's decision to "ignore the African Union's request for wide consultation and instead to unilaterally extend its term beyond the end of the transition period is a disservice to the people of Somalia and a setback to the establishment of legitimate and effective government... It serves only to further undermine the credibility of the Parliament and risks strengthening al-Shabaab (Somaliweyn, February 4; CNN, February 5). [1]

Al-Shabaab is also seeking to exploit the spirit of recent demonstrations elsewhere in the Islamic world. An al-Shabaab leader, Shaykh Jama Abdusalam, appealed on local radio for Somalis "to carry out Egyptian and Tunisian style uprisings in Somalia... It is good to take up such revolution against all governments that serve the interests of Western countries. We have to follow Muslims who are fighting for their dignity and religion in Tunisia and Egypt" (Alfurqaan Radio, February 14; *Daily Nation*, February 14). So far, no pro-al-Shabaab demonstrations have been reported in areas controlled by the movement, where most residents are trying to cope with a massive drought and an al-Shabaab ban on international relief efforts.

Note:

1. Matt Goshko, Public Affairs Officer, Somali Affairs Unit, U.S. Embassy, Nairobi - Press Release, February 4, 2011.

## Al-Awlaki Recruits Bangladeshi Militants for Strike on the United States

By Raffaello Pantucci

Rajib Karim, a 31-year-old Bangladeshi national resident in the United Kingdom, pled guilty on January 31 to charges of assisting Bangladeshi terrorist group Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Confessing to helping produce and distribute videos on behalf of the JMB, sending money for terrorist purposes and offering himself for terror training abroad, Karim's admission was made public at the beginning of a trial against him at Woolwich Crown Court in suburban London (*Press Association* [London], January 31; BdNews24.com [Dhaka], February 2).

Founded in 1998, the JMB is the largest extremist group in Bangladesh. The movement has expressed its opposition to democracy, socialism, secularism, cultural events, public entertainment and women's rights through hundreds of bombings within Bangladesh. Though banned in 2005, the movement is believed to still maintain ties with various Islamist groups in the country.

On trial for further charges of preparing acts of terrorism in the UK, it has been suggested in the press that Karim was identified by the Home Secretary as a suspected agent for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (*Press Association*, November 3, 2010). [1]

According to information released at the opening of his trial, Karim first came to the UK in 2006 with his wife to seek a hospital for their child who was sick with what they thought was cancer (*Guardian*, February 2). The child got better and by September of the next year Karim had secured a position in a British Airways trainee scheme in Newcastle. According to the prosecution, he established himself as a sleeper agent in the UK, making "a very conscious and successful effort to adopt this low profile." He kept his beard short, did not become involved in local Muslim groups, did not express radical views, played football locally, went to the gym and was described by people who knew him as "mild-mannered, well-educated and respectful" (*Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, February 2).

Much of the prosecution's information on Karim appears to come from electronic communications between himself and his brother Tehzeeb that the police were able to find on Karim's hard-drive. According to the prosecutor's opening statement, Tehzeeb was also a long-term radical for JMB who travelled in 2009 with two others from Bangladesh to Yemen to seek out Anwar al-Awlaki (*Press Association*, February 1). Once connected with Awlaki, Tehzeeb told the Yemeni-American preacher of his brother. Awlaki recognized the benefits of having such a contact in place and in January 2010, the preacher is said to have emailed Karim, saying "my advice to you is to remain in your current position... I pray that Allah may grant us a breakthrough through you [to find] limitations and cracks in airport security systems." The preacher apparently found the brothers of such importance that he sent them a personal voice message to counter claims of his death that had circulated in December 2009 (*Press Association*, February 2).

It seems as though Karim was in contact with extremist commanders long before this. According to the prosecution's case, anonymous "terror chiefs abroad" wanted him to remain in his British Airways job as far back as November 2007 and to become a "managing director" for them. In an email exchange with his brother at around this time, the two discussed whether a small team could also "be the beginning of another July Seven;" a supposed reference to the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks on London's underground system (*Press Association*, February 2). It is unclear at the moment who these terror chiefs were, though it has been suggested Karim was in contact with Awlaki for more than two years.

