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**International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism - The Hague**

Al Qaeda in
the Indian
Subcontinent:

A New Frontline in the Global
Jihadist Movement?

In September 2014, al-Qaeda Central (AQC) launched its latest regional affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). The new group was created to operate across South Asia, however, with its centre of gravity and leadership based in Pakistan. This paper is a background brief, designed for policy makers, to shed light on and increase understanding of AQC's latest affiliate AQIS. At first glance the lack of successful action has led many to argue that AQIS is of limited threat. However, despite early setbacks, the group has not been eliminated and continues to organise and plan for the future.

About the Author

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1. Introduction

In September 2014, al-Qaeda Central (AQC) launched its latest regional affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), building on the already existing affiliates such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) or Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) in Syria. The new group was created to operate across South Asia, however, with its centre of gravity and leadership based in Pakistan. It was formed through the amalgamation of numerous pre-existing al-Qaeda associated regional and local groups.

The creation of this new al-Qaeda affiliate followed soon after the formal split between AQC and ISIS, with the latter's declaration of a caliphate in Syria and Iraq and seemingly threatening to replace AQC as the leader of the global jihad. Timing which led many to perceive the creation of AQIS as merely a reaction to these events and an attempt to regain the initiative by AQC. As a result of the split, both AQC and ISIS started to compete for influence and the loyalty of Jihadist groups across the globe, which would in due course also reach South Asia.

This paper is a background brief, designed for policy makers, to shed light on and increase understanding of AQC's latest affiliate AQIS. This paper starts with outlining what AQIS is, which groups it was created from and who its leaders are. Second, the reasons for the creation of AQIS are explored. Third, AQIS's narrative is dissected and examined. Fourth, the group's operational strategy, through the terrorist attacks carried out by AQIS since its formation, are investigated. Finally, the rivalry between ISIS and AQIS in South Asia is addressed, before concluding with an analyses of the future prospects of AQIS.

2. Who is AQIS?

According to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's announcement of the formation of AQIS, it was the product of more than two years' work in recruiting fighters and uniting different pre-existing Jihadi groups in the Indian Subcontinent.[1] As explained in the first edition of al Qaeda's magazine *Resurgence* [2], "[t]he establishment of this organization is a direct result of the merger of several groups that have been engaged in Jihad in this region for several years. In guidance of their Ameer, Shaykh Ayman al Zawahiri, the leaders of these Jihadi groups have joined forces to coalesce into a single organisation, Jama'ah Qa'eda al jihad in the Subcontinent." [3] However, exactly which Jihadi groups have been merged to form AQIS, has never been confirmed by the group. The topic is subject to some debate among analysts and below is a list of groups compiled from

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[1] A. Basit, "Asim Umar - 'New Kid on the Block'?", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 6, no. 10 (2014), pp. 8-12, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CTTA-November14.pdf.

[2] Resurgence magazine was launched by al-Qaeda to promote Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent following the formation of AQIS. "As an effort to spread the message of Islam and support the revival of Jihad, As-Sahab (Subcontinent) has launched Resurgence, a magazine that will primarily focus on issues concerning the Muslims of the Subcontinent, besides encouraging Muslims in every corner of the globe to target the arch enemy of Islam and Muslims, the United States" (*Resurgence* 1 (Fall 2014), p. 6). http://worldanalysis.net/14/2014/10/new-english-magazine-sahab-resurgence-issue-01/.

[3] *Resurgence* 1 (Fall 2014), p. 20, http://worldanalysis.net/14/2014/10/new-english-magazine-sahab-resurgence-issue-01/.

different sources, elements of which are thought likely to have been included in the formation of AQIS:[4]

- o Afghan Taliban (Afghanistan)
- o Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (Pakistan)
- o Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI) (Bangladesh and Pakistan)
- o Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) (disputed Kashmir region)
- o Harkat-ul-Mujahideen al Almi (HuMA) (Pakistan)
- o Brigade 313 (Pakistan)
- o Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) (Pakistan)
- o Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) (Pakistan)
- o Jundullah (Pakistan)
- o Ansar ut-Tawhid wa al Jihad in Kashmir (disputed Kashmir region)
- o Ansar al Islam Bangladesh (Bangladesh)
- o Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) (Bangladesh)
- o Indian Mujahideen (IM) (India)
- o Lanshkar-e-Taiba (LeT) (Pakistan)
- o Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Pakistan)
- o Turkistan Islamic Party (Paskistan)

3. AQIS Leadership

With the formation of AQIS, al-Zawahiri named Asim Umar the Emir of al Qaeda's latest affiliate. A trained theologian and Pakistani native, Asim is known as a skilled orator who previously taught at a madrassa in Karachi and has written four books promoting Jihad.[5] He has been associated with a number of Jihadi groups including Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HUJI)[6] and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), and was a former commander in the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).[7] Before going onto become a trusted lieutenant of al-Qaeda, and rose to be the group's "internet propagandist and also head of Al Qaeda's Sharia committee for Pakistan" before being appointed Emir of AQIS.[8]

The choice of Asim marks a change from al-Qaeda predilection for choosing Arab leaders, and it shows a clear strategic vision to choose a leader that is both well-known al Qaeda Central (AQC) but also well-connected to Jihadi groups across South Asia. As Abdul Basit notes, "[t]he emergence of AQIS and the appointment of a Pakistani jihadist

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[4] A. Chandran, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten", *Critical Threats Project*, 3 September 2015, http://www.criticalthreats.org/al-qaeda/chandran-al-qaeda-in-indian-subcontinent-backgrounder-september-3-2015; see also B. Roggio, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent incorporates regional jihadist groups", *The Long War Journal*, 5 September 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/analysis_al_qaeda_in.php see also S. Shay, "AQIS: Rooting out al-Qaeda's New Branch", *Diplomatist*, October 2014, http://www.diplomatist.com/dipom10y2014/article012.html.

[5] A. Basit, "Asim Umar - 'New Kid on the Block'?" (2014), pp. 8-12.

[6] It is worth noting that HUJI is the oldest Pakistani jihadist group and a Kashmir-focused anti-Indian outfit. ibid.

[7] S. Das, "The Emergence of al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-Continent", *The International Security Observer*, 4 May 2015, http://securityobserver.org/the-emergence-of-al-qaeda-in-the-indian-sub-continent/; see also A. Basit, "Asim Umar - 'New Kid on the Block'?" (2014), pp. 8-12, see also A. Chandran, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten" (3 September 2015).

