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Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula
(Also known as: Al-Qa'ida in Yemen; Ansar al-Sharia; AQAP; AQY)

This statement is based on publicly available details about al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). 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, 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

AQAP was known previously as al-Qa'ida in Yemen (AQY), which was founded after the escape of 23 extremist detainees from a high-security government correctional facility in Sana'a in February 2006. In a January 2009 statement, AQY announced a change of name to AQAP, the name of the previous al-Qa'ida network in Saudi Arabia, which was dismantled by Saudi authorities in 2006. In the same statement, AQAP announced two Saudi former Guantanamo Bay detainees had joined the group as senior members. One of them has since surrendered to Saudi authorities.

In an audio recording released in April 2011, AQAP official Abu Zabayr Adl al-Abab said '[t]he name Ansar al-Sharia is what we use to introduce ourselves in areas where we work, to tell people about our activity and goals, and that we are on the path of God.'

Objectives

In May 2010, AQAP issued a statement titled, *Who are the mujahideen in the Arabian Peninsula*, which laid out AQAP's objectives. These included the 'expulsion of Jews and crusaders from the Arabian Peninsula'; the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate and the introduction of sharia; and the liberation of Muslim lands. While the group mainly operates inside Yemen and has conducted attacks in Saudi Arabia, it has also attempted to conduct attacks within the United States (US).

Following AQAP's attempted attack on Northwest Airlines flight 253 on 25 December 2009, AQAP issued a statement saying 'we tell the American people that since you support the leaders who kill our women and children ... we have come to slaughter you [and] will strike you with no previous [warning], our vengeance is near ... we call on all Muslims ... to throw out all unbelievers from the Arabian Peninsula by killing crusaders who work in embassies or elsewhere ... [in] a total war on all crusaders in the Peninsula of [Prophet] Muhammad.'

Leadership

AQAP's leader, or emir, is Nasir al-Wahishi (aka Abu Basir) – a Yemeni national who was amongst the group of 23 veteran extremist leaders who escaped from a Yemeni Government

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correctional facility in February 2006. This group went on to form the leadership elements of the current AQAP organisation. Al-Wahishi is reported to have served as an aide and a bodyguard to Usama bin Ladin in Afghanistan. Al-Wahishi, whose appointment as AQAP leader was confirmed by then-deputy al-Qa'ida leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri, is featured on Saudi Arabia's most wanted terrorist list.

AQAP announced the death of its deputy leader Sa'id al-Shihri (aka Abu Sayyaf, aka Abu Sufyan)—a Saudi national and former Guantanamo detainee—on 16 July 2013. Al-Shihri was returned to Saudi Arabia in 2007 and underwent a rehabilitation program, but fled to Yemen upon his release. AQAP has not announced a replacement for al-Shihri.

AQAP's operational commander is Qasim al-Rimi (aka Abu-Hurayrah al-San'ani).

Membership

AQAP consists of at least several hundred fighters. Yemen's economic, political and environmental crises have enabled AQAP to find sanctuary there.

Recruitment and funding

AQAP is comprised mostly of Yemenis and Saudis but also recruits internationally. Those who have joined their ranks include Western, African and Asian citizens, and the (now-deceased) influential AQAP cleric and dual US and Yemeni citizen Anwar al-Awlaqi. AQAP recruits from a variety of sources, including conflict zones such as Afghanistan, prisons and through familial and tribal links. AQAP also employs media, including the digital magazine *Inspire* and audio messages via its online media outlet al-Malahim.

AQAP is self-funded and raises money through the collection of *zakat* (religious donations) by both willing and unsuspecting donors in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and other countries; collection of cash at mosques; criminal activities such as robberies; and ransom payments for hostages.

Terrorist activity of the organisation

Directly or indirectly engaged in the doing of terrorist acts

AQAP employs person and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (including suicide attacks), small arms and rocket-propelled grenades against Yemeni and foreign government interests. Kidnapping of foreign nationals is relatively common.

Terrorist attacks by AQAP continue to be a major concern of Western governments. According to news reports, in August 2013, the US closed diplomatic missions in the Middle East and Africa in response to intercepted messages between al-Zawahiri and al-Wahishi. The *New York Times* claimed al-Zawahiri ordered AQAP to conduct an attack.

