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Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 5 - al-Qa'ida

Aka al-Qa'eda; Qa'idat al-Jihad (The Base for Jihad); formerly Qa'idat Ansar Allah (The Base of the Supporters of God); the Islamic Army; Islamic Salvation Foundation; The Base; The Group for the Preservation of the Holy Sites; The Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Places; the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders; the Usama Bin Laden Network; the Usama Bin Laden Organization; al-Jihad; the Jihad Group; Egyptian al-Jihad; Egyptian Islamic Jihad; New Jihad.

Description: Designated as a FTO on October 8, 1999, al-Qa'ida (AQ) was established in 1988. The group helped finance, recruit, transport, and train fighters for the Afghan resistance against the former Soviet Union. AQ strives to eliminate Western influence from the Muslim world, topple "apostate" governments of Muslim countries, and establish a pan-Islamic caliphate governed by its own interpretation of Sharia law that would ultimately be at the center of a new international order. These goals remain essentially unchanged since the group's 1996 public declaration of war against the United States. AQ leaders issued a statement in 1998 under the banner of "The World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders," saying it was the duty of all Muslims to kill U.S. citizens – civilian and military – and their allies everywhere. AQ merged with al-Jihad (Egyptian Islamic Jihad) in June 2001. Many AQ leaders have been killed in recent years, including Usama bin Laden in May 2011. As of 2018, AQ's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, remained at-large. In a 2018 video message, al-Zawahiri, called for jihad against the United States after the U.S. Embassy in Israel moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Activities: AQ and its supporters conducted three bombings targeting U.S. troops in Aden, Yemen, in December 1992, and claimed responsibility for shooting down U.S. helicopters and killing U.S. soldiers in Somalia in 1993. AQ also carried out the August 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killing up to 300 individuals and injuring more than 5,000. In October 2000, AQ conducted a suicide attack on the USS Cole in the port of Aden with an explosive-laden boat, killing 17 U.S. Navy sailors and injuring 39 others.

On September 11, 2001, 19 AQ members hijacked and crashed four U.S. commercial jets – two into the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon, and the last into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Nearly 3,000 civilians, police, and first responders were killed. The dead included U.S. and foreign citizens from at least 77 countries.

In a December 2011 video, al-Zawahiri claimed AQ was behind the kidnapping of U.S. aid worker Warren Weinstein in Pakistan. Weinstein was held captive until his death in January 2015.

In September 2015, five senior AQ leaders were released from Iranian custody in exchange for an Iranian diplomat kidnapped in Yemen. Of the five, Saif al Adel and Abu Mohammed al Masri are wanted for the August 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

In January 2016, al-Zawahiri publicly released two audio messages and one seven-page statement, condemning the Government of Saudi Arabia and its role in the Syrian conflict, encouraging AQ activity in Southeast Asia – especially Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and acknowledging support for its affiliate in Syria, al-Nusrah Front. On October 3, Abu al-Faraj al-Masri, a senior AQ leader involved in planning attacks, was killed in Syria.

In February 2017, AQ senior leader Abu al-Khayr al-Masri was killed in Syria. In September 2017, a U.S. citizen was convicted in New York of charges related to supporting AQ to attack a U.S. military base in Afghanistan in 2009 using two truck bombs. In October 2017, al-Zawahiri released a video calling for jihadists around the world to conduct attacks against the United States. Al-Zawahiri released multiple recordings and videos in 2018 in which he continued to call for attacks against the United States.

Strength: In South Asia, AQ's core has been seriously degraded. The death or arrest of dozens of mid- and senior-level AQ operatives, including Usama bin Laden, has disrupted communication, financial support, facilitation nodes, and several terrorist plots. AQ, however, remains a focal point of "inspiration" for a worldwide network of affiliated groups. Among them, alQa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Nusrah Front, al-Shabaab, al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), and other terrorist groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkar i Jhangvi, Harakat ul-Mujahideen, and Jemaah Islamiya. In September 2014, al-Zawahiri announced the establishment of AQIS. Ongoing counterterrorism efforts by South Asian governments have seriously degraded AQIS. The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Haqqani Network also have ties to AQ. In addition, supporters and associates worldwide who are "inspired" by the group's ideology may operate without direction from AQ central leadership.

Location/Area of Operation: AQ was based in Afghanistan until Coalition Forces removed the Taliban from power in late 2001. Subsequently, the group's core leadership was based largely in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (formerly known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas), until Pakistani military operations in 2014 significantly degraded the group there. AQ affiliates – al-Nusrah Front, AQAP, AQIM, al-Shabaab, and AQIS – operate in Syria and Lebanon, Yemen, the TransSahara, Somalia, and Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively.

Funding and External Aid: AQ primarily depends on donations from like-minded supporters, and from individuals who believe that their money is supporting a humanitarian cause. Some funds are diverted from Islamic charitable organizations.

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ecoi.net summary:
Brief description of al-Qa'ida (Excerpt of chapter 5 of the country report on terrorism 2018)

Countries:
Afghanistan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen

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