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Terrorist and Extremist Movements in the Middle East:

The Impact on the Regional Military Balance

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Please note that this document is a working draft and will be revised regularly. To comment, or to provide suggestions and corrections, please e-mail the author at acordesman@aol.com.

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I. Introduction

Terrorism and asymmetric warfare are scarcely new features of the Middle Eastern military balance, and Islamic extremism is scarcely the only source of extremist violence. There are many serious ethnic and sectarian differences in the Middle East, and these have long led to sporadic violence within given states, and sometimes to major civil conflicts. The civil wars in Yemen and the Dhofar Rebellion in Oman are examples, as are the long history of civil war in Lebanon and Syria's violent suppression of Islamic political groups that opposed the regime of Hafez al-Asad. The rising power of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) led to a civil war in Jordan in September 1970. The Iranian revolution in 1979 was followed by serious political fighting, and an effort to export a theocratic revolution that helped trigger the Iran-Iraq War. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have both had civil clashes between their Sunni ruling elites and hostile Shi'ites and these clashes led to significant violence in the case of Saudi Arabia.

There also, however, has been a long history of violent Islamic extremism in the region, sometimes encouraged by regimes that later became the target of the very Islamists they initially supported. Sadat attempted to use Islamic movements as a counter to his secular opposition in Egypt only to be assassinated by one such movement after his peace agreement with Israel. Israel thought it safe to sponsor Islamic movements after 1967 as a counter to the PLO, only to see the rapid emergence of violently anti-Israeli groups. North and South Yemen were the scene of coups and civil wars since the early 1960s, and it was a civil war in South Yemen that ultimately led to the collapse of its regime and its merger with North Yemen in 1990.

The fall of the shah led to an Islamist takeover in Iran, and resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan triggered an Islamist reaction that still influences the Middle East and the entire Islamic world. Saudi Arabia had to deal with an uprising at the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979. The religious character of this uprising shared many elements of the movements that arose after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Gulf War in 1991.

Algerian efforts to suppress the victory of Islamic political parties in a democratic election in 1992 were followed by a civil war that has lasted ever since. Egypt fought a long and largely successful battle with its own Islamic extremists in the 1990s, but Egypt has only managed to have suppressed such movements rather than eradicated them. In the rest of the Arab World, the civil wars in Kosovo and Bosnia helped create new Islamic extremist cadres. Saudi Arabia suffered from two major terrorist attacks before 2001. These attacks struck at a National Guard Training center and USAF barracks at Al Khobar, and at least one seems to have been the result of Islamic extremists. Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Yemen have all seen hard-line Islamist movements become a serious national threat.

While not directly part of the region, the Sudan has fought a 15-year long civil war that has probably cost over two million lives, and this war had been supported by hard-line Islamist elements in the Arab north. Somalia has also been the scene of a civil war since 1991 that has allowed Islamist cells to operate in that country.

II. The Problem of Islamic Extremism and Violence

Islamist extremist violence has proved to be exceptionally dangerous and destabilizing. Every nation in the Middle East, no matter how moderate, faces some level of internal and external threat from such movements. Active internal fighting has taken place in Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Iran is torn between Islamic "hardliners" and "moderates," and the fall of Saddam Hussein has unleashed new Islamist forces in Iraq. Every other MENA country has had to establish new security procedures, and cope with its own Islamist extremists. The problem is also an international one that reaches far outside the MENA area. It now involves Central Asia, South Asia, the Islamic countries of Southeast Asia, and movements in Europe and North America.

While militarism and proliferation pose potential threats to the region's development and energy exports, the most active threat of violence now comes from this violent extremism. It does not, however, have one source or represent one cause. Some movements have arisen in response to state terrorism, some movements have arisen in response to regional conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian War, and other elements have developed more in response to the pressures of social change. The end result is a complex mix of threats including national movements, regional movements, and truly international movements like Al Qaeda.

The ideology and goals of these movements differ from group to group, but there are often loose alliances of groups with different goals. What most do have in common is that their ideology is based on an extremist version of Shi'ite, Sufi, Salafi, and Wahhabi Islam and that the religious goals of each movement are mixed with an anti-secular

political agenda and a rejection of modern economic priorities and reform. So far, they are all small extremist groups that do not represent the views and hopes of the vast majority of the people in the MENA region, but several have already proven to be dangerous both inside and outside the Middle East.

The Regional and Global Impact of Islamic Extremist Terrorism

Long before 9/11, the attacks on Al Khobar, the USS Cole, and the World Trade Center showed that terrorism posed a threat to the moderate regimes in the Middle East and a transnational threat to the West. There have been many serious terrorist attacks on Western targets in the Middle East in the past, such as the bombing of the Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut.ⁱ

The November 13, 1995 truck bombing of the National Guard Headquarters in Riyadh killed five U.S. service men and two Iranians. The June 25, 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers killed 19 U.S. servicemen. The attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania involved large numbers of innocent casualties – 247 dead and over 5,000 wounded in the case of Kenya, and 10 dead and more than 75 wounded in the case of Tanzania. These attacks involved truck bombs with 600-800 pounds of explosives.

Civil tension in the Middle East has made Western businesses and tourists a target as well as embassies and military facilities. For example, the worst terrorist attack in Egypt's history occurred on November 17, 1997. Six gunmen belonging to the Egyptian terrorist group al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group or IG) entered the Hatsheput Temple in Luxor. For nearly half an hour, they methodically shot and knifed tourists trapped inside the Temple's alcoves. Fifty-eight foreign tourists were murdered, along with three Egyptian police officers and one Egyptian tour guide. Although the gunmen then fled the scene, Egyptian security forces pursued them and all six were killed. Terrorists launched a grenade attack on a tour bus parked in front of the Egyptian National Antiquities Museum in Cairo on September 18, 1997, killing nine German tourists, an Egyptian bus driver, and wounding eight others.

The West began to respond to these threats long before "9/11." The U.S. cruise missile attacks on targets in Afghanistan and the Sudan on August 20, 1998 reflected the fact that U.S. intelligence had reliable information that Osama Bin Laden, a leading sponsor and financier of terrorism, was planning large-scale attacks on U.S. targets. The goal of the U.S. preemptive attack on the Shifa Pharmaceutical Plant in Khartoum was to prevent the production and use of VX nerve gas by Bin Laden's organization. These attacks, however, show that the wrong use of military power can do more to provoke than deter.

Nevertheless, the attack that truly revealed globalized Middle Eastern terrorism was the series of attack on the World Trade center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. There have been many previous attempts at such attacks, and many smaller successful attacks on targets in Europe. It was "9/11," however, that showed the US that its territory and civil population could be as vulnerable as the nations of the Middle East.

While Al Qaeda has emerged as the most visible current threat, there are many causes of transnational terrorism in the Middle East, and many different targets:

- The U.S. is a major target because it projects the most power into the region, because of its close ties to Israel, because attacks on the U.S. produce the most world-wide publicity, and because the U.S. can often be used as a proxy for less popular attacks on Middle Eastern regimes.
- The breakdown in the Arab-Israeli peace process has triggered a wave of Palestinian "terrorism" in response to steadily escalating Israeli "excessive force." It is a tragedy that could trigger a broader Arab-Israeli conflict and make Americans a target, both out of frustration and in an effort to break up the peace process.
- The failures of Middle Eastern secular governments, state terrorism and authoritarianism, economic hardship, social dislocation, and the alienation of youth, combine to create extremist groups that not only attack their governments, but use Western targets as proxies. Motives can include attempting to drive out the Western military forces that provide Middle Eastern countries with security, cripple the economy to weaken governments, or win public recognition in the region. While some of these groups are secular, most are Islamic in character. Some totally reject both secularism and any ties to the West or what are perceived as Western values.
- The West can be attacked on the basis of its perceived values, and for corrupting Islamic countries and supporting secular regimes. While the U.S. is the primary target of such attacks, figures like the Saudi

terrorist financier Osama Bin Laden want to drive the West out of the region. Unlike more conventional forms of terrorism, such attacks deliberately seek to create a “clash of civilizations” and to build on other regional problems and tensions to divide the West and Arab worlds.ⁱⁱ

- European nations can become the battleground for opposition groups to attack the Embassies of Middle Eastern regimes, or by opposition groups attacking each other. Iran has sponsored state terrorist attacks on the People’s Mujahideen and Kurdish opposition groups in France, Germany, Switzerland and Turkey. Israel has killed Palestinians in nations like Norway. France has become the scene of fighting between Algerian factions.
- Western tourists and businessmen can become the focus of much more intense terrorist attacks, as such groups seek to put economic pressure on local regimes, or prove their status and power. For example, an Algerian terrorist group called the GIA (Armed Islamic Group) killed seven foreigners in Algeria in 1997, bringing the total number of foreigners the GIA has killed in Algeria to 133 (since 1992). Bombs have been used in civilian areas in Bahrain, although Westerners have not been major targets. Four U.S. Union Texas Petroleum employees and their Pakistani driver were shot and killed in Karachi on November 12, 1998, when the vehicle they were riding in was attacked by terrorists that seem to have been affiliated with Middle Eastern extremist groups.

