“A new phase in the war on terror?”

Analysis of the terrorist attack on In Amenas (Algeria) and events in northern Mali

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The International State Crime Initiative (ISCI) is a cross-disciplinary research centre. Our staff team incorporates backgrounds in law, criminology, and the social sciences. We aim to introduce new perspectives to the field of human rights research, which has traditionally been focussed on legal theory and mechanisms, but today exists as an intersection of academic fields.

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Introduction

The two incidents that are the subject of this analysis refer to two related events, namely France’s sudden and unexpected military intervention in Mali on January 11 and the terrorist attack on the Tigantourine gas plant near In Amenas in the Algerian Sahara, which was launched five days later on January 16.

My initial analysis of these two events was written for professional clients almost immediately after their occurrence. This version, my first published analysis and assessment of these events, was written specifically for the International State Crime Initiative (ISCI) website some two weeks later. It does not differ much from my initial analysis, at least in its broad, overall conclusions, particularly in regard to the ‘Who’ and ‘Why’ questions of the In Amenas attack. It does, however, benefit from the analysis of both further information that has come to light since the In Amenas attack and the unfolding course of events in Mali as France has led, with noticeable lack of support from other western powers, a determined military assault to rid the country of the Islamist terrorists (‘insurgents’) that took over northern Mali (Azawad) during 2012 and who, on January 10, launched an offensive that threatened the capital, Bamako, itself.

I should begin by emphasising that neither of these two events can be fully understood without a firm grasp of what has been going on in this region since 2002 (some would say earlier). That background, which cannot be dwelt on here, is documented in detail in The Dying Sahara (Pluto Press, March 2013)[2]. That volume is the sequel to my first
volume on the subject of the global war on terror (GWOT) in the Sahara-Sahel, namely *The Dark Sahara* (Pluto Press, 2009).

In both those books, as well as in several dozen other publications and broadcasts since 2003, I have predicated and warned that US foreign policy and actions in this part of the world, combined with the complicit support of other Western government and the actions of the US proxy power in the region, Algeria, would lead to a Sahara-wide conflagration. That conflagration would now appear to have begun.

I will deal first with the In Amenas attack before turning to the situation in Mali, highlighting especially the links between Algeria’s secret police, the DRS (*Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité*) and the Islamist terrorists who had taken over northern Mali and who have been blamed for the In Amenas attack.

**The In Amenas terrorist attack**

In Amenas is Algeria’s third largest gas field. The Tigantourine plant is operated by BP, Statoil and Sonatrach (Algeria’s national oil company) and is located 40 kms SW of In Amenas and 80 kms as the crow flies from the Libyan border. Many details of the attack on the plant, which began around dawn on January 16 and continued for some four days, are still not known. One reason for this has been the unwillingness of the Algerian authorities to release more than a minimum of information, much of which is unverifiable and is almost certainly ‘disinformation’. Indeed, it seems that the most reliable information on what actually happened at the plant has come from piecing together the reports of those foreign nationals who survived the attack. Also, much of the information held by BP and Statoil cannot yet be released, not simply because of company confidentialities, but because inquests and other legal matters are still pending. What we do know is that some eighty people were killed in the attack. These comprised at least 49 foreign nationals and some 31 terrorists (possibly 28 with three taken captive).
My immediate reaction to the attack was that it was either a catastrophic failure of Algeria’s intelligence-security system or collusion, or a combination of both. Let me explain.

**Intelligence-security failure**

Algeria’s DRS is probably one of the world’s most ruthlessly efficient intelligence service: it rarely ‘fails’. There is little that happens or moves in Algeria, its Saharan regions, or in neighbouring countries, that is not known to the DRS. Its informants and operatives are ‘everywhere’. In an interview published on October 19, 2012, former Algerian Prime Minister Sid Ahmed Ghozali (The PM put in charge by the Generals at the time of the 1992 coup), described the DRS, including all its paid and other informers, as an organisation of 2 million people.

Moreover, security in the Algerian Sahara, especially in its border regions and around its oil and gas facilities, is rigorous. There has never been a substantive attack on an Algerian oil or gas facility, even in the ‘civil war’ (‘Dirty War’) of the 1990s. Since 2011, Algeria claims to have at least 7,000 gendarmes of the GGF (Gendarmerie garde-frontières) in defensive position along the Algerian-Libyan border, as well as over 20,000 troops in the 4th and 6th two military region, namely Ouargla and Tamanrasset. The fourth region is responsible for guarding the Hasi Messaoud and In Amenas oil and gas fields and the Libya border region. The sixth region covers Algeria’s southern border regions adjoining Mali and Niger. Both commands contain several military bases with air facilities designed to undertake helicopter and fixed-wing aerial attacks, air transportation and surveillance.

In explaining where the terrorists had come from, the Algerian government, through the personage of Dahou Ould Kablia, the Minister of the Interior, presented the world with an extraordinary demonstration of complete ineptitude, no doubt resulting from a mixture of disinformation and confusion within the state’s security-intelligence services. Ould Kablia’s first response was to state that the attack did not come from Libya. Then, in an article published in *Liberté*, the paper’s deputy editor, Mounir B
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(Boudjemaa), a leading mouthpiece of the DRS, confirmed that the attack had come from Libya. This seems to have been confirmed by Ould Kablia. Then, following an official denial later in the day from the Libyan government, the Interior Minister attempted to clarify the situation by saying that the attackers had come from Aguelhok in northern Mali, crossing the Algerian-Malian and then the Algeria-Niger frontiers (a bit of a geographical contortion) before getting to the Tigantourine gas plant via places the Minister named as ‘Abid’ and ‘Ijil’. The trip across the desert was said to have taken two months.

If the attackers had come from Mali, whether via Niger or not, they would had to have crossed well over a 1,000 kms of Algerian territory. Most analysts who know Algeria (rather than relying on second hand information) know that security in those parts of Algeria is so thick on the ground (and in the air) that such a journey would have been virtually impossible without the collusion of the security services.

When the Algerian authorities realised the implausibility of this version of events, they plumped for the Libya option, which has now become the ‘official’ entry route. If the attackers had crossed from Libya, as the Algerian authorities now claim, the authorities must explain (i) how the attackers were able to cross a border which is not only ‘closed’ but allegedly heavily guarded by the more than Algerians because of the post-Gadaffi arms trafficking from Libya and (ii) how they were able to travel across a region which Algeria has claimed to be under ‘maximum security’. In Amenas, after all, is one of Algeria’s key gas producing regions.

Therefore, not only is it virtually impossible to enter into and travel across Algeria’s desert regions undetected, but it has widely been assumed that the Tigantourine plant, like Algeria’s other oil and gas facilities, was virtually impenetrable.

However, evidence indicates that the border was almost totally unsecured, as was the plant itself. Why? What happened to Algeria’s much vaunted and near impregnable security system?
Collusion

The reason why any analyst who knows Algeria would immediately suspect ‘collusion’ is because probably the majority of ‘terrorist’ incidents within Algeria since 2002/3 (as in the 1990s) have involved some degree of collusion between the DRS and the ‘terrorists’ involved in the operation.

