

An Introduction to a Special Issue of Strategic Insights: Analyses of the *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC)

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by [Thomas H. Johnson](#)

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Introduction

During the Spring Quarter of 2006, the Department of National Security Affairs of the Naval Postgraduate School introduced a new graduate seminar entitled *Modeling Terrorism: New Analytical Approaches*. This course was designed to introduce the seminar students to a variety of analytic methods which could be used to organize their thinking about and approach to terrorism research. One objective of the course was to introduce the students to heuristics and techniques that would allow them to model or simulate terrorist dynamics in any number of virtual environments. The course aimed at sharpening the students' analytic skills and equipping them with tools for actionable analysis to commanders and policymakers confronting questions concerning terrorism. Substantively, the course focused its attention on the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (the *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*, or GSPC), a terrorist organization active in west and north Africa.

This special edition of *Strategic Insights* presents four articles that represent products of this course and subsequent research. As will be suggested below, these articles explicitly explore aspects and dynamics concerning GSPC operations, financing, recruitment, and narratives.[1] Before introducing these articles, however, I would first like to introduce the reader to the GSPC and set a context for the articles that follow.

The GSPC organized sometime between 1996 and 1998 as an offshoot of the *takfiri* group, Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The GSPC was ostensibly organized due to disagreement over the targeting of civilians, a widespread GIA tactic the GSPC found unpalatable. Nonetheless, the GSPC retained the GIA's primary objective of overthrowing the government in Algiers and installing an Islamist state.[2] While most observers agree the GSPC's Algerian operations are in decline,[3] the group's leadership vehemently denies this claim.[4] Although the GSPC historically confined its operations to Algeria, today the organization appears to be expanding throughout North Africa.[5] Additionally, the GSPC has reportedly "taken over the GIA's external networks across Europe." [6] Evidence also links the GSPC to Ahmed Ressam, an Algerian convicted of attempting to attack Los Angeles International Airport in December 1999.[7] The GSPC further alarmed observers in September 2003, when the group's leader declared allegiance to al

Qaeda.[8] More recently, Canadian authorities dismantled a GSPC cell in Toronto in November 2005.[9] The increasingly global nature of the GSPC threat makes it an important and timely subject for counterterrorism research.

History of GSPC

The beginnings of what would eventually become the GSPC date back to the early 1930s with the foundation of the Algerian Ulama under French colonial rule. The purpose of the foundation was to provide a basic social service structure without any political purpose.[10] During the 1930s, the foundation slowly shifted more toward political involvement in its efforts to create political and economic equality in the colony. In November 1954, after the Algerian War of Independence, members of the association were divided between those who supported an armed struggle against the government and those who opposed such an effort. Although the Ulama remained non-violent, in 1982 the Algerian Islamic Armed Movement (MAIA) took a more militant approach. MAIA called for the establishment of an Islamist state, through violence if necessary, in order to resolve economic and social inequities.[11]

In 1989, Algeria adopted a new constitution that granted Algerians the right to form political parties. A group of Islamist Algerians wasted little time in forming the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Eventually, the FIS rejected the idea of democracy and re-focused its agenda on the establishment of an Islamic state. After a FIS victory in the 1991 Algerian national elections, the National Assembly President resigned and military High Security Council (HCE) assumed power. The HCE abolished the electoral process and dissolved the FIS.[12]

Although the FIS was finished as a political party, after its dissolution elements from the FIS reconstituted themselves as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). This group would go on to become the most radical and extreme terrorist group in Algeria, engaging in a violent campaign to overthrow the secular Algerian government. In doing so, the GIA targeted indiscriminately, engaging not only governmental and military targets but also civilians. In 1996 the campaign reached its peak. The GIA massacred thousands of Algerian civilians for their suspected support of the Algerian regime and opposition to the GIA. Some estimates put the death toll from these GIA attacks at nearly 150,000.[13] The GIA's violence against Algerian civilians eventually led to an organizational schism. In 1996, Hassan Hattab (a.k.a., Abu Hamza) split from the GIA and formed the GSPC.[14] The group distinguished itself from the GIA by condemning the latter's attacks on Algerian civilians. Accordingly, the GSPC shifted the focus of its operations by limiting its targeting to military, police, and other government entities.

