

# Exhibit 49

June 2015 Pentagon Statement



# U.S. Airstrike in Libya Targets Planner of 2013 Algeria Attack

By ERIC SCHMITT

[Continue reading the main story](#) [Share This Page](#)

WASHINGTON — The United States carried out an airstrike in [Libya](#) early Sunday against the mastermind of the [2013 terrorist seizure of an Algerian gas plant](#) that left 38 foreign hostages dead, American and Libyan officials said on Sunday.

The Libyan government issued a statement Sunday night saying that the airstrikes killed the terrorist leader, [Mokhtar Belmokhtar](#), and “a number” of Libyan terrorists in the eastern part of the country.

American officials confirmed that Mr. Belmokhtar was the target of the strike, carried out by multiple American F-15E fighter jets. But they expressed caution about his fate, saying forensic proof was needed to declare with certainty that Mr. Belmokhtar had been killed. Given the likely extent of the damage — multiple bombs were dropped on the target, officials said — that determination could take some time unless terrorist websites issue an official statement of mourning.

The Libyan statement said: “The Libyan government announces that American planes undertook action that resulted in the death of the wanted terrorist Mokhtar Belmokhtar and a number of Libyans belonging to one of the terrorist groups in Eastern Libya, after consultation with the Libyan interim government to take action on terrorist leadership present on Libyan soil.”

## Photo

An undated image of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an Algerian militant leader reported to have been killed in an American airstrike. Credit via Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

If confirmed, the death of Mr. Belmokhtar would be a major counterterrorism victory for the United States against one of the world’s most wanted militants.

“I can confirm that the target of last night’s counterterrorism strike in Libya was Mokhtar Belmokhtar,” said Col. Steven H. Warren, a Defense Department spokesman. He said Mr. Belmokhtar “has a long history of leading terrorist activities” and “maintains his personal allegiance to [Al Qaeda](#).”

The United States government, he said, was “continuing to assess the results of the operation and will provide more details as appropriate.”

Mr. Belmokhtar is an Algerian militant with a long history in the Sahel region, which falls on the southern flank of the Sahara stretching from Senegal to Chad. Although his direct operational ties to Al Qaeda may have lessened, his stature as a terrorist leader has grown.

Called the Prince by his entourage, he was considered the last major surviving figure among the jihadists in North Africa. All the others have been killed in French raids. He is certainly the most feared among them



because of his operational and planning skills.

Born in [Algeria](#), he fought in the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. He joined a militant group based in Algeria and took up smuggling and kidnapping for ransom; one terrorist raid included the [abduction of a Canadian diplomat](#) in late 2008.

Mr. Belmokhtar's success in maneuvering largely unhindered for years in the deserts of northern Mali and southern Algeria and Libya was a result of his masterful integration into the local populations. He married a woman from Timbuktu, Mali; spoke the local dialects; and shared some of his rich takings from more than a decade of kidnapping Westerners.

The Canadian diplomat, Robert Fowler, a former United Nations special envoy, [was released](#) after four months. He said in a 2013 interview, "I was always impressed by the quiet authority he exhibited." Mr. Fowler met with Mr. Belmokhtar several times during his captivity in the desert.

Among his militant names is Laouar, or the One-Eyed, because it is said he may have lost an eye while fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, where he learned combat skills. A major cigarette trafficker, he is also known as Marlboro Man.

Mr. Belmokhtar became a leading figure in Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or A.Q.I.M., the Qaeda affiliate in North Africa. He was the most experienced of four leaders of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb until he broke with the group to lead Al Mulathameen Battalion, which was officially [designated as a foreign terrorist organization](#) by the State Department in 2013.

Photo



An Algerian soldier near the gas plant where a terrorist attack in January 2013 resulted in the deaths of 38 foreign hostages, including three Americans. Mokhtar Belmokhtar led the attack. Credit Louafi Larbi/Reuters

In January 2013, Mr. Belmokhtar led the attack on a gas plant in Algeria that resulted in the death of 38 civilians, including three Americans. Four months later, his group joined with a West African terrorist faction — the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa — to carry out [attacks in Niger](#) that killed at least 20 people, the State Department said.

In August 2013, Mr. Belmokhtar's faction and the West African extremists announced that they were joining to form yet another group, Al Murabitoun. But the merger fell apart, and the other militants split from Mr. Belmokhtar's group. This year they announced they had joined the Islamic State.

Mr. Belmokhtar has remained loyal to Al Qaeda. His last public statement was a rebuke of his colleagues who had gone to the Islamic State, who he said had "violated the foundation" of their organization.

Western diplomats say that intelligence agencies have been tracking Mr. Belmokhtar in and out of Libya at least since a late 2012 spotting in Tripoli. But the targeting by American air power came up in just the past 48 to 72 hours, a senior American official said. Officials confirmed that American surveillance drones had been part of the effort to track the terrorist leader.

"It was a strike on an extremist leadership target whom we believed posed a threat against American and Western interests," said one official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential intelligence reports.

The attack marked the first time the American military has carried out any kind of airstrike in Libya since the [NATO operation there in 2011](#) that helped oust Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

American commandos, though, have carried out other operations in Libya since the NATO air war.

In October 2013, American forces [captured a Libyan militant](#) who had been indicted in 2000 for his role in the 1998 bombings of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The militant, born Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai and known by his nom de guerre, Abu Anas al-Libi, had a \$5 million bounty on his head.

In June 2014, American commandos operating under the cover of night seized the man suspected of leading the [deadly 2012 attack on the United States Mission](#) in Benghazi, Libya, ending a manhunt that had dragged on for nearly two years and inflamed domestic and international politics. About two-dozen Delta Force commandos and two or three F.B.I. agents descended on the outskirts of Benghazi in predawn raid to grab the suspect, [Ahmed Abu Khattala](#). No shots were fired, and the suspect was removed from Libya to a United States Navy warship in the Mediterranean, on which he was transported to Washington for prosecution.

The airstrike against Mr. Belmokhtar came as the group's chief ideological rival, the Islamic State, also known as ISIL or ISIS, has expanded its presence inside Libya, alarming Western officials because of the country's proximity to Europe, across the Mediterranean.

Four years after the removal of the Qaddafi regime, the near-collapse of the Libyan government has left no central authority to check the group's advance or even to partner with Western military efforts against it.

Two armed factions, each with its own paper government, are fighting for control, and each has focused more on internal quarrels than on defeating the Islamic State.