French forces kill al-Qaeda’s Algeria leader

Droukel, an explosives expert, had been sentenced to death in 2013 for terror attacks

France said its forces have killed the leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, in a blow to the group behind a string of deadly attacks across the troubled Sahel region.

Who?

Abdelmalek Droukdel was killed in northern Mali near the Algerian border, where the group has bases from which it has carried out attacks and abductions of Westerners in the sub-Saharan Sahel zone. “Many close associates” of the Algerian — who commanded several affiliate jihadist groups across the lawless region — were also “neutralised”, she added.

Important points

- **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)** emerged from a group started in the late 1990s by radical Algerian Islamists, who in 2007 pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda network.
- The group has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks on troops and civilians across the Sahel, including a 2016 attack on an upmarket hotel and restaurant in Burkina Faso, which killed 30 people, mainly Westerners.
- The death of Droukdel — once regarded as Algeria’s enemy number one — could leave AQIM in disarray, French military sources suggested.
- France has deployed more than 5,000 troops to combat jihadist groups in the region — a largely lawless expanse stretching over Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, where drugs and arms flow through porous borders.
- Northern Mali is the site of frequent clashes between rival armed groups, as well as a haven for jihadist activity.
- In 2012, key cities fell under the control of jihadist groups linked to al-Qaeda, who exploited an ethnic Tuareg-led rebel uprising, leading to a French-led military intervention.
- **According to the UN**, Droukdel was an explosives expert and manufactured devices that killed hundreds of civilians in attacks on public places.

He was sentenced to death in Algeria in 2013 for his involvement in the bombings of a government building and offices of the UN’s refugee committee in Algiers that killed 26 people and wounded 177.

Droukdel’s death is a symbolic coup for the French, a military source said.

Born in 1971 in a poor neighbourhood of Algiers, Droukdel — also known as Abou Moussaab Abdelouadoud — took part in the founding in Algeria of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).