The Clash Within A Civilization, the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the Western Counter-Reaction

It is still unclear how Islamic extremism and the aftermath of “9/11” will play out in the MENA area, and how they will change the regional military balance. What is clear is that broad historical and social forces are at work, and new patterns of attack continue to emerge. Al Qaeda launched a new series of bloody attacks in Saudi Arabia, , major attacks have taken place in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein since May 2003, and now extremist Islamic cells continue to emerge in virtually every MENA state. Extremism and terrorism are likely to remain a major threat to MENA governments for the next few decades, and the end result is likely to be a continuing clash within an Islamic civilization rather than a clash between Islam and the Arab world, and the West.

The primary goal of most Islamic extremist movements is not to attack the West but to create Islamic regimes based on ill-defined concepts of religious Puritanism, radical socialism or economic change, and conservative social customs. Such extremism is often an attack on secularism per se, and explains why such movements oppose MENA secular governments as well as social and economic modernization without clearly articulating the kind of government, society, and economy that should replace them. Islamic extremists know what they are against. They have only vague and impractical ideas of what they are for.

There are, however, other forms of terrorism and extremist violence. The fact that the Arab-Israel peace process has given way to an Israeli-Palestinian war has led to a new wave of violence on both sides. The Israeli side has used conventional forces to occupy and attack the Palestinians. The Palestinians have used asymmetric and guerrilla warfare in addition to terrorism – most notably in the form of suicide bombings. The Palestinian terrorist attacks have been overwhelmingly by Islamist groups like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, but have increasingly involved support from the hard-line elements of secular Palestinian groups as well.

Unlike most forms of Islamic extremism and terrorism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also polarizes the Arab world at a popular level. If the Israeli image is one of Palestinian terrorism, the Arab image is one of excessive Israeli use of force, continued occupation, and continued settlements. This allows extremist and terrorist groups to exploit the conflict to win popular support and to reinforce the image of the US as Israel’s ally and supporter. More generally, it enables them to cast the West as the exploiter of the Arab world.

At the same time, the lines between Islamic extremism and the Arab-Israeli conflict have been further blurred by the role Shi’ite groups like the Hezbollah played in driving Israel out of Lebanon, and the role Iran and Syria have played in supporting the Hezbollah. Syria at least tolerates terrorist groups on its soil that oppose Israel. Iran has increasingly funded non-Shi’ite groups like Hamas and the PIJ, while money has flowed to such groups from the Gulf and other Arab states – partly to support their charities and partly to support the groups in attacking Israel. Yet Sunni and Salafi extremism also targets Shi’ites and other Islamic threats. As events in Iraq have shown, there is the risk of Sunni versus Shi’ite terrorism and conflicts.

The West, and particularly the US, have often reacted by confusing the very different types of Islamist extremism and terrorism with Islam, the Arab world, and Iran. US officials have tried to avoid such stereotypes and dangerous generalizations, but many analysts and those in the American and Western media have not. One of the ironies of “9/11” is that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda have succeeded in part in producing a Western counterreaction that does to some extent reflect a “clash between civilizations.” The US and British invasion and occupation of Iraq have increased such tensions, as have the failures to bring effective security and development to Afghanistan, as well as US talk of broad regime change throughout the region. Ironically, such talk of future “democracies” is as vaguely defined as the future desired by most Islamist extremists.

III. State Support of Terrorism and the Use of Terrorist Proxies

The regional security problems created by independent terrorist movements are further compounded by state support of terrorism or state use of terrorist proxies. Several states have actively sponsored external terrorist movements or have conducted acts of terrorism outside their own territory. These states have included Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

As Chapter Ten discusses in some depth, such states may help extremist movements acquire weapons of mass destruction in the future. The most serious challenge proliferation poses to MENA energy facilities may well prove to be the interaction with terrorism. At present, this is only a possibility, but terrorist attacks using weapons of mass destruction would present a fundamentally different kind of threat. They would represent a vastly more lethal brand of terrorist threat than the region and the West have yet faced.

Under many conditions, a single act of such terrorism could kill thousands of people and or induce levels of panic and political reaction that governments cannot easily deal with. Under some conditions, the use of weapons of mass destruction can pose an existential threat to the existing social and political structure of a small country -- particularly one where much of the population and governing elite is concentrated in a single urban area.

Identifying State Sponsors of Terrorism and Regional Terrorist Organizations

The threat of terrorism and violent extremism involves a wide range of regional and local actors, including both states and independent organizations. Many scattered incidents have arisen from extremist groups with tenuous or no ties to Al Qaeda. New linkages may be developing between Sunni and Shi'ite movements, and which tie extremist groups in the Gulf to groups like the Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Arab-Israeli countries. There are massive demographic, social, economic, and political shifts going on in the Middle East that are likely to cause turmoil for decades, and some -- at least -- will be a source of further internal violence.

Complicating matters further, the tensions and divisions within the Middle East make it difficult to characterize all violent non-state actors as “terrorists”. The Arab-Israel conflict makes one side’s “terrorists” the other side’s “freedom fighters. In addition, there are violent and oppressive regimes like Algeria whose legal and human rights abuses provoke terrorist and extremist opposition.

There are no easy ways to resolve these issues or measure the strength and effectiveness of terrorist and extremist movements. The International Institute of Strategic Studies has, however, developed a survey of the violent extremist movements in the world as part of its annual military balance. The figure on the next page adapts this IISS summary, and a report by the Congressional Research Service, to focus on the key movements in the Middle East. While there may be a Western bias in such lists, such movements do exist and often threaten Middle Eastern states far more than the West.

The US State Department provides further lists and descriptions of states and movements that it sees as either supportive of terrorism or terrorist in nature which already play a role in the Middle Eastern military balance or could do so at any time. While such lists are written from a US perspective, they do provide important insights into the way states that support extremist movements as well as how individual movements could affect the Middle Eastern military balance.

