

Ansar al-Dine (AAD)



OVERVIEW

AS OF APRIL 2026

Ansar al-Dine (AAD) was an al-Qa'ida-aligned armed group that aspired to create an Islamic state in Mali, targeting Malian civilians and government forces as well as foreign troops and peacekeepers. AAD formed in November 2011 as a Tuareg rebel group under Iyad Ag Ghali and in mid-2012 began an association with AQIM, in part because of their shared desire to implement sharia law in Mali. After a coup in 2012 toppled the Malian Government, AAD seized control of territory in northern Mali until a French intervention in 2013 ousted the militants, leading AAD to retreat and regroup. In mid-2016, AAD reemerged and in a matter of days conducted four attacks that killed 21 people and injured 35. In 2017, AAD merged with three other extremist groups to form Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), and Ghali was named the overall JNIM amir.

Operating Area

Central and northern Mali

Members

Unknown

Tactics And Targets

Since 2017, AAD has carried out many of its attacks alongside other JNIM component groups conducting ambushes, roadside bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and suicide bombings. Fighters have used small arms, light and heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, landmines, mortars, and rockets. Historically the group has targeted Malian civilians and security forces, French troops, and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

Terrorist Group Designation

The US State Department added the group's leader, Iyad Ag Ghali, to its list of specially designated global terrorists in February 2013 and designated AAD a foreign terrorist organization one month later.



Ansar al-Dine (AAD) *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS



Iyad Ag Ghali

AAD amir from its founding in November 2011 until AAD's merger with JNIM in March 2017; JNIM amir since March 2017



Omar Hould Hamaha [DECEASED]

Former commander and spokesperson; killed by a French airstrike in March 2014



Alghabass Ag Intalla

Political chief and spokesperson from February 2012 to January 2013; left the group in 2013 to form Mouvement Islamique de l'Azawad (MIA)

NOTABLE ATTACKS

19 July 2016

Nampala, Mali

AAD militants attack a Malian military base, killing at least 17 soldiers and kidnapping five and injuring 35 other individuals.

12 February 2016

Kidal region, Mali

AAD members conduct a suicide VBIED against a UN base, killing six Guinean peacekeepers.

March 2012

Village of Aguelhok, Kidal region, Mali

AAD members kill 82 Malian soldiers and kidnap 32 other individuals.

