

## *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)*

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**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**

*Executive Summary:*

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is a jihadist terrorist group based in North Africa. As a formal [al-Qaeda](#) 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](#), 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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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.<sup>5</sup>

### *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](#) 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."<sup>6</sup>

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."<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> Regarding attacks on American interests, Droukdel said that, "We will strive to strike them whenever we can."<sup>9</sup>

### *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](#). AQIM also has a central decision-making body, the Majlis al-Ayan (Council of Notables),<sup>10</sup> its own media wing, Al-Andalus Media Productions, and a Sharia Council that governs Islamic legal matters.<sup>11</sup> French troops killed Droukdel in Mali on June 4, 2020.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

After al-Mourabitoun re-joined AQIM in 2015, al-Qaeda leader [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#) allegedly ordered a regional division among his commanders. Droukdel was placed in charge of Algeria, al-Mourabitoun leader [Mokhtar Belmokhtar](#) of Libya, and Djame Okacha (a.k.a. [Abu Yahya al-Hammam](#)) of West Africa.<sup>14</sup> The Tunisian branch of AQIM has carried out a series of attacks in recent years, particularly in Tunisia's Kasserine region.<sup>15</sup> This regional division reflects the early organization of AQIM, which was divided in *katibas* (brigades) that both cooperated and competed with each other.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup> Ghali claimed that the factions had united "into one group" operating under "one emir" after al-Qaeda "sought unification according to Sharia law."<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

### *Financing:*

AQIM acquires a significant portion of its funding through kidnapping and extortion.<sup>21</sup> 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."<sup>22</sup> Lastly, AQIM also successfully fundraises globally. This includes supporters residing in Western Europe, who "provide limited financial and logistical support."<sup>23</sup>

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

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majority located in Western Europe, who provide financial and logistical support.”<sup>24</sup>

### *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.<sup>25</sup> As part of this plan, GSPC trained and sent fighters to join [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](#)—then the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq—in 2005.<sup>26</sup> The increased scope and scale of attacks after 2007 suggests that AQIM successfully recruited some of these Iraqi fighters after Zarqawi’s death.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup>

### *Training:*

Most of AQIM’s leadership first trained alongside Osama bin Laden during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> In the mid-2000s, GSPC trained recruits in the desert in temporary bivouacs which they moved after a few days.<sup>31</sup> However in 2006 reports emerged suggesting that AQIM had sent men to train with [Hezbollah](#) in Lebanon.<sup>32</sup> By the late 2000s, AQIM began training [Boko Haram](#) fighters in the construction of IEDs.<sup>33</sup> 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.”<sup>34</sup>

### *Also known as:*

- Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)<sup>35</sup>
- Al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)<sup>36</sup>
- Armed Islamic Group (GIA)<sup>37</sup>
- Gruppo Islamico Armato (GIA)<sup>38</sup>
- Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)<sup>39</sup>
- Le Groupe Salafiste Pour La Predication Et Le Combat (GSPC)<sup>40</sup>
- Organization of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)<sup>41</sup>
- Salafist Group for Call and Combat<sup>42</sup>
- Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat<sup>43</sup>
- Tanzim al-Qa’ida fi Bilad al-Maghrib al-Islamiya<sup>44</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Caleb Weiss, “AQIM targets beach resort in Ivory Coast,” Long War Journal, March 13, 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/03/aqim-claims-beach-attack-in-ivory-coast.php>.

<sup>2</sup> 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/>; Beligh Nabli, “L’unification du djihadisme sahelien,” L’Economiste, June 3, 2017, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2017/03/06/lunification-djihadisme-sahelien/>.

<sup>3</sup> 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>.

<sup>4</sup> Caleb Weiss, “Al Qaeda maintains operational tempo in West Africa in 2017,” Long War Journal, January 5, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/01/al-qaeda-maintains-operational-tempo-in-west-africa-in-2017.php>.

<sup>5</sup> “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Who is the terror group reportedly behind the Ivory Coast shooting?” *Independent* (London), March 13, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/al-qaeda-in-maghreb-aqim-terror-group-who-where-a6929276.html>.

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<sup>8</sup> “An Interview with Abdelmalek Droukdal,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01transcript-droukdal.html?pagewanted=all>.

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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)



**Mohamed Lahbous (a.k.a. Mohamed Ould Nouini)**

Military commander of al-Mourabitoun and co-founder of JNIM (deceased)



**Abdelmalek Droukdel**

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



**Mokhtar Belmokhtar**

Al-Mourabitoun emir, co-founder



**Yahya Abu Hammam**

AQIM leader in West Africa (deceased)



**Yahia Djouadi**

Former emir of the southern sector



**Abdarraahmane al-Azawadi**

Spokesman

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**Salah Mohamed**

Head of media committee



**Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmad**

Head of media



**Ahmed Deghdegh**

Finance chief



**Sidan Ag Hitta**

JNIM Commander responsible for  
the Kidal Region in Mali



**Salem ould Breihmatt**

JNIM emir of Arbinda and Serma  
in the Mopti Region of Mali

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### History:

