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Xhemati Alban: Albanian Snipers in Syria

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1.0 Introduction

Xhemati Alban is a Sunni jihadist militant group operating in the Idlib Governorate in Syria. Garnering attention for its formidable “sniper squad”, they have been active in spreading propaganda detailing the unit’s exploits. Linked to Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) (HTTPS://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/), they have been involved in several operations together. Comprised of ethnic Albanians

from Kosovo and North Macedonia, the group’s current membership numbers are unknown but believed to not exceed two dozen members. Despite claiming establishment in 2012, the group’s earliest piece of propaganda dates back to 2017. [Source (https://en.netpress.com.mk/2024/02/06/albanian-macedonia-member-islamist-group-killed-syria-sniper/), source (https://ctc.westpoint.edu/western-balkans-foreign-fighters-homegrown-jihadis-trends-implications/), source (https://silahreport.com/2021/03/27/albanians-fighting-in-syria-xhemati-alban-in-2020-part-1/)]

2.0 Motto, Symbols, Patches and History

2.1 Mottos



Xhemati Alban’s logo

The group lacks known mottos or phrases but often disseminates religious quotations through various channels. Upon the death of one of the group’s members Khalid Albani in February 2024, the group shared an image of him alongside a Quranic quote. [Source (https://t.me/xhematialbannews/5337)]

2.2 Patches



Albanian Tactical patch – Tactical subgroup of Xhemati Alban

The group’s fighters are relatively unadorned when compared to contemporary modern fighting forces and their propaganda pieces are usually without patches of any kind. However, the group does have one patch of note which is that of Albanian Tactical which is a further subgroup within Xhemati Alban. Albanian Tactical offers tactical training in line with other mercenary or contract organisations in the region such as Yurtugh Tactical and Muhojir Tactical. This has allowed them to frame themselves as a contract enterprise and not simply a militia/terror group.

2.3 History of Xhemati Alban

2.3.1 Albanian Group

Xhemati Alban, which translates to “Albanian Group,” comprises ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, and the Presovo Valley in [Serbia](#) (<https://greydynamics.com/serbian-in-security-a-12-month-outlook/>). Although the group claims to have originated in 2012, reports indicate that its active operations began around 2017, coinciding with its involvement in conflicts such as those in Ras al-Ayn, Abu al-Duhur Airbase, and Jisr al-Shughur.

2.3.2 Abu Qatada al-Albani

Under the leadership of Abu Qatada al-Albani (Abdul Jashari), born in 1976 in Skopje, North Macedonia, the group appointed its military leader, as designated by former Jabhat al-Nusra leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani in 2014. Al-Albani’s association with Jabhat al-Nusra led to his inclusion in the U.S. Department of Treasury’s Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List in late 2016. Notably, al-Albani also serves as a close military advisor to the leader of **Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)** (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>). [Source (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>), source (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-04-18/pdf/2022-08197.pdf>), source (<https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20161110>)]

2.4 Operations with Xhemati Alban Involvement

Due to its embedded nature within both [HTS](#) (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>) and allied forces, many of the group’s operations on the ground in Syria remain unknown and undocumented. However, several operations involving Xhemati Alban have been televised or are known to have occurred.

2.4.1 Battle for Idlib – 2015

The Battle for Idlib occurred on 24 March 2015 when the recently established “Army of Conquest” assaulted Idlib City from 3 separate sides. Three days later on the 27 March, they managed to penetrate the city’s exterior and completely encircle the city. The next day rebel fighters managed to completely capture the city and they (Army of Conquest) began to besiege the towns of Kafarya and al-Fu’a, forcing the Syrian government troops to regroup to the south of Idlib and begin prepare for a counterattack by rebel forces. A propaganda video released by the group shows a four-man team from Xhemati Alban advancing through the al-Layramoun district in Western [Aleppo](#) (<https://greydynamics.com/the-fall-of-aleppo-syrian-rebels-surprise/>). When the group managed to establish themselves inside a building, snipers from Xhemati Alban began to set up a sniper’s nest and engage regime fighters at a distance of approximately 800m. [Source] (<https://www.francesoir.fr/politique-monde/bataille-didlib-les-snipers-albanais-des-djihadistes-dhayat-tahrir-al-cham>).

