

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

Executive Summary:

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) is a U.S.-designated terrorist group and al-Qaeda's newest affiliate.¹ 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.² AQIS reportedly operates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.³

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, 2014.⁴ 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](#).⁵

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.⁶

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Flashpoint Global Partners senior analyst Laith Alkhouri called the group's formation at the time "a serious counternarrative to the ISIS expansion."⁷

However, an unnamed jihadist close to AQIS told Reuters, "After the killing of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda's new chief al-Zawahiri started the reorganization of al-Qaeda, with its main focus on South Asia." Sources close to AQIS's former emir (leader), Asim Umar, 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.⁸

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."⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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 Shafiul Islam in Pakistan.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³

On September 23, 2019, the United States launched a joint operation with the Afghan military, carrying out a raid in Musa Qala, southern Afghanistan. On October 8, 2019, Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security confirmed that along with AQIS leader, Asim Umar, six other militants were killed during the operation. The NDS also claimed that Osama Mehmood, AQIS's spokesman, is now the leader of AQIS.¹⁴

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).¹⁵ 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."¹⁶

[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.¹⁷ In the first issue of al-Qaeda's new English language magazine *Resurgence*,¹⁸ 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."¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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."²¹ 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.²² 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.²³

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

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Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁴ 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.²⁵

AQIS prioritizes American targets in Pakistan and strives for a complete American withdrawal from the region, according to the Code of Conduct document.²⁶ 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.²⁷

Organizational Structure:

In December 2014, AQIS spokesman Osama Mehmoud 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.”²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.³⁰

Analysts have alleged that AQIS may be broken into regional branches, including in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Karachi, Pakistan.³¹ 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.³²

Al-Qaeda officials have also called on AQIS to carry out attacks in Myanmar in response to government-inflicted violence against the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group.³³ 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.³⁴

In a July 2020 report published by the United Nations Security Council, it was alleged that around 150 to 200 AQIS members from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, and Pakistan are operating under the Taliban in the Nimruz, Helmand, and Kandahar provinces in Afghanistan. According to the report, AQIS is allegedly planning retaliatory operations in the area to avenge the death of its former leader, Asim Umar.³⁵

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.³⁶ 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.³⁷

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.³⁸

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 former emir, Asim Umar, reportedly spent years disseminating recruitment videos to Kashmiri Muslims.³⁹ An al-Qaeda video released three months before AQIS’s formation featured Umar, the then-commander of an al-

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Qaeda cell in Pakistan. Umar called on Kashmiri Muslims to wage jihad on India.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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.⁴² South Asia expert Jason Burke wrote, “Though there are some signs of increasing radicalisation in India, recruitment to extremist networks there is negligible.”⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

Beyond videos and online magazines, little is known about AQIS’s recruitment tactics. According to a January 2019 report by The Soufan Center, AQIS has relied on using person-to-person contacts for recruitment, training and indoctrination.⁴⁸

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.”⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ This may explain the existence of a massive AQIS training facility in Kandahar, Afghanistan.⁵¹ U.S. and Afghan troops raided and demolished the 30-square mile camp in early October 2015.⁵²

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.⁵³ New al-Qaeda recruits progress from basic physical training to weapons training, training in armed assault, and bomb making.⁵⁴ Harakat-ul-Mujahiddeen, a Pakistani Islamist terrorist organization long linked to al-Qaeda and now to AQIS, reportedly operates training camps in Afghanistan.⁵⁵ AQIS emir Asim Umar reportedly trained at one of the camps, which also served to train Kashmiri jihadists.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷

Also Known As:

- Ansar al Islam⁵⁸
- Jamaat Qaidat al-jihad fi shibhi al-qarrat al-Hindiy⁵⁹

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- Jamaat Qaidat al-Jihad fi'shibhi al-Qarrat al-Hindiya⁶⁰
- Organisation of The Base of Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent⁶¹
- Qaedat al-Jihad⁶²
- Qaedat al-Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent⁶³

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Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

Key Leaders



Asim Umar

AQIS emir (leader) (deceased)



Osama Mehmood

Emir



**Ustad Ahmad Farooq a.k.a.
Raja Suleman**

Deputy emir (deceased)



Atif Yahya Ghouri

Deputy emir



Muhammad Maruf

Head of recruitment



**Atta ur Rahman a.k.a.
Naeem Bukhari**

High-ranking member, bridge
between AQIS and al-Qaeda
central



Shahid Usman

Head of al-Qaeda's Karachi wing-
incarcerated in Pakistan



Oweis Jakhrani

Mastermind of the ship missile plot

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)



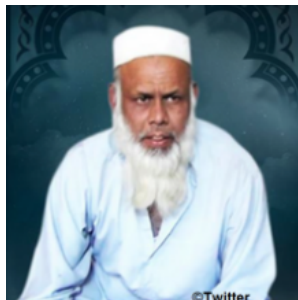
Zeeshan Rafeeq

Mastermind of the ship missile plot



**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 Waliullah**

Shura council member (deceased)



Mawlana Mainul Islam

Top coordinator in Bangladesh



Mufti Abdullah Ashraf

Spokesman of Ansar al Islam,
AQIS's Bangladesh chapter



Mohammad Asif

Chief of India Wing (arrested)



Zakir Musa

Chief of Kashmir Affiliate Ansar
Ghazwat ul Hind (deceased)



Hameed Lelhari

Chief of Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

History:

- **December 1, 2022:** The U.S. Department of State designates three AQIS members as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). Among those designated are: Osama Mehmood, the emir of AQIS; Atif Yahya Ghouri, the deputy emir of AQIS; and Muhammad Maruf who is responsible for the group's recruiting branch. Sources: "Terrorist Designation of AQIS and TTP Leaders," U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-aqis-and-ttp-leaders/>; "US Brands South Asian Jihadists As Terrorists," Agence France Presse, December 1, 2022, <https://www.barrons.com/news/us-brands-south-asian-jihadists-as-terrorists-01669934108>.
- **October 22, 2022:** India's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) enlists the help of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to uncover an AQIS cell "active in different districts of Assam as well as in Goalpara," that also has links to Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), a Bangladesh-based terror group. According to the NIA, the cell reportedly seeks to launch attacks against and overthrow the governments of India and Bangladesh to eventually establish Sharia Law in India. Source: Rajnish Singh, "Terror outfit AQIS active in different districts of Assam to implement 'Ghazwa-e-Hind', MHA ropes in NIA to probe," ANI, October 22, 2022, <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/terror-outfit-aqis-active-in-different-districts-of-assam-to-implement-ghazwa-e-hind-mha-ropes-in-nia-to-probe20221022142227>.
- **August 29, 2022 - August 31, 2022:** Indian authorities destroy two madrassas in Assam, northeastern India for allegedly carrying out "jihadi" activities on its premises. One madrassa in Barpeta district was destroyed on August 29, as it was claimed to be used as a training hub by AQIS, and the other in Bongaigaon district was demolished on August 31. A week earlier, a teacher from the Bongaigaon madrassa was arrested on suspicion of links with AQIS. According to police officers, incriminating documents relating to jihadist activity were discovered in the Bongaigaon canteen. Sources: "Assam: Madrassa with 'links' to terror outfits demolished after arrest of teacher," The Print, August 31, 2022, <https://theprint.in/india/assam-madrassa-with-links-to-terror-outfits-demolished-after-arrest-of-teacher-2/1109841>; Ratnadip Choudhury and Sanjib Kumar Das, "Assam Demolishes 3rd Madrassa After Teacher Arrested Over Al Qaeda Links," NDTV, August 31, 2022, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/assam-demolishes-third-madrassa-after-teacher-arrested-over-terror-links-3302442>.
- **August 18, 2022 - September 6, 2022:** Police in West Bengal arrest two suspected members of AQIS in Parganas district. Upon investigation of the suspects homes, officers discover several documents containing highly radicalized thoughts, and statements regarding waging war against India. During the interrogation process, the two men—Raqib Sarkar and Kazi Ahshanullah—reveal that 17 other AQIS members were active in the region. Sarkar is allegedly the "Ansar" or chief coordinator of AQIS's external coordination wing in West Bengal where he coordinated across cells in different states and arranged for safe houses for AQIS leaders visiting West Bengal. Source: "West Bengal: Two suspected members of terror outfit held," Indian Express, August 18, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/kolkata/bengal-two-suspected-members-of-terror-outfit-held-8096728/>; "Another AQIS sleeper cell module spotted in West Bengal," Hindu Post, September 6, 2022, <https://hindupost.in/terrorism/another-aqis-sleeper-cell-module-spotted-in-west-bengal>.
- In July, police in Assam, northeastern India, arrest an unreported number of members from Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT)—an affiliate of AQIS. According to police, the ABT members were the "most technologically advanced terrorist modules busted so far...using a very sophisticated app for encrypted communication." Upon the suspects' arrest, a large amount of information was extracted from the arrested members, including their plans for expansion in India. According to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, since April 2020, five ABT sleeper cells and 30 members have been busted in Assam. Source: Rajeev Bhattacharyya, "Al-Qaida-Affiliated Terrorists in India Found With Sophisticated Communication App," The Diplomat, August 5, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/al-qaida-affiliated-terrorists-in-india-found-with-sophisticated-communication-app>.
- **June 6, 2022:** AQIS circulates announcements threatening that its members will carry out attacks in India. The threats came after members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a pro-Hindu nationalist political group, made controversial statements regarding the prophet Muhammad. According to media sources, the statement released by AQIS called for attacks in Delhi, Mumbai, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat to defend the honor of the prophet. Sources: Saurabh Sharma and Rupam Jain, "India tightens security after militants threaten attacks over anti-Muslim remarks," Reuters, June 13, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indian-police-arrest-youth-leader-modis-party-anti-muslim-comments-2022-06-08/>; Kallol Bhattacharjee, "Al-Qaeda in Indian subcontinent threatens to attack India after Prophet controversy," The Hindu, June 8, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/al-qaeda-in-indian-subcontinent-threatens-to-attack-india-after-prophet-controversy/article65505330.ece>.
- **April 7, 2022:** Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri releases a video speaking on an Indian government order banning Muslim girls from wearing head scarves in the classroom. In the video, Zawahiri asks Muslims in the subcontinent to fight the reported assault on Islam "intellectually, using the media with weapons on the battlefield." Additionally, Zawahiri states "we must stop being deceived by the mirage of Hindu democracy of India, which to begin with, was never more than a tool to oppress Islam." Source: "Al-Qaeda chief Zawahiri asks Muslims to unite over hijab controversy in India," New India Express, April 7, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/al-qaeda-chief-zawahiri-asks-muslims-to-unite-over-hijab-controversy-in-india-7856096/>.
- **July 11, 2021:** Police in Uttar Pradesh, India, arrest two suspected AQIS members. Reportedly, the suspects—who were among three key members of the AQIS cell in the Uttar Pradesh—sought to carry out serial blasts and long-wolf suicide bombings in the state. Source: "Uttar Pradesh ATS arrests two suspected Al Qaeda terrorists, claims major terror plot foiled," New Indian Express, July 11, 2021, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2021/jul/11/two-terrorist-of-al-qaeda-supported-outfit-arrested-from-lucknow-2328674.html>.
- **July 23, 2020:** The U.N. Security Council releases a report that claims around 150 to 200 AQIS members from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, and Pakistan are operating under the Taliban in the Nimruz, Helmand, and Kandahar provinces in Afghanistan. According to the report, AQIS is allegedly planning retaliatory operations to avenge the death of its former leader, Asim Umar. Source: "Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, July 23, 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_717.pdf.
- **March 27, 2020:** AQIS calls for "long wolf" attacks in response to communal violence that largely targeted Muslims protesting India's new citizenship law in New Delhi in February 2020. Sources: Ajit Kumar Singh, "Threat of Islamist Terrorism in India is Real," League of India, May 25, 2020, <https://leagueofindia.com/internal-challenges/the-threat-of-islamist-terrorism-in-india/>; "Death toll from Delhi's worst riots in decades rises to 38," Guardian, February 27, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/27/death-toll-from-delhis-worst-riots-in-decades-rises-to-38>.

