**Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)**

**Name:** Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

**Type of Organization:**
- Insurgent
- non-state actor
- terrorist
- transnational
- violent

**Ideologies and Affiliations:**
- Al-Qaeda/affiliate
- Islamist
- jihadist
- Qutbist
- Salafist
- Sunni
- takfiri

**Place of Origin:**
Pakistan (suspected)

**Year of Origin:**
September 2014

**Founder(s):**
Ayman al-Zawahiri and Asim Umar

**Places of Operation:**
Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Burma, Bangladesh, and Kashmir

**Overview**

**Also Known As:**
- Ansar al Islam¹
- Jamaat Qaidat al-jihad fi’shibhi al-qarrat al-Hindiy²
- Jamaat Qaidat al-Jihad fi’shibhi al-Qarrat al-Hindiya³
- Organisation of The Base of Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent⁴
- Qaedaat al-Jihad⁵
- Qaedaat al-Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent⁶

**Executive Summary:**

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) is a U.S.-designated terrorist group and al-Qaeda’s newest affiliate.⁷ Founded in September 2014, the group has claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks in the region, including the September 6, 2014, attempted seizure of a Pakistan navy frigate in a naval dockyard in Karachi, Pakistan. The group has also claimed responsibility for the murders of secular activists, writers, professors, and doctors in Bangladesh.⁸ AQIS reportedly operates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.⁹
AQIS is al-Qaeda’s fifth official chapter.

AQIS was formed after a two-year effort to consolidate jihadist factions on the Indian Subcontinent, according to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who announced the affiliate’s formation in a video dated September 3, 2014.1 Included in the group’s ranks are Taliban fighters loyal to both Zawahiri and Taliban emir Mullah Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzada, who assumed this position in May 2015 following the death of the Taliban’s former emir, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour.2

Analysts generally believe that al-Zawahiri created AQIS in order to steal the limelight from expanding ISIS and therefore promote al-Qaeda’s brand. The Diplomat’s Jordan Olmstead asserts that “AQIS isn’t about India—it’s about preserving al-Qaeda’s safe havens in Pakistan and Afghanistan,” especially amid rivalries with ISIS and the Pakistani army for influence and control over the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.3 Flashpoint Global Partners senior analyst Laith Alkhouri called the group’s formation at the time “a serious counternarrative to the ISIS expansion.”4

However, an unnamed jihadist close to AQIS told Reuters, “After the killing of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda’s new chief al-Zawahri started the reorganization of al-Qaeda, with its main focus on South Asia.” Sources close to AQIS’s emir (leader) told Reuters that Umar has eyed the Indian subcontinent for many years, and has released videos propagandizing to Kashmiri Muslims in a hope to recruit them to fight the secular governments.5

AQIS has claimed responsibility for the murders of a number of secular activists.

Analysts have downplayed the threat of AQIS and al-Qaeda central to the subcontinent. “Al-Qaeda first mentioned India as a target in 1996, when bin Laden made a reference to both Jammu and Kashmir and Assam,” said Ajai Sahni of India’s Institute for Conflict Management. “Since then, it has not been able to achieve anything significant in both these Indian states.”6 However, AQIS launched its first attack three days after its founding. On September 6, 2014, AQIS militants attempted to seize a Pakistani navy frigate, from which they planned to launch missiles at nearby American and Pakistani ships. Ten militants and one officer died in an ensuing suicide bombing and shootout.7

AQIS has claimed responsibility for the murder of a number of secular activists. In May 2015, the group claimed responsibility for the murder of atheist bloggers Avijit Roy and Washiqur Rahman in Bangladesh and liberal professors Mohammad Shakil Auj and Shaful Islam in Pakistan.8 In October 2015, AQIS’s Bangladesh branch, known as Ansar al Islam, claimed responsibility for the killing of Faisal Arefin Dipon, a Bangladeshi publisher of secular books. Another publisher, Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, was also targeted but not killed.9 In April 2016, Ansar al Islam claimed responsibility for the murders of secular campaigner Nazimuddin Samad, and the editors of an LGBT magazine, Xulhaz Mannan and Tanay Mojumdar.10