2.4.2 Latakia

Xhemati Alban fighters have been active in targeting regime forces in Kabani in the Latakia Governorate. Several videos released by the organisation show them engaging regime fighters from long ranges with both recoilless rifles and ATGMs. In one video the group engages two regime fighters with an ATGM injuring one and potentially fatally injuring another fighter as they are returning to positions. Another video from the Latakia countryside depicts the group scoring a direct hit on a regime position with a recoilless rifle, resulting in the killing of a regime fighter. [Source] (<https://x.com/CalibreObscura/status/1277282843052384258?s=20>), source] (<https://x.com/PetTheGreat1/status/1123980810196082693?s=20>)

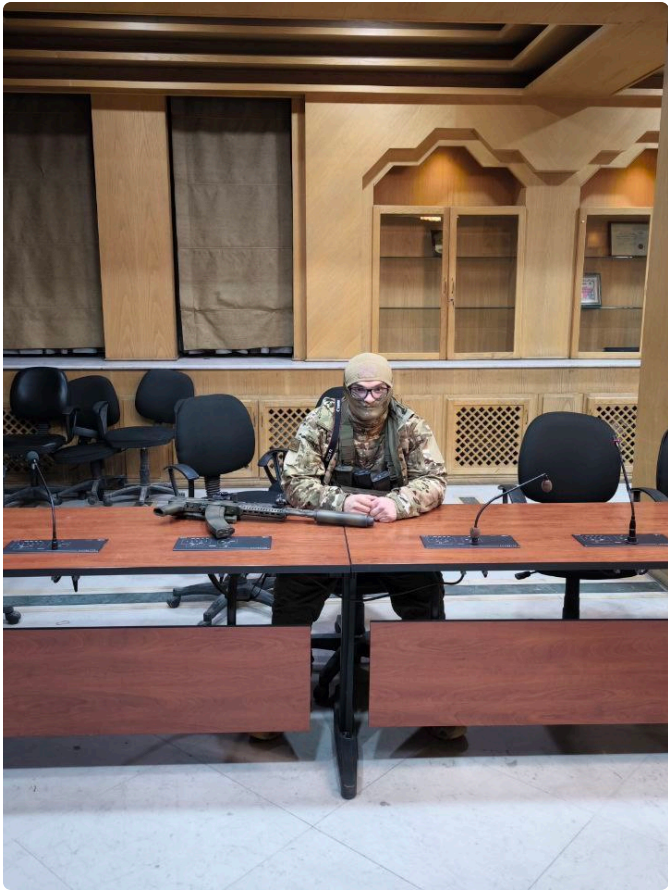
2.4.3 Burkan Hill

HTS (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>) fighters conducted a raid against Syrian Arab Army (SAA) positions on Burkan Hill, Kabani, Latakia Governorate. During this attack, two [HTS](#) (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>) fighters lost their lives, while regime forces sustained an unclear number of casualties. Xhemati Alban released a video during this attack, demonstrating its fighters’ involvement in fire support. Using an AGS-17 (Automatic grenade launcher) they engaged regime forces and corrected fire via radio commands relayed from frontline troops or possibly from an HQ position which was monitoring the attack via drone. [Source] (<https://x.com/CalibreObscura/status/1621955634320052224?s=20>).

2.4.4 Northwestern Syria Offensive (2024)

There are elements of Xhemeti Alban active in the ongoing, renewed Northwest Syria offensive. Photographs released by the group and its subsidiary organisations, such as Albanian Tactical, appear to show members of the group present in Aleppo and also Hama and taking part in offensives against government forces.

[Source (<https://t.me/mediaslame01/1668>), source (<http://t.me/gazangaafer/5519> ↗), source (<https://t.me/mburoja2/36077>)]



Xhemati Alban (Albanian Tactical) fighter in Aleppo (2024) – [Images source (<https://t.me/gazangaafer/5519>)]



Xhemeti Alban Direct Action Unit equipped with vehicle-borne recoilless rifles in Aleppo (2024) – [Image source (<https://t.me/mburoja2/36077>)]

3.0 Organisation of Xhemati Alban

Due to the group’s relatively small size (24 – 90 fighters), it does not allow it to organise itself to commit large-scale attacks like other groups such as HTS (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>). Due to its small size, it effectively focuses on providing support to larger organizations that bear the main brunt of fighting in Syria. The group is positioning itself as a training organization through its sub-group Albanian Tactical. This strategic move will enable the organization to gain influence through the high-quality training provided by its fighters.

3.1 Place within the HTS terrorist structure

Xhemati Alban and its subgroup Albanian Tactical closely align with and actively operate alongside Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>). HTS (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al->

[sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/](https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/)) is one of the largest Salafist jihadist organisations currently active in Syria and is the dominant faction in the Idlib province. Affiliation with HTS (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>) allows them to operate with a high degree of efficiency and they have been responsible for a multitude of attacks against Syrian Army positions as shown in their telegram channel, which regularly posts their accomplishments. [Source (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-a-situational-assessment/>), source (<https://t.me/xhematialbannews>)]

3.2 Business Structure

As Xhemati Alban is a terror organisation they are believed to receive funding and support from HTS (<https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/>) as well as from their exploits. However, its sub-group Albanian Tactical offers training and tactical advice which may further broaden the group’s ability to acquire funding. This is evident in the group’s propaganda, which frequently showcases refitted Mosin Nagant rifles. These rifles, inexpensive in the region at around \$50, are fitted with expensive hunting scopes costing upwards of \$1500. Such extensive funding implies substantial financial support for the group. [Source (<https://www.calibreobscura.com/the-xhemati-alban-sniper-squad-and-weapons/>)]

3.2.1 Albanian Tactical

Albanian Tactical is a subgroup of Xhemati Alban and offers tactical training on contract to other Jihadist groups in the region. This group has allowed Xhemati Alban to frame itself as a high-quality training provider using the newest gear and equipment. Videos and photographs of Albanian Tactical published on their telegram channel display an array of well-equipped fighters with the newest equipment and weaponry.



Albanian Tactical has collaborated with a variety of other Jihadist tactical formations such as Yurtugh Tactical (seen above) in which the groups posted a 5:45 minute-long video titled “Training of the day”. In this video, the two groups can be seen exchanging knowledge over tactics and firearms operations. [Source (<https://t.me/tacbrotherhoood/296>)]

Yurtugh Tactical emerged in 2018, founded by veteran Uyghur combatants. Consisting solely of highly skilled and experienced veteran Uyghur fighters, the group’s formation stemmed from their perception of a dearth of military education among their people, which they attributed to the suppression by the Chinese regime. As articulated by their

spokesperson during an interview, they recognized the disparity in their community's military preparedness. Consequently, the objectives of Yurtugh Tactical are threefold: firstly, to impart military knowledge and expertise to the Uyghur populace; secondly, to combat the oppressive Chinese regime to liberate their homeland from occupation; and finally, to establish the sovereign state of East Turkestan. [Source (https://www.danielegarofalomonmonitoring.com/p/yurtugh-tactical-interview-with-their)]

3.3 Key Figures of Xhemati Alban

Due to the group’s relatively small size, it only has one notable figure which is the group’s leader Abdul Jashari.

Abdul Jashari – “Abu Qatada al-Albani” is an ethnic Albanian, born on September 25 1976 in Skopje, former Yugoslavia. Considered a close advisor to many top members of HTS (https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/), such as Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of HTS (https://greydynamics.com/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts-no-longer-an-al-qaeda-affiliate/), he was designated as the leader of Xhemati Alban by al-Julani in 2014. Subsequently, the United States Government designated him as a terrorist. Although never revealing his face he has addressed audiences in propaganda videos on several occasions. He maintains a significant reputation within the Syrian jihadist community and has praised the bravery of fallen comrades and battlefield tactics employed by Xhemati Alban and other ideologically aligned groups. [Source (https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=20882)]

3.4 Recruitment

Mostly consisting of ethnic Albania (https://greydynamics.com/sherbimi-informativ-i-shtetit-shish-albanias-all-seeing-eagle/).ns from North Macedonia, Presevo Valley (southern Serbia), Kosovo, and Albania, individuals who have travelled to Syria are fighting with the group. The group’s official webpage (which has since been taken down) featured a description of Xhemati Alban as a

“JIHADIST FORMATION COMPOSED OF PEOPLE OF GREAT WILL MAINLY ALBANIANS FROM KOSOVO, ALBANIA, (NORTHERN) MACEDONIA AND PRESEVO VALLEY (TERRITORY IN SOUTHERN SERBIA POPULATED PREDOMINANTLY BY ETHNIC ALBANIANS), WHOSE CAUSE IS TO FIGHT IN THE WAY OF ALLAH”.

