

Epreuve écrite

Examen de fin d'études secondaires 2013

Section: B-C

Branche: ANGLAIS

Numéro d'ordre du candidat

What's In a Name?

The recent terrorist attack at a natural gas plant in Algeria--which, together with the counterstrike by Algiers, left 38 hostages and 29 militants dead--has aroused fears that we are watching the resurrection of al-Qaeda, no longer just in Southwest Asia but in virtually every corner of Africa as well. British Prime Minister David Cameron reacted to the events in a way that evoked the days after 9/11. "This is a global threat, and it will require a global response," he said. "It wants to destroy our way of life. It believes in killing as many people as it can."

There's little doubt that the Algerian terrorists are brutal, nasty people, but many questions about them remain. Are they a branch of al-Qaeda? Do they have global jihadist aims? Do they seek to destroy our way of life? It's vitally important that we understand these groups so that our response to them is tailored to the facts.

The Algerian group responsible for the attack, al-Mulathameen Brigade, which translates as "the brigade of the masked ones," is led by Moktar Belmoktar, who has been fighting the Algerian government for two decades. He claims to be a veteran of the war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, but he came to prominence in Algeria in the 1990s. That's when the nation's Islamic political parties were poised to win parliamentary elections. But in 1992, the Algerian army cancelled the elections, banned the Islamist parties and began a brutal offensive against the radical and violent wings of the Islamist groups.

Accounts vary as to whether closer to 150,000 or 200,000 people were killed in this counterterrorist campaign, but everyone agrees that both the insurgents and the army showed no mercy and observed no boundaries. The most extreme groups that survived continued to battle the Algerian state but never espoused larger goals. In fact, they were careful never to blow up oil pipelines--though there are thousands of miles of exposed pipelines in oil-rich Algeria--because they wanted to replace the government, not destroy the world.

It is these groups that a few years ago morphed into al-Qaeda in Islamic Northwest Africa. They have survived not because of any ideological support from the population but rather because, some believe, they have managed to raise plenty of money by engaging in thoroughly un-Islamic activities like smuggling drugs and tobacco. (Belmoktar is nicknamed the Marlboro Man for that reason.) In recent years, it seems they have stumbled upon a far more lucrative business: hostage taking. Belmoktar and groups like his in Algeria and Mali have kidnapped Westerners and extracted rich ransoms in return. The going rate for a Western hostage in 2011 was \$5.4 million. This sort of terrorism pays richly in this world, not the next.

What conclusions can we draw from all this? These groups are largely composed of local thugs with long-standing grievances that often have little to do with global jihad. Also, terrorism is good business for them. Their causes have lost support at home, so they have latched on to the al-Qaeda brand in the hope of enhancing their appeal--and, perhaps crucially, gaining greater global attention. (Keep in mind Osama bin Laden's words in 2004: "All that we have to do is to send two mujahedin to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al-qaeda in order to make the generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic and political losses.") To elevate these thugs and smugglers to grand ideological foes is to play into their hands.

(595 words, slightly abridged, from Fareed Zakaria, *Time Magazine*, February 2013)

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A) Comprehension questions (3 x 10 = 30 marks)

- 1) How and why have Algerian Islamists been fighting the government since the 1990s?
- 2) How have these extreme Islamist groups such as "al-Mulathameen" been able to survive?
- 3) What is these groups' connection to Al-Qaeda?

B) Development question (30 marks)

Write a well-structured essay of 250-350 words on the following topic:

"One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." Discuss.

Indicate the number of words used.