

Carlos Ruiz Miguel:

TERRORISM AND COVERT OPERATIONS IN NORTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT: Islamist terrorism is currently present in North Africa, outside some isolated attacks, since the Algerian Army prevented the Islamists from seizing power in 1991. However, ten years later there were several warnings about real or just imagined terrorist (islamist) threats in other countries of the region. In the following years the warnings multiplied. Three attacks had a special significance: the attack on the Mauritanian Army in Lemgheity on 4th June 2005; the first kidnapping of three Spanish citizens in the Sahel region of the Sahara desert (Mauritania) on 29th November 2009 by a group known as "Al-Qaeda in the Lands of Islamic Maghreb" (AQLIM); and the kidnapping of two Spanish and one Italian citizens in the Sahrawi refugee camps of Tindouf (South-West Algeria) on 23rd October 2011 by a group called "Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA or MUJAO).

In this paper, after making reference to (I) the methodological premise of this study, I will refer to (II) the dubious character of the islamist terrorism that prevailed in Algeria mainly in the 90s, going then to analyse (III) the situation outside Algeria before 2005, and then (IV) I will focus on the birth of AQLIM in 2006, a group which carried out several attacks, considering the thesis that it is an instrumental terrorist group serving certain State interests, and will end with (V) reference to another of those groups (MUJWA), that is also quite likely to serve State interests. The (VI) alleged transformation of the MUJWA in the group "Al Murabitoun" and its merge with AQLIM and its allegiances to ISIS and Al Qaeda offer a final clarification of these processes.

KEYWORDS: North Africa, terrorism, AQIM, Al-Qaeda, MUJAO

A METHODOLOGICAL PREMISE: TERRORISM AND COVERT OPERATIONS

The laws establishing or regulating intelligence services consider the fight against terrorism as one of their aims, as terrorism is considered a type of violence politically motivated to attack or destroy a certain Government or State. In this sense intelligence agencies are the "enemies" of terrorist groups.

However, since the very first moments of the history of terrorism there have been accusations or suspicions against the very nature of the terrorist attacks. One of the most famous episodes was the Reichstag fire, attributed to a Communist terrorist but executed by a secret cell of the German ruling party. During the Cold War there were numerous authors who denounced the complicity of the communist governments with extreme-left terrorist groups in Western Europe. Maybe the clearest, although not the only, example was the "*Rot Armee Fraktion*" which operated in West-Germany. After the Cold War terrorism became one of the selective means used by Islamists. Several leaks of confidential information, mainly (but not only) by Wikileaks, revealed that well-known Islamist terrorist groups had the support of certain State secret services. This finding has even a legislative recognition in the "28 pages"

of the report on the 9/11¹ attacks declassified on 15th July 2016, and through the passing of the “Justice against Sponsors of Terrorism Act” (JASTA) on 29th September 2016. Then, it is an uncontested fact that there are certain states sponsoring the terrorism. This paper considers that some state or states may also sponsor factual or just presumed terrorism in North Africa and that the states which sponsor terrorism use their secret services (“deep State”) to do it. The rivalries between Morocco and Algeria, France and Algeria, and Morocco and the Frente Polisario, taking into account the positions of other neighbouring countries (Spain, Mauritania and Mali) constitute the soil for eventual covert actions.

THE DUBIOUS CHARACTER OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM IN ALGERIA

After the cancellation of the 1992 elections by the Algerian Army, which were to be won by FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), an Islamic terrorist group the GIA (Armed Islamic Group) arose, which launched at first a guerrilla war and then a terrorist war against the army and the population. The GIA provided itself with guerrilla fighters who had been part of anti-Soviet Islamic movements, financed and trained by the North-American CIA and the Pakistani ISI. Once the pro-Soviet government was overthrown, these guerrilla fighters were a source of instability for the country and the CIA pressed Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries to provide the guerrilla fighters with passports and send them away from that area. An estimated 900 joined the GIA ranks. In 1998, a GIA faction appeared, the GSCP (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), which would progressively eclipse the first one. Terrorism was practiced in Algeria, although there were accusations that this terrorism was actually just a disguised instrument of state actors.

Some of the accusations pointed at the Algerian State itself. Those accusations were branded with the tag “Qui tue qui”. Shortly after the actions of the Army and the civil population against the guerrillas and Islamic terrorism started (from 1992), a thesis began to spread widely according to which actually the Algerian intelligence services were behind the Islamic terrorist groups. This so-called thesis (“who kills who?”) was developed in order to accuse the Algerian secret services (“DRS-Département de Renseignement et Sécurité”) of being those who were encouraging the Islamic terrorism that devastated the country mainly in the nineties. In my opinion, this thesis should be considered with scepticism for various reasons. First of all, the works supporting this thesis² have been fought by their adversaries arguing that they provide data that are inaccurate³. In the second place, it should be noted that the most active elements in its dissemination (Florence Aubenas and José Garçon, journalists of *Libération*; Jean-Baptiste Rivoire, journalist at Channel+; and other persons in the editorial world like François Gèze, owner of the publishing house *La Découverte*) have been

¹ Joint Enquiry into Intelligence Community activities prior and after the terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001. Report of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, December 2002. The “28 pages” declassified in September 2016 are 415-443.

² The best known is that by Habib Souaïdia, “*La sale guerre*” (The dirty war), La Découverte, Paris, 2002; Lounis Aggoun and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire, “*Françalgérie, Crimes et mensonges d’États. Histoire secrète, de la guerre d’indépendance à la “troisième guerre” d’Algérie*” (Françalgérie, State crimes and lies. Secret history of the war of independence in “third war” in Algeria), La Découverte, Paris, 2004; Abdelkader Tigha and Philippe Lobjois, “*Contre-espionnage algérien: Notre guerre contre les islamistes: la mémoire traquée*”, (Algerian counter-espionage: Our war against Islamists: Memory hunted), Nouveau Monde, Paris, 2008.

³ “Le Coauteur de “La sale guerre”: pourquoi m’a-t-on manipulé?”, *Marianne* (19-II-2001); cfr.: http://www.marianne.fr/LE-CO-AUTEUR-DE-LA-SALE-GUERRE-POURQUOI-M-A-T-ON-MANIPULE_a133543.html

accused of being linked to the French DGSE (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure), the foreign secret service of the power hostile to Algeria which is par excellence France⁴. One of those journalists, José Garçon, was also accused of complicity with the Moroccan secret service after a certain “Chris Coleman’s” leak on Twitter of an important number of documents and emails of the Moroccan Secret Service and especially of the link between the Service and those journalists, according to the documents⁵.

However, there have been other accusations, more solid in my view, which point at Morocco and France as the backers of Islamist terrorism in Algeria. As a matter of fact it is common knowledge that, after the Islamic rebellion started in Algeria, the Algerian fundamentalists enjoyed great freedom of movement in France, a country which did not hide its sympathy for the Islamic triumph in Algeria. There are several grounds for the thesis of the French and Moroccan support of the Algerian Islamists.

First of all, we have the concurring testimony of two central characters: Abdelhak Layada (“national emir” until 1994 of one of the Islamic terrorist groups preceding the so-called “AQLIM”, the Armed Islamic Group-GIA), and Dris Basri (Moroccan Minister for Home Affairs until 1999).

Layada confessed that he had received some aid from the Moroccan government and had met with Driss Basri, Minister for Home Affairs and the right-hand of the king, and with Hassán II himself. About his interview with the king, he only revealed that he had been blackmailed with regard to Western Sahara⁶ and even that the Moroccan government had suggested him to recruit members of the Polisario Front in order to be able to immediately incriminate them for their involvement in terrorist acts. On June 8th 2009, the BBC broadcasting station in Arabic questioned the current Moroccan minister of Foreign Affairs Taieb Fassi-Fihri about Layada’s statements and the Moroccan minister did not deny them, which led his interviewer to say that then the same had to be understood as certain⁷. Abdelhaq Layada also confessed that he received support from France, doing very serious allegations, such as France helped GIA to organise a coup that was aborted; France supplied

⁴ *La Nouvelle République*, “Terrorisme : la France et le jeu d’équilibre” (Terrorism : France and the balancing game), (4-VIII-2010); cfr.: <http://www.djazairress.com/fr/lnr/92855>; <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6917>

La Nouvelle République, “«Qui tue qui ?» : une invention des services français” (“Who kills who?”: an invention of the French services) (31-VIII-2010); cfr.: <http://www.djazairress.com/fr/lnr/93750>; <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6911>

⁵ <http://www.algeriepatriotique.com/article/quand-mireille-duteil-et-jose-garcon-confirment-leurs-liens-avec-lagent-de-la-dged-ahmed-cha>

⁶ Declarations of Abdelhak Layada to the Moroccan journal *Al Massae* (25-XII-2008), recognized by the Algerian journal *El Khabar* (27-XII-2008). Translated in part from the French by me and published in my blog *Desde el Atlántico*. Cfr.: <http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/desdeatlantico.php/2008/12/31/al-qaida-del-magreb-islamico-genealogia->

⁷ About this interview, vid. *Le Jour d’Algérie* (10-VI-2009) “Layada, drogue, Sahara Occidental et terrorisme. Les graves dérapages de Taïb Fassi sur BBC” («Layada, drugs, Western Sahara and terrorism. Taïb Fassi’s serious skidding at BBC”) Cf.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6495>; <http://diasporasaharai.blogspot.com.es/2014/09/maroc-layada-droque-sahara-occidental.html>

weapons to GIA⁸; and the French secret services were behind the unlawful seizure of an Airbus by the GIA back on December 24th 1994⁹.

As far as Driss Basri is concerned, we have his testimony in one of his last interviews where he said that the Moroccan government was not only aware of the fact that the Islamic terrorists who operated in Algeria were taking refuge in Morocco, but they did not even think about intervening to prevent it¹⁰.

Moreover, the analysis of what is certainly the most investigated GIA crime (the murder of seven French Trappist monks in Tibéhirine) is far from confirming the implication of the Algerian intelligence in such murder, notwithstanding the accusations made by the advocates of the “qui tue qui?” (“who kills who?”), and it rather allows to defend completely opposed theses¹¹. The investigation of this crime led journalist Didier Contant to discredit several of the most relevant representatives of the thesis that accused the Algerian intelligence of complicity with the GIA, such as Abdelkader Tigha and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire. Contant, who came to the conclusion that there was no such complicity, was subject of a slandering campaign and was harassed by Rivoire. The outcome is that Contant died in not very clear circumstances. On November 26th 2009, Rivoire was convicted by a Paris Court for having exerted premeditated violence against Contant, thus being given victory to the criminal proceedings initiated by Rina Sherman, the fiancée of the deceased Contant¹².

THE TERRORIST THREAT SPREADS OUTSIDE ALGERIA

On October 30th 2001, Morocco retired his Ambassador in Spain, as a reaction to the position of the Government of Spain and at the moment opposed to a solution to the conflict of

⁸ vid. *Le Jour d'Algérie*, “Graves révélations de Abdelhak Layada: «La France nous aidait à fomenter un coup d'État»” (Serious revelations of Abdelhak Layada: «France was helping us to promote a coup») (12-VII-2009). Cf.: <http://axedelaresistance.com/revelations-de-abdelhak-layada-gia-letat-francais-nous-aidait-a-fomenter-un-coup-detat-en-algerie/>; <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6525>

⁹ *La Nouvelle République*, “Révélations du fondateur des GIA, Abdelhak Layada: «Les services secrets français sont derrière le détournement de l'Airbus en 1995»” (Revelations of GIA founder, Abdelhak Layada: «The French secret services are behind the diversion of the Airbus back in 1995») (09-VII-2009). Cf.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6525>

¹⁰ Interview with Driss Basri in the *ABC* journal (30-V-2004):

^{10P}: Cuando Argelia ardía por el terrorismo, el gobierno de Argel acusó a a Marruecos de dejar pasar a su territorio a los terroristas para descansar después de cometer sus atentados en suelo argelino. ¿Era cierto aquello? (Q.: When Algeria was on fire because of the terrorism, the government of Algiers accused Morocco of letting the terrorists pass into its territory in order to take some rest after committing their attacks in Algerian soil. ¿Was that true?)