The page goes on further to claim that members’ primary reasoning for joining is to fight against the

“TYRANNY AND OPPRESSION OF SYRIA’S DICTATORIAL REGIME AGAINST ITS PEOPLE”
•

This indicates that Xhemati Alban is primarily focused on recruiting ethnic Albanians who may be drawn to the region’s vulnerabilities and religious tensions. These factors have contributed to a sense of belonging among various jihadist formations in the region. [Source (https://ctc.westpoint.edu/western-balkans-foreign-fighters-homegrown-jihadis-trends-implications/), source (https://www.gfatf.org/archives/the-balkans-turn-into-hotbed-for-terrorist-recruitment/)]

4.0 Equipment

4.1 Weapons of Xhemati Alban

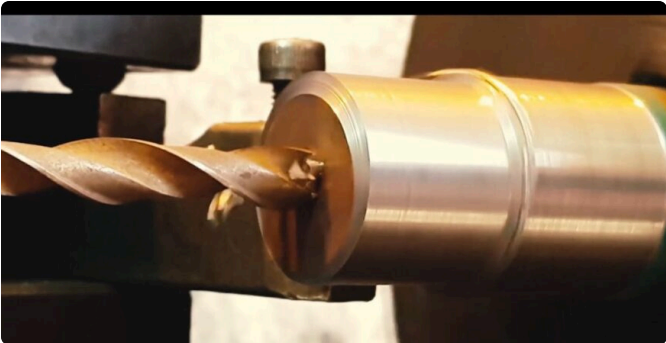
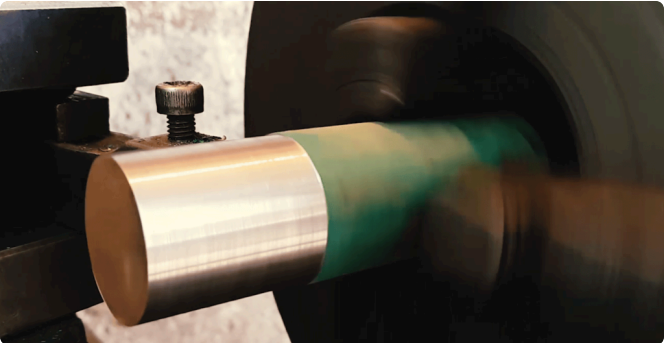
Beyond sniper rifles, Xhemati Alban possesses a substantial arsenal, including modern weapon platforms like the AKS-74 and AK-74. They frequently equip these firearms with handmade suppressors, modernize optics, and apply camouflage sprays. Additionally, owing to the flourishing gun and weapon trade in Idlib, Xhemati Alban’s weaponry often features customized rail platforms. Consequently, this enables cheaper AK platform models to mount optics and various attachments such as foregrips and laser sights. [\[Source\] \(https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/idlib-syria-from-olive-oil-producer-to-arms-bazaar-1.1186985\)](https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/idlib-syria-from-olive-oil-producer-to-arms-bazaar-1.1186985)



Suppressed AK-74 used by Albanian Tactical – [\[Image source\] \(https://t.me/tacbrotherhood/209\)](https://t.me/tacbrotherhood/209)

4.1.1 Craft-made suppressors

The production of suppressors is not exclusive to Xhemati Alban and is in common widespread production with varying groups across Syria. However, in Images posted by Xhemati Alban, we get to see the production of these and it gives insight into this process.



These suppressors appear to be created using a singular piece of metal, with baffles (commonly found within suppressors) added. The group has the machinery and expertise to create these advanced pieces of equipment. This professionalism allows the group to upgrade their rifles to a standard which allows them to more effectively engage targets stealthily.

4.2 Sniper Squad Weapons

The sniper squad of Xhemati Alban frequently features images of modernized Mosin Nagant rifles. These rifles often undergo modifications, including the replacement of their barrels with PK series general-purpose machine gun (GPMG) barrels. This modification enhances their accuracy compared to the possibly outdated and ancient barrels originally equipped with the rifles.

Further customizing the threaded rifle barrels with various muzzle attachments enables the group to attach suppressors and flash hiders. This enhancement boosts the group’s notorious lethality, enabling them to conduct stealth operations and strike without detection or sound. [\[Source \(https://www.calibreobscura.com/the-xhemati-alban-sniper-squad-and-weapons/\)\]](https://www.calibreobscura.com/the-xhemati-alban-sniper-squad-and-weapons/)



Xhemati Alban sniper team with a locally made AM-50 (Note threaded barrel for suppressor)

4.2.1 Sniper Squad heavy-calibre weaponry

The group has frequently appeared in photographs with another platform, the AM-50 Sayyad anti-materiel rifle. This Iranian-made rifle, a clone of the Steyr HS .50 bolt action, is frequently observed in the group’s possession alongside other heavy-calibre sniper rifles. These other heavy-calibre sniper rifles are often craft-made and produced locally or in Idlib.