[8] A. Basit, "Asim Umar - 'New Kid on the Block'?" (2014), pp. 8-12.

leader with anti-India credentials indicates that Al Qaeda wants to cement its place in the region on a long-term basis".[9]

In addition, Ahmad Farouq was appointed as deputy-emir. He was previously al Qaeda's head of preaching and media in Pakistan. Although AQIS has claimed he is from Pakistan, the U.S. have also stated that he was an American citizen. However Farouq was subsequently killed by a U.S. drone strike on 15 January 2015 in North Waziristan, Pakistan.[10] Since its formation the leadership of AQIS have been consistently targeted by the US – less than half a year after AQIS' formation, five senior leaders had been killed by the US, either by drone strikes or by US forces in al-Qaeda's Afghan/Pakistan border regions.[11]

4. The Rationale for the Creation of AQIS

The dominant initial interpretation by the media and security analysts of the announcement of the formation of AQIS, was that this was an attempt to regain the initiative from ISIS, after the latter began to challenge al-Qaeda as the leaders of the worldwide jihadi movement, following their announcement of the formation of the caliphate two months earlier.[12] However, there is a debate over reasons behind AQIS formation, was it simply a reaction to ISIS?

In a special addition of the *Resurgence* magazine published in Summer 2015, almost a year after the announcement of the formation of AQIS, Adam Yahiye Gadahn [13] answered accusations that the announcement had been contrived as an attempt to take back the initiative from ISIS. Rejecting this, Gadahn claims that the project was:

> spread out over a period of years and months. And I know for a fact that the actual formation of the branch was finalized in mid-2013, i.e. well before the break with the Iraqi branch. So the founding of the new branch had

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[9] Ibid.

[10] A. Chandran, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten" (3 September 2015); see also S. Das "The Emergence of al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-Continent" 4 May 2015.

[11] B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn, "US killed AQIS deputy emir, shura member in January drone strikes", *The Long War Journal*, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/04/us-killed-aqis-deputy-emir-shura-member-in-january-drone-strikes.php.

[12] J. Olmstead "The Real Reason al-Qaeda Is Establishing an India Branch", *The Diplomat*, http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/the-real-reason-al-qaeda-is-establishing-an-india-branch/; see also B. B. Bikkani, "Why India should be worried about Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent", *CDA Institute Blog: The Forum*, 10 September 2015, https://www.cdainstitute.ca/en/blog/entry/why-india-should-be-worried-about-al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent; see also S. Dasgupta, "Al Qaeda in India: Why We Should Pay Attention", *The International Relations and Security Network (ISN)*, 15 January 2015, http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=187026;   see also K. K. Nair, "India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014", *Manekshaw Paper*, no. 55 (2015), http://www.claws.in/images/publication_pdf/1330417563_MP55PreintversioninsideKirit.pdf.

[13] An American who converted to Islam in his teens. He would go on to be one of Bin Laden's senior operatives and member of al-Qaeda's media committee. He was killed in a U.S. drone strike in January 2015. R. Khatchadourian "Azzam the American", *The New Yorker*, 22 January 2007 http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/01/22/azzam-the-american; see also J. Miklaszewski, R. Windrem, T. Connor and NBC NEWS "Americans Warren Weinstein and Adam Gadahn Killed in U.S. Drone Strikes", *NBC NEWS*, 23 April 2015, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/warren-weinstein-adam-gadahn-killed-u-s-operation-n346861.

absolutely nothing to do with any perceived or presumed rivalry between al-Qaeda and Islamic State.[14]

Similarly, security analyst Shreya Das argues that the process was set in motion before the rise of ISIS, but also that this was not the first time al-Qaeda had attempted to open a South-Asian branch, with a previous effort failing after the killing of senior operative Ilyas Kashmiri in a U.S. drone strike in 2011.[15] However, as Das points out, by lending the new branch the al-Qaeda brand name, this immediately put the new group in the front line of the war on terror, arguing that "[t]he interests of the group may have been better served by adopting a more innocuous name, which would allow it to fly under the radar and consolidate its position, while avoiding excess scrutiny", and suggesting that "public image and bolstering the al-Qaeda global brand" may have been important reasons for the formation of AQIS.[16]

An alternative narrative regarding the formation of AQIS, is that it is driven by a long-term strategic re-adjustment to the drawdown of American troops in Afghanistan. In an article *Resurgence* in Fall 2014, Hassan Yusuf explains that the formation of AQIS "comes in the wake of the American defeat and withdrawal from Afghanistan. … This Jihad will not end with the American withdrawal from Afghanistan; America's defeat is only the prelude. What lies in wait for her despicable 'allies' (read toadies) in this region is yet to unfold".[17] Following this line argument, the departure of American forces would then free up fighters for al Qaeda allowing the re-deploying of experienced fighters to different fronts in South Asia.[18] As such it is argued that the formation of AQIS can be seen as a strategic restructuring from the 'far' enemy, America, to the 'near' enemy, the regimes of South Asia that prevent the formation of a new caliphate - the governments of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. In doing so the key driver of the Jihad in South Asia is changing from U.S. occupation of Afghanistan to the narrative of Ghazwa-Al-Hind (Battle of India).[19]

A different perspective is that the formation of AQIS is about legacy – anchoring "al-Qaeda's presence" in South Asia.[20] The centre of al-Qaeda's operations and its leadership have been based in South Asia, in particular Afghanistan and Pakistan, for the last three decades. However, the geopolitics of the Global Jihad are changing. First the drawdown of US troops in Afghanistan removes the primary reason for Jihad in the region. Second, the last decade has seen the rise of powerful al-Qaeda affiliates such as AQAP and JAN. Raising the realistic possibility that the future leadership of AQC, if al-Zawahiri dies or is killed, may come from one of its regional affiliates and that al-Qaeda's central command may move out of South Asia. Under this reading of events, the formation of AQIS is designed to create a structure through which al-Qaeda can remain operational in South Asia, even if the central command moves elsewhere.[21]

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[14] *Resurgence* 2, p. 67, http://worldanalysis.net/14/2015/06/as-sahab-media-presents-resurgence-issue-2/.

[15] S. Das, "The Emergence of al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-Continent" (4 May 2015).

[16] ibid.

[17] *Resurgence* 1 (Fall 2014), p.20, http://worldanalysis.net/14/2014/10/new-english-magazine-sahab-resurgence-issue-01/.

[18] S. Shay, "AQIS: Rooting out al-Qaeda's New Branch" (October 2014)

[19] A. Basit, "Asim Umar - 'New Kid on the Block'?" (2014) pp. 8-12

[20] A. Rafiq, "The New Al Qaeda Group in South Asia Has Nothing to Do With ISIS", *New Republic*, 5 September 2014, https://newrepublic.com/article/119333/al-qaeda-indian-subcontinent-not-response-islamic-state.

[21] ibid.

