

Algiers *L'Expression* in French 18 February 2003

Azeddine Badri: "Nigerien Tribes Resupplying Belmokhtar: The Southern Powderkeg"

Belmokhtar's threat reportedly comes from the weapons support from fighting tribes based in the north of Niger.

Reports coming from a reliable source have indicated that two Tuareg tribes located in the far north of Niger reportedly sold a major consignment of weapons and munitions to the Salafist Group for Call and Combat [GSPC] active under the yoke of emir Mokhtar Belmokhtar in the far south of Algeria. This merchandise, the source explained, had reportedly been bought in Niger, in a locality of Tazaret, located in the north, by two "officials" belonging to two different tribes. These are, the source explained, E'Tawareks and El'Mcharkas, two feuding tribes, based along the width of the Algerian-Nigerien border strip. According to the reports, the transaction was reportedly carried out by a certain Freha, set up in [Algerian] national territory, and a Nigerien calling himself Mada, who was reportedly accompanied by the son of a member of parliament from the same country. This major quantity of weapons and munitions was reportedly made up of MAT 49-type rifles, Kalashnikovs, RPG7's, Seminov rifles, FAL- and RPK-type weapons, and cartridges.

In fact, the movement of weapons along the width of the border stripe really constitutes a supply source for weapons for the terrorists infesting these tribal areas where generally the movement reportedly takes place of Pakistanis (or Arab Afghans) wishing to get to either the north of the country, to join Hassan Hattab's GSPC, or Europe, via Moroccan territory, with the goal of perpetrating terrorist operations. The ambush that was laid in the Aures area, in Batna, during which 40 or so soldiers died, reportedly showed, as part of this, that terrorists speaking a foreign language had reportedly really and truly "taken part in that operation." Furthermore, the case of Bin Ladin's emissary, Imad Abdelwahid, who was slain by the Algerian antiterrorist forces last September in the east, in the same city, was highly significant of this strategy by the al-Qa'ida organization which, according to security analyses, had reportedly been applied, indeed, around 11 September 2001.

However, if one looks very closely at the reports coming either from Malian nationals, who are very up on current security news, or directly from the regions of the Algerian south, one is tempted to say that the armed threat reportedly comes much more from the Belmokhtar's GSPC groups which, in this regard, are reportedly "well" supported with military logistics by Tuareg tribes living in the north of Mali and Niger, than from networks linked to al-Qa'ida. In fact, the movement of weapons in these desert regions is reportedly a response to considerations tied in particular to "safeguarding the interest" or this or that feuding tribe. It is from these conflict situations, producing a profusion of weapons and especially the tribes' propensity for logistical support, especially of those presenting themselves as being their allies of the moment, from which "emir" Belmokhtar seems to be "benefiting" and from whom he is making his other terrorist "leaders" in the center and the east, Hattab and El-Para respectively, "benefit."

Furthermore, the north of Nigeria is reportedly another "attraction" area for the purchase of Belmokhtar's weapons. Recently a Toyota vehicle was reportedly loaded with weapons in the

north of Nigeria, in Kano, not far from Niger, and reportedly went through Tazaret, a community located in Niger, to be convoyed to Tamanrasset via Ain Guezzam, this in order to "land" with Belmokhtar's elements.

And one can add that the latter, during a bogus roadblock that was thrown up, let us remind readers, on 18 December of last year, and followed by a terrorist attack on the home base of an Algerian company located 120 kilometers away from that city, were in possession of the same weapons that had reportedly just been sold by these tribes to Belmokhtar's groups.

Indeed involved was a group of 20 terrorists who, according to the latest reports, were all reportedly natives of cities in the center of the country. A certain Hassen from Bouira, possessing an FAL-type weapon, Yahia, from Algiers, more precisely from Birkhadem, with a Kalashnikov rifle, the man nicknamed "Boudj" from Cherchell, the owner of an RPG7 rifle and an MAT 49, the man named Omar, from Ain Temouchent, with an FAL-type weapon, and a certain M. Abderrazak, from Medea who, during this attack, had an RPK and an MAT 49. Might this be a mere coincidence?