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Obama Counterterrorism Official Says al-Qaeda Poses “Immediate Threat” in North Africa to American and Western Nationals

Stresses Need to Resolve Western Sahara Question and Strengthen Regional Cooperation

Washington, DC (February 19) — In remarks at an event hosted by the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) this week, Ambassador Robert F. Godec, Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department, said that al-Qaeda’s regional terrorist network in North Africa, *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM), poses a serious threat to countries in the Maghreb, as well as to Americans and other Westerners in the region. He pointed to resolution of the Western Sahara conflict as an essential step to improve regional cooperation and effectively fight terrorism in North Africa.

Ambassador Godec called AQIM “the biggest challenge facing the Maghreb in the terrorist area” and said that regional organizations like the Arab Maghreb Union [Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia] must be strengthened to help bridge the region’s differences and successfully combat this “immediate threat.”

“While the Maghreb governments have had some success in combating AQIM and terrorism, there remains much to be done,” said Godec, at the CSIS panel addressing “The Dynamics of North African Terror.” He noted that regional disputes continue to be an obstacle to coordination among the Maghreb nations. “Unfortunately,” he said, “the lack of resolution of the Western Sahara question block[s] the cooperation and integration the region needs. For the region to achieve real success, the key differences must be resolved or at least bridged.”

Godec said it isn’t known whether AQIM is planning an attack from North Africa like the attempted al-Qaeda Christmas-day bombing of an airliner over Detroit, but “we already know the organization poses a dangerous threat to countries of the region and is a real and immediate threat to American citizens and other Westerners in North Africa.”

The International Center for Terrorism Studies (ICTS) at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies recently issued a report, “Maghreb & Sahel Terrorism,” documenting a dramatic 558% percent increase in the number of terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in North and West/Central Africa since September 11, 2001, with more than 900 terrorist bombings, murders, kidnappings, and ambushes claiming more than 1,500 lives and 6,000 victims in the region.

The full ICTS report is available at

http://www.potomac institute.org/attachments/525_Maghreb%20Terrorism%20report.pdf.

For more on the CSIS panel, “The Dynamics of North African Terror,” including Ambassador Godec’s full remarks, go to: <http://csis.org/event/conference-dynamics-north-african-terror>

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