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Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: al-Nusrah Front

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aka Jabhat al-Nusrah; Jabhet al-Nusrah; The Victory Front; al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant; al-Nusrah Front in Lebanon; Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham min Mujahedi al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad; Support Front for the People of the Levant; Jabhat Fath al-Sham; Jabhat Fath al Sham; Jabhat Fatah al-Sham; Jabhat Fateh al-Sham; Front for the Conquest of Syria; The Front for liberation of al Sham; Front for the Conquest of Syria/the Levant; Front for the Liberation of the Levant; Conquest of the Levant Front; Fatah al-Sham Front; Fateh Al-Sham Front

Description: Al-Nusrah Front (ANF) is al-Qa'ida's affiliate in Syria and was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on May 15, 2014. It is led by Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, aka al-Julani. The group was formed in late 2011 when then-al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) – now ISIS – leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi sent al-Jawlani to Syria to organize terrorist cells. In 2013, the group split from AQI and became an independent entity. ANF's stated goal is to oust Syria's Assad regime and replace it with a Sunni Islamic state. The group is present throughout Syria, but is concentrated in and controls a portion of territory in northwest Syria, where it is active as an opposition force, in local governance, and in external plotting.

Activities: ANF has been active in a number of operations against other factions in the Syrian conflict. In December 2013, ANF abducted 13 nuns from a Christian monastery in Maaloula, holding them for three months. In 2014, ANF also carried out multiple suicide bomb attacks and kidnappings, including the abduction of UN peacekeepers.

ANF continued fighting in Syria throughout 2015, attacking other opposition groups and kidnapping civilians. In March, ANF claimed an attack on the intelligence headquarters of Syria's air force in Aleppo, killing an estimated 20 members of the security force. In June, ANF claimed responsibility for the massacre of the Druze village Qalb Lawzeh in Idlib province, Syria, which killed 20. In July, the group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing of an army outpost in Aleppo, which killed at least 25 soldiers and allied militia.

In 2016, the group carried out attacks in Aleppo and in other parts of Syria controlled by the Syrian army, killing both military officials and civilians. In July 2016, ANF leader Jawlani announced the group had adopted a new name, Jabhat Fath al-Sham, and would no longer be known as Al-Nusrah Front. The Department of State amended the designation in November 2016 to add additional aliases, including Jabhat Fath al-Sham.

In early 2017, ANF joined with four smaller Syrian factions and created "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham" (HTS) as a vehicle to advance its position in the Syrian insurgency and further its own goals as al-Qa'ida's affiliate in Syria. ANF continued to dominate and operate through HTS in pursuit of its objectives. In October, ANF launched an attack near the Turkish border against the Syrian army, killing several soldiers. The group carried out multiple suicide bombings in Damascus, including suicide attacks using vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices in March. ANF took control of Idlib in July 2017, and it exercised an effective military monopoly over other local opposition groups there, as it continued plotting against U.S. and allied interests.

Strength: ANF has an estimated 18,000 members.

Location/Area of Operation: The group is based in Syria and Lebanon.

Funding and External Aid: ANF receives funding from a variety of sources, including kidnapping-for-ransom payments and donations from external Gulf-based donors.

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