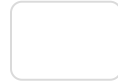


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What Is Jaish Al-Adl, The Separatist Group Targeting Iranian Forces?

Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan has been rocked by a spate of deadly attacks targeting security forces in recent months.

The attacks have been claimed by Jaish al-Adl, a Baluch separatist militant group that is believed to be operating out of neighboring Pakistan.

On April 3, over a dozen militants attacked military and police installations in two separate cities in the province, killing at least 16 Iranian security personnel. It was the deadliest coordinated attack that had Jaish al-Adl carried out in years.

Six days later, the group [ambushed a police convoy](#) in Sistan-Baluchistan and killed five security officers.

What Is Jaish al-Adl?

Jaish al-Adl, or "Army of Justice" in Arabic, emerged in 2012 as the successor to Jundullah, a Baluch militant group.

Jundullah, formed around 2003, carried out sporadic bomb and gun attacks against Iranian security forces. But the group was largely dismantled following a brutal government crackdown and the capture and execution of Jundullah leader Abdolmalek Rigi in 2010.

Rigi's brother, Abdulrauf, established Jaish al-Adl several years later. But he soon left the group and formed Jaish al-Nassr, a separate militant group. The militant leader was killed in Pakistan in 2014, with Baluch

separatists accusing Iran of assassinating him. Two years later, Jaish al-Nassr merged with Jaish al-Adl.

Jaish al-Adl is led by Salahuddin Farooqi and is designated as a terrorist organization by Iran and the United States.

Iran alleges that Jaish al-Adl is based in Pakistan and has criticized Islamabad for not cracking down on the group. Pakistan denies that Jaish al-Adl has an organized presence on its territory.

What Does It Want?

Many Jaish al-Adl fighters are members of Iran's ethnic Baluch minority. The group claims that it is fighting for the rights of the Baluchis and seeking independence from the Islamic republic.

Members of the Baluch minority, many of whom are Sunni Muslims in Shi'a-majority Iran, have long faced disproportionate discrimination and violence at the hands of the authorities. Many live in Sistan-Baluchistan, one of Iran's poorest provinces.

Baluchis make up around 5 percent of Iran's population of some 88 million. But they account for around 20 percent of all executions in the country.

During the nationwide antiestablishment protests that rocked Iran in 2022, Sistan-Baluchistan was the scene of the deadliest government crackdown. On September 30 that year, referred to as "Bloody Friday," nearly 100 protesters were gunned down.

Even as the protests died down across most of Iran by early 2023, thousands of people across Sistan-Baluchistan continued to hold weekly protests for months against the clerical regime.

Daniele Garofalo, a researcher and analyst on terrorism and armed groups, says Jaish al-Adl has portrayed itself as a defender of the Sunni Baluch community against "Shi'a oppression."

Who Funds Jaish al-Adl?

Iran over the years has accused its foes of arming Jaish al-Adl, including the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia.

"Attributing the Baluch resistance solely to American weapons or Saudi funding ignores Iran's decadeslong oppressive policies and its use of force to maintain control over the Baluch," said Kiyra Baloch, a Pakistani journalist and commentator who tracks militancy in the region.

Baloch said that "influential and wealthy Baluch" based in the Arab Persian Gulf states are Jaish al-Adl's primary financial backers. Another "substantial" source of revenue, he said, was the smuggling of drugs. Iran sits on a major opium-smuggling route linking Afghanistan to Europe.

Weapons left behind after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 "fell into the hands of various militant groups," including Jaish al-Adl, according to Baloch, who adds that the separatist group has also procured weapons via the black market.

Garofalo agrees that Tehran's allegations that Jaish al-Adl is backed by foreign states are "highly unfounded." He also notes that the group recently launched an initiative to collect donations in the form of cryptocurrency on its website and Telegram channel.

Is The Group Becoming More Dangerous?

Jaish al-Adl has intensified its attacks against Iranian security forces in recent months. The group claimed an attack in December that killed 11 officers at a police station in Rask, a city in Sistan-Baluchistan. In January, one police officer was killed in an attack on another Rask police station.

Garofalo said Jaish al-Adl is "becoming more brazen in their attacks" and attributed it to the group's increasing recruitment and support from the local population.

He said Jaish al-Adl's attack on April 3 in Rask and the city of Chabahar suggested that its fighters were "on a suicide mission," a tactic passed down from Jundullah.

The authorities have been unable to curb the rising number of attacks in Sistan-Baluchistan, a vast and barren region. "Iran struggles to contain these groups because they operate in extremely remote areas where they have a fair amount of support and the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps] has little control," Garofalo said.

The group is active along Iran's porous 900-kilometer-long border with Pakistan.

Fatemeh Aman, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute, said that "rising social discontent, aggravated by the government's response to recent protests, might have contributed to an increase in terrorist incidents."

"Typically, poverty, despair, and harsh treatment by the central government create fertile conditions for sympathizing with or joining militia groups," Aman said.

Nevertheless, she adds that Molavi Abdolhamid, Iran's top Sunni cleric and an influential Baluch figure, has "broad sympathy" from members of the community. Abdolhamid, she said, "firmly rejects violence."

Will The Attacks Impact Iran-Pakistan Relations?

In January, Iran carried out drone and missile strikes against what it said were Jaish al-Adl targets over the border in Pakistan.

Tehran said the move was retaliation for the group's attacks in Sistan-Baluchistan in December and January.

In response, Pakistan carried out air strikes against what it said were Pakistani Baluch separatists inside Iran.

Militant activity along the border has long been a source of tension between Iran and Pakistan.

Baloch said the rising number of attacks by Baluch militant groups in Iran as well as in Pakistan "will only deepen the mistrust between the two neighbors."

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