Indeed, this is the problem that John Schindler – a senior US intelligence officer, 10-year member of the US National Security Council and the current head of Security Studies at the US Naval War College – tried to bring to the attention of Western governments and intelligence services in July last year and again in the wake of the In Amenas incident. In July 2012, Schindler called it “The Ugly Truth about Algeria”. After In Amenas, he spoke of “Algeria’s hidden hand”, drawing attention to the parallel between Algeria’s DRS and Pakistan’s ISI and the problems that the ISI’s relationship with the Taliban has caused for the US and the West in general.

This ‘collusion’ usually takes one, or a combination of, five forms:

- The establishment of ‘terrorist’ cells/units by the DRS, in which the leadership of the unit is linked to the DRS, either as a DRS officer/agent, associate, accomplice or in some other such way. In these units, the ‘foot soldiers’ are mostly genuine ‘jihadi-salafists’. Such known ‘DRS-affiliated’ terrorist leaders include: Abdelhamid abou Zaid, Yahia Djouadi, El Para (Lamari Saifi), Mokhtar ben Mokhtar (Belmokhtar), Iyad ag Ghaly (and his cousin Hamada ag Hama, dubbed ‘Le Taleb/Le Touareg Abdoulkrim’), Sultan Ould Badi, Mohamed Lamine Bouchneb and, no doubt, many others. Most of these ‘identities’ have many aliases.
- The infiltration of genuine terrorist cells by the DRS;
- DRS units masquerading as terrorists;
- False-flag incidents of various sorts, some of which are completely fictionalized (i.e. did not happen)
- The press-ganging and training of marginalised and psychologically disturbed youths who are in various degrees of alienation from their communities across North Africa (and even further afield). They are held in camps deep in the Algerian Sahara where they are trained and indoctrinated to commit atrocities in Algerian communities with which they have no connection. These
youths are generally executed after they perform their tasks, or before if they give any hint of dissent. Evidence of such training camps is documented in *The Dying Sahara*. More evidence of these camps has come to light since going to press.

Examples and details of many such ‘fabricated’, ‘false flag’ or ‘fictionalised’ terrorist incidents in the Sahara-Sahel since 2002 are documented in *The Dying Sahara*.

**The alleged perpetrators of the In Amenas attack**

The In Amenas attack is alleged by the Algerian authorities to have been masterminded by Mokhtar ben Mokhtar (MBM), alias Khaled Abou al-Abbas and often known as Laouer (*le borgne*) as a result of his lost eye. Aside from MBM, the Algerian authorities have named several of the terrorist leaders involved in the attack. More or less in order of media appearance, they have been: Bara Al Jazaïri, alias Abou Walid, Abou Doujana, Abdel Rahman al-Nigiri and Mohamed Lamine Bouchneb, also known as Taher. None of these can be verified at this stage, especially as the Algerian authorities are known for their disinformation.

A few days after the attack, Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalik Sellal said that a Canadian known as Chedad was one of the leaders of the attack. While one Frenchman and one or two Canadians are said to have been identified as being amongst the attackers, and my own research information on the composition of AQIM camps in northern Mali in December revealed the presence of a number of French-speakers – presumed to be ‘westerners’ – there must be doubts over their leadership roles. There are also doubts about the identities of both Abou Walid and Abou Doudjana.

Rather, it seems that the actual leaders of the attack were Abdel Rahman al-Nigiri and Mohamed Lamine Bouchneb. But, as with so many of the Algeria’s ‘terrorists’, especially those linked to the DRS, no certainty can be placed on their real identities. While there are doubts about the identity of Abdel Rahman, which is almost certainly an alias, there is increasing evidence that Bouchneb may have been the main leader of the In Amenas operation. Indeed, the one name (aside from MBM) that has come to the fore over the last two weeks, and on whom much of this analysis focuses, has been that of Mohamed Lamine Bouchneb.
In summary, the general consensus, promoted by the Algerian authorities and seemingly accepted by virtually all the media, is that the mastermind of the attack was 40-year-old Mokhtar ben Mokhtar (MBM) (Belmokhtar), with Bouchneb being his key ‘lieutenant’ on the ground.

Questions about Mokhtar ben Mokhtar (MBM)

While I am inclined to accept that MBM may have been the mastermind, or at least one of the masterminds of the In Amenas attack, although he was not present in person, it should not be taken as a simple fact.

There are several reasons for saying this.

The first is the small matter of whether he is actually alive. I am inclined to think that he is, especially following the statement of Roque Pascal, one of MBM’s former hostages, that was published after the In Amenas attack (see below). The reason for my initial doubt is that MBM’s death has been reported by the Algerian authorities on seven occasions since the mid-1990s. That is why he is sometimes also known as “le phantôme”.

The last reported account of his death was June 26, 2012, when he was allegedly hit in the chest by an RPG (rocket propelled grenade) during fighting between the Tuareg MNLA and Islamists at Gao. However, the MNLA, who claimed to have killed him, did not photograph the corpse. However, the death was widely reported by Liberté’s ‘Mounir B’ (Boudjemaa). If MBM was not killed on June 26, as now appears to be the case, the question that has to be asked is: Why did the DRS want him reported dead?

Since his latest reincarnation, MBM has also changed his modus operandi. In his nearly 20 years of outlaw activity prior to his latest ‘death’, he rarely, if ever, issued statements in any medium, was rarely, if ever, photographed or even seen. He was an enigma. Since his latest death (at Gao) in June of last year, he has been ‘singing like a canary’, with epistles of one sort or another being issued on websites, video-recordings, interviews etc. He
has become an open book. Indeed, his latest video recording that accompanied the In Amenas attack and which shows him with full-face exposed (unveiled), is so unusual that it is actually difficult to know whether it is MBM or not. However, Rocque Pacual, who spent nine months as a hostage of MBM in 2009-2010, confirmed in an interview to *El País* on February 3, that the video is indeed of MBM.[6]

This seeming transformation in his character and modus operandi since mid-2012 coincides with a range of publicity, mostly emanating from DRS-related sources, about his outlaw operations and relations with AQIM.

