

Islamic Army of Aden (IAA)

(Also known as: Aden Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA); Islamic Army of Aden Abyan; Aden Islamic Army; Muhammed's Army/Army of Mohammed; Jaish Adan al Islami)

The following information is based on publicly available details about the Islamic Army of Aden (IAA). The Islamic Army of Aden (IAA) is listed in the United Nations 1267 Committee's consolidated list and as a proscribed terrorist organisation by the European Union and the governments of the UK, New Zealand and Canada. The US has designated the IAA as a terrorist organisation on the Terrorist Exclusion List.

Current status of the IAA

The IAA is a Sunni Islamic extremist group and was formed in 1996 as a splinter group of the Yemeni Islamic Jihad. The IAA first came to public prominence in 1998 when it issued statements detailing its intention to overthrow the Yemeni government and implement Sharia law; and called for operations against Western interests in Yemen.

The IAA predominantly operates in the southern governorates of Yemen – particularly Aden and Abyan. The IAA has been involved in a number of terrorist attacks against Yemeni and Western interests. It has used bombings and hostage-taking as a means of furthering its goals. In 1998, the IAA abducted 16 Western tourists. Four of the tourists, including an Australian, were killed in a rescue attempt. The IAA also claimed responsibility for the suicide bomb attack against the USS Cole on 12 October 2000 and the MV Limburg on 7 October 2002. However, these operations are generally believed to have been al-Qa'ida operations.

The IAA is associated with al-Qa'ida and shares similar goals of driving Westerners from the region and removing the Yemeni government in order to establish an Islamic state.

Although current specific funding arrangements for the group are unknown, the IAA has traditionally conducted criminal activities as a means of raising money.

Between 2003 and 2006, counter-terrorism operations by Yemeni authorities reduced the size of the group and limited its operational effectiveness. However, the IAA has not been completely eradicated and there is no indication the intent of the IAA has changed. IAA members were last arrested in 2006, including the reported arrest of individuals suspected of involvement in terrorist activities in Iraq. In June 2008, IAA's leader, Khalid Abd al-Nabi, gave an interview which suggested he retained similar goals and ideology. He also stated the Abyan Governorate is ready for the emergence of IAA. While the interview does not explicitly call for a return to violence, it contains nothing to suggest that IAA has departed from its previous intentions to engage in terrorist acts.

Objectives

The IAA aims to remove Western interests from Yemen and wider Arabian Peninsula, overthrow the current Yemeni government and establish an Islamic state.

Leadership and membership

The IAA's founder and former leader Zain al-Abidin al-Mihdar (aka Abu Hassan) was executed in 1999 for his role in the 1998 hostage-taking of 16 Western tourists in Yemen. Founding members were veterans of the struggle in Afghanistan against the Soviets. Khalid Abd al-Nabi assumed leadership of the IAA before surrendering to authorities in October 2003. In return for his cooperation Abd al-Nabi received a Presidential pardon that same year. Abd al-Nabi continues to appear in, and make statements to, the media, usually in relation to IAA.

Although the current strength of the IAA is unknown, previous estimates of the group's size were between 30 to 100 core members divided into a number of small groups or cells. The group is likely to now have no more than 30 core members.

IAA engagement in terrorist activities

Security operations by the Yemeni authorities have restricted the IAA's capabilities within Yemen. However, IAA operatives still exist in Yemen and could undertake terrorist activities if and when the opportunity arises.

Terrorist attacks and plans for terrorist attacks for which responsibility has been claimed by, or reliably attributed to, the IAA, have included:

- August 2002: three Yemenis belonging to the IAA were convicted of carrying out bombing attacks in the southern port of Aden on 1 January 2001;
- 21 June 2003: attack on a military medical convoy, injuring 7 soldiers;
- June 2003: arrest of four alleged IAA members and seizure of a car packed with hand grenades, explosives and rocket-propelled grenades that had been used in the attack on a military medical convoy on 21 June 2003;
- 25 June 2003: clash between IAA members and government troops at the group's hideout in Harat – captured IAA members revealed they were waiting for orders to carry out terrorist operations;
- October 2003: a planned car bomb attack against the US, UK and German embassies in Sana'a allegedly involving the IAA was disrupted;
- March/April 2006: arrest of IAA members suspected of planning to travel to Iraq to fight foreign forces.