

Algeria: Covid-19 and Combating Violent Extremism –

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In March 2020, shortly after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Al Qaeda leadership issued a document; [“The way forward”](#). Al Qaeda presented this pandemic as a divine punishment against the United States and the Muslim world where “obscurity and moral corruption has become widespread.” The Islamic State (IS), released two documents, in its magazine Al Naba, issue no. [225](#) and [226](#), in which it provided hygiene measures for the Muslims to protect themselves from the virus. Like Al Qaeda, IS considers the virus a divine punishment that has installed fear among the western powers, and Muslims are encouraged to take advantage of the situation and the weakness of these countries to increase their attacks against them.

In this context, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the only jihadi organization still somehow active in Algeria, released in May 2020 two audio files by two members of its “Judicial authority”, i.e. Abu Al Barra Ahmed and Al Hassan Rashid Al Bulaydi, the head of this “authority”. With these two statements, they attempted to re-mobilize popular support in Algeria, a country where AQIM has been otherwise considerably weakened in the past few years. IS affiliates in Algeria have been considered extinguished since 2016 after a massive military crackdown.

The start of the Hirak in February 2019 did not change anything to the situation of AQIM as there was “no power nor security vacuum” from which it could benefit, as it happened in other Arab countries that faced popular uprisings. As a matter of fact, it was rather the opposite that happened as the Algerian authorities reinforced their security measures and police/military deployments all over the country during the uprising.

Thus, when the pandemic broke out in early 2020, AQIM was already an extremely weakened and marginalized organization. No major attack has taken place in the country except one suicide bombing by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), in February 2020, and [a terrorist incident killing two Algerian soldiers](#). A review of the published information between February and May 2020 shows that the Algerian security services conducted uninterrupted operations against AQIM indicating that the outbreak of the coronavirus did not at all affect the fight against terrorism nor that it changed AQIM position either.

Thus, while the outbreak of the virus seems to have favored terrorist attacks in the Sahel, where AQIM affiliate, the JNIM and the ISGS, IS affiliate there, have stepped up their attacks, in the case of Algeria, there was no such thing. It also confirms a trend observed in the past two years of a [dramatic decrease in terrorist attacks in the country](#).