**Doctrine:**

Like al-Qaeda Central, AQIS ascribes to a Salafi ideology whose central tenet is waging jihad in order to wrest power from what al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri calls the “infidel enemy” and impose rule by sharia (Islamic law).11 In the group’s first video, released on September 3, 2014, Zawahiri declared that AQIS would “raise the flag of jihad, return the Islamic rule, and [empower] the Shariah of Allah across the Indian subcontinent.”12

[AQIS seeks to] establish sharia in the land and to free the occupied land of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent. Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of al-Qaeda

Salafis hold that Muslims should emulate the actions of the first generation of Muslim leaders—known as the righteous ancestors (al-Salaf al-Salih)—and disregard more than a thousand years of Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Qaeda believes it is fighting a “defensive jihad” against the United States and its allies, defending Muslim lands from the “new crusade led by America against the Islamic nations…” according to Osama bin Laden.13 In the first issue of al-Qaeda’s new English
language magazine *Resurgence*, which appeared on jihadist forums in October 2014, its editor Hasaan Yusuf wrote: "It was Jihad that brought Islam to the Indian Subcontinent, and it will be Jihad again that will overturn the legacy of imperialism from Pakistan to Bangladesh and beyond." Through its "defensive jihad," AQIS seeks to "[e]stablish sharia in the land and to free the occupied land of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent," as Ayman al-Zawahiri said in the video announcing AQIS’s formation.

Necessary to AQIS’s ideology is the indoctrinated prophecy—found in the Hadith, oral traditions of the prophet Muhammad—of Ghazwa-e-Hind, the "final battle in India." Al-Qaeda and AQIS members believe in an impending, apocalyptic war with the Indian state, resulting in the fall of the Hindu nation to Islam and the recreation of the caliphate. In Zawahiri's announcement of the new affiliate, "Pakistan was mentioned only as a country that needed to be brought under full Sharia rule while Hindu India was portrayed as the enemy of Islam," said Husain Haqqani, Hudson Institute senior fellow and former Pakistani ambassador to the U.S.

A 20-page "Code of Conduct" published by AQIS in June 2017 reiterated the group’s intentions of attacking targets—particularly military related—in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. While the document claimed that Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist civilians and places of worship would not be attacked, it called for increased attacks on both active-duty and off-duty soldiers, as well as Americans operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The "Code of Conduct" also reiterated the group’s allegiance to al-Qaeda Central and the Taliban, and stated that one of its principal aims is defending and strengthening the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” by working with the Taliban.

AQIS prioritizes American targets in Pakistan and strives for a complete American withdrawal from the region, according to the Code of Conduct document. While AQIS maintains its focus on jihad in the regions specified above, it also supports and espouses al-Qaeda’s broader objective to conduct attacks against the United States and other Western targets.

**Organizational Structure:**

In December 2014, AQIS spokesman Usama Mahmoud released a statement detailing the group’s operational structure, saying, “Although al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent was announced this year [2014], we started operating under one Shura [consultative] committee and one commander almost a year ago.” In its “Code of Conduct” released in June 2017, AQIS explained that it operates with an emir, a vice emir, and a shura council, which acts as an advisory board. The emir and shura council can consult with each other to make administrative changes. AQIS also has a sharia committee, which provides guidance on matters of sharia law. A military committee provides guidance on military matters, such as the treatment of prisoners.

Like other al-Qaeda outfits, AQIS’s command structure may also include political, propaganda, and religious arms. However, AQIS is closely linked to the Taliban, and may therefore share some organizational aspects with that group. AQIS members have at times fought under the Taliban’s flag and are integrated into the Taliban’s chain-of-command. According to the Long War Journal, this may account for AQIS’s apparent lack of battlefield propaganda.

Analysts have alleged that AQIS may be broken into regional branches, including in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Karachi, Pakistan. AQIS’s Bangladesh branch is officially known as Ansar al Islam, and has claimed responsibility for a number of the attacks against secularists in the country.

