



Ansar al-Islam

لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله

Also known as Ansarul Islam or Ansar al-Islam fi Kurdistan also referred to as AAI is a Sunni Muslim insurgent group in Iraq and Syria. It was established in Iraqi Kurdistan by former al-Qaeda members in 2001 as a Salafist Islamist movement that imposed a strict application of Sharia in villages it controlled around Biyara to the northeast of Halabja, near the Iranian border. Its ideology follows a literal interpretation of the Koran and promotes a return to the example of the first Muslims (Salaf). Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the group became an insurgent group which fought against the Kurdish government, American led forces and their Iraqi allies. The group continued to fight the Iraqi Government following the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, and sent members to Syria to fight the Government following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War.

The group was a designated terrorist organization in the United Nations, Australia, Canada, Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States, and a known affiliate of the al-Qaeda network.

On 29 August 2014, a statement on the behalf of 50 leaders and members of Ansar al-Islam announced that the group was merging with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, thereby officially dissolving the organization.

However, some small elements within Ansar al-Islam rejected this merger, and continued to function as an independent organization. When a previously unknown Kurdish militant group using white flags appeared in Iraq in 2017, Iraqi security and intelligence officials argued that this was a front organization of Ansar al-Islam, which reportedly still had hundreds of fighters operating in the Hamrin Mountains.

Ideology:

Ansar al-Islam was formed in September 2001 from a merger of Jund al-Islam (Soldiers of Islam), led by Abu Abdullah al-Shafi'i, and a splinter group from the Kurdistan Islamic Movement led by Mullah Krekar. Krekar became the leader of the merged Ansar al-Islam, which opposed an agreement made between IMK and the dominant Kurdish group in the area, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The group later made an allegiance to al-Qaeda and allegedly received direct funds from the terror network.

The two IMK splinter groups that formed Jund al Islam on 1 September 2001, had some early battlefield successes in the same month when it killed 42 PUK fighters in an ambush, which led to them drawing in more IMK leaders their ranks, on 10 December 2001, the group became known as AAI (Ansar al-Islam).

Ansar al-Islam initially comprised approximately 300 men, many of them veterans of the Soviet–Afghan War, and a proportion being neither Kurd nor Arab. During its stay in the Biyara region near the Iranian border, there were allegations of logistical support from "powerful factions in Iran."

The roots of Ansar al-Islam can be traced to the mid-1990s. The group consists of various Islamist factions that splintered from the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK). In 2001, shortly before the 9/11 attacks, leaders of

several Kurdish Islamist factions visited the al-Qa'ida leadership in Afghanistan planning to create a base for al-Qa'ida in northern Iraq. A document found in Kabul stated the groups' objectives, which was to ""expel those Jews and Christians from Kurdistan and join the way of jihad, (and) rule every piece of land ... with the Islamic Shari'a rule."

This was also confirmed by the Los Angeles Times, based upon interviews with an Ansar prisoner, which stated that in October 2000, Kurdish Islamist leaders sent jihadists to bin Laden's camps. They received the message from bin Laden that Kurdish Islamic cells should unite.

Alleged ties to Saddam Hussein's regime:

In a "Special Analysis" report dated July 31, 2002, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) concluded the following regarding possible connections between Saddam's regime and Ansar al-Islam: "The Iraqi regime seeks to influence and manipulate political events in the Kurdish-controlled north and probably has some type of assets in contact with Ansar al-Islam, either through liaison or through penetration by an intelligence asset."

In January 2003, the U.S. alleged that Ansar al-Islam provided a possible link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, and said to prepare to unveil new evidence of it. Ansar's leader Mullah Krekar in January 2003 denied links of Ansar with Saddam Hussein's government. U.S. terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna in January 2003 agreed with Krekar that links of Ansar with Iraqi Government were never proven.

In February 2003, then United States Secretary of State Colin Powell told the United Nations Security Council, "Baghdad has an agent in the most senior levels of the radical organization, Ansar al-Islam, that controls this

corner of Iraq. In 2000 this agent offered Al Qaida safe haven in the region. After we swept Al Qaida from Afghanistan, some of its members accepted this safe haven."

In March–April 2003, the BBC reported that a captured Iraqi intelligence officer had indicated that a senior Ansar leader, Abu Wail, was an Iraqi intelligence officer. If that was true, then Saddam's regime had some influence on Ansar, said the BBC. Saddam's interest could have been to have Ansar as a force directly opposing Kurdish independence in northern Iraq, said the BBC.

In January 2004, Powell acknowledged that his speech of February 2003 presented no hard evidence of collaboration between Saddam and al-Qaeda; he told reporters at a State Department press conference that "I have not seen smoking gun, concrete evidence about the connection, but I do believe the connections existed."

The Senate Report on Pre-war Intelligence on Iraq, issued in 2004, concluded that Saddam "was aware of Ansar al-Islam and al-Qaeda presence in northeastern Iraq, but the groups' presence was considered a threat to the regime and the Iraqi government attempted intelligence collection operations against them. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) stated that information from senior Ansar al-Islam detainees revealed that the group viewed Saddam's regime as apostate, and denied any relationship with it."