- **June 26, 2024:** The International Criminal Court (ICC) convicts AQIM and Ansar Dine member Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud of war crimes and crimes against humanity for acts committed between April 2, 2012, and January 29, 2013, in Timbuktu, Mali. After being recruited by AQIM senior leaders, Al Hassan became a senior member of the Islamic police where he helped the Islamic Court implement draconian judgments and sentences against civilians. Al Hassan is also charged with contributing to the crimes perpetrated by AQIM and Ansar Dine through his cooperation in the cruel treatment and torture of civilians. The ICC took custody of Al Hassan on March 31, 2018. His trial began on July 14, 2020. Al Hassan faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Sources: “Situation in Mali: Mr **Al Hassan convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Timbuktu,**” **International Criminal Court, June 26, 2024,** <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-mali-mr-al-hassan-convicted-war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity-committed>; “Al Hassan Case,” International Criminal Court, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/mali/al-hassan>.
- **October 13, 2023:** AQIM and Sahel-based al-Qaeda affiliate JNIM release a joint statement praising Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel, which killed approximately 1,200 people. In the statement, they congratulate Hamas on their actions and urge the terror group to continue its assault on Israel. They further claim that al-Qaeda’s various factions are “racing against time” to reach Hamas and join its offensive to “fight the Jews and those who protect the Jews.” Source: Caleb Weiss, “Al-Qaeda’s North and West African branches respond to the Hamas-led invasion of Israel,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, October 13, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/10/13/al-qaedas-north-and-west-african-branches-respond-to-the-hamas-led-invasion-of-israel/>.
- **August 7, 2023:** AQIM releases a video entitled “Oh, citizens of Morocco,” in which the group encourages attacks targeting Morocco. Media reports claim that throughout the video, AQIM ideologue Abu Yasser Jazaery attempts to recruit young Moroccan Muslims. The video is the first time AQIM specifically targeted Morocco. Source: Marta Dorgambide, “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb launches propaganda campaign targeting Morocco,” Atalayar, August 7, 2023, <https://www.atalayar.com/en/articulo/politics/qaeda-in-the-islamic-maghreb-launches-propaganda-campaign-targeting-morocco/20230807175446189261.html>.
- **March 27, 2023:** Burkina Faso indefinitely suspends France 24 news channel’s broadcast license following the channel’s interview with AQIM leader al-Anabi. According to the transitional military junta’s spokesperson, the military regime respects freedom of the press, but has warned media outlets about their “responsibilities with regard to the editorial choices they make in the treatment of information on terrorism.” Source: “Burkina Faso suspends France 24 news channel over terror leader interview,” *Financial Times*, March 27, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/209dbde9-b97f-4f0f-962b-9060484e7f86>.
- **March 6, 2023:** France 24 interviews AQIM leader al-Anabi. In the interview, the leader states that AQIM’s key interests are exclusive to Africa and that the Sahel is the “epicenter” of jihad today. He further claims there are no limits to the group’s possible expansion and also confirms AQIM’s de facto war with ISGS. Source: “In context: FRANCE 24 analyses comments by al Qaeda’s North Africa leader,” France 24, March 6, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20230306-al-qaeda-leader-in-north-africa-grants-exclusive-interview-to-france-24>.
- **January 6, 2023:** AQIM’s official media outlet releases a video declaring that fighting against the Algerian government is “one of the greatest forms of jihad.” The video is the third in a series titled “Illuminating the Minds to the Unbelief of the Rulers of Algeria.” Source: “Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor (JTTM) Weekly: January 14-21, 2023,” Middle East Media Research Institute, January 21, 2023, <https://www.memri.org/reports/jihad-and-terrorism-threat-monitor-jttm-weekly-january-14-21-2023>.
- **December 28, 2022:** A court in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, sentences four men to life sentences on charges of assisting AQIM members in carrying out a terrorist attack. On March 13, 2016, AQIM carried out an attack at a beach resort that killed 19 people and wounded 33 others. The four men reportedly played a subsidiary role in the attack, with one serving as the driver of Kounta Dallah, the operational brain behind the attack. An international search warrant for Kounta was also issued by the court. Source: “I.Coast hands down four life terms for 2016 jihadist attack-1,” France 24, December 28, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221228-i-coast-hands-down-four-life-terms-for-2016-jihadist-attack-1>.
- **December 10, 2022:** A Brooklyn court charges Fawaz Ould Ahmed Ould Ahmeid, a Mauritanian national, with six counts of terrorism offenses. Ahmeid allegedly helped carry out the March 2017 attack in Sevaré, Mali, which killed 13, including five United Nations workers. He also assisted in the planning and carrying out of the November 2015 attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali. The hotel siege and mass shooting killed 20, including an American citizen. Included among Ahmeid’s charges are conspiracy to provide material support and attempted provision of material support to AQIM and al-Mourabitoun. Ahmeid was transferred to U.S. custody from Mali on December 9, 2022. Source: “Mauritanian Terrorist Indicted for the Death of U.S. National in Deadly Mali Hotel Attack and With Providing Material Support to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Al-Murabitoun,” U.S. Department of Justice, December 10, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/mauritanian-terrorist-indicted-death-us-national-deadly-mali-hotel-attack-and-providing>.
- **June 20, 2022:** The Council of the European Union adds Sidan Ag Hitta and Salem Ould Breihmatt—JNIM’s commander in the Kidal region and emir of Arbinda and Serma in the Mopti Region of Mali, respectively—to its terrorism sanctions list. Breihmatt is an explosives expert and instructor who also oversees the activities of JNIM in Burkina Faso. Hitta was reportedly involved in the abduction and murder of French reporters Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon in Kidal in November 2013, and he was also responsible for the January 2019 attack on a U.N. base in northern Mali which killed 10 U.N. peacekeepers. Sources: “COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2022/950 of 20 June 2022 amending Decision (CFSP) 2016/1693 concerning restrictive measures against ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaeda and persons, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them,” Journal of the European Union, June 20, 2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D0950>; “Designations of ISIS-Mozambique, JNIM, and al-Shabaab Leaders,” U.S. Department of State, August 6, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/designations-of-isis-mozambique-jnim-and-al-shabaab-leaders/>; “Ten UN peacekeepers killed in a terrorist attack in northern Mali,” United Nations, January 20, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1030892>; “6 years on questions remain over murder of RFI journalists in Mali,” RFI, November 2, 2019, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20191102-questions-remain-murder-dupont-verlon-mali-impunity-crimes-against-journalists>
- **May 20, 2022:** Given the death of Musa Abu Dawud, an AQIM senior leader, in March 2018 by a U.S. drone strike, the U.S. Department of State revokes Dawud’s designation as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). Dawud was designated as a SDGT in May 2016 for engaging in terrorist activity as early as 1992 as a member of the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), a forerunner to AQIM. Sources: “State Department Terrorist Designation of Musa Abu Dawud,” U.S. Department of State, May 5, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/05/256921.htm>; “Revocation of Five Foreign Terrorist Organizations Designations and the Delisting of Six Deceased Individuals as



