

Threat Profile - Imuna Kakuatan (IK)

Background and Overview

The roots of IK lie in the late 1980s during a period of prolonged unrest in the neighboring country Westland. In late 1985, members of Abu clans of the Imuna tribe led an insurgency against the Westland Government. During the Westland campaign against the insurgency, many of the rebels fled across the border into Garland. The group went on to launch sustained offensives against the Westland Armed Forces (WAF) from Garland's remote west province throughout 1986 and 1987; however, their offensives were not successful and were suppressed by the WAF. At that time the group was known as the Abu Popular Front for the Liberation of Imuna lands in Westland (APFLIW). At its peak, the APFLIW numbered approximately 3000 rebel fighters, but the group's heterogeneous character meant that the Government of Westland (GoW) had little difficulty in buying some of the more powerful clans off, destroying others. Indeed, only those that fled to Garland were in a position to keep the insurgency alive. By 1987, the majority of the Imuna signed a peace agreement with the GoW, which required them to give up their heavy weapons and integrate into the WAF. However, the GoW did not trust these reconciled Imuna and deployed them far from the border area. Those that did not reconcile chose to remain operational, organizing in groups straddling the Westland-Garland border.

The rebels that stayed in Garland or refused to reconcile formed Imuna Kakuatan (IK) and subsequently adopted terrorist tactics, recognizing the engaging conventional forces head-on was destined to fail; Kakuatan is the Imuna word for God.

The original goal of the Imuna rebels was to overthrow the Government of Westland. However, these secular aims were forgotten in the aftermath of the 1987 peace agreement, and IK limits its objectives to controlling the areas it currently occupies, and applying its ideology (religious) there. The group claims that its long-term goal is to replace the governments of Westland and Garland with a theocracy, but this is generally considered impossible.

From 1987 until late 1990, IK had space and time to grow as an armed group, largely due to the GAF's involvement in the Garland-Eastland war (1988-1990). It used this time well, moving into small urban areas along routes running from Garland to Westland, and taking control of them. This allowed to create links to local businessmen, to extort money from commercial ventures, and to engage in smuggling. This period of relative quiet allowed the group to raise significant funds, facilitating the purchase of arms and ammunition; IK is known to have purchased weapons from corrupt officers of both the GAF and the WAF, and is also known to have stolen weapons from Westland DDR sites.

During the 1990s, the group was wary of a war-fighting capability of the GAF, and so focused its efforts on proselytization to build local support, on smuggling, and on creating networks within the local population; it was largely successful in its efforts. Its plan to spread their strict interpretation of the Imuna religion was particularly successful among the disenfranchised Abu youth living in refugee camps close the Westland border (these refugees fled Westland during the original Imuna-WAF conflict), and in other Abu camps. The group also created and maintains links to Dotan and Eastarian traders, who use the groups to smuggle goods from Westland to Eastland and along the reverse route.

By 2000, IK had approximately 1200 men operating in between 4 and 6 Brigades or 'Katibats'. Its leadership is unknown, but is known to have a decentralized command structure, with each Katibat named after a famous fighter; it remains unclear if these men are dead or alive. Today, the areas over which it has control varies according to military operations conducted by the Garland Armed Forces, but extends from eastern Westland into western Garland, and the GAF cannot patrol along the border with anything less than platoon strength.

Throughout the early 2000s, the GAF launched a series of sporadic operations against IK. These operations were launched not because the Government of Garland was concerned that IK pose a

strategic threat, but because the weaker Government of Westland (GoW) was concerned at a growth in pro-IK sentiment in the eastern part of the country; simply put, the GoW wanted to destroy the group, lest it grew into a more significant threat in the long term. Indeed, IK did strengthen and now poses a far more significant threat to both the GoW and to the GoG. However, the threat remains at the tactical level.

Most recently (2010-2016) IK sent many of its fighters to a country in the 7th Continent where a bitter ideological Civil war is being fought. In the face of extreme pressure from a sustained combined arms offensive by western forces on the 7th Continent, IK and aligned forces were defeated. While many IK fighters were killed, hundreds returned to Westland and to Garland. Some of these fighters returned further radicalized, and all returned with combat experience, and training. Indeed, from 2014 onwards, the typical IK small scale, low-intensity assaults and criminal activities, were replaced by attacks of a growing sophistication. These attacks incorporated complex attack methodologies, including the use of both IEDs, PBIEDs and (S)VBIEDs; all types of IEDs can be either remotely or command wire detonated.