The leadership and size of the GSPC both have fluctuated since its inception. Hattab resigned as the leader of the GSPC in 2001 due to an ideological disagreement among the Islamists. The organization's current leader, Abd al-Malik Druqdal (a.k.a., Abu Musab Abd al-Wadud) is still at odds with Hattab, even issuing a fatwa against Hattab on 9 February 2005. As for organizational strength, the GSPC initially comprised approximately 700 fighters. Membership grew to as high as 4000 around the 2002 timeframe.[15] Experts estimate the organization's present day strength at somewhere between 300 and 500 fighters.[16]

These extreme fluctuations in GSPC strength are the result of not only from operational attrition, but also liberal government amnesty programs. In September 2000, a national referendum approved the Civil Concord amnesty for those opposed the government during the 1990s.[17] In September 2005, another referendum approved the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation amnesty, targeting Islamist forces. Additionally, this program exempted security forces from prosecution for crimes committed in the 1990s and compensated victims of violence and the families of the disappeared.[18]

Social and Economic Context

Social and economic factors have also had a significant impact on the support base for Algerian terrorist groups, affecting their ability to recruit and conduct operations. Throughout the 1990s Algeria suffered from a host of problems, including high unemployment and underemployment; inadequate housing, health services, and education; eroding infrastructure; inequality of income distribution; and government corruption. Today, the government is attempted to address these endemic issues with some success. A plan is currently in place to spend \$60 billion from 2005-2009 on infrastructure, housing, and social projects.[19] Nonetheless, the government has its work cut out for it. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World Factbook 2005*, Algerian gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$7,200. Furthermore, although unemployment in Algeria has declining recently as a result of high oil prices, the unemployment rate is still 22.5 percent.[20] In 2005, a United Nations Human Development Report ranked Algeria 103 out of 177 for health, education, and standard of living.[21]

Hydrocarbons drive the Algerian economy, providing 60 percent of budget revenue and accounting for 30 percent of the GDP. Algeria has the fifth largest natural gas reserves in the world and ranks second among gas exporting nations. Recent high oil prices have boosted economic growth, reduced the unemployment rate, and allowed Algeria to repay some of its foreign debt. Economic growth is expected to continue as the government plans to increase crude oil output from 1.5 million to 2 million barrels per day by 2010.[22]

Despite the socioeconomic challenges facing Algeria, domestic support for the GSPC is currently low. This lack of support stems from the GSPC's reversion to violence against the civilian populace. The organization targets civilians for two reasons. First, the GSPC will often force civilians to listen to their Islamist rhetoric as a crude attempt to spread their ideology. Second, the organization targets civilians with the objective of acquiring resources. Inexplicably, the GSPC sometime combines these two objectives during one attack. For example, in May 2006 GSPC members raided a café in town of Ouled Rabah. "Once surrounded, the customers were forced to listen to a bloodthirsty sermon" before the terrorists "ordered the targeted people to pay them major sums of money." [23]

GSPC Structure and Operations

The GSPC structure consists of nine zones. A GSPC-appointed emir is in charge of each zone.[24] The two most critical zones are the First Region, which borders Algiers to the east, and the Ninth Region, which consists of most of the southwestern portion of Algeria. Mokhtar Belmokhtar operates in this region, facilitating smuggling operations for drugs, arms and cigarettes.[25] Other elements of the GSPC are organized along functional lines. For example, Sakir Adil performed websites services for the GSPC while living in Syria. One other significant functional task is facilitating GSPC support for insurgent operations in Iraq. To carry out these duties, the GSPC recently formed a subgroup called the Organization of al Qaeda in the Land of Berbers.[26]

