

## **IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **NEW REPORT WARNS AL-QAEDA'S NEWEST AFFILIATE ON COURSE FOR A COMEBACK IN SOUTH ASIA & BEYOND**

*As al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent gains support in South Asia by “going local,” current socio-political dynamics create conditions favorable for expansion of the group’s appeal.*

## **LINK TO REPORT**

**(New York, NY– January 23, 2019)** As the so-called Islamic State (IS) suffers devastating setbacks in Syria and Iraq, al-Qaeda continues to pose a formidable threat, principally through its regional affiliates in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Seventeen years after the September 11 attacks, al-Qaeda has survived due in large part to a deliberate strategy focused on gaining the support of the masses by “going local.” This strategy also means that al-Qaeda has avoided the brunt of United States and Western counter-terrorism efforts for several years, allowing it to resuscitate once dormant networks of allies while building broad-based support and a robust logistics infrastructure.

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

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the youngest affiliate of al-Qaeda, is in many ways the realization of that strategy. Believed to be operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, the AQIS affiliate presents an ideal blueprint for core al-Qaeda to use as a litmus test for current and future franchise groups and affiliates. In many ways, AQIS is a throwback to core al-Qaeda in the 1990s, a patchwork of militant groups with a shared ideology and common enemies. Given the potential it has already demonstrated, AQIS could very well lead al-Qaeda into its next decade.

Between 2014 and 2015, AQIS’ leadership suffered heavy losses at the hands of Pakistani and U.S counter-terrorism operations. After a string of defeats, many observers believed that AQIS would eventually fade into oblivion. However, like core al-Qaeda, its South Asian progeny demonstrated remarkable resilience and now seems to be on course for a comeback, not just in South Asia, but perhaps beyond the region.

Importantly, the current socio-political dynamics in South Asia could play a critical role in the expansion of the group’s appeal. In India, the rise in inter-religious clashes due to a changing political discourse, including a rise in Hindu-nationalism, has resulted in further division between Hindus and Muslims. For example, a spate of violent attacks on Muslims in India accused of eating beef has contributed to an atmosphere of fear and hatred between Hindus and Muslims. Arrested AQIS operatives have cited the growing violence against Muslims as one of the principal drivers for joining jihadist groups. In Pakistan, Indian Kashmir, and Bangladesh, external Wahhabi influence has resulted in an increase in Jihadist violence. The bitter Kashmir conflict and Myanmar’s ongoing military campaign against the Rohingya minority will continue to provide emotional capital in the region, which has the potential of serving al-Qaeda’s cause.

The United States in particular and the West in general continue to remain al-Qaeda's primary targets. AQIS poses a threat to other states in the international system, such as China, which is increasing its presence in South Asia, however.

### **ABOUT THE SOUFAN CENTER (TSC)**

Based in New York, [The Soufan Center](#) is a nonprofit serving as a forum for research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on human security & emergent threats. Please contact **Stephanie Foggett** with any inquiries or interview requests: [stephanie.foggett@thesoufancenter.org](mailto:stephanie.foggett@thesoufancenter.org).

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