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- **March 21, 2020:** AQIS releases a statement in one of its Urdu language magazines, claiming that it has changed the title of the publication from Nawa-I Afghan Jihad to Nawa-i Gazawatul Hind.
The name demonstrates a geographical shift in the insurgent's group focus, as the statement also claims that Kashmir will now be the epicenter of AQIS's jihadist campaign. Source: Animesh Roul, "Al-Qaeda's South Asian Branch Gravitating Toward Kashmir," Jamestown Foundation, April 17, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/al-qaeda-south-asian-branch-gravitating-toward-kashmir/>.
 - **January 29, 2020:** According to a report released by the U.N. Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, AQIS and the Taliban continue to maintain a close relationship despite the Taliban's ongoing peace negotiations with the U.S.
According to the report, the Taliban's shadow governor of Musa Qala, the district where former AQIS leader, Asim Umar, was killed, had "arranged" for the protection of AQIS men and had facilitated the movement of AQIS fighters from the south to the eastern region of Afghanistan. Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "UN: Al-Qaeda maintains close ties to Taliban despite talks with U.S.," January 29, 2020, Long War Journal, January 29, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/01/un-al-qaeda-maintains-close-ties-to-taliban-despite-talks-with-u-s.php>.
 - **December 27, 2019:** Pakistani officials arrest five suspected AQIS members in Punjab.
The suspects, who ran AQIM's media operations and fundraising, were allegedly planning an attack on security personnel. Source: Mubasher Bukhari, "Pakistan seizes five suspected al Qaeda militants," December 27, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-arrests/pakistan-seizes-five-suspected-al-qaeda-militants-idUSKBN1YV10I>.
 - AQIS issues a message on Telegram and al-Qaeda's official al-Sahab web portal, urging members to ensure unity following the death of former ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.
The statement also criticizes ISIS for sowing discord among the global jihad movement. The message is one among many that AQIS former spokesman and current leader, Osama Mehmood, releases. Source: Animesh Roul, "Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent's Propaganda Campaign Continues Despite Digital Disruptions and Stifled Operational Capability," Jamestown Foundation, January 28, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/al-qaeda-in-indian-subcontinent-propaganda-campaign-continues-despite-digital-disruptions-and-stifled-operational-capability/>.
 - **September 23, 2019 - October 8, 2019:** On September 23, the United States launches a joint operation with the Afghan military, carrying out a raid in Musa Qala, southern Afghanistan.
On October 8, Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security confirms that along with AQIS leader, Asim Umar, six other militants were killed during the operation. The NDS also claims that Osama Mehmood, AQIS's spokesman, is now the leader of AQIS. Sources: "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent chief Asim Umar killed in Afghanistan," The Hindu, October 8, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-chief-asim-umar-killed-in-afghanistan/article29618954.ece>; Bill Rogio, "Afghan intelligence confirms death of AQIS emir," Long War Journal, October 8, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/10/afghan-intelligence-confirms-death-of-aqis-emir.php>.
 - **September 16, 2019:** Following a raid on a Taliban warehouse in Ghazni Muqur district, Afghan Commandos and a unit from the National Directorate of Security discover explosives that were allegedly being stored for AQIS members to eventually conduct attacks in Kabul and other major cities.
Source: Bill Rogio, "Taliban supplies al Qaeda with explosives for attacks in major Afghan cities," Long War Journal, June 3, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/09/taliban-supplies-al-qaeda-with-explosives-for-attacks-in-major-afghan-cities.php>.
 - **August 6, 2019:** AQIS accuses Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of killing Jihadi Commander Maulana Abdul Jabbar in Baluchistan.
AQIS then publishes a statement on Telegram called "The Martyrdom Of The Leading Jihadi Commander Maulana Abdul Jabbar At The Hand Of Pakistani Intelligence Agencies." Source: "Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor (JTTM) Weekend Summary," The Middle East Media Research Institute, August 17, 2019, <https://www.memri.org/reports/jihad-and-terrorism-threat-monitor-jttm-weekend-summary-367>.
 - **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 jihadist 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>.
 - **June 13, 2019:** Asim Umar, the emir of AQIS, releases a statement praising the Taliban's "victory" in Afghanistan.
The "victory" refers to the on-going 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 Jihad and Caliphate in the back." Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Senior al Qaeda official praises Taliban's 'victory' in Afghanistan," Long War Journal, June 13, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/06/senior-al-qaeda-official-praises-talibans-victory-in-afghanistan.php>.
 - **May 23, 2019:** Indian forces kill Zakir Musa after an 11-hour gunfight in Indian-administered Kashmir.
Musa served as the rebel commander of Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, an al-Qaeda affiliated insurgency. Source: Rifat Fareed, "Zakir Musa: Tensions in Kashmir after killing of top rebel," Al Jazeera, May 24, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/zakir-musa-tensions-kashmir-killing-top-rebel-190524092820067.html>.
 - **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 airstrikes targeted a compound in the district of Giro that was run by AQIS commander Qari Arif. Source: Bill Rogio, "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>.
 - **November 20, 2018:** The Pakistani Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) conducts a search operation in Karachi, capturing Umar Jalal Chandio, a local emir for AQIS, in the process.
Jalal led many Baloch youth in kidnapping for ransom, terrorism and attacks on NATO forces. Security officials claimed that Jalal's wife is also an active member of AQIS. Source: "Key commander of banned outfit AQIS arrested from Karachi," Pakistan Today, November 20, 2018, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/11/20/key-commander-of-banned-outfit-aqis-arrested-from-karachi/>.
 - **April 23, 2018:** U.S. airstrike kills senior AQIS commander and Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) commander Hazrat Abbas in Nangahar, Afghanistan.
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Source: Bill Roggio, "US military kills 'dual-hatted' AQIS leader in eastern Afghanistan," Long War Journal, May 16, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/05/us-military-kills-dual-hatted-aqis-leader-in-eastern-afghanistan.php>.