Whatever the reasons behind the creation of AQIS, it is likely to put Pakistan's complex relationship with the many jihadi groups on its soil under strain. Pakistan has long drawn a distinction between Pakistani groups that have committed terrorists attacks on targets in other countries (such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)) and those that wage a campaign of violence against the Pakistani State (such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)).[22] The formation of AQIS brings both sides together placing this distinction under pressure. As Sunil Dasgupta comments, "as the line between the two evaporates, the willingness and ability of the Pakistani state itself to abandon this distinction, which has been the source of much acrimony with Washington and New Delhi, may determine the future of the country".[23]

4.1 Connecting the Global and Local Jihad in South Asia

Collectively, South Asia constitutes a Muslim population of 484 million, which together makes up over a third of the global Muslim community.[24] Whilst AQC has been present in Afghanistan and Pakistan, since the 1990s, what drew it there was the safe heavens provided by the Taliban rather than to launch Jihad across South Asia. However, it is a region that AQC is well imbedded in with its safe havens, and with a long history of local Islamist groups to which AQC is well connected.

To a certain extent the creation of AQIS can be seen as the formalisation of the already close working relationships of the different Jihadi groups in South Asia.[25] This though marks a major change for the region, as whilst the sub-continent has seen an extensive amount of Jihadi terrorism over the last few decades, most of this has been home grown rather than part of the global jihadi struggle. As Sunil Dasgupta comments, "[w]hat makes the emergence of AQIS significant, however, is that it is the first time a global jihadi organization has explicitly targeted governments and people in the region".[26] Through the formation of AQIS, al-Qaeda is seeking to do what it has previously done so effectively elsewhere around the world, to combine the local conflicts into its global Jihad.

5.   The Narrative of AQIS

Central to the formation of AQIS, was the adoption of a "narrative to underpin a long-term Jihad in South Asia. That narrative is *Ghazwa al-Hind* or Battle of India, referenced to in a *hadith* or Islamic prophetic tradition".[27] The Hadiths are the oral traditions attributed to the prophet Muhammad; the ones cited by al-Zawahiri prophesise the Muslim conquest of historic India and claims that those that take part will be rewarded

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[22] S. Dasgupta, "Al Qaeda in India: Why We Should Pay Attention" (15 January 2015); see also A. Chandran, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten" (3 September 2015).
[23] S. Dasgupta, "Al Qaeda in India: Why We Should Pay Attention" (15 January 2015).
[24] Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population", October 2009, http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population9/ (n.b. Here South Asia is taken to include seven countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).
[25] B. Roggio, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent Incorporates Regional Jihadist groups" (5 September 2014); A. Chandran, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten" (3 September 2015).
[26] S. Dasgupta, "Al Qaeda in India: Why We Should Pay Attention" (15 January 2015).
[27] A. Rafiq "The New Al Qaeda Group in South Asia Has Nothing to Do with ISIS" (5 September 2014); see also H. Haqqani, "Prophecy & the Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent", *Hudson Institute*, 27 March 2015,

with their place in paradise.[28] This is similar in nature to how ISIS has been successfully projecting the 'apocalyptic' nature of its vision, depicting its conflict in Syria/Iraq as the end of times war in the Levant, in which those who take part are rewarded with a place in Paradise.[29]

The narrative of Ghazwa al-Hind has played a central role in the discourse of the sub-continent's Islamists ever since the emergence of jihadist attacks in Indian-controlled Kashmir. In fact most Pakistani-based Jihadist groups have framed their attacks on Indian soil as part of the 'Battle for India'.[30] However, the 'battle for India' is taken here to refer to an area far bigger than the modern day nation state of India, including the land today covered by Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Kashmir, Myanmar and Bangladesh (and more).[31] AQIS has since placed the concept of Ghazwa al-Hind at the centre of their narrative, describing their first major attack at the Naval shipyard in Karachi in September 2014 as giving "a clear message to India that Ghazwa-e-Hind has only just begun".[32]

In the audio message that al-Qaeda chief al-Zawahiri released, to announce the formation of AQIS, he rallied against the governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh, describing them as criminals, corrupt and self-serving politicians that are backed by the west, which has prevented them from becoming true Islamic states. As he exclaims:

> They claimed that they created Pakistan more than 60 years ago to defend Islam and Muslims in the subcontinent. Today we have a Pakistan that has no Shariah, no independence and no honour. Its government, army, intelligence, police and judiciary act as mercenaries hired to defend the interests of the crusader onslaught in South Asia.[33]

Arguing the same for the creation of Bangladesh, he claims that "today we see Bangladesh turning into a huge prison in which the sanctities, honour, dignity and sacred places of Muslims are violated".[34] Stating that the real purpose of the creation of Bangladesh out of Pakistan was to "rip the Muslim Ummah apart" and weaken the Muslim Ummah in the subcontinent.[35] Framing it as a situation of the Crusader West supporting corrupt politicians that are preventing the formation of true Islamic states. In which democracy is in opposition to Islam's system of life,[36] and is "a one- way

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http://www.hudson.org/research/11167-prophecy-the-jihad-in-the-indian-subcontinent.
[29] A. Rafiq "The New Al Qaeda Group in South Asia Has Nothing to Do with ISIS" (5 September 2014)
[30] H. Haqqani, "Prophecy & the Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent" (27 March 2015)
[31] Ibid.
[32] "Targeting Navies", 27 September 2014, http://worldanalysis.net/14/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/targeting_navies.pdf.
[33] "Full text of al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri's audio message" http://www.thedailystar.net/sites/default/files/upload-2014/gallery/pdf/transcription-zawahiri-msg.pdf
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid.
[36] The central argument made is that under sharia sovereignty rests not will the people but with Allah. Whereas in democracy, as sovereignty rests with the people, it is subject to the whims of the majority, and hence whatever is accepted by the majority is therefore justified. Arguing that, "The reality of democracy is that it knows no religion, values or principles. Everything is right as long as it gets the majority of votes. It was a democratic Britain that occupied Muslim lands, killed millions, and robbed its resources for centuries. It was a democratic Britain that promised Palestine to the Jews. It was also a democratic Britain that handed over Palestine to the Zionists before withdrawing from Palestine. Similarly, it was a democratic America that dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan. It was democratic America that destroyed Vietnam and killed five million people. And it is still a democratic America that steals the petroleum resources of Muslims and occupies their lands".

highway that lands you in a position where you can serve the West".[37] Arguments that serve to support his call for Muslims of South Asia to rise up against their corrupt western backed leaders and the democratic system to create an Islamic state under sharia:

> I invite you to lead the masses in a vast and inclusive popular uprising (intifada) whose tide does not receive, nor its dynamism subsides, until the Shariah of Islam governs the land of Islam, instead of being governed over; until it becomes the authority, instead of being subjected to 'authority'; and until it leads the way, instead of being led. I invite you to expose the deception of the democratic system in front of the masses.[38]