By early 2011, Karim had become of greater concern to British police. His emails to his brother indicated that he was becoming restless and wanted to go abroad to fight. He had apparently spoken to his wife about this prospect, reporting to his brother that he "told her if she wants to, she can make hijrah [migration] with me and if the new baby dies or she dies while delivering, it is *qadr Allah* [predestined] and they will be counted as martyrs" (*Press Association*, February 2). He was also exchanging emails with Anwar al-Awlaki that indicated he had made contact with "two brothers [i.e. Muslims], one who works in baggage handling at Heathrow and another who works in airport security. Both are good practicing brothers and sympathize." Awlaki was doubtless pleased to hear this, though he indicated, "our highest priority is the U.S. Anything there, even on a smaller scale compared to what we may do in the

UK, would be our choice" (*Daily Mail*, February 2). It seems likely that the "brothers" referred to were those picked up by police in Slough a month after Karim's arrest, though none were charged (*The Times*, March 4, 2010; *Telegraph*, March 10, 2010).

This message and others turned up after Metropolitan Police, with the assistance of Britain's intelligence agencies, were able to crack the rather complex encryption system that Karim used to store his messages and information on his computers (*Daily Star* [Dhaka], February 15). Much of this now appears to be the foundation of the case against Karim beyond the charges he has already admitted to as a member of JMB. JMB has some history in the UK; acting on a British intelligence tip, Bangladeshi forces raided a charity-run school in March 2009 and found a large cache of weapons and extremist material. One of the key individuals involved in the charity was a figure who is believed to be a long-term British intelligence target. In another case, two British-Bangladeshi brothers allegedly linked to the banned British extremist group al-Muhajiroun were accused of giving the JMB money. [2] In neither case was there evidence the UK was targeted and it seems as though prosecutors in this current case are more eager to incarcerate Karim for his connections with Anwar al-Awlaki and AQAP than for his involvement with JMB abroad.

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Notes:

1. Theresa May speech at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), November 3, 2010, <http://www.rusi.org/news/,ref:N4CD17AFA05486/>.
2. "The Threat from Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh," International Crisis Group, Asia Report no.187, March 1, 2010, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/187\\_the\\_threat\\_from\\_jamaat\\_ul\\_mujahideen\\_bangladesh.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/187_the_threat_from_jamaat_ul_mujahideen_bangladesh.ashx).

## “How I Joined Jihad”: Nigerian Bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab in His Own Words (Part One)

By Murad Batal Al-Shishani

The story of 23-year old Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who attempted to blow up North West Airlines Flight 253 en-route from Amsterdam to Detroit on December 25, 2009, presents a vehicle for distinguishing between political but non-violent radicalization and wholesale conversion to the jihad ideology. It also provides an opportunity to examine the validity of assumptions that suggest British universities are a breeding ground for radicalized groups and a place for recruitment. Abdulmutallab’s story also presents a case for examining the influence of the internet in recruiting young men in the West to Islamist extremism.

A series of studies has suggested UK universities are important places for the recruitment of young Muslim men with inclinations toward radicalism. Abdulmutallab might be seen as an example of this trend; after studying for two years at the University College of London, a number of reports indicate that Abdulmutallab was recruited by Iraqi-born Taimour al-Abdli who also studied in the UK before his suicide bombing in Stockholm a year after Abdulmutallab’s attempt (BBC, December 13, 2010). This led Prime Minister David Cameron to stress the importance of fighting extremism in the nation’s universities (*Guardian*, February 6; BBC, February 7).

However, reading Abdulmutallab’s posts on the English-language “Islam Forum” shows that university recruitment was not necessarily the most important factor in his adoption of extremism. Instead, they shed more light on the role of the internet and the attempts of young, non-Arab Muslims to link themselves to the ummah (Islamic community) and suggest this is more likely to be the paradigm that helps in understanding why such young Muslims join jihad.

This two-part article aims to analyze Abdulmutallab’s posts on the Islam Forum between the years 2005-2007 (precise dates shown at the end of each quote) in order to understand the journey to radicalism.

