

Mauritania VNSA Cases
Last Updated: 25 November 2016

torg	gname	onset	min	max
T1360	AL-QA`IDA IN THE LANDS OF THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQLIM)		1996	2012
T28	AL-QA'IDA		1989	2012
T376	FRENTE POPULAR PARA LA LIBERACION DE SAGUIA EL HAMRA Y RIO DE ORO	1975	1973	1987
T446	GROUPE SALAFISTE POUR LA PREDICATION ET LE COMBAT	2010	1996	2012

I. AL-QA`IDA IN THE LANDS OF THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQLIM)

Min. Group Date: 1996
 Max. Group Date: 2012
 Onset: NA

Aliases: Al-Qa`ida In The Lands Of The Islamic Maghreb (Aqlim), Al-Qaeda Committee In The Islamic Maghreb, Al-Qaeda Committee In The Islamic Maghreb (Aqim), Al-Qaeda Organization In The Islamic Maghreb

Part 1. Bibliography

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Part 2. Narrative

Group Formation

The group formed in 1998 as a splinter of the GIA. As of 2012, the AQIM was still active, mostly in Algeria. The group's original goal was to liberate the Algerian population from FLN rule and create an Islamic state, though now the goal seems to have shifted to be more about global jihad, in line with what al-Qaeda generally preaches. The group's ideology is solidly Salafi. Some notable violent attacks include: in June 2005 a group of then-GSPC (precursor to AQIM) fighters killed 15 soldiers in an attack on a Mauritanian army base, and in early 2003, the group kidnapped 32 German tourists.

Geography

The group primarily operates in Algeria, though it has had troops stationed in Mali and Mauritania. It has expanded somewhat into Tunisia and Libya, though most of its attacks are in Algeria and many of its bases are in northern Mali.

Organizational Structure

The leadership is complicated: when the group first split from the GIA in 1998, Hassan Hattab (a former GIA member) was the leader. In 2003, Nabil Sahraoui ousted him, though he died less than a year later. After that, the current leader, Abdelmalek Droukdal, took power, though he shared it in a hierarchy similar to al-Qaeda. Organized in different divisions (like the Sahara division), each of the group's branches had their own commanders. The group operates mostly through cells – like al-Qaeda – with many suicide bombings and smaller group attacks. However, before it allied with and became a part of al-Qaeda, the group was more concentrated in Algeria. Given that the group split from the GIA (a brutal radical Islamist organization in Algeria) specifically because of its brutality, the movement seems to have started as a political issue of a difference of opinions on how to go about realizing an Islamic state and turned into a much more militaristic movement afterwards. The group does not seem to have a formal political wing. Many of its supporters are Algerians, mostly men, who fought against the US in Afghanistan and, upon their return, joined AQIM. Apart from that, the group does not seem to recruit from a specific class or ethnic group.

Additionally, the group that was once the GSPC is now a part of al-Qaeda. Announced in 2006 by bin Laden's deputy Zawahiri and by the name switch to AQIM, the merger is representative of the GSPC's attempt at a more global approach. Bin Laden and al-Qaeda ideologically supported the group.

External Ties

The group received no external support from other countries, seeming to prefer making money through extortion and hostage-taking. However, the group does have a number of ties to other groups. As a splinter of the GIA, the GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat in English) allegedly allied itself with a number of other Islamist groups in the region such as GICT, GICM and LIFG in order to share resources. According to Harmon, there is evidence that these ties deteriorated after 2008 as the group lost some power.

Group Outcome

AQIM was prepared to offer a truce with the Mauritanian government, which may explain the absence of violence in the country between 2011-2016. The Mauritanian government also boosted military spending, reformed the military, and improved intelligence capabilities to detect the group's movements (Financial Times 2016). Governments have taken a number of different approaches to dealing with AQIM. The Algerian government has tried offering the group amnesty in exchange for disarmament, raiding and other military tactics often in conjunction with other governments, and even arresting suspected AQIM members. Other states affected by the AQIM have tried similar tactics, though few seemed to have an effect.

Part 3. Proposed Changes

Aliases: Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb; Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb; Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat; GSPC; Groupe salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat

Group Formation: 1998

Group End (Outcome): 2016 (Active)

II. AL-QA'IDA

Min. Group Date: 1989

Max. Group Date: 2012

Onset: NA

Aliases:

Part 1. Bibliography

Part 2. Narrative

Group Formation

This section is where you would include information about the group's founding date, its initial goals, ideology, and date when it first came to attention as a violent group.

Geography

This section is where you would include information about the group's operational environment including the names of areas where they operate from, the name of any external sanctuaries, the name of any cities, towns, or neighborhoods where they conduct attacks. You may also provide a generic descriptor if you cannot identify specifically where, but know what the geographic composition of the area was.