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Specially Designated Global Terrorists,” U.S. Department of State, May 20, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/revocation-of-five-foreign-terrorist-organizations-designations-and-the-delisting-of-six-deceased-individuals-as-specially-designated-global-terrorists>.

- February 25, 2022 - February 26, 2022:** French troops launch an operation targeting a senior AQIM official in Timbuktu, Mali. The operation leads to the death of Yahia Djouadi a.k.a. Abou Ammar al Jazairi. The operation included an attack helicopter and two French drones. Djouadi was appointed emir of the southern region of AQIM in 2007 before becoming AQIM’s emir in Libya in 2015. In 2019, Djouadi moved to Mali where he supported the structuring and the coordination of supplies and materials to the high command of GSIM and AQIM. Additionally, Djouadi acted as a financial and logistical coordinator for AQIM. Source: “Mali: Algerian AQIM leader killed by French army,” Agence France Presse and Africa News, March 7, 2021, <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/07/mali-algerian-aqim-leader-killed-by-french-army>.
- January 2, 2022:** Ansaru, al-Qaeda’s affiliated group in Nigeria, reconfirms its allegiance to AQIM in a statement released online. Ansaru reportedly maintains operational ties to AQIM’s Sahelian branch in the Sahel, the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM). Ansaru originally broke away from Boko Haram in early 2012 with support from AQIM, but between 2015 and 2019, the group remained relatively quiet throughout Nigeria. In 2019, the group became active throughout Nigeria’s northwest once again. Source: Caleb Weiss, “Ansaru reaffirms its allegiance to al Qaeda,” Long War Journal, January 2, 2022, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2022/01/ansaru-reaffirms-its-allegiance-to-al-qaeda.php>.
- September 26, 2021:** Given the impending end of France’s military mission Operation Barkhane, Mali’s transitional government announces that Mali would partner with the Russian Wagner Group to combat Islamist jihadist movements across the country. In the \$10.8 million a month deal, Mali will allegedly hire 1,000 Wagner Group mercenaries to combat JNIM and AQIM fighters. Source: Steve Balestrieri, “Mali to Hire Wagner Group to Fight Terrorists as the EU Draws a Red Line Against Russia,” SOFREP, September 26, 2021, <https://sofrep.com/news/mali-to-hire-wagner-group-to-fight-terrorists-as-the-eu-draws-a-red-line-against-russia/>.
- June 3, 2021:** The U.S. Department of State’s Rewards for Justice program offers a reward of up to \$7 million for information leading to the arrest of AQIM leader Abu Ubaydah Yusuf al-Anabi. Source: Thomas Joscelyn, “State Department announces reward for information on AQIM leader,” Long War Journal, June 3, 2021, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/06/state-department-announces-reward-for-information-on-aqim-leader.php>.
- February 18, 2021:** According to regional analysts at Critical Threats, JNIM has expanded its operations to Senegal, adding to their bases in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d’Ivoire. Senegalese security forces allegedly dismantled a JNIM cell in eastern Senegal in January 2021, leading the Senegalese government to build a military camp near the Malian border to counter the emerging jihadist threat. Source: Rahma Bayrakdar, “Al Qaeda’s Growing Threat to Senegal,” Critical Threats, February 18, 2021, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-qaedas-growing-threat-to-senegal>.
- November 21, 2020:** According to SITE Intelligence Group, AQIM released a video that showed the body of its former leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel, while also announcing al-Anabi as the group’s new leader. Source: “Al-Qaeda in North Africa appoints new leader after killing,” Press News Agency, November 22, 2020, [https://pressnewsagency.org/al-qaeda-in-north-africa-appoints-new-leader-after-killing/?fbclid=IwAR3ygg4tr\\_niifrQSnghpJhNh2irK8vcxvrxBteSSJvpndf4wH2i33SDRA](https://pressnewsagency.org/al-qaeda-in-north-africa-appoints-new-leader-after-killing/?fbclid=IwAR3ygg4tr_niifrQSnghpJhNh2irK8vcxvrxBteSSJvpndf4wH2i33SDRA).
- November 13, 2020:** French ground forces and helicopters launch an operation in the Menaka region of eastern Mali. The operation targets and neutralizes Bah ag Moussa, a senior leader in AQIM. Sources: “French forces kill jihadist commander in Mali,” France 24, November 13, 2020, [https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201113-french-forces-kill-jihadist-commander-in-mali?utm\\_source=iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=1715438](https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201113-french-forces-kill-jihadist-commander-in-mali?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1715438); “French Forces Kill al-Qaida-Linked Commander in Mali,” Associated Press, November 13, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/french-forces-kill-al-qaida-linked-commander-mali>.
- 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-qaida-menace-macron-et-appelle-a-tuer-quiconque-insulte-le-prophete/>.
- 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/>; 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>.
- 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>.
- 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>; “Libyan security arrests al-Qaeda leaders in Tripoli,” Xinhua, July 25, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/25/c\\_138255075.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/25/c_138255075.htm).
- 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>.

