

Fatah al-Islam Sleeper Cell Arrested in Sidon

Contributed by Naharnet - AFP/Daily Star
 Tuesday, 14 August 2007
 Last Updated Tuesday, 14 August 2007

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Fatah al-Islam Dormant Cell Arrested in Sidon

Police arrested members of a dormant cell for the notorious Fatah al-Islam terrorist network in the southern provincial capital of Sidon and confiscated weapons, computers and a list of targets, a security source told Naharnet on Monday.

The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said four Palestinian members of the dormant cell were arrested in two separate busts and a manhunt was launched for the fifth.

Two of the suspects, identified as brothers Younis and Youssef Shibli, were rounded up from the family's flat in Taamir Harert Saida district, east of the port city.

Two other suspects, Ismail al-Sayyad and Mahmoud Shaaban, were rounded up from the city of Sidon in a night time raid Sunday, the sources said.

A ranking source said a fifth suspect, whom he refused to identify, remains at large and a man hunt was launched to arrest him.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "we might end up with more than just five members. This is an ongoing operation."

The raids were carried out by the Data Branch, an anti-terrorism police force headed by Lt. Col. Wissam al-Hassan.

The Data Branch brought in reinforcements from Beirut and carried out the raids Sunday based on information obtained by investigators from a Palestinian suspect who goes by the name of Jamal Malas.

Malas was arrested after an exchange of fire with police in the northern town of Tripoli on July 31. Fatah al-Islam's military commander Shehab al-Qadour, who goes by the code name of Abu Huerira, was killed in the clash.

Members of the Sidon Fatah al-Islam cell were affiliated with Qadour, who had been based at the city's Ain el-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp before moving to north Lebanon's Nahr al-Bared camp, where Fatah al-Islam terrorists have been fighting the Lebanese army since May 20.

Police had confiscated 30,000 dollars from the Malas Residence near Tripoli, and the source said the Shibli brothers "testified that they had sent the money to finance Qadour's operations in the north."

The four detained suspects also testified to police investigators that they had carried out three bombing attacks in the Christian villages of Roum and Kfar Falous, east of Sidon, earlier this year.

Fatah al-Islam has repeatedly threatened to carry out attacks in other provinces than north Lebanon.

Beirut, 13 Aug 07, 16:21

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&25F206B3DA2352D9C225733600494C99>

 Security forces crack Fatah al-Islam sleeper cell
 Four sidon men confess to being members of terror group
 By Michael Bluhm and Mohammed Zaatari
 Daily Star staff
 Tuesday, August 14, 2007

BEIRUT, SIDON: Four Sidon men confessed on Monday to being members of a Fatah al-Islam sleeper cell that had detonated three bombs in the Jezzine area on July 18 and had delivered about \$40,000 to Fatah al-Islam deputy commander Abu Hureira in Tripoli, security sources said on Monday. Meanwhile, a Fatah al-Islam sniper killed a Lebanese Army soldier and militants fired five Katyusha rockets into civilian areas around the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in North Lebanon on Monday, as army commander General Michel Suleiman said the Islamist group was a branch of Al-Qaeda and not part of the Syrian intelligence apparatus.

The four Fatah al-Islam members from Sidon included two Palestinian brothers, Youssef and Younes Khaled Shibli, and two Lebanese men, Ismail Ali Sayyad and Mohammad Mahmoud Shabban, the security source said. The four said they were honored to be members of Fatah al-Islam.

Police arrested the Shibli brothers Saturday night at their home on the second floor of the Malah building in Haret Sidon, while the two Lebanese were apprehended separately in Sidon. At the Shibilis' Haret Sidon home, police confiscated weapons, ammunition, a laptop, maps and more than \$50,000. Police also recovered Kalashnikov rifles that the brothers' mother had tossed into the building's garden when police arrived.

The four Sidon men admitted they were behind a bomb explosion in Roum and two bombs in Kfar Falous in the Jezzine area on July 18, the security source added. The attackers threw plastic bags loaded with explosives at the homes of two targets, although police defused one of the bombs in Kfar Falous, and the explosions caused only material damage and did not wound anyone.

The members of the sleeper cell also confessed that they had been in direct contact with Abu Hureira since the battle erupted on May 20 in North Lebanon between Fatah al-Islam and the army. Abu Hureira, a Lebanese national whose real name was Shehab al-Qaddour, was killed by police about two weeks ago in Tripoli, to where he had escaped from the Nahr al-Bared camp.

