

Islamist Terrorism in Northwestern Africa: A 'Thorn in the Neck' of the United States?

by [Emily Hunt \(/experts/emily-hunt\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Emily Hunt \(/experts/emily-hunt\)](#)

Emily Hunt is a Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, where she analyzes evolving terrorist tactics.



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In August 2006, al-Qaeda's second-in-command announced a new alliance with the Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), with the stated aim of becoming a "thorn in the neck" of America and the West. This radical network -- which is little known in the United States but has become one of the top terrorist threats in North Africa -- is active in Europe and may even have connections to aspiring militants in North America.

In this Washington Institute Policy Focus, terrorism expert Emily Hunt examines how the intersection of local conflicts with al-Qaeda's global ideology and technological expertise is prompting U.S. officials to focus on North Africa, as both a potential target of attacks and a safe haven or recruiting ground for terrorists intent on attacking elsewhere. In particular, she assesses the State Department-led multi-agency effort to empower counterterrorism partners in countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, and Tunisia. Given the involvement of northwestern Africans in major acts of international terrorism such as the September 11 attacks and the 2004 Madrid train bombings, this paper provides a welcome means of determining whether U.S. efforts in the region are sufficient and effective.

- 31 pages

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