^{10R}: Sí, *estábamos al corriente*, pero no podíamos hacer nada. Esos maquis atraviesan la frontera para ver a sus parientes, y *no siempre* sabíamos quienes era. Aun si lo hubiéramos sabido, si no cometían ningún acto delictivo en nuestro territorio *no teníamos motivo para intervenir*” (cursivas mías) (A.: Yes, *we were informed*, but we could not do anything about it. Those guerrilla bands crossed the border in order to visit their relatives and *we did not always know* who they were. Even if we had known that, if they did not commit any criminal act on our soil, *we had no reason to intervene*. (The italics are mine). Cf.: <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/2004/05/30/011.html>

¹¹ Ruiz Miguel, C. Crímenes islamistas en Argelia y servicios secretos: una clarificación necesaria (Islamic crimes in Algeria and the secret services: a necessary clarification), *GEES* (21-VII-2009); cf.: http://www.gees.org/articulos/crimenes_islamistas_en_argelia_y_servicios_secretos_una_clarificacion_necesaria_6627

¹² http://www.lemidi-dz.com/index.php?operation=voir_article&id_article=evenement%40art4%402009-11-29. <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6652>

Western Sahara without holding a referendum for self-determination. In the context of such a crisis, on June 23rd 2002, Morocco detained three Saudi nationals accused of preparing attacks against the Sixth USA Fleet in the Strait of Gibraltar with “suicide-boats”. Just 3 weeks later Morocco invaded the small Spanish island of Perejil, in the Strait of Gibraltar, with the argument that it intended to prevent terrorist attacks in the zone. As I said at the very first moment, this “anti-terrorist” operation was just a swindle to justify the occupation of the Spanish Territories in Northern Africa off the Mediterranean coast¹³. Notwithstanding, an author close to Spanish official bodies gave credibility to this operation, ignoring my opinion¹⁴. However, there was no follow-up for this so-called threat after Spain liberated the island in a blitz operation.

On 16th May 2003 there were some suicide attacks in Casablanca (Morocco) although some of them were aimed at Spanish interests. At the time of the attacks on May 16th 2003, the question of their authorship was raised in Casablanca. Two theories were presented. According to the first one, which I defended, the attacks complied with Morocco’s internal dynamics¹⁵. According to the second, the official one¹⁶, the attacks had an external inspiration and specifically from a group allegedly connected to “Al-Qaeda”¹⁷, the “Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group” (“GICM”). Notwithstanding the fact that it had not previously committed any attack, on October 10th 2002 (before the Casablanca bombings) the group was included, at the request of Morocco, in the terrorist organizations list created after Resolution 1333 (2000) of the Security Council concerning Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and their associates¹⁸. The alleged “GICM”, the existence of which was asserted by the Moroccan government, was a little later declared as an existing “terrorist group” by the North American¹⁹ and the British governments, before the Casablanca attacks. It should be pointed out that when those attacks were performed the alleged “GICM” did not claim responsibility for such attacks.

¹³ Ruiz Miguel, C. “Corremos el riesgo de repetir la Historia”, *El Mundo* (13-VII-2002) <http://www.elmundo.es/2002/07/13/opinion/index.html> and Ruiz Miguel, C. “Integrismo y crisis política en Marruecos” (Fundamentalism and political crisis in Morocco), *Análisis del Real Instituto Elcano* (3-VI-2003). cf. <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/298/ARI-82-2003-E.pdf>

¹⁴ Echevarría, C. “Libertad, democracia y desarrollo en el Magreb siglo XXI:

^{10s} desafíos de seguridad” (15-III-2016). www.almendron.com/politica/pdf/2006/8610.pdf

¹⁵ Ruiz Miguel, C. “Integrismo y crisis política en Marruecos”, cit.

¹⁶ Several international human rights organisations have denounced the use of the torture to obtain confessions of the detainees after those attacks. See Federation Internationale des Liges des Droits de l’Homme, *Les autorités marocaines a l’épreuve du terrorisme : la tentation de l’arbitraire. Violations flagrantes des droits de l’Homme dans la lutte anti-terroriste*, February 2004. <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ma379f-3.pdf>
Amnesty International, *Maroc et Sahara Occidental. « Lutte contre le terrorisme » et recours à la torture: le cas du centre de détention de Témara*, 24 June 2004. <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/mde29/004/2004/fr/>

Human Rights Watch, *Morocco: Human Rights at a Crossroads*, October 2004. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/morocco1004/morocco1004.pdf>

¹⁷ So is said, for example, by Miguel Hernando de Larramendi, “Las relaciones con Marruecos tras los atentados del 11 de marzo” (The relationships with Morocco after the attacks of March 11), *Análisis del Real Instituto Elcano* (5-IV-2004). cf. http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/terrorismo+internacional/ari+61-2004

¹⁸ The USA also listed this “group” before it committed any crime on November, 22nd 2002. The “group” was delisted on May 28th 2013.

¹⁹ Statement of December 5, 2002, *Federal Register*: December 17, 2002 (Volume 67, Number 242, 77311). The North-American statement only says that this group “has committed, or poses a significant risk of committing, acts of terrorism”.

If “Al-Qaeda” had already been present in North Africa through that alleged “GICM” which, according to some people, was already bound with Bin Laden’s organization, why should a “franchise” for the whole Maghreb under the name of “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” been established? This issue is even more surprising when you consider that at the origin of this alleged “Al-Qaeda” there was another group (GIA-GSPC) which, according to the United Nations’ terrorist organization list, had already had connections with “Al-Qaeda”²⁰. The fact is that the European Court of Human Rights has declared that the “evidences” obtained by Moroccan courts about the “GICM” have been obtained in clear violation of the right not to be tortured and therefore have no validity in European courts²¹.

Some Moroccan nationals were involved in the Madrid bombings on 11th March 2004. The attack presented some peculiar circumstances. The first and more important one is that it was not carried out by suicide-terrorists despite some misinformation at the first moment. The second is that several Moroccan nationals were involved in this attack, one of them, Said Berraj, the most important of all (considered as material author of the crime) fled, has never been captured and was suspected to work for the Moroccan Secret Service²². But the third and most important factor is that two high-ranking Spanish officials (one publicly, the other privately) acknowledged a link between this attack and the question of Western Sahara. On the one hand, Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel Ángel Moratinos said on July 15th 2004, at a summer course organized by the University Complutense of Madrid, that an acceptable solution for the conflict of Western Sahara was vital for all the parties in the conflict, and also for the others, because otherwise “we will still have situations like the one in Madrid on March 11th”²³. On the other hand, General Director for the Foreign Policy in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa Álvaro Iranzo Gutiérrez privately communicated with an USA official in the same direction in at least two cables released by Wikileaks. In a cable dated July 14th 2004 (that is, one day before the public statement made by the Spanish MFA) he said that “the GOS is concerned that failure in the Western Sahara would jeopardize the MINURSO mandate, radicalize Moroccans, and possibly increase illegal immigration and terrorism in Spain”²⁴. In another cable dated three years later (October 1st 2007), the same Iranzo discussed “about Spanish concerns about terrorism coming from or through the Maghreb. “Western Sahara is our Iraq,” said Iranzo”²⁵. It is worth mentioning that long before, at the time when Spain administered Western Sahara, according to another USA cable from 1973, the Moroccan MFA said that “if Spain intended to present Morocco with a

²⁰ <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/un-sc-consolidated-list>

²¹ European Court of Human Rights, Case of El Haski v. Belgium, 25 September 2012, paragraph 99.

²² Parliamentary question of Alicia Castro Masaveu, *Boletín Oficial del Congreso de los Diputados* n° 379 (4-V-2006), 170. http://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L8/CONG/BOCG/D/D_379.PDF#page=170

The Government just answered that the Government has no evidence about it

Boletín Oficial del Congreso de los Diputados n° 407 (15-VI-2006), p. 194 http://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L8/CONG/BOCG/D/D_407.PDF#page=194

²³ According to a dispatch of EFE, speaking about the Western Sahara conflict the Minister said: “*la consecución de una solución aceptable para todos ‘es una necesidad objetiva y vital para ellos y, sobre todo, para nosotros, porque si no seguiremos viviendo situaciones como el 11 de Marzo’*”.

The pages with this statement are almost all completely deleted in the web. It still can be found in <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/2739> and <http://www.libertaddigital.com/mundo/moratinos-dice-que-si-no-se-resuelve-el-conflicto-del-sahara-viviremos-situaciones-como-el-11-m-1276227945/>

²⁴ https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04MADRID2659_a.html

²⁵ https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07STATE138404_a.html

fait accomplice of referendum which would result either in a decision of continued association of Spanish Sahara with Spain or for independence, Morocco would create a situation of great insecurity for Spain in the Sahara and has means to do so”²⁶.

On June 4th 2005, there was an armed attack that killed 15 Mauritanian soldiers in the north of Mauritania, at the Lemgheity garrison (situated near the frontier between Mauritania and Mali and Algeria) and 400(!) kilometres away from the Western Sahara frontier. The responsibility for that attack was claimed by the Algerian group GSPC (“Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat”) so far operating inside the Algerian borders.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE AQLIM IN 2006

1.

The GSPC in 2006, under strange circumstances, decided to change its name into “Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb” (AQLIM) and allegedly took a pledge of loyalty to Osama Bin Laden. On a webpage no more existent (*Magharebia*) officially sponsored by the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) on North African issues, strange circumstances that gave rise to this “Al-Qaeda” were reminded:

“The relationships between (Abdelmalek) Droukdel²⁷ (the supposed former AQIM leader) and (Abou Obeida) Youcef²⁸ (the supposed new AQIM leader and previous head of the group’s “Council of Worthies”) have deteriorated ever since the 2006 announcement that the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) had become affiliated with the international Al-Qaeda network. The Council of Worthies was set aside and it was never consulted by the terrorist organization’s new leader (Droukdel)”²⁹.

Such a rare form of “association” with Al-Qaeda led an Algerian newspaper, *La Nouvelle République*, to ask:

“Is GSPC affiliation with Al-Qaeda credible? Why not consider that it is a promoted, provoked, programmed announcement by those who consider us as their strategic enemy within the geopolitical area which the Algerian authorities do not give up declaring as their property?”³⁰.

This group has been responsible for several kidnappings and assassinations since it was labelled as “AQLIM”. Those crimes were carried out against French, Spanish, Austrian, and British citizens, in Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Tunisia³¹. One of the more striking actions was the kidnapping of three Spanish citizens in Mauritania on November 29th 2009, shortly after the outbreak of the crisis in the “Haidar case” that made Spain confront with Morocco, shortly after Morocco illegally deported to Spain Saharawi citizen Aminatu Haidar, who had landed in El Aaiún, on November 14th. The Moroccan authorities took Haidar’s passport and deported her to Spain with the complicity of the Spanish authorities.

²⁶ https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1973STATE059672_b.html [note: the referendum could not be a “fait accomplice” insofar the United Nations asked for it since its Resolution A/RES/2229 from December 20th 1966].

²⁷ Also known as the alias of Abu Mussaab Abdelwadud.

²⁸ “Abu Obeida Yusef” or “Yusef el Annabf” is the alias of Yassid Embarek.

²⁹ <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6773>

³⁰ *La Nouvelle République* (16-III-2010): <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6773>

³¹ For a reference until 2011, see <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2011/0119/AQIM-kidnapping-and-murder-a-brief-history>

The deported then began a hunger strike at the airport of Lanzarote until she was allowed to return to her country, Western Sahara, something that only occurred on December 17th 2009. The webpage of the US Department of State considers that AQLIM was listed as a terrorist group on 27th March 2002³², however at that time AQLIM as such did not exist and it was the GSPC which was listed.

2.

There are several reasons to support the idea that “AQLIM” might be used as an instrument by one or several states. Several theses were devised in this regard: some of them bind “AQLIM” with Mali; others with Algeria; others with the Polisario Front and others with Morocco and France. Of course, if “AQLIM” is an instrument for covert operations it also might not be just ONE organization, but a set of two or more groups manipulated by different actors.

AQLIM and Mali

The bond between “AQLIM” and *Mali*, although it did not appear originally, has been denounced as an occurred fact. The argumentation turns around two ideas. On one hand, the surprising AQLIM freedom of movement in Mali, according to the testimony of Mustafá Chafi (a Mauritanian citizen, assistant and adviser of the former president of Burkina (Blaise Compaoré), who acted as a mediator in order to release some Spanish citizens who had been kidnapped by “AQLIM”), who admitted at an interview with the daily newspaper ABC that, during his intervention to make “AQIM” release three kidnapped Spanish citizens he went to “AQIM” bases in the North of Mali at least twelve times³³. On the other hand, it has been stated that “AQIM” takes advantage of the passiveness or even of the complicity of certain Malian responsible agents belonging to the high spheres of the state³⁴ or at least to corrupt spheres of the state³⁵.

A variation of this thesis binds “AQLIM” with Mustafá Chafi. According to the Algerian press, during the kidnapping of the Spanish citizens in 2009-2010 the Mauritanian govern-

³² <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>; However, the Executive Order 13224 blocking Terrorist Property and a summary of the Terrorism Sanctions Regulations, considers that the GSPC was listed on August 21st 2002.

