



## MOJWA - A splinter group of AQIM

*Structural changes in global jihadi groups in the Sahal region a hint of things to come?*

With the formation of the *Jamaat Tawhid Wal Jihad Fi Garbi Ifriqiya* (The Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa - MOJWA) on 10 December 2011, young militants from al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) declared an internal uprising against the leadership of AQIM and broke away from their parent organization. While espousing the same goals, their means are different; the young militants seek to finance their activities using kidnappings for ransom.<sup>1</sup>

The new group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of three European aid workers from a refugee camp near Tindouf, Algeria in October 2011. The kidnapping had previously been presumed to have been carried out by al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which has claimed several other kidnappings in 2011 and has been active since 2007 in Niger, Mali, Algeria and Mauritania. The abduction claim came as a high-level meeting in Nouakchott of ten European and African ministers from the Mediterranean area met to discuss the situation in the region.

Kidnapping in the Sahal is not a new phenomenon. At present 12 Europeans are still being held by militants throughout the region<sup>2</sup>. The emergence of MOJWA and other splinter groups that may form is likely to complicate negotiations to free the hostages.

AQIM (or its offshoot) is expecting to get at least a million dollars in ransom money for each of the captives, enabling the group to recruit impoverished young locals and equip them with vehicles and weapons. Tourists are seen as especially profitable targets, and many Western governments have issued travel warnings against visiting these region.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile African countries have pressured Western governments to refuse to pay the ransom, and instead to help track down the captives and rescue them (dead or alive).

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> AFP, "North African al-Qaida warns against hostage rescue bid", 13 January 2012; 30 December 2011;

<sup>3</sup> AFP, "N.African Al-Qaeda warns against hostage rescue bid", 12 January 2012 ;



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Like AQIM, it is likely MOJWA will exploit the excess of weapons looted from the fall of the Ghaddafi regime to assist their operational activities. Many weapons have leaked through southern borders into the hands of militants in Mali and throughout North West Africa.<sup>4</sup> Alliances with Libyan militants may also help the group to establish a foothold in southern Sahel. Authorities have expressed concern that the threat may move further south into Senegal, Guinea and Burkina Faso.<sup>5</sup>

## Bottom Line:

In 2012 we may see a greater threat of kidnappings in the Sahel region from other splinter groups but it may also indicate that the main leaders of groups such as AQIM will have less power.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> North Africa United Journal, "The Unity Movement for Jihad in West Africa (Mujao) have claimed the kidnapping of three Western hostages", 13 December 2011;

<sup>5</sup> Algiers Post, "Al-Qaeda Threatens to Spread Jihad Across West African Nations", 16 January 2012;

<sup>6</sup> Middle East Online, "AQIM's black African-led splinter group threatens West Africa", 22 December 2011;



## **Profile: Jamaat Tawhid Wal Jihad Fi Garbi Ifriqiya**

*The Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA). The group is also known as the Unity Movement for Jihad in West Africa (Mujao).*

On 10 December 2011, a previously unknown group calling themselves the *Jamaat Tawhid Wal Jihad Fi Garbi Ifriqiya* (The Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa - MOJWA) claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of three aid workers at an Algerian refugee camp on 23 October 2011 near Tindouf.<sup>7</sup>

In an audio message the hostages two Spaniards and an Italian identified themselves in their own languages; the male hostage had his foot bandaged whilst the two women were dressed in blue gowns and yellow headscarves. In the background of the video, masked gunmen were seen guarding the hostages.<sup>8</sup>



## **Ideology**

MOJWA is believed to be a splinter group of AQIM. Its stated goal is the imposition of sharia (Islamic law) across the whole of West Africa. In a statement released in English and Hausa on the 10 December 2011, the group threatened to spread jihad beyond North African deserts and establish a foothold in sub-Saharan West Africa.<sup>9</sup> The group also claims inspiration from 19<sup>th</sup> century West African Moslem leaders, who fought European colonial powers.<sup>10</sup>

7 Echorouk, "Tawhid and Jihad splinter group claims kidnap of three Europeans south of Algeria", 4 January 2012;

8 AFP, "Al-Qaeda splinter group' claims kidnap of Westerners", 10 December 2011;

9 Middle East Online, "AQIM's black African-led splinter group threatens West Africa", 22 December 2011;

10 www.Strategypage.com, "Algeria: Al Qaeda And The Savage Splinter", 29 December 2011;



## Organizational Structure and Leadership

MOJWA is unique in that its leadership is comprised of black African, despite a history of tension between Arabs and black Africans. In the past, perceived Arab disregard for blacks had given rise to inter-organizational tension and resentment; another possible reason for the split. By declaring their motivation to carry out jihad throughout Western Africa, MOJWA is striving to show they can be more extreme and effective than the Arab-dominated AQIM<sup>11</sup>.

The presumed leader of MOJWA is Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, who appeared in the video claiming responsibility for the kidnapping of the European hostages. Kheirou also threatened the French government where he declared an open war against France due to its aggression against Muslims. Kheirou also emphasized his intentions to launch Jihad against all of Africa until the Sharia laws are implemented<sup>12</sup>. On 28 December 2011, Mauritania issued an international arrest warrant for the capture of Kheirou.<sup>13</sup>

Another of the group's presumed leaders is Khadim Ould Semane, who formed an alliance with Kheirou after the two of them escaped from a Mauritanian prison in 2006. Other suspected members include Algeria's Ahmed al-Talmasi and Sultan Ould Badi of Mali.<sup>14</sup>

The group is believed to be comprised of other ex- AQIM fighters who are Sahrawis and West Africans, as well as Algerians. Authorities believe the group may have links with Boko Haram militants in Nigeria.<sup>15</sup>

MOJWA's primary modus operandi is kidnapping.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> alakhbar, "Walad Muhammad Al-Khayri threatens France and keeps in his custody the western citizens", 4 January 2012;

<sup>13</sup> AFP, "Mauritania issues arrest warrant against Al-Qaeda suspects", 29 December 2011;

<sup>14</sup> Magrehebia, "Al-Qaeda splinter group reveals internal erosion", 30 December 2011;

<sup>15</sup> North Africa United Journal, "The Unity Movement for Jihad in West Africa (Mujao) have claimed the kidnapping of three Western hostages", 13 December 2011.



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## Related Articles:

1. Echorouk, "Tawhid and Jihad splinter group claims kidnap of three Europeans south of Algeria", 4 January 2012.
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3. North Africa United Journal, "The Unity Movement for Jihad in West Africa (Mujao) have claimed the kidnapping of three Western hostages", 13 December 2011.
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