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## Terrorism in Algeria-Mali: Command & Control in Pakistan

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By B.Raman

In swift retaliation against the French military intervention against Al Qaeda-affiliated jihadi terrorists in Northern Mali starting from January 11, 2013, a group of pro-Al Qaeda terrorists, reportedly headed by Abdul Rahman al-Nigeri of Niger, raided on January 16 a huge gas production complex employing many foreign experts located at In Amenas at Tiganourine, about 40km (25 miles) south-west of the town of In Amenas and 1,300km (800 miles) south-east of Algiers, occupied the plant, mined it and took hostage the Algerian and foreign workers.

2. The gas facility, which is jointly owned by British Petroleum, Norway's Statoil and Algeria's state-owned oil company, employs hundreds of Algerians and 132 foreigners from France, the UK, the US, Norway, Austria, Romania, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Colombia.

3. The terrorists reportedly demanded an end to the French intervention in Mali and the release of some terrorists held in prison in Algeria. The Algerian authorities rejected their demands and raided the gas facility. After four-days of bloody confrontation, they managed to re-capture the plant on January 19, 2013, after killing many of the terrorists, who before their death, are reported to have executed seven of the hostages taken by them.

4. According to the Algerian authorities, at least 32 terrorists and 23 hostages died during the operation. Some foreign hostages are still unaccounted for.

5. The exercise of the hard option by the Algerian authorities of not bowing to the demands of the terrorists and taking military action against them has not been questioned by the Governments of the countries to which the hostages belonged.

6. The French have been strongly supportive of the Algerian action despite the loss of many foreign lives. French President Francois Hollande defended the Algerian response to the crisis as being "the most suitable". He told the media: "When you have people taken hostage in such large numbers by terrorists with such cold determination and ready to kill those hostages - as they did - Algeria has an approach which to me, as I see it, is the most appropriate because there could be no negotiation."

7. Mr. Leon Panetta, the US Defence Secretary, has reiterated the determination of the US to hunt for Al Qaeda, wherever it may find sanctuary.

8. India, which is still paying a heavy price for the soft option adopted by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government against the Pakistani terrorists who hijacked an Indian Airlines plane to Kandahar in 1999 and for the humming and hawing of the Dr. Manmohan Singh Government after the 26/11 terrorist strikes in Mumbai, has lessons to learn from the Algerian firmness.

9. It will be incorrect to assume that the bloody raid in Algeria must have been locally organized. It is likely that the ideological inspiration and operational guidance came from the command and control of Al Qaeda located in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. As I had pointed out in my past writings, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the present chief of Al Qaeda, has for many years been stressing the importance of the African front in the so-called global jihad against the Crusaders and the Jewish People.

10. As part of the drive to neutralize the African front of Al Qaeda, Zawahiri has to be located and his sanctuary in Pakistan neutralized, in addition to the on-going action against the local cadres of Al Qaeda in North Africa.

11. Till now, one has been assuming that he must be hiding in the FATA. It is quite likely that, like bin Laden, he might be actually living in the non-tribal areas of Pakistan and from there commanding and controlling the activities of Al Qaeda in Yemen, Somalia, Mali, Algeria and other African countries. Searches should be made for him in other parts of Pakistan too.

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