³³ “Mustafa Chafi told ABC how he managed to release the two aid workers”, *ABC* (24-VIII-2010). On the above mentioned reportage this textual phrase is assigned to the mediator: “During the nine months kidnapping, Chafi went up to the Camps of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb at least a dozen times and each time negotiated face to face with Mojtar Belmokhtar, the responsible for the cell that was detaining the Spanish citizens”. Cfr. <http://www.abc.es/20100824/espana/liberacion-201008240111.html>

³⁴ This is asserted by the Algerian newspaper “*Liberté*” on its edition of 31-VIII-2010 in an article under the heading “Le Mali, une fausse note dans la lutte antiterroriste: ce pays est devenu une base arrière de l’islamisme armé” (Mali, a false note in the fight against terrorism: this country became a rear base of armed Islamism). In this article is affirmed that “everything is done under the planning of the State which takes advantage of the intermediaries who move around the Malian power” according to some persons close to the “AQIM” leader, named Belmokhtar, who kidnapped the Spanish citizens. The daily paper adds that a former comrade of Belmokhtar disclosed that he has seen responsible agents of the Malian government taking tea at AQIM camps in the desert on occasion of a courtesy call to a leader of the group”. cf. http://www.liberte-algerie.com/edit_archive.php?id=141783

³⁵ *Reuters*, “Al Qaeda gets help from Mali officials - ex-rebel” (12-VIII-2010); cf. <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE67B3BD20100812>

ment tried to convince the Spanish government that the kidnappings were planned by Chafi the mediator himself because he would profit from a percentage of the ransoms. It was not in vain that Chafi acted as a mediator in two other cases: the kidnapping of two Canadian diplomatic agents in 2009 and that of the French spy Pierre Camatte, who were set free in exchange for the release of prisoners and also for money³⁶.

AQLIM and Algeria (and USA)

The thesis linking “AQLIM” to *Algeria* and the *USA* has its precedent in the “qui tue qui” accusations which bound the Algerian intelligence service with the Algerian Islamic terrorism before the appearance of “AQLIM”. Later has been supported by Jeremy Keenan as its most prominent upholder.

Keenan says that “the way in which this terrorism was fabricated is a very long narrative, (...) That whole long narrative was conducted by the Algerian secret military intelligence services — the DRS”. Keenan, has developed this thesis by adding a new argument: the USA became an accomplice of “AQLIM” kidnappings by providing intelligence and political cover to the operations of the Algerian secret services. The reason that led Washington to this cooperation was the purpose of fabricating a terrorist threat at the very heart of the Sahara in order to be able to immediately justify the USA military expansion in Africa with a view to control the oil and the natural resources of the continent, in particular those of the Sahara. It was this operation that provided the pretext for the launch of a new front on the War on Terror in Africa: the Sahara-Sahel front”. According to Keenan, on its part Algeria consented on this operation because it needed modern military equipment in order to put an end to the armed activities that arose after the military coup which prevented the Algerian Islamists to reach power in 1992³⁷.

However, Keenan’s thesis has some inconsistencies or weak points. Firstly, he assumes the thesis of “Qui tue qui?” (Who kills who?) to be true although there are good reasons to think that it may have been launched as a disinformation operation. Secondly, it is difficult to understand why Algeria would support the creation of a terrorist threat in Sahara-Sahel to obtain modern weapons meant to fight a group which is already a threat inside the country(!) and which ironically is said to be created and controlled by the Algerian secret service itself.

³⁶ *Liberté*, “Révélations du principal médiateur burkinabais: Comment j’ai négocié avec Belmokhtar pour libérer les espagnols” (Revelations of the principal Burkinabè mediator: How I negotiated with Belmokhtar to release the Spanish), (29-VIII-2010). cfr.: <http://www.liberte-algerie.com/actualite/le-mali-une-fausse-note-dans-la-lutte-antiterroriste-83052/print/1>

³⁷ “Although the name has changed from GSPC (Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat) to AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), it is essentially the same organisation, heavily infiltrated by the Algerian secret intelligence service (DRS [Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité, Department of Intelligence and Security, i.e., military intelligence]) and with its key leaders (emirs) linked to the DRS”. Cfr. Jeremy Keenan, “The origins of AFRICOM: the Obama administration, the Sahara-Sahel and US Militarization of Africa (Part Three)”, in *ACAS Bulletin 85: US militarization of the Sahara-Sahel: Security, Space & Imperialism* (2010) cfr. <http://concernedafricascholars.org/bulletin/issue85/keenan/>

These theses have been exposed by Keenan in several other works: Jeremy Keenan. “Conspiracy theories and terrorists”, *Anthropology Today*, vol. 22 (2006), 4 ff., cf.: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8322.2006.00470.x/pdf>; ID., *The Dark Sahara: America’s War on Terror in Africa*, Pluto Press, London, 2009; Interview with J. Keenan, “British Anthropologist Jeremy Keenan on “The Dark Sahara: America’s War on Terror in Africa” (6-IX-2010), cfr. <http://www.democracynow.org/2009/8/6/keenan>; Keenan, J. “‘Secret hand’ in French Sahel raid”, in <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2010/08/201085183329292214.html> [29-VIII-2010]

Thirdly, it is unreasonable that the creator of such a terrorist group could be the very same country that doubtlessly fights it the most: the group's leaders were tried and condemned (and put on the run in order not to be imprisoned); the government is against the payment of ransoms that will finance the group; finally, there is no doubt that Algeria is the country which eliminated several terrorists.

Nevertheless, it is also true that Keenan emphasized some very relevant facts. The most interesting one may be that as early as 2003 there was an attempt to link the GSPC leader (known as "El Para") to Bin Laden through a video, although it appears that the video was a fraud³⁸.

AQLIM and the Polisario Front

A less credible thesis, but the most insidious one, is the one that binds AQLIM with the *Polisario Front* and which was widely spread from publications to the environment centres of the Moroccan intelligence service. This thesis began to circulate as a result of the 2005 attack on the Mauritanian garrison of Lemgheity ascribed to GSPC³⁹, near the boundary of this country with Mali and later on it came up again on the occasion of the kidnapping of three Spanish citizens in Mauritania, in November 2009.

A

Just a few days after the Lemgheity attack on *June 4th 2005*, the disinformation machine of the Moroccan secret services entered into operation and daily paper "Makhzen" ("*Aujourd'hui le Maroc*"), very close to the high spheres of the supreme Moroccan power, started the "mediatisation" operation with an article entitled "The Algerian trail becomes definite", which reported the following:

"(...) One of the injured men at the Lemgheity attack has stated that, during the attack, he identified two "Land Rover" vehicles belonging to Polisario. The passengers of these vehicles who were present at the moment of the attack helped the terrorists to transport the communication equipment and weaponry, affirmed the injured man in a statement at the office of MAP (Moroccan official news agency) in Nuakchott (Mauritanian capital). The injured, whose state of health improved, added that the first groups of armed elements of the GSPC who arrived at the place of the attack were speaking fluently the "Hassaniya" dialect,

³⁸ Keenan, J. "Conspiracy theories and 'terrorists'", cit., 5-6.

³⁹ I pointed this idea in 2006, see "Implicaciones estratégicas de la nueva situación política en Mauritania" (12-I-2006) https://www.almendron.com/politica/pdf/2006/int/int_1719.pdf

However, there is an author (close to the Spanish Army and secret service) who repeatedly has tried to contest this opinion. According to his view the "first" time that Morocco tried to link the Polisario with the islamist terrorism was in "2002" in a meeting of Mohamed VI with Donald Rumsfeld in "Ifiran" (Morocco). Cfr. Carlos Echeverría, "La industria del secuestro en el escenario africano", *Ejército* n° 850 (2012), 114. The same author exposed the same opinión in "¿Proyección limitada de Al Qaeda en las tierras del Magreb islámico (AQMI)?" (13-XI-2010), <http://www.onemagazine.es/noticia/3123/sin-especificar/proyeccion-limitada-de-al-qaeda-en-las-tierras-del-magreb-islamico-aqmi.html>

However this thesis lack of any credibility at all for the very simple reason that there has never been a meeting between Mohamed VI and Rumsfeld in Ifiran in 2002.

which leads one to believe that they were “Bidani”. On the other hand, he denied that these men were Mauritanian.⁴⁰

This thesis was assumed by the “report” published in November 2005 by a Centre for Studies with headquarters in Brussels (ESISC) in order to discredit the Polisario Front, by stating that “it was not possible to reject” the thesis that Polisario was involved in that attack, given the fact that it was claimed by “certain witnesses”⁴¹. Well now, the “witnesses” are only “one”, the injured man mentioned by “*Aujourd’hui le Maroc*”. An injured man whose credibility is null and void not only for reasons we shall discuss later but also because the “Bidani” who speak “Hassaniya” are both the Saharawi and the non-black Mauritanian.

A few weeks before the publication of the ESISC report meant to discredit the Polisario Front in December 2005, the critical Moroccan weekly newspaper “*Le Journal Hebdomadaire*” published a special number on the same subject⁴². That special number reproduced numerous fragments of the mentioned report in order to explain the weekly newspaper’s theses which were structured into three articles. In one of them, it was said that ESISC was funded through the payment of orders for studies placed with them and that there were reasons to suspect that the report had been directly or indirectly financed by the Moroccan power. In another article it was stated that the report was “remotely controlled” by Rabat. Finally, in a third article, there was an interview with Bernabé López García, a well-known Spanish defender of Moroccan theses, who said that the report had been prepared “to please Morocco”.

A concurrent fact gave some credibility to the denouncement made by “*Le Journal Hebdomadaire*”. The Polisario Front sent ESISC a written response to the “report” dated December 29th 2005⁴³. To that official response the replies worked out by members of the Polisario Front in their personal capacity should be added⁴⁴. ESISC has refused to publish it. Up to this day. Since that time the partiality in favour of the Moroccan power has no longer been a subjective issue but an objective one.

The special number of “*Le Journal Hebdomadaire*” has been quite a severe blow to the makhzen because it assumes the total loss of credibility of the ESISC report which was supposed to discredit the Polisario Front. It had been no use to try to silence the Polisario Front by refusing its right of reply. “*Le Journal Hebdomadaire*”, the most prestigious publication in the diplomatic environment accredited in Rabat, had just dismantled the discrediting operation against the Polisario Front.

Before such a failure, the reaction did not take long: Claude Moniquet, a representative of ESISC, sued *Le Journal* for considering that the statement about the report having been

⁴⁰ <http://aujourd'hui.ma/monde/mauritanie-la-piste-algerienne-se-precise-32990> <http://www.maghress.com/fr/aujourd'hui/36896>

⁴¹ ESISC, *The Polisario Front, credible negotiations partner or after-effect of the cold war and obstacle to a political solution in Western Sahara?* (November 2005). Cfr.: (page 73 of the report). The text is no more available in the ESISC webpage.

⁴² *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* had a page in Internet. After the closure of this newspaper by pressure of the Moroccan authorities, that page disappeared. Nevertheless, the articles it has published on this issue can be consulted here: <http://es.groups.yahoo.com/group/sahara-info/message/4105>

⁴³ <http://www.arso.org/esiscpf.pdf>

⁴⁴ Worthy of mention are those of Khatry Beirouk, *Qué hay detrás del informe del ESISC* (What lies behind the report of ESISC) (1-VI-2006); cf.: <http://www.arso.org/opinions/kbESISCs.htm>; and of Sidi Omar, *Review of the ESISC Report on the POLISARIO Front* (22-XII-2005) cf.: <http://www.arso.org/opinions/sidiomaresics.pdf>; <http://www.arso.org/opinions/sidiomaresics.htm>

“ordered” by Morocco was defamation⁴⁵. He made this claim before the Moroccan courts. Moniquet’s lawyer recognized that “it was Moroccan staff members who are perfectly integrated in various European countries who instigated the report”. The trial was held in a record time and the result was the expectable one in a country like Morocco, where there is no judicial independence: “*Le Journal*” was convicted to pay a fine equivalent to 275,000 euros, the highest one in Morocco’s history. Do not forget that the average salary in Morocco is around 200 euros a month. The final result was that “*Le Journal*” had to shut down because it could not cope with such a payment. The conviction occurred after “*Le Journal*” accused Moniquet and his lawyer of bad faith. Bad faith was clear as Claude Moniquet did not sue Bernabé López before the Spanish courts for having stated that the report was made “to please Morocco”.

But finally justice did its job in order to put an end to the speculations. On July 13th 2009, the Court of Appeal of Nuakchott tried the Lemgheity case, determined who had carried out the attack against the Lemgheity garrison on June 4th 2005, condemned some detainees and released others. It was proven that there had been absolutely no involvement of the Polisario Front⁴⁶:

“According to an ANI correspondent, the Court of Appeal has made public his verdict on the Lemgheity matter on Monday afternoon, (...)”

The sentences are as follows: conviction of Taher Uld Biyé and Teyeb Uld Salek for falsification and use of falsifications, belonging to an armed group against Mauritania.

Taher Uld Abdel Jelil Uld Biyé was sentenced to eight instead of five years imprisonment. Teyeb Uld Salek was sentenced to seven instead of three years imprisonment..

The Court confirmed the three year prison sentence for the convicted Ely Cheij Uld Jaumani and the conviction to two years (on probation) of Mustafá Uld Abdel Kader.

It acquitted Mohamed Salem Uld Mohamed Lemín, a.k.a. Al Mashlisi, Sidi Uld Sidina, Brahim Uld Hmeida.

It filed, by reason of his death, the accusation made against Ahmed Uld Rahdi.

The Court postponed the pronouncement of its verdict with respect to those who were tried in absentia, namely Mohamed Lamin, Uld Yeddu and Mohamed el Mustafá Uld Cheiguer Sidi Mohamed Uld Cheijani, expecting that they may appear according to the laws in force”.