IV. Key Violent and Extremist Movements in the Middle East and North Africa

Origin	Organization and Aims (Remarks)	Established	Operates	Estimated Strength	Status
Algeria	Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS) Socialist republic in Algeria within framework of Islamic principles. Truce 1997. Armed wing of Front Islamique du Salut (FIS)	1992	Algeria	Not known	Cease-fire
Algeria	Groupe Islamique Armée □ Armed Islamic Group (GIA) ▲ Fundamentalist Islamic state in Algeria (Refused January 2000 peace plan)	1992/93	Algeria	100+	Active Hard-line violence
Algeria	Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le combat (GSPC)-al-Safayya Fundamentalist Islamic state in Algeria (Splinter faction of GIA)	1998	Algeria, possibly Western Europe, Middle East, and North Africa	4,000	Active Hard-line violence
Egypt	Al-Jihad• Egyptian Islamic Jihad• Jihad Group• Islamic Jihad• Vanguard of Conquest ▲ Islamic state in Egypt. Merged with al-Qaeda in June 2001	1973	International	Several hundreds	Active Hard-line violence
Egypt	Islamic Group• al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya Islamic state in Egypt (Largest militant group in Egypt)	1970s	South Egypt	1,000+	Cease-fire
Israel	Kahane Chai (Kach) Restore the biblical state of Israel	1990	West Bank, Israel, possibly US	Not known	Active Limited, low-level violence
Iran	Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (DPKI) • Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) Kurdish autonomy in Iran	1995	Iran	1,200-1,800	Dormant
Iran	Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran (KOMALA) Communist government in Iran (Formed Communist Party of Iran in 1983)	1967	Iran	200	Active
Iran/Iraq	National Liberation Army (NLA) 'Democratic, socialist, Islamic republic in Iran' (Largest and most active armed Iranian dissident group of Mujahideen-e Khalq Organization)	1987	Iran, Iraq	6,000-8,000	Disrupted and largely disarmed by Iraq War

Iraq	Kurdish Democratic Party Overthrow Iraq government (Ongoing conflict with PUK)	1946	Iraq	15,000	Active Reduced level of recent violence
Iraq	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) 'Revitalize resistance and rebuild a democratic Kurdish society' (Evolved into a political movement)	1975	Iraq	10,000	Active
Iraq	Ansar al Islam • Jund al-Islam • Army of Islam ▲ Pro al-Qaeda group, opposed to <i>Operation Enduring Freedom</i> . Opposes secular Kurdish parties in Iraq	2001	Iraq	Not known	Active May be a major source of terrorism in Iraq
Iraq	Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) • Fatah Revolutionary Council • Black September • Arab Revolutionary Brigades • Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims □ Black June Destroy Israel (Operations in Libya and Egypt shut down by governments in 1999)	1974	International	300	Largely dormant
Iraq	Badr Corps Opposed Iraq aggression against Iran (Shi'ite; mutual agreement signed with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan against Iraq) Armed wing of Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)	1982	Baghdad and South Iraq	10,000	Active As elements of militia in Iraq
Iraq	Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO) Advocate Secular Muslim regime	1960	Iran, Iraq, France	3,000	Now more political, but some cells active in Iran and Iraq
Lebanon	Asbat al-Ansar Advocates Salafism, opposed to any peace with Israel, establish an Islamic state in Lebanon	1990s	Lebanon	300	Active
Lebanon	Hezbollah (Party of God) • Islamic Jihad-Revolutionary Justice Organization • Organization of the Oppressed on Earth ▲ Iran-style Islamic republic in Lebanon; all non-Islamic influences removed from area (Shi'ite; formed to resist Israeli occupation of south Lebanon with political representation in Lebanon Assembly).	1982	Bekaa Valley, Beirut, south Lebanon, Shebaa Farms Cells in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa	2,000+	Active Some incidents of violence in Israeli border area. Build up of long-range rockets. Training violent Palestinian elements
Morocco	Assirat Al-Moustakim Claimed Casablanca blast		Morocco	Not known	Active Limited recent violence

Morocco	Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) Establish an Islamic state in Morocco and support al-Qaeda's jihad against the West	1990s	Western Europe Africa, Morocco	Not known	Active Source of concern to Moroccan security services
Morocco	Sahrawi People's Liberation Army Independent Western Sahara (Armed wing is the Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el-Hamra y del Rio de Oro (Polisario Front))	1973	Morocco	3,000-6,000	Cease-fire with some continuing elements of violence. Moroccans claim has Algerian support.
Morocco	Salafya Al-Aihadya Jihad Claimed Casablanca blast		Morocco	Not known	Active Limited recent violence
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade ▲ Associated, though not officially backed, by Arafat Military offshoot of Fatah. Aims to expel Israelis from Gaza and West Bank	2000	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel	Not known	Active Attempted infiltrations and bombings, shootings, kidnappings
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Al Saika Military wing of Palestinian faction of Syrian Ba'ath Party (Nominally part of PLO)	1968	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel	300	Active
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Arab Liberation Front Achieve national goals of Palestinian Authority (Faction of PLO formed by leadership of Iraq Ba'ath party)	1969	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel	500	Dormant
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) Achieve Palestinian national goals through revolution (Marxist-Leninist; splintered from PFLP)	1969	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel	100+	Active
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Fatah Tanzim Armed militia link to Fatah	1995	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel	1,000+	Active Continuing clashes with Israeli forces
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (HAMAS) Islamic Resistance Front Establish an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel	1987	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel	Not known	Active Key source of suicide bombings
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (IDQ) ▲ Replace Israel with Islamic state in Palestinian Areas (Armed wing of Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas); separate from overt organization)	1991	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel	500+	Active

Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) ▲ Destroy Israel with holy war and establish Islamic state in Palestinian areas (One of the more extreme groups from the Palestinian areas.)	1979	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel, Damascus, Beirut, Tehran. Possibly Khartoum	Estimated 500	Active Key source of suicide bombings
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) ▲ Armed struggle against Israel (Splintered from PFLP)	1977	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel, Iraq	300-400	Dormant
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Armed struggle against Israel (Marzist-Leninist), end American influence in the region	1967	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel, Lebanon, Damascus	1000	Active
Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC) ▲ Armed struggle against Israel (Marzist-Leninist; Split from PFLP to focus on fighting rather than politics)	1968	Palestinian Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho, Israel, Lebanon, Syria	500	Dormant
Yemen	Islamic Army of Aden (IAA) Overthrow of the Yemeni Government and operations against US and other Western interests in Yemen	1998	South Yemen	100+	Active Ties to Al Qaeda and other scattered, extremist and terrorist elements unclear

Notes:

- ▲ Group known to carry out suicide attacks
- A—active
- C—cease-fire
- D—dormant (inactive for the past 12 months)

Source: Adapted from IISS, Military Balance, 2003-2004; Audrey Kurth Cronin, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Washington, Congressional Research Service, RL32223, February 6, 2004; with additional comments by author.

V. Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations in the Middle East

Abu Nidal organization (ANO)

The Revolutionary Council, Arab Revolutionary Brigades, Black September, and Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims

Description:

International terrorist organization founded by Sabri al-Banna (a.k.a Abu Nidal). Split from PLO in 1974. Made up of various functional committees, including political, military, and financial. In November 2002, Abu Nidal died in Baghdad; the new leadership of the organization is unclear.

Activities:

Has carried out terrorist attacks in 20 countries, killing or injuring almost 900 persons. Targets include the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, moderate Palestinians, the PLO, and various Arab countries. Major attacks included the Rome and Vienna airports in December 1985, a failed attempt to bomb the U.S. embassy in Cairo, the Neve Shalom synagogue in Istanbul, the Pan Am Flight 73 hijacking in Karachi in September 1986, and the City of Poros day-excursion ship attack in Greece in July 1988. Suspected of assassinating PLO deputy chief Abu Iyad and PLO security chief Abu Hul in Tunis in January 1991. ANO assassinated a Jordanian diplomat in Lebanon in January 1994 and has been linked to the killing of the PLO representative there. Has not staged a major attack against Western targets since the late 1980s.

Strength:

Few hundred plus limited overseas support structure.

Location/Area of Operation:

Al-Banna relocated to Iraq in December 1998, where the group maintains a presence. Has an operational presence in Lebanon including in several Palestinian refugee camps. Authorities shut down the ANO's operations in Libya and Egypt in 1999. Has demonstrated ability to operate over wide area, including the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. Financial problems and internal disorganization have reduced the group's activities and capabilities.

External Aid:

Has received considerable support, including safe havens, training, logistic assistance, and financial aid from Iraq, Libya, and Syria (until 1987), in addition to close support for selected operations.

Ansar al-Islam (AI)

a.k.a. Partisans of Islam, Helpers of Islam, Supporters of Islam

Description:

Ansar al-Islam is a radical Islamist group of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs who have vowed to establish an independent Islamic state in northern Iraq. It was formed in September 2001 and is closely allied with al-Qaeda. Its members trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and now provide safehaven to al-Qaeda fighters fleeing Afghanistan. (Ansar al-Islam was designated on 20 February 2003, under E.O. 13224. The UNSCR 1267 Committee designated Ansar al-Islam pursuant to UNSCRs 1267, 1390, and 1455 on 27 February 2003.) Since Operations Iraqi Freedom, AI has been one of the leading groups attacking Coalition troops.

