Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

Algeria: Information on terrorism and banditry; measures taken by the state to fight terrorism and banditry

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate indicate that there has been an "increase" in terrorist acts in Northern Algeria (Lebovich 26 Sept. 2011; El Watan 28 Aug. 2011). According to an analytical piece published in 2011 in CTC Sentinel of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point - CTC, Northern Algeria has been hit by a larger number of attacks with more victims than in previous years, more specifically since April 2011 (Lebovich 26 Sept. 2011). According to the daily Algerian newspaper El Watan, terrorist attacks "have been recorded on a daily basis" since the beginning of summer 2011 (28 Aug. 2011).

According to an article published in a Policy Brief of the Washington-based Middle East Institute by a researcher who specializes in security matters in Northern Algeria, despite an increase in violence in 2009, attacks decreased in 2010 (Roussellier Aug. 2011, 5). Sources consulted by the Research Directorate indicate that acts of violence perpetrated by Algerian armed groups have significantly decreased in comparison with the 1990s (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2011; US 5 Aug. 2010).

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been described by the Overseas Security Advisory Council of the United States (OSAC) as the most "active" Algerian armed group (US 21 Apr. 2011). AQIM has been implicated in several attacks in Algeria (Reuters 22 Nov. 2010; Freedom House 2010) and remains a major "threat" (US 21 Apr. 2011; UPI 6 July. 2010). According to the US Department of States' Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010, "most terrorist attacks were attributed to AQMI" (US 8 Apr. 2011, sec.1a). The Congressional Research Service of the United States (CRS) indicates, however, that "AQIM's cohesiveness is questioned as it may be operating as relatively autonomous and/or rival groups and has experienced defections" (US 22 Feb. 2011, 6). Liberté, a daily Algerian newspaper, states that there are internal conflicts and quarrels among leadership within AQIM (Liberté 29 Aug. 2011).

Formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat GSPC), the group assumed the AQIM name in 2007 after affiliating with Al-Qaida (UPI 6 July 2010; Human Rights Watch 16 Mar. 2010; START n.d.). The objective of AQIM is to overthrow the government of Algeria and to replace it with an Islamist state (US 22 Feb. 2011, 6; START n.d.).

According to two sources, AQIM has approximately 300 active armed members (UPI 6 July. 2010; START n.d.). Other sources indicate that in recent years, the number of armed militants in Algeria is between 400 and 800 (US 8 Apr. 2011, sec. 1; L'Expression 24 Jan. 2010). According to Liberté, in recent years, AQIM has had difficulty recruiting new members, because some were killed, while others surrendered (Liberté 29 Aug. 2011).

Some sources indicate that in Algeria, the difference between terrorists and bandits is unclear (LADDH 24 Apr. 2011; Le Monde 19 Dec. 2010). According to CRS, in order to raise funds, AQIM is involved in criminal activities such as the trafficking of drugs, arms, vehicles, cigarettes and persons (US 22 Feb. 2011, 8). Notably, AQIM is involved in kidnapping for ransom as a way of raising funds to finance its activities (ibid.;
The targets of the terrorist groups

In Algeria, security forces and government representatives, as well as foreigners, are the main targets of AQIM (US 21 Apr. 2011; Freedom House 2010). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 24 April 2011, a representative of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (Ligue algérienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme, LADDH), an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) (LADDH n.d.), explained that

[...] during the previous decade, intellectuals, journalists, politicians and artists were particularly tracked down by [terrorist groups] but in recent years, military officers, police officers and all those who assist them (leaders of administrative ridings...) are particularly targeted, as well as state institutions.

CTC Sentinel and Country Reports 2010 also note that in some cases, civilians were the targets of attacks, but do not give details on those attacks (Lebovich 26 Sept. 2011; US 8 Apr. 2011, intro.).

Areas of operations

Besides operating in Algeria, AQIM also perpetrates attacks in other North African countries (UPI 6 July 2010; Human Rights Watch 16 Mar. 2010; US 5 Aug. 2010). In Algeria, the region of Kabylie is often the scene of confrontations between security forces and terrorist groups, as well as kidnappings (LADDH 24 Apr. 2011; Le Monde 19 Dec. 2010; Reuters 22 Nov. 2010). Kabylie is considered to be one of the strongholds of AQIM (Le Monde 19 Dec. 2010; Lebovich 26 Sept. 2011). The LADDH representative noted the following:

The regions of Boumerdès, Dellys and Tizi Ouzou [in Kabylie] are strongholds favoured by the terrorists, particularly because of the mountain massifs there. Furthermore, these regions are the scene of attacks and frequent searches: this is evident from the numerous barricades on the road that are impacting the lives of citizens in these regions. (LADDH 24 Apr. 2011)

According to El Watan, there has been an increase in violence in Kabylie in August 2011 (28 Aug.2011). The French daily newspaper Le Figaro indicates that the region located east of Algiers, which is at the border of Kabylie, has been hit by an increasing number of attacks every summer; at that time of the year, it would be easier for "terrorists" to move along the coast because of the greater number of vacationers and higher traffic (Le Figaro 27 July 2011). However, according to El Watan, more recent attacks indicate that the scope of operations of AQIM has increased, moving from east Algiers to west, signs of either greater mobility or the presence of local cells (28 Aug. 2011). Furthermore, El Watan states that more recent attacks targeted places once considered more secure, operating within cities rather than aiming at isolated targets (ibid.).