The proof that this accusation is based on a clear bad faith is that even after this sentence has proven the untruth of the accusations against the Polisario Front, some people went on keeping them up, thus feeding the spiral of misinformation that was caused to rise by the Moroccan intelligence. So did ESISC on a new report in which it renews the accusations already made in 2005, without any reconsideration in spite of the facts⁴⁷. So did a Spanish journalist too adding some new elements to this fabrication:

“The attack on June 4th 2005 by the GSCP against Mauritanian barracks in Lemgheity, in which fifteen soldiers were killed, seems to announce that beyond logistical work the

⁴⁵ A complete dossier on this process can be found in this address: <http://www.arso.org/esiscpf.pdf>

⁴⁶ *Agence Nouakchott Info (ANI)*, “La Cour d’Appel prononce son verdict dans le dossier Lemgheithy” (The Court of Appeal pronounces its verdict on the Lemgheity dossier) (17-VII-2009). cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6695>; <http://ocvidh.blogspot.com.es/2009/07/la-cour-dappel-prononce-son-verdict.html>

⁴⁷ ESISC, *The Polisario Front and the development of terrorism in the Sahel*, May 2010, 15. cf.: <http://www.esisc.org/publications/analyses/the-polisario-front-and-the-development-of-terrorism-in-the-sahel>
This new “report” was the subject of a reply by Lih Beiruk, “*Las frívolas y vanas elucubraciones del ESISC*” (“The frivolous and vain speculations of ESISC”). cf.: <http://www.arso.org/lasfrivololasESISC.pdf>

Saharawi are directly involved in terrorist attacks. The participation of at least one member of the Polisario Front, Muawía Uld Lamín Labied, was established by the subsequent investigation. Besides, according to the latter, 4x4 vehicles of the Polisario Front were used in the operation and several terrorists spoke the Arabic dialect Hassaniya, typical of the Saharawi⁴⁸.

It should be noted that, although the judgement by the Court of Appeal of Nuakchott had been issued well before the book was published, the author omits that according to the real judicial investigation there is no Polisario Front member called “Muawía Uld Lamín Labied” convicted, not even prosecuted, because of this matter. On the other hand, it is highly suspicious that an expert in the region argues, in order to accuse the Polisario Front, that the terrorists “spoke the Hassaniya dialect, typical of the Saharawi” when it is well known that same dialect is also spoken in Mauretania. In fact, precisely because they were Mauritians, all convicted spoke Hassaniya.

Between October 2014 and January 2015, there was a massive leak of secret Moroccan documents through a twitter account (@chris_coleman24). Among those documents there was a number of emails where the cabinet chief of the Director of the Moroccan foreign intelligence launched a campaign against the Polisario Front using this so-called “report”⁴⁹.

B

Although it was the first time, after the attack on Lemgheity that the Polisario Front was publicly accused of being linked to Islamic terrorism, the ESISC “report” of November 2005 refers to some pretended previous connections in the year of 2004. However, this is a thesis with no basis at all. The ESISC “report” attributes these statements to “a high-ranking Moroccan official who is an expert in this subject matter”:

“1994 the Algerian security services captured, in the hands of GIA terrorists, a few weapons the serial number of which showed them that they had been supplied by their own Army... to Polisario. We have never known whether these weapons have been sold within a context of traffic or they have been supplied to the terrorists by followers in the Tinduf camps. What is true, on the other hand, is that the Algerian military security forces have asked Polisario for explanations and have very seriously intensified their control over the Islamists who belong to the Front...”⁵⁰.

Although the ESISC report only makes an insinuation saying that “we have never known whether these weapons have been sold within a context of traffic or have been supplied to the terrorists by followers in the Tinduf camps”, a Spanish journalist known for his closeness to the official positions of Rabat had no doubt in citing this report to say something much more serious that not even the report of ESISC dared to say. In particular, this journalist said:

⁴⁸ Alvarado, D. *La yihad a nuestras puertas. La amenaza de Al Qaeda en el Magreb Islámico* (The Jihad at our doors. Al-Qaida threat in Islamic Maghreb), Foca-Akal, Madrid, 2010, 178. The author adds to this text a footnote (note 81) saying that “a Mauritian soldier who survived the attack declared before those in charge of the investigation that in the terrorist convoy were all-terrain vehicles from the Polisario Front”. Note that the author virtually reproduces what is said by *Aujourd’hui le Maroc* on June 20, 2005.

⁴⁹ Among the many emails leaked on this issue, see <http://diasporasaharai.blogspot.com.es/2014/10/document-prouvant-la-relation-entre.html>

⁵⁰ ESISC, *The Polisario Front, credible negotiations partner or after-effect of the cold war and obstacle to a political solution in Western Sahara?* (November 2005), page 71 of the report.

^{The} report, on footnote number 139 says that the source is an “interview with a high Moroccan responsible, Rabat, August 8, 2005”.

“In some cases a *direct* relationship of the Polisario Front’s young people is established with the GIA terrorists. In 1994 the *contacts between both organizations* were evident when, (...), the security services seized a stock of weapons from the GIA, which the Algerian Army itself had previously provided to the Polisario Front, this fact being *confirmed* by the serial number of the arsenal seized”⁵¹.

This statement is rather incredible as the Islamic Front was the not close at all to the Polisario whose ideology was close to the socialist panarabism. Moreover, a good expert of the region must know that the “national emir” of the GIA, Abdelhaq Layada, when he was tried in Algiers in 1994 after being captured, declared that before his extradition by Morocco, high representatives of that State have asked him to eliminate some members of the Moroccan opposition living in Algeria, as well as the Secretary General of the Polisario Front Mohamed Abdelaziz⁵².

C

After the Lemgheity attack there was a new essay to link the Polisario Front to “AQLIM” after the kidnapping of three Spanish citizens in Mauritania on *November 29th 2009*, only a few days after the beginning of the Spanish-Moroccan crisis with the “Haidar case”, mentioned above.

1. Just one day after the kidnapping of the Spanish citizens the disinformation operation began. The office of the *France Presse Agency* (AFP) in Rabat issued a press release according to which “a Moroccan security source” had told them that “the three aid workers would have been abandoned between the North of Mauritania and the South of Western Sahara” in the region of “Aguouimite” (Agwanit, the part of Western Sahara under control of the SADR/Polisario Front). The same dispatch, however, said that these data had been denied by a “Moroccan government official”⁵³. In another press release from Rabat, the AFP argued that “one of the kidnappers who respond to the name of “Azzouzz” – according to the source cited by AFP – had a position of responsibility in the Polisario Front, an armed group that calls for the independence of Western Sahara”⁵⁴.

Despite the low consistency of these press releases a digital medium close to the Moroccan positions, on the very same day of December 1st 2009 echoed the information of APF with two articles that fed the idea that the Polisario Front was involved. On one hand, it headlined that “New information points to possible release of aid workers” relegating to the fine print that was partly dedicated to the denial of such release announced by the headline⁵⁵. On the other hand, and this is more serious, there appeared another article under the title “Morocco

⁵¹ Alvarado, D. *La yihad a nuestras puertas*, cit., 175. The author adds a footnote to this text (note 77) citing as source the report of ESISC, but without citing the page of document where that statement is supposed to be found.

⁵² *The Middle East and North Africa*, vol. 50, Routledge, London, 2003, 839.

⁵³ AFP (30-XI-2009), “No contact with Spanish hostages in Mauritania: ambassador”. The news has been deleted in the web.

⁵⁴ AFP (1-XII-2010), “Los españoles secuestrados en Mauritania habrían sido liberados, según AFP” (The Spanish citizens kidnapped in Mauritania would have been released, according to APF); cf.: <http://www.abc.es/20091201/nacional-asuntos-exteriores/tres-espanoles-secuestrados-mauritania-200912012037.html>

⁵⁵ Canales, P. *El Imparcial* (1-XII-2010), “Nuevas informaciones apuntan a la posible liberación de los cooperantes” (New information points out to the possible release of the aid workers), cf.: <http://www.elimparcial.es/nacional/localizados-los-tres-cooperantes-espanoles-secuestrados-en-mauritania-52884.html>

insinuates that behind the kidnapping would be the Polisario Front”. In the text of the same article it is stated that

“In the kidnapping of the three Spanish persons in Mauritania “several terrorist groups are involved who operate in the region” and “persons who live in the Tinduf camps”, according to an official release made public this Tuesday by the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs”⁵⁶.

This digital medium adds the reference of AFP to mentioned “Azzouzz” in order to totally side with the alleged Moroccan thesis, as it subtitles one section of this “information” as follows: “The *information confirms* that one of the kidnappers belonged to the Polisario Front” (the italic is mine). Only a day later a digital medium close to the Polisario Front published a parody-article commenting the alleged existence of a so-called “Azzouzz” in the Polisario Front and calling attention to the fact that no one is called so among the Saharawi⁵⁷.

2. After these early skirmishes, a second intoxicating offensive was produced a few weeks later. On February 20th 2010, the government of Mali handed over one of its citizens (who had been detained a short time before) to Mauritania, in order to be judged for his participation in the kidnapping of the Spanish. The individual concerned, called Omar Uld Sidi Uld Ahmed, began to receive the nickname “Omar Saharawi”, despite being a citizen of Mali⁵⁸. From this time on, a new intoxication process began.

A Web Page (*Sahel “Intelligence”*), during Uld Hama’s two-day detention began the new intoxication campaign in an article signed by a former lieutenant colonel of the Israeli Army. On the basis of presumed “reliable sources close to the security services operating in the region” this new campaign articulated two points. On one hand, it launched for the first time the a.k.a. of “Omar Saharawi” to designate Uld Hama; on the other hand, also for the first time, it launched the idea that newly named “Omar Saharawi” was nothing more and nothing less than a “staff member of the Polisario Front”. From then on, Benshimon sustains that this detention reinforces the Moroccan thesis that “certain staff members of Polisario glided to Sahel’s Islamic terrorist movements”⁵⁹.

From this point on the campaign continued. A blog close to the Moroccan intelligence service named “*Sahara-retos*”, in the beginning of April launched the idea that “Omar Saharawi” and others involved in the kidnapping were Saharawi:

“The aid workers, two of whom are still in the hands of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, Emir of AQIM in Sahel, were kidnapped by Omar Ould Sid’Ahmed Ould Hamma a.k.a. Omar Saharawi, member of Polisario, who has just been accused by the Mauritanian justice as the main author of the kidnapping and therefore imprisoned in the Central Prison of Nuakchot.

⁵⁶ Canales, P. *El Imparcial* (1-XII-2010), Marruecos insinúa que detras del secuestro estaría el Frente Polisario (Morocco insinuates that behind the kidnapping would be the Polisario Front), cf.: <http://www.elimparcial.es/nacional/marruecos-insinua-que-detras-del-secuestro-de-los-tres-espanoles-estaria-el-frente-polisario-52908.html>

I have not been able to locate the official release made public by the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs; therefore I cannot confirm that it actually exists.

⁵⁷ Beiruk, J. “¿AZZOUZZ?”, *blog Sahara Opinions* (2-XII-2010); cf.: <http://saharaopinions.blogspot.com/2009/12/azzouzz.html>

⁵⁸ ANI (20-II-2010), “L’«argentier» des enlèvements d’otages européens en Mauritanie entre les mains de la DGSN” (The “money man” of the kidnappings of European hostages in Mauritania in the hands of DGSN); cfr. <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6742>

⁵⁹ Benshimon, S. *Sahel Intelligence* (22-II-2010), “L’auteur du rapt des 3 humanitaires en Mauritanie serait un cadre du Front Polisario” (The author of the kidnapping of three humanitarian aid workers in Mauritania would be a staff member of the Polisario Front). cfr.: <http://sahel-intelligence.com/2338-exclusif-lauteur-du-rapt-des-trois-humanitaires-en-mauritanie-serait-un-cadre-du-front-polisario.html>

This piece of information is still not known by Spanish society.

Other executive staff members of Polisario

From Mauritania a request was made to Algeria concerning Polisario leaders Mohamed Salem Mohamed Ali Ould Rguibi, a military belonging in Polisario's Fourth Region, M'hrez, as well as Mohamed Salem Hamoud, an Algerian guerrilla soldier, and Nafii Ould Mohamed M'Barek, who has been a military at Polisario's Seventh Region and was released in the smuggling and illegal traffic of all kinds between Zouirat and Atar, in the North of Mauritania"⁶⁰.