Activities:

The group is challenging one of the two main Kurdish political factions, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and has mounted ambushes and attacks in PUK areas. AI members have been implicated in assassinations and assassination attempts against PUK officials and claim to have produced cyanide-based toxins, ricin, and alfatoxin. AI may be a major source of terrorism in Iraq as they have claimed over 30 suicide bombings in Iraq resulting in over 800 deaths, including the bombings of the Jordanian embassy and the UN headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003.

Strength:

Approximately 700 members.

Location/Area of Operation:

Ansar al-Islam is based in northern Iraq near the Iranian border outside Baghdad's control.

External Aid:

The group receives funding, training, equipment, and combat support from al-Qaeda and logistical support from Iran and Syria.

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (al-Aqsa)

Description:

The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade comprises an unknown number of small cells of Fatah-affiliated activists that emerged at the outset of the current intifada to attack Israeli targets. It aims to drive the Israeli military and settlers from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem and to establish a Palestinian state. It does not claim to seek the destruction of the Israeli state.

Activities:

Al-Aqsa has carried out shootings and suicide operations against Israeli military personnel and civilians and has killed Palestinians who it believed were collaborating with Israel. At least five US citizens, four of them dual Israeli-US citizens, were killed in al-Aqsa's attacks. The group probably did not attack them because of their US citizenship. In January 2002, al-Aqsa claimed responsibility for the first suicide bombing carried out by a female.

Strength:

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation:

Al-Aqsa operates mainly in the West Bank and has claimed attacks inside Israel and the Gaza Strip. It may have followers in Palestinian refugee camps in southern Lebanon.

External Aid:

Unknown.

Armed Islamic Group (GIA)

Description:

An Islamic extremist group, the GIA aims to overthrow the secular Algerian regime and replace it with an Islamic state. The GIA began its violent activity in 1993 after Algiers voided the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front—the largest Islamic opposition party—in the first round of legislative elections in December 1991. It is composed of radical Islamists and Algerian veterans of the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Activities:

Frequent attacks against civilians and government workers. Since 1992, the GIA has conducted a terrorist campaign of civilian massacres, sometimes wiping out entire villages in its area of operation, although the group's dwindling numbers have caused a decrease in the number of attacks. The Algerian military was once thought to have aided the GIA in some of its massacres, but a military crackdown suggests that such cooperation has ceased. Since announcing its campaign against foreigners living in Algeria in 1993, the GIA has killed more than 100 expatriate men and women—mostly Europeans—in the country. The group uses assassinations and bombings, including car bombs, and it is known to favor kidnapping victims and slitting their throats. The GIA hijacked an Air France flight to Algiers in December 1994. In 2002, a French court sentenced two GIA members to life in prison for conducting a series of bombings in France in 1995.

Strength:

Precise numbers unknown, probably fewer than 100.

Location/Area of Operation:

Algeria.

External Aid:

None known.

‘Asbat al-Ansar

Description:

‘Asbat al-Ansar—the League of the Followers—is a Lebanon-based, Sunni extremist group, composed primarily of Palestinians and associated with Osama Bin Laden. The group follows an extremist interpretation of Islam that justifies violence against civilian targets to achieve political ends. Some of those goals include overthrowing the Lebanese Government and thwarting perceived anti-Islamic and pro-Western influences in the country.

Activities:

‘Asbat al-Ansar has carried out multiple terrorist attacks in Lebanon since it first emerged in the early 1990s. The group assassinated Lebanese religious leaders and bombed nightclubs, theaters, and liquor stores in the mid-1990s. The group raised its operational profile in 2000 with two attacks against Lebanese and international targets. It was involved in clashes in northern Lebanon in December 1999 and carried out a rocket-propelled grenade attack on the Russian Embassy in Beirut in January 2000.

In 2002, there was an increase in anti-US attacks, including bombings of US-franchised restaurants and the murder of an American missionary. The perpetrators are believed to be Sunni extremists that may be linked to ‘Asbat al-Ansar.

In 2003, suspected ‘Asbat al-Ansar elements were responsible for the attempt in April to use a car bomb against a McDonald’s in a Beirut suburb. By October, Lebanese security forces arrested Ibn al-Shahid, who is believed to be associated with ‘Asbat al-Ansar, and charged him with masterminding the bombing of three fast food restaurants in 2002 and the attempted attack in April 2003 on the McDonald’s. ‘Asbat forces were involved in other violence in Lebanon in 2003, including clashes with members of Yassir Arafat’s Fatah movement in the ‘Ayn al-Hilwah refugee camp and a rocket attack in June on the Future TV building in Beirut.

Strength:

The group commands about 300 fighters in Lebanon.

Location/Area of Operation:

The group’s primary base of operations is the ‘Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp near Sidon in southern Lebanon.

External Aid:

Probably receives money through international Sunni extremist networks and Bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network.

Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group, IG)

Description:

Egypt’s largest militant group, active since the late 1970s; appears to be loosely organized. It has an external wing with supporters in several countries worldwide. The group issued a cease-fire in March 1999, but its spiritual leader, Shaykh Umar Abd al-Rahman, sentenced to life in prison in January 1996 for his involvement in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and incarcerated in the United States, rescinded his support for the cease-fire in June 2000. The Gama’a has not conducted an attack inside Egypt since August 1998. A senior member signed Osama Bin Laden’s fatwa in February 1998 calling for attacks against the United States.

Unofficially it is split in two factions; one that supports the cease-fire led by Mustafa Hamza, and one led by Rifa’i Taha Musa, calling for a return to armed operations. Taha Musa in early 2001 published a book in which he attempted to justify terrorist attacks that would cause mass casualties. Musa disappeared several months thereafter, and there are conflicting reports as to his current whereabouts. In March 2002, members of the group’s historic leadership in Egypt declared use of violence misguided and renounced its future use, prompting denunciations by much of the leadership abroad.

For members still dedicated to violent jihad, primary goal is to overthrow the Egyptian Government and replace it with an Islamic state. Disaffected IG members, such as those potentially inspired by Taha Musa or Abd al-Rahman, may be interested in carrying out attacks against US and Israeli interests.

Activities:

Group conducted armed attacks against Egyptian security and other government officials, Coptic Christians, and Egyptian opponents of Islamic extremism before the cease-fire. IG agents were convicted of aiding the group al-Jihad in killing Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981. From 1993 until the cease-fire, al-Gama'a launched attacks on tourists in Egypt, most notably the attack in November 1997 at Luxor that killed 58 foreign tourists. Also claimed responsibility for the attempt in June 1995 to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Gama'a never has specifically attacked a US citizen or facility but has threatened US interests.

Strength:

Unknown. At its peak the IG probably commanded several thousand hard-core members and a like number of sympathizers. The 1999 cease-fire and security crackdowns following the attack in Luxor in 1997 and, more recently, security efforts following September 11, probably have resulted in a substantial decrease in the group's numbers.

Location/Area of Operation:

Operates mainly in the Al-Minya, Asyut, Qina, and Sohaj Governorates of southern Egypt. Also appears to have support in Cairo, Alexandria, and other urban locations, particularly among unemployed graduates and students. Has a worldwide presence, including in the United Kingdom, Afghanistan, Yemen, and various locations in Europe.

External Aid:

Unknown. The Egyptian Government believes that Iran, Bin Laden, and Afghan militant groups support the organization. Also may obtain some funding through various Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Great East Islamic Raiders-Front (IBDA-C)

Description:

The Islamic Great Eastern Raiders-Front (IBDA-C) is a Sunni Salafi st group that supports Islamic rule in Turkey and believes that Turkey's present secular leadership is "illegal." It has been known to cooperate with various opposition elements in Turkey in attempts to destabilize the country's political structure. The group supports the establishment of a "pure Islamic" state, to replace the present "corrupt" Turkish regime that is cooperating with the West. Its primary goal is the establishment of the Federative Islamic State, a goal backed by armed terrorist attacks primarily against civilian targets. It has been active since the mid-1970s.