- **December 5, 2017:** Afghanistan's intelligence agency and the U.S. military report that after a series of joint U.S.-Afghan operations, they have killed Omar bin Khatab, a top leader of AQIS in the Gilan district of Ghazni.
U.S. military officials described Khatab as the number two leader of AQIS and report that he was directly involved in fighting Afghan government and foreign troops and advised the Taliban in night attacks with rockets and mortars. Source: Sayed Salahuddin and Dan Lamothe, "Top al-Qaeda leader reported killed in Afghanistan in U.S.-Afghan operation," *Washington Post*, December 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/top-al-qaeda-leader-killed-in-afghanistan-in-us-afghan-operation/2017/12/05/48d1f332-d998-11e7-a841-2066faf731ef_story.html.
- **July 28, 2017:** Al-Qaeda announces a new group in Kashmir and names Zakir Musa as the chief of the cell known as Ansar Ghawzat-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>.
- AQIS releases a 20-page "Code of Conduct" detailing the group's organization, principles, and objectives. It calls for increased attacks on Pakistani troops as well as on American targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The "Code of Conduct" also reiterates the group's allegiance to al-Qaeda Central and the Taliban.
Thomas Joscelyn, "AQIS emphasizes allegiance to Ayman al Zawahiri, Taliban in new 'code of conduct,'" Long War Journal, June 26, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/06/aqis-emphasizes-allegiance-to-ayman-al-zawahiri-taliban-in-new-code-of-conduct.php>.
- **April 29, 2017:** Al-Qaeda commander Abdul Raheem is killed in a U.S. drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan. Media analysts suspect that Raheem was likely a commander for AQIS.
Bill Roggio, "Iraqi al Qaeda leader reportedly killed in drone strike in Pakistan," Long War Journal, May 3, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/05/iraqi-al-qaeda-leader-reportedly-killed-in-drone-strike-in-pakistan.php>.
- Pakistani authorities arrest seven AQIS militants during a series of raids across Karachi, Pakistan. In Afghanistan, AQIS announces the death of five militants in U.S. raids, including Tariq Bhai, the "head of Bangladeshi Affairs."
Imtiaz Ali, "'Two AQIS men' among 20 held in Rangers' raids," *Dawn* (Pakistan), April 25, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1328975>; Imtiaz Ali, "Five 'AQIS militants' held, plot for major act of terrorism foiled," *Dawn* (Pakistan), April 13, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1326577>; Faraz Khan, "Rangers, CTD arrest eight suspects during separate raids in Karachi," *Express Tribune* (Karachi), April 25, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1392460/rangers-ctd-arrest-eight-suspects-separate-raids-karachi/>; Bill Roggio, "US military kills AQIS leaders, fighters in southern Afghanistan," Long War Journal, April 16, 2017, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/04/us-military-kills-aqis-leaders-fighters-in-southern-afghanistan.php>.
- **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.
"Behind bars: CTD arrests three alleged terrorists," *Express Tribune* (Karachi), November 5, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1221013/behind-bars-ctd-arrests-three-alleged-terrorists/>; "CTD arrests three commanders of banned outfits," *Daily Times* (Lahore), November 5, 2016; <https://dailytimes.com.pk/47868/ctd-arrests-three-commanders-of-banned-outfits/>; "Three AQIS, LeJ 'facilitators' arrested," *News International* (Karachi), November 5, 2016; <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/162409-Three-AQIS-LeJ-facilitators-arrested>.
- **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.
Salis bin Perwaiz, "Nine suspected terrorists of LeJ and AQIS arrested in North Nazimabad raid," *News* (Pakistan), October 8, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/155694-Nine-suspected-terrorists-of-LeJ-and-AQIS-arrested-in-North-Nazimabad-raid>; Haider Ali Sindhu, "CTD arrests nine suspected terrorists in Karachi," *Daily Pakistan* (Lahore), October 8, 2016, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/ctd-arrests-nine-suspected-terrorists-in-karachi/>; "9 Hardcore Terrorists Arrested," *Nation* (Lahore), October 8, 2016, <http://nation.com.pk/08-Oct-2016/9-hardcore-terrorists-arrested>.
- U.S. forces in Afghanistan kill Usama Ibrahim, the head of AQIS's as-Sahab Media.
Bill Roggio, "US military kills AQIS leaders, fighters in southern Afghanistan," Long War Journal, April 16, 2017, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/04/us-military-kills-aqis-leaders-fighters-in-southern-afghanistan.php>.
- **July 12, 2016:** AQIS releases a message urging Kashmiri Muslims to "slit the throats of the Kufr [nonbelievers]."
The message further instructs militants to use petrol bombs, as such weapons are "one of the best ways to soften up the enemies [before attacking] them with knives and iron rods." Source: Sagnik Chowdhury, "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent asks Kashmiri muslims to follow Burhan Wani's footsteps," *Indian Express*, July 14, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-asks-kashmiri-muslims-to-follow-burhan-wanis-footsteps-2912376/>; "A Message to THE MUJAHID NATION OF KASHMIR," JustPaste.it, July 12, 2016, <https://justpaste.it/khorasan2kashmir>.
- **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." Specifically, Omar calls on Indian Muslims to target members of Indian law enforcement. Source: "Al-Qaeda calls for lone wolf attacks in India," *Indian Express*, July 5, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/al-qaeda-calls-for-lone-wolf-attacks-in-india-2892620/>.
- **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.
The Department of State also designates AQIS leader Asim Omar as an SDGT. Source: "State Department Terrorist Designations," U.S. Department of State, June 30, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/06/259219.htm>.
- **May 15, 2016:** Bangladeshi authorities arrest AQIS-affiliated Shariful Islam Shihab in connection to the April 26 attack in Dhaka.
Sources: CNN, "Man arrested in hacking deaths of 2 LGBT activists in Bangladesh," KESQ CBS Local 2, May 15, 2016, <http://www.ksq.com/news/man-arrested-in-hacking-deaths-of-2-lgbt-activists-in-bangladesh/39558152>; Reuters, "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent 'Claims' Murder of US Citizen in Bangladesh," *Telegraph* (London), May 3, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/bangladesh/11580758/Al-Qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent-claims-murder-of-US-citizen-in-Bangladesh.html>; Syed Zain al-Mahmood, "Al Qaeda Affiliate Claims Responsibility for Attacks in Bangladesh," *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/al-qaeda-affiliate-claims-responsibility-for-attacks-in-bangladesh-1446392987>.