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab introduces himself as follows:

My name is Umar but you can call me Farouk. I just turned 18 (born in 1986, hence the “Farouk1986.” I come from the Muslim ummah and I permanently live in Nigeria but often come to London. I am in a boarding school with about 30 other Muslims. I’m doing the IB [pre-university] diploma. Insh’Allah, I will finish this year and I plan to head to Stanford University, California to study Engineering, or UC Berkeley or Caltech. Imperial College London gave me an offer, so if I don’t go to Cali, I plan to go to London. I sent a post in the [website’s] counselling forum to get some help. Alhamdulillah, I got some good responses from brothers and sisters. Anyway I get lonely sometimes because I have never found a true Muslim friend. I’m active, I socialize with everybody around me, no conflicts, I laugh and joke but not excessively. I will describe myself as very ambitious and determined, especially in the deen [faith]. I strive to live my daily life according to the Qu’ran and Sunnah to the best of my ability. I do almost everything, sports, TV, books... (of course trying not to cross the limits in the deen) (February 5, 2005). [1]

The signs Umar Farouk showed of his commitment to the Islamic faith in his daily life point to a deep religiosity born of a childhood in northern Nigeria’s Kaduna region where religiosity, *Hisba* (lit. “verification,” referring to the control of the observance of Islamic principles) groups and the application of Shari’a at local levels was prevalent, though Abdulmutallab’s family was wealthy and displayed a tendency to secularism, as he mentions in one of his posts.

His deep religiosity was associated with a feeling of loneliness which emanated from two fundamental concepts; “the search for ummah” and *al-Hijrah* migration to Islamic lands, and the Salafist principle of *al-wala’ wa’l-bara’* (loyalty [towards the believers] and disavowal [of the disbelievers]). These two concepts radicalized Abdulmutallab and made the Salafi-Jihadist discourse more attractive. These two concepts are fundamental in Salafi-Jihadi thought, though the former concept is more common to non-Arab Muslims.

Abdulmutallab wrote of his loneliness and the “dilemmas” he faced as a student in a boarding school with few Muslims:

First of all, I have no friend. Not because I do not socialize, etc., but because either people do not want to get too close to me as they go partying and stuff while I don't, or they are bad people who befriend me and influence me to do bad things. Hence I am in a situation where I do not have a friend, I have no one to speak to, no-one to consult, no-one to support me and I feel depressed and lonely. I do not know what to do. The last thing I want to talk about is my dilemma between liberalism and extremism (January 28, 2005).

Umar Farouk's professed loneliness and alienation drove him to find in cyberspace the "Islamic ummah" mentioned repeatedly in his postings. He believed that the next generations of Muslims would "reunite the ummah" through mixed marriages (January 31, 2005). Abdulmutallab expressed happiness on meeting the ummah, even if only virtually; "I love you all in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood in Islam" (February 10, 2005).

Abdulmutallab's feelings of alienation also reinforced in him the concept of "migration for the sake of God" (*hijrah fi sabil Allah*), which was developed as a political concept by Islamic writer Sayyid Qutb and later adopted by various Islamist groups. The concept has two sides to it; the physical migration to Islamic lands and "migration by rejection," which means that a true Muslim should shun those who are uncommitted.

It seemed that the concept began to take hold progressively in Umar Farouk:

I am new to IF [Islam Forum] and when I first came here, I thought I was the only lonely soul. But after, I realized that almost every good Muslim gets lonely at some point. This I believe is because really there are many Muslims but most are just Muslims by name who do not practice the deen earnestly, leaving the few good Muslims alone. So it's a test we have to strive and go through for the sake of Allah (January 29, 2005).

In addition to the concept of migration, another notion, *al-wala' wa'l-bara'*, began to develop in his mind; "The biggest obstacle I think is the Kafir imposed school system. These guys are just controlling us around anyhow. We ought to have our own systems that will make our ummah do things according to Quran and Sunnah (February 13, 2005).

This alienation was accompanied by another factor—the ideological confusion that Umar Farouk was experiencing. This element will be examined in Part Two.

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Note:

Spelling and typographical errors within Abdulmutallab's messages have been corrected for ease of reading.

## AQIM Operations Threaten Niger's Return to Democracy

By Dario Cristiani

Almost one year after the military coup that overthrew former Nigerien president Mamadou Tandja, the people of Niger are in the process of choosing a new president. One of the most important challenges that the new president will face is the increasing role that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) plays in the impoverished country.