As an ‘outlaw’ or ‘terrorist’ since the early-to-mid 1990s, the world’s media, fed largely by DRS outlets, is currently attributing to MBM many qualities and acts of terrorism and criminality in which he had no part. In short, he is again being wheeled out by the Algerian authorities as an increasingly ‘mythologized’ character. For instance, although MBM was named by the Algerian authorities as the hostage-taker for most of the 6-month long duration of the kidnapping of 32 European tourists in the Sahara in 2003, he played no part at all in the operation. That operation, which provided the US with the justification for launching a second or Saharan front in the GWOT was led by the DRS agent ‘El Para’, with Abdelhamid Abou Zaid, AQIM’s current leader in the Sahara-Sahel, as second-in-command.[7]

Similar confusion and ambiguity surrounds MBM’s alleged membership of and relations with AQIM and its leaders. Without going into details, MBM is best described as a ‘freelance’. He has worked with AQIM cells and leaders on many occasions and seemingly for long periods. But he has also ‘broken’ from them on occasion and ‘done his own thing’. More importantly, he has also ‘worked’ on behalf of Algeria’s DRS on many occasions. Many local people in the Sahara, as well as many others who actually know how ‘security’ and ‘terrorism’ in Algeria is manipulated by the DRS, regard MBM as a DRS agent. I think that is an over-simplification. While there is much evidence that MBM has worked with the DRS (see below), especially in recent years, he came on the scene in the late-1990s, not for his alleged activities within the Armed Islamic Groups (GIA) of the 1990s, for which there is little or no solid evidence, but for the war he waged, quite individually, against the Algerian state under the banner of ‘La Liberation du Grand Sud’, in revenge for the killing of his brother...
by an Algerian customs patrol in the Deb Deb region in the mid-1990s. His brother’s death, perhaps significantly, occurred just north of In Amenas.

It is MBM’s ‘off-on’ relations with the DRS that raise so many questions about possible collusion with Algeria’s DRS in the In Amenas attack.

Indeed, the In Amenas attack comes within only a few weeks of a highly suspicious and very public series of announcements saying that MBM, who for most of 2012 was being portrayed as one of the top Islamist leaders in Mali, had broken with AQIM to set up his own terrorist (jihadist) operation that would span the Sahara from Mauritania, through the Sahel and Algeria to Libya and even Chad.

This announcement was made around December 3 (2012). Members of the international media were briefed by Malian and Algerian security sources and local Islamist leaders that MBM had left AQIM. Headlines read: “Head of Mali terror group quits al-Qaeda”, “Belmokhtar breaks away from AQIM” and “‘Laaouar’ quits AQIM”.

I believe that this ‘break’ was based on a mixture of DRS propaganda and an element of truth. By early December, there was firm evidence of fragmentations taking place within the Islamist/terrorist groupings of AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar al-Din in Mali. These fragmentations continued through December-January, with the latest being the announcement by Alghabass ag Intallah that many members of Ansar al-Din, possibly the majority, had broken away from Iyad ag Ghaly to form a new organisation, the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA), which claims it is ready to seek a negotiated solution to Mali’s conflict.

In fact, I believe that the Islamists’ surprise ‘break-out’ from northern Mali on January 10, which led to the immediate French military intervention in the form of air assaults on the Islamists’ advance at Konna and many of their supply bases at Gao, Ansongo, Kidal, Timbuktu and elsewhere, may have been a strategic attempt by Iyad ag Ghaly to limit this fragmentation process.

A selection of press statements at the time of this ‘fragmentation’, largely attributed to Algerian (i.e. DRS) sources, make the point:

- “Belmokhtar reportedly quit the terror group after being fired as one
of its two top commanders in northern Mali.”

- “Belmokhtar couldn’t stand being dismissed. He sent a letter to his superiors announcing he was no longer a member of AQIM.”
- “The Algerian terrorist (real name Khaled Abou El Abass) reportedly left AQIM after his demotion as head of the El Moulethemine *katibat* (‘Brigade of the Veiled Ones’)”
- “[Moktar Belmoktar], an Algerian-born jihadist who heads one of the most powerful and feared cells of al Qaeda’s North African branch has decided to leave the al Qaeda franchise in order to create a movement spanning the entire Sahara desert, said one of his close associates and a local official who had been briefed on the matter.”.
- “It’s true,” said Oumar Ould Hamaha, the Islamist boss of Timbuktu under Yahia Djouadi. “We have left this group [AQIM], whose name is tied to the Maghreb, so that we can better operate in the field and expand our zone of operation throughout the entire Sahara, going from Niger through to Chad and Burkina Faso.”
- “The announcement that MBM and his group ‘will remain subject to Al Qaeda Central’, indicates that Al Qaeda is setting its sights on a larger zone of operation. So far AQIM, [which operates in Mali], has conducted raids into Mauritania and Niger, but has not been able to establish long-term bases there. [It] has never operated in Chad.”
- “Dissent is growing among terrorist groups controlling the Sahel. Former AQIM emir Mokhtar Belmokhtar [has] quit the group to assemble his own band of suicide bombers in northern Mali.”
- “Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the Algerian believed to have been behind the kidnapping and deaths of several French nationals in the countries of the Sahel has announced in a video statement...that he is creating a new armed Islamist group called the Signers in Blood.”
- “Belmokhtar said that his new *katibat* [cell] included foreign jihadists.”

Irrespective of both DRS propaganda and MBM’s reincarnations, there is sufficient evidence to believe that a ‘new’ jihadist grouping may have been coming into play over the last 2-3 months. This new grouping, comprising many of the ‘Islamists’ that have been operating in northern Mali, but also possibly others in Mauritania, Libya and elsewhere, has been named as *Les Signataires par le sang* (Those who sign with blood), with its leader, real or fictive, being MBM.
The fact that this grouping is so closely associated with MBM raises the obvious question of the extent to which it is associated with the DRS.

This question is at the core of our understanding of ‘who’ and ‘what’ was behind the In Amenas attack.

The problem facing the investigators of the In Amenas attack is that there is substantial evidence of MBM having ‘worked for’ the DRS on several occasions since he turned ‘outlaw’ almost 20 years ago.

The most recent has been in Mali (see below), where there is abundant evidence that the Islamist groups, or rather their leaders (which includes MBM), have been supported by Algeria’s DRS.

Since the start of the Mali crisis in the beginning of 2012, I have received countless reports from local sources in northern Mali of the presence of MBM, most especially liaising with and commanding MUJAO forces in the Gao region, where he (or someone impersonating him) was seen on several occasions in the company of Algerians, identified by local (mostly MNLA operatives) as Algerian/DRS special forces.

There is also evidence of MBM being seen in the company of Sultan Ould Badi, the Gao-based cocaine trafficker, who is also a MUJAO leader. Sultan Ould Badi’s drugs’ trafficking business is protected directly by General Rachid Lalali (“Attafi”), head of the DRS External Security Directorate (DDSE). When Ould Badi was inadvertently arrested by Mali’s police in late 2010, General Lalali flew directly from Berlin (where he was accompanying President Bouteflika on a visit to Chancellor Angela Merkel) to secure his immediate release.

Prior to the Mali crisis, the most concrete evidence of MBM’s collaboration with the DRS was his role as the ‘logistics officer’ responsible for supplying the DRS-managed AQIM ‘Tamouret’ (pseudonym) training camp in Algeria’s Tassili mountains between 2005 and 2009 (see below).
Questions about Mohamed Lamine Bouchneb

The Algerian authorities claim that the In Amenas attack was masterminded Mokhtar ben Mokhtar (MBM) but led by his right-hand man, Mohamed Lamine Bouchneb (alt. spellings: Muhammad Lamiin Bushanab). Bouchneb was reported by the Algerian authorities to have been killed on the afternoon of the second day of the attack, Thursday, January 17.