Significant attacks for which responsibility has been claimed by, or reliably attributed to, AQAP include:

- 4 March 2013: a car bomb at the Popular Committee barracks in Lawdar District killed at least 12 people and wounded more than a dozen others;
- 29 January 2013: an attack on Yemeni Army assembly areas in al-Bayda Governorate killed 15 soldiers;

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- 24 December 2012: the kidnapping of two Finnish and one Austrian citizen; they were released in May 2013;
- 18 August 2012: an attack on a military intelligence compound in Aden killed 14 officers;
- 21 May 2012: a person-borne suicide attack against a military parade rehearsal in Sana'a killed 100 people and wounded more than 300 others;
- 8 May 2012: US officials announced they had thwarted AQAP plans to detonate explosives onboard a US-bound aircraft;
- 28 March 2012: the kidnapping of Saudi Arabian Deputy Consul Abdullah al-Khalidi in Aden;
- 18 March 2012: the shooting death of US citizen Joel Shrum in Ta'izz;
- 14 March 2012: the kidnapping of a Swiss national working as a teacher in Hudaydah; she was released for a ransom payment on 27 February 2013;
- 4 March 2012: two car bombs killed at least 190 soldiers and tens were kidnapped in Zinjibar, Abyan Governorate;
- 25 February 2012: a car bomb in al-Mukallah killed 26 Republican Guards on the same day President Hadi was being sworn in as Yemeni President. AQAP claimed responsibility for the attacks, saying it was meant to send a message to the US Ambassador in Yemen and the Yemeni military;
- 29 October 2010: explosive devices concealed in printer cartridges in air freight destined for the US were set to detonate while the aircraft were airborne. The bombs were intercepted by the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom. Following public announcement of the disruption, AQAP claimed responsibility for the attempted attack and published details in a special edition of *Inspire* in November 2010. AQAP noted that 'From the beginning our objective was economic...to cause maximum losses to the American economy';
- 6 October 2010: a rocket propelled grenade was fired at the convoy of the British deputy ambassador to Yemen; no one was killed;
- 26 April 2010: a suicide bomber targeted the convoy of the British ambassador to Yemen; three were wounded, but the ambassador was unharmed;
- 25 December 2009: Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to detonate an improvised explosive device aboard Northwest Airlines flight 253 en route from Amsterdam to Detroit. On 28 December, AQAP released a statement on a jihadist internet forum claiming responsibility for the attempt; and
- 27 August 2009: a suicide bomber attempted to assassinate Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Prince Muhammad bin Nayif in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

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

In July 2010, AQAP launched its online magazine *Inspire*, which attempts to incite individuals living across the world, especially in Western countries, to undertake acts of terrorism with practical guidance as well as ideological justification for attacks in their own countries. Instructions for weapons and attack planning include attaching metal blades to vehicles to mow down civilians, making basic improvised explosive devices, using firearms and starting forest fires. In addition to *Inspire*, AQAP has also published a companion document called the *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*, which largely comprises articles previously published in *Inspire* with an emphasis on tactics for carrying out 'lone' attacks in Western countries.

The 11th issue of *Inspire*, published on 30 May 2013, was a special edition that praised the Boston marathon bombings and included an item on the attack on the British soldier in Woolwich, describing these incidents as 'inspired by *Inspire*'.

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On 23 March 2012, AQAP's media outlet, al-Malahim Foundation, released the full version of its *Jihad of the Ummah* video, including previously missing segments offering 3000 grams of gold to anyone who murders the US Ambassador to Yemen, Gerald Feierstein, and five million Yemeni Riyals to anyone who kills an American soldier in Yemen.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above information, ASIO assesses that AQAP is directly and indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in, and fostering the doing of terrorist acts and advocates the doing of terrorist acts, involving threats to human life and serious damage to property. It is submitted that the acts attributable to AQAP are terrorist acts as they:

- (i) constitute acts, which cause serious physical harm to persons, including death, as well as serious damage to property;
- (ii) are done with the intention of advancing a political cause, namely, removing Western influences and interests from the Arabian Peninsula; and
- (iii) are intended to coerce or influence by intimidation, the public or a section of the public outside Australia (including the governments of, and foreign nationals in, Yemen and Saudi Arabia).

This assessment is corroborated by information provided by reliable intelligence sources.

Other relevant information

Links to other terrorist groups or networks

AQAP is a recognised affiliate of al-Qa'ida. AQAP has also developed some links with other extremist and terrorist groups, including al-Shabaab in Somalia.

Proscription by the UN and other countries

On 19 January 2010, pursuant to paragraph 2 of resolution 1904 (2009), the United Nations listed AQAP as being 'associated with Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden or the Taliban'. In January 2010, the US designated AQAP as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. On 23 December 2010, Canada designated AQAP as a terrorist entity under Canadian Criminal Code article 83.05.

Peace and mediation processes

AQAP was involved in peace talks with the Yemeni Government in 2013, but no agreement has been reached. AQAP senior official Ibrahim al-Rubeish said that AQAP's conditions for the truce included amending the Yemeni constitution to accept sharia laws, monitoring non-Muslim based organizations in Yemen and removing all 'apparent evils' such as interest-based banks.