



# AL-QA'IDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB



## Background

- Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) became al-Qa'ida's North Africa affiliate in 2007. 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.
- In March 2017, AQIM merged with Ansar al-Din and al-Mourabitoun in Africa to form Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), translated to mean Group to Support Islam and Muslims.
- Abdelmalek Droukdel has led AQIM and its predecessor groups since 2004. He cited religious motives for the group becoming an al-Qa'ida affiliate; this strategic decision also unified loosely connected brigades, enhancing recruitment and fundraising.
- In 2017, Droukdel acknowledged in al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's *Inspire* magazine that counterterrorism operations bogged down his forces, resulting in a lack of support in the Algerian front.



*AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel's Inspire magazine interview*

## Threat to New Jersey: Low

*AQIM poses a low threat to New Jersey as it continues to focus its efforts on northwest African targets.* AQIM has never attacked the United States; however, the group's leadership reinforces targeting Western interests abroad to follow al-Qa'ida's ideology.

- The group's main goal continues to focus on overthrowing the governments of Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Mali to establish an Islamic caliphate.
- In January 2020, the US Department of Justice charged Mimi Ould Baba, a Mali citizen who is currently in Malian custody, with killing a US citizen and conspiring to provide material support to AQIM. The charges allege Baba played a central role in the planning of two separate terrorist attacks in January 2016 targeting a restaurant and hotel in the capital city of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

## Additional Resources

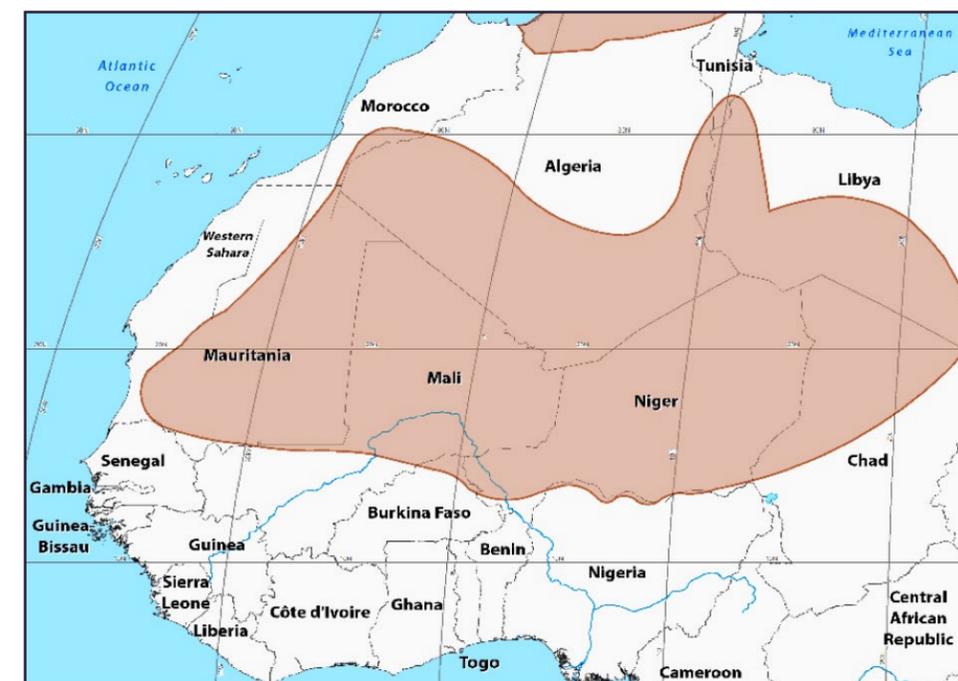
[2020 Terrorism Threat Assessment](#)

[Al-Qa'ida Leader Calls for Attacks on 9/11 Anniversary](#)

[Al-Qa'ida Affiliates Merge with Regional Extremists](#)

## US Nexus

- US Africa Command has stated there are approximately 6,000 Department of Defense personnel in Africa to assist in counterterrorism operations, including logistics support, airlifts, and intelligence sharing.
- In May 2018, AQIM warned Western countries and French citizens that they are legitimate targets for the mujahideen and urged Muslims to avoid areas associated with Westerners to ensure they are not targeted accidentally.
- Despite its main objectives, the group also releases sporadic statements threatening Israel and the United States. In 2019, the group threatened the United States for moving its embassy to Jerusalem and issued a joint statement with JNIM condemning mosque attacks by right-wing extremists and threatening retaliation against Westerners.
- In February 2020, Djamel Okacha, an AQIM Algerian commander, was killed in a counterterrorism operation in northern Mali. Okacha was suspected of involvement in the assassination of a US citizen, Christopher Leggett, in Mauritania in 2009.



*AQIM's areas of operation and influence*