AQIM's Growing Presence in Niger

The recent killings of French citizens Antoine de Léocour and Vincent Delory, abducted in downtown Niamey, as well as the kidnapping in southern Algeria of Italian tourist Maria Sandra Mariani, who was immediately taken by her captors to Niger, demonstrate AQIM's

growing presence in Niger (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 27; Adnkronos, February 4; *El Watan* [Algiers], February 5). In September 2010, seven uranium industry employees of the Areva and Satom companies (including five French, a Togolese and a Malagasy) were abducted and still remain in the hands of their AQIM kidnapers, while in April 2010 AQIM seized French citizen Michel Germaneau in northern Niger before killing him three months later. This sequence shows increased activity in Niger by AQIM and its local criminal associates. Since Niger is a structurally weak and poor country, the emergence of this threat could represent a major problem for the new president.

### The Democratic Transition

Nigeriens voted to choose a new president on January 31, though results were not announced by the electoral commission until February 4. Mahamadou Issoufou, leader of the Parti Nigérien pour la démocratie et le socialisme (PNDS) won 36% of the votes, while Seïni Oumarou, former prime minister from 2007 to 2009 and the candidate of Mamadou Tandja's Mouvement national pour la société de développement (MNSD), came in second with 23%. These are the two candidates that will contest the March 12 run-off, with results expected to be announced on April 4 (*Courrier International* [Paris], February 1; Afrik.com, February 4).

Legislative elections held at the same time gave the PNDS 39 of 113 seats, while the MNSD was second with 26 MPs (Tamtam.info, February 3). The elections have so far been considered free and fair by observers from the European Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Tamtaminfo, February 2; AFP, February 2).

### The Nigerien Context

Shortly after the kidnappings of the two Frenchmen in Niamey, European governments released several statements concerning the increased risks for its citizens in Niger. On January 9, the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry recommended avoiding any kind of travel in the country. [1] France did the same with an announcement on its Foreign Affairs Ministry website. [2] Niger is facing the same problem as Mali; even though the number of kidnappings is low compared to places such as Central and South America, the al-Qaeda label makes them far more worrisome for Western governments (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 28, 2010).

Niger is among the poorest countries of the world according to a number of indices:

- It ranked 167 out of 169 in the latest United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report. [3]
- Its Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is 0.64 – on a scale from 0 to 0.7 – the worst worldwide. According to this index, Niger's poor represent 92.7% of the population. [4]
- The 2010 Failed State Index ranked Niger 20th out of 60 countries at "risk." Among the twelve indicators, Niger scored the worst in public services (9.7/10) and has very poor performances regarding demographic pressure (9.6/10), economic decline (9.2/10) and destabilization of the state (8.9/10). Here, Niger is described as likely the poorest country worldwide and one in which public authority lacks any ability to provide services such as education and health care. [5] Moreover, in the past few years, the country has suffered several environmental disasters which further worsened the economic and health conditions of the population.

The most important economic resource for Niger is its uranium deposits, which rank in the top five internationally. Another important economic resource for the country is represented by tourism; the Sahara desert and the Niger River represent two main attractions for tourists, most of whom come from Europe.

### AQIM's Impact on Niger

AQIM's threat to Niger emerged in late 2008, when two Canadian diplomats were abducted before being released in April 2009. Niger is one of the areas in which the two main Sahelian factions of AQIM, led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Abdelhamid Abu Za'id, struggle for money, prestige and influence. Belmokhtar has been accused of being the organizer of the abductions of Léocour and Delory in Niamey (*Le Parisien*, January 12). Abu Za'id is believed to hold the uranium industry hostages taken in September (France 24, September 23, 2010). A major feature of AQIM activities in the past few months has been the increasing rivalry between its Sahelian factions, which act autonomously from the central leadership.

The structural weakness of Niger makes it particularly attractive for the pursuit of illegal activities. To assess the correct impact of AQIM on Niger, however, the political dimension of the threat should be separated from the security dimension. On the political level, AQIM does not represent a consistent or existential threat to the country. AQIM's ability to provide a true political alternative in Niger is extremely low. More than other regional groups linked to al-Qaeda, AQIM seems to be absolutely incapable of playing a truly political role in the theaters in which it operates, failing to provide a clear political program.

