

“Many dead” in strike on Algeria gas plant

Algerian forces have raided a remote Sahara gas plant in an attempt to free dozens of foreign workers held by militants with ties to Mali’s rebel Islamists. The militants claim strafing by Algerian helicopters killed 35 hostages and 15 kidnappers



MOKHTAR BELMOKHTAR

- Born in Algeria in 1972, gained combat experience in Afghanistan before returning home in 1992 to join Islamic militancy
- Senior commander of al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) before breaking away to form own group in late 2012 after fallout with rival leaders
- Linked to string of kidnappings of foreigners in North Africa in last decade
- Heavily involved in smuggling diamonds and cigarettes
- Sentenced by Algerian court to life imprisonment in absentia in connection with killing of 10 Algerian customs agents in 2007

Group called Masked Brigade, led by *Mokhtar Belmokhtar* – dubbed as “The Uncatchable” by French intelligence – claims attack on gas facility is in retaliation for France’s intervention in Mali



■ **In Amenas:** Gas field jointly operated by state oil company *Sonatrach*, Britain’s *BP* and Norway’s *Statoil*

■ **Jan 16, In Amenas:** Islamist militants attack complex, killing one Briton and one Algerian. **41 foreign workers held, including British, U.S., Japanese, French and Norwegian nationals**

Picture: AFP / Getty Images

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