



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Friday, January 29, 2010

New Counterterrorism Report Warns of Rising al-Qaeda Threat in N. Africa; Calls Resolving W. Sahara Conflict Key for Regional Cooperation to Fight Back

Report by International Center for Terrorism Studies cites 558% rise in terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in North and West/Central Africa since 9/11

Washington, DC (January 29) — Just days after President Barack Obama underscored in his State of the Union address America's commitment to "take the fight to al-Qaeda," a new counterterrorism report was issued today documenting a dramatic 558 percent jump in terrorist attacks and activity by al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in North and West/Central Africa since 9/11.

The report was released at the 11th annual terrorism review and outlook seminar of the International Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, hosted this morning by the Brookings Institution. The event brought together a panel of former CIA, US State Department and Department of Homeland Security officials, as well as international experts, to examine the growing threat and changing face of international terrorism.

The panel was unanimous in identifying al-Qaeda as the most serious terrorist threat to the US, evidenced by the recent failed Christmas suicide bombing attempt on Northwest flight 253 over Detroit organized by al-Qaeda forces in Yemen. "Al-Qaeda remains dangerous, though damaged" by recent US strikes against it in Pakistan, said Charles Allen, Undersecretary for Intelligence, US Department of Homeland Security. The new development, the panel agreed, is that al-Qaeda's regional affiliates continue to pose a serious threat even as its core leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan has come under siege.

The new report, authored by Professor Yonah Alexander, Director of the International Center for Terrorism Studies, highlights the growing danger posed by *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*. "If we truly want to take the fight to al-Qaeda, we must go everywhere they pose a serious threat," said Prof. Alexander. "A comprehensive US counterterrorism strategy must address the increasingly volatile terrorist breeding ground in North and West/Central Africa, where al-Qaeda and other terrorists are exploiting weak regional security cooperation and links to narco-trafficking networks in Latin America to recruit and train terrorists to carry out attacks in the region and elsewhere."

The special report *"Maghreb & Sahel Terrorism: Addressing the Rising Threat from al-Qaeda & other Terrorists in North & West/Central Africa,"* was published by the International Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. It analyzes and provides a timeline for how al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have taken root and flourished in the region since 9/11.

As a key step to combat terrorism, the report recommends resolving the more than 30-year-old Western Sahara conflict, which is a major obstacle to regional security and economic cooperation. Alexander noted today that "the Tindouf camps in Algeria, where refugees have been confined for decades without hope, present a prime breeding ground for potential recruits by the terrorists." The report outlines a number of other recommendations, including: strengthening US intelligence in the region; expanding US counterterrorism technical assistance to Maghreb/Sahel countries; and raising diplomatic, economic, political, and military costs to Iran to discourage its support of jihadist terrorism in the region.

The full report, including its detailed recommendations and a chronology of terrorist attacks in the region since 9/11, is available online at the Potomac Institute's website, www.potomacinstitute.org (by Monday, February 1), or by contacting Reina Matsuzawa at icts@potomacinstitute.org or 703-562-4522.

###

The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials and interested publics in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. For more, please visit www.moroccanamericanpolicy.org

This material is distributed by the Moroccan American Center for Policy on behalf of the Government of Morocco. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.