Abu Hureira's death led police to the Sidon offshoot, as police arrested Jamaledine Mustafa Malas during the raid that killed Abu Hureira. Malas told authorities about the Fatah al-Islam cell in Sidon, and a team of army troops and Internal Security Forces intelligence personnel from Beirut arrested the Sidon men late Saturday night. The four arrests brought the total of Fatah al-Islam members in police custody to 64, the security source said.

The Shibilis' neighbors told The Daily Star that the brothers had been good students in school and were good people who would not have committed the crimes attributed to them. A female neighbor who gave her name as Umm Ahmad said the Shibli brothers were shy. Members of the Shibli family maintained the brothers' innocence.

Fatah al-Islam militants resumed firing 107-millimeter Katyusha rockets from the Nahr al-Bared camp on Monday. The five rockets landed in Deir Ammar and Burj al-Yehudiyeh before 9 a.m. and damaged crops. The militants began spraying areas around the camp with Katyusha rockets on July 13 and have fired dozens of rockets since.

Katyushas damaged the Deir Ammar power plant on August 2, triggering daily shortages of electricity throughout the country. Exacerbating the electricity deficit, fuel tankers have refused since the rocket attacks began to dock at the power station, one of Lebanon's largest.

Inside the Nahr al-Bared camp on Monday, Fatah al-Islam gunmen wounded two soldiers and a Fatah al-Islam sniper killed one soldier, bringing the total number of army troop deaths to 137 in the 13-week-old conflict.

Militants and soldiers exchanged fire in close quarters, as the army used artillery and tanks to pummel fortified Fatah al-Islam bunkers while the militants launched rockets and grenades.

"Every day we are moving from building to building" and gaining ground, an army officer told The Daily Star on Monday on condition of anonymity.

An army report said troops were strengthening positions and combing roads and newly taken territory, as well as clearing land mines from camp roads and booby traps from buildings. Bulldozers were removing rubble from streets that had been cleared of mines, it added.

The militants had been planning to use Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps to launch terror attacks here and outside the country, Suleiman said on Monday while speaking to officers who graduated with him from the military academy in 1970.

Fatah al-Islam should be seen as part of Al-Qaeda and not as belonging to the Syrian intelligence network, Suleiman added. The militants are well-armed, well-trained and have the most modern guns, rockets and cannons available. They also have a high level of expertise with explosives, he said.

The army has completed the majority of the battle against Fatah al-Islam, although troops are advancing slowly in order

to avoid civilian casualties, Suleiman said. He estimated that 70 fighters and 100 women and children remain in the camp, a higher estimate of the remaining civilians than other sources have been providing. - With agencies

Rice adds Fatah al-Islam to terrorism list

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has designated Fatah al-Islam, a Lebanese Islamist organization blamed for major fighting at a refugee camp in that country, as a "terrorist" group, the State Department said Monday.

"As part of ongoing US efforts against terrorism," Rice "designated Fatah al-Islam as a specially designated global terrorist" group under US law, the department said in a statement.

Rice took the action, which cuts off the group from the US financial system, in consultation with the US attorney general and the treasury secretary, the statement said.

The group had used civilian refugees as "human shields" during the fighting, it said.

"This terrorist group threatens the safety and security of the Lebanese people and the region," the State Department said.

Fatah al-Islam has been led by Shaker al-Abssi, a well-known Palestinian-Jordanian militant who was sentenced to death in absentia in Jordan for his involvement in the 2002 murder of a US diplomat.

"The United States calls on governments across the world to take action to isolate these terrorist organizations, to choke off their sources of financial support, and to prevent their members' movement across international borders," the statement said.

It added that the US supported the Lebanese government and its security forces in their efforts to promote stability and rule of law throughout the country. - AFP

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Video from LBC TV in Beirut - Sleeper Cells Caught - 8/13/2007

{youtube}xVolie7l0Pw{/youtube}

Video from LBC TV in Beirut - Nahr al-Bared Update 1 - 8/13/2007

{youtube}WJv7aKhQ-kw{/youtube}

Video from LBC TV in Beirut - Nahr al-Bared Update 2 - 8/12/2007

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