AQIM also lacks the capacity to be the catalyst of dissatisfaction and rage against governments in power. Moreover, the consistent lack of any attempt to "Africanize" the different levels of AQIM leadership is a major blow for AQIM penetration in the area. Despite its increasing regional role in the Sahel, AQIM remains an Algerian organization in its leadership. AQIM recruits new members in the Mauritania, Mali and Niger, but these are little more than gunmen having few, if any, opportunities to climb the internal hierarchy of the group.

AQIM seems to be simply a group focused on illegal and parasitic activities. The threat for Niger is thus strictly related to security issues. Niamey has few resources to devote to confronting these groups and has a very low ability to secure effective control of its territories and its borders. The latest kidnappings, which occurred in the downtown Niamey Plateau district, supposedly one of the best guarded areas in the country, demonstrate this weakness (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 28).

The widespread poverty in Niger can provide fuel for AQIM activities, but not in terms of political proselytism. Unemployed youth could join the organization striving to get a salary. The high ransoms paid by European governments to save their citizens make the "kidnapping industry" very attractive and lucrative. Getting a slice of this business does not necessarily mean that people have to be involved within AQIM; they simply need a connection with AQIM leaders to sell hostages to the group. This industry creates an army of local mediators, which try to get as much as they can using their local connections. Widespread poverty also makes it easier to corrupt local officials and police.

Moreover, there is another aspect to take into consideration- the impact of kidnappings on the economic activities of the country. In late January, Areva

and Satom announced the reduction of their foreign workforce in the country. Areva, whose main stakeholder is the French government, is the most important player in the Nigerien uranium sector, owning 63% of the Société des Mines de l'Air (SOMAIR) and 34% of Compagnie Minière d'Akouta (COMINAK), the two joint ventures created to exploit Niger's uranium resources.

Access to uranium is a strategic interest for France. Paris needs Nigerien uranium to supply its own civil reactors and to sustain its nuclear weapons program. France is also the major external player in the country because of its past colonial ties and continuing economic interests. Even though Areva's monopoly ended in 2007, with the entrance of Chinese and Indian companies in this market, it still remains the most important actor in this field. A further deterioration of security conditions could lead Areva to increasingly reduce its involvement in the country, leading France to rely on other, safer countries to satisfy its uranium needs. Security developments could also impact the tourism industry; in January 2011, the chief of Point Afrique, Maurice Freund, decided to stop the organization of travel to the Sahel. Point Afrique was one of the main operators in this sector, promoting, moreover, a responsible and sustainable tourism sector based on respect for the local people (*Le Quotidien du Tourisme*, January 11; *Sud Ouest*, January 13). The impact of the kidnappings could even outlast the restoration of security in Niger and a reduction in AQIM activities, as tourists would need some time to restore their trust and confidence in Niger's ability to guarantee safe journeys and stays.

### Conclusion

The trends of the past few months seem to be clear. AQIM activities in the country have increased and its structural weakness makes it a perfect base for AQIM factions and their local associates that use Niger to conduct kidnappings or house hostages taken elsewhere. AQIM is a security threat and not a political one since it has only a limited capacity to provide a suitable political alternative to the existing government. However, AQIM will represent a top priority in the agenda of the next Nigerien president because of the impact it has on the security of country and, above all, the economy. The uranium and tourism industries could be the targets of a sort of "economic jihad" against strategic economic infrastructures, following al-Qaeda doctrines. To avoid losing its legitimacy as a sovereign government, Niger must reduce the risk of foreign intervention to restore security and stability by safeguarding its few economic



interests while improving its effectiveness in counter-terrorism efforts. These will be among the major challenges that Niger's new civilian government must address in the next few months.

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Notes:

1. Ministero Degli Affari Esteri, January 9, 2011; <http://www.viaggiaresecuri.it/index.php?niger>.
2. Le Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes, February 11, 2011; [http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-aux-voyageurs\\_909/pays\\_12191/niger\\_12300/index.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-aux-voyageurs_909/pays_12191/niger_12300/index.html).
3. <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NER.html>.
4. Alkire, Sabina & Maria Emma Santos. 2010. Niger Country Briefing. Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Multidimensional Poverty Index Country Briefing Series. Available at: [www.ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/mpi-country-briefings](http://www.ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/mpi-country-briefings).
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