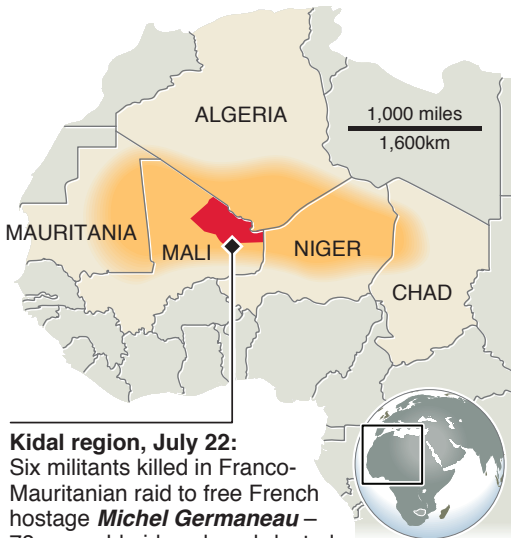


France declares war against Al Qaeda

France has declared war on Al Qaeda, and matched its fighting words with a first attack on a base camp of the terror network's North African branch, after militants killed a French aid worker taken hostage in April

Approximate extent of operations of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)



Kidal region, July 22:

Six militants killed in Franco-Mauritanian raid to free French hostage **Michel Germaneau** – 78-year-old aid worker abducted April 22 in Niger

July 24: Al Qaeda says Germaneau (right) executed in retaliation for raid. Group also holds two Spanish aid workers captured Nov 2009

▶ AQIM formed in 1998 as ***Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat***. Changed name in 2007

▶ Thought to number 500 fighters, led by **Abu Musab Abdul Wadud**

▶ AQIM operates in vast, semi-arid **Sahel** region where security is sparse

▶ Mounted series of high-profile attacks on **Algeria's** government and security forces in 2007

▶ More recently, group has carried out kidnappings and attacks on Western targets, mainly in **Mauritania**