In his article of January 19, the DRS scribe, Mounir B, gave a detailed résumé of Bouchneb. The clear objective of the article was to portray Bouchneb as one of the Sahara’s leading ‘jihadists’. Boudjemaa’s article identified Bouchneb as MBM’s right-hand man and the key man in the In Amenas attack. Boudjemaa described Bouchneb as the leader of an organisation called the ‘Fils du Sahara pour la justice islamique’ (Sons of the Sahara for Islamic justice), an organisation which I have not heard of before. According to Boudjemaa, it comprised a regrouping of smugglers and drug traffickers as well-known in SE Algeria as the cartel which controlled the drug routes going into Libya (from SE Algeria). He was MBM’s ‘businessman’, who organised all the smuggling networks into Libya.

Boudjemaa gives Bouchneb a glowing ‘jihadist CV’, stating that he was responsible for the attack on Djanet airport in 2008 (the attack was actually in November 2007) and the kidnapping on February 2, 2011, of an Italian tourist, 53 year old Maria Sandra Mariani, in the Tadrart region of SE Algeria, approximately 130 kms south of Djanet.

In several earlier publications, I have said that the Djanet airport attack had been undertaken by Tuareg youths demonstrating against the government authorities in Djanet over unemployment and related issues. On re-examining the airport attack this last week with local informants, who knew Bouchneb well, it is now evident that Bouchneb had been operating as an agent...
provocateur on behalf of the DRS who provoked the Tuareg youths and led them out to the airport. The Djanet airport attack came two months after Tuareg rebels in Mali had shot at a US Hercules 130 at Tin Zaouatene (Mali). The Algerian DRS, working hand-in-hand at that time with US intelligence services, wanted to link the two airport incidents and portray the GSPC, renamed in 2006-7 as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), as an ‘international’ terrorist organisation with ‘long reach’.[8]

In the case of the Tadrart hostage-taking, I was informed by multiple sources in Djanet that the kidnapping had been undertaken by Bouchneb, working on the orders of MBM, but who in turn was working on behalf of the DRS. This was re-confirmed to me this last week following further meetings with local informants.

At the time of the kidnap, the cook and guide who were accompanying Ms Mariani had been able to get to the nearby Algerian military base at In Ezzane immediately after her abduction to sound the alarm and to ask the military to ‘follow the tracks’ of the kidnappers. The army, however, refused, saying they had no fuel!! In Ezzane is a supply base for Algerian military operations in SE Algeria and northern Niger and is well-stocked with fuel.

According to local, well-informed sources, the reason for the DRS’s ordering the kidnap was as follows: During 2010, local Tuareg had been accusing the government of using the pretext of terrorism to close the Tassili-n-Ahaggar region to tourism so that government contractors (mostly Chinese) could undertake environmentally damaging mineral prospection. In short, Tuareg were accusing the government of using terrorism as a pretext for land clearance. Around Djanet, the situation had been a bit more difficult for the authorities because most of the region is designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The authorities therefore said that the Tassili (above Djanet) could mostly remain open, but that the Tadrart, which is the extension of the Tassili from just south of Djanet to the Niger border (and which is part of the UNESCO site), would be closed for security reasons. The people of Djanet, however, led by their local tourism agencies, told the authorities that if they were to close the Tadrart, then they would simply set fire to and destroy the municipal offices.
The Tadrart therefore remained open, but with an agreed system of ‘community guards’, comprising local Tuareg who would ‘keep an eye’ on the region. The Mariani kidnap was seen by local people as giving the Algerian authorities sufficient reason to close the region. This was done one month later.

**Bouchneb’s role in DRS-managed terrorist training camps**

Much stronger evidence of Bouchneb’s (and MBM’s) relationship with the DRS comes from the testimonies of three independent witnesses who had been held captive and trained in terrorists techniques (mostly killing and indoctrination) in ‘Al Qaeda’ (GSPC/AQIM) training camps in the Algerian Sahara.

The existence of such camps has been suspected for several years. Hard evidence of their existence, as yet unpublished but in the process of being passed to the International Criminal Court (ICC), came to light a year or two ago. Since then, I have been able, with the help of colleagues, to conduct wide-ranging and largely unrestricted interviews with these witnesses. In *The Dying Sahara*, I have referred to the location of these camps by the pseudonym of ‘Tamouret’.

All three witnesses have provided detailed accounts, now corroborated by photographic evidence and further witness reports, of how Tamouret was run by the DRS under the management, surveillance and control of the Algerian army. Tamouret is believed to have been opened in 2005, although the above-mentioned witnesses believe that similar camps existed before then. The witnesses believed Tamouret to have been closed down on the order of President Bouteflika in 2009 – at a time when Bouteflika is believed to have felt he had secured sufficient power over the DRS. Most of the occupants are known to have moved subsequently to northern Mali.

The camp’s purpose was to press-gang and train marginal youths, in various degrees of alienation from their communities across North Africa (and even further afield), to indoctrinate and commit atrocities in Algerian communities with whom they had no connection. They were generally executed after they had performed their tasks, or before, if they gave any hint of dissent. These children (they were often mere teenagers) were seen as utterly disposable, much as the Iranians regarded the peasant children they
sent across Iraqi minefields in the 1980s.

Those who remained in the camp (i.e. not killed) numbered, at any one time, about 270. They were trained specifically in snipping and throat-slitting (égorgement). The camp was visited by senior army officers (believed by witnesses to be both regular army and DRS) almost every evening. The ordnance used in the camp was Algerian army issue. Prisoners, to be killed as part of the training process, were delivered to the camp by the Algerian army/DRS in a more or less continual flow (on average 4 times a week). One witness claims to have seen some 180 murders undertaken in this way during his seven-month stay in the camp.

The dead bodies were disposed of by burial details. The witnesses have provided details of the burial locations that they know. Some of these have now been investigated, with photographic evidence of the dead bodies and skeletal remains (along with accompanying data and evidence) being made available to the ICC.

Fortuitously, I and a colleague were able to re-interview two of the three witnesses to these crimes this last week. They re-confirmed the main organiser of the camp as being Abdelhamid abou Zaïd and that they saw him in the company of senior army/DRS officers almost every evening. MBM was also identified as visiting the camp and was perceived by the witnesses as being a ‘logistics officer’ for the DRS. Bouchneb, however, was identified as being one of the most frequent visitors to the camp. He was seen regularly in the company of the camp organiser, Abou Zaid, MBM when he also visited, and the army/DRS officers.

Both the army/DRS officers and supplies are believed to have come from Illizi. It may be relevant that Illizi was also the main centre used by the DRS to supply El Para’s 64 ‘terrorists’ who kidnapped 32 European hostages in 2003. Fifteen of these hostages were held in the Oued Samene, not far from both Illizi and Tamouret.