In its messaging AQIS makes a special focus against India, who it sees as in alliance with the West against South Asia's Muslim population. Al-Zawahiri's called for Muslims to unite in "support to confront the alliance of India, the West, secularists and atheists".[39] In this way AQIS has striven to connect the local with the global,[40] seeking to conflate Modi's rule in India with the Islamist global Jihad against the west. In a video release in May 2015 called 'From France to Bangladesh: the Dust Will Never Settle Down", AQIS pronounces that "[t]hrough the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, drone attacks, Charlie Hebdo's writings... and Narendra Modi's speeches, which call for Muslims to be burnt alive — this is the same war".[41]
In doing so it seeks to capitalise on the existing cleavages in Indian society between the Hindu majority and the large Muslim minority, while also seeking to exploit age-old fears of domination and suppression of the Muslim community. In what al-Zawahiri describes as our Muslim brothers "living under the dark shade of Hindu occupation".[42]
An article called "The Future of Muslims in India" in the first edition of *Resurgence*, claims that the Indian establishment is "working methodically to bring the Muslims down from the level of former kings and emperors to the level of Shudars, Dalits and lower castes so that they lose the will and strength to stand up to the Hindus".[43]

However, AQIS' propaganda appears to be more than just appealing to ancient divisions, but rather a calculated attempt to exploit rising tensions in "India's disenchanted Muslim underclass", a large portion of whom it is argued live "inside ghettos, without modern education, and unable to access the emerging 'Indian Dream'".[44] The key driver of these rising tensions was the election of Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi as prime minister of India a few months earlier in May 2014. Modi is a controversial figure in the Muslim community, as he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat State during the 2002 communal riots in which at least 1,000 people were killed, mainly Muslims.[45] Modi's role as Chief Minister has been plagued with accusations of failing to

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[37] "Full text of al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri's audio message".
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] S. Dasgupta, "Al Qaeda in India: Why We Should Pay Attention" (15 January 2015).
[41] "Al Qaeda threatens PM Modi in new video" *India Tomorrow*, 4 May 2015, http://www.indiatomorrow.co/nation/3169-al-qaeda-threatens-pm-modi-in-new-video; see also E. Bennett, "A Comeback for al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent?" *Foreign Policy Journal*, 12 May 2015, http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/05/12/a-comeback-for-al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent/.
[42] "Full text of al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri's audio message" http://www.thedailystar.net/sites/default/files/upload-2014/gallery/pdf/transcription-zawahiri-msg.pdf
[43] *Resurgence* 01 (Fall 2014), p.75.
[44] S. Dasgupta, "Al Qaeda in India: Why We Should Pay Attention" (15 September 2015).
[45] "Indian court clears six men of murdering four people during 2002 Gujarat riots", *The Guardian,* 27 February 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/27/indian-court-clears-six-men-2002-gujarat-riots.

take sufficient actions to protect the Muslim community. Despite being cleared by courts and investigations, many Indians are still suspicious of his handling of the riots.[46]

Al-Zawahiri, points out the communal violence against Muslims in both Gujarat and Ahmadabad – in which violence broke out following the 2002 Gujarat riot - as well as high-lighting the ongoing conflicts in Kashmir and Assam in India. In the former where a Muslim insurgency is fighting for independence for the Muslim majority state from India, and the latter which has seen ongoing violence since the 1980s between local ethnic groups and Bengali speaking Muslims. Connections to these local conflicts, provides propaganda and potential recruiting grounds but also, in particular in Kashmir, access to experienced jihadi veterans.[47]

However, many analysts argue that despite these elements, al-Qaeda has little prospect of being able to radicalise the Indian Muslim population – pointing out that is something that al-Qaeda has tried and failed to do over the last two decades.[48] As Kirit Nair argues, "AQIS is unlikely to gain traction as India's democratic dispensation provides Indian Muslims freedom, liberty and media exposure to a level unheard of in most of the Islamic world".[49] There is also an ideological disconnect with little support within the Indian Muslim population for the Wahhabi strand of Islam followed by some extremists, nor for the establishment of a Caliphate.[50]

In is not just in Hindu majority India that al-Zawahiri seeks to capitalise on an aggrieved Muslim minority, but also in Budhist majority Myanmar, in which he highlights the plight of the persecuted Muslim Rohingyas.[51] Their marginalisation and persecution is again linked to the West, pointing out how America praises the progress that the country has made towards democracy and on human rights, whilst the violence against the Muslim Rohingyas continues.[52]

6. AQIS Attacks and Operational Strategy

Despite AQIS' stated vision of fighting a war for South Asia, since its formation it has largely failed to live up to its ambitions, unable to carry out a terrorist spectacular and managing only a handful of relatively minor attacks across South Asia.[53] The table below lists all the AQIS attacks that researchers at the ICCT have been able to identify.[54] Two of which occurred before the formation of AQIS, but have since been claimed by the group.

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[46] S. Dasgupta, "Al Qaeda in India: Why We Should Pay Attention" (15 September 2015); see also B. B. Bikkani, "Why India should be worried about Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent" (10 September 2015)
[47] Ibid.
[48] S. Shay, "AQIS: Rooting out al-Qaeda's New Branch" (October 2014); see also R. H. Laskar, "Al Qaeda's Indian subcontinent wing an old plan" *Mail Today*, 14 September 2014, http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/al-qaeda-india-wing-an-old-plan/1/382752.html.
[49] K. K. Nair, "India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014", *Centre for Land Warfare Studies* 55, 2015 http://www.claws.in/images/publication_pdf/1330417563_MP55PreintversioninsideKirit.pdf
[50] E. Barry "Al Qaeda Opens New Branch on Indian Subcontinent", *The New York Times*, 4 September 2014, *http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/world/asia/al-qaeda-announces-new-branch-on-indian-subcontinent.html?_r=0;* see also K. K. Nair, "India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014" (2015).
[51] A. Rafiq "The New Al Qaeda Group in South Asia Has Nothing to Do With ISIS" (5 September 2014).
[52] "Full text of al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri's audio message"
[53] E. Bennett "A Comeback for al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent?" (12 May 2015).
[54] A. Chandran, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten" (3 September 2015).

Date	Country	Fatalities	Event
2012	Pakistan	1	The Pakistani blogger Aniqa Naz was reportedly killed in a road accident in 2012. However, in a video released on 2 May 2015, AQIS claimed responsibility for the death of Naz.[55]
15 February 2013	Bangladesh	1	The Bangladeshi anti-Islamist blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider was hacked to death in Dhaka, Bangladesh.[56] In a video released on 2 May 2015, AQIS claimed responsibility for the death of Haider.[57]
2 September 2014	Pakistan	3	AQIS killed three people, including the Pakistani army officer Brigadier Fazal Zahoor and his brother, at a Shia mosque in Sargodha, Pakistan.[58] Usama Mahmoud, the spokesman for AQIS, claimed responsibility for this attack in a statement on Twitter.[59]
6 September 2014	Pakistan	4	AQIS boarded a Pakistani ship (PNS Zulfiqar) in an apparent attempt to launch missiles on US frigates in the Arabian Sea. The attack was partly carried out by Pakistani Navy officers that were recruited by AQIS. Although AQIS seized the warship, the attempt failed.[60] In the attack three militants and one petty officer were killed. AQIS claimed responsibility in a statement on Twitter.[61]
18 September 2014	Pakistan	1	The liberal Islamic scholar Dr. Muhammad Shakil Auj was fatally shot in Karachi, Pakistan. Dr. Auj had previously been accused of blasphemy

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[55] T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent leader says attacks on 'blasphemers' ordered by Zawahiri", *The Long War Journal,* 3 May 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-says-attacks-on-blasphemers-ordered-by-zawahiri.php.