Although AQIS is not presently active in Myanmar, al-Qaeda officials have called on AQIS to carry out attacks in the country in response to government-inflicted violence against the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group. The Myanmar-based Harakat al-Yaqin, in part responsible for the recent escalation in violence in the country, is reported to have had contact with al-Qaeda officials in the past.
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Financing:

Little is publicly known about AQIS’s funding. It is suspected that AQIS is supported by al-Qaeda central, which receives funding from private donors, charities and foundations, drug trafficking, and state sponsors of terrorism, among other sources. The other known sources of funding are kidnappings for ransom, donations from individuals, charitable foundations, and religious charities including zakat, occasional state sponsorship, and proceeds from counterfeit currency.40 AQIS also benefits from its strong linkages with groups affiliated with the Pakistan’s intelligence agency—the ISI. In certain instances, Lashkar-e-Taiba funds have made their way to members of AQIS, such as the case with Abdur Rehman who received over $20,000 from LeT in a period of two years.41

In Pakistan, there are discreet cells that specifically cater to raising funds for AQIS. In Karachi, one AQIS cell is dedicated to soliciting donations from businesspersons under the guise of support for Islamic charities. The money then makes its way through various channels throughout Quetta and southern Afghanistan before making its way to AQIS leadership in Waziristan.42

Recruitment:

Before Ayman al-Zawahiri announced AQIS’s formation in September 2014, al-Qaeda looked to recruit jihadists in the disputed territory of Kashmir, a longtime hotbed of foreign jihadist elements. AQIS’s emir, Asim Umar, reportedly spent years disseminating recruitment videos to Kashmiri Muslims.43 An al-Qaeda video released three months before AQIS’s formation featured Umar, the then-commander of an al-Qaeda cell in Pakistan. Umar called on Kashmiri Muslims to wage jihad on India.44 An intelligence report alleged in July 2014 that the prophecy of Ghazwa-e-Hind, or the “final battle in India,” was being used by al-Qaeda and the Taliban to drive recruits into Kashmir.45

Asim Umar reportedly spent years disseminating recruitment videos to Kashmiri Muslims.

Recruiting inside India has historically been difficult for al-Qaeda, as Indian Muslims have not felt the same grievances that may pull others into the organization.46 South Asia expert Jason Burke wrote, “Though there are some signs of increasing radicalisation in India, recruitment to extremist networks there is negligible.”47 Amir Rana of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies was also skeptical of AQIS’s recruitment strength within India, as well as Burma. Rana told the Los Angeles Times that it will “be very tough for [AQIS] to establish an infrastructure in India. It may be able to establish it in some part of the Indian side of Kashmir. In the past it had failed to attract Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.”48

AQIS’s online propaganda, including videos and PDF magazines, plays a large role in recruiting South Asian Muslims to the jihad on the subcontinent. Al-Qaeda’s As-Sahab media arm has produced videos of speeches appealing to young Muslims in India, specifically in Bihar, Gujarat, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and South India.49 In the group’s inaugural announcement, Zawahiri specifically referenced the Indian districts of Assam, Gujarat, and Ahmedabad, three areas whose Muslim minorities have experienced or engaged in sectarian unrest in recent years.50 This reference may have been intended as a psychological appeal to disaffected Muslim youth within India and across the subcontinent.

AQIS’s online propaganda plays a large role in recruiting South Asian Muslims to terrorism.

Trying to bolster its image and draw new recruits, al-Qaeda released a new English-language magazine, Resurgence, in October 2014. The first issue focused heavily on the brand’s new affiliate. AQIS emir Asim Umar wrote an article deriding the Indian government and its policies towards Muslims. He aimed to appeal to Indian Muslims, writing, “We have little doubt that, sooner or later, the Muslims of India too will come to the realization that their future is inextricably linked to the success of the Afghan Jihad [by the Taliban and al-Qaeda].” In August 2016, AQIS began translating its propaganda into Tamil and Malayam in an attempt to reach South Indian Muslims.51

Beyond videos and online magazines, little is known about AQIS’s recruitment tactics.
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Two weeks after the group’s formation in September 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that AQIS would struggle to recruit Indian Muslims to its cause. Modi declared, “If anyone thinks Indian Muslims will dance to their tune, they are delusional. Indian Muslims will live for India. They will die for India.”

Training:

Little is known about how AQIS trains its soldiers. In the group’s inaugural video in September 2014, Zawahiri announced the membership of “soldiers of the Islamic Emirate” (meaning the Afghan Taliban) in AQIS. This may explain the existence of a massive AQIS training facility in Kandahar, Afghanistan. U.S. and Afghan troops raided and demolished the 30-square mile camp in early October 2015.