Just a few days after the blog "*Sahara-retos*" introduced in Spain the intoxication on Uld Hama, it was the daily paper *ABC* who disseminated it at national level. An article published on April 12th 2010 under the heading "Mercenary of Al Qaeda", claimed that "Saharawi who, according to an *ABC* source, has been part of Polisario Front organization flowchart"⁶¹. Polisario Front's denial was published on April 18th in the same daily newspaper *ABC* with following words:

"Concerning the information published last April 12th relating to Omar Sidamed Hama, a.k.a. «Saharawi», in which *ABC* assigns to Mauritanian sources alleged bonds with the Polisario Front, the Office of the Polisario Front in Brussels makes the following clarification: «The so-called Omar Sidahmed Hama has never been a member of the Polisario Front, and has no bond whatsoever either by consanguinity or of any kind with the Saharawi. According to his own statements to the Mauritanian press, he is a citizen of Malian origin of the well-known Kinta tribe, who has always lived in the limits of Mauritania's East border, in particular near the border town of Basouknou. Always according to the same person, before being detained he was near the Malian town of Tumbuctu taking care of his herds of camels. We ignore the veracity of the source which *ABC* refers to but it would have been recommendable to be as careful as to get to know that in Mauritania is acting one of the most abundant and active networks of the Moroccan spying services due to the obvious reasons of geographic vicinity and to the historic relationships with the area of the Saharawi conflict. On the other hand, and in order to dissipate any doubt in this regard, the Mauritanian maintain fluid relations with the Polisario Front and so far we have not received any official communication that credits Mr. Omar Sidamed Hama as having any kind of relationship with the Saharawi. The fact of relating the alleged author of the kidnapping of the three Spanish aid workers betrays the clear intent to damage the margin of sympathy that the Saharawi cause has traditionally enjoyed in wide sectors of the Spanish public opinion».⁶²

It was presumable that after this complete refutation the intoxication operation would come to an end. Nevertheless, the proof of how much this territory under litigation is worth is provided by the fierceness to impose such intoxication. In fact, after the refutation, the intoxicating offensive increased with the publication in Spain of a book by a journalist posted in Morocco, who has repeatedly defended the official positions of the Moroccan regime. In that book (published in May 2010, I insist, after the refutation of the Polisario Front was issued), this journalist makes allegations the character of which is proven to be clearly de-

⁶⁰ Blog "*Sahara-Retos*" (7-IV-2010), "Apagón informativo en Madrid por el papel del Polisario en el secuestro de cooperantes catalanes" (News black out in Madrid for the role of Polisario in the kidnapping of Catalan aid workers); cf.: <http://sahara-retos.blogspot.com/2010/04/apagon-informativo-en-madrid-por-el.html>

⁶¹ De Vega, L. *ABC* (12-IV-2010), "Mercenario de Al Qaida" (Mercenary of Al-Qaeda); cf.: <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/2010/04/12/023.html>

⁶² *ABC* (18-IV-2010), "ABC y sus lectores" (ABC and its Readers); cf.: <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/2010/04/18/016.html>

ceitful, by verifying that he goes beyond the article of *Sahel Intelligence* which he quotes to make his allegations. Thus, on one hand, where Benshimon mentions “a Polisario Front’s staff member”, Alvarado writes about “a military representative of the Polisario Front”. On the other hand, where Benshimon mentions a “drift of certain staff members of Polisario” towards terrorism, Alvarado affirms that the existence of “close ties between the Polisario Front and AQIIM” is being “confirmed”. So, Alvarado produces an affirmation that is not contained in the text he cited as the source on the note. This affirmation feeds the theses of the Moroccan intelligence services. Here is the literal passage:

“By the end of February of this year (2010) Omar Uld Sidi Ahmed Hama, a.k.a. Omar Saharawi, a military responsible of the independence supporting organization, has been detained, thus confirming the suspicions about the existence of close ties between the Polisario Front and AQIM”⁶³.

3. The reality, however, was different. When the Mauritanian courts of law opened the process for the kidnapping of the Spanish aid workers there were eleven defendants, (from Western Sahara, Mauritania, Algeria and Mali). On July 21st 2010 the judgement of first instance sentenced Uld Hama to 12 years hard labour and a 75 years old Mauritanian shepherd to one year imprisonment on probation. The other four accused (Mohamed Salem Ould Hmouda, Boukhary Ould Ayssaoui, El Id Ould Ehbouss Regragui et Kowriya Mint Issaoui) were acquitted⁶⁴. In this first instance it was definitely clear that Uld Hama, although he was dubbed “Saharawi” by some people, was actually no Saharawi, but a Malian citizen. Furthermore, it was then specified in detail that he came from the “Machdhuf” tribe (present in Mali and Mauritania)⁶⁵. This case was appealed and on August 11th the Court of Appeal pronounced its final judgement which confirmed all former pronouncements and added an

⁶³ Alvarado, D. *La yihad a nuestras puertas*, cit., p. 178. The author quotes the article of *Sahel Intelligence* dated 22-II-2010, but he presents allegations that have no factual basis.

⁶⁴ *Agence Nouakchott Info* (21-VII-2010), “Procès des auteurs du rapt des espagnols: 12 ans fermes pour Omar Sahraoui et un an avec sursis pour Issaoui” (Trial of the perpetrators of the kidnapping of the Spanish : 12 years effective for Omar Saharawi and one year with suspension for Issaoui); cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6916> <http://www.kassataya.com/mauritanie/8049-proces-des-auteurs-du-rapt-des-espagnols-12-ans-fermes-pour-omar-sahraoui-et-un-an-avec-sursis-pour-issaoui>
Emjad (22-VII-2010), “Enlèvement de trois Espagnols en Mauritanie : douze ans de prison pour Omar le Sarhaoui” (Kidnapping of three Spanish in Mauritania: twelve years in prison for Omar the Saharawi); cfr. <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6916>
Résau Mauritanien d’Informations (24-VII-2010), “Affaire des otages espagnols: Verdict clément” (The case of the Spanish hostages: Clement verdict); cf.: http://www.rmibiladi.com/fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1089:affaire-des-otages-espagnolsverdict-clement&catid=1:actualites&Itemid=2; <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6916>

⁶⁵ *Points Chauds* (16-VIII-2010), “Un mensonge grossier et une tentative insidieuse d’impliquer les sahraouis dans une affaire mauritano-malienne “ (A coarse lie and an insidious attempt to involve the Saharawi in a Mauritanian - Malian case); cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6916>

acquitting pronouncement in favour of another implicated person, Joumaâ Al Regraghi⁶⁶. The conclusion is clear: Uld Hama was Saharawi and no Saharawi had participated in the kidnapping.

4. Despite the objective data, a third intoxicating offensive took place on this subject. A Mauritanian journal published a new intrigue on August 14th just a few days after the appeal judgement. According to this intrigue, when on the very same day of August 14th Uld Hama was taken from the Nuakchot prison, the idea was launched that this had been done to deliver him to Mali... or to Polisario⁶⁷. This third intoxication had a short range, since the Mali government requested the delivery of its citizen, thus putting a swift end to that speculation.

5. Only a few days after the judgement of the Court of Appeal, a new offensive (the fourth one) was launched in two directions. On one hand, Simon Benshimon, in "*Sahel Intelligence*", accused Sleima E'rguibi Mohammed Ali of being a member of the Polisario Front involved in the kidnapping⁶⁸. Still, it is well known that none of the two process judgements gave any credibility to his insinuations. On the other hand, in a rougher way, an individual in Spain endorsed and published a curious thesis according to which the "proof" of "the common interests that unite Polisario (sic) with Al-Qaeda" is "the absence of a minimum confrontation between both parties and the weapons trafficking in which Polisario leaders are engaged (sic) who then sell them again to Al-Qaeda members"⁶⁹. Laying aside the fact that, as it has been documented above, the group from which AQIIM proceeds has attacked individuals of the Polisario Front in Algeria, such "proof" has been absurd since both groups are in different territories. As it is known, "AQIIM" acts mainly in Sahel but, as it is also well known, Western Sahara is not part of Sahel, which is the Southern strip of the Sahara desert.

6. The fourth offensive had poor echo and the third one appeared to be groundless as soon as Uld Hama was delivered to his country, Mali. Then a fifth intoxicating offensive burst out. This time it consisted of a document falsification with the purpose of giving credit to the thesis of the "Saharawi origin" of Uld Hama. On August 18th a web page launched the idea that Uld Hama "had been given a fabricated Malian identity according to the

⁶⁶ *Agence Nouakchott Info* (11-VIII-2010), "La Cour d'appel confirme la peine de 12 ans avec travaux forcés requise contre «Oumar Sahraoui»" (The Court of Appeal confirms the 12 years sentence with hard labour required against «Omar Saharawi»); cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6916>

Résau Mauritanien d'Informations (24-VII-2010), "Affaire Omar Sahraoui: Un verdict très attendu" (*Mauritanian information network* (24-VII-2010), The Omar Saharawi case: A very awaited verdict); cfr.: http://www.rmibiladi.com/fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1176:affaire-omar-sahraoui-un-verdict-tres-attente&catid=1:actualites&Itemid=2

PANA (12-VIII-2010), "Confirmation en appel de la condamnation pour terrorisme d'un Malien" (Confirmation on appeal of the conviction for terrorism of a Malian); cfr.: http://www.mauritanie-web.com/actualite_7550_1_confirmation-en-appel-de-la-condamnation-pour-terrorisme-d-un-malien.htm

⁶⁷ *Tahalil* (14-VIII-2010), "Libération-expulsion de Omar Sahraoui sur fond de menaces contre les otages" (Release-banishment of Omar Saharawi on the ground of threats against the hostages). <http://www.journaltahalil.com/detail.php?id=4222&categ=19>

⁶⁸ Benshimon, S. *Sahel Intelligence* (27-VIII-2010), "Otages espagnols : l'hypothèse du troisième homme (Spanish hostages: the assumption of the third man). Cfr.: <http://sahel-intelligence.com/2395-otages-espagnols-lhypothese-du-troisieme-homme.html>

⁶⁹ Gil Garre, J. M. C. *Globedia* (24-VIII-2010), "El Polisario: treinta años abusando de los derechos de los saharauis (II Parte)" (The Polisario : thirty years abusing the rights of the Saharawi (Part II)); cf.: <http://globedia.com/polisario-anos-abusando-derechos-saharauis-parte>

moment”⁷⁰. Thus, in a Mauritanian publication (*CRIDEM*), usually very receptive to Rabat the new message transmitted was published on August 28th by someone who calls himself Mohamed Mohamed Lamine. This Lamine, in addition to citing the odd thesis of Gil Garre according to which the “proof” of the collusion between the Polisario Front and “AQLIM” was the absence of conflicts between them, also cited the insinuations of ESISC again in the same sense. In this context, a new “controversy” was aroused on the true identity of Uld Hama. According to this new intoxication:

“Generally well informed Moroccan sources have recently expressed their great astonishment over the extradition of Omar Uld Si Ahmed Uld Hamma, better known under the name of ‘Omar Saharawi’ to Mali by the Mauritanian authorities.

(...) Such sources have also condemned the extradition operation by pointing out that the information given by Mauritania about the Malian identity is inaccurate, showing the birth certificate established by Polisario”⁷¹

In a blog under the dubious title “*Intelligence and national security*”, but dedicated to defame the Polisario Front, on September 9th the publication of the alleged documents “as an exclusive” was announced, “to which we gained access through a journey worthy of a movie”, stated the author of the blog, José María (Chema) Gil Garre. The alleged documents appear as certificates issued by SADR, a birth certificate and a paternity certificate. In accordance with the alleged “birth certificate”, Omar, son of Sidamed Hamma and Deina Embarec, was born in Farsia on March 18th 1957 and has SADR’s ID number 79692146⁷². The next day, September 10th, weekly paper *Maroc Hebdo*, close to the Moroccan military intelligence, published the alleged birth certificate too⁷³ which, a few days later, on 14th, was also reproduced by Moroccan journal *Libération*⁷⁴.

Nevertheless, there are several indications that lead us to conclude that we are facing a gross forgery. Firstly, and considering that even before the documents were published “as exclusive”, there had already been a warning of this operation since August 18th the intent of forgery had already been denounced and it was published that the SADR ID number 79692146 corresponds to that of another citizen, also born in Farsia on a 18th March but of 1978, specifically to Elbu Salahi Moh-Moulud⁷⁵. Secondly, it is very hard to explain that those “as exclusive” documents are translated into Spanish if, as it is mentioned in same

⁷⁰ *Maghreb Intelligence* (18-VIII-2010), “Omar Ould Hamma « Sahraoui », le cadeau algérien à l’Espagne” (Omar Uld Hamma “Saharawi”, the <Algerian> <gift> to Spain). The article has been deleted from the web.

⁷¹ Lamine, M. M. *CRIDEM* (28-VIII-2010), “Polémique sur l’identité d’Omar Sahraoui” (Polemical on the identity of Omar Saharawi); cfr.: http://www.cridem.org/C_Info.php?article=46794

⁷² Gil Garre, J. M. C., blog *Inteligencia y Seguridad internacional* (9-IX-2010), “EXCLUSIVA: El Secuestrador de los cooperantes españoles era un saharawi de los campamentos del Frente Polisario, estos son sus papeles” (EXCLUSIVE : The Kidnapper of the Spanish aid workers was a Saharawi from the Polisario Front Camps, these are his papers); The article has been deleted from the web.

