



## THE JUND AL-KHALIFA AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

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### ABSTRACT

A new armed group calling itself the “Jund al-Khalifa” (“Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria”) split from Al-Qaeda's North African branch and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS).

Jund al-Khilafa kidnapped a French tourist in Algeria and threatened that he would be killed within 24 hours if France did not stop airstrikes against the Islamic State. Two days later, he was beheaded.

The abduction was announced on the same day that the spokesman for IS, warned that it would target Americans and other Western citizens, "especially the spiteful and filthy French", after French jets joined the US in carrying out strikes in Iraq on IS targets.

The current situation constitutes a war between two coalitions: One is a coalition of terrorism led by the Islamic State and its allies, and the other is the US-led coalition against terrorism. The terrorist groups extended the war beyond the area controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and turned it into a global war.

\* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

## The Jund al-Khalifa and the Islamic State

Dr. Shaul Shay (September 2014)

The Islamic State (IS) power is focused in Iraq and Syria, but a review of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's declaration of an Islamic caliphate<sup>1</sup> in Iraq and Syria reveals that the group has much wider ambitions, and that there are groups far beyond those borders who have aligned themselves with the Islamic State.

On June 29, 2014, the Islamic State announced the formation of the caliphate and stressed the following:

"We clarify to the Muslims that with this declaration of khilāfah, it is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to the khalīfah Ibrāhīm and support him (may Allah preserve him). The legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations, becomes null by the expansion of the khilāfah's authority and arrival of its troops to their areas".

Al-Baghdadi's speech is addressed to all Muslims and refers to his fighters as "your Mujahideen brothers"; nowhere in the speech does he mention geographical locations or limits for the caliphate or jihad.<sup>2</sup>

The IS magazine, *Dabiq*, includes remarks by al-Baghdadi, in which he broadly defines the group's ambitious as well as its enemies. The world, he says, now has divided into two camps: "the camp of Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions...all being led by America and Russia and mobilized by the Jews."<sup>3</sup>

The group's enemies are defined to include the leaders of Iran and Al-Qaeda, "the crusaders in Washington" and the "secularists" leading Turkey. Followers are said to be found in **Algeria**, Sudan, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Al-Baghdadi, who has declared himself the "leader of Muslims everywhere", fell out with Al-Qaeda in 2013 over his decision to expand into Syria, where his followers carried out beheadings, crucifixions, and mass executions Al-Baghdadi's call for all jihadists to swear allegiance to his so-called caliphate is dividing Al-Qaeda's branch in the Maghreb.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2014/06/isis\\_announces\\_formation\\_of\\_ca.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2014/06/isis_announces_formation_of_ca.php)

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Lundquist, The Islamic State's global reach, The Long War Journal, September 5, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Why the Islamic state represents a dangerous turn in terror threat, The Wall Street Journal, August 18, 2014.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is a mostly Algerian and Mauritanian group that has been present in northern Mali since 2003, as well as a source of thousands of young fighters who travel to Syria and Iraq. Tuaregs and Arabs joined AQIM in Mali, and youths from Senegal, Niger, and other countries have also reportedly joined the group's fight.

AQIM is split between those who view al-Baghdadi as their new leader and those who remain under the banner of the parent Al-Qaeda organization led by Ayman al-Zawahiri. The infighting started in mid-July 2014 when AQIM chief Abdelmalek Droukdel (alias Abou Moussaab Abdelouadoud) decided not to ally his group with al-Baghdadi's terrorist organization. He refused to recognize the Islamic State and instead renewed his allegiance to al-Zawahiri. AQIM released a statement that said: "We confirm we still adhere to our allegiance to our sheikh and emir Ayman al-Zawahiri. This is a sharia-based bay'ah, which we are committed to, and we haven't seen anything that would make us revoke it".<sup>4</sup>

### **The Jund al-Khalifa, or "The Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria"**

A new armed group calling itself the "Jund al-Khalifa" or "Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria" split from Al-Qaeda's North African branch and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS).

In a communique released on September 14, 2014, Gouri Abdelmalek (alias Khaled Abu Suleimane), an AQIM regional commander, claimed leadership of the splinter group. "You have in the Islamic Maghreb men if you order them they will obey you," Suleimane said in reference to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-professed "caliph" of the IS group.<sup>5</sup>

French radio reported that the group claimed Toulouse gunman, Mohamed Merah, a French citizen of Algerian origin, as a member after he murdered seven people in southwestern France in March 2012.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Kidnapping and Assassination of Herve Gourdel**

Jund al-Khalifa kidnapped Herve Gourdel and threatened that he would be killed within 24 hours if France did not stop airstrikes against the Islamic State.

The abduction was announced on the same day that the spokesman for the IS, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, warned that it would target Americans and other Western citizens, "especially the spiteful and filthy French", after French jets joined the US in carrying out strikes in Iraq on IS targets.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jemal Oumar, North Africa: Maghreb Al-Qaeda Torn Apart By ISIS, AllAfrica' August 15, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Algeria's al-Qaeda defectors join IS group, Al Jazeera, September 13, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> French tourist Herve Gourdel abducted by Algeria militants, BBC News Africa, September 23, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> ISIL ally abducts Frenchman in Algeria, Al Jazeera, September 23, 2014.

The Jund al-Khalifa group said in a video on September 23, 2014, that it had abducted Gourdel in the mountainous Tizi Ouzu region in northern Algeria, where AQIM is active.