Activities:

The IBDA-C has engaged in activities that minimize personal risk, such as bombings, throwing Molotov cocktails and sabotage. The group has announced its actions and targets in publications to its members, who are free to launch independent attacks. The IBDA-C typically has attacked civilian targets, including: churches, charities, minority affiliated targets, television transmitters, newspapers, prosecular journalists, Atatürk statues, taverns, banks, clubs, and tobacco shops.

One of the IBDA-C's more renowned attacks was the killing of 37 people in a firebomb attack in July 1993 on a hotel in Sivas. The group claimed responsibility for a quadruple bomb attack in Istanbul in February 2002. In 1994, the IBDA-C was tied to an attempt to assassinate a Jewish businessman and an attack on the Greek Orthodox Church in Istanbul. In 1992, the group had unconfirmed involvement in an attack on an Istanbul synagogue. Turkish police believe that the IBDA-C has also claimed responsibilities for attacks carried out by other groups to elevate its image.

Strength

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation

Turkey.

External Aid

Specific sources of external aid are unknown.

HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement)

Description:

Formed in late 1987 as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Various HAMAS elements have used both political and violent means, including terrorism, to pursue the goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel. Loosely structured, with some elements working clandestinely and others working openly through mosques and social service institutions to recruit members, raise money, organize activities, and distribute propaganda. Hamas's strength is concentrated in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Also has engaged in peaceful political activity, such as running candidates in West Bank Chamber of Commerce elections and more recently in general Palestinian elections.

Activities:

HAMAS activists, especially those in the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, have conducted many attacks—including large-scale suicide bombings—against Israeli civilian and military targets. In the early 1990s, they also targeted suspected Palestinian collaborators and Fatah rivals. HAMAS increased its operational activity during 2001-2002 claiming numerous attacks against Israeli interests. The group has not targeted US interests—although some US citizens have been killed in HAMAS operations—and continues to confine its attacks to Israelis inside Israel and the territories.

Strength:

Unknown number of official members; tens of thousands of supporters and sympathizers.

Location/Area of Operation:

HAMAS currently limits its terrorist operations to Israeli military and civilian targets in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel. The group's leadership is dispersed throughout the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with a few senior leaders residing in Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf States.

External Aid:

Receives some funding from Iran but primarily relies on donations from Palestinian expatriates around the world and private benefactors in moderate Arab states. Some fundraising and propaganda activity take place in Western Europe and North America.

Hezbollah (Party of God)

a.k.a. Islamic Jihad, Revolutionary Justice Organization, Organization of the Oppressed on Earth, and Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine.

Description:

Formed in 1982 in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, this Lebanon-based radical Shi'a group takes its ideological inspiration from the Iranian revolution and the teachings of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. The Majlis al-Shura, or Consultative Council, is the group's highest governing body and is led by Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah is dedicated to liberating Jerusalem, ultimately eliminating Israel, and has formally advocated ultimate establishment of Islamic rule in Lebanon. Nonetheless, Hezbollah has actively participated in Lebanon's political system since 1992. Hezbollah is closely allied with, and often directed by, Iran but may have conducted operations that were not approved by Tehran. While Hezbollah does not share the Syrian regime's secular orientation, the group has been a strong tactical ally in helping Syria advance its political objectives in the region.

Activities:

Known or suspected to have been involved in numerous anti-US and anti-Israeli terrorist attacks, including the suicide truck bombings of the US Embassy and US Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983 and the US Embassy annex in Beirut in September 1984. Three members of Hezbollah, 'Imad Mughniyah, Hasan Izz-al-Din, and Ali Atwa, are on the FBI's list of 22 Most Wanted Terrorists for the hijacking in 1985 of TWA Flight 847 during which a US Navy diver was murdered. Elements of the group were responsible for the kidnapping and detention of US and other Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s. Hezbollah also attacked the Israeli Embassy in Argentina in 1992 and the

Israeli cultural center in Buenos Aires in 1994. In fall 2000, it captured three Israeli soldiers in the Shebaa Farms and kidnapped an Israeli noncombatant whom it may have lured to Lebanon under false pretenses.

In 2003, Hezbollah appeared to have established a presence in Iraq, but for the moment its activities there are limited. Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah stated in speeches that “we are heading . . . toward the end and elimination of Israel from the region” and that the group’s “slogan is and will continue to be death to America.” Hezbollah’s television station, al-Manar, continued to use inflammatory images and reporting in an effort to encourage the intifadah and promote Palestinian suicide operations.

In early 2004, Hezbollah released the non-combatant and returned the remains of the three IDF soldiers to Israel in exchange for the release of several Hezbollah members, including two senior officials.

Strength:

Several thousand supporters and a few hundred terrorist operatives

Location/Area of Operation:

Operates in the southern suburbs of Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, and southern Lebanon. Has established cells in Europe, Africa, South America, North America, and Asia.

External Aid:

Receives financial, training, weapons, explosives, political, diplomatic, and organizational aid from Iran and diplomatic, political, and logistic support from Syria.

Islamic Army of Aden (IAA) a.k.a.

Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA)

Description:

The Islamic Army of Aden (IAA) emerged publicly in mid-1998 when the group released a series of communiqués that expressed support for Osama Bin Laden and appealed for the overthrow of the Yemeni Government and operations against US and other Western interests in Yemen. IAA’s assets were frozen under E.O. 13224 in September 2001, and it was designated for sanctions under UNSCR 1333 in the same month.

Activities:

Engages in bombings and kidnappings to promote its goals. Kidnapped 16 British, US, and Australian tourists in late December 1998 near Mudiyah in southern Yemen. Since the capture and trial of the Mudiyah kidnappers and the execution in October 1999 of the group’s leader, Zein al-Abidine al-Mihdar (a.k.a. Abu Hassan), individuals associated with the IAA have remained involved in terrorist activities on a number of occasions. In 2001, the Yemeni Government convicted an IAA member and three associates for their role in the bombing in October 2000 of the British Embassy in Sanaa. The current status of the IAA is unknown. Despite the appearance of several press statements attributed to the IAA and released through intermediaries and the Internet in 2002, Yemeni officials claim that the group is operationally defunct. However, the group reportedly was behind an attack in June 2003 against a medical assistance convoy in the Abyan Governorate. Yemeni authorities responded with a raid on a suspected IAA facility, killing several individuals and capturing others, including Khalid al-Nabi al-Yazidi, the group’s leader. This would suggest that he group had resumed activity.

Strength:

Not known.

Location/Area of Operation

Operates in the southern governorates of Yemen—primarily Aden and Abyan.

External Aid:

Not known.

Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI)

a.k.a. Islamic Union

Description:

Somalia's largest militant Islamic organization rose to power in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. Its aims to establish an Islamic regime in Somalia and force the secession of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia have largely been abandoned. Some elements associated with AIAI maintain ties to al-Qaeda.

Activities:

Conducted terrorist attacks against Ethiopian forces and other Somali factions in the 1990s. The group is believed to be responsible for a series of bomb attacks in public places in Addis Ababa in 1996 and 1997 as well as the kidnapping of several relief workers in 1998. AIAI sponsors Islamic social programs, such as orphanages and schools, and provides pockets of security in Somalia.

Strength:

Estimated at some 2,000 members, plus additional reserve militias. Sustained significant losses at the hands of the Ethiopian military in the late 1990s, and members are now relegated to operating in small cells.

Location/Area of Operation:

Primarily in Somalia, with limited presence in Ethiopia and Kenya.

External Aid:

Receives funds from Middle East financiers and Western diaspora remittances and suspected training in Afghanistan. Past weapons deliveries from Sudan and Eritrea.

Al-Jihad

a.k.a. Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Jihad Group, Islamic Jihad, Vanguard of Conquest

Description:

Egyptian Islamic extremist group active since the late 1970s. Merged with Bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization in June 2001, but may retain some capability to conduct independent operations. Primary goals are to overthrow the Egyptian Government and replace it with an Islamic state and to attack US and Israeli interests in Egypt and abroad.

