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Country Report on Terrorism 2022 - 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, killed in 2020 by French forces, the group chose Abu Obaida Yusuf al-Annabi as Droukdel's successor.

Activities: Since becoming an al-Qa'ida affiliate, AQIM has claimed responsibility for or was involved in numerous high-profile attacks including the 2007 bombing of the UN headquarters building and an Algerian government building in Algiers that killed 60 people. 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. AQIM also participated in a 2015 attack against the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali. More than 170 people, including U.S. citizens, were taken hostage in the Radisson attack, and at least 26 people were killed, among them a U.S. international development worker.

Between 2016 and 2020, AQIM carried out several attacks against civilians, as well as security and military personnel, including 2016 attacks on a hotel in Burkina Faso that killed 28 people and a popular tourist beach resort in Côte d'Ivoire that killed more than 16 people; a 2018 vehicle suicide attack on an army patrol in Gao that killed four civilians and wounded 31 others, including four French soldiers; and a 2019 attack on a UN camp in northern Mali, killing 10 Peacekeepers and wounding 25 others.

In February 2022, French forces killed Yahia Djouadi, a senior AQIM official responsible for finance and logistics, in Mali. AQIM did not claim responsibility for any attacks in 2022.

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.