The evidence now forwarded to the ICC indicates that both MBM and Bouchneb worked closely with the DRS in the running of Tamouret (and its various locations).

It is significant that the main witness to Tamouret does not believe that Bouchneb was killed at In Amenas. He maintains that Bouchneb is too seasoned a DRS/AQIM operative to be risked in such an operation.
Algeria must provide investigators with verifiable DNA proof

The role of Bouchneb in the In Amenas operation needs much further investigation. It is essential that those involved in the investigations into the In Amenas attack must demand that the Algerian authorities provide verifiable DNA evidence of Bouchneb’s death (and all other terrorists killed in the attack). This should not be difficult, as Algeria’s security-intelligences services are continually referring to the use of DNA evidence in the identification of dead militants/terrorists.

If such evidence is not provided, it must then be assumed that he was not killed on January 17, and was either not there or perhaps ‘plucked’ from the scene. In short, if DNA evidence of his death is not provided, serious questions must be asked of the Algerian authorities by the foreign governments whose nationals were killed in the operation.

If verifiable evidence is produced that does confirm Bouchneb’s death at In Amenas, then it would lend support to the view expressed by an (anonymous) French intelligence source that the In Amenas operation was a parallel to the massacre of the French monks at Tibhirine in 1996: a DRS operation that went wrong. This view, which is endorsed widely by local people in southern Algeria who are familiar with DRS operations in the region, is that “the DRS let it happen”. By “it”, the belief is that MBM, through Bouchneb, may have been organising some sort of hostage-taking (not the destruction of the plant), that went seriously wrong and that the outcome was not what was intended.

Terrorist infiltration of the plant: was it an inside job?

Quite apart from the question of possible DRS complicity, serious questions are being asked about whether the In Amenas attack was an ‘inside job’. Many of the reported statements of those who escaped the catastrophe suggest that the attackers may have had some degree of familiarity with the plant.

There are three lines of enquiry which need further exploration. These are:

a) The nature of the plant’s internal security arrangements;
b) The relevancy of a major labour dispute with drivers (and possibly other workers) at the plant; and

c) The relationship between the owner of the SARL BATT transport company, which was reported as being contracted to the plant, and Abdelhamid abou Zaid, the effective head of AQIM in the Sahara-Sahel region.

a) Internal security

Houston sources, quoted in the New York Times, said that the companies operating the In Amenas gas plant had chosen not to deploy armed guards inside the sprawling compound, leading security analysts to question whether the assault by more than 30 Islamist militants might have been slowed or even prevented if security had been tighter.

This raises a number of questions, notably the role of private security companies (PSCs) in Algeria. Algerian law has insisted that only Algerian PSCs can be used for this task. This is perceived as difficult by some IOCs (International oil [and gas] companies) as most Algerian PSCs are owned by or linked to retired DRS and army generals and are invariably highly corrupt.

b) links between the transport contractor and AQIM

On January 19, Mounir B (Boudjemaa), a DRS mouthpiece, published an article in Algeria’s Liberté newspaper alleging that BP and Statoil had had a contract for some three years with a transport company, SARL BAAT, owned by Ghediri Abdelhamid (Abdelhamid Ghadir), the brother of AQIM leader Abdelhamid Abou Zaid, and that Abou Zaid’s real name is Mohamed Ghadir. According to Mounir B. Abou Zaid insisted that his brother employ his (Abou Zaid’s) men, which may explain how the terrorists came to have such detailed knowledge of the plant. In short,
Mounir B is effectively stating that the plant had been infiltrated by AQIM terrorists.

Mounir B went further, by stating that BP had been warned by the Algerian authorities about this relationship, but that neither BP, its HSE staff in London, nor MI6 had done anything about it.

I can confirm that this relationship is almost certainly true and that knowledge of it has been in the public domain for at least two years.

Whether Mounir B is telling the truth or merely trying to incriminate the two oil companies (BP and Statoil), remains to be investigated.

However, the article raises a number of potentially serious questions. The first is why Mounir B made no mention of the serious, six month labour dispute which had embroiled either this company, or whatever companies BP & Statoil may have been contracting for their drivers and transportation services (see below). Sources close to BP and Statoil believe that this labour dispute may have considerable relevance in explaining much of what happened at In Amenas. Why do the DRS and Mounir B not share that belief?

A second series of questions relate to Algeria’s (and Mounir B’s) attempts to point fingers at Libya, not only in terms of the ‘geography’ of the attack, but by suggesting that it was linked with Libyan jihadist elements. If the attack did come from Libya, which has not yet been established beyond reasonable doubt, it is most unlikely that the DRS, which has extraordinarily efficient intelligence networks in all Algeria’s neighbouring Saharan and Sahelian states, would have been unaware of it.

Indeed, Mounir B provides strong evidence of the DRS’s knowledge of terrorist activities going on in Libya. In additions to his documentation of Bouchneb’s operations in and around the Illizi-Djanet-SE Algerian-Libyan nexus, he even detailed how MBM’s first meeting with Bouchneb and the other operatives involved in the In Amenas attack took place in Tripoli. Mounir B, thanks to information (or ‘disinformation’) provided to him by the DRS, was even able to say that MBM spent precisely 18 days in Tripoli.

The obvious question is this: If the DRS had such precise knowledge of the whereabouts and meeting dates of MBM and Bouchneb, how was it possible for the operation to buy arms (see below), set up training camp(s), cross Libyan territory and
then enter Algerian territory in what is meant to be a heavily secured border area, without the DRS’s knowledge?

Is the answer to this question what our Algerian sources are suggesting, namely that the DRS “let it happen”?

c) The possible importance of labour unrest

According to numerous sources, most especially the survivors of the In Amenas attack, the terrorists appeared to have some degree of knowledge of the plant, suggesting that they may have had some assistance from the inside. Survivors are reported as saying that “the amount of information on the plant available to the attackers suggests they had inside information.” However, the attackers’ apparent lack of ‘high level’ technical knowledge of the plant suggests that their more basic knowledge of the plant may have come from accomplices amongst the unskilled employees.

The section of the workforce under scrutiny is some 100 local drivers who were involved in a six-month strike that at times brought the plant close to a standstill during 2012. The strike only ended in December, a few weeks before the attack. So far, no drivers appear to have been singled out, in spite of the Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal saying that the attackers had obtained information about the plant’s workings and arrived with a former driver from the facility and that “the terrorists knew what they were doing.”

According to reliable sources, the strike consisted of two factions: skilled technical and administration workers, mainly from Algeria’s north, and unskilled drivers, primarily local Tuareg workers. Both groups apparently worked on short-term contracts with SARL BAAT, the company that Mounir B has linked to AQIM leader Abou Zaïd, but wanted permanent contracts with Sonatrach.

Reports indicate that the main tension was with the local drivers, some of whom are said to have linked their grievances at the plant with the wider grievance, commonplace throughout much of Algeria’s south and the neighbouring Sahel (viz. Areva’s uranium operations in Niger), that they don’t benefit from the natural wealth of the their region.