Activities:

Historically specialized in armed attacks against high-level Egyptian Government personnel, including cabinet ministers, and car bombings against official US and Egyptian facilities. The original Jihad was responsible for the assassination in 1981 of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Assassinated the People's Assembly Speaker Rifaat el-Mahgoub in October 1990. Claimed responsibility for the attempted assassinations of Interior Minister Hassan al-Alfi in August 1993 and Prime Minister Atef Sedky in November 1993. Has not conducted an attack inside Egypt since 1993 and has never targeted foreign tourists there. Responsible for Egyptian Embassy bombing in Islamabad in 1995; in 1998 an attack against US Embassy in Albania was thwarted. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has taken staunch measures to crack down on the group's operational capability since the 1980's.

Strength:

Unknown, but probably has several hundred hard-core members.

Location/Area of Operation:

Historically operated in the Cairo area, but most of its network is outside Egypt, including Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, and the United Kingdom, and its activities have been centered outside Egypt for several years.

External Aid:

Unknown. The Egyptian Government and US intelligence services claim that Iran supports the Jihad. Its merger with al-Qaeda also boosts Bin Laden's support for the group. Also may obtain some funding through various Islamic nongovernmental organizations, cover businesses, and criminal acts.

Kahane Chai (Kach)

Description:

Stated goal is to restore the biblical state of Israel and the implementation of Jewish law. Kach (founded by radical Israeli-American rabbi Meir Kahane) and its offshoot Kahane Chai, which means "Kahane Lives," (founded by Meir

Kahane's son Binyamin following his father's assassination in the United States) were declared to be terrorist organizations in March 1994 by the Israeli Cabinet under the 1948 Terrorism Law. This followed the groups' statements in support of Dr. Baruch Goldstein's attack in February 1994 on the al-Ibrahimi Mosque—Goldstein was affiliated with Kach—and their verbal attacks on the Israeli Government. Palestinian gunmen killed Binyamin Kahane and his wife in a drive-by shooting in December 2000 in the West Bank.

Activities:

The group has organized protests against the Israeli Government and has harassed and threatened Palestinians in the West Bank. Kach members have threatened to attack Arabs, Palestinians, and Israeli Government officials. Has vowed revenge for the death of Binyamin Kahane and his wife. Suspected of involvement in a number of low-level attacks since the start of the al-Aqsa intifada. Allegedly plotted to kill a US Representative and to attack Muslim groups and mosques in Los Angeles.

Strength:

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation:

Israel and West Bank settlements, particularly Qiryat Arba' in Hebron.

External Aid:

Receives support from sympathizers in the United States and Europe.

Kongra-Gel (KGK) (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK, KADEK)

a.k.a. Kurdistan People's Congress, Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK), Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan

Description:

Founded in 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist insurgent group primarily composed of Turkish Kurds. The group's goal has been to establish an independent, democratic Kurdish state in the Middle East. In the early 1990s, the PKK moved beyond rural-based insurgent activities to include urban terrorism. Turkish authorities captured Chairman Abdullah Ocalan in Kenya in early 1999; the Turkish State Security Court subsequently sentenced him to death. In August 1999, Ocalan announced a "peace initiative," ordering members to refrain from violence and requesting dialogue with Ankara on Kurdish issues. At a PKK Congress in January 2000, members supported Ocalan's initiative and claimed the group now would use only political means to achieve its public goal of improved rights for Kurds in Turkey. In April 2002 at its 8th Party Congress, the PKK changed its name to the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and proclaimed a commitment to nonviolent activities in support of Kurdish rights. Despite this pledge, a PKK/KADEK spokesman stated that its armed wing, The People's Defense Force, would not disband or surrender its weapons for reasons of self-defense. In late 2003, the group sought to engineer another political face-lift, renaming the group Kongra-Gel (KGK) and brandishing its "peaceful" intentions, while continuing to commit attacks and refuse disarmament. First designated in October 1997.

Activities:

Primary targets have been Turkish Government security forces in Turkey, local Turkish officials, and illagers who oppose the organization in Turkey. Conducted attacks on Turkish diplomatic and commercial facilities in dozens of West European cities in 1993 and again in spring 1995. In an attempt to damage Turkey's tourist industry, the then PKK bombed tourist sites and hotels and kidnapped foreign tourists in the early-to-mid 1990s. KGK continued to engage in violent acts—including at least one terrorist attack—against the Turkish state in 2003. Several members were arrested in Istanbul in late 2003 in possession of explosive materials.

Strength:

Approximately 4,000 to 5,000, most of whom currently are located in northern Iraq. Has thousands of sympathizers in Turkey and Europe.

Location/Area of Operation:

Operates primarily in Turkey, Europe, and the Middle East.

External Aid:

Has received safehaven and modest aid from Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Syria and Iran appear to cooperate with Turkey against KGK in a limited fashion when it serves their immediate interests. KGK uses Europe for fundraising and conducting political propaganda.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

a.k.a. Al-Jam'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah, Fighting Islamic Group, Libyan Fighting Group, Libyan Islamic Group, Al Manar

Description:

Emerged in 1995 among Libyans who had fought against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Declared the government of Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi un-Islamic and pledged to overthrow it. Some members maintain a strictly anti-Qadhafi focus and organize against Libyan Government interests, but others are aligned with Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization or are active in the international mujahadeen network. The group was designated for asset freeze under E. O. 13224 and UNSCR 1333 in September 2001.

Activities:

Claimed responsibility for a failed assassination attempt against Qadhafi in 1996 and engaged Libyan security forces in armed clashes during the mid-to-late 1990s. Continues to target Libyan interests and may engage in sporadic clashes with Libyan security forces.

Strength:

Not known but probably has several hundred active members or supporters.

Location/Area of Operation:

Probably maintains a clandestine presence in Libya, but since late 1990s, many members have fled to various Middle Eastern and European countries.

External Aid:

Not known. May obtain some funding through private donations, various Islamic nongovernmental organizations, and criminal acts.

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

Description:

Founded in 1989 as the successor to the Holy Spirit Movement, the LRA seeks to overthrow the Ugandan Government and replace it with a regime that will implement the group's brand of Christianity.

Activities:

Since the early 1990's, the LRA has kidnapped and killed local Ugandan civilians in order to discourage foreign investment, precipitate a crisis in Uganda, and replenish their ranks. LRA has stepped up its activities since early 2002 when the Ugandan army, with the Sudanese Government's permission, attacked LRA positions inside Sudan. Since then, the number of internally displaced has doubled to 1.4 million, and the LRA has pushed deep into non-Acholi areas where it had never previously operated.

Strength:

Estimated between 1,000 and 1,500 of which 85% are abducted children.

Location/Area of Operation: Northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

External Aid:

While the LRA has been supported by the Government of Sudan in the past, the Sudanese are now cooperating with the Government of Uganda in a campaign to eliminate LRA sanctuaries in Sudan.

Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM)

Description:

The goals of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) reportedly include establishing an Islamic state in Morocco and supporting al-Qaeda's jihad against the West. The group appears to have emerged in the late 1990s and comprises Moroccan recruits who trained in armed camps in Afghanistan. GICM members interact with other North African extremists, particularly in Europe. On 22 November 2002, the United States designated the GICM for asset freeze under E.O. 13224. This followed the submission of the GICM to the UNSCR 1267 sanctions committee.

Activities:

Moroccans associated with the GICM are part of the support network of the broader international jihadist movement and are believed to be involved in the Casablanca suicide bombings in May 2003. GICM members, working with other North African extremists, engage in trafficking falsified documents and possibly gunrunning. The group in the past has issued communiqués and statements against the Moroccan Government.

Strength:

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation

Western Europe, Afghanistan, and possibly Morocco.

External Aid

Unknown.

Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO)

a.k.a. The National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA, the militant wing of the MEK), the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), National Council of Resistance (NCR), the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), Muslim Iranian Student's Society (front organization used to garner financial support)

Description:

The MEK philosophy mixes Marxism and Islam. Formed in the 1960s, the organization was expelled from Iran after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and its primary support came from the Iraqi regime. The MEK's history is studded with anti-Western attacks as well as terrorist attacks on the interests of the clerical regime in Iran and abroad. The MEK now advocates a secular Iranian regime.