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- **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.
Sources: "BANGLADESH DIVISION OF AQIS CLAIMS MURDER OF BLOGGER NAZIMUDDIN SAMAD," SITE Intelligence, April 8, 2016, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/bangladesh-division-of-aqis-claims-murder-of-blogger-nazimuddin-samad.html>; Elliott C. McLaughlin and Don Melvin, "LGBT editor and friend hacked to death in Bangladeshi capital," CNN, April 26, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/25/asia/bangladesh-u-s-embassy-worker-killed/>.
- **April 8, 2016:** Ansar al Islam claims responsibility for the murder of secular campaigner Nazimuddin Samad.
Samad was hacked to death and then shot at a traffic junction in Dhaka on April 6, 2016. Sources: "Bangladesh student Nazimuddin Samad hacked to death," BBC News, April 7, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35983979>; "BANGLADESH DIVISION OF AQIS CLAIMS MURDER OF BLOGGER NAZIMUDDIN SAMAD," SITE Intelligence, April 8, 2016, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/bangladesh-division-of-aqis-claims-murder-of-blogger-nazimuddin-samad.html>.
- **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.
Johnson T A, "Renewed efforts to bring back 'terror recruiter' from Saudi Arabia," Indian Express, September 15, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/lashkar-e-taiba-aqis-recruitment-sabeel-ahmed-youth-terrorists-3031803/>; Steven Brocklehurst, "The day terror came to Glasgow Airport," BBC News, June 30, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-40416026>; "Indian-origin al Qaeda top operative arrested in Saudi Arabia," India Today (Noida), August 5, 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indian-origin-al-qaeda-top-operative-arrested-in-saudi-arabia/1/732689.html>.
- **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 targets Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, another publisher, though he survives the attack. Sources: "Bangladeshi secular publisher hacked to death," BBC News, October 31, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34688245>; "Ansar-Al-Islam claims responsibility of attacks on writers, publishers," NTVBD, October 21, 2015, <http://en.ntvbd.com/bangladesh/11823/Ansar-Al-Islam-claims-responsibility-of-attacks-on-writers-publishers>.
- The United States raids and demolishes a 30-square mile AQIS training camp in Kandahar, Afghanistan.
Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio, "US military strikes large al Qaeda training camps in southern Afghanistan," Long War Journal, October 13, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/us-military-strikes-large-al-qaeda-training-camps-in-southern-afghanistan.php>.
- **September 16, 2015:** One of Pakistan's provincial counterterrorism units reportedly arrests an alleged AQIS financier in Karachi.
Source: "CTD Arrests 'al Qaeda Financer' in Karachi," *Tribune* (Karachi), September 16, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/957913/ctd-arrests-al-qaeda-financer-in-karachi/>.
- **August 18, 2015:** Bangladeshi police arrest two suspects for the murder of Bangladeshi atheist bloggers Avijit Roy and Ananta Bijoy Das. The men are suspected members of the Ansarullah Bangla Team, a Bangladeshi Islamist group commonly known as Ansar Bangla, which has close ties to AQIS. Source: Sugam Pokharel and Laura Smith-Spark, "Police: 3 Arrested in Deaths of Bangladeshi Bloggers," CNN, August 18, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/18/asia/bangladesh-blogger-deaths-arrests/index.html>.
- **August 7, 2015:** Secular Bangladeshi bloggers Niloy Neel and Chaterjee are hacked to death.
Ansar al Islam takes responsibility for the murders in emails to media outlets. Sources: Suman Varandani, "Bangladesh Blogger Death: 2 Islamists Arrested in Connection With Niloy Neel's Hacking Death," *International Business Times*, August 14, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/bangladesh-blogger-death-2-islamists-arrested-connection-niloy-neels-hacking-death-2053427>; Nida Najjar, "2 Arrested in Killing of Secular Blogger in Bangladesh," *New York Times*, August 14, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/15/world/asia/2-arrested-in-killing-of-secular-blogger-in-bangladesh.html>.
- **July 2, 2015:** Bangladeshi forces reportedly arrest 12 AQIS operatives in the capital of Dhaka.
Source: Johnlee Varghese, "Bangladesh: Al Qaeda Chief for Indian Subcontinent Among 12 Arrested in Dhaka," *International Business Times*, July 2, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/bangladesh-al-qaeda-chief-indian-subcontinent-among-12-arrested-dhaka-637847>.
- **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.
The names of the deceased are not released. Source: Associated Press, "Pakistan: 4 Members of Al-Qaeda's South Asian Branch Killed," *Daily Star* (Beirut), July 1, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/World/2015/Jul-01/304622-pakistan-4-members-of-al-qaedas-south-asian-branch-killed.aspx>.
- **May 25, 2015:** The Bangladeshi government bans the AQIS-affiliated Ansarullah Bangla Team, one of Bangladesh's most prominent Islamist groups.
Source: "Ansarullah Bangla Team banned," *Dhaka Tribune*, May 25, 2015, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2015/may/25/ansarullah-bangla-team-banned>.
- **May 12, 2015:** Secular blogger Ananta Bijoy Das is hacked to death in Bangladesh.
AQIS's Bangladesh branch, Ansar al Islam, takes responsibility. Sources: Agence France-Presse, "Third Secular Blogger Hacked to Death in Bangladesh," Yahoo News, May 12, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/third-secular-blogger-hacked-death-bangladesh-051937126.html>; "Ansar al-Islam Bangladesh' Says AQIS Claims Murder of Blogger Ananta Bijoy Das," SITE Intelligence Group, May 12, 2015, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/ansar-al-islam-bangladesh-says-aqis-claims-murder-of-blogger-ananta-bijoy-das.html>.
- **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 Shafiul Islam in Pakistan.
Omar also claims responsibility for the murders of Anika Naz, a Pakistani blogger, and Ahmad Rajib Haider, an atheist Bangladeshi blogger who was murdered in February 2013. Omar 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)." Authorities say there is insufficient evidence to link AQIS to the attacks. Analysts suggest that the new al-Qaeda affiliate may be claiming the attacks in an attempt to gain prestige and reputation. Sources: Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent Leader Says Attacks on 'Blasphemers' Ordered by Zawahiri," Long War Journal, May 3, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-says-attacks-on-blasphemers-ordered-by-zawahiri.php>; Ellen Barry, "Al Qaeda Branch Claims Responsibility for Bangladeshi Blogger's Killing," *New York Times*, May 3, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/world/asia/bangladesh-al-qaeda-indian-subcontinent-attack-on-bloggers.html>; Jason Burke, "South Asia al-Qaida Group Video Claims Responsibility for Blogger Murders," *Guardian* (London), May 3, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/03/south-asia-al-qaeda-group-video-claims-responsibility-for-blogger-murders>.

