

Car Bombs Follow Suicide Attack in Algeria

Date: August 20, 2008

Location: Bouira, Algeria

The Incident

Two car bombs exploded within fifteen minutes of each other around 6 AM outside a military command post and the neighboring Hotel Sophie in the town of Bouira, approximately 60 miles southeast of Algiers. The first bomb was powerful and seriously damaged the military compound and barracks. Four soldiers outside the regional military command center were injured in the blast.

The second bomb detonated near the hotel as a passenger bus drove by, according to the state-run Algerian press agency APS.¹ The blast destroyed the bus and shattered the windows of the hotel and other surrounding buildings. The bus was transporting employees of SNC-Lavalin, a Canadian-based multinational corporation, from the hotel to a water-filtration and pumping-plant construction project which the company supervises.² Twelve employees were killed on the bus and 15 were injured. All of the casualties are Algerian.

A ministry communiqué announced that the official fatality count is 12 people, while 42 people, including 7 military personnel and a policeman, were injured.³ The bombings took place a day after a vehicle-borne suicide bomber drove into a police academy in the town of Issers, killing between 43 and 48 people and wounding 45.

Location



¹ "Blasts Kill 12 and Damage a Military Compound in Algeria," *The New York Times*, 20 Aug. 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/21/world/africa/21algeria.html>

² Ibid.

³ "12 Killed in Algeria Bombs," *Gulf Daily News*, 21 Aug. 2008. <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/Story.asp?Article=226901&Sn=WORLD&IssueID=31154>

Modus Operandi

An eyewitness who lives near the military barracks, Halim Osbani, said a suicide bomber drove his vehicle into the building, and that the bomber's limbs were hurled meters away from the explosion.⁴ The detonation method of the second bomb outside the hotel is unclear; it may have been set off by a suicide bomber, a timer, or by remote control.

Images from the Scene



Source: "Blasts Kill 12 and Damage a Military Compound in Algeria," *The New York Times*, 20 Aug. 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/21/world/africa/21algeria.html>



Source: "Twin Car Bomb Attacks Kill 11 People in Eastern Algeria," *The Daily Star*, 21 Aug. 2008. http://dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=2&article_id=95240

⁴ "12 Killed in Algeria Blasts," *Gulf Daily News*, 21 Aug. 2008. <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/Story.asp?Article=226901&Sn=WORLD&IssueID=31154>

The Perpetrators

Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility for the car bombings via an audio recording by Salah Abu Mohammad, one of the group's officials. The group also claimed responsibility for a recent spate of attacks, including the suicide bombing at a police academy on 19 August that killed 48 people, as well as ambushes against a military commander and his escort on 17 August that killed 11 people.

Analysis

The government has been battling an AQIM-led insurgency since 1992 when the military-backed government canceled elections that an Islamist party was primed to win.⁵ Formerly called the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, the group changed its name to Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb after declaring its loyalty to al-Qaeda and officially merging with the transnational terrorist organization in January 2007. The group has carried out a string of bombings in Algeria since December 2006, the deadliest being the 17 August attack and the December 2007 attacks against a government office and a UN building, which killed an estimated 62 people and injured scores more.

AQIM has embraced a new set of tactics following its merger with al-Qaeda. The group previously focused on launching surprise attacks against military and police posts in remote locations, but now executes suicide attacks and bombings in urban areas. The apparent change in attack methodology is undoubtedly linked to the merger, signifying al-Qaeda's influence over the strategy and ideology of the group. It is also apparent that the leaders of the Algerian-based group are in accord with the radical clerics' fatwas (usually linked to al-Qaeda) that permit suicide attacks, an issue that is highly disputed among Islamic scholars elsewhere. Such a stark shift in operational methods highlights that the hardliners who advocate suicide attacks are in command of operations on the ground.⁶

Implications

AQIM's unremitting wave of attacks challenges the Algerian government's claim that amnesty programs and military offensives have devastated the group's strength.⁷ Although the group's ranks have been significantly reduced through these initiatives, there is the possibility that hundreds of Algerian insurgents who have been fighting in Iraq may return to join AQIM in Algeria. Furthermore, recruitment of youth from Algerian ghettos has steadily increased since 2005.⁸ How the government addresses its social and economic dilemmas will play a role in aiding its counterterrorist efforts.

⁵ "Blasts Kill 12 and Damage a Military Compound in Algeria," *The New York Times*, 20 Aug. 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/21/world/africa/21algeria.html>

⁶ "12 Killed in Algeria Blasts," *Gulf Daily News*, 21 Aug. 2008. <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/Story.asp?Article=226901&Sn=WORL&IssueID=31154>

⁷ "The Terror Warning from Algeria," *TIME*, 12 Dec. 2007.

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1693741,00.html>

⁸ *Ibid.*

AQIM's threat is not only domestic, but it also has an international dimension. The group has repeatedly announced its desire to globalize its Jihad, its first signal attack being the bombings against the UN offices in Algiers in December 2007. Since then, the group has supplemented its local insurgency with sporadic attacks against the employees and infrastructure of foreign consulates and businesses.⁹ Although AQIM's attacks are likely to remain confined to Algeria and its neighbors, as well as Iraq, French intelligence foiled a terror cell directed by the AQIM plotting to carry out attacks in France in September 2005. The recent revival of AQIM attacks, and their desire to expand operations to other North African countries and to France, is indeed a cause for international concern.

⁹ "The Terror Warning from Algeria," *TIME*, 12 Dec. 2007.
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1693741,00.html>