Activities:

The worldwide campaign against the Iranian Government stresses propaganda and occasionally uses terrorist violence. During the 1970s, the MEK killed US military personnel and US civilians working on defense projects in Tehran and supported the takeover in 1979 of the US Embassy in Tehran. In 1981, the MEK detonated bombs in the head office of the Islamic Republic Party and the Premier's office, killing some 70 high-ranking Iranian officials, including chief Justice Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, President Mohammad-Ali Rajaei, and Premier Mohammad-Javad Bahonar. Near the end of the 1980-88 war with Iran, Baghdad armed the MEK with military equipment and sent it into action against Iranian forces. In 1991, it assisted the Government of Iraq in suppressing the Shia and Kurdish uprisings in southern Iraq and the Kurdish uprisings in the north. Since then, the MEK has continued to perform internal security services for the Government of Iraq. In April 1992, the MEK conducted near-simultaneous attacks on Iranian Embassies and installations in 13 countries, demonstrating the group's ability to mount large-scale operations overseas. In recent years, the MEK has targeted key military officers and assassinated the deputy chief of the Armed Forces General Staff in April 1999. In April 2000, the MEK attempted to assassinate the commander of the Nasr Headquarters—the interagency board responsible for coordinating policies on Iraq. The normal pace of anti-Iranian operations increased during the "Operation Great Bahman" in February 2000, when the group launched a dozen attacks against Iran. In 2000 and 2001, the MEK was involved regularly in mortar attacks and hit-and-run raids on Iranian military and law-enforcement units and government buildings near the Iran-Iraq border, although MEK terrorism in Iran declined throughout the remainder of 2001. Since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the tactics along the border have garnered almost no military gains and have become commonplace. MEK insurgent activities in Tehran constitute the biggest security concern for the Iranian leadership. In February 2000, for example, the MEK launched a mortar attack against the leadership complex in Tehran that houses the offices of the Supreme Leader and the President. Assassinated the Iranian Chief of Staff. France decided to end its policy of giving the group asylum in 2003, and arrested several top members who had been living there for some time. In 2003, as part of the Iraq War, the US signed a cease-fire with the MEK and have since disarmed them.

Strength

Some 3,800 members are confined to Camp Ashraf, the MEK's main compound near Baghdad, where they remain under Coalition control. As a condition of the cease-fire agreement, the group relinquished its weapons, including tanks, armored vehicles, and heavy artillery.

Location/Area of Operation:

In the 1980s, the MEK's leaders were forced by Iranian security forces to flee to France. Since resettling in Iraq in 1987, almost all of its armed units are currently stationed in fortified bases near the border with Iran. In the mid-1980s, the group did not mount terrorist operations in Iran at a level similar to its activities in the 1970s, but by the 1990s the MEK had claimed credit for an increasing number of operations in Iran.

External Aid:

Beyond receiving all of its military assistance, and most of its financial support, from the Iraqi regime, the MEK uses front organizations to solicit contributions from expatriate Iranian communities.

The Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

Description:

Originated among militant Palestinians in the Gaza Strip during the 1970s. PIJ-Shiqaqi faction, currently led by Ramadan Shallah in Damascus, is most active. Committed to the creation of an Islamic Palestinian state and the destruction of Israel through holy war. Also opposes moderate Arab governments that it believes have been tainted by Western secularism.

Activities:

PIJ activists have conducted many attacks including large-scale suicide bombings against Israeli civilian and military targets. The group increased its operational activity since 2002, claiming numerous attacks against Israeli interests. The group has not yet targeted US interests and continues to confine its attacks to Israelis inside Israel and the territories, although US citizens have died in attacks mounted by the PIJ. The group announced in February 2003 that it would not target American nationals even though the US indicted eight members of the PIJ.

Strength:

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation:

Primarily Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip, but the group's leaders reside in other parts of the Middle East, including Lebanon and Syria.

External Aid:

Receives financial assistance from Iran and limited logistic support assistance from Syria.

Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)

Description:

Broke away from the PFLP-GC in the late 1970's. Later split again into pro-PLO, pro-Syrian, and pro-Libyan factions. Pro-PLO faction led by Muhammad Abbas (a.k.a Abu Abbas), currently based in Baghdad.

Activities:

The Abu Abbas-led faction is known for aerial attacks, including the use of hang gliders and hot air balloons, against Israel. Abbas's group also was responsible for the attack in 1985 on the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro and the murder of US citizen Leon Klinghoffer. A warrant for Abu Abbas's arrest was outstanding in Italy. He was captured by the U.S. military in Iraq in early 2004 and died of natural causes shortly thereafter. Launched an assault on the Israeli beach area at Nizanim in 1990. Has become more active since the start of the al-Aqsa intifada, and several PLF members have been arrested by Israeli authorities for planning attacks in Israel and the West Bank.

Strength:

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation:

Based in Iraq since 1990; has a presence in Lebanon and the West Bank.

External Aid:

Receives support mainly from Iraq. Has received support from Libya in the past.

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)

Description:

Marxist-Leninist group founded in 1967 by George Habash—as a member of the PLO— when it broke away from the Arab Nationalist Movement. The PFLP views the Palestinian struggle as a legitimate struggle against illegal occupation. The PFLP is opposed to negotiations with Israel.

Activities:

Committed numerous international terrorist attacks during the 1970s. Since 1978 has conducted attacks against Israeli or moderate Arab targets, including killing a settler and her son in December 1996. The PFLP has stepped up its operational activity since the start of the current intifada highlighted by its assassination of the Israeli Tourism Minister in October 2001 to avenge Israel's killing of the PFLP Secretary General earlier that year. The PFLP leader, Ahmed Sadat, was arrested by the Palestinian Authority in 2002. The PA has received threats from PFLP supporters.

Strength:

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation:

Syria, Lebanon, Israel, West Bank, and Gaza Strip.

External Aid:

Receives safe haven and some logistic assistance from Syria. Iran contributes financially.

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)

Description:

Split from the PFLP in 1968, claiming it wanted to focus more on fighting and less on politics. Opposed to Arafat's PLO. Led by Ahmad Jabril, a former captain in the Syrian Army. Jabril's son, Jihad, was killed by a car bomb in May 2002. Closely tied to both Syria and Iran.

Activities:

Carried out dozens of attacks in Europe and the Middle East during 1970s-80s. Known for cross-border terrorist attacks into Israel using unusual means, such as hot-air balloons and motorized hang gliders. Primary focus now on guerrilla operations in southern Lebanon and small-scale attacks in Israel, West Bank, and Gaza Strip. The PFLP-GC killed two IDF soldiers on patrol in the West Bank in November, 2003.

Strength:

Several hundred.

Location/Area of Operation:

Headquartered in Damascus with bases in Lebanon. Operates in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

External Aid:

Receives logistic and military support from Syria and Libya. Libya provided the hang gliders used in several raids.

Al-Qaeda

a.k.a. Qa'idat al-Jihad**Description:**

Established by Osama Bin Laden in the late 1980s to bring together Arabs who fought in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. Helped finance, recruit, transport, and train Sunni Islamic extremists for the Afghan resistance. Current goal is to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate throughout the world by working with allied Islamic extremist groups to overthrow regimes it deems "non-Islamic" and expelling Westerners and non-Muslims from Muslim countries—particularly Saudi Arabia. Issued statement under banner of "the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders" in February 1998, saying it was the duty of all Muslims to kill US citizens—civilian or military—and their allies everywhere. Merged with Egyptian Islamic Jihad (Al-Jihad) in June 2001.