I was able to discuss the driver dispute with local Tuareg informants
shortly after the In Amenas attack. They had little knowledge of the labour unrest and were of the opinion that the majority of the drivers were Chaamba from the Ouargla region and not Tuareg (a fact which the plant operators will presumably be able to ascertain). There were clearly some Tuareg drivers from the Illizi region, although my informants were not aware of any significant ramifications of the unrest within the Tuareg social and political milieu. They said this was because the dispute focused mostly on the Ouargla region, the headquarters of the SARL BATT transport company, and involved mostly Chaamba rather than Tuareg drivers.

This information, for what it is worth, throws the light back on Ouargla, which has been beset by serious labour and civil unrest over the last year or more. This unrest has been met with excessive brutality from the police. Court records have revealed that the heavy police action was ordered by the DRS.

This is not to say that the transport dispute may not have been of significance in the attack. Indeed, it is clear that investigators of the In Amenas attack should dig deeper into both the nature and possible relevancy of the transport dispute and Mounir B’s allegations of linkages between the transport company’s owner and AQIM leader Abdelhamid abou Zaïd.

**Events in Northern Mali and their connections with In Amenas**

On January 10 (2013), the Islamist ‘terrorists’ who had taken over northern Mali broke out from their *de facto* front line, so posing an urgent and immediate threat to the rest of Mali, including its capital Bamako. The Mali government appealed to France for urgent help. This was provided immediately, with French airstrikes being launched on January 11 against the Islamists who had advanced to and taken the town of Konna, barely 50 kilometers from Mopti, Mali’s second town, and its nearby strategic Sévaré military air base.
Assistance to France was provided by the UK, in the form of two military C17 transporters, and Algeria, which granted overflight rights, thus enabling France to launch bombing missions from air bases in France against Islamist bases at Gao, Timbuktu, Ansongo and elsewhere in northern Mali.

Was the In Amenas attack linked to events in Mali?

The key question is whether these events in Mali were related to the terrorist attack at In Amenas five days later.

William Hague, the British Foreign Secretary, said that he believed the In Amenas attack was unrelated to the situation in northern Mali and especially Britain’s provision of material assistance to French forces operating in Mali. However, the meagre resources of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), along with the ideologically constrained and ill-directed priorities of Britain’s intelligence services are such that they are unable to provide the Foreign Secretary with sufficient information to make such a bald and possibly misleading statement.

There is no conclusive evidence to indicate that the In Amenas attack is not linked to events in Mali.

The key aspects of the Mali situation which are relevant to the understanding of the In Amenas attack are as follows:

- Algeria has long tried to prevent any western military intervention in the Sahel region, which it regards as more than just its own ‘backyard’. That has explained much of Algeria’s seemingly recalcitrant attitude towards counter-terrorism in those regions. Since the Islamists’ take-over of northern Mali, Algeria has argued strongly for a ‘political solution’ and against military, especially Western, intervention.

- Algeria, largely through its DRS, has been supporting and provisioning the Islamists in northern Mali. The reasons for this are detailed in *The Dying Sahara*.

- Many, if not all, the main Islamist groups in northern Mali, at least at their leadership levels, knew that they were being supported and provisioned from Algeria.

- When the Islamists learned that Algeria had given France overfly rights, they were extremely angry and believed that they had been
betrayed by Algeria. Hence their call that ‘jihad’ should be directed at not just France, but also Algeria (for the overfly rights) and the UK (for providing the two C17 transporters).

**Motives for the In Amenas attack**

The In Amenas attackers, as well as a multitude of Islamists sources, have stated that the In Amenas attack was in revenge for Algeria’s support for France in allowing overfly rights.

From contacts with Islamists in Mali, it is known that there was immense anger at Algeria’s perceived betrayal of the Islamists. This anger and sense of betrayal clearly provides a strong motive for the In Amenas attack.

However, there is one make flaw in this reasoning. It is that most of the Islamist leaders in northern Mali were linked in one way or another to the DRS. They would therefore have been most unlikely to have launched an attack on In Amenas on their own initiative.

Western security analysts, who, for the most part are out of their depth in this area, would not have been aware of the Islamist-DRS links. Rather, they tended to share the view that the In Amenas operation could not have been prepared in such a short time – 6 days. If one accepts that view, which I do not (knowing the abilities of these groups to mount such long-range attacks at short notice), we are left with the question of whether the attackers may have had advance warning of the French attack.

This would seem unlikely, given the almost ‘instantaneous’ French response to the Mali government’s urgent request for help. However, it may not be as simple as that. There are still a few questions left unanswered. One of these is a report on the Mauritanian elhourriya.net website, which reported that French Special Forces (COS) attacked an Islamist base near Tessalit on December 12-13. The report said that gunmen, believed to be French COS, attacked and destroyed an AQIM camp and weapons base some 27 kms from Tessalit. A former MNLA leader was quoted as saying that the attack was carried out by 20-30 gunmen in military dress and that the arms base, containing heavy rockets and munitions, was guarded by 12 AQIM militants, who were all killed.

I have been unable to get verification of whether this attack actually happened. If it did, or is believed to
have happened, it may have been a preparatory warning to the Islamists that ‘France meant business’ and was likely to attack them in bigger force. If that is true, it would lend more credence to their stated motive for attacking In Amenas.

The obvious question: why no precautions against ‘jihad’?

The most obvious question to be asked of Algeria is why, in the light of this clear threat from the Islamist terrorists in neighbouring Mali, was the Tigantourine gas plant not better protected by Algeria’s large and professional security forces.

France moved to a state of high security alert following this call for jihad. Presumably Algeria, which was fully aware of the Islamists call for revenge against both the UK and Algeria, would have realised that a UK-linked plant in Algeria would have been an obvious and top priority target. The two obvious targets were the BP facilities at In Salah and/or In Amenas. Why were no precautions taken? Was it because the DRS knew that the call by Mali’s Islamists for jihad against the infidel was without foundation?

Evidence of Algerian support for Islamist terrorists in Mali

Not only do most of the Islamist leaders operating in Northern Mali (notably Abou Zaïd, Yahia Djouadi, Sultan Ould Badi, MBM and Iyad ag Ghaly) have close links and associations with the DRS, but they have been strongly supported and supplied through DRS channels in the form of food, clothing, fuel, possibly cash, and reinforcements from the DRS’s own ranks. There have been multiple eyewitness reports from MNLA and non-MNLA local residents in northern Mali of this Algerian support.

In the few weeks prior to the Islamists’ January 10 breakout, local Tuareg informants who had been captured and detained in Islamist camps located between Goundam and Lac Faguibine, just north of Timbuktu, observed several dozen reinforcements, with at least seven vehicles, join the camp after crossing into northern Mali from Algeria (across a border that is allegedly ‘closed’). The Tuareg, who know the nuances of ethnic and other identities in this region exceptionally well, said that they were DRS.

