

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	254
Land:	Algeriet
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 5 - al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb
Udgivet:	1. november 2019
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	30. januar 2020

Document #2019516

USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 5 - al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb

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 alMaghrib al-Islamiya.

Description: The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) was designated as a 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. Abdelmalek Droukdel, also known as 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 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 plan and conduct expanded 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. Also in 2015, AQIM twice attacked UN convoys near Timbuktu, Mali, with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades; three peacekeepers were killed in a May attack and six peacekeepers 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 resulted in 28 deaths; 56 people were injured. In March 2016, AQIM claimed responsibility for a strike on a popular tourist beach resort in Cote d’Ivoire that killed at least 16 people and wounded another 33.

AQIM also has continued to conduct kidnapping-for-ransom operations. Its targets are typically Western citizens from governments or third parties that have established a 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.

Strength: AQIM has an estimated 1,000 fighters operating in the Sahel, including Algeria, northern Mali, southwest Libya, and Niger. However, AQIM has been reorganizing and expanding in recent years.

Location/Area of Operation: The group is based in southern and eastern Algeria (including isolated parts of the Kabylie region), Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, northern Mali, Niger, and Tunisia. 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.

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 the group received limited financial and logistical assistance from supporters residing in Western Europe.

ecoi.net summary:

Brief description of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (Excerpt of chapter 5 of the country report on terrorism 2018)



Countries:

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

Source:

USDOS – US Department of State (</en/source/11558.html>)

Original link (no longer valid):

<https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2018/#AQIM>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

1 November 2019

Document ID:

2019516

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

