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Jabhat al-Nusra

(Also known as: Al-Nusra Front; Al-Nusrah Front;
Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant;
Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham Min Mujahideen al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad;
Jabhat al-Nusrah; Jabhet al-Nusra;
Support Front for the People of Syria from the Mujahideen of Syria in the Places of
Jihad; The Victory Front)

This statement is based on publicly available information about Jabhat al-Nusra. To the Australian Government's knowledge, this information is accurate and reliable and has been corroborated by classified information.

Basis for listing a terrorist organisation

Division 102 of the *Criminal Code* provides that for an organisation to be listed as a terrorist organisation, the Attorney-General must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that the organisation:

- (a) is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, or assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur); or
- (b) advocates the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur).

Details of the organisation

Jabhat al-Nusra is a Syria-based Sunni extremist group that adheres to the global jihadist ideology of al-Qa'ida. In late 2011, al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) sent operatives to Syria for the purpose of establishing Jabhat al-Nusra to fight the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. The group publicly announced its presence in Syria in a January 2012 video statement. In early April 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and confirmed the group has received funding and operatives from AQI. The group has received direct endorsement from online extremist forums aligned with al-Qa'ida and leading salafist/jihadist figures. Previously, Jabhat al-Nusra had attempted to play down its extremist ideology and conceal its links to AQI to avoid alienating the Syrian population.

Jabhat al-Nusra releases videos of its attacks and operations through its media network al-Manara al-Bayda (the White Minaret). These videos are uploaded to a pro-al-Qa'ida jihadist forum, Shumukh al-Islam.

Objectives

Jabhat al-Nusra's stated objectives are to remove the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and once this is achieved, create a salafist-oriented Sunni Islamist state in Syria. Jabhat al-Nusra also intends to establish an Islamist caliphate across the Levant. Jabhat al-Nusra believes the fight against the Syrian regime is supported by religious texts, and its fighters hope to fulfill 'God's wish' for an 'Islamic caliphate'.

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Through the experiences of its members who have fought in Iraq and the group's close links to AQI's leadership, Jabhat al-Nusra has learned lessons from AQI's experiences in Iraq and has been careful to avoid the latter's mistakes—beheadings, sectarian violence and indiscriminate civilian casualties—that resulted in the loss of support from the Iraqi population.

Jabhat al-Nusra also intends to expel the minority Alawite and Christian communities from Syria. This is substantiated by statements made by the group, including 'The blessed operations will continue until the land of Syria is purified from the filth of the nusayris (Alawites) and the Sunnis are relieved of their oppression'.

To achieve these objectives, Jabhat al-Nusra undertakes improvised explosive device (IED) (including suicide), sniper and small-arms attacks, as well as kidnapping and executions, against regime security and military targets. Jabhat al-Nusra also attacks individuals and groups it perceives are supporting the regime and has targeted urban areas, resulting in indiscriminate civilian deaths.

Anticipating a new phase of fighting after the fall of the regime, Jabhat al-Nusra plans to unite all jihadists, including fighters from Iraq, under one umbrella to fight the secular opposition.

Leadership

Jabhat al-Nusra is led by Abu-Muhammad al-Jawlani (an alias), who has links to AQI. In early April 2013, AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi announced Jabhat al-Nusra would merge with AQI under the banner of the 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria'. In early April 2013, Abu-Muhammad al-Jawlani pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and denied any knowledge of the merger with AQI.

As Jabhat al-Nusra has a presence throughout Syria, regional leaders are responsible for controlling their respective cells.

Membership

Jabhat al-Nusra's current membership is difficult to ascertain, with one estimate placing it between 6000 and 10 000 members. The group consists primarily of Syrian nationals, but includes foreign fighters from the Levant, North Africa and Europe. A small number of foreign fighters are from Western countries. Several of Jabhat al-Nusra's leaders and operatives have previous experience as AQI operatives in Iraq.

Recruitment and funding

Jabhat al-Nusra has very strict recruitment procedures and requires new recruits to pledge allegiance to the group. Potential recruits are required to fight on the front-line and must be vouched for by Jabhat al-Nusra commanders before they are accepted. Due to Jabhat al-Nusra's high level of operational security, it only recruits individuals who have undergone a vetting process.

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Jabhat al-Nusra is well-funded; benefactors include AQI and Gulf-based salafist supporters.