A video from the group’s Telegram channel depicts an Xhemati Alban fighter using a handcrafted 12.7mm heavy sniper rifle, equipped with a DSHK machine gun barrel, reportedly to eliminate a target at a distance of 1800m. [Source <https://t.me/xhematialbannews/498>)]

01:16

4.3 Weaponry in use with Xhemati Alban

Weaponry which has been pictured with or known to be used by Xhemati Alban includes but is not limited to:

- AKS-74
- AK-74
- Makarov 9mm pistol
- AK-47
- Steyr Aug

- Canik TP9 (Turkish Pistol)
- Glock
- Mosin Nagants
- PKM machine gun
- AM-50 Sayyad
- Steyr HS .50
- Workshop/craft-made heavy sniper rifles
- RBG-6 Grenade Launcher



4.3 Vehicles in use by Xhemati Alban

Xhemati Alban does not typically employ armoured vehicles in its attacks (<https://greydynamics.com/terrorist-vehicle-ramming-attacks-new-weapon-of-choice/>), as a central tactic. However, observers have noted the group using anti-aircraft cannons. These cannons are mounted on the back of pickup trucks and used during attacks on enemy positions.



Truck-mounted anti-aircraft cannon in use by Xhemati Alban fighters in an attack on government forces – [\[Image Source\]](https://t.me/xhematialbannews/348) (<https://t.me/xhematialbannews/348>)

The group’s tactical subdivision Albanian Tactical does however use motorbikes in its propaganda and to transport its soldiers. This allows for the rapid deployment of its fighters and adds to its image as a highly mobile, tactically oriented group.



One of Xhemati Albans’ members was however known to have died in an SVBIED (suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device) attack in late February 2016. [Source (https://ctc.westpoint.edu/western-balkans-foreign-fighters-homegrown-jihadis-trends-implications/)]

4.4 Optics

The group has claimed to use costly Meopta ZD 6-24×56 scopes on their rifles, enhancing their reputation as skilled snipers. They use these alongside smaller Russian optics spotted on their small arms, enabling accurate engagements despite affordability. Additionally, the group utilizes Trijicon ACOG rifle scopes underscoring their ability to acquire high-quality, expensive equipment.



An assortment of high-end magnification scopes in use by Xhemati Alban – [Image Source] (https://t.me/tacbrotherhood/220)

The use of expensive weapons optics on their sniper platforms allows the group to show off the fact that they have significant funding and training. This displays a different and almost methodical approach to their tactics which is often unseen amongst other regional terror organisations. These other groups often possess unadorned rifles without attachments.

4.5 Kit

The group is often pictured in propaganda films being equipped with modernised gear. This is reminiscent of gear which modern armies such as US-NATO forces are equipped with. This allows them to market themselves as a modernised fighting force which can and has eliminated targets at long distances. Gear such as night vision goggles, ballistic vests and tactical clothing including jackets and trousers allow the group to market itself as a professional fighting force.

The usage of specialised gear, like ImpactSport ear defenders, by Albanian Tactical is atypical in the region. Most factions, including militias and jihadist groups, don't employ such protective equipment. This distinctive choice contributes to the group's image as well-equipped, akin to NATO or [CSTO](https://greydynamics.com/turbulence-in-the-csto-a-12-month-outlook/) (<https://greydynamics.com/turbulence-in-the-csto-a-12-month-outlook/>). forces.

4.5.1 Xhemati Alban and 9.11 Tactical

Additionally, the group's Telegram channel showcases a fighter browsing gear from 9.11 Tactical, resembling the popular brand 5.11 Tactical.

This emulation allows the group to procure tactical clothing and gear attachments resembling those used by NATO and CSTO forces. 9.11 Tactical is a shop located in Idlib and allows its customers to purchase a range of tactical kits. This varies from helmets, body armour and tactical backpacks as well as modern optic platforms.