⁷³ *Maroc Hebdo* n° 898 (10/16-IX-2010), “Omar Sahraoui: Le lien entre le Polisario et Al Qaïda” (Omar Saharawi: The link between Polisario and Al-Qaida).

⁷⁴ Ouchen, S. *Libération* (14-IX-2010), Les liaisons suspectes du Polisario ne font plus de doute: Un terroriste malien se fait livrer son acte de naissance depuis Tindouf (The suspicious links of Polisario are no longer of doubt: A Malian terrorist arranges for the delivery of his birth certificate from Tindouf); cf.: http://www.libema.com/Les-liaisons-suspectes-du-Polisario-ne-font-plus-de-doute-Un-terroriste-malien-se-fait-livrer-son-acte-de-naissance_a13925.html

⁷⁵ *Diaspora Saharawi*, (31-VIII-2010) “Identité d’Omar Ould Hamma : Les manipulations des services secrets marocains” (The identity of Omar Uld Hamma: The manipulations of the Moroccan secret services, *Saharawi Diaspora*); cf.: <http://diasporasaharawi.blogspot.com/2010/08/identite-domar-ould-hamma-les.html>

documents, the original is in Arabic. And this is because the usefulness of such translation cannot be seen if those documents, as argued, were issued to be used in Mauritania and Mali, both French-speaking countries. In the third place, the so-called “certificate of paternity” issued at the request of Uld Hamma’s supposed parents is completely ridiculous⁷⁶, whose parents allegedly live in the Saharawi refugee camps in Tinduf. For what were the supposed parents of Uld Hamma going to ask for a certificate attesting that they are his parents? In the fourth place, it is odd that whereas the supposed certificate of paternity is dated, there is no date (which is amazing) on the supposed certificate of birth. Taking into account the aforesaid, I think we can have an idea of the credibility deserved by the “in exclusive” publication of such “documents”.

7. The most astonishing, however, is to confirm that a North American professor, certainly used to defend the Moroccan official positions (Peter Pham) was willing to be part of these intoxications. As I say, this professor has lent himself to put his signature to claims, such as that Uld Hamma is an “ex-high representative” of the Polisario Front and that, with the money obtained from ransoms, “AQLIM” recruits “mercenary fighters from Polisario, who have usually more experience than the ordinary recruits of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb”⁷⁷. The same North American professor is also lending his name to other allegations which, according to the available data, can only be classified as false. It is the case, for instance, of his statement that Mohamed Salem Mohamed Ali Ould Rguibi, Mohamed Salem Hamoud, and Nafii Uld Mohamed M’Barek are “elements of the Polisario Front” who have been “involved in the kidnapping” of the Spanish aid workers and who have been “convicted” by the Mauritanian justice⁷⁸. As we see, Pham repeats what has been circulated by the blog “*Sahara-retos*” (cf. above no. 2). However, while the blog “*Sahara-retos*” launched this intoxication when it had not yet been handed down the sentences of the Mauritanian justice, Pham even asserts, after those sentences have been pronounced, that these three individuals have been “convicted”.

D

The Moroccan thesis of the link between Polisario Front and Islamic terrorism has been pushed with two other “arguments” which, in my opinion, are even more inconsistent.

According to the first one, on *December 22nd 2005* the Moroccan police arrested one Saharawi “in the possession of thirteen rockets” in occupied El Aaiún. This individual who had lived in the refugee camps of the Polisario Front had, however, joined Morocco which

⁷⁶ http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_RjqZ8k09nRY/TIk205CznJI/AAAAAAAAAFA/LD1ycF2__PY/s1600/doc+3+omar.jpg

⁷⁷ *MAP* (25-VIII-2010), “Con el dinero de los rescates, AQMI recurre a los mercenarios del Polisario para intensificar sus actividades (Experto US)” (“With the ransom money, AQIM resorts to mercenaries of Polisario in order to intensify its activities (US expert)”; cfr.: <http://www.intelpage.info/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1817&start=160>

⁷⁸ *Le Quotidien de Nouackchott* (29-IX-2010), “Mercenaires à la solde de Aqmi: Un chercheur américain confirme le recrutement des «vétérans» du Polisario” (Mercenaries in the pay of AQIM: An American researcher confirms the recruitment of “veterans” of Polisario); cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/7006> and *MAP* (30-IX-2010), “Al Qaeda a recruté des <mercenarios> du Polisario pour bénéficier de leur expérience militaire (Peter Pham)” (Al-Qaida recruited <mercenarios> of Polisario in order to benefit from their military experience (Peter Pham)); cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/7006>

explains his detention in El Aaiún under occupation⁷⁹. For Alvarado, this fact “opens the debate about Polisario Front’s eventually going for a terrorist turn and the presumed alliance with the then Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), at a time when the Algerian group begins to establish its rapprochement to Al-Qaeda”⁸⁰.

Nonetheless, the opposite happens. It is clear that this fact does not prove anything for several reasons. The first one is that this detention was followed by neither a trial nor a conviction, not even in compliance with the Moroccan procedural “practice” which is not recognized as very orthodox for the standards of the Rule of Law even within Morocco. The second reason, as already mentioned, is that the GSPC had the Polisario Front among his targets of attack. And the third reason is that this very individual abandoned the Tinduf camps in order to accept the Moroccan offer⁸¹, and therefore if there is something demonstrated hereby, it is that the Polisario Front has nothing to do with this.

The second “argument” is quite similar to the former one. It concerns the detention of a “terrorist plot” which was called “*Fath Al Andalus*” (“Al Andalus Conquest”) in occupied El Aaiún, which was dismantled on August 29th 2008 (other members of this “group” were arrested earlier in Morocco)⁸². According to the Moroccan police, among the fifteen detainees there were “several Saharawi” who maintain ties with AQLIM after having been trained by the Algerian GSPC”. As from here, Alvarado speculates:

“This is a fact that goes unnoticed for almost anybody in Morocco, and it comes to shuffle that the command centre of the plot was located in El Aaiún, the administrative capital of the ex-Spanish colony.

After a detailed analysis of the personal paths of those implicated in Fatha al Andalus (“Al Andalus Conquest”), it has even been pointed out that AQLIM infiltration strategy in the country of Mohamed VI was done through Sahara, allegedly making the Saharawi as the vanguard of Droukdel’s organization in the Sherifian Kingdom. Various factors could favour the implication of the Saharawi independency movement in the particular jihad of AQLIM. First, the apparent complementarities between the Maghreb branch of Al-Qaeda and the Polisario Front. The Jihadists need people who know the ground and they need to extend their networks until the South. (...) Both organizations fight for a common goal of destabilizing Morocco and Mauritania, which could make them strategic allies in the region”⁸³.

It is certainly difficult to accept these “arguments” for multiple reasons. First of all, it is surprising to say that the operation against this “cell” has been “unnoticed for almost anybody in Morocco”, when we consider that the main titles of the Moroccan press have published articles on that (*Aujourd’hui le Maroc, Libération, L’Economiste, L’Opinion*, as well as the

⁷⁹ Morocco offers various economic advantages to the Saharawi who leave the refugee Camps in Tinduf and accept to live in the occupied territory.

⁸⁰ Alvarado, D. *La yihad a nuestras*, cit., 178.

⁸¹ About the economic advantages offered by Morocco to those who leave the refugee camps to move to the occupied territory of Western Sahara, a good analysis performed with a Moroccan approach can be referred to: Houda Filali-Ansary, “Comment les ralliés du Polisario vivent leur retour au Maroc” (How the Polisario rallies experience their return to Morocco), *La Vie Économique* (12-IV-2010); cf.: <http://lavieeco.com/news/politique/16319-comment-les-rallies-du-polisario-vivent-leur-retour-au-maroc-16319>

⁸² The ESISC “report” *The Polisario Front and the development of terrorism in the Sahel*, May 2010, says that the “group” was dismantled in “2009” (19). <http://www.esisc.org/upload/publications/analyses/le-front-polisario-et-le-developpement-du-terrorisme-au-sahel/6.%20LE%20FRONT%20POLISARIO%20ET%20LE%20DEVELOPPEMENT%20DU%20TERRORISME%20AU%20SAHEL.pdf>

⁸³ Alvarado, D. *La yihad a nuestras puertas*, cit., 179.

official agency *MAP*). Second, when Alvarado published his book the detainees had already been convicted of terrorism with sentences between 4 to 15 years of imprisonment (those sentences were reduced in appeal to sentences to 12 years maximum), although he made no reference to the judgements⁸⁴. Third, the bond with GSPC continues to be hard to believe when taking into account that GSPC considered the Polisario Front as an enemy and actually none of the news released by Moroccan media mentioned any links of the “cell” with GSPC (although they revealed supposed links with Al Qaeda). Not only has there been no evidence of ties of the detainees with the Polisario Front: these people are individuals who have not even lived in the camps, and all of them were of Moroccan origin and were “simple traders”⁸⁵. Therefore it is hard to see how it may be an “infiltration” and actually the news of the Moroccan media about the case did not mention such a link. Fourth, it is difficult to accept the argument about people with “knowledge of the ground”, because the ground of the occupied Sahara is now equally known by the Saharawi as well as by the Moroccan settlers who occupy it. Fifth, it is even more difficult to accept that the Polisario (and the Sahrawi Republic) could be interested in destabilizing Mauritania. The reason is extremely simple: Mauritania is a State that recognizes the SADR. Therefore, if there is someone interested in destabilizing Mauritania, it is not precisely the Polisario Front ... but Morocco. It is well known that the coup d'état on August 6th 2008 that overthrew President Sidi Mohamed Uld Cheif Abdalahi, elected after a democratic electoral process in 2007 (the most impeccably democratic election in North Africa), was supported by Morocco. If the foregoing were not enough, it appears that the data provided by Alvarado are not fully in accordance with those provided by Morocco. Although the first articles in the Moroccan press claimed that the purpose of this supposed group was to attack “Spanish interests”⁸⁶, the judgement said that they wanted to attack touristic places in Agadir and a military casern in El Aaiun⁸⁷: no reference to attacks in Mauritania. For all these reasons it is apparently difficult to understand the laudatory prologue of this book written by Spanish diplomat Gustavo de Arístegui⁸⁸. However, this could be easier to understand if we consider that according to some secret documents leaked by “Chris Coleman” (the most important leak in the history of Morocco), Arístegui's wife is an agent of the Moroccan secret service⁸⁹.

For a better understanding of this case it should be noted, on the one hand, that according to an expert in terrorism in the Maghreb consulted by Radio France International at the moment of the detento, this “group” was unknown and even the name “Fatha Al Andalus” seems to be created by the police itself; and, on the other hand that the use of torture to

⁸⁴ *MAP* (28-VI-2010), “Salé : Réduction en appel des peines prononcées dans l'affaire du groupe 'fath al andalous'” <http://www.maghress.com/fr/mapfr/11410>

⁸⁵ *RFI* (29-VIII-2008), “Démantèlement d'un «dangereux» réseau terroriste”, cfr.: http://www1.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/104/article_71746.asp

⁸⁶ *Aujourd'hui le Maroc* (1-IX-2008), “La cellule «Fath Al Andalus» visait des intérêts espagnols” (The «Fath Al Andalus cell aimed at Spanish interests»); cfr.: <http://aujourd'hui.ma/focus/la-cellule-fath-al-andalous-visait-des-interets-espagnols-58612>

⁸⁷ *MAP/Libération* (9-I-2009), “Des membres de Fath Al Andalous condamnés à la prison”, cfr. http://www.libe.ma/Des-membres-de-Fath-Al-Andalous-condamnes-a-la-prison_a8107.html

⁸⁸ The foreword of this book written by Spanish diplomat and then MP Gustavo de Arístegui has written a foreword to this book where it says that Alvarado is “one of the youngest and firmest experts we have in Spain” or “this young man but a firm researcher” Alvarado, *La yihad a nuestras puertas*, cit., 15-19.

⁸⁹ Ruiz Miguel, C., *blog Desde el Atlántico* (26-I-2015) “Wikileaks del majzen (V): graves secretos del régimen marroquí al descubierto. El caso Nadia Jalfi”, cfr.: <http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/desdeatlantico.php/2015/01/26/wikileaks-del-majzen-v-gravisimas-revela>

extract confessions through has been officially stated by the United Nations, and Moroccan courts might give a sentence with the only “evidence” of such “confessions”.

AQLIM and Morocco and France

In my view the most solid thesis about the very nature of “AQLIM” is that of a possible connection with *Morocco* or *France* or both of them. There are a lot of arguments supporting this thesis.

1. If we accept that AQLIM is the follower of GSPC and we also accept that GSPC was infiltrated by France and supported by Morocco and France, this would lead us to accept that AQLIM is also an organisation supported by one or both of these two countries.