In August 2016, AQIS released footage of another training camp in South Waziristan in Pakistan. Militants trained with AK-47s, machine guns, and RPGs at the Qari Imran Camp, named after the founder of AQIS. New al-Qaeda recruits progress from basic physical training to weapons training, training in armed assault, and bomb making. Harakat-ul-Mujahiddeen, a Pakistani Islamist terrorist organization long linked to al-Qaeda and now to AQIS, reportedly operates training camps in Afghanistan. AQIS emir Asim Umar reportedly trained at one of the camps, which also served to train Kashmiri jihadists.

According to the Soufan Center, AQIS provides a two-week in-person religious training course in the federally administered tribal areas (FATA) that exist along the permeable border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This training course is meant to further indoctrinate its new recruits. All the members of the AQIS India cell were trained in religious madrassas in the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) region.

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41 Praveen Swami, “More Qaeda-Pak links: AQIS chief was at ‘ISI’ PoK camp,” Indian Express (New Delhi), March 13, 2015, http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/more-qaeda-pak-links-aqis-chief-was-at-is-isk-pok-camp/ [54].

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Key Leaders

Asim Umar
AQIS emir (leader)

Usama Mahmoud
Spokesman

Atta ur Rahman a.k.a. Naeem Bukhari
High-ranking member, bridge between AQIS and al-Qaeda central

Mawlana Mainul Islam
Top coordinator in Bangladesh

Mufti Abdullah Ashraf
Spokesman of Ansar al Islam, AQIS’s Bangladesh chapter

Shahid Usman
Head of al-Qaeda’s Karachi wing, incarcerated in Pakistan

Oweis Jakhrani
Mastermind of the ship missile plot

Zeeshan Rabeeq
Mastermind of the ship missile plot

Ustad Ahmad Farooq a.k.a. Raja Soleman
Deputy emir (deceased)

Qari ‘Imran a.k.a. Ubaidullah
Shura council member and chief of operations in Afghanistan (deceased)

Sheikh Imran Ali Siddiqi a.k.a. Haji Shaikh Walullah
Shura council member (deceased)

Mohammad Asif
Chief of India Wing (arrested)

Zakir Musa
Chief of Kashmir Affiliate Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind (deceased)

Hameed Leilhari
Chief of Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind
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History:

- **August 6, 2019:** AQIS accuses Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of killing Jihadi Commander Maulana Abdul Jabbar in Baluchistan.
  

- **June 26, 2019:** Indian forces kill Shabir Ahmad Malik, the spokesman for al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar Gazwat-ul-Hind. Malik was originally a member of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, but defected to AGH. Al-Qaeda has been in conflict with Pakistani-backed insurgencies and has actively recruited from their ranks. Al-Qaeda’s goal is to create an independent jihadi presence in Jammu and Kashmir, one that is not accountable to Pakistan. Source: Thomas Joscelyn, “Indian forces kill spokesman for al-Qaeda group in Kashmir,” Long War Journal, June 28, 2019, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/06/indian-forces-kill-spokesman-for-al-qaeda-group-in-kashmir.php [56].

- **June 13, 2019:** Asim Umar, the emir of AQIS, releases a statement praising the Taliban’s “victory” in Afghanistan. The “victory” refers to the ongoing peace talks between the United States and the Taliban as “America once threatened war, it is now begging for ceasefire.” Umar also asks Allah to “end this ISIS fitnah forever which has stabbed Jihadi and Caliphate in the back.” Source: Thomas Joscelyn, “Senior al-Qaeda officials praise Taliban’s ‘victory’ in Afghanistan,” Long War Journal, June 13, 2019, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/06/senior-al-qaeda-officials-praise-talibans-victory-in-afghanistan.php [57].


- **March 13, 2019:** The Afghan military reports that it has killed 31 members of AQIS, including nine suicide bombers, during recent airstrikes in Ghazni province.
  
  Ghazni has long been a haven for al-Qaeda. It was one of four provinces recommended by Osama bin Laden for its commanders and families to seek shelter during the height of the US drone campaign in Pakistan a decade ago. The airstrike targeted a compound in the district of Giro that was run by AQIS commander Qari Arif. Source: Bill Roggio, “Afghan military kills 31 AQIS fighters in Ghazni,” Long War Journal, March 13, 2019, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/afghan-military-kills-31-aqis-fighters-in-ghazni.php [59].