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- **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>; 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>.
- **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/>.
- **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. A month later on March 11, Sidan Ag-Hitta, JNIM’s commander of the Kidal region in Mali, confirms Hammam’s death in an audio recording distributed across social media. Sources: “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>.
- **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-idUSKCN1PC1LU>; “Al-Qaeda leader killed in operation in southern Libya,” Arab News, January 18, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1437651/middle-east>.
- **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-africom/>.
- **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>; “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>.
- **August 8, 2018:** French forces kill 14 al-Mourabitoun fighters, including one of the group’s top commanders and 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/>.
- **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/>.
- **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>.
- **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>.
- **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>; 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>.
- **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/>.
- **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 Abdul 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>; 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/>; Beligh Nabli, “L’unification du djihadisme sahelien,” L’Economiste, June 3, 2017, <http://www.leconomistemaghreb.com/2017/03/06/lunification-djihadisme-sahelien/>; “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-revendiquee-lorganisation-jihadiste-diyad-ag-ghali/>; 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>; Caleb Weiss, “Al Qaeda group claims assault near

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- **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>; "Al-Qaeda suspected of abducting three westerners in Libya," Middle East Eye, September 23, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/expatriates-abducted-libya-aqim-suspected-563532115>; 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>; 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>; "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>.
- **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](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/01/06/world/africa/ap-af-mali-violence.html?_r=0); "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>; 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>; "Mali hotel attack: Police seek info on hotel attack gunmen," BBC News, November 23, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34897745>; "UPDATE 2-Mali TV airs images of man, woman suspected in hotel attack," Reuters, November 23, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/mali-attacks-idUSL8N1311YV20151123>; Nadia Khomami, "Burkina Faso hotel attack: 18 nationalities among dead," Guardian (London), January 16, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/15/security-forces-battle-suspected-jihadists-in-burkina-faso-capital>; 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>; 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/>; 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>; Michael E. Miller, "Horror at the beach: 22 dead in terrorist attack on Ivory Coast resorts," Washington Post, March 14, 2016, [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](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); Vincent Duhem, "Côte d'Ivoire: The bombing of Grand Bassam has mainly hit Ivoirians," Jeune Afrique, March 16, 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/310315/politique/cote-divoire-lattentat-13-mars-a-majoritairement-frappe-ivoiriens/>; 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>; 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](http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2015/01/08/world/africa/08reuters-france-shooting-aqim.html?_r=0); 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>.
- **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>; 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>.
- **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>.
- **October 10, 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>; "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>.
- **May 27, 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>; 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](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/09/03/feature-02); 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>; "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>; 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](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/09/03/feature-02).



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- 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>.
- **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>; Katarina Höjje, "AQIM Claims Responsibility for Mali Killings," CNN, November 6, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/06/world/africa/mali-journalists-deaths-arrests/>; "Militants Kill Soldiers in Algeria," Reuters, April 20, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/world/africa/militants-kill-soldiers-in-algeria.html>.
- 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>. 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>.
- Fighting between militants and French forces escalates in Mali after militants 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." 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>, 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>; 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>; 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>. 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>.
- **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>; 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/>.
- **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](http://magharebiamagharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/04/16/feature-02); 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>; "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>; 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/>; 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>; 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>.
- 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](http://magharebiamagharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/04/16/feature-02).
- **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 Cherchell, 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

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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>; "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/>; "Serge Lazarevic: Mali confirms militants freed for French hostage," BBC, December 12, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30450092>; "Dutch hostage Sjaak Rijke freed in Mali," BBC, April 6, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32195723>; "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," Australian National Security, accessed June 27, 2014, <http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/Al-QaidaintheIslamicMaghrebAQIM.aspx>; Jeremy Keenan, "Mali's Tuareg Rebellion: What Next," Al Jazeera, March 20, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/20123208133276463.html>.

- **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?iref=nextin>; 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>; "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>.
- **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](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf).
- **April 11, 2002 - :** 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](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2061071.st); "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," Anti-Defamation League, accessed June 28, 2014, [http://archive.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al\\_qaeda\\_maghreb.html#6](http://archive.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al_qaeda_maghreb.html#6); 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](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf).
- **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 - :** 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](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf).
- **- :** 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> 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](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf).