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- **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.
The leaders were deputy leader Ustad Ahmad Farood, a.k.a. Raja Suleman, and Shura member and Afghan operations chief Qari 'Imran, a.k.a. Ubaidullah. Mahmoud claims that past U.S. drone strikes have killed approximately 50 members of the group to date. Source: Associated Press, "Al-Qaida Says US Drones Kill 2 Leaders in Pakistan," Fox News, April 12, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/04/12/al-qaeda-indian-branch-says-us-drone-attacks-in-pakistan-kills-2-new-group/>.
- **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.**
On April 13, Pakistani security forces kill five AQIS militants and shut down an IED facility in Karachi, Pakistan. Included among the dead are the Karachi-based chief and deputy chief of AQIS. Bill Roggio, "US drone strike kills four in Taliban, Al Qaeda haven," Long War Journal, April 13, 2015, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/04/us-drone-strike-kills-four-in-taliban-al-qaeda-haven.php>; Imtiaz Ali, "AQIS city chief among five killed in 'encounter'," Dawn (Pakistan), April 14, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1175776>; David Sterman and Neeli Shah, "AQIS Commanders Killed in Karachi Raid; Modi Woos German Companies; 5 Cabinet Nominees Address Wolsi Jirga," Foreign Policy, April 14, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/14/aqis-commanders-killed-in-karachi-raid-modi-woos-german-companies-5-cabinet-nominees-address-wolsi-jirga/>.
- **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, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/30/blogger-hacked-death-bangladesh-dhaka>; Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent Leader Says Attacks on 'Blasphemers' Ordered by Zawahiri," Long War Journal, May 3, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-says-attacks-on-blasphemers-ordered-by-zawahiri.php>.
- **February 27, 2015:** Avijit Roy, a liberal, secular American-Bangladeshi blogger, is hacked to death in Bangladesh.
AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015. Sources: Agence France-Presse, "American Atheist Blogger Hacked to Death in Bangladesh," *Guardian* (London), February 27, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/27/american-atheist-blogger-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh>; Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent Leader Says Attacks on 'Blasphemers' Ordered by Zawahiri," Long War Journal, May 3, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-says-attacks-on-blasphemers-ordered-by-zawahiri.php>.
- **December 12, 2014:** Pakistani authorities arrest AQIS Karachi chief Shahid Usman, along with four other men, and confiscate approximately 22 pounds of explosives.
Source: Syed Raza Hassan, "Pakistan Arrests Suspected South Asian al Qaeda Commander," Reuters, December 12, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/12/us-pakistan-militants-idUSKBN0J11W20141212>.
- **November 16, 2014:** Sociology professor Shafiul Islam is hacked to death in western Bangladesh.
AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015. Sources: Agence France-Presse, "Bangladesh Professor 'Hacked to Death' by Suspected Militants," *Daily Mail* (London), November 16, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2836615/Bangladesh-professor-hacked-death-suspected-militants.html>; Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent Leader Says Attacks on 'Blasphemers' Ordered by Zawahiri," Long War Journal, May 3, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-says-attacks-on-blasphemers-ordered-by-zawahiri.php>.
- **November 3, 2014:** Usama Mahmoud releases a statement via Twitter calling on rival jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria to join together and defeat their common enemy, the United States.
The statement is titled, "American Aggression on Iraq and Syria... O! Muslims Unite for the Guardianship of Al-Haram." Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent Calls for Jihadist Unity against US-led Coalition," Long War Journal, November 4, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/11/al_qaeda_in_the_indi_2.php.
- **October 11, 2014:** In an official AQIS statement, spokesman Usama Mahmoud announces the death of Shura council member Sheikh Imran Ali Siddiqi, a.k.a. Haji Shaikh Waliullah, in a U.S. drone strike.
Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "US Drone Strike Kills Veteran Jihadist Turned Senior AQIS Official," Long War Journal, October 15, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/10/us_drone_strike_kill_32.php.
- **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 18, 2014:** Mohammad Shakil Auj, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Karachi known for his liberal religious views, is murdered in Pakistan.
AQIS claims responsibility in May 2015. Sources: Agence France-Presse, "Liberal Professor of Islam Shot Dead in Pakistan," *Guardian* (London), September 18, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/liberal-professor-islam-shot-dead-pakistan-karachi>; Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent Leader Says Attacks on 'Blasphemers' Ordered by Zawahiri," Long War Journal, May 3, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-says-attacks-on-blasphemers-ordered-by-zawahiri.php>.
- **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 Shay, "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/Al-Qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent>.
- **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 an ensuing suicide bombing and shoot-out. Pakistani officials allege AQIS recruited members of the Pakistan Navy to participate in the attack. Sources: Dr. Shaul Shay, "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/Al-Qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent>; Syed Shoaib Hasan, Saeed Shah and Siobhan Gorman, "Al Qaeda Militants Tried to Seize Pakistan Navy Frigate," *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/al-qaeda-militants-tried-to-seize-pakistan-navy-frigate-1410884514>.