The Algerian Interior Ministry said that Gourdel and two Algerian companions had been driving through mountains near the village of Ait Ouabane when they were stopped by gunmen who subsequently let the Algerians go but took the Frenchman captive.<sup>8</sup>

Gourdel was shown squatting on the ground, flanked by two hooded men with assault rifles, as he asks French president, Francois Hollande, to intervene. He said that he arrived in Algeria on September 20 and was abducted a day later. "I am in the hands of Jund al-Khalifa. This group is asking me to ask you [Hollande] to not intervene in Iraq. I ask you to do everything to get me out of this bad situation and I thank you."

A massive manhunt had been under way in Algeria in a bid to rescue Gourdel.

On September 24, 2014 members of the group beheaded Gourdel in what it said was a response to France's action against Islamic State militants in Iraq.

In a video released by his captors, Gourdel is seen kneeling with his arms tied behind his back before four masked militants who read out a statement in Arabic criticizing France's intervention. They then push him on his side and hold him down. The video does not show the beheading but a militant later holds the head up to the camera.<sup>9</sup>

"This is why the Caliphate Soldiers in Algeria have decided to punish France, by executing this man, and to defend our beloved Islamic State," one of the militants says in the statement.<sup>10</sup>

The release of the beheading video could have been timed to coincide with Barack Obama's address to the General Assembly, in which the US president urged the world to come together to defeat a jihadist "network of death" in Iraq and Syria.<sup>11</sup>

This is the first terrorist attack carried out by the group, which was formed in mid-September 2014.

### **The French Response**

France launched air attacks on IS fighters after joining a US-led coalition to "degrade and destroy" the threat posed by the group.

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<sup>8</sup> French tourist Herve Gourdel abducted by Algeria militants, BBC News Africa, September 23, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Markey, Algerian militants behead kidnapped French tourist, Reuters, September 24, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Johnston and Kim Willsher, French tourist beheaded in Algeria by Isis-linked jihadis, the Guardian, September 24, 2014.

Following the kidnapping, French President Francois Hollande's office said that he had spoken to Algerian Prime Minister, Abdelmalek Sellal, by phone and that there was "total cooperation" to try to find Mr Gourdel." "Authorities are mobilized and no hypothesis is being discarded," the French government added.<sup>12</sup>

The French Foreign Ministry and the President acknowledged that Gourdel had been abducted and that the video was genuine. "We will do everything we can to liberate hostages," said France's Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius., "but a terrorist group cannot change France's position."<sup>13</sup>

France raised the threat level for 30 of its embassies throughout the Middle East and Africa in response to what Interior Minister, Bernard Cazeneuve, called "yet another demonstration of the barbarism of these terrorists".<sup>14</sup>

French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, said there would be "no discussion, no negotiation" with the kidnapers. "If you give in, if you go back one inch... you give [terrorism] this victory," he told French radio while on a visit to Germany.<sup>15</sup>

On September 24, 2014 France's President Francois Hollande confirmed the death of Gourdel and vowed that French military operations against Islamic State would continue.

"Our compatriot has been killed cruelly and in a cowardly way by a terrorist group. Herve Gourdel was assassinated because he was French," Hollande said at the United Nations. "My determination is total, and this aggression only strengthens it. France will continue to fight terrorists everywhere. The operations against Islamic State will continue."<sup>16</sup>

## Summary

The "Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria" is the latest group to break with AQIM and side with al-Baghdadi after veteran Algerian jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar's group, the "Signed-in-Blood Battalion", pledged allegiance to the IS.

The militants said that they were responding to the IS call to attack citizens involved in strikes on Iraq and that they would kill Gourdel unless France ended its military operation.

The Filipino terrorist group, Abu Sayyaf, which pledged allegiance to the IS, said on September 24, 2014 that it would [kill two kidnapped German tourists](#) that have apparently been held by the group since April 2014 if Germany does not abandon its support for military action against the IS.

<sup>12</sup> French tourist Herve Gourdel abducted by Algeria militants, BBC News Africa, September 23, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> ISIL ally abducts Frenchman in Algeria, Al Jazeera, and September 23, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> French tourist Herve Gourdel abducted by Algeria militants, BBC News Africa, September 23, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Markey, Algerian militants behead kidnapped French tourist, Reuters, September 24, 2014.

Western diplomats and intelligence sources say they believe there are fewer than 10 Western hostages still held by Islamic State. The group has recently beheaded two Americans, James Foley and Steven Sotloff, and one Briton, David Haines, and threatened to kill another Briton, Alan Henning. This is the first terrorist attack of the group that was formed in mid-September 2014.

The current situation constitutes a war between two coalitions: one is a coalition of terrorism led by the Islamic State and its allies, and the other is the US-led coalition against terrorism. The terrorist groups extended the war beyond the area controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and turned it into a global one.

Earlier this month, AQIM chief, Abdelmalek Droukdel, refused to recognize the self-proclaimed caliphate and instead renewed allegiance to the parent Al-Qaeda organization led by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Without AQIM, al-Baghdadi and his group are desperate for friends. After failing to attract AQIM, the Islamic State is now trying to gain the support of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, which it believes is key to a takeover of the Maghreb and Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

Last week Egyptian, Algerian and Tunisian intelligence officials met in Tunis to discuss security reports about the transfer of IS to Libya. There are reports indicating the return of Libyan jihadists and others from Syria to their home countries in order to create branches of IS in North Africa.<sup>18</sup>

The recent violence in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya demonstrates the threat to the region. Maghreb stability and security are now threatened in a way that requires swift and decisive intervention from the international community before it is too late.

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<sup>17</sup> Mawassi Lahcen, ISIS woos Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, [Magharebia](#), and July 31, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Jamel Arfoui, Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia spokesman backs ISIS, Magharebia, July 7, 2014.