[56] R. Greenslade, "Bangladeshi journalists attacked", *The Guardian*, 25 February 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2013/feb/25/journalist-safety-bangladesh.

[57] T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent leader says attacks on 'blasphemers' ordered by Zawahiri" (3 May 2015)

[58] "Pakistani army officer killed in attack", *Al Jazeera*, 8 September 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/09/pakistani-army-officer-killed-attack-20149872645405767.html.

[59] T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent claims 2 attacks in Pakistan", *The Long War Journal*, 13 September 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/al_qaeda_in_the_indi.php

[60] Ibid.

[61] S. Shaul, "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)" and "Jihad on the Seas", *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 25 November 2014 http://www.ict.org.il/Article/1256/Al-Qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent.

			for comments during a speech.[62] In a video that was released on 2 May 2015, AQIS's leader Asim Umar claimed responsibility for murdering Dr. Auj.[63]
15 November 2014	Bangladesh	1	Shafiul Islam, a Bangladeshi professor in sociology, was killed near Rajshahi University, Bangladesh.[64] In a video that was released on 2 May 2015, AQIS's leader Asim Umar claimed responsibility for the murder.[65]
26 February 2015	Bangladesh	1	The American-Bangladeshi blogger and activist Dr. Avijit Roy was hacked to death near Dhaka University, Bangladesh. His wife was also targeted, but survived. In a video that was released on 2 May 2015, AQIS claimed responsibility for the murder.[66]
30 March 2015	Bangladesh	1	The blogger Oyasiqur Rahman Babu was killed in Dhaka, Bangladesh in a similar way to Avijit Roy. His attackers claimed to have killed him for his anti-Islamist stances.[67] Dhaka Metropolitan Police believe that members of the Ansarullah Bangla Team, an al-Qaeda inspired Islamic extremist group, are responsible for the murder.[68] Again, in the video that was released on 2 May 2015, AQIS claimed responsibility for the murder[69]
12 May 2015	Bangladesh	1	The blogger Ananta Bijoy Das was hacked to death near his home in Sylhet, Bangladesh. AQIS claimed

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[62] Z ur-Rehman, "A Pakistani Scholar Accused of Blasphemy Is Shot Dead", *The New York Times*, 18 September 2014, http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/09/19/world/asia/pakistan-shakil-auj-assassinated-blasphemy-karachi.html?referrer=&_r=0.

[63] E. Barry, "Al Qaeda Branch Claims Responsibility for Bangladeshi Blogger's Killing", *The New York Times*, 3 May 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/world/asia/bangladesh-al-qaeda-indian-subcontinent-attack-on-bloggers.html?_r=3.

[64] "Arrests follow Bangladesh professor murder", *Al Jazeera*, 17 November 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/11/arrests-follow-bangladesh-professor-murder-20141116165454843133.html.

[65] T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent leader says attacks on 'blasphemers' ordered by Zawahiri" (3 May 2015)

[66] E. Barry, "Al Qaeda Branch Claims Responsibility for Bangladeshi Blogger's Killing" (3 May 2015); see also T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent leader says attacks on 'blasphemers' ordered by Zawahiri", (3 May 2015)

[67] "Knife attack kills Bangladesh blogger Washiqur Rahman", *BBC News*, 30 March 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32112433; T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent leader says attacks on 'blasphemers' ordered by Zawahiri" (3 May 2015)

[68] "Ansarullah behind Wasiq murder: DMP", *The Daily Oberver*, 2 April 2015, http://www.observerbd.com/2015/04/02/81400.php.

[69] T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent leader says attacks on 'blasphemers' ordered by Zawahiri" (3 May 2015).

			responsibility for the attack in a statement on Twitter.[70]
7 August 2015	Bangladesh	1	The secular Bangladeshi blogger Niloy Neel was hacked to death in his apartment in Dhaka, Bangladesh. AQIS claimed responsibility for the murder.[71]
31 October 2015	Bangladesh	1	The publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan was hacked to death outside his office in Dhaka, Bangladesh. On the same day, the publisher Ahmed Rahim Tutul and two writers were wounded in an attack in Dhaka, but all survived. AQIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks.[72]

6.1   Failed Attack on Pakistani Naval Ship

One attack that stands out from all the others is the AQIS attack on a Pakistani naval ship on 6 September 2014, the same month in which AQIS was formally launched. Although ultimately a failure, it was as close as AQIS has come to committing a terrorist spectacular.[73] The alleged plan behind the attack was to hijack two Pakistani navy frigates and then use them to attack both the American and Indian navies.[74] In comparison to subsequent attacks, which have largely been individual assassinations, this attack required considerable planning and operational capability. Furthermore, the attack was carried out in part by Pakistani Naval personnel recruited by AQIS.[75] The complexity of the attack and the infiltration of the Pakistani armed forces, raised fears of AQIS's ability to launch future spectacular attacks, which have so far not materialised. However, the attack remains a stark reminder of the potential that AQIS harbours.

This attack also highlighted a new and emerging strategy of al-Qaeda to target America's control of the sea. In a press release about the Naval attack, AQIS stated that it had targeted the Navy since, "It is because of their Naval strength that America and its allies have been able to impose a military and economic stranglehold on the Muslim world, especially on the land of Makkah and Madinah. America's naval-military capability represents the backbone of its global empire of oppression".[76] The strategy

