

**Asbat al-Ansar (AAA)**

**(Also known as: League of Partisans; Band of Partisans, Band of Helpers, League of the Followers, Partisans' League, Usbat al-Ansar, Usbat ul-Ansar, Osbat al-Ansar, Isbat al-Ansar, Esbat al-Ansar).**

The following information is based on publicly available details about Asbat al-Ansar (AAA). AAA is listed in the United Nation's 1267 Committee's consolidated list and as a proscribed terrorist organisation by the governments of Canada, the UK, the US and Russia.

AAA adheres to an extremist jihadist ideology akin to that of al-Qa'ida (AQ). AAA's objectives are to establish a Sunni Islamic state in Lebanon by overthrowing the Lebanese government, eliminating Israel and impeding anti-Islamic and pro-Western influences in Lebanon. The group believes its struggle justifies violence against civilians and the group's strategy in seeking its objective includes the use of terrorist tactics.

AAA is a Sunni Muslim extremist group, largely based in the Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp near Sidon in southern Lebanon. The group was established by Hisham al-Shraidi after Lebanon's Al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya group removed him in 1986. Shraidi was assassinated in 1991, apparently on the orders of Amin Khayid, a Fatah member also based in the Ayn al-Hilwah camp. He was succeeded by Ahmed Abd al-Karim al-Saadi, who is also known as Abu Muhjin.

**Current status of AAA**

In the 1990's, AAA limited its operations to Lebanon and engaged in a number of low-level attacks against 'un-Islamic' targets. These included attacks against religious institutions, bars, and theatres, as well as Lebanese forces, elements of the Lebanese government and foreign nationals. The group became more widely known following a series of attacks on nightclubs, theatres and liquor stores. AAA widened its operations to conduct attacks against foreign interests in Lebanon and assassinations of significant religious leaders. AAA's attack methods included rocket-propelled grenades, explosive charges, rockets and car bombs. Since 2004 there is no record of AAA conducting any violent operations in Lebanon. However, there is evidence of AAA members being involved in violent incidents, including fighting Coalition forces in Iraq.

AAA has recently been reluctant to involve itself in operations in Lebanon as it fears it will attract the attention of the Lebanese Armed Forces and threaten its uninterrupted operations in Ayn al-Hilwah. Various extremist web forums criticized AAA for its failure to support fellow Sunni extremist group Fatah al-Islam (FAI) during the Lebanese Armed Forces campaign in summer 2007 that forced FAI out of Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in northern Lebanon, which had a significant impact on the operations of the group. AAA now concentrates on recruiting, training and dispatching volunteers to the insurgency in Iraq. On 3 June 2008, Jund al-Sham gunmen attacked a Lebanese army position on the edge of Ayn al-Hilweh but AAA appears to have distanced itself from the fighting and joined a united Palestinian group to maintain peace in the camp. AAA is likely to actively urge for peace in the camp to ensure it can continue to provide fighters for Iraq without interference from the Lebanese Armed Forces.

AAA maintains close ties with al-Qa'ida. They share the same doctrine and AAA openly supports the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, AAA does not support al-Qa'ida's operations in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria and Syria.

AAA remains active and has shifted its focus to Iraq, sending fighters in support of the insurgency in collaboration with al-Qa'ida. AAA continues to announce the death or martyrdom of AAA members fighting the 'crusader' forces in Iraq.

AAA's leaders continue to make statements supporting attacks conducted by other groups and advocates violent acts against the West, such as the February 2006 statement praising attacks by angry mobs against the Danish consulates in Beirut and Damascus in response to the Danish cartoons controversy, and the April 2004 announcement urging Iraqi insurgents to kill Western hostages to avenge the death of Hamas leaders Abdul Aziz Rantisi and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

AAA primarily receives funding from other extremist Sunni terrorist organisations, such as al-Qa'ida. AAA is one of a number of Sunni Salafist groups located in Lebanon to receive funds from Saudi Arabia. Financial assistance is also received by AAA from Muslims living abroad and repatriated to AAA in Lebanon and also from people of Lebanese origin visiting Lebanon from abroad.

### **Objectives**

AAA is a Lebanon based, Sunni extremist group, composed primarily of Palestinians and associated with al-Qa'ida. The group follows an extremist interpretation of Islam that justifies violence against civilians to achieve political ends. Some of those goals include overthrowing the Lebanese Government and impeding perceived anti-Islamic and pro-Western influences. It also supports the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan and the activities of violent extremists in the Palestinian Territories.

### **Leadership and Membership**

AAA was formerly led by Ahmed Abd al-Karim al-Saadi (aka Abu Muhjin). Abu Muhjin has continued his activities in secret after being sentenced to death by the Lebanese Government *in absentia* for the 1994 assassination of Sheikh Nizar al-Halabi, the leader of a rival Islamic extremist group. In his absence, Abu Muhjin's brother, Haytham 'Abd Al-Karim Al Sa'di (aka Abu Tariq), had been nominally leading the group.

AAA is primarily Palestinian and its membership is estimated to be 100-300 members. AAA operatives have previously fought in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, the Balkans and Iraq.

### **AAA engagement in terrorist activities**

On 8 January 2008 the Lebanese military judiciary security forces charged Mu'ammarr Al-Awami (aka Ibn al-Shahid), who is believed to be associated with AAA, and charged him with planning attacks against American fast food outlets in Beirut in 2002 and 2003. AAA members were involved in other violence in Lebanon in 2003, including a June 2003 rocket attack on the Hariri affiliated Future TV building in Beirut.

Around 2003, AAA gave priority to supporting the insurgency in Iraq with a corresponding reduction in its activities in Lebanon. AAA operatives have been

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involved in fighting Coalition Forces in Iraq since at least 2005 and several members of the group have been killed in anti-Coalition operations.

In September 2004 AAA linked operatives were believed to be involved in a plan to target foreign embassies and Lebanese Government offices for terrorist attacks. In October 2004, Mahir al-Sa'idi, a member of AAA, was sentenced *in absentia* to life imprisonment for plotting to assassinate former US Ambassador to Lebanon David Satterfield in 2000. Al-Sa'idi was working in cooperation with Abu Muhammad al-Masri, the head of al-Qa'ida at the Ayn al-Hilwah refugee camp, where fighting has occurred between Asbat al-Ansar and Fatah elements.

Members of AAA were believed responsible for a Katyusha rocket attack on the Galilee region of Israel in December 2005 and most likely sought refuge in southern Lebanon in AAA controlled neighbourhoods.

In May 2007 AAA announced one of its members was "martyred" during an attack outside Ayn al-Hilwah against the Lebanese Army in support of the Fatah al-Islam conflict in Nahr al-Barid refugee camp.

Lebanese authorities detained a cell of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) extremists in June 2007 in the Bekaa Valley that had trained with AAA and was possibly planning terrorist attacks throughout Lebanon against United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) or Western targets.

In 2007, AAA remained focused on supporting jihad in Iraq and planning attacks against UNIFIL, Lebanese security forces, and Western interests. AAA associates were implicated in the 17 June 2007 Katyusha rocket attack against northern Israel.

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