Organizational Structure

This section is where you would include information about the group's organizational structure including its leadership, membership, source of funding, and different wings.

External Ties

This section is where you would include information about the group's ties to other actors including both other armed groups as well as other countries. This includes information about external support, alliances, and splinters.

Group Outcome

This section is where you would include information about the state's response to the group, if any, and how this affects the group. You will also identify whether the group is still active, when it stopped using violence, and what happened to the group to cause it to stop using violence.

Part 3. Proposed Changes

Aliases: Any additional aliases you may have encountered

Group Formation: A new proposed formation date if different than above

Group End (Outcome): A new proposed end date with the reason for ending in parentheses

III. FRENTE POPULAR PARA LA LIBERACION DE SAGUIA EL HAMRA Y RIO DE ORO

Min. Group Date: 1973

Max. Group Date: 1987

Onset: 1975

Aliases: Polisario Front, Frente Popular Para La Liberacion De Saguia El Hamra Y Rio De Oro

Part 1. Bibliography

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Part 2. Narrative

Group Formation

The group formed in 1973. As of 2012, POLISARIO was still active, though it had yet to achieve its goal of creating an independent Sahrawi state in the Western Sahara region. The group is primarily Muslim but does not seem to justify its actions based on any particular Islamic ideology; their only goal is regime change and Islam seems to be second to that. The most notable violent attacks are all part of the 16-year-long guerilla war waged between the Moroccan government and POLISARIO (also known as the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic or SADR) between 1975 and 1991

Geography

The group operates out of Western Sahara and Tindouf, Algeria.

Organizational Structure

The group has established itself as a government in exile (SADR) based in Tindouf, Algeria, though the group has some (fluctuating) control over areas in the Western Sahara. The group has had a number of leaders. Originally, the group was led by a Sahrawi man named El Ouali Mustapha Sayed, who was one of the founding members of POLISARIO. After Sayed's death in 1976, Mohammed Abdelaziz (another founding member) led the group, though a leadership restructuring in 1991 changed the nature of his leadership from an unelected official to an elected one. After his death in 2016, Khatri Addouh became the Acting President of the SADR. The leader seemed to have ultimate veto authority but did delegate tasks to others, such as the SADR media wing. The group is fairly concentrated and started as a political movement protesting Moroccan annexation of the Western Saharan region that became violent by (from their perspective) necessity. The group has a formal political negotiation wing, which they seem to use mostly in conjunction with UN efforts towards a Western Saharan self-government referendum. Most, if not all, of POLISARIO's supporters are Sahrawi people, and all of their fighting corps seems to be young to middle-aged Sahrawi men.

External Ties

There seems to be academic consensus that POLISARIO received logistical and financial aid from Algeria, at least during the guerilla war. Other sources allege that POLISARIO allied with Cuba as well, though there's little information to support that. Finally, the UN has released statements confirming that they have provided food to the Tindouf Sahrawi camps. The group allegedly allied with AQIM in 2013 and 2014 to consolidate their drug trafficking ventures but there does not seem to be any material basis for these allegations and neither group has confirmed them.

Group Outcome

Mauritania fought against the Polisario guerrillas for several years before signing a peace agreement with them in 1979 in which they formally renounced their claim over the Western Sahara (New York Times 1979). The Moroccan government has taken a number of steps to respond to POLISARIO, from directly fighting them during the guerilla war to creating mined walls around Morocco-controlled cities in the Western Saharan region and negotiating with the rebels through the UN (though the Moroccan government promised to hold a referendum about self-governance in the region, they have yet to try).

Part 3. Proposed Changes

Aliases: The Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia al-Hamra and Rio de Oro; Frente Popular por la Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro; SADR; Saharan Arab Democratic Republic

Group Formation: 1973 (Strachan)

Group End (Outcome): 2016 (active)

IV. GROUPE SALAFISTE POUR LA PREDICATION ET LE COMBAT

Min. Group Date: 1996

Max. Group Date: 2012

Onset:

Aliases: Salafist Group For Preaching And Fighting (Gspc), Groupe Salafiste Pour La Predication Et Le Combat, Salafist Group For Call And Combat, Salafist Group For Call And Combat (Gspc), Salafist Group For Preaching And Combat, Salafist Group For Preaching And Combat [Gspc]

Part 1. Bibliography

This is an alias for AQIM.

Part 2. Narrative

Group Formation

This is an alias for AQIM.

Geography

This is an alias for AQIM.

Organizational Structure

This is an alias for AQIM.

External Ties

This is an alias for AQIM.

Group Outcome

This is an alias for AQIM.

Part 3. Proposed Changes

Aliases: This is an alias for AQIM.

Group Formation: 1998

Group End (Outcome): 2016 (active)