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### **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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

- **September 26, 2022:** JNIM militants ambush a military convoy taking supplies to a town in Gaskinde, northern Burkina Faso. The militants kill 11 soldiers and injure 28 others, including 20 soldiers. The military reports 50 other soldiers are missing.<sup>47</sup>
- **August 13, 2022:** JNIM militants ambush Russian mercenaries in Bandiagra central Mali. The attack kills four soldiers. The Russian private military firm Wagner Group does not comment on the attack.<sup>48</sup>
- **July 23, 2022:** JNIM militants raid Kati base, Mali's main military base right outside of Bamako. The ambush kills one soldier and wounds six others. JNIM releases a statement claiming the attack was a response to governmental collaboration with Russian mercenaries.<sup>49</sup>
- **July 2, 2022:** JNIM militants attack Benin's national park in the northern part of the country. The attack kills two Beninese soldiers.<sup>50</sup>
- **July 1, 2022:** JNIM militants ambush Beninese troops near Alfa Kawoura, northern Benin. The attack kills four.<sup>51</sup>
- **June 17, 2022:** Suspected Katiba Macina militants launch a series of attacks across central Mali in the village of Diarrassagou and two surrounding towns in the Bankass circle. The attacks kill more than 130 civilians.<sup>52</sup>
- **May 11, 2022:** JNIM militants ambush security forces in Kpekankandi, Togo, near the border of Burkina Faso. The militants kills eight Togolese soldiers and injure 13 others. The attack demonstrates JNIM's expanding geographical operations as they have threatened not only Mali, but northern parts of coastal Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Togo.<sup>53</sup>
- **April 24, 2022:** Militants launch three attacks on army bases in Sevare, Niono, and Bapho, central Mali. The attacks kill six soldiers and injure 20 others. Katiba Macina, a JNIM-affiliate, claims responsibility for the attacks.<sup>54</sup>
- **March 29, 2021:** Unidentified assailants attack an army post near Kafolo, Ivory Coast. The attack kills two people. Later that day, a police post is attacked in Tehini, killing a gendarme. Although no group claims responsibility, it is suspected that the assailants belonged to Katibat Macina, a JNIM-affiliate.<sup>55</sup>
- **December 28, 2020:** An armed vehicle carrying French soldiers strikes an explosive device in Mali. The blast kills three French soldiers. JNIM claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>56</sup>
- **September 6, 2019:** JNIM rebels ambush an army patrol in Soum province, Burkina Faso. One soldier and five assailants are killed.<sup>57</sup>
- **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.<sup>58</sup>
- **August 19, 2019:** Suspected AQIM militants on motorbikes and pickup trucks ambush soldiers in northern Burkina Faso. More than a dozen soldiers are killed.<sup>59</sup>
- **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.<sup>60</sup>
- **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.<sup>61</sup>
- **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.<sup>62</sup>
- **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.<sup>63</sup>
- **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.<sup>64</sup>
- **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.<sup>65</sup>

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- **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.<sup>66</sup>
  - **July 8, 2018:** AQIM affiliate Katiba Uqba ibn Nafi carries out a grenade and small-arms attack in northwest Tunisia, killing six police officers.<sup>67</sup>
  - **July 1, 2018:** A JNIM suicide bomber attacks a French military patrol in the city of Gao, killing two civilians and wounding dozens.<sup>68</sup>
  - **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.<sup>69</sup>
  - **May 8, 2018:** AQIM calls western companies operating in North and West Africa “legitimate targets,” threatening attacks and urging Muslims to boycott them.<sup>70</sup>
  - **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.<sup>71</sup>
  - **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.<sup>72</sup>
  - **December 28, 2017:** Two IED attacks destroy at least one Malian army vehicle. JNIM claims responsibility.<sup>73</sup>
  - **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.<sup>74</sup>
  - **October 26, 2017:** Three U.N. peacekeepers are killed in an IED attack on to road between Aguelhok and Tessalit, Mali. JNIM claims responsibility.<sup>75</sup>
  - **October 25, 2017:** JNIM attacks the French company SATOM, burning several trucks and killing both civilians and soldiers.<sup>76</sup>
  - **October 23, 2017:** JNIM attacks two separate police posts in the Segou region of Mali and ambushes a Malian vehicle near Tenenkou.<sup>77</sup>
  - **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.<sup>78</sup>
  - **August 3, 2017:** A JNIM IED wounds four French soldiers near Tessalit, Mali.<sup>79</sup>
  - **July 17, 2017:** JNIM is suspected of firing mortars at a French-U.N. military base in Tessalit, Mali.<sup>80</sup>
  - **July 8, 2017:** JNIM wounds three French soldiers with an IED near Tessalit, Mali.<sup>81</sup>
  - **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.<sup>82</sup>
  - **April 5, 2017:** A JNIM IED kills a French soldier in Mali.<sup>83</sup>
  - **March 27, 2017:** AQIM claims to have attacked a Malian vehicle with an IED. No casualties are reported.<sup>84</sup>
  - **March 24 2017:** AQIM claims to have killed “dozens” of locals during communal clashes between Fulani herders and Bambara farmers in Mali.<sup>85</sup>
  - **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.<sup>86</sup>
  - **January 18, 2017:** Al-Mourabitoun claims responsibility for a suicide bombing on a military camp in northern Mali that kills 77.<sup>87</sup>
  - **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.<sup>88</sup>
  - **October 6, 2016:** AQIM is suspected of attacking a refugee camp in Niger, killing 20 security forces.<sup>89</sup>
  - **September 19, 2016:** AQIM is suspected of kidnapping two Italians and a Canadian in Southern Libya.<sup>90</sup>

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- **August 29, 2016:** AQIM's branch in Tunisia, the Uqba bin Nafi Battalion, claims responsibility for an ambush on Tunisian forces in the Mount Sannama area of Kasserine Governorate, killing three soldiers and wounding seven others.<sup>91</sup>
  - **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.<sup>92</sup>
  - **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.<sup>93</sup>
  - **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.<sup>94</sup>
  - **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.<sup>95</sup>
  - **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.<sup>96</sup>
  - **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.<sup>97</sup>
  - **December 2014:** AQIM claims two attacks on Tunisian forces in the Mount Chaambi region.<sup>98</sup>
  - **August 16, 2014:** A suicide bomber self-detonates on a patrol base in northern Mali, killing two and injuring nine.<sup>99</sup> AQIM claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>100</sup>
  - **July 9, 2014:** French authorities thwart an AQIM plot to target the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and a nuclear power plant in France.<sup>101</sup>
  - **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.<sup>102</sup>
  - **June 2014:** AQIM claims responsibility for two separate attacks on U.N. vehicles in Mali.<sup>103</sup>
  - **May 27, 2014:** AQIM claims responsibility for an attack on the home of Tunisia's interior minister that killed four policemen.<sup>104</sup>
  - **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.<sup>105</sup>
  - **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.<sup>106</sup>
  - **March 19, 2013:** AQIM announces that it beheaded French hostage Philippe Verdon, whom the group captured in November 2011.<sup>107</sup>
  - **January 16, 2013:** AQIM splinter group al-Mulathamun seizes control of the In Amenas natural gas plant in Algeria.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup>
  - **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.”<sup>110</sup>
  - **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.<sup>111</sup>
  - **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.<sup>112</sup>
  - **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.”<sup>113</sup>
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- **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.<sup>114</sup>
  - **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.<sup>115</sup>
  - **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.<sup>116</sup> AQIM also captures French national Serge Lazarevic and Dutch national Sjaak Rijke and continues to hold them hostage as of December 2014.<sup>117</sup>
  - **August 26, 2011:** AQIM launches two suicide attacks against “Algeria’s premier military academy,” Academie Militaire Interarmes, in Cherchell, killing 18.<sup>118</sup>
  - **April 15, 2011:** AQIM militants attack a checkpoint in Tizi Ouzou Province, killing 17 Algerian soldiers.<sup>119</sup>
  - **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.<sup>120</sup>
  - **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.<sup>121</sup>
  - **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.<sup>122</sup>
  - **December 18, 2009:** AQIM kidnaps two Italian nationals in Mauritania, holding them for four months before they are released on April 16, 2010.<sup>123</sup>
  - **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.<sup>124</sup>
  - **November 25, 2009:** AQIM kidnaps French citizen Pierre Camatte near Mali’s border with Niger. He is eventually returned in exchange for four AQIM militants.<sup>125</sup>
  - **June 23, 2009:** AQIM militants kill American aid worker Christopher Legget in a kidnapping attempt in Nouakchott, Mauritania.<sup>126</sup>
  - **June 17, 2009:** AQIM militants ambush a group of Algerian paramilitary policemen, killing 20.<sup>127</sup>
  - **May 31, 2009:** AQIM executes kidnapped British citizen Edwin Dyer.<sup>128</sup>
  - **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.<sup>129</sup>
  - **December 24, 2007:** AQIM operatives shoot and kill four members of a French family vacationing in Mauritania.<sup>130</sup>
  - **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.<sup>131</sup>
  - **September 8, 2007:** An AQIM operative detonates a car bomb in the northern town of Dellys, killing 28 coast guard officers.<sup>132</sup>
  - **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.<sup>133</sup>
  - **July 2007:** A suicide bomber self-detonates in a car, killing 10 soldiers in a military encampment. AQIM claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>134</sup>
  - **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.<sup>135</sup>
  - **December 10, 2006:** GSPC bombs a bus carrying Haliburton employees, killing one.<sup>136</sup>
  - **February 2003:** GSPC militants kidnap 32 European tourists in southern Algeria.<sup>137</sup>
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- **April 11, 2002:** Al-Qaeda claims responsibility for a synagogue bombing in Djerba, Tunisia, that kills 19.<sup>138</sup>
- **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.<sup>139</sup>
- **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.<sup>140</sup>
- **January 1996:** GIA declares war against the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)<sup>141</sup>
- **July-October 1995:** GIA carries out numerous bombings in Paris, killing eight and wounding about 200.<sup>142</sup>
- **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.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Anne Mimault and Thiam Ndiaga, "Eleven soldiers dead, 50 civilians missing after Burkina Faso convoy attack," Reuters, September 27, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/several-feared-dead-trucks-destroyed-burkina-faso-convoy-attack-2022-09-27/>; "Al Qaeda branch claims attack on Burkina Faso convoy that killed over a dozen," Reuters, October 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/al-qaeda-branch-claims-attack-burkina-faso-convoy-that-killed-over-dozen-2022-10-04/>.

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<sup>49</sup> "Al Qaeda affiliate claims attack on Mali's main military base," Reuters, July 23, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/al-qaeda-affiliate-claims-attack-malis-main-military-base-2022-07-23/>.

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<sup>51</sup> Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State claims first attacks inside Benin," September 17, 2022, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2022/09/islamic-state-claims-first-attacks-inside-benin.php>.

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<sup>55</sup> "Assailants attack Ivory Coast security posts near Burkina border," France 24, March 29, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210329-assailants-attack-ivory-coast-security-posts-near-burkina-border>; Caleb Weiss, "Analysis: Ivory Coast witnesses surge in jihadist activity," Long War Journal, June 16, 2021, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/06/analysis-ivory-coast-witnesses-surge-in-jihadist-activity.php>.

<sup>56</sup> "Al Qaeda-linked jihadist group claims deaths of French soldiers in Mali," France 24, January 2, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210102-al-qaeda-linked-jihadist-group-claims-deaths-of-french-soldiers-in-mali>.

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<sup>59</sup> "Burkina Faso troops killed in 'major attack' by 'terrorist armed groups'," France 24, August 20, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190820-burkina-faso-troops-killed-attack-terrorist-armed-groups>.

<sup>60</sup> "Tunisia soldier killed in IED explosion on Mount Chambi," Defense Post, April 27, 2019, <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/04/27/tunisia-soldier-killed-ied-mount-chambi/>.

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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).<sup>144</sup>
- **March 27, 2002:** The Department of the Treasury designates GSPC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (under section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act).<sup>145</sup>
- **October 24, 2003:** The Department of the Treasury designates Mokhtar Belmokhtar as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).<sup>146</sup>
- **February 21, 2008:** The Department of the Treasury designates AQIM as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).<sup>147</sup>
- **July 17, 2008:** The Department of the Treasury designates Ahmed Deghdegh as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).<sup>148</sup>  
July 17, 2008: The Department of the Treasury designates Abid Hammadou as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).<sup>149</sup>
- **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).<sup>150</sup>
- **February 14, 2013:** The Department of the Treasury designates Yahya Abu Hammam as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).<sup>151</sup>
- **September 5, 2018: The Department of State designates JNIM as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (under Executive Order 13224).**<sup>152</sup>
- **July 16, 2019:** The Department of the Treasury designates Bah Ag Moussa as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13244.<sup>153</sup>
- **August 21, 2019:** The U.S. Department of State designates Salem Ould Breihmatt and Sidan Ag-Hitta as Specially Designated Global Terrorists.<sup>154</sup>

#### *Designations by Foreign Governments and Organizations:*

- United Nations—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on October 6, 2001.<sup>155</sup>
- United Nations—listed AQIM as a terrorist organization on April 26, 2007.<sup>156</sup>
- Australia—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on November 14, 2002.<sup>157</sup>
- United Kingdom—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on October 10, 2001.<sup>158</sup>
- Canada—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on July 23, 2002.<sup>159</sup>
- New Zealand—listed GSPC as a terrorist organization on October 17, 2002.<sup>160</sup>
- European Union—added Sidan Ag-Hitta and Salem ould Breihmatt to its terrorism sanctions list on June 20, 2022.<sup>161</sup>

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### **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.<sup>162</sup> They have also cooperated with, trained, or equipped other extremist groups in North Africa, including al-Mourabitoun and Boko Haram.<sup>163</sup>

- **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.”<sup>164</sup>

- **[Al-Mourabitoun](#)**

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](#), al-Mourabitoun seeks to establish an Islamic state in West Africa.<sup>165</sup> 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.<sup>166</sup>

- **[Al-Qaeda](#)**

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.”<sup>167</sup>

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

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...”<sup>168</sup>

- **[ISIS](#)**

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.<sup>169</sup> 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.”<sup>170</sup> 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.<sup>171</sup> 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.<sup>172</sup> In September 2014, AQIM and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released a joint statement calling on ISIS to reconcile with al-Qaeda.<sup>173</sup> 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.”<sup>174</sup>

- **[Boko Haram](#)**

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.<sup>175</sup> 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.<sup>176</sup> 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.<sup>177</sup> Al-Qaeda has not made formal links with Boko Haram, and Ayman al-Zawahiri has made no explicit mention of the group.<sup>178</sup> 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

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affiliates are “now so numerous that they are impossible to ignore.”<sup>179</sup>

- **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.”<sup>180</sup>

- **Al-Shabab**

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.”<sup>181</sup>

- **Nusra Front**

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.”<sup>182</sup>

<sup>162</sup> 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>.

<sup>163</sup> SITE Intel Group, Twitter post, March 16, 2016, 10:56 a.m., <https://twitter.com/siteintelgroup/status/710162802565062656>; Felipe Pathé Duarte, “Maghrebien Militant Maneuvers: AQIM as a Strategic Challenge,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, September 28, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/maghrebien-militant-maneuvers-aqim-strategic-challenge>.

<sup>164</sup> 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>.

<sup>165</sup> 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>.

<sup>166</sup> SITE Intel Group, Twitter post, March 16, 2016, 10:56 a.m., <https://twitter.com/siteintelgroup/status/710162802565062656>.

<sup>167</sup> “An Interview With Abdelmalek Droukdal,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01transcript-droukdal.html>.

<sup>168</sup> 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>.

<sup>169</sup> 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](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/al_qaeda_in_the_isla.php).

<sup>170</sup> 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](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/al_qaeda_in_the_isla.php).

<sup>171</sup> 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](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/aqim_rejects_islamic.php).

<sup>172</sup> “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>; “ISIS Divides Maghreb al-Qaeda (AQIM),” African Armed Forces, August 19, 2014, <http://www.aafonline.co.za/news/isis-divides-maghreb-al-qaeda-aqim>.

<sup>173</sup> 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](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/al_qaeda_branches_ur.php).

<sup>174</sup> 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-idINL6NORF0F020140914>.

<sup>175</sup> Felipe Pathé Duarte, “Maghrebien Militant Maneuvers: AQIM as a Strategic Challenge,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, September 28, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/maghrebien-militant-maneuvers-aqim-strategic-challenge>.

<sup>176</sup> 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>.

<sup>177</sup> 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>; “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>.

<sup>178</sup> 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>; 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>.

<sup>179</sup> 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>.

<sup>180</sup> 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>.

<sup>181</sup> 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>.

<sup>182</sup> 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>.

