



Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula



Homebase: Southern & Eastern Yemen

Key Leaders/Members

Nasir al-Wuhayshi
Emir (Leader)

Jalal Balaidi
Regional Commander

Qasim al-Raymi
Military Commander

Ibrahim al-Rubaish
Mufti/Religious Scholar

Ibrahim al-Asiri
Chief Bomb-maker

History

Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) announced its formation in January 2009 from a merger of al-Qa'ida in Yemen (often described as AQAP's predecessor) and al-Qa'ida members who fled to Yemen after a government crackdown in Saudi Arabia in late 2008. Since its formation, AQAP has been implicated in a handful of high profile terrorist attacks and attempted attacks, including multiple attempts to attack the US Homeland. AQAP's first major attack was the attempted assassination of Saudi prince Mohammed bin Nayef by Abdullah Hassan al-Asiri, a suicide bomber and younger brother to AQAP chief bomb-maker Ibrahim al-Asiri. Al-Asiri also constructed the bombs used to target the US Homeland including the failed "underwear bomber" on Christmas Day 2009, the October 2010 bomb attempt against US-bound cargo planes, and the May 2012 attempt to bomb US-bound airplanes.

In summer 2010, AQAP released its first issue of *Inspire*, an online English language magazine. A total of eleven issues have been released to date. The magazine contains articles intended to radicalize a Western audience as well as provide practical advice on carrying out simple terrorist plots in a section entitled "Open Source Jihad." Multiple home-grown violent extremists (HVE) in the US have been known to have read *Inspire* including Naser Jason Abdo, Adel Daoud, and the Qazi brothers. The magazine was edited and published by Samir Khan with significant contributions by Anwar al-Awlaki. Both were US citizens and members of AQAP killed in a US drone strike on September 30, 2011.

Current Intent & Capability

AQAP has continued to demonstrate both the intent and capability to strike US interests at home and abroad. According to statements from US intelligence officials, including former NCTC director Michael Leiter, AQAP presents the greatest international terrorism threat to the US Homeland.

The US State Department estimates AQAP's current strength at 1,000 members, although much of this membership is not fully engaged in external operations. Continuing US drone strikes in Yemen, which have killed key AQAP leaders like Anwar al-Awlaki and Said al-Shihri, help to degrade capabilities in the near term.

Future Outlook

Analysts have recently noted a shift of al-Qa'ida's center of gravity from al-Qa'ida Core (AQC) in Afghanistan to AQAP in Yemen, citing two major developments. First is Wuhayshi's appointment as AQ Core Deputy Emir and heir apparent to the wider AQ movement. Second is the central location of Yemen across active al-Qa'ida areas of operation that has allowed AQAP to become a hub of communication and training between al-Qa'ida Core and various affiliates.