This usage of specialised gear and equipment contrasts the typical portrayal of jihadist groups as unprofessional, and clad in ordinary attire. It enables the group to maintain its reputation as a feared terrorist faction amongst targeted loyalist regime forces. [Source (<https://t.me/tacbrotherhood/219>), source (<https://t.me/tacbrotherhood/214>), source (https://t.me/Tactical9_11)]

5.0 Tactical-Operational Information

5.1 Operations

The group has asserted its presence on multiple fronts in the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, it consistently releases propaganda footage depicting operations in Kabani Heights, located in the northern countryside of the Latakia region. Primarily, the group’s activities in this area centre on the exploits of its sniper squad. They meticulously monitor and eliminate regime forces present in the vicinity. These propaganda clips, marked by a high level of operational proficiency, serve to bolster the group’s image as a highly trained and well-equipped faction. [Source (<https://al-akhbar.com/Syria/276826>)]

5.2 Xhemati Alban tactics

Xhemati Alban appears to organise itself into three distinct fighting formations when it is deployed at the front:

- Frontline teams – These fighters are equipped with small arms weapons platforms such as the AK-74 and AKS-74. They actively engage in combat operations and their primary role is capturing and defending frontline positions.
- Light weapons teams – Xhemati Alban occasionally embeds light weapons teams with frontline fighters. However, they often operate independently, utilizing mortars, grenade launchers and machine guns to provide covering fire.
- Sniper Squads – Xhemati Alban’s most notorious formation, the Sniper Squads, reflect their independent nature through their tactics. These formations typically operate in two-man teams consisting of a spotter and a sniper. Correspondingly they are deployed to eliminate heavy weapons emplacements and target high-value individuals such as officers or support teams. [Source (<https://t.me/xhematialbannews/498>)]

5.2.1 Tactics in support of operations

As evidenced by the operations mentioned above, the videos and photographs released by the group illustrate these tactical subdivisions. Xhemati Alban’s videos depict the group’s light weapons teams actively supporting an attack with an automatic grenade launcher.

Fighters are observed adjusting fire upon receiving commands via radio communications. These are likely relayed from a frontline soldier or an HQ position monitoring the attack via drone. This tactic is increasingly common among several militia organizations in Syria. It involves the use of drones to direct attacks through the dropping of explosives. However it can also be to correct fire support from heavy weapons or support emplacements.



Also shown in the videos released by the group is the sniper team. This team engages regime fighters and positions from great distances often acting in autonomy from other components of the group. These fighters engage regime forces intending to harass and or eliminate high-value targets such as officers or positions. They have also demonstrated their capability to engage dug-in heavy weapon positions in support of the frontline soldiers mentioned earlier. [Source] (https://paxforpeace.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/import/2022-11/PAX_Syria_A%20Laboratory%20of%20Drone%20Warfare_2022.pdf).

5.3 Personnel size

Research by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point estimates the group’s membership at around two dozen members. However, the SilahReport research project has put the number of combatants to be around 60-90 individuals. These individuals specialize

in various areas of weaponry. Around a third of this number is people who utilise the sniper platforms in their infamous sniper squad. [Source (<https://ctc.westpoint.edu/western-balkans-foreign-fighters-homegrown-jihadis-trends-implications/>), Source (<https://silahreport.com/2021/03/27/albanians-fighting-in-syria-xhemati-alban-in-2020-part-1/>)]

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6.0 Future of Xhemati Alban and Albanian Tactical

XIIHADISM ([HTTPS://GREYDYNAMICS.COM/TAGS/XIIHADISM/](https://GREYDYNAMICS.COM/TAGS/XIIHADISM/))
 Al-Qaeda and its subgroup, Al-Naba' Tactical, are ready to further embrace their role as an armed contracting group. They will draw on experience to train other groups, akin to how [MERCENARY \(HTTPS://GREYDYNAMICS.COM/TAGS/MERCENARY/\)](https://GREYDYNAMICS.COM/TAGS/MERCENARY/) [Malhama Tactical \(https://malhama-tactical-extremists-for-hire/\)](https://malhama-tactical-extremists-for-hire/).
 has operated in Syria and Iraq. These groups, resembling Blackwater, aim to carve a niche in the Middle Eastern market.
 SYRIA ([HTTPS://GREYDYNAMICS.COM/TAGS/SYRIA/](https://GREYDYNAMICS.COM/TAGS/SYRIA/))

With Xhemati Albans' experience and propaganda-style videos, they create an image of highly trained and lethal snipers and operators. This imagery, reminiscent of propaganda about special forces in both the East and West will attract substantial business. Their appeal surpasses that of less visible groups in the region, potentially allowing them to expand their operations significantly.

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