Activities:

In 2002, carried out bombing on 28 November of hotel in Mombassa, Kenya, killing 15 and injuring 40. Probably supported a nightclub bombing in Bali, Indonesia, on 12 October that killed about 180. Responsible for an attack on US military personnel in Kuwait, on 8 October, that killed one US soldier and injured another. Directed a suicide attack on the MV Limburg off the coast of Yemen, on 6 October that killed one and injured four. Carried out a firebombing of a synagogue in Tunisia on 11 April that killed 19 and injured 22. On 11 September 2001, 19 al-Qaeda suicide attackers hijacked and crashed four US commercial jets, two into the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon near Washington, DC, and a fourth into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, leaving about 3,000 individuals dead or missing. Directed the 12 October 2000 attack on the USS Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, killing 17 US Navy members, and injuring another 39. Conducted the bombings in August 1998 of the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, that killed at least 301 individuals and injured more than 5,000 others. Claims to have shot down US helicopters and killed US servicemen in Somalia in 1993 and to have conducted three bombings that targeted US troops in Aden, Yemen, in December 1992. Taliban and al-Qaeda elements are responsible for continuing attacks on relief workers and Afghans working with the coalition in Afghanistan. An affiliated group has been linked to the bombing of a series of Spanish trains in March 2004. It is suspected that the group or groups affiliated with al-Qaeda have carried out attacks against coalition forces in Iraq.

Al-Qaeda is linked to the following plans that were disrupted or not carried out: to assassinate Pope John Paul II during his visit to Manila in late 1994, to kill President Clinton during a visit to the Philippines in early 1995, to bomb in midair a dozen US trans-Pacific flights in 1995, and to set off a bomb at Los Angeles International Airport in 1999. Also plotted to carry out terrorist operations against US and Israeli tourists visiting Jordan for millennial celebrations in late 1999. (Jordanian authorities thwarted the planned attacks and put 28 suspects on trial.) In December 2001, suspected al-Qaeda associate Richard Colvin Reid attempted to ignite a shoe bomb on a transatlantic flight from Paris to Miami. Attempted to shoot down an Israeli chartered plane with a surface-to-air missile as it departed the Mombassa airport in November 2002.

Strength:

Al-Qaeda probably has several thousand members and associates. The arrests of senior-level al-Qaeda operatives have interrupted some terrorist plots. Also serves as a focal point or umbrella organization for a worldwide network that includes many Sunni Islamic extremist groups, some members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and the Harakat ul-Mujahidin.

Location/Area of Operation:

Al-Qaeda has cells worldwide and is reinforced by its ties to Sunni extremist networks. Was based in Afghanistan until Coalition forces removed the Taliban from power in late 2001. Al-Qaeda has dispersed in small groups across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East and probably will attempt to carry out future attacks against US interests. It is suspected that a number of Al-Qaeda operatives remain active in the border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

External Aid:

Al-Qaeda maintains moneymaking front businesses, solicits donations from like-minded supporters, and illicitly siphons funds from donations to Muslim charitable organizations. US efforts to block al-Qaeda funding have hampered the group's ability to obtain money. They are also suspected of being involved with the illicit narcotics trade in Afghanistan.

The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC)

Description:

The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), an outgrowth of the GIA, appears to have eclipsed the GIA since approximately 1998, and is currently the most effective armed group inside Algeria. In contrast to the GIA, the GSPC has gained popular support through its pledge to avoid civilian attacks inside Algeria. Its adherents abroad appear to have largely co-opted the external networks of the GIA, active particularly throughout Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Activities:

The GSPC continues to conduct operations aimed at government and military targets, primarily in rural areas, although civilians are sometimes killed. Such attacks include false roadblocks and attacks against convoys transporting military, police, or other government personnel. According to press reporting, some GSPC members in Europe maintain contacts with other North African extremists sympathetic to al Qaeda. In late 2002, Algerian authorities announced they had killed a Yemeni al-Qaeda operative who had been meeting with the GSPC inside Algeria. Attacks by the GSPC increased in 2003.

Strength:

Unknown; probably several hundred fighters with an unknown number of support networks inside Algeria.

Location/Area of Operation:

Algeria, possibly Western Europe

External Aid:

Algerian expatriates and GSPC members abroad, many residing in Western Europe, provide financial and logistic support. In addition, the Algerian Government has accused Iran and Sudan of supporting Algerian extremists in years past.

Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (QJBR) (al-Qaida in Iraq)

(formerly Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad, JTJ, al-Zarqawi Network)ⁱⁱⁱ

Description:

A group led by al-Zarqawi dedicated to overthrow the interim Iraqi government and establish an Islamic state in Iraq by forcing out the U.S.-led coalition. The group has ties to al-Qaeda and al-Zarqawi has publicly sworn his allegiance to Bin Ladin. The group not only targets US-led coalition troops, but anyone they deem assistant the Coalition's efforts, including Iraqi police, local and foreign contractors and Iraqi army recruits.

Activities:

The group has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks on both Iraqis and Coalition troops, as well as a number of high profile kidnappings and murders, such as the beheading of US contractor Nicholas Berg.

Strength:

Estimates vary, but the group probably has several hundred dedicated members.

Location/Area of Operation:

The group operates in Iraq.

External Aid:

Unknown

The Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG)

Description:

The Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG), also known as the Jama'a Combattante Tunisienne, reportedly is seeking to establish an Islamic regime in Tunisia and targets US and Western interests. Probably founded in 2000 by Tarek

Maaroufi and Saifallah Ben Hassine, the loosely organized group has come to be associated with al-Qaeda and other North African extremist networks that have been implicated in terrorist plots during the past two years. The group was designated for sanctions under UNSCR 1333 in December 2000. Belgian authorities continue to hold Maaroufi, whom they arrested in December 2001.

Activities:

Tunisians associated with the TCG are part of the support network of the broader international jihadist movement. According to European press reports, TCG members or affiliates in the past have engaged in trafficking falsified documents and recruiting for terror training camps in Afghanistan. Some TCG associates are suspected of planning an attack against the US, Algerian, and Tunisian diplomatic missions in Rome in January 2001. Some members reportedly maintain ties to the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).

Strength:

Unknown.

Location/Area of Operation:

Western Europe, Afghanistan.

External Aid:

Unknown.

Turkish Hezbollah

Description

Turkish Hezbollah is a Kurdish Islamic (Sunni) extremist organization that arose in the early 1980s in response to Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) atrocities against Muslims in southeastern Turkey, where Turkish Hezbollah seeks to establish an independent Islamic state.

Activities

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Turkish Hezbollah, which is unrelated to Lebanese Hezbollah, expanded its target base and modus operandi from killing PKK militants to conducting low-level bombings against liquor stores, bordellos, and other establishments that the organization considered "anti-Islamic." In January 2000, Turkish security forces killed Huseyin Velioglu, the leader of Turkish Hezbollah, in a shootout at a safehouse in Istanbul. The incident sparked a yearlong series of counterterrorist operations against the group that resulted in the detention of some 2,000 individuals; authorities arrested several hundred of those on criminal charges. At the same time, police recovered nearly 70 bodies of Turkish and Kurdish businessmen and journalists that Turkish Hezbollah had tortured and brutally murdered during the mid-to-late 1990s. The group began targeting official Turkish interests in January 2001, when its operatives assassinated the Diyarbakir police chief in the group's most sophisticated operation to date. Turkish Hezbollah did not conduct a major operation in 2003 but is probably attempting to reorganize.

Strength

Possibly a few hundred members and several thousand supporters.

Location/Area of Operation

Turkey, primarily the Diyarbakir region of southeastern Turkey.

External Aid

Unknown

Source: Adapted from IISS, Military Balance, 2003-2004 and the CRS report on Foreign Terrorist Organizations, with additional comments by author.

ⁱ There have also been cases of state-sponsored attacks. These include the Libyan bombings of Pan Am flight 103 over Scotland in 1988 and the bombing of UTA flight 772 over Chad in 1989. The bombing of Pan Am flight 103 killed 259 people on board and 11 people on the ground, and the bombing of UTA flight 772 killed 171 people on board.

ⁱⁱ For historical background on Bin Laden, see Kenneth Katzman, "Persian Gulf: Radical Islamic Movements," Washington, Congressional Research Service, 96-731-F, August 30, 1996.

ⁱⁱⁱ Information drawn from the US Department of State, the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism.