

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: An Unclassified Backgrounder

- Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is an Algeria-based Sunni Muslim jihadist group.¹
 - The group originally formed in 1998 as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (also known as the Group for Call and Combat) (GSPC).²
 - GSPC was a faction of the Armed Islamic Group (AIG) which itself was then the largest terrorist group in Algeria.³
 - In January 2007, following its September 2006 “merger” with Al Qaeda (AQ), GSPC was renamed AQIM.⁴
 - At its height, the group had close to 30,000 members, but counterterrorism efforts have reduced its numbers to less than 1,000.⁵
 - AQIM primarily operates on the north coast of Algeria and the desert regions of southern Algeria and northern Mali.⁶
 - Until 2007, AQIM employed conventional terrorist tactics like guerrilla-style ambushes and mortar, rocket, and IED attacks.⁷
 - In April 2007, however, AQIM added the use of suicide bombings to its repertoire and, in May 2007, declared such attacks to be their main tactic going forward.⁸
- AQIM has evolved from a North Africa-centric organization to one with increasing desire to attack western targets.⁹
 - From the 1990s through its merger with AQ, AQIM focused its attacks on Algerian targets with the goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate in North Africa.¹⁰

¹ National Counterterrorism Center, Profile: Al-Qa’ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb at 1, available online at <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqim.html> (NCTC AQIM Profile).

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³ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

⁴ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

⁵ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

⁶ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

⁷ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

⁸ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

⁹ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹⁰ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

- In April 2007, AQIM used suicide bombers against government ministries and police buildings in Algiers, killing more than 30 people.¹¹
- In July 2007, AQIM claimed responsibility for a suicide truck bomb attack that killed at least eight soldiers and injured more than 20 at a military barracks in Algeria.¹²
- Since the merger, however, AQIM has declared its intention to attack western targets and has conducted a handful of such attacks.¹³
 - In late 2006 and early 2007, AQIM conducted several IED attacks against convoys of foreign nationals working in energy sector.¹⁴
 - In December 2007, AQIM used a car bomb against the UN offices in Algiers.¹⁵
 - In February 2008, AQIM used small arms against the Israeli Embassy in Mauritania.¹⁶
 - AQIM has also claimed responsibility for killing an American citizen in Mauritania for participating in missionary activities.¹⁷
 - This represents the first time that AQIM has killed an American in North Africa.¹⁸
- In addition, AQIM continues to successfully kidnap and ransom Westerners, using a tactic that predates its merger with Al Qaeda.¹⁹
 - In May 2009, AQIM killed a British hostage after months of failed negotiations.²⁰

¹¹ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹² NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹³ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹⁴ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹⁵ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹⁶ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹⁷ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹⁸ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

¹⁹ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

²⁰ NCTC AQIM Profile at 1.

- In 2010, multinational counterterrorism efforts—including a joint French-Mauritanian raid in July against an AQIM camp—resulted in deaths and possibly disrupted some AQIM activity.²¹

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