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Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Army of Islam (AOI)

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aka Jaysh al-Islam; Jaish al-Islam

Description: Designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on May 19, 2011, the Army of Islam (AOI), founded in late 2015, is a Gaza-based terrorist organization responsible for numerous terrorist acts against the Israeli and Egyptian governments and British, New Zealand, and U.S. citizens. The group, led by Mumtaz Dughmush, subscribes to a violent extremist Salafist ideology.

Activities: AOI is responsible for a number of rocket attacks on Israel, the 2006 kidnapping of a U.S. and a New Zealander journalist in Gaza, and the 2007 kidnapping of a British citizen in Gaza. AOI also carried out the early 2009 attacks on Egyptian civilians in Cairo and Heliopolis, Egypt, and planned the January 1, 2011, attack on a Coptic Christian church in Alexandria that killed 25 and wounded 100. On July 28, 2012, AOI released a statement that its member Nidal al 'Ashi was killed fighting in Syria, and in November 2012 announced that it had launched rocket attacks on Israel in a joint operation with the Mujahidin Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem. In August 2013, an Israeli official reported that AOI leader Dughmush was running training camps in Gaza. In August 2014, Israeli forces reportedly intercepted and killed several AOI fighters allegedly planning to attack Israel.

In September 2015, AOI reportedly released a statement pledging allegiance to ISIS. In the short post attributed to the group, AOI declared itself an inseparable part of ISIL-Sinai Province, the ISIS-branch in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

In 2016, AOI continued to express support for ISIS. The group released a video in October in an effort to encourage ISIS fighters defending Mosul.

Strength: Membership is estimated in the low hundreds.

Location/Area of Operation: Egypt, Gaza, and Israel.

Funding and External Aid: AOI receives much of its funding from a variety of criminal activities in Gaza.

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