



Algeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 24 September 2015

Information on terrorist activity in Algeria, in particular the group Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb.

A *BBC News* profile of the group known as Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) states:

“Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), to give its full name in English, has its roots in the bitter Algerian civil war of the early 1990s, but has since evolved to take on a more international Islamist agenda. Its reach has also expanded across the Sahel region south of the Sahara Desert, attracting members from Mauritania, Morocco, Niger and Senegal as well as from within Mali where, in alliance with other Islamists, it is fighting French troops on the ground. During the Mali crisis, its fighters have dramatically increased their profile, allowing them to further their aim of spreading Islamic law and jihad across West Africa. AQIM's influence over other nascent Islamist cells comes from its wealth: it is one of the region's best-armed groups thanks to the money it makes from kidnapping Westerners and drug and cigarette trafficking across the Sahara. It emerged in early 2007, after a feared militant group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), aligned itself with Osama Bin Laden's international network.” (BBC News (17 January 2013) *Profile: Al-Qaeda in North Africa*)

A *US Congressional Research Service* report, in a section titled “Origins and Evolution of Al Qaeda Affiliate(s)”, states:

“The region of North and West Africa is host to at least one Al Qaeda ‘affiliate’: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM. AQIM was formed when a former armed faction in Algeria's 1990s civil conflict known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) declared allegiance to Al Qaeda in 2003, ‘united’ with Al Qaeda in 2006, and renamed itself the following year. The largest-scale AQIM attacks to date, a series of bombings targeting Algerian and international institutions, were carried out in 2007 and 2008 in Algiers and surrounding areas.” (US Congressional Research Service (10 October 2014) *Al Qaeda-Affiliated Groups: Middle East and Africa*, p19)

This section of the report also states:

“AQIM remains largely led by Algerian nationals. The group was long seen as internally divided between a more ideologically driven leadership based in northeastern Algeria, which focused on attacking Algerian state targets, and cells based in southern Algeria and the Sahel whose activities were more focused on raising funds through kidnap-for-ransom and transnational smuggling activities.” (ibid, p.19)

An *Al Jazeera* report states:

“A new armed group calling itself the ‘Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria’ has split from al-Qaeda’s North African branch and sworn loyalty to the group calling itself the Islamic State (IS), fighting in Syria and Iraq. In a communique released on Sunday, a regional commander of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) said he broke away from the group, accusing it of ‘deviating from the true path’. Gouri Abdelmalek, nom de guerre Khaled Abu Suleimane, claimed leadership of the splinter group, and was joined by a AQIM commander of an eastern region in Algeria.” (Al Jazeera (14 September 2014) *Algeria’s al-Qaeda defectors join IS group*)

The *US Department of State* country report on Algeria for the events of 2014, in a section headed “Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life”, states:

“Terrorists remained active in the country and perpetrated attacks directed towards government officials and security services personnel. The deadliest attack occurred on April 19, when a group of armed men ambushed an army convoy in Tizi Ouzou, killing 11 soldiers. AQIM claimed responsibility for the attack.” (US Department of State (25 June 2015) *2014 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Algeria*, p.2)

The *US Department of State* report on terrorism in Algeria during 2014 states:

“Within Algeria, al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Murabitoun, led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, remained active terrorist threats. AQIM’s leader, Abdelmalik Droukdel, and Belmokhtar, both Algerian nationals, remained a threat and were at-large in the region at year’s end. These groups aspired to attack Algerian security services, local government targets, and Western interests. AQIM continued attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), bombings, false roadblocks, kidnappings, and ambushes. The terrorist group Jund al-Khilafa fi Ard al-Jazayer (JAK, Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria), emerged in 2014 following a split from AQIM, and swore allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).” (US Department of State (19 June 2015) *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014 – Algeria*)

A *US Department of State* report on the activities of al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb during 2014, in a paragraph headed “Description”, states:

“The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on March 27, 2002. After the GSPC officially joined with al-Qa’ida (AQ) in September 2006 and became known as al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Department of State amended the GSPC designation on February 20, 2008, to reflect the change. Although AQIM remains largely a regionally-focused terrorist group, it has adopted a more anti-Western rhetoric and ideology, and has aspirations of overthrowing ‘apostate’ African regimes and creating an Islamic state. Abdelmalek Droukdel, aka Abu Mus’ab Abd al-Wadoud, is the group’s leader.” (US Department of State (19 June 2015) *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb*)

In a paragraph headed “Activities” this report states:

“After 2007, when AQIM bombed the UN headquarters building and an Algerian government building in Algiers killing 60 people, AQIM’s northern leadership was largely

contained to the mountainous region of northeastern Algeria, and the group's southern battalions focused mostly on its kidnapping for ransom efforts.” (ibid)

A *BBC News* report states:

“Islamist militants have killed 14 Algerian soldiers in an ambush on a convoy in mountains east of the capital Algiers, security officials say. Reuters news agency reports the troops were searching for militants in Tizi Ouzou region when they were attacked. It is believed the attack was carried out by fighters from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). It was one of the deadliest attacks on the Algerian military for several years.” (BBC News (20 April 2014) *Algeria: AQIM militants kill 14 soldiers in mountains*)

The 2015 *Freedom House* report on Algeria states:

“In 2014, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continued to attack Algerian police officers and political officials. In April, AQIM killed 14 soldiers near Tizi Ouzou – one of the deadliest attacks in recent years. French hiker Hervé Gourdel was kidnapped and beheaded in September. In December, the government announced that it had killed the perpetrator, Abdelmalek Gouri, along with two associates from the IS-affiliated Jund al-Khilafah group.” (Freedom House (10 July 2015) *Freedom in the World 2015 – Algeria*)

A report from *France 24* states:

“Al-Qaeda's North African branch claimed an ambush of an Algerian army patrol that killed at least nine soldiers, in one of the deadliest such attacks in years. The assault took place in Djebel Louh in Ain Defla province, 140 kilometres (85 miles) southwest of Algiers, on Friday night at the start of the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed the attack in an unverified statement posted online late on Saturday night. (France 24 (19 July 2015) *Al Qaeda affiliate claims deadly attack on Algerian soldiers*)

A report from the *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project* states:

“At the same time, military forces are grappling with frequent lethal incursions by Islamist groups. On July 16, nine soldiers were killed in an ambush carried out by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the northern region of Ain Defla (Radio France Internationale, 18 July 2015). This attack indicates that Islamists are attempting to extend their area of activity to outside the Kabylie, which includes the provinces of Tizi Ouzou, Boumerdes, Bouira and Be-jaia, where armed groups have mostly operated in the past few years. It also points to the increasing pressure faced by AQIM, which has to expand its outreach in order to compete with other Islamist groups, including the Daesh-aligned Jund al-Khilafa. According to local sources, AQIM's leader Abdelmalek Droukdel would have reached a compromise with Mokhtar Belmokhtar's Al Mourabitoun group to counter the rise of the Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria (Africa Confidential, 23 July 2015). Belmokhtar, who was reported dead during a US air strike in Libya in June, had previously denied claims that his group pledged allegiance to Daesh. Although the Algerian security forces have thus far succeeded in restricting the operational capacities of Islamist groups, persisting instability in neighbouring Libya and Mali may increasingly spill across the Algerian borders.” (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

(ACLED) (6 August 2015) *Conflict Trends (No. 40): Real-Time Analysis of African Political Violence, August 2015* [Algeria excerpt]

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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