

Second Soran Unit

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 1998

Disbanded: September 1, 2001

First Attack: The SSU is thought to have carried out military operations against the KDP and PUK between 1998-2001, although no documentation of specific attacks exists and the group did not publicly claim responsibility for any incidences of violence.¹

Last Attack: NA

OVERVIEW

The Second Soran Unit (SSU) was a predominantly Kurdish, Sunni Islamist militant group that was led by Asad Muhammad Hasan (more commonly known as Aso Hawleri). The SSU had been a military brigade in the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) before splitting off to form an independent group in 1998. Then in 2001, the SSU merged with two other Kurdish Sunni groups to form Jund al-Islam, which shortly after became a founding member of Ansar al-Islam later that year.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Second Soran Unit (SSU) was a predominantly Kurdish, Salafi militant group formed in 1998 after a group of approximately 350-400 fighters split from the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK).² This splinter group, led by As'ad Muhammad Hasan (more commonly known as Aso Hawleri), was largely comprised of Kurdish, in addition to roughly 50-60 Arab, veterans of the Afghanistan War against the Soviet Union.³ The

SSU split from the IMK in response to the IMK's 1997 truce with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), its subsequent cooperation with the PUK and Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and the SSU's perception that Iranian influence over the IMK leadership was increasing. The SSU was vehemently opposed to both the KDP and PUK because of their secular ideologies and to Iran because of its Shiite faith.⁴

Soon after its inception in 1998, the SSU took control of the IMK's historic stronghold in Biyara, from where it based its operations for the next three years. The SSU possessed advanced small firearms as well as a vast arsenal of modern large munitions, making it one of the best-armed and most capable Kurdish militant groups in Iraq.⁵ The SSU is thought to have carried out military operations against the KDP and PUK between 1998-2001, although no documentation of specific attacks exists and the group did not publically claim responsibility for any incidences of violence.⁶

In September 2001, the SSU merged with two other splinter groups of the IMK, the al-Tawhid Islamic Front and Kurdish Hamas (unrelated to Hamas Iraq or to the Palestinian Hamas), to form Jund al-Islam. Shortly thereafter, Jund al-Islam merged with several other Salaf organizations to form Ansar al-Islam.⁷

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

As'ad Muhammad Hasan (1998-2001): Hasan, better known as Aso Hawleri, was a veteran of the Afghanistan War against the Soviet Union and a member of the IMK from 1991-1998, who served on the IMK Central Council from 1997-1998 before breaking with the IMK to found the Second Soran Unit in 1998. After merging with Jund al-Islam and subsequently Ansar al-Islam in 2001, Hawleri was considered to be the 3rd ranking member in Ansar al-Islam and was believed to have been in command of the Second Soran Unit (then a brigade within Ansar al-Islam) when U.S. forces captured him in October 2003.⁸

B. NAME CHANGES

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 2001: 350-400 (*Human Rights Watch*)⁹

D. RESOURCES

The SSU reportedly possessed highly advanced artillery and heavy weaponry, most notably surface-to-surface missiles known as *Daushkas* and 106mm artillery shells. However, it remains unclear who funded the group or how it obtained these arms.¹⁰

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

The SSU operated predominantly in Iraqi Kurdistan and was headquartered in the city of Biyara near the Iranian border.¹¹

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

The Second Soran Force is a radical Salafi militant organization that is fervently anti-secular and anti-Shiite.¹² The SSU sought to impose strict Shariah law over Iraqi Kurdistan, and eventually over the entirety of Iraq.¹³

B. POLITICAL ACITIVITES

The SSU was a primarily militant group and does not appear to have taken part in large-scale political activities until after joining Jund al-Islam. However, in 1998, Hawleri created a political activist group called the Central Islamic Faction (CIF). The group was led by Hawleri and a Turkoman named Abu Khubayi Barachak, who was later imprisoned by the KDP on terrorism charges. The CIF's activities were largely undocumented and thus its purpose and connection to the SSU remain unclear.¹⁴

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

Very little is known about the SSU's targets or tactics. However, it was widely known that the group possessed a large arsenal of heavy weaponry.¹⁵

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

Although the SSU is known to have violently opposed the KDP and PUK, there is no documentation of any specific attacks conducted by the group.¹⁶

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

The SSU was never designated as a foreign terrorist organization; however, Ansar al-Islam was listed by the U.S. as a terrorist group in 2004.¹⁷

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The SSU split from the IMK in 1998 because it objected to the IMK's cooperation with the largely secular KRG. In 2001, the SSU merged with the al-Tawhid Islamic Front and Kurdish Hamas to form Jund al-Islam, which became the largest founding member of Ansar al-Islam later that year.¹⁸

The SSU was deeply opposed to the secular PUK and KDP and violently clashed with these groups between 1998 and 2001.¹⁹

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

The SSU operated almost exclusively within Iraq and it is unclear if it was in contact with any groups or governments outside of the country. Many of its members, however, were veterans of the Afghan Mujahideen of the 1980s, and thus had received training in Afghanistan.²⁰

MAPS

- Iraq

¹ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

² Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

³ "Ansar al-Islam." *Janes Terrorism Monitor*, 17 October 2010.

⁴ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

⁵ Romano, David. "An Outline of Kurdish Islamist Groups in Iraq." *The Jamestown Foundation*, September 2007 p.10. Web. 15 October 2010.

⁶ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

⁷ "Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Human Rights Watch*, Date unknown. Web. 18 October 2010.

⁸ "Muslim Extremist Caught." LexisNexis Academic, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 October 2003.

⁹ "Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Human Rights Watch*, Date unknown. Web. 18 October 2010.

¹⁰ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

¹¹ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

¹² Romano, David. "An Outline of Kurdish Islamist Groups in Iraq." *The Jamestown Foundation*, September 2007 p.10. Web. 15 October 2010; "Kitaab al-Haqiqa." *Information Bureau of Ansar al-Islam*, p.4, (trans. Ansar al-Mujahideen English Forum). Web. 18 October 2010.

¹³ "Kitaab al-Haqiqa." *Information Bureau of Ansar al-Islam*, p.4, (trans. Ansar al-Mujahideen English Forum). Web. 18 October 2010.

¹⁴ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

¹⁵ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

¹⁶ Romano, David. "An Outline of Kurdish Islamist Groups in Iraq." *The Jamestown Foundation*, September 2007 p.10. Web. 15 October 2010; Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

¹⁷ US Department of State. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Bureau of Counterterrorism." US Department of State. Retrieved June 30, 2014.

¹⁸ Romano, David. "An Outline of Kurdish Islamist Groups in Iraq." *The Jamestown Foundation*, September 2007 p.10. Web. 15 October 2010.

¹⁹ Rubin, Michael. "The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. 7 August 2012.

²⁰ "Ansar al-Islam." *Jane's Terrorism Monitor*, 17 October 2010.