The U.S. Select Committee on Intelligence in September 2006 again stated that: 'Postwar information reveals that Baghdad viewed Ansar al-Islam as a threat to the regime and (...) attempted to collect intelligence on the group'.

After Powell had left office, he in 2008 acknowledged that he was skeptical of the evidence presented to him for the speech of February 2003. In an interview, he told Barbara Walters then that he considered that speech a "blot" on his record and that he felt "terrible" about assertions that he made in the speech that turned out to be false. He said, "There were some people in the intelligence community who knew at that time that some of these sources were not good, and shouldn't be relied upon, and they didn't speak up. That devastated me." When asked specifically about a Saddam/al-Qaeda connection, Powell responded, "I have never seen a connection. ... I can't think otherwise because I'd never seen evidence to suggest there was one."

Links to al-Qaeda:

Ansar's first leader, Abu Abdullah al-Shafi'i, was trained by al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Another early leader of Ansar, Abu Abdul Rahman, killed in October 2001, had, to the conviction of the U.S. government, also ties to al-Qaeda. In a report dated July 31, 2002, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) concluded: "Ansar al-Islam is an independent organization that receives assistance from al-Qaeda, but is not a branch of the group."

Begin 2003, less than 10 percent of individuals in Ansar were both Taliban and al-Qaeda members. This, and the information about Shafi'i and Rahman, led the U.S. government, in January 2003, to proclaim, by the mouth of Secretary of State Colin Powell, that a 'link' between Ansar and al-Qaeda exist, and that the U.S. was preparing to unveil new evidence of it.

Mullah Krekar in January 2003 denied links of Ansar with al-Qaeda. U.S. terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna in January 2003 however disagreed with Krekar and affirmed links of Ansar with al-Qaeda: "Ansar al-Islam has

links with al-Qaeda – in fact it is an associate group of al-Qaeda”. In March–April 2003, Mullah Krekar again protested against such links, and said to newspaper Al-Hayat that he had contacts with the American government prior to 11 September 2001, and possessed “irrefutable evidence against the Americans and I am prepared to supply it ... if [the U.S.] tries to implicate me in an affair linked to terrorism”.

Organization:

Ansar’s first leader until shortly after 11 September 2001 was Abu Abdullah al-Shafi’i.

Mullah Krekar in 2001 replaced Shafi’i as leader of Ansar, Shafi’i became his deputy. After Mullah Krekar left for Norway in 2003, Abu Abdullah al-Shafi’i was again the leader of Ansar al-Islam.

On May 4, 2010 Abu Abdullah al-Shafi’i was captured by US forces in Baghdad. On December 15, 2011 Ansar al-Islam announced a new emir, Sheikh Abu Hashim al Ibrahim A history of the group published on Twitter in November, 2015 by Abu al-Waleed al-Salafi states that "a number of leaders of the group, including Abu Hashim Al Ibrahim, the amir of the group," were arrested "at the beginning of 2014"; the article does not at all suggest that any replacement emir had been appointed.

Campaign of violence:

Swedish fund-raising case:

Ali Berzengi and Ferman Abdulla, the owner of a falafel stand in Stockholm, raised money for what they claimed was poor children and Muslims. The money was then transferred through Abdulla's food stand, using the hawala

transfer system. The Swedish Security Service was informed in 2002 that people in Sweden had transferred money to Ansar al-Islam. On April 19, 2004, Berzengi and Abdulla were arrested along with another Iraqi, Shaho Shahab, and Lebanese-born Bilal Ramadan. Ramadan was released in September after a court found that there wasn't enough evidence to keep him in custody.

Shahab was released in December after the government decided to deport him to Iraq. However, since Shahab risks receiving the death penalty in his home country, the deportation has not been carried out. In Abdulla's apartment the police found a letter from a man who claimed to have been in contact with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, as well as a detailed manual on how to use coded language.

On May 12, 2005, Abdulla and Berzengi were convicted by the Stockholm District Court for "planning of terrorist offences" (Swedish: förberedelse till terroristbrott) and "planning of public devastation" (Swedish: förberedelse till allmänfarlig ödeläggelse) according to Swedish law. Accord to the court they had transferred approximately one million SEK to Ansar al-Islam.

According to the court there was strong evidence that the collected money had the specific purpose of financing terrorist attacks. Much of the evidence presented consisted of secret wire-tappings from U.S. and German intelligence sources. In the recordings Abdulla and Berzengi used coded language to describe the attacks. Berzengi, who according to the court was the leading of the two, was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment and Abdulla to six years. The Svea Court of Appeal later reduced the sentences to five years for Berzengi and four and a half year for Abdulla. The appeal to the Supreme Court was denied. The both are also to be deported

back to Iraq after serving their sentences in Sweden. Abdulla is currently serving his sentence at the Norrköping Prison.

The conviction of Berzengi and Abdulla was the first since the new Swedish terrorism legislation was taken into effect on July 1, 2003. It was also the first ever conviction in Western Europe of people financing terrorism.

Period up to the Iraq War:

Upon its founding, Ansar al-Islam declared war on all secular political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, throughout 2002, AAI carried out attacks and targeting killings of these Kurdish groups, particularly high-level PUK members, as well as engaging in battles and skirmishes with the PUK. The attacks allowed the AAI to carve out space to impose its form of Islamist governance in northeast Iraq under its spiritual founder and leader Mullah Krekar. Sharia Law was implemented, enforcing it through bombing of businesses it deemed in-Islamic, acid attacks on women it deemed immodest and beheading of those it deemed apostates.

Villagers under Ansar al-Islam's control were subjected to harsh sharia laws; musical instruments were destroyed and singing forbidden. The only school for girls in the area was destroyed, and all pictures of women removed from merchandise labels. Sufi shrines were desecrated and members of the Kaka'i (a religious group also known as Ahl-e Haqq) were forced to convert to Islam or flee. Former prisoners of the group also claim that Ansar al-Islam routinely used torture and severe beatings when interrogating prisoners. Beheading of prisoners had also been reported.

In late 2001 and early 2002, the AAI received an inflow of foreign (mostly Arab) jihadists fleeing Afghanistan following the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Prior to the US 2003 invasion of Iraq, Paramilitary teams from the Special Activities Division (SAD) and the Army's 10th Special Forces Group entered Iraq and cooperated with Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Peshmerga to attack Ansar al-Islam.

Together they launched Operation Viking Hammer in March 2003 which dealt a huge blow to the terrorist group which resulted in the deaths of a substantial number of terrorists and the uncovering of a chemical weapons facility at Sargat. Sargat was the only facility of its type discovered in Iraq.

Iraq War:

In September 2003, members of Ansar al-Islam who had fled to Iran after the 2003 joint operation by Iraqi and US forces against them announced the creation of a group called Jamaat Ansar al-Sunna, which was dedicated to expelling U.S. occupation forces from Iraq. Ansar al-Sunna became a prominent insurgent group active in the so-called Sunni Triangle, carrying out kidnappings, suicide bombings and guerilla attacks.

In November or December 2007 the Ansar al-Sunna group formally acknowledged being derived from Ansar al-Islam, and reverted to using that name.

Iraqi Insurgency (post-U.S. withdrawal):

Ansar al-Islam remained active after the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq of 2011, taking part in the insurgency against Iraq's central government. Attacks against Iraqi security forces have been claimed by the group, particularly around Mosul and Kirkuk.

Syrian Civil War:

Ansar al-Islam has established a presence in Syria to take part in the Syrian Civil War, initially under the name of "Ansar al-Sham", later under its own name.

The group has played a role in the Battle of Aleppo and coordinates with other Salafist groups including al-Qaeda's al-Nusra Front and the Islamic Front. The Syrian Ansar al-Islam units in Aleppo remained independent when the main faction joined ISIL in 2014.

In 2016, they fought alongside the al-Nusra Front during a major offensive in the city. On August 19, 2016, the group issued a statement entitled "Obituary for the Martyred Military Commander Abu Layth al-Tunisi and a Group of his Brothers". A newsletter article by Ziad Fadel states that this occurred southwest of Aleppo, in an attack conducted by the SAA and Hezbollah.

Reported re-emergence in Iraq:

After the defeat of ISIL and the capture of Tuz Khurmatu by Turkmen and Shiite Popular Mobilization Forces during the 2017 Iraqi–Kurdish conflict, the town and its surroundings came under almost daily rocket attacks by a militant faction that used a white flag with the black head of a lion.

This group, led by Assi Al-Qawali, reportedly consisted of Kurdish militants, ex-ISIL fighters and Kurdistan Democratic Party supporters who claimed to be fighting to "liberate the Kurdish lands - occupied by the Iranian Shiite militias". Iraqi security and intelligence officials said that intelligence reports made it likely that this new group was a front organization of Ansar al-Islam, which reportedly still had hundreds of fighters operating in the Hamrin Mountains.

Other claimed and alleged attacks:

Ansar al-Islam detonated a suicide car bomb on March 22, 2003, killing Australian journalist Paul Moran and several others. The group was also thought to have been responsible for a September 9, 2003 attempted bombing of a United States Department of Defense office in Arbil, which killed three people.

On February 1, 2004 suicide bombings hit parallel Eid-celebrations arranged by the two main Kurdish parties, PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP), in the Kurdish capital of Arbil, killing 109 and wounding more than 200 partygoers. Responsibility for this attack was claimed by the then unknown group Ansar al-Sunnah, and stated to be in support of "our brothers in Ansar al-Islam."

In November 2008, an archbishop in Mosul received a threat signed by the "Ansar al-Islam brigades", warning all Christians to leave Iraq or else be killed.

Stabbing attack on police officer in Berlin on September 17, 2015 by Ansar operative Rafik Yousef.

Source: /Wikipedia

Date: 22-02-2018