In 2011, attacks took place in the cities of Bordj Menaïel (Liberté 29 Aug. 2011; El Watan 28 Aug. 2011; Le Figaro 27 July 2011), Tizi Ouzou (El Watan 28 Aug. 2011; Liberté 29 Aug. 2011) and against a military academy in Cherchell (El Watan 28 Aug. 2011; Lebovich 26 Sept. 2011). According to El Watan, 20 people were killed and more than 60 were injured in the attacks (28 Aug. 2011). Moreover, CTC Sentinel indicates that in 2011, according to Algerian media, members of the military and security forces were attacked in Azazga, in Tizi Ouzou province, in Thénia and in Ammal, in Boumerdes province, and in Bouderbala, in Bouira province, resulting in the deaths of 24 police officers (Lebovich 26 Sept. 2011). According to the same article, AQIM is also active in a "broad swath of territory" touching Mauritania, Mali and Niger (ibid.). The author of the article states that the attacks which took place in 2011 are proof that AQIM has the capacity to operate outside of Kabylie (ibid.). Moreover, according to the CTC Sentinel article, the increase in the number of suicide bombings is an indication that AQIM is able to recruit willing suicide bombers (ibid.).

Some sources go on to explain the increase in the number of attacks by the galvanizing effect of the civil war in neighbouring Libya; such a situation facilitates the acquisition of arms and ammunition, as well as recruiting (Liberté 29 Aug. 2011; Lebovich 26 Sept.2011). According to CTC, AQIM members have accused the Algerian government of supporting the Kadhafi regime in Libya (ibid.). The same article indicates also that AQIM is suspected of getting support and supplies from its other cells based in other parts of Sahel (ibid.).

Measures taken by the state to counter terrorism

Algeria cooperates with other countries in North Africa in its fight against terrorism in the region (UPI 6 July 2010; Reuters 17 Mar. 2010; Freedom House 2010).

The Parisian newspaper Le Monde reports that in December 2010, Algeria launched [translation] the "largest military intervention in recent years against the AQIM combatants, and many thousands of military
officers were mobilized and sent in the field" (19 Dec. 2010). According to the US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), another military operation took place in the fall of 2010, during which hundreds of "terrorists" were arrested and many killed (US 21 Apr. 2011). An article published on 6 July 2010, by United Press International (UPI) states that several AQIM leaders surrendered in 2010, and that the Algerian army sent 3,000 additional soldiers to support the 15,000 already posted to fight terrorism near the borders in the south of the country. In addition, according to the US Department of State, the Algerian government implemented in 2008 a program to hire 100,000 new police officers and paramilitary police officers (US 5 Aug. 2010).

According to Le Figaro, the Algerian authorities have launched "combing operations" in Kabylie and have reinforced checks in the surroundings of Algiers, which is under "a close watch" (Le Figaro 27 July 2011). CRS has also stated that the police have resumed combing operations in Tizi Ouzou, Boumerdes and Bouira and have sent additional officers in order to try to monitor possible routes and targets (26 Sept. 2011). According to Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, the Algerian authorities are also making efforts to counter radicalism and extremism by enlisting religious scholars who appeal to militants by way of radio programmes (US 18 Aug.2011).

According to Country Reports 2010, it is "difficult to verify independently information concerning violence linked to terrorism in the country" and the Ministry of Interior releases "information sporadically concerning the total number of civilian, terrorist and security force deaths" (US 8 Apr. 2011, sec.1a).

According to the article published by CTC Sentinel, some people believe that the relative success of anti-terrorism measures in recent years had made for more flexible security measures allowing AQIM to rebuild its power (Lebovich 26 Sept. 2011). According to the same article, security forces have been "strongly criticized due to their inability to counter violence despite their strong presence in Kabylie" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References


**Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** attempts to contact two analysts of the Jamestown Foundation think tank who specialize in security matters in the North of Africa were unsuccessful.

**Publications:** Algeria: Current Issues; Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria.

**Internet sites, including:** Algérie-Watch; Amnesty International; City DZ Magazine; Council on Foreign Relations; Crime & Justice International; European Country of Origin Information Network; Human Security Gateway; International Crisis Group; Jane's Intelligence Review; Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor; Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism; United Nations - Refworld, Integrated Regional Information Networks; Le Soir d’Algérie; Sources.

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