

Lebanon indicts 21 Al Qaeda inspired militants

Contributed by (AP)
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A Lebanese investigating judge on Tuesday indicted 21 members of an Al Qaeda-inspired militant group for a bombing in northern Lebanon last year that killed 18 people, mostly soldiers.

The suspects belong to the Fatah Islam group, which became prominent during a three-month battle with Lebanese troops in 2007, in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared near the northern city of Tripoli. About 220 militants and 171 soldiers died in the bitter fighting, while Palestinian officials put the civilian death toll there at 47.

The 21 indicted are said to be part of a 'terrorist cell' believed to be behind a string of bombings last year, a court official said. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

They are suspected of being behind an Aug. 13 bomb attack that killed 18 people, mostly soldiers, and a Sept. 29 roadside car bomb explosion that killed five soldiers and two civilians in Tripoli last year.

The indictment only pertains to the 18 deaths in the Aug. 13 bombing. In it, Judge Nabil Sari accused the suspects of establishing an armed gang with the intent to kill soldiers and civilians and undermine the state's security — crimes punishable by death in Lebanon.

The 21 defendants — mostly Palestinians — are all in custody, including the group's alleged leader, Abdel-Ghani Ali Jawhar, a 25-year-old from Lebanon's northern Akkar region, and Obeid Mubarak Abed Al Kafil, a Saudi.

No trial date has been set. Sari also dismissed charges against 16 others implicated in the Aug. 13 bombing for lack of evidence.