

AQAP

Party Portrait

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was created from the unification of al Qaeda groups in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. With size estimates at around 4,000 fighters, AQAP punches far above its weight in terms of geopolitical influence. AQAP has been labeled “the most lethal Qaeda franchise.” It is seen as a top priority for U.S. counterterrorism officials and a destabilizing force in Yemen, a country already racked with governance issues. AQAP threatens powerful regimes like the Saudi royal family and Sultanate of Oman. In many ways, it has become the face of Al Qaeda (AQ) since the death of founder Osama Bin Laden in 2011 and the dismantling of AQ in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. At the same time, it remains a strongly Yemeni outfit, dedicated to the parochialism of Yemen as much as to global jihad. Although the group faces an existential threat in the rise of Salafist rival ISIS, AQAP has taken advantage of the Yemeni civil war and lack of territorial control to become more powerful than it has been in years.

Key Interests

- Hold on to territory gained as a result of Yemen’s collapse
- Disrupt the current Middle East powers and competing regional actors in Yemen, the region, and around the globe
- Take the mantle of Sunni Salafist leadership from ISIS
- Maintain and expand support of Yemeni population

Sources of Leverage

- Geographic** - Mountainous territory presents a challenge for military intervention
- Military** - Local Yemeni population possess an abundance of weapons which AQAP can use to its advantage; AQAP’s integration into local groups makes it difficult to attack without harming civilians
- Soft Power** - Grievances of the local Yemeni population with Middle East regimes
- Political** - Yemeni Government’s lack of territorial control and poor central governance

Regional Strategy

AQAP’s strategy includes: learning from ISIS’ strategy in Syria and Iraq to gain more territory; expanding and strengthening its forces in the Middle East, Western states and elsewhere; obtaining support from Gulf donors; and cultivating relationships with Muslims all over the world as a method to recruitment and enhanced capabilities.

Powerful Individuals

Qasim al-Rimi (Amir)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Reconcile with ISIS as it is weakened by Western forces, to form a combined Salafist terrorist organization

Internal Conflicts

There is evidence that AQAP has in the past shirked orders from AQ central, specifically the directive from AQ central not to establish Islamic governance

Memberships

N/A

Allies

N/A

Partners

SYRIA Jabhat Fatah a-Sham

Rivals

ISIS

Adversaries

EGYPT Government, ISRAEL, JORDAN

Active Armed Opponents

EUROPEAN UNION, IRAN, OMAN, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government, YEMEN Houthis

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

Private citizens in mostly GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia