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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 5 - Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

Aka IMU

Description: Designated as an FTO on September 25, 2000, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) seeks to overthrow the Uzbek government and establish an Islamic state. For most of the past decade, however, the group has recruited members from other Central Asian states and Europe. Despite its stated objective to set up an Islamic state in Uzbekistan, the group primarily operates along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and in northern Afghanistan, where it fights against international forces. Several IMU members are also suspected of having traveled to Syria to fight with terrorist groups.

The IMU has had a decade-long relationship with al-Qa’ida (AQ), the Taliban, and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan. Top IMU leaders have integrated themselves into the Taliban’s shadow government in Afghanistan’s northern provinces.

In August 2015, IMU leader Usman Ghazi publicly announced the group’s shift of allegiance to ISIS. Numerous IMU members, including possibly Ghazi himself, were subsequently reported to have been killed as a result of hostilities between ISIS and the IMU’s former Taliban allies.

Activities: Since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, the IMU has been predominantly focused on attacking international forces in Afghanistan. In late 2009, NATO forces reported an increase in IMU-affiliated FTFs in Afghanistan. In 2010, the IMU claimed responsibility for the September 19 ambush that killed 25 Tajik troops in Tajikistan. On June 8, 2014, IMU claimed responsibility for an attack on Karachi’s international airport that resulted in the deaths of at least 39 people.

Throughout 2015, the IMU actively threatened the Afghan government, primarily in the northern part of the country. In April 2015, the group released a video showing IMU members beheading an individual they claimed to be an Afghan soldier and threatened to behead Hazara (a historically persecuted ethnic group in Afghanistan) hostages, in supposed retaliation for the Afghan security forces capture of several female IMU members. In 2016, Uzbek refugee Fazliddin Kurbanov was sentenced by a U.S. federal court to 25 years in prison for planning a bomb attack in Idaho. Kurbanov had been in online contact with members of IMU, seeking advice on how to make explosives and discussing attacking U.S. military bases.

In June 2016, a faction of the IMU announced its continued commitment to the Taliban and AQ, marking a split with its leader Ghazi and the rest of the group, which announced its loyalty to ISIS in 2015 and has since cooperated with Islamic State’s Khorasan Province. IMU did not claim responsibility for any attacks in 2019.

Strength: Precise numbers are unknown.

Location/Area of Operation: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Central Asia, and Turkey

Funding and External Aid: The IMU receives support from a large Uzbek diaspora, terrorist organizations, and donors from Europe, Central and South Asia, and the Middle East.

ecoi.net summary:

Brief description of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Excerpt of chapter 5 of the country report on terrorism 2019)



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