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Al Qaeda threatens Bulgaria over involvement in Afghanistan

Oct 22, 2010

Sofia - Bulgaria has made itself a target for terrorist attacks since it sent its soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan, a representative of an Islamic extremist group said in an interview published Friday.

'Your soldiers deployed to fight in a Muslim land, so Bulgaria became a legal and legitimate target of Al Qaeda,' Sheik Abu Sharif, a spokesman for the Asbat al-Ansar group, told the daily 24 Casa.

Speaking in Ayn al-Hilweh, a Palestinian refugee camp near Sidon in Lebanon, Abu Sharif warned Bulgaria to pull out from Afghanistan as it has from Iraq, or to face consequences.

'Withdraw your soldiers before they return home as corpses,' the newspaper quoted him as saying. Bulgaria maintains a contingent of 600 soldiers in Afghanistan, in Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. Defence Minister Anyu Angelov recently said that Bulgaria may send an additional 700 soldiers to the country in 2013.

Bulgaria was a part of the multi-national peacekeeping effort in Iraq between 2003 and 2008, with a contingent of 500 soldiers. The Bulgarian mission suffered 13 casualties during that time.

The United States State Department described Asbat al-Ansar as a Lebanon-based terrorist group with alleged links to Al-Qaeda. It targets Lebanese, American and other foreign interests.