- **July 28, 2017:** Al-Qaeda announces a new group in Kashmir and names Zakir Musa as the chief of the cell known as Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind.
  
  Musa has risen to be one of the top militant leaders in Kashmir after the death of his predecessor of the rebel group known as Hizbul Mujahideen. Source: Jack Moore, "Kashmir Has A New Insurgent Group: Al-Qaeda,” Newsweek, July 28, 2017, https://www.newsweek.com/kashmir-has-new-insurgent-group-al-qaeda-643348


- **April 29, 2017:** Al-Qaeda commander Abdul Raheem is killed in a U.S. drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan.
  


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**November 5, 2016:** Pakistan’s Counter-terrorism Department arrest three militants, including, AQIS commander Muhammad Uzair, in a series of raids in Orangi Town and Lyari, Pakistan.


**October 8, 2016:** Pakistani authorities arrest four AQIS militants in Karachi, Pakistan, including the new Karachi chief, Faizur Rehman, and deputy chief of AQIS, Mustafa alias Shahzad.


**September 2016:** U.S. forces in Afghanistan kill Usama Ibrahim, the head of AQIS’s as-Sahab Media.


**July 12, 2016:** AQIS releases a message urging Kashmiri Muslims to “slit the throats of the Kufr [nonbelievers].”


**July 4, 2016:** Asim Omar releases an audio message urging followers to “rise up and to follow the example of lone wolf attackers in Europe.”


**June 30, 2016:** The U.S. Department of State designates AQIS as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as well as a specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224.


**May 15, 2016:** Bangladeshi authorities arrest AQIS-affiliated Shirful Islam Shihab in connection to the April 26 attack in Dhaka.


**April 26, 2016:** Ansar al Islam claims responsibility for the murders of Xulhaz Mannan and Tanay Mojumdar, the editors of an LGBT magazine who were hacked to death in Dhaka on April 15, 2016.


**April 8, 2016:** Ansar al Islam claims responsibility for the murder of secular campaigner Nazimuddin Samad.


**February 9, 2016:** Saudi authorities arrest Sabeel Ahmad, a suspected AQIS recruiter and brother of the U.K. terrorist Kafeel Ahmed, responsible for the June 2007 Glasgow airport attack.


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- **September 16, 2015:** One of Pakistan’s provincial counterterrorism units reportedly arrests an alleged AQIS financier in Karachi.

- **August 18, 2015:** Bangladesh police arrest two suspects for the murder of Bangladeshi atheist bloggers Avijit Roy and Ananta Bijoy Das.

- **August 7, 2015:** Secular Bangladesh bloggers Niloy Neel and Chaterjee are hacked to death.

- **July 2, 2015:** Bangladesh forces reportedly arrest 12 AQIS operatives in the capital of Dhaka.

- **July 1, 2015:** Pakistani authorities say they have killed four AQIS insurgents in Lahore, Pakistan, who were allegedly planning an attack on Pakistan’s spy agency.

- **May 25, 2015:** The Bangladesh government bans the AQIS-affiliated Ansarullah Bangla Team, one of Bangladesh’s most prominent Islamist groups.

- **May 12, 2015:** Secular blogger Ananta Bijoy Das is hacked to death in Bangladesh.

- **May 3, 2015:** AQIS releases a nine-minute video in which emir Asim Omar claims responsibility for the recent murders of atheist bloggers Avijit Roy and Washiqur Rahman in Bangladesh and liberal professors Mohammad Shakil Auj and Shafiuul Islam in Pakistan.

- **April 12, 2015:** In an official AQIS video posted on jihadist forums, spokesman Usama Mahmoud announces that a January 5 U.S. airstrike in Pakistan’s North Waziristan region had killed two AQIS leaders.

- **April 2015:** AQIS announces the death of 50 militants, including two of its leaders, at the hands of U.S. drone strikes and Pakistani military campaigns since the previous summer.

