



AL-QA'IDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM)



Background

- Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) became al-Qa'ida's North and West Africa affiliate in 2006. AQIM was formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, a splinter group of the Armed Islamic Group, both of which fought against Algeria's secular government.
- Abdelmalek Droukdel has led AQIM and its predecessor groups since 2004. He cited religious motives for becoming an al-Qa'ida affiliate; however, the strategic decision also unified loosely connected brigades, enhancing recruitment and fundraising.
- AQIM finances its operations through drug smuggling, protection rackets, and weapons trafficking, as well as the kidnapping and ransom of Westerners in North and West Africa.
- In 2015, AQIM announced a merger with al-Murabitun, a terrorist group led by former AQIM member Mokhtar Belmokhtar. Since this merger, AQIM has executed attacks against civilians, including Westerners, in public places such as hotels and restaurants.



Abdelmalek Droukdel,
AQIM's leader



Mokhtar Belmokhtar,
al-Murabitun's leader

Threat to New Jersey: Low

AQIM lacks the capability and intent to plan and carry out an attack in the United States or New Jersey. AQIM's operational focus is in North and West Africa, and its membership includes few foreign fighters. While AQIM is hostile toward the West, the group remains focused on targeting European interests in the region.

- AQIM has not attacked the United States; however, the group's leadership continues to reinforce targeting Western interests. In an interview with the New York Times in 2008, Droukdel said, "American interests are legitimate targets to us."
- There are no known US citizens in AQIM's ranks, and unlike fellow al-Qa'ida affiliate al-Shabaab in Somalia, there is no large diaspora community in the United States for AQIM to target its recruitment.
- AQIM operates primarily in Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Tunisia, and it focuses on ridding North and West Africa of regimes it deems apostate, as well as Western influence. The group has targeted European security forces – primarily French and Spanish – and European civilians.



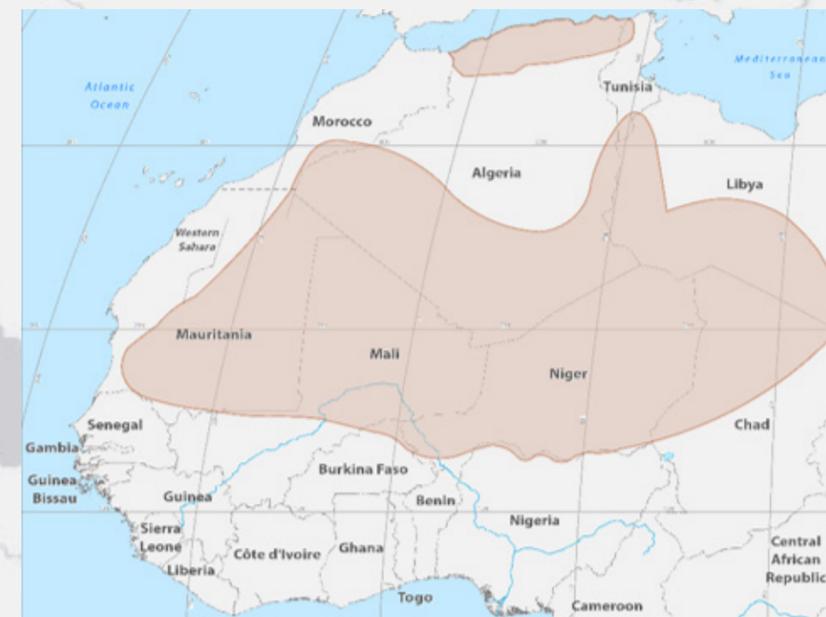
AQIM's flag

Intelligence Gaps

- What targets will the group focus on as a result of the AQIM and al-Murabitun merger?
- How will AQIM respond if US interests infringe on the group's smuggling routes?
- What is Mokhtar Belmokhtar's role after the merger of AQIM and al-Murabitun?

US Nexus

- In September 2015, AQIM called multinational corporations attractive targets. Major US-based companies such as Citibank, Halliburton, and Hess have facilities in AQIM's areas of operation.
- In January 2013, Belmokhtar led an attack against the Tigantourine natural gas plant in eastern Algeria, near In Amenas, killing 67, including three US citizens.
- In June 2009, AQIM killed a US aid worker during a failed kidnapping attempt. Several months later in November, the group failed to kidnap US Embassy personnel.



AQIM's area of operations and influence

Contact Information

For more information, please contact NJOHSP's Analysis Bureau at analysis@njohsp.gov or 609-584-4000.