The group is also known to have access to a wide variety of small arms, RPGs, mines (used to make the IEDs), and to have a low-level indirect fire capability. The group uses modified 4x4 ATVs to move, many that have artisanal armor plating, and most with mounted HMGs.

The group remains generally popular among the local population, but its brutality against unsupportive sections of the population means that its popularity among mainstream Abu has waned; this trend became more pronounced in the years after 2010.

Recent and Significant Activity

On 10 February 2012, an unknown number of people were killed or wounded when suspected Imuna Kakuatan militants attacked a village (mixed ethnicity) in Garland, approximately 15 km east of the border with Westland.

On 6 June 2012, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that at least 20 attacks had been carried out by the IK in the Westland border area of Garland's Central Province and Northland since the beginning of the year, leaving one person dead, 17 others kidnapped, and displacing several thousand people.

2013

On 30 March 2013, the UNHCR confirmed that two people had been killed in attacks by IK militants in the Central Province, and four people had been killed in the West Province since the start of 2013.

On 20 May 2013, the Garland Police confirmed that a suspected senior IK commander had been arrested during a counter-terrorism operation.

2014

On 3 September 2014, 11 people were wounded and 25 others were injured when IK militants raided five border villages of West Province. This precipitated the first of several internal population displacements.

On 28 September 2014, three people were killed and 13 others were abducted when IK launched an attack near a western border town of West Province.

On 6 October 2014, the Garland military force announced that it had resumed active joint operations with WAF against the IK and had killed 100 suspected militants.

On 10 November 2014, a soldier was killed and six others were wounded, including one UN local national staff, when IK militants ambushed an army convoy near the tri-border of Garland (Central Province), Northland and Westland.

Reliable intelligence reports suggest that members of the group travelled to the 7th Continent to participate in a civil conflict.

2015

On 17 May 2015, a VBIED was detonated at a Westland border police checkpoint on the road leading to Garland's Central Provincial capital.

2016

On 6 July 2016, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) released a report in which it alleged that the IK killed and injured 26 civilians and abducted 26 others, including 10 children, in 44 separate attacks along the West and Central Provincial border areas with Westland during 2014-2016.

Members of IK that had been fighting in the 7th Continent begin to return to Westland as western forces secure battlefield victory in the fight against terrorism.

2017

On 23 April 2017, GAF, in coordination with Westland counter terrorism forces, launched a 3-week anti-terror campaign in the desert area of eastern Westland and Garland's West Province. 18 IK fighters were killed on the Garland side of the border. No prisoners were reported taken, which resulted in a demand for an investigation by OHCHR.

On 9 June 2017, a VBIED was detonated at the Garland Central Province border check point with Westland. The VBIED detonated prior to reaching its target.

From Jun to Dec 2017, IK carried out several suicide operations against the GAF along the border with Westland.

Reports indicate the presence of IK religious figures and fighters in villages close to the border with Garland, preaching to the local population and – in some cases – intimidating them in an effort to change their ideological outlook.

In Nov 17, reports indicate that IK attempted to forcibly recruit members of the local population in western Garland and eastern Westland, leading to large population movements to UNHCR-run IDP camps in Garland.

On 17 Dec 2017, IK launched a complex suicide attack on a GAF base in central province of Garland.

2018

From Jan to Jun 17, reports indicate that IK continued to recruit among local villages in both central and west province.

Reports also indicate that some AWF fighters may have travelled to these provinces to benefit from IK training.

The 7th Continent Force actively engaged several IK convoys with air power.

IK responded with a campaign of sniping against the 7th Continent Forces, and launched several IED attacks on their convoys.

In Jun 18, Source (F6) reports that IK plans to attack UN forces in order to keep them out of IK operating areas. IK is reportedly concerned that a long-term presence may hamper its fund-raising and recruitment efforts, as well as undermining its safe havens for attacks against both the government of Westland, and the Garland Armed Forces.

Jul 18: there were credible reports that IK was testing explosives in the border area.

Aug 18: UNDSS publish a threat warning indicating that a UN convoy would be attacked on a resupply route. Attack methodology was unknown.

Sep 18: Reports emerge indicating that IK is now recruiting at POC sites in Garland.

Reports emerge (unverified) that IK has formalized its links with the AWF.