

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Name: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Type of Organization:

- Insurgent
- non-state actor
- religious
- terrorist
- transnational
- violent

Ideologies and Affiliations:

- Al-Qaeda affiliated group
- Islamist
- jihadist
- Qutbist
- Salafist
- Sunni
- takfiri

Place of Origin:

Algeria

Year of Origin:

2007

Founder(s):

Abdelmalek Droukdel, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, Hassan Hattab (founder and former leader of GSPC), Sofiane El-Fassila (former leader)

Places of Operation:

Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Libya, Mauritania, Tunisia

Overview

Also known as:

- Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)¹
- Al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)²
- Armed Islamic Group (GIA)³
- Gruppo Islamico Armato (GIA)⁴
- Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)⁵
- Le Groupe Salafiste Pour La Predication Et Le Combat (GSPC)⁶
- Organization of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)⁷
- Salafist Group for Call and Combat⁸
- Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat⁹
- Tanzim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Maghrib al-Islamiya¹⁰

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Executive Summary:

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is a jihadist terrorist group based in North Africa. As a formal [al-Qaeda](#) [1] affiliate, the group is dedicated to dismantling regional governments and implementing sharia (Islamic law) in areas where it operates, primarily in Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Libya, Tunisia, and Niger. In December 2015, AQIM linked up with its former offshoot, [al-Mourabitoun](#) [2], to carry out attacks throughout the Sahel region. The groups carried out a series of deadly terrorist attacks, including the November 2015 attacks in Mali, the January 2016 attacks in Burkina Faso, and the March 2016 attacks in Côte d'Ivoire.¹¹

On March 2, 2017, AQIM merged with local Salafist groups Ansar al-Dine and al-Mourabitoun to form Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), led by Iyad Ag Ghali, Ansar al-Dine's former emir.¹² While operating under a new name and new emir, JNIM appears to remain under the direction of AQIM and AQ central. Ghali pledged allegiance to both al-Qaeda central and AQIM emir Abu Musab Abdul Wadoud.¹³ In 2017, al-Qaeda-linked groups were responsible for 276 attacks in Mali and West Africa, comparable to the number of attacks its affiliated groups launched in 2016.¹⁴

AQIM finds its roots in the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), an Islamist movement founded in Algeria in the early 1990s. GIA leader Hassan Hattab split from the GIA over ideological differences, and he later founded the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). In September 2006, GSPC merged with al-Qaeda, formally rebranding itself as AQIM in the months following. In Mali, AQIM is known for its de facto war with the French government beginning in 2013, as well as its extensive history of kidnapping and extortion.¹⁵

Doctrine:

AQIM aligns its movement with al-Qaeda's broader goals to institute sharia (Islamic law) in all its areas of operation. Then-leader [Abdelmalek Droukdel](#) [3] told the *New York Times* in 2008 that "Our first goal is the arbitration of the Lord of the world's law [Sharia], and the achievement of the servitude to God. Our general goals are the same goals of Al Qaeda the mother, and you know them."¹⁶

AQIM perceives all non-Islamist governments as illegitimate and, accordingly, seeks to replace the various governments in the countries in which AQIM operates. According to Droukdel, these governments "are all secretions of the colonialism that invaded our country in the last two centuries, and enabled those regimes to govern. Therefore, they started governing for its account and on behalf of it. They implement its programs and protect its interests and fight Islam on its behalf."¹⁷ Moreover, the group specifically targets what it sees as continued Western influence in the region. According to Droukdel, "We seek to liberate the Islamic Maghreb from the sons of France and Spain and from all symbols of treason and employment for the outsiders, and protect it from the foreign greed and the crusader's hegemony."¹⁸ Regarding attacks on American interests, Droukdel said that, "We will strive to strike them whenever we can."¹⁹

Organizational Structure:

Like all al-Qaeda outfits, AQIM has a distinct hierarchy, with a leader or emir at its head. The former emir was [Abdelmalouk Droukdel](#) [3]. AQIM also has a central decision-making body, the Majlis al-Ayan (Council of Notables),²⁰ its own media wing, Al-Andalus Media Productions, and a Sharia Council that governs Islamic legal matters.²¹ French troops killed Droukdel in Mali on June 4, 2020.²² On November 21, 2020, AQIM released a video that showed the body of its former leader while also announcing Abu Ubaydah Yusef al-Anabi—the former leader of AQIM's Council of Notables—as the group's new leader.²³

After al-Mourabitoun re-joined AQIM in 2015, al-Qaeda leader [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#) [4] allegedly ordered a regional division among his commanders. Droukdel was placed in charge of Algeria, al-Mourabitoun leader [Mokhtar Belmokhtar](#) [5] of Libya, and Djame Okacha (a.k.a. [Abu Yahya al-Hammam](#) [6]) of West Africa.²⁴ The Tunisian branch of AQIM has carried out

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a series of attacks in recent years, particularly in Tunisia’s Kasserine region.²⁵ This regional division reflects the early organization of AQIM, which was divided in *katibas* (brigades) that both cooperated and competed with each other.²⁶

In March 2017, AQIM announced the formation of *Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM) in a merger that included Ansar al-Dine and al-Mourabitoun. JNIM announced Ansar al-Dine’s former emir, Iyad Ag Ghali, as its leader.²⁷ Ghali claimed that the factions had united “into one group” operating under “one emir” after al-Qaeda “sought unification according to Sharia law.”²⁸ While operating under a new name and new emir, JNIM appears to remain under the aegis of al-Qaeda. Ghali paid *bayat* (allegiance) to al-Qaeda central and AQIM emir Abu Musab Abdul Wadoud.²⁹ Thus, the relationship between AQIM and Ansar al-Dine and al-Mourabitoun has shifted from one of collaboration to a structured hierarchy with AQIM at the top.³⁰

Financing:

AQIM acquires a significant portion of its funding through kidnapping and extortion.³¹ The State Department’s 2013 Country Reports on Terrorism noted that, in addition to kidnapping for ransom, the group also engages in criminal activities to finance its operations. Specifically, AQIM reportedly raises funds through “protection rackets, robbery, people and arms trafficking, money laundering and smuggling and increasingly, the facilitation of drug trafficking from South America into Europe.”³² Lastly, AQIM also successfully fundraises globally. This includes supporters residing in Western Europe, who “provide limited financial and logistical support.”³³

AQIM is also allegedly supported by foreign governments. According to the Anti-Defamation League, “The Algerian government has accused Iran and Sudan of funding the group. Al Qaeda also provides material and financial support to AQIM. In addition, AQIM has many members abroad, the majority located in Western Europe, who provide financial and logistical support.”³⁴

Recruitment:

An April 2007 report by Lianne Boudali of West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center suggested that the GSPC merged with al-Qaeda in part due to declining recruitment. Rebranding as AQIM and broadening their focus outside of Algeria and Tunisia made it easier for the group to recruit informants, logisticians, and militants.³⁵ As part of this plan, GSPC trained and sent fighters to join [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](#) [7]—then the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq—in 2005.³⁶ The increased scope and scale of attacks after 2007 suggests that AQIM successfully recruited some of these Iraqi fighters after Zarqawi’s death.³⁷

As AQIM shifted its focus away from Algeria and toward the more vulnerable west African countries of Mali, Niger, and Côte d’Ivoire, it increased its recruitment efforts within these countries. By 2016, Malians had reportedly replaced Algerians as the most prominent nationality within the group.³⁸ This change is visible in the March 2016 beach resort attack in Côte d’Ivoire, in which all of the terrorists involved were sub-Saharan Africans.³⁹

Training:

Most of AQIM’s leadership first trained alongside Osama bin Laden during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁴⁰ In the mid-2000s, GSPC trained recruits in the desert in temporary bivouacs which they moved after a few days.⁴¹ However in 2006 reports emerged suggesting that AQIM had sent men to train with [Hezbollah](#) [8] in Lebanon.⁴² By the late 2000s, AQIM began training [Boko Haram](#) [9] fighters in the construction of IEDs.⁴³ According to internal documents seized from bin Laden’s compound, AQIM divides its training into two parts: “practical training and... theoretical training, which is less beneficial.”⁴⁴

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Key Leaders



Abu Ubaydah Yusuf al-Anabi
Emir, leader of the Council of Notables (formerly), media chief (formerly)



Iyad Ag Ghali
JNIM emir (leader)



Abdelmalek Droukdel
Former AQIM emir (leader), in charge of Algeria (deceased)



Mokhtar Belmokhtar
Al-Mourabitoun emir, co-founder



Yahya Abu Hammam
Leader of Sahara-Sahel region



Yahia Djouadi
Former emir of the southern sector



Salah Mohamed
Head of media committee



Abdarrahmane al-Azawadi
Spokesman



Salah Mohamed
Head of media committee



Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad
Head of media



Ahmed Deghdegh
Finance chief



Mohamed Lahbous (a.k.a. Mohamed Ould Nouini)
Military commander of al-Mourabitoun and co-founder of JNIM (deceased)

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History:

- **November 2, 2020:** AQIM releases a statement following the October 16 decapitation of French teacher Samuel Paty who was killed in an Islamist attack for showing caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed. The statement read “killing the one who insults the prophet is the right of every Muslim capable of applying it.” The group also threatened to take revenge on French President Emmanuel Macron who defended the publication of the cartoons in the name of freedom of expression. Source: “Al-Qaeda threatens Macron and calls for killing anyone who insults the prophet,” H24, November 2, 2020, <https://www.h24info.ma/monde/al-qaeda-menace-macron-et-appelle-a-tuer-quiconque-insulte-le-prophete/> [35].
- **June 2020:** French troops kill AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel in Talhandak, Mali, near the Algerian border on June 4. The United States provides the French military with intelligence that helps them locate Droukdel in northern Mali. On June 18, AQIM confirms Droukdel’s death in a short statement via Abd al Ilah Ahmad, one of the group’s media officials. Sources: Agence France-Presse, “French troops kill Al-Qaeda’s North Africa chief Abdelmalek Droukdel,” *Telangana Today*, June 6, 2020, <https://telanganatoday.com/french-troops-kill-al-qaedas-north-africa-chief-abdelmalek-droukdel> [22]; Caleb Weiss, “AQIM confirms leader’s death,” *Long War Journal*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/06/aqim-confirms-leaders-death.php> [36].
- **September 2, 2019:** Tunisian forces launch a search operation in the mountainous Kasserine region and engage in an armed battle with insurgents. Three suspected jihadists are killed. The interior ministry claims one of the three alleged jihadists, identified as El Behi Akrouf and nicknamed Abu Salma, could be a top leader of Okba ibn Nafaa—the Tunisian branch of AQIM. Source: “Tunisia says killed jihadists were Al-Qaeda leaders,” *Ahram Online*, September 3, 2019, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/345106/World/Region/Tunisia-says-killed-jihadists-were-AlQaeda-leaders.aspx> [37].
- **July 25, 2019:** The Interior Ministry of Libya’s U.N.-backed government arrests a number of AQIM leaders on the outskirts of Tripoli. The main target, an Algerian national fighting under the name “Al-Chaoui,” was rounded up along with several wanted Libyans, it added, without giving names or the total number arrested. Sources: “Libya forces arrest suspected Al-Qaeda leaders in dawn Tripoli raid,” *The New Arab*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/7/25/libya-forces-arrest-suspected-al-qaeda-leaders-in-tripoli-raid> [38]; “Libyan security arrests al-Qaeda leaders in Tripoli,” *Xinhua*, July 25, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/25/c_138255075.htm [39].
- **May 14, 2019:** A Tunisian court sentences three brothers to 48 years in jail. Two were convicted on charges of joining ISIS and the third for joining an affiliate of AQIM. The court charges them with membership in a terrorist organization both locally and abroad, receiving military training with the intent of committing violence, providing weapons and ammunition to a terrorist organization, and using Tunisian territory to recruit for terrorist acts. Source: “Tunisia: 4 Siblings Sentenced to 50 Years in Jail on Terror Charges,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, May 13, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1720261/tunisia-4-siblings-sentenced-50-years-jail-terror-charges> [40].
- **March 9, 2019:** Abu Ubaydah Yusuf al-Anabi, a leading AQIM official, delivers a speech and calls on Muslims to unite to ensure that Algeria is ruled according to Islam “alone.” Designated a “terrorist” by the U.S. State Department in 2015, al-Anabi encouraged the Algerian people to take up his religious demands and employ “Islamic morals and sharia ethics” in their street demonstrations. Sources: “Al Qaeda official calls for Algeria to become Islamic state governed by sharia law,” *Barnabas Fund*, March 26, 2019, <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/al-qaeda-official-calls-for-algeria-to-become-islamic-state-governed-by-sharia-law> [41]; Thomas Joscelyn, “AQIM official calls for sharia governance in Algeria,” *Long War Journal*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/aqim-official-calls-for-sharia-governance-in-algeria.php> [42].
- **February 23, 2019:** French forces launch aerial raids north of Mopti in central Mali. The operation kills 15 terrorists belonging to Katiba Macina, an AQIM affiliate. Source: Joanne Stocker, “Mali: France airstrike kills 15 in Mopti as EU training base in Koulikoro attacked,” *Defense Post*, February 25, 2019, <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/02/25/mali-france-airstrike-kills-jnim-mopti-eutm-koulikoro-attacked/> [43].
- **February 22, 2019:** French forces ambush a convoy of vehicles in Timbuktu and kill Yahya Abou El Hamame, an AQIM commander. El Hamame was reputedly responsible for kidnapping a number of Westerners in North and West Africa. Source: “France says top al Qaeda commander in Sahel killed,” *France 24*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190222-france-al-qaeda-commander-hamame-killed-sahel> [44].
- **January 18, 2019:** Eastern Libyan forces launch an operation to secure oil and gas assets in the city of Sabha. The Libyan National Army kills Abu Talha al-Libi, an AQIM commander and two other militants, Egyptian national Abdullah al-Desouki and Libyan Abu Barakat. Sources: Ayman al-Warfalli, “Eastern Libyan force says it killed senior al Qaeda operative,” *Reuters*, January 18, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/eastern-libyan-force-says-it-killed-senior-al-qaeda-operative-idUSKCN1PC1U> [45]; “Al-Qaeda leader killed in operation in southern Libya,” *Arab News*, January 18, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1437651/middle-east> [46].
- **November 30, 2018:** U.S. forces carry out an airstrike against al-Qaeda militants near Al Uwaynat, Libya. The attack kills 11 AQIM members. Source: Joanne Stocker, “US carries out third airstrike against Al-Qaeda in Libya,” *Defense Post*, November 30, 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/11/30/us-airstrike-al-qaeda-libya-africa/> [47].
- **November 15, 2018:** France launches air strikes in the Gourma area of Timbuktu. The strikes kill seven jihadists including Ag Kassam. Kassam had worked with several al Qaeda groups, including the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, or JNIM) in Mali. Sources: Caleb Weiss, “AQIM emir confirms death of jihadist commander in Mali,” *Long War Journal*, December 12, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/12/aqim-emir-confirms-death-of-jihadist-commander-in-mali.php> [48]; “BARKHANE : la force Barkhane met hors de combat un groupe terroriste au Mali,” *Ministère des Armées*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/actualites2/barkhane-la-force-barkhane-met-hors-de-combat-un-groupe-terroriste-au-mali> [49].
- **August 8, 2018:** French forces kill 14 al-Mourabitoun fighters, including one of the group’s top commanders and

