



Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb

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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 a Foreign Terrorist Organization on March 27, 2002. After the GSPC officially joined with al-Qa'ida (AQ) in September 2006 and became known as al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Department of State amended the GSPC designation on February 20, 2008 to reflect the change. Although AQIM remains largely a regionally-focused terrorist group, it has adopted a more anti-Western rhetoric and ideology, and has aspirations of overthrowing "apostate" African regimes and creating an Islamic state. Abdelmalek Droukdel, aka Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadoud, is the group's leader.

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 largely contained to the mountainous region of northeastern Algeria; the group's southern battalions focused mostly on its kidnapping for ransom efforts. In 2011 and 2012, however, AQIM took advantage of the deteriorating security situation across Tunisia, Libya, and Mali, to plan and conduct expanded operations. Militants with ties to AQIM were involved in the September 11, 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 2013, AQIM attacked regional security forces, local government targets, and westerners in the Sahel, including a suicide bombing that killed two Malian civilians and injured six Malian soldiers. In April 2014, AQIM killed 14 Algerian soldiers in an ambush on a convoy in mountains to the east of Algiers, one of the deadliest attacks on the Algerian military in several years. AQIM also claimed responsibility for the May 27, 2014 attack on the house of Tunisia's interior minister, Lotfi Ben Jeddou.

In January 2015, AQIM claimed responsibility for an attack on a UN vehicle in Kidal, which wounded seven peacekeepers. Also in 2015, AQIM twice attacked UN convoys near Timbuktu with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades; three peacekeepers were killed in a May attack and six in a July attack. In November 2015, AQIM, jointly with other terrorist groups, attacked the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako and took multiple hostages, 20 of whom died during the attack.

AQIM has also continued to conduct kidnapping for ransom operations. The targets were usually Western citizens from governments or third parties that have established a pattern of making concessions in the form of ransom payments for the release of individuals in custody. In November 2014, AQIM released a video of two Western hostages, a Dutch and a French national, who were later released in December 2014.

In June 2015, AQIM released a video featuring one Swedish and one South African hostage who continued to be held captive through the end of 2015. In November, the group was reportedly involved in the attack on the Bamako/Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali, which was likely planned by al-Mulathamun Battalion (aka al-Murabitoun). More than 170 people were taken hostage in the attack, some of whom were American.

Strength: AQIM has several hundred fighters operating in Algeria and the Sahel. Since the French intervention in northern Mali, AQIM's safe haven in northern Mali is less tenable for the organization and elements have moved to remote regions of northern Mali or to southwestern Libya. AQIM is attempting to reorganize in the wake of setbacks inflicted upon it by the combined French and African forces.

Location/Area of Operation: Northeastern Algeria (including but not limited to the Kabylie region), Libya, Tunisia, northern Mali, and Niger.

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

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