- **March 30, 2015:** Atheist blogger Washiqur Rahman is stabbed to death in Bangladesh.
  AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015. Sources: Jason Burke and Saad Hammadi, “Bangladesh Blogger Becomes Second to Be Murdered in a Month,” *Guardian* (London), March 30, 2015,
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**September 19, 2014:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declares that AQIS will fail to wage terror or recruit in India. He says, "If anyone thinks Indian Muslims will dance to their tune, they are delusional. Indian Muslims will live for India. They will die for India. They will not want anything bad for India. Source: Laura Smith-Spark, "Al Qaeda Will Fail to Recruit India’s Muslims, Prime Minister Says," CNN, September 21, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/19/world/asia/india-modi-extremists/.


**September 10, 2014:** AQIS spokesman Usama Mahmoud issues a statement claiming responsibility for the September 6 attack on the Pakistan Navy frigate. Mahmoud declares that the attack was “a plan to strike America’s military strength on the seas [ordered by] the respected [emir] Shaykh Ayman al Zawahiri.” Source: Dr. Shaul Shuy, "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and ‘Jihad on the Seas’,” International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, November 25, 2014, http://www.ict.org.il/Article/1256/AI qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent.


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Violent history:
Since its founding, AQIS has focused primarily on executing lone-wolf style attacks, targeting secular and atheist activists and intellectuals based in Bangladesh. In 2016, groups and individuals affiliated with AQIS began calling for lone-wolf attacks on U.S. interests, issuing a target list of specific U.S. politicians and calling for attacks on U.S. universities involved in designing drones. In June 2017, AQIS also called for attacks against U.S. interests and personnel based in Afghanistan.

- **February 16, 2013**: AQIS claims responsibility for the murder of Bangladeshi activist Rajib Haider.
- **September 6, 2014**: AQIS militants attempt to seize a Pakistan Navy frigate, PNS Zulfiqar, in the waters of a naval dockyard in Karachi. They plan to use the ship as a launching pad for missiles on nearby American and Pakistani ships. Ten militants and one petty officer are killed in the ensuing shoot-out. Pakistani officials allege AQIS recruited members of the Pakistan Navy to participate in the attack.
- **September 10, 2014**: AQIS spokesman Usama Mahmood issues a statement claiming responsibility for the attack on the Pakistan Navy frigate. Mahmood declares that the attack was "a plan to strike America’s military strength on the seas [ordered by] the respected [emir] Shaykh Ayman al Zawahiri."
- **September 14, 2014**: AQIS claims responsibility for the murder of Islamic scholar Mohammad Shakil Auj in Karachi, Pakistan.
- **November 16, 2014**: Sociology professor Shafiul Islam is hacked to death in western Bangladesh. AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015.
- **February 26, 2015**: AQIS claims responsibility for the murder of Bangladeshi-American blogger Avijit Roy in Bangladesh. AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015.
- **March 20, 2015**: A suspected AQIS suicide bombing in Karachi, Pakistan, leaves two soldiers dead.
- **March 30, 2015**: Atheist blogger Washiqur Rahman is stabbed to death in Bangladesh. AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015.
- **May 3, 2015**: AQIS releases a nine-minute video in which emir Asim Umar claims responsibility for the then-recent murders of atheist bloggers Avijit Roy and Washiqur Rahman in Bangladesh and liberal professors Mohammad Shakil Auj and Shafiul Islam in Pakistan. Umar also claims responsibility for the murders of Aniqa Naz, a Pakistani blogger, and Ahmad Rajib Haidar, an atheist Bangladeshi blogger murdered in February 2013. Umar declares, "Praise be to Allah, these assassinations are part of a series of operations initiated by the different branches of al Qaeda on the orders of our respected leader Sheikh Ayman al Zawahiri (may Allah protect him)."
- **May 12, 2015**: Secular blogger Ananta Bijoy Das is hacked to death in Bangladesh. AQIS’s Bangladesh branch, Ansar al Islam, claims responsibility.
- **August 7, 2015**: Secular Bangladeshi bloggers Niloy Neel and Chaterjee are hacked to death. Ansar al Islam takes responsibility for the murders via emails to media outlets.
- **September 24, 2015**: The AQIS-linked Ansarullah Bangla Team releases a "hit list" of secular Bangladeshi bloggers and writers living in North America and Europe.
- **October 31, 2015**: Ansar al Islam claims responsibility for the murder of Faisal Arefin Dipon, a Bangladeshi publisher of secular books. He was hacked to death at the Jagriti Prokashoni publishing house in Dhaka. Ansar al Islam militants also targeted Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, another publisher, though he survived the attack.
- **April 8, 2016**: Ansar al Islam, AQIS’s Bangladesh affiliate, claims responsibility for the murder of Bangladeshi blogger Nazimuddin Samad.
- **April 26, 2016**: An al-Qaeda affiliate claims responsibility for the brutal murder of gay rights activist Xulhaz Mannan in Bangladesh.
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- **January 6, 2017**: AQIS militants attack a police headquarters in Karachi with grenades, killing one civilian.78
- **August 10, 2018**: According to Afghan Intelligence officials, AQIS has joined the Taliban’s assault on Ghazni city in Afghanistan.79

