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Country Report on Terrorism 2021 - Chapter 5 - al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Aka AQIM; GSPC; *Le Groupe Salafiste Pour la Predication et le Combat;* Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat; Salafist Group for Call and Combat; Tanzim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Maghrib al-Islamiya

Description: The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) was designated as an FTO on March 27, 2002. The Department of State amended the GSPC designation in 2008, after the GSPC officially joined with al-Qa'ida in 2006 and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) became the primary name of the group. Although AQIM remains largely a regionally focused terrorist group, it has adopted a more anti-western rhetoric and ideology. The group aspires to overthrow "apostate" African regimes and create an Islamic state. Following the death of AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel, who was killed in 2020 by French forces, the group chose Abu Obaida Yusuf al-Annabi as Droukdel's successor.

Activities: Following AQIM's 2007 bombing of the UN headquarters building and an Algerian government building in Algiers, which killed 60 people, AQIM's northern leadership was contained to northeastern Algeria, while the group's southern battalions focused mostly on kidnapping-for-ransom efforts. In 2011 and 2012, however, AQIM took advantage of the deteriorating security situation across Libya, Mali, and Tunisia to expand its operations. Terrorists with ties to AQIM were involved in the 2012 attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi that killed U.S. Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens and three other embassy staff members. In 2014, AQIM killed 14 Algerian soldiers in an ambush east of Algiers.

In 2015, AQIM claimed responsibility for multiple attacks on UN personnel in Mali that killed and wounded UN Peacekeepers, and, in cooperation with other terrorist groups, attacked the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali, taking more than 170 hostages, including U.S. citizens. As many as 27 people were killed, among them a U.S. international development worker.

In 2016, AQIM carried out an attack on a hotel in Burkina Faso that killed 28 people and injured 56 others. Also in 2016, AQIM claimed responsibility for a strike on a popular tourist beach resort in Côte d'Ivoire that killed more than 16 people and wounded another 33. In 2017, AQIM conducted a suicide attack that left more than 50 people dead in Gao, Mali. In 2018, AQIM claimed responsibility for a vehicle suicide attack on an army patrol in Gao that killed 4 civilians and wounded 31 others, including 4 French soldiers.

In 2019, AQIM claimed responsibility for an attack on a UN camp in northern Mali, killing 10 Peacekeepers and wounding 25 others. In 2020, AQIM engaged in clashes with Algerian security forces during sweeping operations in which AQIM primarily used IEDs and small arms.

AQIM did not claim responsibility for any attacks in 2021.

Strength: AQIM has an estimated 1,000 fighters operating in the Sahel, including Algeria, northern Mali, southwest Libya, and Niger.

Location/Area of Operation: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Tunisia

Funding and External Aid: AQIM members engage in kidnapping for ransom and other criminal activities to finance their operations. AQIM also successfully fundraises globally and receives limited financial and logistical assistance from supporters residing in Western Europe.

Associated documents

Document ID 2088090 Chapter

27 February 2023 | HRW – Human Rights Watch (Author)

Tunisia

Justice Ministry ignores administrative court order to reinstate 49 magistrates; instead the Justice Minister announced the preparation of criminal cases against the dismissed judges

President Intensifies Attacks on Judicial Independence (Appeal or News Release, English)

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ID 2087703

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27 February 2023 | USDOS – US Department of State (Author)

Mali

Annual report on terrorism (covering 2021)

Country Report on Terrorism 2021 - Chapter 1 - Mali (Periodical Report, English)

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ID 2087854

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27 February 2023 | USDOS – US Department of State (Author)