The operational scope of the GSPC extends beyond the borders of Algeria. Evidence suggests that the GSPC has formed relatively self contained cells through Europe in France, Italy, Spain, and Britain.[27] Of these countries, Italy and Spain suffer the highest levels of GSPC activity. Some experts assess that Italy has become a forward logistical base for operational activities throughout Europe.[28] European GSPC cells collaborate on logistical issues, weapons procurement, communications, and propaganda. For example, Italian counter-terrorism investigations reveal GSPC members in Italy were producing false documentation to enable travel to France, Norway, and other northern European Countries.[29] The group has declared France its primary European target.[30]

Evidence also suggests the existence of a network of GSPC funding sources throughout Europe. Spanish authorities arrested several GSPC operatives suspected of funneling crime money to

back to Algeria and to other locations abroad. Algerians suspected of having ties to GSPC are routinely arrested across Europe for illegal fundraising activities and plotting operations against European governments.[31]

London-based Algerian Haydar Abd Doha was instrumental in the formation of GSPC cells throughout Europe. The Afghan-trained Doha was one of the first to push for the GSPC split from the GIA. He refocused the organizations recruitment efforts on the disenfranchised Algerian youth resident in various European cities.[32] Doha collaborated with Algerian leaders in Germany and Italy to recruit radical militants left behind from previous conflicts such as Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan. He also worked to enable the GSPC's takeover of pre-existing GIA networks across Europe and North Africa in the late 1990s.[33]

Despite its sprawling European infrastructure, evidence of ties between GSPC and al Qaeda are tenuous at best. In addition to ideological similarities between the groups, numerous sources connect the GSPC with al Qaeda through GIA participation in Afghan training camps during the 1990s. Others assert that the GSPC's shift away from brutal attacks on fellow Muslims attracted the financial and logistical support of al Qaeda.[34] Some even claim the GSPC was formed by Osama Bin Laden himself. French intelligence and the U.S. State Department sources have indicated close cooperation between the two groups.[35] Close to half of the Islamic extremists arrested in Europe who claim ties to al Qaeda have been associated with the GSPC.[36] Furthermore, in September 2003 the GSPC announced its support for al Qaeda, claiming it was now under the direction of Mullah Omar.[37]

While some evidence supporting GSPC ties to al Qaeda does exist, an interview with former GSPC leader Hattab paints a different picture. Hattab refers to Bin Laden's influence as a source of contention within the GSPC. He accuses bin Laden of post-dating his involvement in the GSPC. The al Qaeda leader has demonstrated an affinity toward claiming affiliation with movements around the world, particularly after a successful attack.[38] Given Hattab's perspective, GSPC allegiance to al Qaeda may simply be an effort by the GSPC to open the door to additional funding and resources.

Still, some conclude that the GSPC's allegiance and ties to al Qaeda indicate the organization is "de-nationalizing" and shifting to international Islamic terrorism. Several sources indicate the GSPC is providing support to the insurgency in Iraq. This support began with ideological and propaganda messages posted on the GSPC website expressing strong sympathy for the Iraqi cause, including a call for Algerians to travel to Iraq and join the insurgency.[39] The GSPC has facilitated the movement of Algerians to Iraq to join the insurgency. While it is possible that these Algerians are traveling to Iraq in hopes of obtaining valuable training with the intent to return to Algeria, most of them are being used as suicide bombers.[40]

Volume Contents

The first article of this volume of *Strategic Insights* authored by Maj Cliff Gyves and Maj Chris Wyckoff titled "Algerian Group Salafiste de la Predication et le Combat (Salafi Group for Call and Combat, GSPC): An Operational Analysis" represents a detailed analysis of GSPC operations based on open source data systematically gathered from a variety of sources. Over 2,400 articles on the GSPC were identified and from these articles 405 events attributable to GSPC or affiliates were coded representing a timeframe beginning January 1, 1996 to the present. Data were gathered on GSPC operational details such as date, tactic, target, harm/resource, geo coordinate, and source. Hence both temporal and well as spatial considerations of GSPC operations could be systematically analyzed. While the veracity of the data may be questioned, it is assumed that biases in the data are randomly distributed and should not have a significant impact on the trends of these data. The research presented in this article subjects these data to a variety of descriptive statistics in order to clearly and systematically define characteristics of the GSPC in an attempt to