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Designations:

Designations by the U.S. Government:

June 30, 2016: The U.S. Department of State designated AQIS as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as well as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224.80

Designations by Foreign Governments and Organizations:

November 28, 2016: Australia designated AQUIS as a terrorist organization.81

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**Associations:**

**Ties to Extremist Entities:**

AQIS’s emir, Asim Umar, had reported directly to Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar [98] before the latter’s death. As a former commander in the Pakistani Taliban, Umar’s appointment as emir of AQIS reveals the ties between the Taliban and the new al-Qaeda affiliate. In its “Code of Conduct” published in June 2017, AQIS reiterated its allegiance to the emir of the Taliban and declared that its members fight “shoulder-to-shoulder” with the Taliban—and sometimes under its banner—in the Afghan insurgency. It also revealed that AQIS is so closely integrated with the Taliban that some AQIS members are part of the Taliban’s chain-of-command.82

Al-Qaeda Central and the Taliban have close ties. Al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri has repeatedly renewed his oath, or pledge of allegiance, to the leader of the Taliban and declared that members fight “shoulder-to-shoulder” with the Taliban— and sometimes under its banner—in the Afghan insurgency. It also revealed that AQIS is so closely integrated with the Taliban that some AQIS members are part of the Taliban’s chain-of-command.82

Al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri has repeatedly renewed his oath, or pledge of allegiance, to the leader of the Taliban, formerly Omar.83 Since May 2015, the Taliban has been led by Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada [99].84

The Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), commonly known as the Ansar Bangla, is an Islamist group based in Bangladesh. It was formed in 2007 and banned by the Bangladeshi government on May 25, 2015.85 Nonetheless, it is believed to continue working closely with AQIS, and has been blamed for numerous murders of secular bloggers for which AQIS has taken responsibility.86

Since its ban in 2015, a number of ABT members have been arrested on murder-related charges. ABT cleric Jashimuddin Rahmani was one of seven defendants found guilty in December 2015 of the murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider. Accused ABT members have also been arrested for links to the murder of liberal blogger Niloy Neel. At least one ABT member was reportedly arrested on undisclosed charges after carrying out pro-ISIS recruitment in the country.87

 Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind

Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind (AGH) is a Kashmiri jihadist group founded in July 2017 after its leader, Zakir Musa, broke away from Kashmiri separatist group Hizbul Mujahideen. Musa declared his allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2017, and disseminated rhetoric that was consistent with the agendas of both AQIS and al-Qaeda Central.80 Furthermore, Taliban commander Haji Mansoor Mehsood praised the establishment of Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind and credited the “hard work” of AQIS for making it possible.91

Following Musa’s capture and eventual execution by Indian forces in 2019, Hameed Lelhari was declared the new chief of AGH.92 Although the Kashmiri insurgent group benefits from the support of Pakistan, al-Qaeda has been in conflict with Pakistani-backed insurgencies and has amplified the presence of AGH as a way to create an independent jihadist presence in Jammu and Kashmir that is not accountable to Pakistan and its interests.89

82 Thomas Joscelyn, “AQIS emphasizes allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri, Taliban in new ‘code of conduct,’” Long War Journal, June 26, 2017,[34].


85 “Ansarullah Bangla Team Banned,” Dhaka Tribune, May 25, 2015,
Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)


Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

Media Coverage:
Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

**Rhetoric:**

**Group Message, July 12, 2016**

“What stops you from using a dagger or knife to slit the throats of forces of Kufr? Remember, that the glory you seek demands nothing less than blood and nothing more than initiative and unwavering belief in the path of Allah - Jihad Fi'sabilillah.”

