

Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC)
(Also known as: Le Group Salafiste Pour La Prediction et le Combat)

The following information is based on publicly available details about the GSPC. These details have been corroborated by material from intelligence investigations into the activities of the GSPC and by official reporting. ASIO assesses that the details set out below are accurate and reliable.

The GSPC is listed as a proscribed terrorist organisation by the United Nations and the United States Government.

Background

The Algeria-based GSPC was formed by a splinter group of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in 1998. The GIA in turn was founded in the early 1990's following the Algerian Government's ban on the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) imposed after FIS's victory in the first round of legislative elections in December 1991. The GIA began a high profile campaign of terrorist acts in 1993 and quickly became one of Algeria's most radical and violent Islamist extremist groups. It distinguished itself from other such groups operating in Algeria by indiscriminately targeting civilians, a policy which led one of its commanders, Hassan Hattab, to break away to found the GSPC. Many GIA guerrillas defected to the new group.

The GSPC has links to al-Qa'ida. Prior to his arrest in 2002, London-based Sheikh Omar Mahmud Muhammad Othman, also known as Abu Qatada and a spiritual leader within al Qa'ida, maintained a relationship and coordinating role with the GSPC from the time of its formation. Abu Qatada was arrested in October 2002 by British authorities under the *Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001*. ASIO has additional credible information on links between GSPC members and al-Qa'ida, including information that GSPC members have received training in al-Qa'ida training camps and that the group receives weapons from al Qa'ida.

The GSPC continues to engage in planned acts of violence with a view to furthering its political and religious objectives in Algeria, and has issued threats against US and European interests. It has made statements indicating an intention to attack western civilians. In June 2004, the GSPC published a statement on a jihadist website declaring war on non-muslims in Algeria. The text, entitled "Communiqué on war against foreigners" and signed by the emir Abou Ibrahim Mustapha, announced that "taking into account the difficult circumstances the Oumma and the mujahidine are going through, war is declared against all foreigners in Algeria. Its interests, premises and infra-structures will not be spared".

Objectives

GSPC is a Sunni Islamic extremist group which aims to overthrow the secular government in Algeria and establish an Islamic Republic. The GSPC has, in pursuing this objective, undertaken murders, kidnappings, bombings, robbery, extortion and looting.

Membership and Leadership

The GSPC has approximately 3000 members. While many of the group's members were concentrated in the east of Algeria, many have recently relocated to Chad and Mali due to porous borders and counter-terrorism operations by the Algerian Government and the United States. The group also attracts support from European cells, predominantly in France, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom.

GSPC founding member and leader Hassan Hattab was reportedly killed in an internal power struggle during September 2003. After this event, Nabil Sahraoui assumed leadership of the group until his death in June 2004. The GSPC is now reportedly led by Abou Mousaab Abdelouadoud.

Terrorist Activities

The GSPC has been involved in a number of terrorist attacks, including assassination, kidnapping, bombing, robbery, and extortion against Algerian government and military targets and Western nationals.

Terrorist attacks and activities for which the GSPC has claimed responsibility or for which responsibility has been reliably attributed to GSPC have included:

- a series of kidnappings of Western tourists in Algerian Sahara. A total of thirty two foreign tourists were kidnapped and held in two groups during February/March 2003. Seventeen hostages were freed through Algerian military action on 13 May 2003. Fourteen were released in Mali in August 2003 after a negotiated ransom. One female hostage died, reportedly from dehydration and exhaustion;
- 7 April 2003 -attack on Maazouz village, killing three;
- a plan to kidnap competitors in the Paris to Dakar Rally in January 2004 as they travelled through Mali was foiled.;
- 10 March 2004 - assassination in Algiers of the Imam of the El Harrach mosque, Abdennacer Abou Hafs;
- 14 March 2004 - Two civilians killed in Dellys, one of them a Democratic National Rally official;
- 24 April 2004 - robbery of an armoured car in Tizi Ouzou;
- 6 June 2004 - assassination of the chief of security for the Mekla region;
- 6 June 2004 - calls for assassinations via a web site with links to armed Islamist fundamentalist groups around the world;

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- 21 June 2004 – car bombing of an electricity plant in Algiers;
- 7 July 04 – killing of an official from a local aggregate extraction quarry in Abouda;
- 18 September 2004 – defusing of a bomb by security agencies in a café located in Erraghen. This village has been the scene of attacks perpetrated by GSPC members active between the Babors mountains and Dar El-Oued;
- 23 October 2004 – 16 killed in attack on a bus transporting fans to a soccer match in Algeriers; and
- June 2003 – September 2004 – numerous attacks against Algerian police, security and military forces resulting in the deaths of approximately 19 personnel.
- The GSPC has also made public anti-Western statements since 2002:
 - October 2003 – the GSPC announced that it had pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida;
 - January 2004 – statement released stating that the GSPC's jihad in Algeria was part of the international jihad led by Usama bin Laden; and
 - June 2004 – statement released declaring "war on all foreigners and foreign interests in Algeria".

ASIO assesses that the GSPC is continuing to prepare, plan and foster the commission of acts involving threats to human life and serious damage to property. This assessment is corroborated by information provided by reliable and credible intelligence sources and by official reporting.

Conclusion

ASIO assesses that the GSPC remains committed to its objective of overthrowing the Algerian Government and replacing it with an Islamic state. ASIO further assess that core members remain active, and continue to prepare, plan and foster the commission of acts involving threats to human life and serious damage to property. This assessment is corroborated by information provided by reliable and credible intelligence sources.

In the course of pursuing its objectives, the GSPC is known to have engaged in actions that:

- are aimed at advancing the GSPC's political and religious causes; and
- are intended to, or do, cause serious damage to property, the death of persons or endangerment of life.
- are intended to cause, or have caused, serious risk to the safety of sections of the public in countries around the world and persons visiting these countries.

In view of the above information, the GSPC is assessed to be preparing, planning, and fostering the conduct of terrorist acts. Such acts include actions which are to be done and threats of actions which are to be made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause and with the intention of coercing, or influencing by

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intimidation the government and people of numerous countries. The actions or threatened actions which the GSPC is assessed to be involved in would, if successfully completed, cause serious physical harm and death to persons and serious damage to property.