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explosives expert Hamza Ould Lekhweir, outside the city of Gao.

Source: "MALI: AL-MOURABITOUN COMMANDER AND ASSOCIATES KILLED AMIDST BARKHANE OPERATION NEAR TABANKORT," MENASTREAM, August 8, 2018, <http://menastream.com/mali-mourabitoun-barkhane-tabankort/> [50].

- **July 25, 2018:** An airstrike kills AQIM commander Ramzi Mansour in Ubari, Libya.
Source: "LIBYA: TUNISIAN AQIM COMMANDER KILLED IN UBARI AIRSTRIKE," MENASTREAM, August 3, 2018, <http://menastream.com/tunisian-aqim-commander-ubari/> [51].
- **March 28, 2018:** The United States carries out its first airstrikes against al-Qaeda in Libya killing a local AQIM leader near Ubari, Libya.
Source: Ryan Browne, "US conducts first airstrike against al-Qaeda in Libya," CNN, March 28, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/28/politics/us-airstrike-al-qaeda-libya/index.html> [52].
- **March 21, 2018:** JNIM releases a propaganda video, which features a speech from al-Qaeda leader Aymen al-Zawahiri, two training camps in central and northern Mali, and several attacks both in Mali and Burkina Faso.
Source: Caleb Weiss, "Al Qaeda group JNIM releases high-level production video," Long War Journal, March 21, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/03/al-qaeda-group-jnim-releases-high-level-production-video.php> [53].
- **February 20, 2018:** The U.S. State Department designates Ansarul Islam, a Burkinabe terrorist group that merged into JNIM, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.
Sources: Caleb Weiss, "State Department designates Burkinabe jihadist group Ansarul Islam," Long War Journal, February 20, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/02/state-department-adds-burkinabe-jihadist-group-to-terror-designation-list.php> [54]; Office of the Spokesperson, "State Department Designation of Ansarul Islam," US Department of State, February 20, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/02/278481.htm> [55].
- **February 14, 2018:** French forces kill JNIM co-founder Mohamed Lahbou and other senior leaders in an operation in the Tin Zaouatene, Boughessa, and Aouhou areas of northern Mali.
Source: "MALI: AL-MOURABITOUN COMMANDER AND ASSOCIATES KILLED AMIDST BARKHANE OPERATION NEAR TABANKORT," MENASTREAM, August 8, 2018, <http://menastream.com/mali-mourabitoun-barkhane-tabankort/> [50].
- **March 2017 - August 14, 2017:** On March 2, AQIM merges with local jihadist groups into Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), led by Ansar al-Dine leader Iyad Ag Ghali, and renew their pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda and to AQIM emir Abu Musab Abdoul Wadoud. The merged groups include Ansar al-Dine, al-Mourabitoun, and AQIM. Under its new name, JNIM conducts or is suspected of conducting six attacks in Mali and one attack in Burkina Faso, killing more than 40 civilians and soldiers. Sources: Thomas Joscelyn, "Analysis: Al Qaeda groups reorganize in West Africa," Long War Journal, March 13, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/analysis-al-qaeda-groups-reorganize-in-west-africa.php> [16]; Dario Cristiani, "Ten Years of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Evolution and Prospects," Jamestown Foundation, May 5, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/ten-years-al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-evolution-prospects/> [13]; Beligh Nabli, "L'unification du djihadisme sahelien," L'Economiste, June 3, 2017, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2017/03/06/unification-djihadisme-sahelien/> [14]; "Mali : l'attaque contre la base militaire de Boulikessi revendiquée par l'organisation jihadiste d'Iyad Ag Ghali," Jeune Afrique, March 10, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/411287/politique/mali-lattaque-contre-base-militaire-de-boulikessi-revendiquée-lorganisation-jihadiste-diyad-ag-ghali/> [56]; Caleb Weiss, "Al Qaeda entity involved in communal violence in central Mali," Long War Journal, March 27, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/al-qaeda-entity-involved-in-communal-violence-in-central-mali.php> [57]; Caleb Weiss, "Al Qaeda group claims assault near Mali capital," Long War Journal, June 20, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/06/al-qaeda-group-claims-assault-near-mali-capital.php> [58]; Caleb Weiss, "Jihadists strike across West Africa," Long War Journal, August 15, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/08/jihadists-launch-attacks-across-west-africa.php> [59].
- **August 29, 2016 - January 18, 2017:** AQIM and its affiliate branches conduct five attacks - including two suicide bombings in the city of Gao - in Tunisia, Niger, and Mali and two kidnappings in Libya, killing 100.
Sources: Caleb Weiss, "Tunisian AQIM branch claims attack on troops in Kasserine," Long War Journal, September 1, 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/tunisian-aqim-branch-claims-attack-on-troops-in-kasserine.php> [26]; "Al-Qaeda suspected of abducting three westerners in Libya," Middel East Eye, September 23, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/expatriates-abducted-libya-aqim-suspected-563532115> [60]; Caleb Weiss, "Suspected jihadists attack Nigerien refugee camp," Long War Journal, October 6, 2016, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/10/suspected-jihadists-attack-niger-refugee-camp.php> [61]; Caleb Weiss, "AQIM claims two attacks in northern Mali," Long War Journal, November 30, 2016, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/11/aqim-claims-two-attacks-in-northern-mali.php> [62]; "Death toll from suicide blast at Gao army base rises," Al Jazeera, January 19, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/suicide-blast-gao-army-base-170119112555093.html> [63].
- **January 5, 2015 - May 31, 2016:** AQIM renews its violent activities, launching six attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire, killing at least 79. AQIM also praises the attackers who killed 12 at the Paris offices of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, calling them "knights of truth."
In December 2015, al-Mourabitoun declares its merger with AQIM following their joint attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, the Malian capital. Sources: Associated Press, "Al-Qaida Militants Claim Responsibility for Attack in Mali," New York Times, January 6, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/01/06/world/africa/ap-af-mali-violence.html?_r=0 [64]; "Mali: UN Mission condemns attack that wounded seven peacekeepers," UN News Centre, January 9, 2015, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49763#.VNUVtPnF-7V> [65]; Matthew Weaver and Nadia Khomami, "Mali hotel attack: officials say hostage situation over - as it happened," Guardian (London), November 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2015/nov/20/mali-hotel-attack-gunmen-take-hostages-in-bamako-live-updates> [66]; "Mali hotel attack: Police seek info on hotel attack gunmen," BBC News, November 23, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34897745> [67]; "UPDATE 2-Mali TV airs images of man, woman suspected in hotel attack," Reuters, November 23, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/mali-attacks-idUSL8N131IYV20151123> [68]; Nadia Khomami, "Burkina Faso hotel attack: 18 nationalities among dead," Guardian (London), January 16, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/16/security-forces-battle-suspected-jihadists-in-burkina-faso-capital> [69]; Jason Burke, "Burkina Faso attack signals spread of Islamist menace," Guardian (London), January 16, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/16/burkina-faso-attack-signals-spread-of-islamist-menace> [70]; Tim Lister, "Burkina Faso attack demonstrates al-Qaeda revival in Africa," CNN, January 16, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/16/world/burkina-faso-attack-al-qaeda/> [71]; Drew Hinshaw and Zoumana Wonogo, "Al Qaeda Attacks in Burkina Faso Kill at Least 30," Wall Street Journal, January 17, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/operation-ends-at-burkina-faso-hotel-seized-by-al-qaeda-1452936866> [72]; Michael E. Miller, "Horror at the beach: 22 dead in terrorist attack on Ivory Coast resorts," Washington Post, March 14, 2016,

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/03/14/horror-at-the-beach-22-dead-in-terrorist-attack-on-ivory-coast-resorts/?utm_term=.41a7ad9cd104 [33]; Vincent Duhem, "Côte d'Ivoire: The bombing of Grand Bassam has mainly hit Ivorians," *Jeune Afrique*, March 16, 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/310315/politique/cote-divoire-lattentat-13-mars-a-majoritairement-frappe-ivoiriens/> [73]; Caleb Weiss, "AQIM claims two attacks in northern Mali," *Long War Journal*, November 30, 2016, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/11/aqim-claims-two-attacks-in-northern-mali.php> [62]. Reuters, "Al Qaeda's North Africa Branch Praises Gunmen for Paris Attack," *New York Times*, January 8, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2015/01/08/world/africa/08reuters-france-shooting-aqim.html?_r=0 [74]; Associated Press, "Mali: Group Merges With Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, December 4, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/world/africa/mali-group-merges-with-al-qaeda.html> [75].

- **December 10, 2014:** AQIM releases Serge Lazarevic, a French hostage captured in Mali in 2011, in exchange for four AQIM militants. Two of the released members are identified as Mohamed Ali Ag Wadoussene and Heiba Ag Acherif, some of the alleged perpetrators who took part in kidnapping French nationals in 2011. According to several Malian news sources, at least five Islamist prisoners are exchanged for Lazarevic. Source: "Mali confirms AQIM militants swapped for French hostage," *France24*, December 12, 2014, <http://www.france24.com/en/20141212-four-al-qaeda-militants-swapped-french-hostage-lazarevic-mali> [76]; John Irish and Abdoulaye Massalaki, "Last French Hostage Freed by Al Qaeda's North African Arm," *Reuters*, December 10, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/10/us-france-hostage-corrected-idUSKBN0JN17D20141210> [77].
- **December 4, 2014:** The U.N. releases a report that AQIM and other terrorist groups are working with the Colombian drug cartel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). According to the report, the "narco-jihadists" transport drugs through a route that traverses much of northwestern Africa. AQIM is allowed as much as 15 percent of profits from each gram of cocaine sold. Source: Walid Ramzi, "North Africa: AQIM Partners with Colombian Drug Cartel," *AllAfrica*, December 5 2014, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201412060088.html> [78].
- **October 10, 2014 - December 2014:** On October 10, French President Francois Hollande announces that French forces have intercepted a large convoy of weapons in Niger that had been traveling from Libya to Mali and captured AQIM fighters. On December 13, Algerian security sources claim that Djilali Mansour, a senior member of AQIM's council, was killed in Libya along with five other al-Qaeda militants by Libyan forces. Mansour was allegedly leading an excursion into Libya in order to obtain armaments and make contact with local groups. Source: "France Destroys Al-Qaeda Convoy in Niger," *Al Jazeera*, last updated October 10, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/10/france-destroys-al-qaeda-convoy-niger-20141010152013860828.html> [79]; "Senior Al Qaeda Leader Killed in Libya," *Yahoo News India and Indo Asian News Service*, December 13, 2014, <https://in.news.yahoo.com/senior-al-qaeda-leader-killed-libya-182804942.html> [80].
- **May 27, 2014 - August 2014:** AQIM launches four attacks while French authorities prevent three more. On May 27, AQIM claims responsibility for killing four policemen during an attack on the home of Tunisia's interior minister. In June, the groups claim responsibility for two separate attacks on U.N. vehicles in Mali. On July 9, French authorities thwart an AQIM plot to target the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and a nuclear power plant in France. On August 16, a suicide bomber self-detonates on a patrol base in northern Mali, killing two and injuring nine. During this time, a rift seems to emerge within AQIM over whether or not to pledge allegiance to ISIS in the wake of ISIS's declaration of a caliphate. Source: "Al-Qaeda claims recent attack on Tunisian minister's home," *Al Arabiya News*, June 13, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/2014/06/13/Al-Qaeda-claims-recent-attack-on-Tunisian-minister-s-home-.html> [81]. Bakari Gueye, "Al-Qaeda Claims Mali Peacekeeper Attacks," *Magharebia*, September 3, 2014, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/09/03/feature-02 [82]. Henry Samuel, "Islamist plot to blow up Eiffel Tower, Louvre and nuclear power plant foiled, say French police," *Daily Telegraph (London)*, July 9, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/10956636/Islamist-plot-to-blow-up-Eiffel-Tower-Louvre-and-nuclear-power-plant-foiled-say-French-police.html> [83]. "Suicide Bomber Attacks U.N. Base in Northern Mali, Kills Two," *Reuters*, August 16, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/16/us-mali-attacks-un-idUSKBN0GG0DL20140816> [84]; Bakari Gueye, "Al-Qaeda Claims Mali Peacekeeper Attacks," *Magharebia*, September 3, 2014, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/09/03/feature-02 [82].
- **April 2014:** Western officials claim that AQIM's "offensive capabilities have been seriously harmed" and that "their leaders have been neutralized... This is not the AQIM of one year ago." Source: Adam Nossiter, "Keeping Al Qaeda's West African Unit on the Run," *New York Times*, April 29, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/30/world/africa/keeping-al-qaedas-west-african-unit-on-the-run.html> [85].
- **July 26, 2013 - April 20, 2014:** AQIM militant activities shift to assassination and small ambushes. On July 26, 2013, Tunisian authorities accuse a jihadist cell linked to AQIM of assassinating opposition leader Mohamed Brahmi, as well as killing Chokri Belaid, another politician, in February. In November 2013, AQIM claims responsibility for kidnapping and murdering two French journalists, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, in northern Mali. The group says that the journalists were killed because of French and African military crimes against Muslims and the Azawad region of Mali. On April 20, 2014, several days after Algeria's presidential elections, AQIM ambushes Algerian soldiers who were returning from their voting stations near Tizi Ouzou, killing at least 14. Source: Carlotta Gall, "Tunisia Says Assassination Has Links to Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, July 26, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/27/world/middleeast/tunisia-assassination.html> [86]; Katarina Höije, "AQIM Claims Responsibility for Mali Killings," *CNN*, November 6, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/06/world/africa/mali-journalists-deaths-arrests/> [87]; "Militants Kill Soldiers in Algeria," *Reuters*, April 20, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/world/africa/militants-kill-soldiers-in-algeria.html> [31].
- **March 2013:** AQIM beheads French hostage Philippe Verdon, whom the group captured in November 2011. Four days later, France officially reports that senior AQIM leader Abdelhamid Abu Zeid has been killed during an offensive by French and Chadian troops in the mountains of northern Mali. The *New York Times* reports that Abu Zeid was responsible for kidnapping a number of Westerners and "was a crucial figure in the Islamist takeover of northern Mali." Source: "Report of Hostage's Beheading," *Reuters*, March 19, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/20/world/africa/report-of-hostages-beheading.html> [88]. Steven Erlanger, "France confirms the Death of a Qaeda Leader in Mali," *New York Times*, March 23, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/world/africa/france-confirms-death-of-abdelhamid-abu-zeid.html> [89].
- **January 2013:** Fighting between militants and French forces escalates in Mali after militants from the AQIM-allied

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MUJAO seize the northern Mali town of Konna, which Reuters describes as “the last buffer between the rebels and Mopti...the main town in the region [which is] seen as the gateway to the country’s north.” The next day, France begins airstrikes in Mali to beat back the jihadists’ advance toward the country’s center.

Several days later, the U.S. pledges military assistance to France and begins transporting French battalions and equipment from bases in France to Bamako, Mali. By the end of the month, French troops take control of Gao, the most populous city in northern Mali, as well as the ancient city of Timbuktu. Source: Tiemoko Diallo, “Mali Islamists Capture Strategic Town, Residents Flee,” Reuters, January 10, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/10/us-mali-rebels-idUSBRE90912Q20130110> [90]. Thom Shanker, “U.S. Begins Airlift of a French Battalion to Mali,” New York Times, January 22, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/23/world/africa/us-begins-airlift-of-french-unit-to-fight-militants-in-mali.html> [91]; Adam Nossiter and Eric Schmitt, “France Battling Islamists in Mali,” New York Times, January 11, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/12/world/africa/mali-islamist-rebels-france.html> [92]; Elisabeth Bumiller, “Leon Panetta Says U.S. Has Pledged to Help France in Mali,” New York Times, January 14, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/15/world/africa/leon-panetta-says-us-has-pledged-to-help-france-in-mali.html> [93]. Lydia Polgreen and Scott Sayare, “With Timbuktu Retaken, France Signals It Plans to Pull Back in Mali,” New York Times, January 28, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/29/world/africa/timbuktu-mali-france-conflict.html> [94].

- **January 16, 2013:** AQIM splinter group al-Mulathamun seizes control of the In Amenas natural gas plant in Algeria. The militants tie up dozens of Western workers and plant explosives throughout the facility. After four days of failed negotiations, Algerian forces storm the facility, killing and driving out the militants. At least 37 hostages die in the ensuing rescue attempt. Source: Adam Nossiter and Scott Sayare, “Militants Seize Americans and Other Hostages in Algeria,” New York Times, January 16, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/17/world/africa/islamists-seize-foreign-hostages-at-algeria-gas-field.html?pagewanted=all> [95]; Amir Ahmed, “At Least 37 Hostages Killed in Algeria Gas Plant Standoff, Prime Minister Says,” CNN, January 23, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/21/world/africa/algeria-hostage-crisis/> [96].
- **May 4, 2012 - December 20, 2012:** AQIM is implicated in two attempted or completed terror attacks against French and U.S. personnel leading to increased military actions by Western countries against the group. On May 4, France sentences French-Algerian particle physicist Said Hicheur to five years in prison for allegedly intending to carry out terrorist attacks against “the French Alpine infantry battalion that was deployed in Afghanistan.” On September 11, the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence asserts that individuals from AQIM are among those who planned the attacks against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens. On October 15, the Algerian military announces that it killed AQIM’s head of external operations, Boualem Bekai, in an ambush near Tizi Ouzou. Sixteen days later, the European Union announces that it is preparing to send military trainers to Mali in an effort to oust Ansar al-Dine, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and AQIM. In December, General Carter F. Ham, commander of U.S. Africa Command, says that AQIM is operating training camps in northern Mali and aiding Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram by equipping it with weapons, explosives, and money. On December 20, the U.N. Security Council unanimously votes to send 3,300 African Union soldiers into Mali to drive out militant jihadist groups. Source: Bakari Gueye, “AQIM Leader Named Timbuktu Governor,” Magharebia, April 16, 2012, http://magharebiamagharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/04/16/feature-02 [97]; Scott Sayare, “Scientist Sentenced in French Terror Case,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/05/science/cern-scientist-adlene-hicheur-sentenced-to-4-years-in-french-terrorism-case.html?pagewanted=all> [98]; “Review of the Terrorist Attacks on U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya, September 11-12, 2012,” U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (2014): 40; “Key Al-Qaeda Militant Boualem Bekai Killed in Algeria,” BBC News, October 15, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-19952931> [99]; Harvey Morris, “Europe Ready to Send Military Trainers as Mali War Looms,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2012, <http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/31/europe-ready-to-send-military-trainers-as-mali-war-looms/> [100]; Eric Schmitt, “American Commander Details Al Qaeda’s Strength in Mali,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/04/world/africa/top-american-commander-in-africa-warns-of-al-qaeda-influence-in-mali.html> [101]; Rick Gladstone, “U.N. Council Votes to Help Mali’s Army Oust Islamists,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/21/world/africa/un-panel-votes-to-help-malis-army-oust-extremists.html> [102].
- **April 2012:** After taking over large parts of northern Mali, the leader of Ansar al-Dine, a group reportedly closely affiliated with al-Qaeda, names AQIM leader Yahya Abu al-Hammam the local governor of Timbuktu. Source: Bakari Gueye, “AQIM Leader Named Timbuktu Governor,” Magharebia, April 16, 2012, http://magharebiamagharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/04/16/feature-02 [97].
- **April 15, 2011 - January 24, 2012:** AQIM renews its violent activities in Algeria and continues kidnapping foreigners and high-profile targets. On April 15, 2011, militants kill 17 Algerian soldiers when they attack a checkpoint in Tizi Ouzou Province. On August 26, AQIM launches two suicide attacks against the Academie Militaire Interarmes military academy in Cherrhell, killing 18. Three months later, AQIM kidnaps four French nationals from a uranium compound in Niger, as well as three foreign nationals from the Netherlands, Sweden, and South Africa. The seven hostages are released in September 2013. AQIM also captures French national Serge Lazarevic and Dutch national Sjaak Rijke, who are freed in 2014 and 2015 respectively. On January 16, 2012, AQIM briefly kidnaps the governor of the Illizi region in Algeria before Libyan forces rescue him the following day. On January 24, 2012, militants from AQIM and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad reportedly massacre more than 100 Malian soldiers in Aguelhok, Mali. The soldiers allegedly run out of ammunition and are then executed, some with their throats slit and others shot in the head. Source: Andrew Lebovich, “AQIM Returns in Force in Northern Algeria,” CTC Sentinel 4, no. 9 (2011): 9, 8; “Al-Qaeda Releases Hostage Video of Seven Kidnapped Westerners,” Agence France-Presse, September 17, 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/09/17/Al-Qaeda-releases-hostage-video-of-kidnapped-Westerners-.html> [103]; “Al Qaeda Branch Releases Video of French, Dutch Hostages,” France 24, last modified November 18, 2014, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) 8 <http://www.france24.com/en/20141118-qaeda-aqim-release-new-video-french-dutch-hostages-lazarevic/> [104]; “Serge Lazarevic: Mali confirms militants freed for French hostage,” BBC, December 12, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30450092> [105]; “Dutch hostage Sjaak Rijke freed in Mali,” BBC, April 6, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32195723> [106]; “Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb,” Australian National Security, accessed June 27, 2014, <http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/Al-QaidaintheIslamicMaghrebAQIM.aspx> [29]; Jeremy Keenan, “Mali’s Tuareg Rebellion: What Next,” Al Jazeera, March 20, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/20123208133276463.html> [107].
- **June 30, 2009 - January 7, 2011:** AQIM conducts six kidnapping operations after threatening to “take revenge” against France after then-President Nicolas Sarkozy declares that the burqa is “not welcome” in France. AQIM kidnaps nine French, three Spanish, and two Italian nationals in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Source: “Al Qaeda Threatens France for Perceived Anti-Burqa Stance,” CNN, June 30, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/06/30/france.burkas.al.qaeda/index.html?ref=nextin> [108]; Alex Thurston, “AQIM, Kidnapping, and Murder: A Brief History,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 19, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2011/0119/AQIM-kidnapping-and-murder-a-brief-history> [109]; “Four French Hostages Kidnapped in Niger in 2010 Released,” National (Dubai), October 29, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/africa/four-french-hostages-kidnapped-in-niger-in-2010-released> [110].

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- **September 11, 2006 - June 23, 2009:** On September 11, 2006, Ayman al-Zawahri announces a partnership between al-Qaeda and the GSPC in Algeria.
In January 2007, GSPC formally changes its name to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The newly formed AQIM embarks on a deadly three-year wave of bombings and executions in Algeria and Tunisia, killing more than 200 locals and foreigners, including at least one American. Source: Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?" Carnegie Papers, October 2009, 3, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf [111].
- **April 11, 2002 - June 2004:** Al-Qaeda and GSPC militants launch attacks throughout Tunisia and Algeria and undergo several structural changes. On April 11, 2002, al-Qaeda claims responsibility for a synagogue bombing in Djerba, Tunisia, that kills 19.
In February 2003, GSPC militants kidnap 32 European tourists in southern Algeria. In August 2003, Nabil Sahrawi replaces Hassan Hattab as leader of the GSPC. Less than a year later, in June 2004, Algerian forces kill Sahrawi and Abdelmalek Droukdel assumes leadership. Sources: "Al-Qaeda Claims Tunisia Attack," BBC News, June 23, 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2061071.st [112]; "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," Anti-Defamation League, accessed June 28, 2014, http://archive.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al_qaeda_maghreb.html#6 [113]; Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?" Carnegie Papers, October 2009, 3, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf [111].
- **September 1998:** GIA leader Hassan Hattab leaves the group due to disagreement with its targeting of innocent civilians.
He founds the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), AQIM's most immediate predecessor prior to the group's formal merging with al-Qaeda in 2006. GSPC is reportedly founded at the urging of Osama bin Laden. Source: Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004-2005), 104.
- **December 24, 1994 - January 1996:** From 1994 through 1996, GIA militants carry out several terror attacks on French targets. On December 24, 1994, GIA militants hijack Air France flight 8969, attempting and failing to crash into the Eiffel Tower in Paris.
In the summer of 1995, the GIA carries out numerous bombings in Paris, killing eight and wounding about 200. On January 1996, the GIA declares war against the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Sources: Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004-2005), 106; Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?" Carnegie Papers, October 2009, 3, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf [111].
- **January 1992 - October 1992:** Algerian authorities nullify the results of democratic elections after it becomes clear that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is going to gain power. In response, a group of Algerian jihadists, who had volunteered in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s, form the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), "initiating a terror campaign against the government forces, civil servants, secular intellectuals-but also the rival FIS." Source: "Profile: Al-Qaeda in North Africa," BBC News, January 17, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17308138> [114] Source: Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?" Carnegie Papers, October 2009, 2, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf [111].

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Violent history:

AQIM has been the most successful al-Qaeda affiliate when it comes to kidnapping and ransoming foreigners, collecting more than \$90 million by the end of 2012.⁴⁵ AQIM also launches hundreds of small-scale attacks each year against United Nations, French, and local security forces, killing hundreds. However, AQIM is most notable for its large-scale terror attacks on a beach resort in March 2016 and a popular restaurant in August 2017, which combined killed 37 civilians.⁴⁶

- **December 24, 1994:** AQIM's predecessor Armed Islamic Group (GIA) hijacks Air France flight 8969, with the objective of crashing the airplane into the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The plane is eventually diverted to Marseilles, where French commandos manage to free all but three passengers.⁴⁷
- **July-October 1995:** GIA carries out numerous bombings in Paris, killing eight and wounding about 200.⁴⁸
- **January 1996:** GIA declares war against the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)⁴⁹
- **September 1998:** GIA leader Hassan Hattab leaves the group, due to disagreement with its targeting of innocent civilians. He founds the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), AQIM's predecessor, reportedly at the urging of Osama bin Laden.⁵⁰
- **September 9, 2001:** Two Tunisians, reportedly sent to Afghanistan by bin Laden, pose as journalists and assassinate Ahmad Shah Masoud, leader of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.⁵¹
- **April 11, 2002:** Al-Qaeda claims responsibility for a synagogue bombing in Djerba, Tunisia, that kills 19.⁵²
- **February 2003:** GSPC militants kidnap 32 European tourists in southern Algeria.⁵³
- **December 10, 2006:** GSPC bombs a bus carrying Haliburton employees, killing one.⁵⁴
- **April 11, 2007:** GSPC—now Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) following a formal merger with al-Qaeda—carries out two deadly attacks: one suicide attack against the prime minister's office in Algiers and a second attack on a police station in the east of the capital. The attacks kill at least 30 and wound dozens.⁵⁵
- **July 2007:** A suicide bomber self-detonates in a car, killing 10 soldiers in a military encampment. AQIM claims responsibility for the attack.⁵⁶
- **September 6, 2007:** AQIM sets off an explosion in a crowd waiting to greet Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The president survives but the blast kills 22.⁵⁷
- **September 8, 2007:** An AQIM operative detonates a car bomb in the northern town of Dellys, killing 28 coast guard officers.⁵⁸
- **December 11, 2007:** AQIM car bombs in Algiers strike the United Nations offices and the Constitutional Court building, killing 41, including 17 U.N. employees.⁵⁹
- **December 24, 2007:** AQIM operatives shoot and kill four members of a French family vacationing in Mauritania.⁶⁰
- **August 19, 2008:** An AQIM suicide car bomber explodes near a police academy in the Algerian town of Issers, killing 43 and wounding more than 45.⁶¹
- **May 31, 2009:** AQIM executes kidnapped British citizen Edwin Dyer.⁶²
- **June 17, 2009:** AQIM militants ambush a group of Algerian paramilitary policemen, killing 20.⁶³
- **June 23, 2009:** AQIM militants kill American aid worker Christopher Legget in a kidnapping attempt in Nouakchott, Mauritania.⁶⁴
- **November 25, 2009:** AQIM kidnaps French citizen Pierre Camatte near Mali's border with Niger. He is eventually

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returned in exchange for four AQIM militants.⁶⁵

- **November 29, 2009:** AQIM kidnaps three Spanish aid workers in Mauritania. The group releases all three workers on March 10, 2010, in exchange for a ransom payment between \$6.3 million and \$12.7 million from the Spanish government.⁶⁶
- **December 18, 2009:** AQIM kidnaps two Italian nationals in Mauritania, holding them for four months before they are released on April 16, 2010.⁶⁷
- **April 19, 2010:** AQIM kidnaps French national Michel Germaneau in northern Niger, and demands prisoner releases in exchange for his release. The group is reported to have killed Germaneau after French and Mauritanian forces launched an assault on AQIM in Mali.⁶⁸
- **September 16, 2010:** AQIM kidnaps five French nationals working for the nuclear company Areva in Niger. The men are held hostage for more than three years, and are released in October 2013.⁶⁹
- **January 7, 2011:** AQIM kidnaps two French nationals in Niger. French and Nigerian forces attempt to free the men, but they are reportedly shot to death.⁷⁰
- **April 15, 2011:** AQIM militants attack a checkpoint in Tizi Ouzou Province, killing 17 Algerian soldiers.⁷¹
- **August 26, 2011:** AQIM launches two suicide attacks against “Algeria’s premier military academy,” Academie Militaire Interarmes, in Cherchell, killing 18.⁷²
- **November 2011:** AQIM kidnaps four French nationals from a uranium compound in Niger, as well as three foreign nationals from the Netherlands, Sweden, and South Africa. The seven hostages are released in September 2013.⁷³ AQIM also captures French national Serge Lazarevic and Dutch national Sjaak Rijke and continues to hold them hostage as of December 2014.⁷⁴
- **January 16, 2012:** AQIM kidnaps the governor of the Illizi region in Algeria after attacking his convoy near the border with Libya. Libyan forces rescued the governor the next day.⁷⁵
- **January 24, 2012:** Militants from AQIM and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad reportedly massacre more than 100 Malian soldiers in Aguelhok. The soldiers allegedly run out of ammunition, and are then executed, some with their throats slit and others shot in the head.⁷⁶
- **May 4, 2012:** France sentences French-Algerian particle physicist Said Hicheur to five years in prison for allegedly intending to carry out terrorist attacks. The court claims that Hicheur exchanged numerous emails with AQIM representative Mustapha Debchi, and that Hicheur planned to attack “the French Alpine infantry battalion that was deployed in Afghanistan.”⁷⁷
- **September 11, 2012:** According to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, individuals from AQIM are among those who planned the attacks against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens.⁷⁸
- **December 3, 2012:** General Carter F. Ham, commander of U.S. Africa Command, says that AQIM is operating training camps in northern Mali and aiding Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram by equipping it with weapons, explosives, and money.⁷⁹
- **January 10, 2013:** Fighters from the AQIM-allied MUJAO seize the northern Mali town of Konna, which Reuters describes as “the last buffer between the rebels and Mopti...the main town in the region [which is] seen as the gateway to the country’s north.”⁸⁰
- **January 16, 2013:** AQIM splinter group al-Mulathamun seizes control of the In Amenas natural gas plant in Algeria.⁸¹ The militants tie up dozens of Western workers and plant explosives throughout the facility. After four days of failed negotiations, Algerian forces storm the facility, killing and driving out the militants. At least 37 hostages die in the hostage crisis and ensuing rescue attempt.⁸²
- **March 19, 2013:** AQIM announces that it beheaded French hostage Philippe Verdon, whom the group captured in

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November 2011.⁸³

- **November 2013:** AQIM claims responsibility for kidnapping and murdering two French journalists—Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon—in northern Mali. The group says that the journalists were killed because of French and African military crimes against Muslims in the Azawad region of Mali.⁸⁴
- **April 20, 2014:** Several days after Algeria’s presidential elections, AQIM ambushes Algerian soldiers who were returning from their voting stations near Tizi Ouzou, killing at least 14.⁸⁵
- **May 27, 2014:** AQIM claims responsibility for an attack on the home of Tunisia’s interior minister that killed four policemen.⁸⁶
- **June 2014:** AQIM claims responsibility for two separate attacks on U.N. vehicles in Mali.⁸⁷
- **July 2014:** The Uqba Ibn Nafi Battalion launches an attack on the Tunisian military in the Chaambi Mountain region, killing 15 soldiers and wounding 20 others.⁸⁸
- **July 9, 2014:** French authorities thwart an AQIM plot to target the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and a nuclear power plant in France.⁸⁹
- **August 16, 2014:** A suicide bomber self-detonates on a patrol base in northern Mali, killing two and injuring nine.⁹⁰ AQIM claims responsibility for the attack.⁹¹
- **December 2014:** AQIM claims two attacks on Tunisian forces in the Mount Chaambi region.⁹²
- **January 5, 2015:** AQIM claims responsibility for an attack in Bamako, Mali. According to an anonymous security official, six soldiers are killed and others injured.⁹³
- **January 9, 2015:** AQIM is the suspected perpetrator of an attack on a U.N. vehicle in Kidal, Mali, that wounds seven Senegalese U.N. peacekeepers.⁹⁴
- **November 20, 2015:** Al-Mourabitoun claims responsibility for a deadly gun and hostage attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali, allegedly as part of a joint attack with AQIM. According to U.N. spokesman Olivier Salgado, 21 people were killed in the attack when gunmen stormed the hotel using counterfeit diplomatic license plates.⁹⁵
- **January 15, 2016:** AQIM militants attack a hotel in Burkina Faso and a police station outside of the capital, killing 30 people of 18 nationalities.⁹⁶
- **March 13, 2016:** AQIM gunmen open fire at a beach resort in Grand-Bassam, a coastal town located 25 miles east of Abidjan in Côte d’Ivoire. The attack—the first al-Qaeda attack in the country—leaves 19 people dead, including 16 civilians and three Ivorian soldiers. Among the killed are foreign citizens from France, Germany, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Cameroon.⁹⁷
- **May 31, 2016:** An al-Mourabitoun militant detonates a suicide bomb near the U.N. airport in Gao, Mali, killing a Chinese peacekeeper and three others.⁹⁸
- **August 29, 2016:** AQIM’s branch in Tunisia, the Uqba bin Nafi Battalion, claims responsibility for an ambush on Tunisian forces in the Mount Sammama area of Kasserine Governorate, killing three soldiers and wounding seven others.⁹⁹
- **September 19, 2016:** AQIM is suspected of kidnapping two Italians and a Canadian in Southern Libya.¹⁰⁰
- **October 6, 2016:** AQIM is suspected of attacking a refugee camp in Niger, killing 20 security forces.¹⁰¹
- **Nov 29, 2016:** AQIM launches two attacks in Mali targeting the airports in the cities of Timbuktu and Gao with rockets and a suicide bomb. No deaths are reported.¹⁰²
- **January 18, 2017:** Al-Mourabitoun claims responsibility for a suicide bombing on a military camp in northern Mali

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that kills 77.¹⁰³

- **March 5, 2017:** AQIM, under its new name Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, attacks a military base in central Mali, killing 11 soldiers.¹⁰⁴
- **March 24 2017:** AQIM claims to have killed “dozens” of locals during communal clashes between Fulani herders and Bambara farmers in Mali.¹⁰⁵
- **March 27, 2017:** AQIM claims to have attacked a Malian vehicle with an IED. No casualties are reported.¹⁰⁶
- **April 5, 2017:** A JNIM IED kills a French soldier in Mali.¹⁰⁷
- **June 18, 2017:** AQIM kills at least two civilians and three members of security forces in an attack on a resort near the city of Bamako, Mali.¹⁰⁸
- **July 8, 2017:** JNIM wounds three French soldiers with an IED near Tessalit, Mali.¹⁰⁹
- **July 17, 2017:** JNIM is suspected of firing mortars at a French-U.N. military base in Tessalit, Mali.¹¹⁰
- **August 3, 2017:** A JNIM IED wounds four French soldiers near Tessalit, Mali.¹¹¹
- **August 14, 2017:** AQIM is suspected of orchestrating an attack on a restaurant in Burkina Faso that leaves 18 dead. The same day, U.N. troops in Mali are attacked in two different locations.¹¹²
- **October 23, 2017:** JNIM attacks two separate police posts in the Segou region of Mali and ambushes a Malian vehicle near Tenenkou.¹¹³
- **October 25, 2017:** JNIM attacks the French company SATOM, burning several trucks and killing both civilians and soldiers.¹¹⁴
- **October 26, 2017:** Three U.N. peacekeepers are killed in an IED attack on to road between Aguelhok and Tessalit, Mali. JNIM claims responsibility.¹¹⁵
- **November 24, 2017:** Four U.N. peacekeepers and a Malian soldier are killed in two separate attacks near Indelimane and Douentza, Mali. JNIM claims responsibility.¹¹⁶
- **December 28, 2017:** Two IED attacks destroy at least one Malian army vehicle. JNIM claims responsibility.¹¹⁷
- **March 2, 2018:** Simultaneous attacks on the French Embassy and an Army headquarters in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, leave 7 Malian soldiers and 9 attackers dead. JNIM claims responsibility.¹¹⁸
- **April 14, 2018:** Four JNIM suicide bombers attack the Timbuktu airport using vehicles disguised as U.N. and Malian military vehicles. One U.N. peacekeeper and at least 15 attackers are killed.¹¹⁹
- **May 8, 2018:** AQIM calls western companies operating in North and West Africa “legitimate targets,” threatening attacks and urging Muslims to boycott them.¹²⁰
- **June 29, 2018:** A suicide bomber and infantry attack the G5-Sahel headquarters in Sevare, Mali leaving six dead. No group officially claimed responsibility, but authorities suspect JNIM.¹²¹
- **July 1, 2018:** A JNIM suicide bomber attacks a French military patrol in the city of Gao, killing two civilians and wounding dozens.¹²²
- **July 8, 2018:** AQIM affiliate Katiba Uqba ibn Nafi carries out a grenade and small-arms attack in northwest Tunisia, killing six police officers.¹²³
- **July 29, 2018:** Militants attack polling stations and burn ballot boxes in several towns in northern and central Mali. Local officials accuse JNIM affiliate al-Mourabitoun.¹²⁴

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- **July 30, 2018:** JNIM fires 10 mortars at a polling station in the Northern Mali town of Aguelhok, temporarily disrupting voting for the presidential elections.¹²⁵
- **October 3, 2018:** Militants carry out an IED attack in Kasserine, Tunisia, killing one soldier and wounding five others. AQIM's Katiba Uqba ibn Nafi claims responsibility.¹²⁶
- **January 20, 2019:** Suspected AQIM gunmen ambush a base in Aguelhok, northern Mali. The militants kill at least ten United Nations peacekeepers and injure an additional 25.¹²⁷
- **April 17, 2019:** AQIM's branch in Tunisia, the Uqba bin Nafi Battalion (KUBN), claims responsibility for two separate IED attacks in the Mount Chaambi region near the border with Algeria. No casualties are reported in both events.¹²⁸
- **April 21, 2019:** A landmine explosion in the southwestern province of Gafsa kills four civilians. Dozens of AQIM terrorists have been hiding in mountainous areas in Tunisia and have planted hundreds of landmines to prevent the advance of the army and security forces.¹²⁹
- **April 27, 2019:** AQIM's Tunisian branch, the Uqba bin Nafi Battalion (KUBN), detonates an IED on a Turkish, Israeli-made armored vehicle KIRPI in the Mount Chaambi region. The attack kills one soldier and injures three others.¹³⁰
- **August 19, 2019:** Suspected AQIM militants on motorbikes and pickup trucks ambush soldiers in northern Burkina Faso. More than a dozen soldiers are killed.¹³¹
- **August 30, 2019:** AQIM affiliate, the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM), attacks soldiers in Tongomayel, Burkina Faso. One soldier is injured in the attack. The militants claim to capture vehicles, weapons and ammunition as well as blow up the barracks.¹³²
- **September 6, 2019:** JNIM rebels ambush an army patrol in Soum province, Burkina Faso. One soldier and five assailants are killed.¹³³

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Designations:

Designations by the U.S. Government:



September 24, 2001: The Department of the Treasury designates GSPC as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹³⁴

March 27, 2002: The Department of the Treasury designates GSPC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (under section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act).¹³⁵

October 24, 2003: The Department of the Treasury designates Mokhtar Belmokhtar as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹³⁶

February 21, 2008: The Department of the Treasury designates AQIM as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹³⁷

July 17, 2008: The Department of the Treasury designates Ahmed Deghdegh as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹³⁸

July 17, 2008: The Department of the Treasury designates Abid Hammadou as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹³⁹

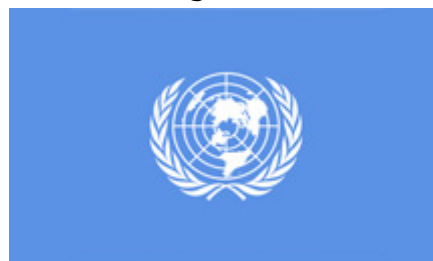
September 7, 2011: The Department of the Treasury designates 'Abd al-Rahman Ould Muhammad al-Husayn Ould Muhammad Salim as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹⁴⁰

February 14, 2013: The Department of the Treasury designates Yahya Abu Hammam as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹⁴¹

September 5, 2018: The Department of State designates JNIM as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).¹⁴²

July 16, 2019: The Department of the Treasury designates Bah Ag Moussa as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13244.¹⁴³

Designations by Foreign Governments and Organizations:



United Nations—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on October 6, 2001.¹⁴⁴

United Nations—listed AQIM as a terrorist organization on April 26, 2007.¹⁴⁵

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Australia—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on November 14, 2002.¹⁴⁶



United Kingdom—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on October 10, 2001.¹⁴⁷



Canada—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on July 23, 2002.¹⁴⁸



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¹⁴² “State Department Terrorist Designation of Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM),” U.S. Department of State, September 5, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/09/285705.htm> [150].

¹⁴³ “Treasury Targets Al-Qa’ida in Mali,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, July 16, 2019, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm730>; Caleb Weiss, “US sanctions leaders of al Qaeda in Mali,” Long War Journal, July 16, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/07/us-sanctions-leaders-of-al-qaeda-in-mali.php> [151].

¹⁴⁴ “Narrative Summaries of Reasons for Listing: QE.T.14.01. The Organization of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb,” United Nations Security Council, last modified September 9, 2014, <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE01401E.shtml> [152].

¹⁴⁵ “Narrative Summaries of Reasons for Listing: QE.T.14.01. The Organization of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb,” United Nations Security Council, last modified September 9, 2014, <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE01401E.shtml> [152].

¹⁴⁶ “Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb,” Australian National Security, accessed June 27, 2014, <http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/Al-QaidaintheIslamicMaghrebAQIM.aspx> [29].

¹⁴⁷ “Consolidated List of Financial Sanctions Targets in the UK,” HM Treasury (UK), last modified June 16, 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320559/alqaida.pdf [153].

¹⁴⁸ Public Safety Canada, “Currently Listed Entities,” Government of Canada, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrnt/cntr-trrrsm/lstd-ntts/crrnt-lstd-ntts-eng.aspx#http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrnt/cntr-trrrsm/lstd-ntts/crrnt-lstd-ntts-eng.aspx#2008> [154].

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¹⁴⁹ "Designated Individuals and Organizations," New Zealand Police, updated June 26, 2014, <http://www.police.govt.nz/advice/personal-community/counterterrorism/designated-entities> [155].

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Associations:

Ties to Extremist Entities:

AQIM has either verbally or materially supported a plethora of Salafi terrorist and extremist groups across the region. AQIM officials have issued clear statements on their attempts to strengthen ties with al-Qaeda subgroups in Yemen, Syria, and East Africa.¹⁵⁰ They have also cooperated with, trained, or equipped other extremist groups in North Africa, including al-Mourabitoun and Boko Haram.¹⁵¹



Ahrar al-Sham

AQIM has posted on Twitter in solidarity with Ahrar al-Sham and other Syrian-based jihadist groups: “The stance of AQIM from the Jihadi groups like... Ahrar Al-Sham Brigades and the other Jihad groups is alliance and support and searching for the ways of cooperation in goodness and piety to bring our Muslim Ummah out from the state of backwardness and humiliation which it fell in to after the fall of the Khilafah.”¹⁵²



[Al-Mourabitoun](#) [2]

Al-Mourabitoun (“The Sentinels”) formed after the 2013 merger of AQIM offshoots al-Mulathamun (“The Masked Men”) Battalion (AMB) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Al-Mourabitoun reaffirmed its allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2015 and formally rejoined the group that December after a joint attack in Bamako, Mali. Led by notorious Algerian terrorist [Mokhtar Belmokhtar](#) [156], al-Mourabitoun seeks to establish an Islamic state in West Africa.¹⁵³ Since rejoining the AQIM banner, al-Mourabitoun is still believed to retain some autonomy. For instance, of the three gunmen named in the attacks at Grand-Bassam, two—Hamza al-Fulani and Abu Adam al-Ansari—were reportedly associated with al-Mourabitoun whereas the third—Abdul Rahman al-Fulani—was reportedly a member of AQIM proper.¹⁵⁴



[Al-Qaeda](#) [1]

AQIM clarified its ties to al-Qaeda when AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel said in 2008, “We [AQIM] and Al Qaeda are one body. It’s normal that they get stronger by us and we get stronger by them. They back us up and we back them up. They supply us and we supply them with any kind of support, loyalty, advice and available support.”¹⁵⁵



[Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula \(AQAP\)](#) [157]

According to AQIM, the group’s relationship with AQAP is “a relation of love, brotherhood, alliance, support and cooperation to retrieve the lost glory of this Ummah....”¹⁵⁶

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[ISIS](#) [158]

AQIM has a controversial relationship with ISIS in light of the strain and ultimate rift between ISIS and al-Qaeda in February 2014. AQIM leaders have expressed support for the group despite the break and AQIM’s official allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri. On July 1, 2014, for example, AQIM posted an official message of congratulations to ISIS in light of the group’s military gains.¹⁵⁷ In the statement, however, AQIM tempers its congratulations with calls for reconciliation between ISIS and al-Qaeda as well as its affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra. The statement also explicitly defers to al-Zawahri, calling him as “Our Sheikh and Emir.”¹⁵⁸ Two weeks later, AQIM posted a statement officially rejecting ISIS’s declaration of a caliphate. In the statement, AQIM refused to swear allegiance to ISIS leader and self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.¹⁵⁹ Some analysts have pointed to these two contradictory statements as evidence of internal rifts emerging within AQIM’s leadership over ISIS’s controversial declaration of caliphate.¹⁶⁰ In September 2014, AQIM and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released a joint statement calling on ISIS to reconcile with al-Qaeda.¹⁶¹ Also in September, some AQIM members are reported to have splintered from the group to pledge allegiance to ISIS under a new name, “the Caliphate Soldiers in Algeria.”¹⁶²



Iran

AQIM has not made a statement on the group’s relationship with the Iranian government or al-Qaeda’s overarching relationship with Iran. When asked to clarify the relationship between al-Qaeda and Iran, AQIM’s representative responded, “We are authorized to speak on behalf of AQIM only, and the answer of that question exceeds our authority, so excuse us.”¹⁶⁸

[Boko Haram](#) [9]

Although AQIM does not have a public relationship with Boko Haram, there are numerous reports of support between the two groups. In January 2010, AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel declared unconditional support for Boko Haram, pledging support in the form of training, weapons, equipment, and personnel.¹⁶³ In 2012, AQIM is reported to have given Boko Haram \$250,000, and trained its members in kidnapping as a way to raise further money.¹⁶⁴ According to intelligence officials, members of Boko Haram have met Algerian brigades of AQIM fighters for training and weapons. The alleged mastermind of the August 2011 UN bombing is reported to have trained with AQIM and a number of operatives in the region have reported ties to both Boko Haram and AQIM.¹⁶⁵ Al-Qaeda has not made formal links with Boko Haram, and Ayman al-Zawahiri has made no explicit mention of the group.¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has claimed that Boko Haram is an “al-Qaeda operation,” and one reporter for news outlet Al Jazeera says that the group’s ties to al-Qaeda and its affiliates are “now so numerous that they are impossible to ignore.”¹⁶⁷



[Al-Shabab](#) [159]

As of April 2013, AQIM pursued a relationship with Somalian group al-Shabab. AQIM has described its relationship with al-Shabab as “what we aspire to achieve not only with al-Qaeda in the East Africa but also with all the branches of al-Qaeda Al-Jihad in the world and that is a normal matter for each organization.”¹⁶⁹

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[Nusra Front](#) [158]

AQIM has declared its support for the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. As AQIM's head of media stated in 2013, "The stance of AQIM from the Jihadi groups like Jabhat Al-Nusra and Ahrar Al-Sham Brigades and the other Jihad groups is alliance and support."¹⁷⁰

¹⁵⁰ Casey Britton, "AQIM : Answers to Open Meeting with Sheikh Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad," WorldAnalysis.net, April 19, 2013, <http://worldanalysis.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2197> [160].

¹⁵¹ SITE Intel Group, Twitter post, March 16, 2016, 10:56 a.m., <https://twitter.com/siteintelgroup/status/710162802565062656> [161]; Felipe Pathé Duarte, "Maghrebian Militant Maneuvers: AQIM as a Strategic Challenge," Center for Strategic & International Studies, September 28, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/maghrebian-militant-maneuvers-aqim-strategic-challenge> [162].

¹⁵² Casey Britton, "AQIM : Answers to Open Meeting with Sheikh Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad," WorldAnalysis.net, April 19, 2013, <http://worldanalysis.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2197> [160].

¹⁵³ Olivier Guitta, "The re-emergence of AQIM in Africa," Al Jazeera, March 20, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/03/emergence-aqim-africa-160320090928469.html> [25].

¹⁵⁴ SITE Intel Group, Twitter post, March 16, 2016, 10:56 a.m., <https://twitter.com/siteintelgroup/status/710162802565062656> [161].

¹⁵⁵ "An Interview With Abdelmalek Droukdal," *New York Times*, July 1, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01transcript-droukdal.html> [163].

¹⁵⁶ Casey Britton, "AQIM : Answers to Open Meeting with Sheikh Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad," WorldAnalysis.net, April 19, 2013, <http://worldanalysis.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2197> [160].

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb calls for reconciliation between jihadist groups," *Long War Journal*, July 2, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/al_qaeda_in_the_isla.php [164].

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb calls for reconciliation between jihadist groups," *Long War Journal*, July 2, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/al_qaeda_in_the_isla.php [164].

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Joscelyn, "AQIM Rejects Islamic State's Caliphate, Reaffirms Allegiance to Zawahiri," *Long War Journal*, July 14, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/aqim_rejects_islamic.php [165].

¹⁶⁰ "Al-Qaeda Group Divided on Islamic State," *Al Monitor*, July 21, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/07/separate-statements-highlight-possible-rift-in-aqim.html> [166]; "ISIS Divides Maghreb al-Qaeda (AQIM)," *African Armed Forces*, August 19, 2014, <http://www.aafonline.co.za/news/isis-divides-maghreb-al-qaeda-aqim> [167].

¹⁶¹ Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda Branches Urge Jihadist Unity Against US," *Long War Journal*, September 16, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/al_qaeda_branches_ur.php [168].

¹⁶² Lamine Chikhi, "Splinter group breaks from al Qaeda in North Africa," *Reuters*, September 15, 2014, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/09/14/algeria-security-idINL6N0RF0F020140914> [169].

¹⁶³ Felipe Pathé Duarte, "Maghrebian Militant Maneuvers: AQIM as a Strategic Challenge," Center for Strategic & International Studies, September 28, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/maghrebian-militant-maneuvers-aqim-strategic-challenge> [162].

¹⁶⁴ Tim Cocks, "Boko Haram Too Extreme for 'al Qaeda in West Africa' Brand," *Reuters*, May 28, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/28/us-nigeria-bokoharam-analysis-idUSKBN0E81D320140528> [170].

¹⁶⁵ Tim Cocks, "Boko Haram Too Extreme for 'al Qaeda in West Africa' Brand," *Reuters*, May 28, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/28/us-nigeria-bokoharam-analysis-idUSKBN0E81D320140528> [170]; "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Abubakar Mohammed Shekau, Ansaru to Its Sanctions List," *United Nations Security Council*, June 26, 2014, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11455.doc.htm> [171].

¹⁶⁶ Tim Cocks, "Boko Haram Too Extreme for 'al Qaeda in West Africa' Brand," *Reuters*, May 28, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/28/us-nigeria-bokoharam-analysis-idUSKBN0E81D320140528> [170]; Robin Simcox, "Boko Haram and Defining the 'Al-Qaeda Network,'" *Al Jazeera*, June 6, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/06/boko-haram-al-qaeda-201463115816142554.html> [172].

¹⁶⁷ Robin Simcox, "Boko Haram and Defining the 'Al-Qaeda Network,'" *Al Jazeera*, June 6, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/06/boko-haram-al-qaeda-201463115816142554.html> [172].

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¹⁶⁸ Casey Britton, "AQIM : Answers to Open Meeting with Sheikh Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad," WorldAnalysis.net, April 19, 2013, <http://worldanalysis.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2197> [160].

¹⁶⁹ Casey Britton, "AQIM : Answers to Open Meeting with Sheikh Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad," WorldAnalysis.net, April 19, 2013, <http://worldanalysis.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2197> [160].

¹⁷⁰ Casey Britton, "AQIM : Answers to Open Meeting with Sheikh Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad," WorldAnalysis.net, April 19, 2013, <http://worldanalysis.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2197> [160].

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Media Coverage:

AQIM Defeated or Resurgent

Like its parent organization and other affiliates, AQIM is not immune from the media debate over whether it has been defeated or is resurgent. In February 2014, McClatchy asked, “Is the U.S. Powerless to Stop the Spread of Al Qaeda?”¹⁷¹ The article ominously noted that the “black flag of al Qaida flies in Fallujah, the group and its offshoots are spreading across the Middle East and Africa, and their fighters are battling for control of cities not only in Iraq but also in Syria, Lebanon and beyond.”¹⁷² The outlet quoted U.S. Representative Mike Rogers (R-MI), chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Intelligence Committee, who bluntly stated, “Harbor no illusions: Al Qaida is not on its heels or even on the run... Their operations in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and large portions of Africa indicate that al Qaida is alive and well...”¹⁷³

Yet by late April 2014, the *New York Times*’ Adam Nossiter asked, “Is Al Qaeda’s regional affiliate in West Africa dead, at least for now?” Nossiter pointed to the deaths of “more than 40[AQIM] jihadists in Mali” since March 2014, including Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s father-in-law, as well as the fact that “jihadists have not pulled off any significant attacks in nearly a year... Many of their arms caches have been destroyed.”¹⁷⁴ Nossiter quoted a Western defense official who said, “Their offensive capabilities have been seriously harmed. Their leaders have been neutralized, their logistics have been damaged... this is not the AQIM of one year ago.” That analysis led Nossiter to conclude, “So the group that terrorized half a country, northern Mali... has been reduced to a pale remnant of its former self. It is no longer the pre-eminent threat to fragile states in West Africa’s Sahel region...”¹⁷⁵

Similarly reporting AQIM’s death-knell militarily in late April, the Associated Press pointed out that AQIM had been so devastated by France’s air strikes that it was “trying something new to stay relevant: Twitter.” According to the network, the group’s PR campaign “aims to allow [AQIM] to move the fight at least partly off the battlefield by appealing to widespread concerns, such as the repression and a sense of injustice that galvanized the Arab Spring revolts.”¹⁷⁶

A CNN article similarly downplays the threat played by AQIM, referring to them as a “a small splinter group of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an al-Qaeda affiliate prone to disunity.” CNN also alluded to al-Qaeda’s message and draw being seemingly outdated in the rise of ISIS, “It is not the first—and likely will not be the last—jihadist outfit to quit al-Qaeda for the millenarian message of al-Baghdadi.”

Islamist Takeover in Mali

While many news sources, such as the *New York Times*, resorted to labeling the diverse mix of jihadist groups operating in Mali as simply “al-Qaeda linked,” Al Jazeera reported that AQIM was operating under the umbrella of Ansar al-Dine. Specifically, Al Jazeera noted that they were “a group of local Ifoghas Tuaregs, Berabiche Arabs and other local ethnic groups” who shared AQIM’s desire for implementing Sharia. According to the report, AQIM’s relationship with Ansar al-Dine was “analogous to the associate between the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, with Ansar al-Dine playing host,” while another group, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), was “split off from AQIM” but was happy to work together with it for common purposes.¹⁷⁷

The *New York Times* further clarified AQIM’s larger role in Mali in December 2012, when it reported top U.S. military commander in Africa General Carter F. Ham, saying that AQIM was running training camps in northern Mali and providing weapons and funding to Boko Haram in Nigeria. The article noted that Boko Haram members “had traveled to [AQIM] training camps in northern Mali,” and described General Ham’s comments as “the most detailed and sobering American military analysis so far of the consequences of” AQIM gaining control of a safe haven in northern Mali.¹⁷⁸ In the *Guardian*, Jason Burke wrote that the violence in Mali was partly due to the fact that AQIM had taken advantage of “arms, anarchy and auxiliaries” to become a force capable of battling the French army.

However, the rule that AQIM, Ansar al-Dine, and MUJAO enjoyed in the north did not last long. This is because, as Burke also notes, the feud between Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Abdelmalek Droukdel created problems within AQIM. Belmokhtar

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was so upset about not being promoted to lead a faction of AQIM that he “set about planning operations that would upstage those of AQIM itself.”¹⁷⁹

After France intervened and put the jihadist groups “on the run” in the northern desert and mountainous regions of the country, *Time* wrote in early February 2013 that France’s military campaign had been “so successful” that the French President planned to visit “scarcely three weeks after the anti-Islamist operation began January 11.”¹⁸⁰

Benghazi

The initial coverage of the U.S. Consulate attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens blamed Ansar al-Sharia (AAS), with few reports linking AQIM to the operation.

The *New York Times* reported that the attack “was led by a brigade of Islamist fighters known as Ansar al-Sharia,” noting that the group claimed it had not acted alone. The article made only one reference to al-Qaeda, indicating that “reports from some terrorism experts” linking the “recent death in drone strikes of senior Qaeda leaders, including Abu Yahya al-Libi, were unsupported.”¹⁸¹

For its part, CNN reported that a “pro-al Qaeda” group called the Imprisoned Omar Abdul Raham Brigades was the “chief suspect” in the attack, pointing out its involvement in previous attacks against the International Red Cross and the British ambassador’s convoy in Benghazi. The article claimed that AAS “was responsible for organizing the demonstration outside the U.S. Consulate,” but it did not clearly tie the Imprisoned Omar Abdul Raham Brigades to Ansar al-Sharia. Furthermore, the authors only brought AQIM into the story offhandedly, mentioning that a number of fighters from the group were operating in the town of Derna, Libya.¹⁸²

But outlets were soon questioning whether AQIM played a larger role in the attacks. On September 28, Eli Lake wrote in the *Daily Beast* that Ansar al-Sharia’s militants had “boasted to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb about the attack,” while also citing one U.S. intelligence official who claimed that “AAS operative[s] were subordinate to the mid-level AQIM members.”¹⁸³ In November 2012, Reuters reported comments from General Carter Ham, the head of the U.S. military’s Africa Command, that “very likely that some of the terrorists who participated in the attack in Benghazi have at least some linkages to AQIM... That is not to say that it was AQIM which planned, or organized or led the activity, but clearly some of the individuals had some linkages.”¹⁸⁴

In addition to Ham’s claims linking AQIM to the attack, CNN reported in March 2013 that a call “was made specifically to [Mokhtar Belmokhtar]” after the attack in which the caller excitedly told the then-AQIM senior leader, “Congratulations!” The network noted, however, that there was “no proof that the call was specifically about the attack,” and likewise said that there was no proof that “[Belmokhtar] directed or was involved in the Benghazi attack.”¹⁸⁵

Kidnappings

From 2009 through 2011, AQIM gained further notoriety by kidnapping more than a dozen predominantly European nationals.

After the June 2009 beheading of Briton Edwin Dyer in Niger, the *Daily Mail* guessed that his slaying could have been “part of a double message of defiance by al-Qaeda ahead of Mr. Obama’s speech in Cairo today.” According to security expert Hamid Ghomrassa, the first message was that “Al-Qaeda is a force in the region that cannot be ignored,” while the second message was that “from now on the West should understand that paying ransoms to get back hostages is the only way to deal.” The paper noted that Europeans and Canadians who were “kidnapped in similar circumstances” were let go in exchange for ransom payments despite the British government’s “blanket policy against” paying ransoms to terrorist groups.¹⁸⁶

When three Spanish aid workers kidnapped in November 2009 were freed by AQIM in late 2010, Reuters speculated that they might have been freed in exchange for prisoners being held in Mauritania. Though officials in Mauritania remained

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silent regarding the alleged prisoner swap. Reuters cited security analysts labeling of AQIM as opportunistic, making such exchanges likely for the return of their own or to fundraise.¹⁸⁷

By the end of 2012, the *New York Times* reported that AQIM had earned "as much as \$90 million or more in ransoms over the past decade, turning it into one of the region's wealthiest, best-armed militant groups." One of the militants interviewed by the paper bragged openly that, "The source of our financing is the Western countries. They are paying for jihad." The paper also quoted the Treasury Department's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, David Cohen, who said that the average ransom payment to AQIM had increased from \$4.5 million per hostage in 2010 to \$5.4 million per hostage in 2011.¹⁸⁸

Violence in Algeria

When the newly minted AQIM unleashed multiple bombings in Algeria on April 11, 2007, including one that targeted the prime minister's office, the *New York Times* described AQIM as "North Africa's most active terrorist group" and noted that the violence was "the deadliest attack in the capital" since the late 1990s.¹⁸⁹ According to the *Times*, the GSPC—AQIM's predecessor—"had been badly eroded in recent years... [but] has apparently undergone a revival... [since it] aligned itself with al-Qaeda. Its aim is to overthrow the government and install an Islamic theocracy there and throughout North Africa."¹⁹⁰

Reuters also compared the scale of violence by AQIM to that of Algeria's civil war, reporting that the April 11 attack "raised fears the [North] African oil exporter was slipping back into the intense political violence of the 1990s." One analyst quoted by the outlet likened the attack on the prime minister's office to the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Mounir Boudjema, the editor of Algeria's *Liberte*, said, "Since they joined al-Qaeda the rebels are clearly opting for symbolic and noisy targets such as the government palace, which is in a way our World Trade Center."¹⁹¹

After AQIM bombed the U.N. headquarters in Algiers in December 2007, *Time* warned that the attack "increases the risk that AQIM is ramping up its violent struggle to bring down the Algerian government," noting that it was the "fourth big hit" by the group since January. As with similar reports about al-Qaeda's ability to regenerate, the magazine pointed out that despite the Algerian authorities having allegedly "decimated AQIM ranks" since April, the group continued to recruit effectively, remaining "the largest risk of non-homegrown terror to continental Europe."¹⁹²

Media Outlets Gauge Scale of Threat from Group's Allegiance to Al-Qaeda

In September 2006, Ayman al-Zawahri announced the merger of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) with al-Qaeda, raising fears the group would begin terror operations beyond Algeria's borders.

The *Guardian's* Ian Black noted in contrast that the group would likely remain a localized threat, citing George Joffe of Cambridge University, who matter-of-factly claimed that the group "is Algeria-based."¹⁹³ In contrast, the *Christian Science Monitor's* Middle East expert, Aron Lund, warned the same year that "this alliance underlines the regional, rather than Algerian, focus of [the] GSPC." Lund pointed to a 2006 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate that "several North African groups, unless countered, are likely to expand their reach and become more capable of multiple and/or mass-casualty attacks outside their traditional areas of operation." Moreover, Lund highlighted reports that GSPC units were spreading throughout the Sahara—popping up in Mauritania, Mali, and Niger—not to mention in Italy, where police disrupted a GSPC cell that was financing operations in Algeria.¹⁹⁴

Meanwhile, the BBC's coverage several days after the report was published focused on the strong anti-France messaging from both al-Zawahri and the GSPC, noting that "GSPC singled out France as its 'enemy number one' [in 2005] and issued a call for action against the country." Consequently, France's interior ministry conceded a "high level threat" against France and France's domestic security agency concurred that the threat of an attack was "very high and very international."¹⁹⁵

¹⁷¹ James Rosen, "Is the U.S. Powerless to Stop the Spread of Al Qaeda?" McClatchy DC, February 10, 2014,

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- <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2014/02/10/217374/is-the-us-powerless-to-stop-the.html> [173].
- ¹⁷² James Rosen, "Is the U.S. Powerless to Stop the Spread of Al Qaeda?" McClatchy DC, February 10, 2014, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2014/02/10/217374/is-the-us-powerless-to-stop-the.html> [173].
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- ¹⁷⁴ Adam Nossiter, "Keeping Al Qaeda's West African Unit on the Run," *New York Times*, April 29, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/30/world/africa/keeping-al-qaedas-west-african-unit-on-the-run.html> [85].
- ¹⁷⁵ Adam Nossiter, "Keeping Al Qaeda's West African Unit on the Run," *New York Times*, April 29, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/30/world/africa/keeping-al-qaedas-west-african-unit-on-the-run.html> [85].
- ¹⁷⁶ "Struggling Al Qaeda Offshoot Using Twitter to Spread Message," Associated Press, April 23, 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/04/23/struggling-al-qaeda-offshoot-using-twitter-to-spread-message/> [174].
- ¹⁷⁷ May Ying Welsh, "Making Sense of Mali's Armed Groups," Al Jazeera, January 17, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/01/20131139522812326.html> [175].
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- ¹⁸⁴ "U.S. Commander Says Benghazi Attacks Linked to Al Qaeda in Maghreb," Reuters, November 14, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/14/us-mali-usa-idUSBRE8AD0WF20121114> [181].
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- ¹⁹⁰ Craig S. Smith, "Blast by Qaeda Unit Are Deadliest Attack in Algiers in Years," *New York Times*, April 12, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/12/world/africa/12algeria.html> [185].
- ¹⁹¹ William Maclean and Lamine Chikhi, "Al Qaeda Claims Algiers Bombings," Reuters, April 11, 2007, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2007/04/11/uk-algeria-blast-idUKL1170766420070411> [186].
- ¹⁹² Bruce Crumley, "Attack in Algiers: A Warning to Europe," *Time*, December 11, 2007, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1693438,00.html> [187].
- ¹⁹³ Ian Black, "A Homegrown Insurgency - or Global Jihad?" *Guardian*, December 11, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/dec/12/alqaida.terrorism1> [188].
- ¹⁹⁴ Aron Lund, "Merger with Al Qaeda Deepens Threat from Algerian Radicals," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 3, 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1003/p05s01-woaf.html> [189].
- ¹⁹⁵ "Al-Qaeda 'Issues France Threat,'" BBC News, September 14, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5345202.stm> [190].

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Rhetoric:

[191] [AQIM Statement, May 2018 \[191\]](#)

“This statement calls to boycott all Western companies and foundations ... that operate in the Islamic Maghreb ... and the countries of the Sahel, and gives a warning to them that they are legitimate target for the mujahideen.”¹⁹⁶



[192] [AQIM Statement, June 2013 \[192\]](#)

“A group of lions... went to cut off the head of the criminal Lotfi Ben Jeddou at his home... and God allowed them to kill a number of his personal guards...”¹⁹⁷



[193] [Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[193\]](#)

“[Polytheists] are working continuously and cunning at day and night against the Muslims and to corrupt their religion and limiting their freedom in practicing its rituals, all that for oppression and enmity and out of envy from themselves.”¹⁹⁸



[194] [Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[194\]](#)

“The enmity of France towards the religion of Islam is old, since this state appeared as a global power, and it set out crusader colonial campaigns it didn’t stop its aggression against the Muslims rather it continued to this day, although in recent times it began to take the forms dominated by the character of malice and guile and cunning, and exhuming the infrastructure of the Islamic civilization and identity intending to ruining and blur its features, without rushing to the use of military force, and this crusade is only another proof for the deep-rootedness of this enmity in the hearts of the French politicians, the old and current, liberals and socialists, moderates and extremists, they are all alike.”¹⁹⁹



[195] [Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[195\]](#)

“Ironically when it began it began its invasion of north Mali to end the rule of the Islamic Sharia under the claim that it is harsh and inhuman... at this time the French parliament was gathered to discuss the law of disgrace, fire and shame, the law of same sex marriage which will remain a disgraceful stain in the forehead of humanity as a whole...”²⁰⁰



[196] [Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[196\]](#)

“[A]fter two days of intensive discussions [on the topic of gay marriage] the supporters of immorality... pass[ed] this dirty project with a disgraceful majority may Allah fight them.”²⁰¹



[197] [Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[197\]](#)

“The advocates of this grave deviation who declared war against Allah and all His messengers and violated the Quran and even the Torah and Bible by this disgraceful law [law of same sex marriage in France] are the same advocates of this crusade that was launched against our Muslim people in Mali unjustly and aggressively to force them to leave the pure Sharia of their Lord and make them follow their madness and rebellion

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against the religions, minds and nature, what they are calling to is a great vice which the heavens may almost be rent thereat, and the earth cleave asunder, and the mountains fall down in pieces, it wasn't legalized by anyone neither in the dark ages and first Jahiliya or the medieval ages or even the people of Lot who were destroyed by Allah for practicing that immorality and destroyed their village by turning it upside down and rained on them stones of baked clay."²⁰²



[198]

[*Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[198\]*](#)

"O' people of Islam all over the world: before this new crusade of France and its occupation for one of the Muslims lands we can only call all of you to a comprehensive and general mobilization, and ask you to support your brothers with all the kinds of support that you capable of, and we remind you that jihad after this aggression became an individual obligation on every capable person from you... O' all Muslims it is an obligation on you to repel this assault by targeting the French interests everywhere because since the first day of this aggression since these interests have become legitimate targets for you."²⁰³



[199]

[*Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[199\]*](#)

"And Muslim you should know that a nation that is indulged in the swamp of immoralities and vices that it reached to this level of debauchery, shamelessness, misguidance and ignorance isn't worthy of causing any eeriness in your souls no matter how much its air force was superior, and France should know that what will resolve this religious war won't be the air force rather it will be the weapon of Aqeeda and Iman Allah willing."²⁰⁴



[200]

[*Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013 \[200\]*](#)

"As for the Islamic Sharia which because of it France invaded us Insha'Allah it will return to prevail on the land of Mali because the feeling of our people there of belonging to Islam is rooted in its conscience that cannot be destabilized by a force or army, especially when this army consists of homosexuals like the French army..."²⁰⁵



[201]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013 \[201\]*](#)

"[W]e support and call all the Muslims to target France and its interests and subjects inside and outside France until it withdraws the last soldier the land of the Muslims and lift its support of rulers of the region who oppress their people and its support to the Zionist entity who occupies Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa one of the greatest sanctities of Islam."²⁰⁶



[202]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013 \[202\]*](#)

"We Alhamdulillah are as one body who defend the honor of Islam and repel every aggressor and invader to the land of the Muslims and if France plans to fight Al-Qaeda isolated from mujahid Jamaats and the aid of the Ummah coming to the fields of jihad, then it has miscalculated, and if it quickly forgot the lessons of Afghanistan then the heroes of Islam and in north and west of Africa, are ready to give it correction lessons for free."²⁰⁷

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013 \[203\]*](#)

"The brother Al- Qayrawani on behalf of the official spokesman of the organization in the

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[203]

Great Sahara region, confirmed that the organization have executed the hostage and intelligence officer Philippe Verdon in revenge for the French army crimes, against our people in north Mali, in a telephone call with Nouakchott News Agency.”²⁰⁸



[204]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [204]

“We are in an open war with the Algerian regime for twenty years ago, and all its interests are legitimate targets for us.”²⁰⁹



[205]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [205]

“The liberation of Al-Quds is the project of our Muslim Ummah as a whole and not the project of Qaedat Al-Jihad alone and it is a project of Qaedat Al-Jihad as have been expressed in its literature and speeches of its leaders, but there are many obstacles that prevent us from reaching our brothers in Bayt Al-Maqdis and the environs of Bayt Al-Maqdis. we ask Allah to remove it and facilitate our arrival to beloved Palestine, but the Ummah gathering around its sons the mujahidin in all the fronts can achieve these miracles Allah willing.”²¹⁰



[206]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [206]

“Field reports are scarce with the French crusade due to the harshness of the desert and its special conditions...”²¹¹



[207]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [207]

“We [AQIM and Islamist political movements in the countries of the Arab Spring] cooperate in liberation of the Muslim lands and implementation of the Sharia...”²¹²



[208]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [208]

“Chinguetti the land of knowledge and wisdom has a special status in our hearts and its sons today are in the first ranks - as their ancestors were - to confront the French crusade on Muslim Mali...”²¹³



[209]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [209]

“[In response to the question, ‘We hear threatening France, when will we hear operations inside France and are their (sic) capabilities to conduct that action on the ground?’] Not everything that known is said (sic), and you will see what will happen Allah willing and repelling assault of aggressive France is an obligation on every Muslim and not Al-Qaeda alone.”²¹⁴

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [210]

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[210]

"We are fighting for our religion, money and honors and victory will be ours Allah willing even if the whole world united against us, because we are people of a just cause while the French soldier has no cause except the desire of the major companies to absorb the resources of the peoples cheaply."²¹⁵



[211]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, April 15, 2013*](#) [211]

"The brother Al- Qayrawani on behalf of the official spokesman of the organization in the Great Sahara region, confirmed that the organization have executed the hostage and intelligence officer Philippe Verdon in revenge for the French army crimes, against our people in north Mali, in a telephone call with Nouakchott News Agency."²¹⁶



[212]

[*Mokhtar Belmokhtar, December 2012*](#) [212]

"We warn all the countries that are intending to participate in the crusader campaign on our land, even if in the name of peacekeeping, that we will make you taste the heat of death and wounds in your homelands and among your soldiers."²¹⁷



[213]

[*Yahya Abu Hammam, Interview with the Nouakchott News Agency, October 2012*](#) [213]

"I want to tell the families of the hostages that the choice of war [in Mali] apparently made by Mr Hollande will inevitably mean that he has signed the death warrant of the French hostages. Mr Hollande will bear the sole responsibility."²¹⁸



[214]

[*Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008*](#) [214]

"Why shouldn't we join our brothers while almost all these nations got united against the Muslims and separated them, and divided their land, and took away Al Aksa mosque out of their hands, and consumed their goodness, and destroyed their morals?"²¹⁹



[215]

[*Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008*](#) [215]

"[L]ook at the crimes that happen in Gaza and Iraq and Afghanistan, and Somalia and others places. These crimes are committed by the Jew-crusader ally."²²⁰



[216]

[*Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008*](#) [216]

"Unity is a reason of strength and victory. This is a universal norm that even the infidels are aware of."²²¹



[217]

[*Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008*](#) [217]

"[B]y this unity [merging with al-Qaeda] we brought grief and sorrow to our enemies the Jews and apostates and crusaders."²²²

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[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [218]

“We hope that we got our God’s pleasure, and the confidence of our nation, and that we made terrorized our enemy.”²²³

[218]



[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [219]

“[M]ost of the Muslims including those residing in Europe are against the crusade war lead by America, and they hate the Arab regimes that are working as agents and that crushed their people and sold the Palestinian cause in the give-up market.”²²⁴

[219]



[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [220]

“European government started judging the Muslims about their intentions and their sympathy with the Muslims’ causes. This comes from the crusade’s religious hate that moves the West, and that blew up all the bright slogans that they hold dear, such as freedom, forgiveness, human rights and justice, those slogans that they hurt our hearing with for years.”²²⁵

[220]



[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [221]

“God says, “And fight them on until there is no more persecution, and religion becomes God’s in its entirety.” (Chapter 8, Verse 39) Our first goal is the arbitration of the Lord of the world’s law, and the achievement of the servitude to God.”²²⁶

[221]



[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [222]

“[W]e seek to liberate the Islamic Maghreb from the sons of France and Spain and from all symbols of treason and employment for the outsiders, and protect it from the foreign greed and the crusader’s hegemony.”²²⁷

[222]



[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [223]

“When we carried arms we declared that we are fighting the crusaders’ agents among those rulers who came out against Islam and committed crimes of corruption and tyranny and treason against the religion and the nation.”²²⁸

[223]



[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [224]

“[W]e want to bring back the place of Islam in the country and the ruling of the Koran over the people.”²²⁹

[224]



[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [225]

“[D]id America leave us any choice with this flagrant aggression? No doubt that the answer is going to be no. Therefore, it became our right and our duty to push away with all our strength this crusade campaign and declare clearly that the American interests are legitimate targets to us.”²³⁰

[225]

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[226]

[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [226]

“We will strive to strike [Americans] whenever we can. And we are sure that America is going to loose (sic) its war against us like it lost it against Afghanistan and Iraq. It’s America that is unfair and that started evil and injustice.”²³¹



[227]

[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [227]

“[In response to the question, ‘Do you intend to carry out any attacks on American soil?’] If the U.S. administration sees that its war against the Muslims is legitimate, then what makes us believe that our war on its territories is not legitimate?”²³²



[228]

[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [228]

“Everyone must know that we will not hesitate in targeting it whenever we can and wherever it is on this planet.”²³³



[229]

[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [229]

“We sacrifice our souls and blood to defend you [Muslims] and to protect you from the sons of France and the agents of America. Our nation must know that we are in a war against the apostates and their crusader masters.”²³⁴



[230]

[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [230]

“America or other than America will not frighten us, but we never underestimate the reason. We do strive to make the right plans to face this evil alliance against Islam and the Muslims. America must know that when it gets involved in a war with the sons of Youssouf ibn Tachfine and the grand children of Tarik ibn Ziyad, then the region will turn on fire under America’s feet, if God permits it. We will mobilize the sons of the Islamic Maghreb in order to soak the nose of the Americans in the mud, and put into their account that’s already filled with defeats, another defiance.”²³⁵



[231]

[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [231]

“We believe that our greatest achievement is that the jihad is sill (sic) continuing in the Islamic Maghreb for 16 years. And today it is developing and climbing.”²³⁶



[232]

[Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, July 1, 2008](#) [232]

“Today, we receive a lot of requests from some Muslims who want to do martyrdom operations. In Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia we see Muslim youths who support our matter, they are ready to sacrifice themselves and their money for the sake of supporting Islam. We consider this as one of our greatest achievements.”²³⁷

[AQIM Statement, September 9, 2007](#) [233]

“We swear to God to continue sacrificing our lives until you stop supporting the crusaders

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[233]

in their war, apply the Islamic tenet and stop your war against God's religion."²³⁸



[234]

[*Abdelmalouk Droukdal, AQIM Leader, January 2007*](#) [234]

"[F]ight the nationals of France and the agents of the crusaders occupying our land."²³⁹



[235]

[*Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed, Head of AQIM Media, Undated*](#) [235]

"Today the global security is one and indivisible. So it is upon the American and European nations to choose: either they share security, luxury and good neighborhood with us, or we share war, fear and destruction. 'Good for good and the first is blessed' and 'An eye for an eye and the first is cursed'."²⁴⁰



[236]

[*Abdelmalek Droukdel, Video Speech, February 2013*](#) [236]

"It is a new ring from the chain of Zio-crusader invasion to the Muslim land, ...we are today before an important historical moment where once again lying is circulated to the world and the methods of satanic deception is reproduced, for a moment we return back with our memory to the days that preceded the invasion of Iraq to remind us of the biggest American lie promoted by Bush and Colin Powell to mobilize for the war? Do you remember it? It is the lie of the chemical weapons, and that Saddam has a close link to Al-Qaeda and Zarqawi." (Video Speech)²⁴¹



[237]

[*Abdelmalek Droukdel, New York Times Interview, July 2008*](#) [237]

"We will strive to strike them whenever we can. And we are sure that America is going to lose its war against us like it lost it against Afghanistan and Iraq. It's America that is unfair and that started evil and injustice...we will not hesitate in targeting it whenever we can and wherever it is on this planet." (New York Times Interview)²⁴²



[238]

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[239]

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"Why shouldn't we join our brothers while almost all these nations got united against the Muslims and separated them, and divided their land, and took away Al Aksa mosque out of their hands, and consumed their goodness, and destroyed their morals?"²⁴⁴

[*Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008*](#) [240]

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[240]

"[L]ook at the crimes that happen in Gaza and Iraq and Afghanistan, and Somalia and others places. These crimes are committed by the Jew-crusader ally."²⁴⁵



[241]

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[242]

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[243]

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[244]

[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [244]

"European government started judging the Muslims about their intentions and their sympathy with the Muslims' causes. This comes from the crusade's religious hate that moves the West, and that blew up all the bright slogans that they hold dear, such as freedom, forgiveness, human rights and justice, those slogans that they hurt our hearing with for years."²⁴⁹



[245]

[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [245]

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[246]

[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [246]

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[247]

[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [247]

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[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [248]

"[W]e want to bring back the place of Islam in the country and the ruling of the Koran over the people."²⁵³

[248]



[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [249]

"[D]id America leave us any choice with this flagrant aggression? No doubt that the answer is going to be no. Therefore, it became our right and our duty to push away with all our strength this crusade campaign and declare clearly that the American interests are legitimate targets to us."²⁵⁴

[249]



[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [250]

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[250]



[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [251]

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[251]



[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [252]

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[252]



[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [253]

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[253]



[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [254]

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[254]

[Abdelmalek Droukdel, July 1, 2008](#) [255]

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[255]

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[256]

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[257]

[Abdelmalek Droukdel, January 2007](#) [257]

“[F]ight the nationals of France and the agents of the crusaders occupying our land.”²⁶²

¹⁹⁶ “Al Qaeda branch threatens attacks on Western companies in Africa,” Reuters, May 8, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-al-qaeda/al-qaeda-branch-threatens-attacks-on-western-companies-in-africa-idUSKBN1I93ES> [131].

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