**Group Message, July 12, 2016**

“Attack the forts of the enemies. Petrol bombs are one of the best ways to soften up the enemies and then attack them with knives and iron rods. Use wet face covers to lessen the impact of tear gas.”

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*Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda emir, September 3, 2014*

“In a video release announcing the formation of AQIS:

“It is an entity that was formed to promulgate the call of the reviving imam Sheikh Usama bin Laden, may Allah have mercy on him, to call the Ummah to unite round the word of Tawhid [monotheism], to wage jihad against its enemies, to liberate its land, to restore its sovereignty, and to revive its Caliphate.”

*Asim Omar, AQIS video, May 3, 2015*

*Claiming responsibility for the murder of numerous secular bloggers and professors:*

“...These assassinations are part of a series of operations initiated by the different branches of al-Qaida on the directions of our respected leader Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri and it is equally part of our commitment to fulfill the oath of Sheikh Osama [bin Laden].”

*Asim Omar, AQIS video, May 3, 2015*

“Where are those who would kill these blasphemers, wherever they may be found, even if it has to be done using a dagger or a knife, and by doing so record their names on the Day of Judgment among the devotees of the prophet?”

*Asim Omar, AQIS video, May 3, 2015*

*In reference to the attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in early 2015 and the murder of secular bloggers in Bangladesh and Pakistan:*

“[Blasphemers have been] taught a lesson in France, Denmark, Pakistan and now in Bangladesh.”

*Asim Omar, AQIS video, May 3, 2015*

*In al-Qaeda’s Resurgance magazine:*

“We have little doubt that, sooner or later, the Muslims of India too will come to the realization that their future is inextricably linked to the success of the Afghan Jihad...”
Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

In an official AQIS statement released via Twitter:
“The attack on Iraq and Syria is not against a particular group or organization. Instead it’s an attack on [the] entire Ummah [worldwide community of Muslims] aiming to terminate every Islamic and Jihadi movement which aims to stand against the tyranny and believes in the establishment of Shari’ah.”

Usama Mahmoud, November 3, 2014

In an official AQIS statement released via Twitter:
“Once again we call upon the Muslims worldwide to stand in support of the Mujahidīn against the American coalition and join this fard-al-ayn (absolute obligation of) Jihad to gain freedom, to protect their Deen [religion], to guard their holy places and to establish the supremacy of Shari’ah.”

Usama Mahmoud, November 3, 2014

In an official AQIS statement released via Twitter:
“The attack on Iraq and Syria is not against a particular group or organization. Instead it’s an attack on [the] entire Ummah [worldwide community of Muslims] aiming to terminate every Islamic and Jihadi movement which aims to stand against the tyranny and believes in the establishment of Shari’ah.”

Usama Mahmoud, November 3, 2014

In a video release announcing the formation of AQIS:
“This entity was not established today, but it is the fruit of a blessed effort for more than two years to gather the mujahideen in the Indian subcontinent into a single entity to be with the main group, Qaedat al-Jihad, from the soldiers of the Islamic Emirate and its triumphant emir, Allah permitting, Emir of the Believers Mullah Muhammad Omar Mujahid.”

Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda emir, September 3, 2014

In a video release announcing the formation of AQIS:
“Your brothers in Qaedat al-Jihad did not forget you and that they are doing what they can to rescue you from injustice, oppression, persecution, and suffering.”

Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda emir, September 3, 2014

In a video release announcing the formation of AQIS:
“The rise of this new branch demonstrates that jihad under the leadership of Amir of Believers, Mullah Omar is expanding.”

Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda emir, September 3, 2014

In a video release announcing the formation of AQIS:
“A new branch of al-Qaeda was established and is Qaedat al-Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent, seeking to raise the flag of jihad, return the Islamic rule, and empowering the Shariah of Allah across the Indian subcontinent.”

Asim Omar, Propaganda video, July 2013

Addressing Indian Muslims:
“[Join the] global jihad to give a final push to the collapsing edifice of America...lives are being sacrificed in this jihad to defeat America and its allies everywhere.”

Asim Omar, Propaganda video, June 2013

“From the land of Afghanistan, a caravan is heading toward India. Not on someone's directive. Not on the basis of some governmental policy. But simply on the basis of abiding by God's command.”

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Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)