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70 ""Ansar al-Islam Bangladesh" Says AQIS Claims Murder of Blogger Ananta Bijoy Das", *SITE Intelligence Group*, 12 May 2015, https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/ansar-al-islam-bangladesh-says-aqis-claims-murder-of-blogger-ananta-bijoy-das.html.
71 S. Pokharel and L. Smith-Spark, "Bangladeshi blogger Niloy Neel hacked to death in latest attack", *CNN*, 7 August 2015, http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/07/asia/bangladesh-blogger-niloy-neel-killed/; https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/bangladesh-branch-of-aqis-claims-murder-of-blogger-niloy-neel.html
72 E. Barry and J. A. Manik, "Al Qaeda Claims Responsibility for Attacks on 2 Publishers in Bangladesh", *The New York Times*, 1 November 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/02/world/asia/bangladesh-publishers-attacked-al-qaeda-claims-responsibility.html?_r=0.
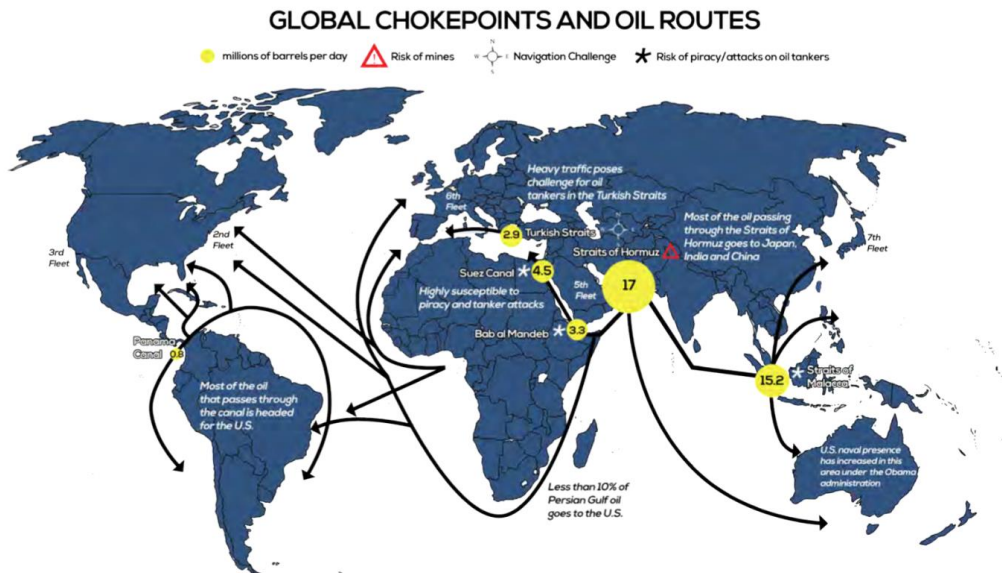73 A. Basit, "Asim Umar - 'New Kid on the Block'?" (2014), pp. 8-12.
74 "Targeting Navies"
75 S. Shaul, "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)" and "Jihad on the Seas" (25 November 2014); see also "Targeting Navies"
76 "Operation against the American Navy by the Mujahideen" *Al Qa'eda in the Subcontinent*, 16 September 2014, http://worldanalysis.net/14/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PRESS-RELEASE_As-Sahab_En_Operation-against-American-Navy.pdf.

was further elaborated in *Resurgence* magazine, in an article called 'Targeting the Achilles Heel of Western Economies', highlighting the importance of open sea lanes to world trade and the flow of oil to the west; pointing out that "[f]ive of the world's most strategic naval chokepoints are located in the Muslim world".[77] The attack on 6 September was perhaps intended to be, if it had succeeded, the first step in pursuit of this new strategy. Demonstrating the unfulfilled ambition that saw the formation of AQIS and the threat it still potentially holds to the security and stability of South Asia.

Map of Global Chokepoints: Taken from "Resurgence", Issue 1, 2014.[78]

6.2   Attacks on Bangladeshi Bloggers

As can be seen from the table above, since November 2014 all of AQIS's attacks have taken place in Bangladesh and have been small attacks targeting individuals, mainly bloggers. Two points can be noted; first that for the time being AQIS is incapable of carrying out attacks in Pakistan or India, potentially highlighting the impact that U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan have had on the AQIS leadership.[79] Further, the attacks that AQIS has claimed responsibility for in Bangladesh are far from terrorist spectaculars, largely individual knife attacks, demonstrating their lack of sophisticated terrorist capabilities. However, reports following the arrest of 12 militants in Bangladesh during July 2015 alleged that AQIS had acquired a large amount of arms and explosives, and had been planning a spectacular terrorist attack in Dhaka during Ramadan[80], indicating that it may only be a matter of time before AQIS in Bangladesh graduates to more sophisticated attacks.

Secondly, the series of attacks in Bangladesh shows that AQIS's reach stretches far outside of the al Qaeda strongholds in Afghanistan and Pakistan, demonstrating that there is more than just retoric to the group's appropriation of the narrative of Ghazwa-

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[77] *Resurgence* 01, (Fall 2014), p.95.

[78] T. Joscelyn, "Analysis: Al Qaeda's 'Resurgence' focuses on Indian Subcontinent" *The Long War Journal*, 23 October 2014.

[79] S. Das, "The Emergence of al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-Continent", *The International Security Observer*, 4 May 2015.

[80] B. Roy, "Al Qaeda and ISIS in South Asia", South Asia Analysis, 14 July 2015 http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/1817.

Al-Hind. In addition it shows AQIS's ability to develop working relationships with local jihadi groups in South Asia, with the attacks in Bangladesh being carried out mainly by its local affiliate Ansar al Islam Bangladesh.[81] In doing so it has successfully connected the global and local together, as it has done so effectively elsewhere in the world. Thus raising the question of what the future may hold? Will AQIS be able to successfully work with other local South Asian Jihadi groups, and will AQIS be able to transfer their tactical and operational knowledge to such groups, increasing their terrorist capabilities?

6.3   Setbacks and Growths

Towards the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, a series of events demonstrated the continued setbacks that AQIS was facing at the hands of the security services. However, they also served to show the latent threat that AQIS continues to present and the extent to which its cells have spread across the sub-continent.

In October 2015, US and Afghan Forces carried out a raid on two AQIS training camps in the Kandahar Province of Afghanistan near the Pakistan border, during which nearly 200 fighters were killed. One of the camps covered nearly 30 square miles with extensive tunnels and fortifications, which was described by military officials "as one of the largest ever discovered".[82] However, these are not the only camps at which al-Qaeda is now believed to be operating at, with further suspected al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, including at least one in Helmand province.[83] Thus highlighting the re-emerging threat of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, in the wake of the US draw down and the Taliban's increasing strength. The resilience of al-Qaeda appears to have caught the US off-guard while they were focused on confronting ISIS and a resurgent Taliban, and raises the question of whether the al-Qaeda training camps may once again become breeding grounds for attacks on the west. Former Deputy CIA Director Michael Morell commented, "It is why we need to worry about the resurgence of the Taliban…because, just like before, the Taliban will give Al Qaeda a safe haven".[84]

Later in December 2015, the extent of the AQIS infiltration into India became apparent with the arrest of three members AQIS's Indian wing, including its leader, Mohammad Asif, in Delhi.[85] In his interrogation it emerged that Asif had attended the grand Shura in

