

New jihadi group will put Arabs in Helmand

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 24 (UPI) -- A new insurgent group has emerged in [Afghanistan](#), bringing significant numbers of Arab jihadists into the country's Helmand province.

An analysis from the Jamestown Foundation said Wednesday the new group is called Jaish al-Mahdi, or the Army of the Mahdi, and that its self-proclaimed leader is an Arab, thought to be Syrian, known as Abu Haris, a veteran of the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The think tank says the group appears to have about 250 fighters, both Afghan and Arab, but that it is unclear which group or groups with which they were formerly associated.

Taliban and [al-Qaida](#) officials told the Pajhwok Afghan News agency that they were aware of the new group's activities and regarded it as friendly, the Jamestown analysis said.

Haris fought in Paktia province against the Soviets, but local media reports since the summer quote him as saying that the new group will operate there, in the Pakistani tribal area of North Waziristan and in Helmand.

"Jaish al-Mahdi's Arab fighters' activities in Helmand would indicate an attempt to insert Arab insurgents into an area that has not traditionally been one of their strongholds," reads the Jamestown analysis, written by Afghan journalist Waliullah Rahmani.

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