



Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb



Key Leaders/Members

Abdelmalek Droukdel
Emir (Leader)

Abu Obeida Youcef al-Annabi
Deputy Emir
Head of Council of Notables

Yahya Abu al-Hamam
Deputy Emir for the Sahara

Mokhtar Belmokhtar
Senior Leader in al-Murabitoun
Former AQIM Commander

Ould Mohamed Kheirou
Senior Leader in al-Murabitoun
Former MUJAO Emir

Homebase: Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger

History

Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) traces its history back through several North African militant groups from the 1990s, although the immediate AQIM pre-cursor was the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). In 2006-2007, the GSPC changed its name to Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb when it swore an oath of allegiance to al-Qa'ida Core and Osama bin Laden.

Since 2007, AQIM has broadened its recruitment efforts and area of influence into the area around the Saharan desert as well as the Sahel belt of West Africa, including Mali and Mauritania. This expansion has brought with it some fracturing though. In 2012, AQIM leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar announced he was breaking with the group to form his own organization, commonly referred to as the "Masked Men Brigade." It was this faction that was responsible for the January 2012 siege of the Algerian petroleum facility at Tigantourine that resulted in dozens of hostages being murdered. In the summer of 2013, Belmokhtar's Masked Men Brigade and MUJAO, another AQIM splinter group, announced that they would be merging their forces into a new militant organization called Al Murabitoun ("the fighters") under the leadership of an unnamed Malian veteran of the fighting in Afghanistan.

Current Intent & Capability

Different components of AQIM have various levels of operational capability, and it appears that intent and organizational priorities vary widely as well. That said, the capability levels of several key components of AQIM have increased in the past several years due to an influx of arms from post-Qadaffi Libya, emerging safe havens in parts of Mali and Mauritania, and by morale boosts resulting from successful attacks across the region. These changes— in combination with continued access to illicit funds from drug trafficking, kidnapping, and other criminal enterprises— would suggest that AQIM's capabilities have been growing rather than shrinking in recent years.

Future Outlook

Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb is a significant threat to US interests in the region, and perhaps in Europe given the vestiges of GSPCs logistical networks there, and it also has the potential to develop into a more serious threat to the US homeland if current trends continue.