While there, they saw three persons whom they identified as ‘white’ (i.e Europeans) who were speaking in
French. It is possible that these could be the Frenchman and 1-2 Canadians found amongst the terrorist killed at In Amenas. Three other ‘Europeans’, possibly the same, were seen in a vehicle with Abou Zaïd in the Essakane area some three weeks later.

It is noteworthy that a ‘dedicated’ cell phone of one of the detained Tuaregs was confiscated by the Islamists and that its details were on the desk of MI5 in London a few days later. The DRS has a close working relationship with British intelligence agencies.

The French push through northern Mali has revealed increasing evidence of Algeria’s support for the Islamists, most notably the fuel dumps which an article in *Le Monde* (21.01.13) described as being of “Algerian provenance”.

There have also been several reports in early February, albeit mostly unverified, of Islamists trying to escape back to Algeria. For example, the Tuareg MNLA announced it had captured two prominent Islamists on February 2 close to the Algerian border. The two men were Mohamed Moussa Ag Mohamed, an Islamist leader who helped impose Shari’a law in Timbuktu, and Oumeini Ould Baba Akhmed, whom they described as a leader of the Islamist group MUJAO.

**The Tibhirine Parallel**

The question of motive brings me back to the question, raised by an anonymous French intelligence source, of whether the In Amenas attack was a replication of the murder of the Tibhirine monks in 1996.

According to this source, the In Amenas incident may have been another ‘false operation’ between the DRS and terrorists that ‘went wrong’. The supposed plan was that MBM
would arrange for the seizure of hostages, rather in the manner in which the Tibhirine monks were taken, and that they would be ‘rescued’ by the Algerian army. The idea was to prove to the international community not only that Algeria was correct in warning that military intervention in Mali would trigger terrorist reprisals, but that Algeria was a capable and essential partner of the West in the war against terrorism and the war being waged by France in Mali.

The plan went wrong, so it is believed, when the terrorists opened fire and killed eight army soldiers (not mentioned by Algeria) at the beginning of the attack. At that point, the commanding general of the 4th military region, General Sheriff Abderrazaq, ‘lost it’ and ordered in the helicopters. From there on, the situation was out of control.

It is believed that one reason for ensuring that all the terrorists were killed is so that they could not answer any questions.

A further consideration, and perhaps why MBM was tasked with this plan, is that he is known for his opposition to gratuitous killing and ensuring that his hostages or other captives are not killed. Indeed, the hallmark of his war against Algeria in the late 1990s was that none (as far as I know) of his many captured gendarmes and others were ever killed. (This encouraged them to surrender rather than fight!).

The end of the regime: internal rifts within and between the DRS and army

As this analysis goes on to the ISCI website, an excellent analysis of the In Amenas attack by the former DRS officer, Habib Souaidia, has been published by Algeria Watch.[9] Given his own ‘unique’ access to the ranks of Algeria’s military and secret services, Souaidia’s documentation of the dissent and fission within and between both the DRS and army is especially revealing. As I have mentioned in this analysis, much about the army-DRS operation at In Amenas has been kept under wraps. Not only does Souaidia give very good reasons as to why that has been necessary, but he also suggests that we may be witnessing the “fin de règne”, or in his own words:

"la fin de règne des acteurs qui dominent l’Algérie depuis plus de deux décennies (à commencer par le général Mohammed ‘Tewfik’ Médiène, patron du DRS depuis septembre

Algerian reactions to the In Amenas attack: Externalizing the attack

There are two responses within Algeria to the In Amenas attack which warrant comment. One is the way in which Algeria is trying to ‘externalize’ the incident; the other is the way in which it has been manipulated by DRS propaganda.

Almost the first statement made on the attack by Interior Minister Daho Ould Kablia was that it did not come from Libya. As mentioned above, the authorities have subsequently been giving out more and more information (or ‘disinformation’) suggesting that the operation did come from Libya.

Algeria is also doing much to highlight the ‘non-Algerian’ elements in the attack. For instance, of the 32 terrorists (29 killed, 3 captured), it has made much ado of the fact that the attackers allegedly comprised eight nationalities, including 11 Tunisians, 2 Canadians, three Egyptians, two Libyans, a Nigerien, a Malian, a Mauritanian and one French national.

The Algerians are putting out much information to ‘prove’ that the attackers crossed from Libya. They claim to have intercepted the terrorists’ phone signals in Libya. They are also saying that the terrorists bought arms from Libya’s Zintan militia.

Both of these claims may be true, but they are unlikely. As for the claim that the Algerians intercepted the terrorists’ phone signals, it is widely known throughout the Sahara-Sahel region that ‘terrorists’ avoid using phones for fear of interception. It also raises the obvious question of why Algeria, if it had intercepted such signals, didn’t alert its security forces.

As for buying arms from the Zintan militia, why would a group of terrorists, known to be already heavily armed (MBM is reputedly the Sahara’s largest arms trafficker), bother to do such shopping along the way?

Algeria has also accused Qatar of assisting the terrorists, saying that the terrorists’ vehicles were provided
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by Qatar and that they were using satellite phones used in Syria and provided by Qatar. The Qatar Prime Minister issued a denial of these accusations on January 29.

The fact that Algeria is making such an issue of the Libya involvement in the attack raises two questions.

First, how and why could such a big group (30+ people), whose leaders are well-known to the DRS, have met (over 18 days?), been brought together and operated out of Libya, where the DRS is known to have a network of agents on the ground, without Algerian border security being notified and placed on high alert?

Second, is this emphasis on Libya designed to mask a different origin, such as from Mali (possibly Mauritania) or from within Algeria itself?

Either way, the answers inevitably point to a serious lapse in DRS intelligence gathering, or, as has been suggested, that the DRS “let it happen”, with the possible presumption that it did not know or realise that the attack would be so big, or get out of hand and have such devastating consequences.

One well informed (anonymous) Algerian source has suggested that because the DRS knew that MBM rarely killed, they were prepared to let him undertake whatever he was planning on the presumption that it would be a ‘low-level’ operation, with few lives lost, etc. If this suggestion is correct, it again raises the question of the DRS being taken off guard, or perhaps that MBM has dramatically changed his style and mode of operation.

The latter possibility raises the question of whether MBM has indeed ‘changed’. Is it perhaps because he may have been seriously injured in Gao on June 26 and perhaps knows that his own life is now short? Or, perhaps, has he finally turned against the Algerian state to inflict a final, deadly blow against it?

We are unlikely to find the answers to such questions, at least for a while.

Political consequences of the In Amenas attack in Algeria

It is of interest to note that both President Bouteflika and General Mohamed Mediène, head of the DRS, were out of the country at the time of the In Amenas attack. Bouteflika
was in either Paris or Geneva; Mediène in hospital in Italy. I do not know if Mediène has yet returned.

Sources in Algiers believe that the DRS “let it happen”, either by negligence or design and probably without foreseeing the consequences, to cause trouble for Bouteflika.