“know thy enemy.” Beginning in 2005 GSPC called for attacks on French and U.S. interests outside of Algeria. This research also explores the analysis of a number of hypotheses concerning GSPC operations and the examinations GSPC behavioral trends and vulnerabilities are assumed to have policy and tactical relevance to counterterrorist strategies.

The second article authored by Maj Alex Grynkewich and Maj Chris Reifel, “Modeling Jihad: A System Dynamics Model of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat Financial Subsystem,” presents a system dynamics simulation model of the GPSC’s financial subsystem. Using a political economy framework to model the GSPC financial subsystem, this model is used by Grynkewich and Reifel to innovatively address the feedback between GSPC finances and the mode and method of the group’s operations. The particular focus of this article is the use of a simulation of the GSPC financial subsystem to identify key vulnerabilities within the terrorist organization created by potentially conflicting preferences within the terrorist organization. As such, the model enables a fuller understanding of the GSPC by answering questions concerning how funding affects the quantity and type of GSPC operations, how the financial and operational aspects of the organization change over its life cycle (from gestation, to growth, to maturation, and decline or death), and what policymakers should expect next from the GSPC. Finally, the model enables exploratory analysis of different counter-terrorism financing (CTF) policy options. As a non-linear cognitive tool, the model allows for the full range of effects from different policy choices, not only the effects they intended. The article concludes with an interesting discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the analytic approach chosen to assess the GSPC financial system.

Keely Fahoum and LT Jonathan Width’s “Marketing Terror: Effects of Anti-Messaging on GSPC Recruitment,” presents research concerning GSPC recruitment efforts. This article explores the social mobilization of the GSPC (framing strategies in particular), as well as the group’s psychology of advertising and marketing and terrorist recruitment. The article also assesses GSPC recruitment strategies and an assessment of the targeting used by the group to acquire committed joiners. The article next presents a discussion of an agent based model of an artificial population programmed with certain levels of receptivity based on perceptions of legitimacy for given governments (Algeria and France respectively). This model, in the form of a pseudo-environment, is used to assess the impact of inputs representing narratives and counter-narratives on artificial population, in part, to assess the impact of messaging by GSPC recruiters and anti-messaging used by Algeria and France. The article concludes with a series of recommendations emanating from the research.

The final article of this special edition of *Strategic Insights* by Maj Tara A. Leweling and CDR Otto Seiber, “Calibrating a Field-level, Systems Dynamics Model of Terrorism’s Human Capital Subsystem: GSPC as Case Study” represents a heuristic inquiry in the form of a systems dynamics model for describing the flow of persons through the terrorism field. Systems dynamics is emerging as an important tool for field-level inquiry into terrorism. Using data coded from news reports, Leweling and Seiber demonstrate how a systems dynamics model of terrorism’s human capital subsystem can be calibrated to a specific terrorist organization. The article also demonstrates how the model might be extended to explore two variables associated with the decline of terrorist groups: 1) the presence of an amnesty program and 2) enhanced information sharing agreements with a foreign country. The systematic calibration of the model suggests that misattributing causal explanations to flows within terrorism’s human capital subsystem has deleterious effects on model integrity. The article concludes that counterterrorism analysts would be well served to be circumspect and highly parsimonious when adding causal factors into their conceptual and computational models of terrorism, or when such circumspection is not possible, to subject their models to aggressive and systematic empirical testing. Leweling and Seiber introduce a rudimentary Recruitment Estimate Technique (RET) to assist with model calibration that may be of use to other researchers.

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40. *Ibid.* Estimates place the percentage suicide bombings performed by Algerians as high as 20 percent.

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