

ISIS-Sahel

a.k.a. ISIS–Greater Sahara



SAHIL WILAYAH

OVERVIEW

AS OF JUNE 2026

ISIS-Sahel is a branch of ISIS that operates primarily in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Originally associated with the al-Qa'ida-aligned group al-Murabitun, it broke away in 2015 to pledge allegiance to ISIS, which acknowledged it as a branch in 2022. ISIS-Sahel seeks to use violence to replace governments in the Sahel with rule by Islamic law, in line with ISIS's strategic direction and goals.

ISIS-Sahel began conducting attacks in the Sahel in 2016. It has targeted Burkinabe, French, Malian, Nigerien, and Russian forces. In October 2017, the group ambushed a US-Nigerien military patrol, killing four US military personnel. Since 2019, the branch has kidnapped dozens of people for ransom, including a US citizen in October 2025.

Operating Area

Primarily Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

Members

Approximately 2,500 fighters; recruits from minority ethnic groups in the Sahel

Tactics And Targets

ISIS-Sahel conducts attacks using ambushes, armed assaults, mortars, roadside bombs, vehicle-borne explosives, and suicide bombers. It also engages in kidnap-for-ransom operations that target foreigners and locals and has killed at least one foreign hostage, Canadian citizen Kirk Woodman. ISIS-Sahel usually operates in mobile cells that sometimes join forces to conduct attacks. The group targets local security forces, civilians, government officials, humanitarian workers, and schools. Since 2019, the group has competed for resources and territory with Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, an al-Qa'ida-affiliated group that operates in the same area.

Terrorist Group Designation

The US State Department designated ISIS-Sahel a foreign terrorist organization in May 2018.

KEY LEADERS



Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi [DECEASED]

Leader from 2015 to 2021, killed by French strike August 2021



ISIS-Sahel *(continued)*

NOTABLE ATTACKS

28 January 2026

Niamey, Niger

ISIS-Sahel attacks the Diori Hamani International Airport, killing at least four Nigerien soldiers.

25 May 2025

Tahoua region, Niger

ISIS-Sahel attacks two Nigerien Army bases, killing 58 soldiers.

9 August 2020

Koure National Park, Niger

ISIS-Sahel kills six French aid workers and two tourist guides.

9 January 2020

Chinagodrar, Niger

ISIS-Sahel attacks a Nigerien military base near the Niger-Mali border, killing 89 Nigerien soldiers.

4 October 2017

Tongo, Niger

Nearly 100 ISIS-Sahel militants ambush a joint US-Nigerien patrol, killing four US and six Nigerien personnel.

