

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Also known as: Al-Harakat Al-Islamiyya; Al-Harakat-ul Al-Islamiyya; Al-Harakatul-Islamia; Al-Harakat Al-Aslamiya; Abou Sayaf Armed Band; Abu Sayaff Group; Abou Sayyef Group and Mujahideen Commando Freedom Fighters

The following information is based on publicly available details about Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). These details have been corroborated by material from intelligence investigations into the activities of the ASG. ASIO assesses that the details set out below are accurate and reliable.

ASG is listed in the United Nation's 1267 Committee's consolidated list and as a proscribed organisation by the governments of Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Current status of the ASG

The ASG is a militant Islamic movement founded by Abdurajak Janjalani in 1991. The group formed in response to the peace process between the government of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) when some of the most militant elements of the MNLF refused to engage in negotiations and accept the end of the established separatist movement in the Southern Philippines.

Abdurajak Janjalani participated in the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s and received training in the late 1980s to 1990s at a training camp in Afghanistan. There he met, trained and established transnational networks with key leaders and members of Islamic extremist groups including Usama bin Laden and Ramzi Yousef. Following the death of Abdurajak Janjalani in a shootout with police in Basilan on December 1998, his brother Khaddafy Janjalani became titular head or 'amir'.

The ASG can be characterised as a loose affiliation of groups, with each group having significant autonomy. The ASG is based in the Sulu archipelago in the Southern Philippines — primarily on the islands of Jolo, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi — and central Mindanao. Historically, ASG has had a strong hold on Basilan, but continued Philippines military offensive operations against the group has greatly weakened, but not eliminated the ASG on Basilan. Currently, the ASG's most secure base of operations is on Jolo Island. Khaddafy Janjalani and his faction are thought to be on Jolo, along with other known ASG commanders such as Jainal Antel Sali (a.k.a. Abu Solaiman) and Isnilon Toton Hapilon. In addition, a small group of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members are reported to be co-located with Janjalani's ASG group on Jolo, including alleged Bali 2002 bombers Dulmatin and Umar Patek. These JI and ASG members and their followers were the target of Philippines military operations on Jolo in August 2006.

The ASG is known to have links to other Islamic extremist organisations such as JI and the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM). In return for shelter and facilitation of training activities, JI provides expert training in explosives to ASG members and has participated in terrorist attacks with ASG. ASG members have also received training from al-Qa'ida. The ASG has been involved in a number of terrorist attacks including assassination; bombings of civilian and military establishments and domestic infrastructure including

airports and ferries; kidnapping local officials and Western tourists; the beheading of local and Western hostages; and extortion against local and Western businesses.

The ASG has undertaken a number of terrorist attacks including the bombing of *Superferry 14* in Manila Bay on 27 February 2004; the three near-simultaneous bomb blasts in Makati City; Davao City; and General Santos City on 14 February 2005 and two bombings in Zamboanga City on 10 August 2005. In August 2006, the Philippines military recovered explosive devices; a large cache of chemicals and 6,000 Indian blasting caps on Jolo, which were attributed to the ASG. In September 2006, Philippines military and police forces seized 600kg of ammonium nitrate in Zamboanga reportedly intended for bombings by the ASG. Taken together, this confirms the ASG continues to have the capability (including current access to the necessary resources) and intent to conduct further terrorist attacks.

ASG funding derives from a range of sources. The ASG engages in opportunistic criminal attacks, including extortion, murder and kidnapping. The ASG also derives funds from Middle Eastern benefactors. On at least one occasion, the ASG sent a member to Saudi Arabia, nominally for language or religious instruction, but primarily to raise funds. This included lobbying wealthy Saudi benefactors and raising funds among expatriate Filipino workers. In addition, there have been allegations that a number of Islamic charities have supported the ASG including the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) and the International Islamic Studies Call and Guidance Centre (ISCAG).

Objectives

ASG's founding objective is to create an autonomous Islamic state encompassing the Southern Philippine island of Mindanao, surrounding islands and the Sulu archipelago.

Leadership and membership

Khadaffy Janjalani, younger brother of Abdurajak Janjalani, is the titular head or 'amir' of the ASG. The ASG membership consists primarily of young *Tausug* (the major ethnic group of the Sulu archipelago) Filipino Muslims whom at first were recruits from the island of Basilan, south of Mindanao. The ASG attract poverty-stricken unemployed young Muslims in the southern Philippines.

ASG numbers reached their peak in the mid to late 1990s when, after a spate of kidnappings and murders, many young Muslims flocked to the group. By mid-2001, ASG numbers were estimated to be between 800 and 850, but by 2002 numbers dropped significantly around the time the Philippines military launched a sustained campaign against the ASG. Despite significant losses resulting from military operations targeting the ASG in Basilan and Jolo, there is no evident decline in its capability to undertake terrorist acts.

ASG's engagement in terrorist attacks

Significant terrorist attacks which have been claimed by, or reliably attributed to ASG, have included:

- 23 April 2000: kidnapping of 21 people, including 10 foreign tourists, from the Malaysian resort island of Sipadan. This kidnapping was resolved in 2001 when the ASG received a \$15 million ransom from the Philippine Government;
- 28 August 2000: kidnapping of an American, Jeffrey Schilling, in Zamboanga City, whom the ASG believed was a CIA spy. Schilling escaped in April 2001;
- 27 May 2001: kidnapping of 20 people from the Philippine tourist resort of Dos Palmas on Palawan Island, in which several victims were subsequently murdered – including a US citizen. Another US citizen was killed during a rescue operation on 7 June 2002;
- 2 October 2002: bombing of a karaoke bar in Zamboanga City killing four people, including a US soldier and injured 24 others;
- 27 February 2004: bombing of Superferry 14 in Manila Bay which is estimated to have killed over 100 people;
- 14 February 2005: three near-simultaneous bomb blasts in Makati City, Davao City, and General Santos City killing eleven people and left approximately 150 injured; and
- 10 August 2005: two bombings in Zamboanga City wounding eight people.

Conclusion

The Criminal Code provides that for an organisation to be listed as a terrorist organisation, the Attorney-General must be satisfied that:

- (i) the organisation 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
- (ii) the organisation advocates the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur).

On the basis of the above information, ASIO assesses that the ASG is directly preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of terrorist acts. It is submitted that the acts attributable to the ASG are terrorist acts as they:

- (i) are done with the intention of advancing a political cause, namely, the establishment of an Islamic state encompassing the southern Philippines;
- (ii) are intended to coerce or influence by intimidation the government of a foreign country, namely the Philippines, and/or intimidate a section of the Filipino public; and
- (iii) constitute acts which cause serious physical harm to persons, including death, as well as serious damage to property.

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