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- **September 3, 2014:** Al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri appears in a 55-minute video produced by al-Qaeda's As-Sahab media department and posted on jihadist forums in which he announces the creation of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). The al-Qaeda central commander declares the new affiliate will "[seek] to raise the flag of jihad, return the Islamic rule, and [empower] the Shariah of Allah across the Indian subcontinent." Al-Zawahiri introduces the group's emir, Asim Omar, and its spokesman, Usama Mahmoud. Source: Bill Roggio, "Al Qaeda Opens Branch in the 'Indian Subcontinent,'" Long War Journal, September 3, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/al_qaeda_opens_branc.php.

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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.⁶⁴ In June 2017, AQIS also called for attacks against U.S. interests and personnel based in Afghanistan.⁶⁵

- **August 10, 2018:** According to Afghan Intelligence officials, AQIS has joined the Taliban's assault on Ghazni city in Afghanistan.⁶⁶
- **January 6, 2017:** AQIS militants attack a police headquarters in Karachi with grenades, killing one civilian.⁶⁷
- **April 26, 2016:** An al-Qaeda affiliate claims responsibility for the brutal murder of gay rights activist Xulhaz Mannan in Bangladesh.⁶⁸
- **April 8, 2016:** Ansar al Islam, AQIS's Bangladesh affiliate, claims responsibility for the murder of Bangladeshi blogger Nazimuddin Samad.⁶⁹
- **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.⁷⁰
- **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.⁷¹
- **August 7, 2015:** Secular Bangladeshi bloggers Niloy Neel and Chatterjee are hacked to death. Ansar al Islam takes responsibility for the murders via emails to media outlets.⁷²
- **May 12, 2015:** Secular blogger Ananta Bijoy Das is hacked to death in Bangladesh. AQIS's Bangladesh branch, Ansar al Islam, claims responsibility.⁷³
- **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 Aniq 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)."⁷⁴
- **March 30, 2015:** Atheist blogger Washiqur Rahman is stabbed to death in Bangladesh. AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015.⁷⁵
- **March 20, 2015:** A suspected AQIS suicide bombing in Karachi, Pakistan, leaves two soldiers dead.⁷⁶
- **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 2015.⁷⁷
- **November 16, 2014:** Sociology professor Shafiul Islam is hacked to death in western Bangladesh. AQIS claims responsibility for the murder in May 2015.⁷⁸
- **September 14, 2014:** AQIS claims responsibility for the murder of Islamic scholar Mohammad Shakil Auj in Karachi, Pakistan.⁷⁹
- **September 10, 2014:** AQIS spokesman Osama Mehmood issues a statement claiming responsibility for the attack on the Pakistan Navy frigate. Mehmood 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."⁸⁰
- **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.⁸¹
- **February 16, 2013:** AQIS claims responsibility for the murder of Bangladeshi activist Rajib Haider.⁸²

⁶⁴ "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent," State of New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, January 17, 2017, <https://www.njhomelandsecurity.gov/analysis/al-qaida-in-the-indian-subcontinent>.

⁶⁵ "AQIS Publishes its 'Code of Conduct,' Declares U.S. Citizens and Interests in Pakistan its 'Foremost Priority,'" Site Intelligence Group, June 25, 2017, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/aqis-publishes-its-code-of-conduct-declares-u-s-citizens-and-interests-in-pakistan-its-foremost-priority.html>.

⁶⁶ Bilal Sarwary, Twitter Post, August 10, 2018, 3:48am, <https://twitter.com/sarwary/status/1027823895800360961>.

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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 13224.⁸³

Designations by Foreign Governments and Organizations:

- **November 28, 2016:** Australia designated AQUIS as a terrorist organization.⁸⁴

⁸³ “State Department Terrorist Designations,” U.S. Department of State, June 30, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/06/259219.htm>.