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[81] A. Chandran, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten" (3 September 2015).
[82] E. Schmitt and D.E. Sanger, "As U.S. Focuses on ISIS and the Taliban, Al Qaeda Re-emerges", *The New York Times,* 29 December 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/30/us/politics/as-us-focuses-on-isis-and-the-taliban-al-qaeda-re-emerges.html?_r=0; see also B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn, "US killed AQIS deputy emir, shura member in January drone strikes", *The Long War Journal*; see also B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda operates in southern Helmand province", *The Long War Journal*, 24 October 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/al-qaeda-operates-in-southern-helmand-province.php; B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn "US military strikes large al Qaeda training camps in southern Afghanistan", *The Long War Journal*, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/us-military-strikes-large-al-qaeda-training-camps-in-southern-afghanistan.php.
[83] E. Schmitt and D.E. Sanger "As U.S. Focuses on ISIS and the Taliban, Al Qaeda Re-emerges", *The New York Times*, 29 December 2015; see also B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn "US killed AQIS deputy emir, shura member in January drone strikes", *The Long War Journal*; see also B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda operates in southern Helmand province", *The Long War Journal*, 24 October 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/al-qaeda-operates-in-southern-helmand-province.php; B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn, "US military strikes large al Qaeda training camps in southern Afghanistan", *The Long War Journal*
[84] E. Schmitt and D.E. Sanger, "As U.S. Focuses on ISIS and the Taliban, Al Qaeda Re-emerges", *The New York Times*, 29 December 2015.
[85] "Delhi police arrest three suspected members of al Qaeda India wing", *Reuters,* 17 December 2015,

Waziristan that had formally announced the formation of AQIS, during which he was instructed to return to India to set up terror groups in the country.[86] It's further alleged that IM was seeking affiliation with AQIS and assistance with IM operations in India.[87] The Delhi police later claimed that a second of the AQIS operatives arrested, Maulana Abdul Rehman Kasmi, had set up a terror training camp "somewhere in Jharkhand forests which is yet to be located".[88] Although Indian security services have so far been successful of countering the AQIS threat, the arrests highlights AQIS's clear intentions.

Then on February 12, Pakistani authorities arrested 97 LeJ and AQIS militants in raids across the southern city of Karachi, including AQIS deputy leader Farooq Bhatti.[89] The arrests allegedly disrupted a planned attack on Hyderbad central jail, designed to free 100 prisoners but also to kill another 35 prisoners.[90] The plan which was said to be "90% ready for execution", was to have included six suicide bombers.[91] At a press conference following the arrests, military spokesman Lieutenant General Asim Bajwa said "Our conclusion is that all of the terrorist groups are trying to cooperate with each other in order to carry out terrorist attacks", articulating the view that AQIS, LeJ and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were working in collusion.[92] Although once again a setback for AQIS, it also demonstrates the continued threat the group poses, as well as its organizational capability and cooperation with other militant groups.

7.   ISIS vs. AQIS

Whether or not the creation of AQIS was a reaction to the rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the rivalry between them has become one of the major dynamics to watch in South

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http://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-militants-idUSKBN0U01PK20151217; see also S. Sengupta, "Arrested sleeper cell from Delhi attended meeting on 'Al Qaeda Indian Subcontinent' in Waziristan: Sources", *News 18*,
http://www.ibnlive.com/news/india/arrested-sleeper-cell-from-delhi-attended-meeting-on-al-qaeda-indian-subcontinent-in-waziristan-sources-1177942.html; see also "Al-Qaeda operative running terror camp in Jharkhand forest, claim Delhi police", *Deccan Chronicle*, 12 March 2016

[86] S. Sengupta, "Arrested sleeper cell from Delhi attended meeting on 'Al Qaeda Indian Subcontinent' in Waziristan: Sources".

[87] D. Tiwari, "IM affiliation with Al-Qaeda Indian subcontinent", *Mumbai Mirror*, 26 December 2015, http://www.mumbaimirror.com/mumbai/crime/IM-affiliation-with-Al-Qaeda-Indian-Subcontinent/articleshow/50328283.cms

[88] "Al Qaeda Operative Running Terror Camp In Jharkhand Forest, Claim Delhi Police", *NDTV*, 12 March 2016, http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/al-qaeda-operative-running-terror-camp-in-jharkhand-forest-claim-delhi-police-1286305; see also "Al-Qaeda operative running terror camp in Jharkhand forest, claim Delhi police", *Deccan Chronicle*, 12 March 2016.

[89] J. Boone, "Pakistan says terror groups jointly plotted 'washing machine' jailbreak", *The Guardian*, 12 February 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/pakistani-military-foils-jailbreak-plot-three-terror-groups; see also Reuters and A. Hashim "Pakistan Arrests 97 Militants, Foils Plan To Break Journalist's Killer Out Of Jail", *The World Post*, 2 February 2016.

[90] J. Boone "Pakistan says terror groups jointly plotted 'washing machine' jailbreak", *The Guardian*, 12 February 2016; see also "Pakistan arrests 97 al-Qaeda and other militants; foils jailbreak plan", DNA, 12 February 2016. http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-pakistan-arrests-97-al-qaeda-and-other-militants-foils-jailbreak-plan-2176956

[91] J. Boone, "Pakistan says terror groups jointly plotted 'washing machine' jailbreak", *The Guardian*, 12 February 2016; see also "Pakistan arrests 97 al-Qaeda and other militants; foils jailbreak plan" (12 February 2016)

[92] A. Hashim, "Pakistan arrests 97 al-Qaeda and other militants; foils jailbreak plan", *Reuters*, 12 February 2016 http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-militants-arrest-idUSKCN0VL0KX; see also Reuters and A. Hashim "Pakistan Arrests 97 Militants, Foils Plan To Break Journalist's Killer Out Of Jail" (2 February 2016).

Asia.[93] The split between ISIS and AQC, culminating with al-Baghdadi's declaration of the caliphate, resulted in tumultuous upheaval within the global Jihadi community, as the two sides competed for influence and followers, setting off a process in which "splits began within organizations, and loyalties began shifting from al-Zawahiri to Caliph al-Baghdadi".[94] This global schism is being fought out locally, with both sides competing to lead the global jihad in South Asia.[95] In practice South Asia is seeing the clash of three competing Jihadi philosophies, on the one side the al-Qaeda/Taliban alliance that combines al-Qaeda's global jihad ('think global but act local'), alongside the Taliban's emirate model ('think local and act local'), in opposition to the ISIS caliphate model ('think global and act global').[96]

At the time of AQIS's formation ISIS had a limited presence in South Asia. However, since January 2015 we have seen the formation of ISIS's Wilayat Khorasan[97] based in Afghanistan, which is even alleged now to have camps across the border in Pakistan's tribal areas.[98] Later that year saw ISIS claim responsibility for a series of attacks in Bangladesh, which are suspected to have been carried out by local militants from Bangladeshi groups such as Jumatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh and Ansarullah Bangla Team – both previously thought to be linked with AQIS.[99]

The impact of this internal-jihadist competition in South-Asia is yet to become clear, although there are three potential outcomes worth highlighting. The first, that quite simply the emergence of ISIS in South Asia steals AQIS's thunder, and the embryonic AQIS is never able to properly establish itself as it bleeds the support of its local affiliates to ISIS. Already the Pakistan-based Jihadi group Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which was previously allied to the Taliban and al Qaeda, has defected to ISIS.[100] Secondly, the rivalry between the groups leads to chaos and infighting that weakens both groups, and whilst they are focussed on their internal schism it diverts their attention from carrying out terrorist attacks. The rivalry has seen groups been torn apart over who they support, leading to defections and splits, such as with the Indian Mujahideen (IM) which has recently fractured in two, one side aligned with al-Qaeda and

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[93] E. Bennett, "South Asia: Battle Ground Between ISIS & al-Qaeda", *Foreign Policy Journal*, 7 November 2014, http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/11/07/south-asia-battle-ground-between-isis-al-qaeda/.