2. In spite of AQLIM’s being a group that feeds on individuals from Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and Mali⁹⁰, its criminal activity is focused mainly on Algeria and more recently in Mauritania. It is quite surprising that despite the presence of Moroccans in its ranks, it never acts in Morocco. And this is even more surprising because according to an AQLIM statement, one of its targets is Spain because of its being “a NATO and a USA ally in the war against Islam”⁹¹. Then, what does not fit here is that it does not act against Morocco, the country that happens to be the best ally of the USA in the region and that, in addition, has the best relations with NATO to the extent that, according to the declaration of a high responsible of the North Atlantic Organization, picked up by the Moroccan official press agency itself, Morocco has been a “strategic partner” of NATO, since 2010⁹².

3. There are direct evidences for the relations between the Moroccan secret service and AQLIM. In February 2015 a document was leaked about a meeting between Moroccan secret officials and a high commander of AQLIM. They arranged a meeting in Nuadhibu, the economic centre of Mauritania, on the Atlantic coast. Hicham Bouchetti, a former agent of the Moroccan secret service declared that the document leaked was “100% original”. He added that AQLIM terrorism is fabricated by the Moroccan secret service, who tries to charge it to Algeria and the Polisario Front⁹³.

4. The collusion between Morocco and AQLIM has been pointed by a Malian official in a French magazine very close to the Moroccan regime:

“Another uncertainty that, from the Malian point of view, weighs on the settlement of the Salafist issue: the tensions between Algeria and Morocco. It is obvious that the Islamic groups benefit from certain supports by Morocco”, accuses a member of the intelligence

⁹⁰ As evidence, the Franco-Mauritanian attack against an AQLIM base on July 22, 2010, resulted in the death of several members of the group, among these were identified one Mauritanian, an Algerian and a Moroccan (Béchir El-Maghrebi). *RFI* (29-VII-2010), “Certains des djihadistes tués lors du raid franco-mauritanien auraient été identifiés” Cfr.: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20100729-certains-djihadistes-tues-lors-raid-franco-mauritanien-auraient-ete-identifies>

⁹¹ AQLIM alledged document, see *El País* (13-III-2010), cfr.: http://elpais.com/diario/2010/03/13/espana/1268434803_850215.html

⁹² *Maghreb Arab Press (MAP)* (12-III-2015), “OTAN : Le Maroc, un partenaire stratégique et une force motrice du dialogue méditerranéen”. Cfr.: <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/actualites/otan-le-maroc-un-partenaire-strategique-et-une-force-motrice-du-dialogue-mediterraneen>

⁹³ *Echourouk* (8-II-2015), “Top secret: alliance entre Droukdel et le Makhzen pour torpiller l’Algérie !”, cfr.: <http://www.echouroukonline.com/ara/articles/232555.html>

services of Mali. According to the latter, that would be an answer to the numerous links that Mali has with the Polisario”⁹⁴.

5. The fourth argument lies about the important figure of the mediator who has worked the most in “AQLIM” kidnapping cases (his work as mediator with “AQLIM” are at least in number of three). This is Mustapha Chafi (already mentioned), a Mauritanian citizen who was a declared enemy of the deposed Mauritanian President Muauya Uld Ahmed Uld Taya, as well as of the present Mauritanian President (Mohamed Uld Abdelaziz) against whom he conspired by supporting a coup that failed⁹⁵. Chafi, although he is a Mauritian, is a special adviser to the President of Burkina Faso Blaise Compaoré, who got the power following a coup and the assassination of the charismatic leader Thomas Sankara. Chafi has also intervened in the crisis of Conakry, Guinea, and Ivory Coast⁹⁶. What is interesting is that Burkina is one of the staunchest allies of France and Morocco in Africa and that its efforts in Guinea and Ivory Coast have been in favour of the allies of these countries in the region. The assumption appears reinforced by an information according to which Chafi was an agent of the Moroccan intelligence services (actually, of the “Directorate General of Studies and Documentation”-DGED) ever since Driss Basri was Minister of Home Affairs and “number 2” in Morocco⁹⁷.

6. “AQLIM” group objectively directs the bulk of its attacks against Algeria, thus weakening the great strategic enemy of France and of its main protégé, Morocco. After the attack in Marrakech in May 22nd 2011 some so-called “analysts” tried to impose the thesis that this was an “AQLIM” attack. If it were true it would be the first attack carried out in Morocco by AQLIM. Since the very first moment I have written that this attack presented many shadows around this attack⁹⁸ and that it did not seem to be an AQLIM attack. Finally, AQLIM released a communicate rejecting the accusation that it was the author of the crime⁹⁹.

7. It should be noted that “AQLIM” actions take place in Mauritania, in Western Algeria, and in the northwest of Mali, which are areas claimed by Morocco in the framework of the expansionist programme of the “Greater Morocco” that is enshrined in Article 42.2 of the Moroccan “Constitution” (the king “is the Guarantor of the Independence of the country and of the territorial integrity of the Kingdom within its authentic border”).

⁹⁴ Naudé, P-F. “Mali: lutte contre le terrorisme: le calme avant la tempête?” (Mali: fight against terrorism: the calm before the storm?), *Jeune Afrique* no. 2524 (24-V-2009). Cfr.: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/203288/politique/lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-le-calme-avant-la-temp-te/>

⁹⁵ Chafi was considered “un acérrimo adversario de Abdelaziz, a que el presidente mauritano no estaba dispuesto a hacer ningún favor liberando a presos” (...a staunch opponent of Abdelaziz, whom the Mauritanian president was not willing to do any favour by releasing prisoners) (*El País*, 24-VIII-2010). Cf.: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/amenaza/intervencion/militar/francesa/provoco/roces/Espana/elpepiesp/20100824elpepinac_5/Tes

⁹⁶ *La Lettre du Continent* (No. 594, 2-IX-2010) “Mustapha Chafi”, Cfr.: <https://www.africaintelligence.fr/LC/who-s-who/2010/09/02/mustapha-chafi,85195636-ART> (paid access). <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/6945>

⁹⁷ *Ennahar* (23-IX-2010), “Echafi’i, un agent des services marocains à El Qaïda”; Cfr.: <http://ennaharonline.com/fr/news/5549.html>

⁹⁸ Ruiz Miguel, C., *blog Desde el Atlántico* (6-V-2011), “Atentado de Marrakech (III): informaciones asombrosas” cfr.: <http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/desdeelatlantico.php/2011/05/06/atentado-de-marrakech-informaciones-cues>

⁹⁹ Ruiz Miguel, C., *blog Desde el Atlántico* (9-V-2011), “Atentado de Marrakech (IV): AQMI se descarta y alguno se vuelve a columpiar” cfr.: <http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/desdeelatlantico.php/2011/05/09/atentado-de-marrakech-aqmi-se-descarta-y>

The Spanish press has assigned the idea that there is an “insistent coincidence” to sources of the Spanish intelligence (when Spain has some crisis with Morocco, the threats increase in the Jihadist networks)¹⁰⁰. But there is an even clearer and authorized statement. Without clearly specifying who it is, the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, has dropped the idea that one of the parties involved in the Western Sahara conflict is behind the terrorism in the Sahel. The Spanish Minister, who due to his position ought to take good information for granted, held a meeting with his French counterpart Bernard Kouchner on September 3rd 2010. At that meeting, in which both dealt with the issue of security in the Sahel, Minister Moratinos delivered a puzzling phrase: “if the Sahara problem is settled, the Sahel one will be settled as well”¹⁰¹. The statement allowed inferring that any of those involved in the Sahara conflict were using terrorism as a means of pressure to get the satisfaction of their claims. Very soon the Moroccan press close to the military intelligence (the weekly newspaper *Maroc Hebdo*) interpreted these declarations as a confession of the Spanish Minister on the responsibility of the Polisario Front in terrorism of the Sahel region¹⁰². However, the same words could also be pointing to the responsibility of Morocco and it is clear that the Polisario Front is not likely to attack the States of the region that recognize the Sahrawi Republic.

9. One of the most bizarre but significant hints about the very nature of AQLIM came when it threatened the World Football Championship in South-Africa¹⁰³. It is clear that South-Africa lies in the opposite place of the African continent to the Maghreb, but there are some data relevant to understand this threat: first of all, South-Africa defeated Morocco in the FIFA when this body decided the question in Zurich on May 8th 2004; and some months later, on September 15th 2004, it decided to recognize the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

10. In this context, a careful analysis of the case of Pierre Camatte, kidnapped in Mali by AQLIM on November 26th 2009 (just three days before the kidnapping of three Spanish citizens in Mauritania) and released on February 23rd 2010, opens the way to an even more complex relation. Camatte was released following the payment of ransom and the liberation of some terrorists imprisoned in Mali. French citizen Pierre Camatte was publicly considered as an “aid worker” present in one State of the African Sahel, Mali. However, as it was later discovered, he was actually an agent of the French intelligence. After a strong French pressure, Mali released four terrorists who were imprisoned in that country in exchange for the hostage and a ransom had been paid¹⁰⁴ as the former US Ambassador in Mali, Vicki J.

¹⁰⁰ *El Mundo* (26-IX-2010), “Protesta oficial de EE.UU. por pagar el rescate a Al Qaeda”; cfr. <http://estaticos.elmundo.es/documentos/2010/09/26/portada.pdf>

¹⁰¹ *Efe* (3-IX-2010) “España y Francia presumen de una ‘misma actitud’ contra Al Qaeda en el Sáhara” (Spain and France boast a ‘same attitude’ against Al-Qaida in Sahara); cfr.: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2010/09/03/espana/1283537880.html>

¹⁰² *Maroc Hebdo* (no. 898, 10-IX-2010), “Omar Sahraoui: Le lien entre le Polisaire et Al Qaeda”; cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/7006>

¹⁰³ *ABC* (10-IV-2010), “Al Qaida amenaza con una matanza en el Inglaterra-EE.UU. del Mundial de fútbol”; cfr.: http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-10-04-2010/abc/Deportes/al-qaida-amenaza-con-una-matanza-en-el-ingles-eeuu-del-mundial-de-futbol_14038878387.html

¹⁰⁴ *El País* (27-VIII-2010), “Sarkozy felicitó a Zapatero dos días antes de criticar el pago de rescates. Paris ha negociado desde los años ochenta por sus ciudadanos secuestrados”; cfr.: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Sarkozy/felicitico/Zapatero/dias/critigar/pago/rescates/elpepiesp/20100827elpepinac_6/Tes?print=1
Napoleoni, L. *Merchants of men*, Seven Stories Press, New York, 2016.

Huddleston, confirmed¹⁰⁵. The ransom has been estimated at 5 million dollars. The fact is that just a few days after his release, on January 27th 2010, the French press examined the records of the appearance of the national coordinator of the intelligence services in the Presidency of the Republic, Bernard Bajolet before the National Assembly¹⁰⁶ and drew the conclusion that Camatte was in fact an agent of the French Foreign Intelligence Service (DGSE)¹⁰⁷

This circumstance gives rise to feed some suspicions which, however, are difficult to prove. First of all, the question comes up if the kidnapping of this French agent did happen. The question is relevant because if accepted that there may be a relationship between the French intelligence and “AQLIM” or any groups who take shelter in these acronyms, this alleged “kidnapping” would be the ideal way for the transmission of messages without any kind of suspicion. Secondly, it should be asked if the ransom was indeed that. The doubt arises because if it is accepted that there may be any kind of relations between the French intelligence and “AQLIM”, this alleged payment of a “ransom” could be a form of “legally” financing a group suspected of serving the strategic interests of France in the region. Thirdly, the fact that nothing more and nothing less than a great power as France saw itself “forced” to “yield” to the terrorists is an element of pressure difficult to resist at the time of demanding a third State’s (Mali, in this case) “cooperation” too, by releasing terrorists imprisoned in its prisons. In short, if the assumption of the connection between the French intelligence and “AQLIM” is true, staging a “kidnapping” could constitute a new means for a State to “legally” finance a terrorist group that eventually serves its interests.

11. After the kidnapping of Spanish citizens the Spanish government aligned with France and Morocco and pressed Mauritania to release an islamist terrorist imprisoned¹⁰⁸ and has also paid high ransoms to liberate the Spanish hostages. For this reason, and also because it is forbidden by the Security Council¹⁰⁹, the United States officially protested against the Spanish decision¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Journal du Dimanche* (8-II-2013), «Otages : une rançon de 17 millions de dollars à Aqmi?», cfr.: <http://www.lejdd.fr/International/Afrique/Actualite/Otages-au-Niger-une-rancon-de-17-millions-de-dollars-a-Aqmi-590390>

¹⁰⁶ Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées. Mercredi 27 janvier 2010. Séance de 10 heures. Compte rendu n° 20 (Committee on National Defence and Armed Forces. Wednesday, January 27, 2010. 10 hours Session. Report no. 20). Cfr.: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/cr-cdef/09-10/c0910020.asp>

¹⁰⁷ *Backchich.info* (26-II-2010), “Le M. Espionnage de Sarko grille son agent”; cfr.: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/fr.soc.politique/4cHMILs-B-w>

Le Monde (25-II-2010), «L’otage libéré Pierre Camatte est-il un agent de la DGSE ?»; cf.: http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/02/25/l-otage-libere-pierre-camatte-est-il-un-agent-de-la-dgse_1311494_3212.html

¹⁰⁸ Ruiz Miguel, C., *blog Desde el Atlántico* (10-VI-2010), “Mauritania rechaza liberar a un criminal como pide Moratinos”, cfr.: <http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/desdeelatlantico.php/2010/06/10/mauritania-rechaza-liberar-a-un-criminal>

¹⁰⁹ S/RES1904 (1999), S/RES/2161 (2014), S/RES/2199 (2015)

¹¹⁰ *El Mundo* (26-IX-2010), “Protesta oficial de EE.UU. por pagar el rescate a Al Qaeda”; cfr. <http://estaticos.elmundo.es/documentos/2010/09/26/portada.pdf>

THE SPECTACULAR COUP OF MUJWA/MUJAO IN THE SAHRAWI REFUGEE CAMPS IN 2011

1.

