

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	458
Land:	Libanon
Kilde:	United States Department of State
Titel:	Country Reports on Terrorism 2014 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations – al-Qa'ida
Udgivet:	19. juni 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	3. september 2015



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Publisher United States Department of State

Publication Date 19 June 2015

Cite as United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: al-Qa'ida*, 19 June 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5587c73115.html> [accessed 31 August 2015]

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aka al-Qa'eda; Qa'idat al-Jihad (The Base for Jihad); formerly Qa'idat Ansar Allah (The Base of the Supporters of God); the Islamic Army; Islamic Salvation Foundation; The Base; The Group for the Preservation of the Holy Sites; The Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Places; the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders; the Usama Bin Laden Network; the Usama Bin Laden Organization; al-Jihad; the Jihad Group; Egyptian al-Jihad; Egyptian Islamic Jihad; New Jihad

Description: Designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on October 8, 1999, al-Qa'ida (AQ) was established by Usama bin Laden in 1988. The group helped finance, recruit, transport, and train Sunni Islamist extremists for the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union. AQ's strategic objectives are to remove Western influence and presence from the Muslim world, topple "apostate" governments of Muslim countries, and establish a pan-Islamic caliphate governed by its own interpretation of Sharia law that ultimately would be at the center of a new international order. These goals remain essentially unchanged since the group's 1996 public declaration of war against the United States. AQ leaders issued a statement in February 1998 under the banner of "The World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders," saying it was the duty of all Muslims to kill U.S. citizens, civilian and military, and their allies everywhere. AQ merged with al-Jihad (Egyptian Islamic Jihad) in June 2001. Many AQ leaders have been killed in recent years, including bin Laden and then second-in-command Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, in May and August 2011, respectively. Al-Rahman's replacement, Abu Yahya al-Libi, was killed in June 2012. Leader Ayman al-Zawahiri remained at-large at year's end.

Activities: AQ and its supporters conducted three bombings that targeted U.S. troops in Aden in December 1992, and claim to have shot down U.S. helicopters and killed U.S. soldiers in Somalia in 1993. AQ also carried out the August 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, killing up to 300 individuals and injuring more than 5,000. In October 2000, AQ conducted a suicide attack on the USS Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, with an explosive-laden boat, killing 17 U.S. Navy sailors and injuring 39.

On September 11, 2001, 19 AQ members hijacked and crashed four U.S. commercial jets – two into the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon near Washington, DC, and the last into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania – leaving over 3,000 individuals dead or missing.

In November 2002, AQ carried out a suicide bombing of a hotel in Mombasa, Kenya that killed 15. In 2003 and 2004, Saudi-based AQ operatives and associated violent extremists launched more than a dozen attacks, killing at least 90 people, including 14 Americans in Saudi Arabia. Al-Zawahiri claimed responsibility on behalf of AQ for the July 7, 2005 attacks against the London public transportation system. AQ likely played a role in the unsuccessful 2006 plot to destroy several commercial aircraft flying from the UK to the United States using liquid explosives. AQ claimed responsibility for a 2008 suicide car bomb attack on the Danish embassy in Pakistan that killed six, as retaliation for a Danish newspaper re-publishing cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad and for Denmark's involvement in Afghanistan.

In January 2009, Bryant Neal Vinas – a U.S. citizen who traveled to Pakistan and allegedly trained in explosives at AQ camps, was captured in Pakistan, extradited to the United States, and charged with providing material support to a terrorist organization and conspiracy to commit murder. Vinas later admitted his role in helping AQ plan an attack against the Long Island Rail Road in New York and confessed to having fired missiles at a U.S. base in Afghanistan. In September 2009, Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan immigrant and U.S. lawful permanent resident, was charged with conspiracy to use weapons of mass destruction, to commit murder in a foreign country, and with providing material support to a terrorist organization as part of an AQ plot to attack the New York subway system. Zazi later admitted to contacts with AQ senior leadership, suggesting they had knowledge of his plans. In February 2010, Zazi pled guilty to charges in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

In a December 2011 video, AQ leader al-Zawahiri claimed AQ was behind the August kidnapping of American aid worker Warren Weinstein in Pakistan. Weinstein remained in captivity until his death in January 2015 in a U.S. counterterrorism operation in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In September 2014, AQ leader al-Zawahiri and other AQ leaders announced the establishment of Pakistan-based AQ in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Two days after the announcement, two Pakistani warships were attacked in Karachi; AQIS took responsibility for plotting the attack almost one week later. The thwarted plan included commandeering the ships and missile system to attack nearby American warships. AQIS claims the orders came from al-Zawahiri. In February 2014, AQ removed the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant as an affiliate.

Strength: In South Asia, AQ's core has been seriously degraded. The death or arrest of dozens of mid- and senior-level AQ operatives – including bin Laden in May 2011 – have disrupted communication, financial, facilitation nodes, and a number of terrorist plots. However, AQ serves as a focal point of "inspiration" for a worldwide network of affiliated groups – AQAP, AQIM, al-Nusrah Front, and al-Shabaab – and other violent Sunni Islamist extremist groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkar i Jhangvi, Harakat ul-Mujahadin, and Jemaah Islamiya. Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Haqqani Network also have ties to AQ. Additionally, supporters and associates worldwide who are "inspired" by the group's ideology may be operating without direction from AQ central leadership, and it is impossible to estimate their numbers.

Location/Area of Operation: AQ was based in Afghanistan until Coalition Forces removed the Afghan Taliban from power in late 2001. Since then, the group's core leadership is believed to reside largely in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. AQ affiliates – al-Nusrah Front, AQAP, AQIM, and al-Shabaab – operate in Syria and Lebanon, Yemen, the Trans-Sahara, and Somalia, respectively.

Funding and External Aid: AQ primarily depends on donations from like-minded supporters, as well as from individuals who believe that their money is supporting a humanitarian cause. Some funds are diverted from Islamic charitable organizations.

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