[94] Y. Schweitzer, "The Internal Conflict in the Global Jihad Camp", *The Institute for National Security Studies*, http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/The%20Internal%20Conflict%20in%20the%20Global%20Jihad%20Camp%20%20Yoram%20Schweitzer.pdf

[95] M. Mishali-Ram, "The Spread of the Islamic State in Southern Asia: Between Vision and Reality", *The Institute for National Security Studies*, http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/The%20Spread%20of%20the%20Islamic%20State%20in%20%20Southern%20Asia%20Between%20Vision%20and%20Reality%20%20Meirav%20Mishali-Ram.pdf; see also A. Basit, "Asim Umar – 'New Kid on the Block'?" (2014) pp. 8-12.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Wilayat Khorasan is a branch of ISIS that operates in Afghanistan/Pakistan. The word Wilayat means province, with ISIS calling each of its regional groups as Wilayat or province. Khorasan refers to an ancient name for this region.

[98] R.H. Laskar, "IS announces expansion into AfPak, parts of India", *Hindustan Times*, 29 January 2015, http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/is-announces-expansion-into-afpak-parts-of-india/story-6oLyWpPxodwnb0jt1rhCbP.html; see also B. Roggio and C. Weiss "Islamic State claims camp in Pakistan's tribal areas", *The Long War Journal*, 3 August 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/08/islamic-state-claims-camp-in-pakistans-tribal-areas.php.

[99] "ISIS Affiliate Claims Bangladesh Mosque Attack", *The World Post*, 27 November 2011; see also V. Mallet "Isis turns to Bangladesh as latest battleground", 24 November 2015, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3dfa3e8a-9294-11e5-bd82-c1fb87bef7af.html#axzz3vGKuIPJA; see also A. Chandran "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten" (3 September 2015).

[100] B. Roggio and T. Joscelyn. "Central Asian groups split over leadership of global jihad", *The Long War Journal*, 24 August 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/08/central-asian-groups-split-over-leadership-of-global-jihad.php.

the other ISIS.[101] The third is that competition between the two groups sparks off a wave of terrorist attacks as each group struggles to portray themselves as relevant, and seeks to outbid the other in the terror stakes. In which attacks become a form of propaganda by deed, but aimed at their own internal audience. The great fear in this scenario, is that this rivalry may prove to be the catalyst to drive AQIS to carry out a terrorist spectacular to prove itself.

8.   Conclusion

Most analysts agree that AQIS has not been able to achieve the success that AQC may have hoped for. It has so far failed to have launched any successful large scale terrorist attacks in South Asia. Although the failed attack on the Pakistani Navy on 6 September 2014 showed both its initial ambition and operational potential to carry out sophisticated attacks. Since then it has only managed to carry out small scale assignation style attacks against soft targets such as bloggers and liberal scholars. Further since the end of 2014 it has only been able to launch attacks in Bangladesh. We can speculate that the early targeting of the AQIS leadership by drone strikes may have decapitated its command structure and hindered its development, although not quite managed to have strangle it at birth.

Recent arrests of AQIS leadership figures in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, as well as the raids on AQIS training camps in Afghanistan, will have dealt a serious blow and kept up the pressure on the organisation. However, they also demonstrate that the group is not dead, and has been developing its network across South Asia. At first glance the lack of successful action has led many to argue that AQIS is of limited threat. Although it is clear, that despite early setbacks, the group has not been eliminated and continues to organise and plan for the future. So far security forces across South Asia have managed to effectively disrupt the group's activities, but the threat still remains. It is hard to predict what the future has in hold for AQIS, whether it remains the dog that didn't bark, or whether it emerges to pose a major threat to South Asia. However, there are four key dynamics that are likely to determine its future:

The first, is the outcome of the AQIS vs. ISIS rivalry in South Asia. There is the very real possibility that the with the rise of ISIS, AQIS may struggle to prove its relevance, and struggle to survive in the face of its more extreme young rival. Similarly, in may induce a period of in fighting amongst Jihadist groups in the region, or be the catalyst to drive AQIS to attempt a series of terrorist spectaculars to prove its worth.

Second, the situation in Afghanistan following the U.S. draw down will have a direct impact on AQIS. If the current instability and resurgence of the Taliban continue, AQIS may well be able to exploit the situation to establish safe havens in Afghanistan from which it can operate. Allowing it to grow and develop, and provide it with the bases from which to launch its campaign of terrorism across South Asia. In many ways reverting to the pre-2001 situation in which safe havens in Afghanistan allowed al Qaeda to flourish and launch attacks on the west.

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[101] B. Viswanathan, "India Jihadi Groups Splinter as Rivalries Intensify", *Geopolitical Monitor,* 8 February 2016, http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/india-jihadi-groups-splinter-as-rivalries-intensify/

Third, how well AQIS is able to connect the global with the local. The group's model is based on collaborating with and absorbing local Jihadists groups across South Asia into its cause. As it has sought to do successfully elsewhere around the world, co-opting local groups into its global jihad. Attacks in Bangladesh, as well arrests in both Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, have shown that AQIS is operating with local groups. Will AQIS be able to act as a force multiplier, and share with these groups its tactical and operational experience, as well as acting as a source of funding, to enable these groups to launch more sophisticated and deadly attacks?

Finally, whether AQIS is able to arise the call of Jihad within India's Muslim population. So far India's Muslim population has seemed largely been immune to the appeal of Jihadists groups, with most Jihadist attacks being carried out by foreign based organisations. However, India remains central to AQIS's strategy and narrative, and if it manages to do what no jihadist group has managed to do before it, it will have big repercussions for both the world's largest democracy, and the region. The distrust of current Prime Minister by large parts of the Muslim population, and existing conflicts within India, it hopes will give it the scope to construct a convincing narrative. Although it's chances of success seem distant.[102]

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[102] J. Olmstead, "The Real Reason al-Qaeda Is Establishing an India Branch", *The Diplomat,* 23 September 2014, http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/the-real-reason-al-qaeda-is-establishing-an-india-branch/

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May 2016

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