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Associations:

Ties to Extremist Entities:

- **Taliban**

AQIS's emir, Asim Umar, had reported directly to Taliban leader [Mullah Mohammad Omar](#) 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.⁸⁵

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, formerly Omar.⁸⁶ Since May 2015, the Taliban has been led by [Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada](#).⁸⁷

- **Ansarullah Bangla Team**

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, 2015.⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰

- **Harakat-ul-Mujahideen**

Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, a Pakistani Islamist terrorist organization long linked to al-Qaeda and now to AQIS, reportedly operates training camps in Afghanistan.⁹¹ AQIS emir Asim Umar reportedly trained at one of the group's camps, which also trains Kashmiri jihadists.⁹²

- **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.⁹³ Furthermore, Taliban commander Haji Mansoor Mehsod praised the establishment of Ansar Ghazwat ul Hind and credited the "hard work" of AQIS for making it possible.⁹⁴ Following Musa's capture and eventual execution by Indian forces in 2019, Hameed Lelhari was declared the new chief of AGH.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶

⁸⁵ Thomas Joscelyn, "AQIS emphasizes allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri, Taliban in new 'code of conduct,'" *Long War Journal*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/06/aqis-emphasizes-allegiance-to-ayman-al-zawahiri-taliban-in-new-code-of-conduct.php>.

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⁹¹ Bill Roggio, "Harakat-ul-Mujahideen 'Operates Terrorist Training Camps in Eastern Afghanistan,'" *Long War Journal*, August 8, 2014, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/08/harakat-ul-mujahidee.php>.

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⁹² 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-isi-pok-camp/>.

⁹³ "Zakir Musa: Thousands mourn India's 'most wanted' militant," BBC News, May 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48392851>.

⁹⁴ Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda-linked jihadist in Kashmir criticizes Pakistani army," Long War Journal, September 2, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/09/al-qaeda-linked-jihadist-in-kashmir-criticizes-pakistani-army.php>.

⁹⁵ "Kashmir's al-Qaeda unit announces Zakir Musa's successor," India Today, June 7, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/zakir-musa-successor-al-qaeda-terrorism-kashmir-hameed-lelhari-kashmir-1544178-2019-06-07>.

⁹⁶ 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>.

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’sabillilah.”⁹⁷

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.”

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.”⁹⁸

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.”⁹⁹

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?”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Sagnik Chowdhury, “Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent asks Kashmiri muslims to follow Burhan Wani’s footsteps,” Indian Express, July 14, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-asks-kashmiri-muslims-to-follow-burhan-wanis-footsteps-2912376/>; “A Message to THE MUJAHID NATION OF KASHMIR,” JustPaste.it, July 12, 2016, <https://justpaste.it/khorasan2kashmir>.

⁹⁸ Sagnik Chowdhury, “Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent asks Kashmiri muslims to follow Burhan Wani’s footsteps,” Indian Express, July 14, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-asks-kashmiri-muslims-to-follow-burhan-wanis-footsteps-2912376/>; “A Message to THE MUJAHID NATION OF KASHMIR,” JustPaste.it, July 12, 2016, <https://justpaste.it/khorasan2kashmir>.

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¹⁰⁰ Ellen Barry, “Al Qaeda Branch Claims Responsibility for Bangladeshi Blogger’s Killing,” *New York Times*, May 3, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/world/asia/bangladesh-al-qaeda-indian-subcontinent-attack-on-bloggers.html>.