In an analysis of the development of the conflict of Western Sahara, I warned on June 2, 2010:

“it is predictable that Morocco tries to regain the initiative by using the terrorist charter. Since the Polisario Front is not involved in terrorist activities, it is predictable that there are circles close to Morocco, or the Moroccan power itself, who may fabricate terrorist threats with the purpose of ascribing the responsibility to the Polisario Front”¹¹¹.

As we have seen, this was actually the strategy of Morocco. Notwithstanding the absence of any evidence to support its claims against the Polisario Front, the Moroccan secret service pursued its campaign. However, this campaign suffered two setbacks: one secret, public the other.

The first one is that the USA diplomacy did not give credibility to the Moroccan fabrication. This is shown by a cable from the Embassy in Algiers, dated December 16th 2009, where Michael Bosshart, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, said that:

“the Polisario “government” severely punishes anyone caught trafficking persons or weapons that could aid terrorists (...) XXXXXXXXXXXXX said that sometime in the past year, the Algerian government detected three or four 4x4 vehicles that it believed were transporting smuggled goods from Mauritania to an AQIM stronghold south of Tindouf. With the Polisario’s approval, two Algerian attack helicopters fired on the vehicles to send a message to Sahrawis and Algerians not to engage in similar dealings. He told of a Spanish man who paid some Sahrawis to smuggle his 14 year old “girlfriend” out of the camps via Mauritania, and said that when the Sahrawi government found out, everyone involved was severely punished and throw in a “dark cell.”

(...)

Extremists in the region have issued threats against Westerners residing in the camps of which the extremists have informed the Polisario. They perceive the Sahrawi people as too close to the West and not pious enough”¹¹².

The second, and public, setback came when Daniel Benjamin, the U.S. State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, in a press-briefing on November 17th 2010 was asked if “an escalation of violence” in the Western Sahara (in the context of Sahrawi protests against the Moroccan occupation) could have “repercussions in terms of terrorists in that particular area”. His answer was:

“Let me take your last question first. In the West – I mean, my view is that most of the violence we’ve seen in the Western Sahara remains the traditional political violence that we’ve seen for some time. We are obviously always concerned that al-Qaeda in the Maghreb could expand its operations, but frankly, I wouldn’t quite get it if they were expanding into that region. I’m not quite sure I would see what the up side for them would be. And in any case, we haven’t seen the proof that it is – that that is really what’s going on”¹¹³.

¹¹¹ Ruiz Miguel, C. *GEES* (2-VI-2010), “Sahara Occidental: la ONU de espaldas a la realidad ¿hasta cuando?” (Western Sahara: The UN with its back to reality ¿until when?), cfr.: <http://gees.org/articulos/sahara-occidental-la-onu-de-espaldas-a-la-realidad-hasta-cuando>

¹¹² https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ALGIERS1117_a.html

¹¹³ <http://fpc.state.gov/151048.htm>

2.

All the attempts to pass the hypothesis of the Polisario Front as a “terrorist” organisation failed so far. And what is more: in those years of trouble the part of Western Sahara under the control of the Polisario Front (known as the liberated territories of the Sahrawi Republic) and the refugee camps in Tindouf (South-west Algeria) were the most secure part of the Sahara desert.

This is the context of the spectacular kidnapping carried out on the night of *October 22nd 2011* in the Sahrawi refugee camps by a terrorist group taking hostages two Spanish and one Italian citizen, who were liberated on *July 18th 2013*. The “Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa” (MUJWA), a new and unknown group, claimed responsibility for the attack. However, it was not until several months after the hostages were released that the United Nations listed the group on December 5th 2012. Two days later, on December 7th 2012, the Department of State listed it.

After the kidnapping, the offensive against Polisario was relaunched. First there was the “enchained” mechanism to spread “disinformation” against Polisario. This began with pretended “exclusive” “news” according to which one of the kidnappers was “Aghdafna Hamady Ahmed Bab” who was a “son” of a Polisario representative in the Spanish region of Cantabria. This “exclusive” was provided by the media (“*Correo Diplomático*”)¹¹⁴ whose director at that time was that David Alvarado who tried to charge Polisario with the attack on Lemgheity. The “exclusive news” was signed by Mauritanian journalist Jedna Deida, who just some months before had given publicity to one of the accusations against the Polisario Front (connecting it with “Omar Sahraoui”) mediated by one of the well-known Moroccan lobbyists in the USA, the already mentioned Peter Pham¹¹⁵. Both, Pham and Deida decided to ignore the fact that those accusations had not only been denied months before by the Polisario Front¹¹⁶ but also proved false¹¹⁷. This “exclusive” was immediately replicated by a Mauritanian webpage close to the terrorist groups, “*Sahara Medias*”¹¹⁸. It must be observed that the director of “*Sahara Medias*” was Abdallahi Uld Mohamedi, a person linked with the Moroccan Secret Service according to the documents leaked by “Chris Coleman”¹¹⁹.

But on July 28th 2012, some days after the aid-workers were liberated, the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs gave an order to repatriate ALL the Spanish aid-workers present in the

¹¹⁴ *Correo Diplomático* (7-XII-2011), “EXCLUSIVA (AVANCE). Uno de los saharauis detenidos en Mauritania sería hijo del delegado diplomático del Frente Polisario en Cantabria”, cfr.: <http://www.correodiplomatico.com/2011/12/07/exclusiva-avance-uno-de-los-saharauis-detenidos-en-mauritania-seria-hijo-del-delegado-diplomatico-del-frente-polisario-en-cantabria/>

¹¹⁵ *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott* (29-IX-2010), “Mercenaires à la solde de Aqmi: Un chercheur américain confirme (sic) le recrutement des «vétérans» du Polisario (Peter Pham)”, cfr.: <https://es.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/sahara-info/conversations/messages/7006> http://www.cridem.org/C_Info.php?article=47856

¹¹⁶ *ABC* (18-IV-2010), “ABC y sus lectores” (ABC and its Readers); cf.: <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/2010/04/18/016.html>

¹¹⁷ See article cited supra, *Diaspora Saharai*, (31-VIII-2010), “Identité d’Omar Ould Hamma : Les manipulations des services secrets marocains”

¹¹⁸ *Sahara Medias* (8-XII-2011), “Un journal espagnol révèle que l’un des Sahraouis arrêtés est le fils d’un diplomate en exercice en Espagne”, cfr.: http://fr.saharamedias.net/Un-journal-espagnol-revele-que-l-un-des-Sahraouis-arretes-est-le-fils-d-un-diplomate-en-exercice-en-Espagne_a2919.html

¹¹⁹ Ruiz Miguel, C., *blog Desde el Atlántico* (23-X-2014), “Wikileaks del majzén (II): graves secretos del régimen marroquí al descubierto”, cfr.: <http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/desdeatlantico.php/2014/10/23/wilikeaks-del-majzen-ii-graves-secretos->

Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf. Taking into account that most of the aid-workers and the cooperation in the camps come from Spain, this measure meant to stifle the economy of the Sahrawi refugee camps where the Polisario Front has its headquarters. The order was not followed by one Spanish aid-worker (Pepe Oropesa) that despite the strong pressure from the Government decided to remain in the camps. Trying to break the resistance of this man the Government issued another warning two days later. However, there were contradictions between the two warnings issued by the Government (28th and 30th July) and the warnings themselves had some inconsistencies. In fact, although the number of aid-workers of other nationalities is inferior, it was remarkable that NO other Western countries ordered the repatriation of their nationals¹²⁰. Finally, there was no attack although the Minister said that it was “verified to exhaustion” and it was “imminent”. Weeks later the Spanish cooperants began to return.

THE “MURABITOUN”, AQLIM AND AL QAEDA. ISIS HASHISH. A FINAL CLARIFICATION

In August 2013, the BBC reported that MUJWA merged with the islamist group (Al-Mulathameen, Masked Men) of the experienced terrorist “Mokhtar Belmokhtar”¹²¹, a.k.a. “The one eyed” or “Mr. Marlboro”, a former terrorist in the GSPC and AQLIM. Belmokhtar was the terrorist who led the audacious attack against the gas facility of In Amenas in the East of Algeria on January 16th 2013. It is very important to note that the only country that has judged and sentenced (*in absentia*) Belmokhtar is Algeria. In December 2015, *Associated Press* reported that this “Al Murabitoun” group joined AQLIM, actually the band derived from those other groups. According to this information the attack in the Radisson Blue hotel of Bamako, capital of Mali, on November 20th 2015 was their “declaration of unity”¹²². However, co-founder Adnan Abu Waleed al-Sahrawi declared the group’s allegiance to ISIS in May 2015. Belmokhtar rejected this pledge saying that the group’s advisory council (shura) had not yet ruled on an ISIS alliance. Several times Belmokhtar was reported as killed, the last time after a US airstrike in Libya on June 14th 2015. His death was denied by the group although there were no life-evidences at the time of the group declared itself a branch of al-Qaeda on July 17th 2015, and renamed itself “Al Murabitoun – Al Qaeda in West Africa”¹²³. As it has been seen in Northwest Africa, the “Islamic State in Iraq and Sham” (ISIS-DA’ISH) did not enjoy a significant presence, apparently. ISIS has certainly been active in Libya but not westwards, at least publicly.

But two recent events help to clarify what is behind the stage related to these terrorist groups.

The first one is related with one of the latest operations of the Spanish “Guardia Civil”. Its agents seized a ship loaded with tonnes of hashish drug, weapons, and ammunition in

¹²⁰ Ruiz Miguel, C., *blog Desde el Atlántico* (31-VII-2012), “Margallo y el Sahara Occidental: ¿mentira o irresponsabilidad?”, cfr.: <http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/desdeelatlantico.php/2012/07/31/margallo-y-el-sahara-occidental-imentira>

¹²¹ *BBC* (22-VIII-2013), “Belmokhtar’s militants ‘merge’ with Mali’s Mujao”, Cfr.: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-23796920>

¹²² *Associated Press* (4-XII-2015), “Mali extremists join with Al-Qaida-linked North Africa group”, cfr.: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-3346528/Al-Qaida-linked-N-Africa-group-unites-Mali-extremists.html>

¹²³ Middle East Online (15-VIII-2015), “Jihadist group of Belmokhtar: We are part of Qaeda not ISIS!”, cfr.: <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=72696>

the southern Spanish Mediterranean waters (opposite to Moroccan and Algerian waters). The cargo was fleeted to Libya to finance ISIS. But the operation provided very useful information according to which the network also used a terrestrial way to transport hashish to Libya along the route: Morocco-Mauritania-Mali-Nigeria-Libya¹²⁴. Morocco is the first world producer of hashish. This drug is not produced in Western Sahara. The Moroccan border with Algeria is closed, and Western Sahara is nearly fully encircled by a wall built by Morocco itself. The way to transport this drug to Mauritania is to cross Western Sahara, occupied by Moroccan military. To cross the wall of Western Sahara to reach Mauritania avoiding the liberated territory of Western Sahara under Polisario control was only possible through the Guerguerat checkpoint (South-West) before the crisis in the region burst on August 11th 2016 between Morocco and the Frente Polisario. It seems that the protection of this transport was provided by one of the terrorist groups in the region.

The second event is one of the emails of Hillary Clinton recently revealed by Wikileaks. This communication, dated August 17th 2014, reveals that Hillary Clinton is perfectly aware that: “we need to use our diplomatic and more traditional intelligence assets to bring pressure on the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which are providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups in the region”¹²⁵.

These events provide clarification about the problem studied. There is no more doubt that Saudi Arabia and Qatar (at least) support radical Sunni groups in the region. ISIS and Al-Qaeda count among those groups. ISIS finances itself with Moroccan hashish transported across Western Sahara occupied by Moroccan military. This is not possible without a complicity of the Moroccan State or Military. The group “Al-Murabitoun” has pledged alliance to Al-Qaeda. ISIS and Al-Qaeda are supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. But Morocco is a firm ally of those countries so much as to participate in the Saudi coalition in the Yemen war. That is clear enough.

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¹²⁴ El Confidencial (11-X-2016), “La Guardia Civil interviene 20 toneladas de hachís en un buque que iba a Libia”, cfr.: http://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2016-10-11/la-guardia-civil-interviene-20-toneladas-de-hachis-en-un-buque-que-iba-a-libia_1273650/

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