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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - 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 on February 20, 2008, after the GSPC officially joined with al-Qa’ida (AQ) in September 2006 and became al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). 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. AQIM is led by Abdelmalek Droukdel, also known as Abu Mus’ab Abd al-Wadoud.

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 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 April 2014, AQIM killed 14 Algerian soldiers in an ambush east of Algiers.

In January 2015, AQIM claimed responsibility for an attack on a UN vehicle in Kidal, Mali, which wounded seven peacekeepers. That same year, AQIM twice attacked UN convoys near Timbuktu, Mali, with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades; three peacekeepers were killed in a May 2015 attack and another six were killed in a July attack. In November 2015, AQIM, 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 in the attack, among them a U.S. international development worker.

In January 2016, AQIM carried out an attack on a hotel in Burkina Faso that killed 28 people and injured 56. In March 2016, AQIM claimed responsibility for a strike on a popular tourist beach resort in Cote d’Ivoire that killed more than 16 people and wounded another 33.

AQIM has continued to conduct kidnapping-for-ransom operations, typically targeting Western citizens from governments or third parties that have an established pattern of paying ransom for the release of individuals. In November 2014, AQIM released a video of two Western hostages (a Dutch national and a French national), who were later released in December 2014.

In January 2017, AQIM conducted a suicide attack that left more than 50 people dead in Gao, Mali. In July 2018, AQIM claimed responsibility for a vehicle suicide attack on an army patrol in Gao that killed four civilians and wounded 31 others, including four French soldiers.

In January 2019, AQIM claimed responsibility for an attack on a UN camp in northern Mali, killing 10 peacekeepers and wounding 25 others.

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.

ecoi.net summary:

Brief description of the Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb
(Excerpt of chapter 5 of the country report on terrorism 2019)

Countries:

Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Niger, Tunisia

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telephone) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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F.A.Q.
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