Quite aside from the long-running internal battle between the head of the DRS and the President, the DRS is known not to have been happy with Bouteflika’s decision to grant France overfly rights. As mentioned above, there is strong evidence of the DRS’s support for the Islamist groups in Mali. Algeria is also known to have been strongly opposed to any military intervention in Mali, especially from France.

The DRS’s reasons for this ‘unhappiness’, aside from its own ‘covert’ self interests in Mali, such as control of the drugs trade, is based on the issue of Algerian sovereignty. Like most Algerians, the DRS has always promoted the belief that neither Algeria’s land nor airspace would be made available to foreign, especially Western powers – above all France. Even worse, it is wholly unacceptable for such a breach in ‘sovereignty’ to be used to strike against fellow Moslems.

The geopolitical triangle of the US, Algeria and France

France’s President Hollande is reported as saying: “I got permission from President Bouteflika himself”

According to some Algerian sources, Bouteflika gave Hollande this permission during his visit to Algeria just before Christmas.

The question, however, is: Why has Algeria, or more specifically Bouteflika, given France this help? And what is France getting, in exchange?

The answer, according to Algerian sources, is not only do with the long-running fight between the Presidency and the DRS, but is also to do with the US-Algerian-French geopolitical triangle.

At the geo-political level, the DRS wanted and has succeeded in becoming the US’s key partner – its ‘local agent’ – in the US’s ‘grand design’ in regard to Africa as a whole, as well as in its specific counter-terrorism policies in North and West Africa. Since 2002, the US and Algeria have shared a common agenda in wanting to reduce French influence in this part of Africa (La francophonie). In short, for the last 10 years, Algerian and US unstated
policy has been to reduce French influence, or, as some have put it, to 'squeeze' France out of this part of Africa. This was aided by President Sarkozy's own inept policies and interventions in the region during his period of office.

US AFRICOM, in its own coded language, has been saying the same thing. Indeed, this may well be part of the reason why the US, in addition to blocking French intervention moves at the UN Security Council, has provided France with only minimal help in its attack on 'terrorism' in Mali.

One of Bouteflika's reasons for providing France with this help may have been because he wants to get rid of the DRS leadership, notably Generals Mediène and Tartag. This is not at all easy, especially as Bouteflika's power in relation to that of the DRS has diminished considerably since the beginning of his third term in 2009.

The 'deal' done with France is that France would support Bouteflika in his attempt to achieve a fourth mandate in the presidential elections of 2014. Indeed, it is significant that in early January, the ruling FLN party announced that Bouteflika would be its sole candidate for the 2014 presidential election.

For its part, France is well aware of how the DRS has been working with the US since 2002. It therefore sees its immediate interests, especially in re-establishing its influence in the Sahel, to lie with a Bouteflika presidency rather than the DRS.

**Getting rid of the DRS**

Getting rid of the DRS, as Bouteflika has experienced so painfully since early 2010, is not so easy.

It was fairly obvious that the In Amenas attack would raise questions about the DRS’s competency to 'protect Algeria'. Indeed, Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci was quick to admit, in a barely coded reference to the DRS, that “We (the army) committed some mistakes.”

Medelci also made comments that Algeria had been asked for help from abroad, with the message being, with clear reference to the granting of airspace to France, that “we are helping the West”.

Bouteflika’s contribution, a clear warning to the DRS, was his statement that he wanted “to investigate what happened (at In Amenas).”
Like his short-lived enquiry in February 2010 into the role of the DRS in the key assassinations of the 1990s, no such inquiry into In Amenas is likely to take place.

The DRS, however, has already fought back, with Bouteflika once again being placed on the back foot.

The DRS’s ‘fight back’ has been through its usual weapons, especially the media, Most of which is either controlled directly by the DRS, or under its broad watch. In a barrage of ‘propaganda’, placed almost entirely in the Arab-language press of *Echorouk*, *Ennahar* and *El Khabar* (i.e. not the French language media), the DRS and army are attacking Bouteflika and Medelci for helping France, the former colonial power, and the outside ‘Western’ world.

These three papers, *Echorouk*, *Ennahar* and *El Khabar*, cover different but overlapping, sections of Algerian readership. *Echorouk* is more or less in the middle demographic; *El Khabar*, which attacks Bouteflika most of the time, although more subtly, is directed at elder readers. *Ennahar* (run by DRS agent Anis Rahmani) has a large readership amongst the more gullible youth. Its UK equivalent would be *The Sun*.

The broad line of the propaganda is that the DRS was not involved in the decision to give France this help. It was given by Bouteflika himself, with the Arab-language media now portraying Bouteflika as a French puppet.

The result of this campaign has been an explosion of popular anger against Bouteflika, saying that he must ‘Go’ because he has humiliated Algeria by giving such help to France.

The predominant opinion of Algeria’s youth is that “the army has done well in destroying terrorists that were working for West.” The rationale behind this seemingly bizarre and perverse argument is that DRS propaganda over the last couple of years (i.e. since the Arab Spring) has been that the overthrow of the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya has been by ‘Islamists’ who have been supported by the West. The terrorists who attacked In Amenas have been portrayed in this same vein: as being supported by the West.

According to this same line of reasoning: the aim of the In Amenas terrorists was to destroy Algeria (i.e by overthrowing its regime, in the same vein as the Arab Spring) and that the army and DRS have done well to stop this conspiracy by killing
all those involved. In short, the manipulation of public opinion is that In Amenas was a big victory for the nation because the army (and DRS) destroyed the terrorists that were being manipulated by the West. The logic of this argument is that Al Qaeda is working for a Western agenda, namely the ‘Arab Spring’, through which it (the West) can colonize Arab countries. According to this propaganda, the evidence is there to see: the West went into Libya to help Islamists (Al Qaeda) take power; the same is happening in Egypt, while in Syria the West is helping terrorists against the regime. Now, at In Amenas, the West is portrayed as manipulating the same ‘terrorists’ against Algeria.

It is against this extraordinary background that 11 political parties, the MSP and mostly other small Islamist parties, which are in the pocket of the DRS, called on Bouteflika to stand down for having helped France in this way.

On January 31, Abdelaziz Belkhadem, was removed as Secretary-General of the FLN. His removal had been expected for some time. However, he is hated by the DRS and the timing of his removal is significant. It is expected that Bouguerra Soltani, leader of the MSP, will go next.

Such is the power of DRS-controlled propaganda. The question now is how both Bouteflika and the West (both governments and IOCs) will respond.

A new phase in the Global War on Terror?

Several Western governments and their media have heralded the In Amenas terrorist attack as marking a new phase in their GWOT. They might be correct, but what they are more likely to find themselves having to face is something rather different, namely questions about what their intelligence services, notably those of the US and UK, have actually been doing in North Africa over the last few years.
References

[1] Jeremy Keenan’s report was written exclusively for the ISCI website.


[8] Both incidents are documented in detail in *The Dying Sahara*.