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COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM 2017 - CHAPTER 5 - ANSAR AL-ISLAM

aka Ansar al-Sunna; Ansar al-Sunna Army; Devotees of Islam; Followers of Islam in Kurdistan; Helpers of Islam; Jaish Ansar al-Sunna; Jund al-Islam; Kurdish Taliban; Kurdistan Supporters of Islam; Partisans of Islam; Soldiers of God; Soldiers of Islam; Supporters of Islam in Kurdistan

Description: Ansar al-Islam (AAI) was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on March 22, 2004. AAI was established in 2001 in the Iraqi Kurdistan region with the merger of two Kurdish terrorist factions that traced their roots to the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan. On May 4, 2010, AAI's leader Abu Abdullah al-Shafi'i was captured by U.S. forces in Baghdad; he remained in prison at the end of 2017. On December 15, 2011, AAI announced a new leader: Abu Hashim Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman al Ibrahim. AAI seeks to expel western interests from Iraq and establish an independent Iraqi state based on its interpretation of Sharia law.

Activities: AAI has conducted attacks against a wide range of targets including Iraqi government and security forces, and U.S. and Coalition Forces. AAI has carried out numerous kidnappings, murders, and assassinations of Iraqi citizens and politicians. In 2012, the group claimed responsibility for the bombing of the Sons of Martyrs School in Damascus, which was occupied by Syrian security forces and pro-government militias; seven people were wounded in the attack.

During summer 2014, part of AAI issued a statement pledging allegiance to ISIS, although later reports suggest that a faction of AAI continues to oppose ISIS. In 2016 and 2017, AAI continued to operate in Syria.

Strength: Precise numbers are unknown.

Location/Area of Operation: AAI is active primarily in northern Iraq, but also maintains a presence in western and central Iraq. Since 2011, AAI has operated in Syria.

Funding and External Aid: AAI receives assistance from a loose network of associates in Europe and the Middle East.