Terrorist activity of the organisation

Directly or indirectly engaged in the doing of terrorist acts

Jabhat al-Nusra has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks. Whilst in most cases specific targets and types of casualties are not known, attacks are conducted primarily in urban areas with no regard for indiscriminate harm. Significant attacks either claimed by, or reliably attributed to, Jabhat al-Nusra include the following:

- 21 February 2013: multiple vehicle suicide bombings in Damascus, Syria, killed between 50 and 100 people. On the same day, a triple vehicle bombing in northern Damascus killed 22 people;
- 24 January 2013: suicide vehicle bombing targeting the Syrian Military Intelligence headquarters in Damascus, Syria, killed 53 people;
- 5 November 2012: suicide vehicle bombing in Hama, Syria, killed at least 50 people;
- 12 October 2012: an assault on an air defence base near the village of Al-Taana in Ar-raqqah, Syria, killed at least three people;
- 8 October 2012: suicide vehicle bomb and small arms attack on an air force intelligence office in Harasta, Rif Dimashq, Syria, killed an unknown number of people;
- 3 October 2012: four vehicle bombs that detonated outside security and government buildings in Aleppo, Syria, killed 40 people;
- 26 September 2012: two suicide vehicle bombs that detonated close to General Staff Headquarters in Damascus, Syria, killed four people;
- 3 August 2012: Jabhat al-Nusra claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and execution of a Syrian Government TV presenter;
- 27 June 2012: an attack on a pro-Syrian Government news station with small arms and bombs in Drousha, south of Damascus, Syria, killed seven people;
- 29 May 2012: 13 men were found shot dead in a field near Deir ez Zour, Syria. Jabhat al-Nusra claimed responsibility for executing the men, stating they were regime soldiers;
- 19 May 2012: a suicide vehicle bombing targeting an air force intelligence hospital in Deir ez Zour, Syria, killed nine people;
- 10 May 2012: a double suicide vehicle bombing killed 55 people in Damascus, Syria;
- 27 April 2012: a suicide bomb targeting security force personnel in the Maidan district of Damascus, Syria, killed ten people;
- 24 April 2012: an IED attached to a military vehicle was detonated as it passed the Iranian Cultural Centre in Damascus, Syria, wounding three people;
- 17 March 2012: a double vehicle bombing targeting a local police headquarters and an air force intelligence office in Damascus, Syria, killed at least 27 people;

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- 10 February 2012: a double vehicle bombing targeting a military intelligence and security force facility in Aleppo, Syria, killed at least 25 people; and
- 6 January 2012: a suicide bombing targeting a busload of security force personnel in Damascus, Syria, killed 26 people.

Directly or indirectly fostering and/or advocating the doing of terrorist acts

Jabhat al-Nusra has its own media outlet, al-Manara al-Bayda (the White Minaret), which it uses to make documentary-style propaganda videos, often featuring car bombs and interviews with suicide bombers. Through the White Minaret, Jabhat al-Nusra's message is disseminated via the jihadist forum Shumukh al-Islam.

Jabhat al-Nusra has issued more than 200 media statements, primarily through the White Minaret. While most of these statements have been in the form of claims of responsibility for attacks, some early media statements address the rationale for the group's actions. These include:

- 24 January 2012: Jabhat al-Nusra leader Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani announced in a video that Jabhat al-Nusra would 'avenge the honour and the spilled blood of those who have been wronged [by the government]' and that jihad was 'the only way that we can end the cloud of oppression and injustice'.
- 27 February 2012: Jawlani stated, 'know what has befallen your comrades in the past will befall you ... For every town or district that is attacked we will conduct an explosive attack against the state security apparatus'.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above information, ASIO assesses Jabhat al-Nusra is directly and/or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in, or fostering the doing of terrorist acts involving threats to human life and serious damage to property.

In the course of pursuing its objectives, Jabhat al-Nusra is known to have committed or threatened action that:

- causes, or could cause, serious damage to property or the death of persons or endangers a person's life or creates serious risk to a person's safety;
- are done with the intention of advancing Jabhat al-Nusra's political, religious or ideological causes; and
- are done with the intention of intimidating sections of the public globally.

This assessment is corroborated by information from reliable and credible intelligence sources.

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Other relevant information

Links to other terrorist groups or networks

In early April 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra released a video statement in which leader Abu-Muhammad al-Jawlani, on behalf of Jabhat al-Nusra, pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. In this same statement, al-Jawlani confirmed that AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi provided Jabhat al-Nusra with funding and operatives to conduct operations in Syria.

Proscription by the UN and other countries

On 11 December 2012, the United States amended the Foreign Terrorist Organisation and Executive Order 13224 designations of AQI to include Jabhat al-Nusra as an alias.

On 15 March 2013, Australia listed Al-Nusrah Front (Jabhat al-Nusrah) as a terrorist entity under the Charter of the United Nations Act 1945.

Peace and mediation processes

Jabhat al-Nusra is not engaged in any peace or mediation process.

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