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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?”<sup>183</sup> 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.”<sup>184</sup> 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...”<sup>185</sup>

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.”<sup>186</sup> 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...”<sup>187</sup>

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.”<sup>188</sup>

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.<sup>189</sup>

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.<sup>190</sup> 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 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.”<sup>191</sup>

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.”<sup>192</sup>

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### *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.”<sup>193</sup>

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.<sup>194</sup>

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.”<sup>195</sup> 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.”<sup>196</sup>

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.”<sup>197</sup>

### *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.<sup>198</sup>

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 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.<sup>199</sup>

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.<sup>200</sup>

### *Violence in Algeria*

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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.<sup>201</sup> 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.”<sup>202</sup>

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.”<sup>203</sup>

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.”<sup>204</sup>

<sup>183</sup> 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>.

<sup>184</sup> 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>.

<sup>185</sup> 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>.

<sup>186</sup> 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>.

<sup>187</sup> 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>.

<sup>188</sup> “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/>.

<sup>189</sup> 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>.

<sup>190</sup> 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>.

<sup>191</sup> Jason Burke, “Mali: How Did It Come to This?” *Guardian* (London), January 17, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/17/mali-aqim-background>.

<sup>192</sup> Bruce Crumley, “France’s Next Move: With Mali’s Islamists on the Run, Time to Talk to the Tuaregs,” CNN, February 1, 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/02/01/frances-next-move-with-malis-islamists-on-the-run-time-to-talk-to-the-tuaregs/>.

<sup>193</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick and Steven Lee Myers, “Libya Attack Brings Challenges for U.S.,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/13/world/middleeast/us-envoy-to-libya-is-reported-killed.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>194</sup> Nic Robertson, Paul Cruickshank, and Tim Lister, “Pro-Al Qaeda Group Seen behind Deadly Benghazi Attack,” CNN, September 13, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/12/world/africa/libya-attack-jihadists/>.

<sup>195</sup> Eli Lake, “Intercepts Show Attackers on U.S. Consulate in Benghazi Bragged to Al Qaeda,” *Daily Beast*, September 28, 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/09/28/intercepts-show-attackers-on-u-s-consulate-in-benghazi-bragged-to-al-qaeda.html>.

<sup>196</sup> “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>.

<sup>197</sup> Paul Cruickshank, Tim Lister and Nic Robertson, “Phone Call Links Benghazi Attack to Al Qaeda Commander,” CNN, March 5, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/05/world/africa/benghazi-al-qaeda/>.

<sup>198</sup> David Williams and Arthur Martin, “British Man ‘Beheaded’ by Al Qaeda Terrorists,” *Daily Mail* (London), June 4, 2009, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1190477/British-man-Edwin-Dyer-beheaded-Al-Qaeda-terrorists.html>.

<sup>199</sup> Tracy Rucinski and Mathieu Bonkougou, “Freed Al Qaeda Hostages Arrive Back in Spain,” Reuters, August 23, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/08/24/idUSLDE67M1V2>.

<sup>200</sup> Adam Nossiter, “Millions in Ransoms Fuel Militants’ Clout in West Africa,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/world/africa/kidnappings-fuel-extremists-in-western-africa.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>201</sup> Craig S. Smith, “Blasts 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>.

<sup>202</sup> 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>.

<sup>203</sup> 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>.

<sup>204</sup> 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>.



## *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)*

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### **Rhetoric:**

*Joint AQIM-JNIM Statement, October 13, 2023*

*Joint AQIM-JNIM statement praising Hamas and encouraging violence on Israel:*

“We congratulate your actions and urge you to continue, biting your teeth with patience on the path of jihad...complete what you began and seek help from God alone for it is He who guarantees victory...we in al-Qaeda are racing against time to obtain the ability to reach you to liberate Jerusalem. Our ranks are stacked together, loud and boastful...Hasten and seek forgiveness from your Lord...and light a fire in the West Bank under the feet of the Jews...so rise up and fight the Jews and those who protect the Jews.”<sup>205</sup>

*AQIM Statement, May 2018*

“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.”<sup>206</sup>

*AQIM Statement, June 2013*

“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...”<sup>207</sup>

*Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013*

“[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.”<sup>208</sup>

*Abu Ubayda Yousif al-Annabi, May 2013*

“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.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Caleb Weiss, “Al-Qaeda’s North and West African branches respond to the Hamas-led invasion of Israel,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, October 13, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/10/13/al-qaedas-north-and-west-african-branches-respond-to-the-hamas-led-invasion-of-israel/>.

<sup>206</sup> “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>.

<sup>207</sup> “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>.

<sup>208</sup> “The English Translation of the audio speech for sheikh Abu Ubayda Yousif Al-Annabi Entitled War on Mali,” Fursan Al-Balagh Media Translation Department, May 2013, <http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/shaykh-abc5ab-ubaydah-yc5absuf-al-anc481bc4ab-22the-war-on-mali22-en.pdf>.

<sup>209</sup> “The English Translation of the audio speech for sheikh Abu Ubayda Yousif Al-Annabi Entitled War on Mali,” azelinfiles.wordpress.com, May 2013, <http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/shaykh-abc5ab-ubaydah-yc5absuf-al-anc481bc4ab-22the-war-on-mali22-en.pdf>. See Aaron Y. Zelin, “al-Andalus Media presents a new video message from al-Q?idah in the Islamic Maghrib’s Shaykh Ab? ‘Ubaydah Y?suf al ‘An?b?: ‘The War on Mali,’” Jihadology, May 7, 2013, <http://jihadology.net/2013/05/07/al-andalus-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghribs-shaykh-abu-ubaydah-yusuf-al-anabi-the-war-in-mali/>.