

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:

Stephanie Foggett

+1-646-233-1704

stephanie.foggett@thesoufancenter.org

PRESS RELEASE

**TWO DECADES AFTER 9/11,
AL-QAEDA REMAINS DIMINISHED BUT NOT DEFEATED**

*The terrorist group's leadership and ability to target the West are weakened,
yet the organization could be positioned for a comeback in the global Salafi-jihadist movement.*

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

(New York, NY – September 10, 2021) A new report by The Soufan Center, *[Diminished, but not Defeated: The Evolution of al-Qaeda Since September 11, 2001](#)*, analyzes the evolution of al-Qaeda over the past two decades against the background of the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan and critical questions about the relationship between its relationship with the Taliban. The report notes that while the Global War on Terror decimated al-Qaeda's leadership and diminished its ability to stage large-scale attacks against the West, the organization has proven to be remarkably resilient and strategically adaptive.

“In the wake of the Arab Spring, al-Qaeda adopted and developed the franchise model that we see today, growing its membership by the tens of thousands and expanding its influence from West Africa to the Levant to South Asia, and drawing international actors into regional conflicts and bleeding wars of attrition,” says Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Executive Director at The Soufan Center. The recent US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's takeover, combined with the challenges posed by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K) provide further opportunities for the group and its adherents to exploit; the country could very likely become an oasis for foreign fighters and a restored territorial base for al-Qaeda.

“Al-Qaeda is very well-positioned to regroup in its former base of operations,” warns Colin P. Clarke, Senior Research Fellow at The Soufan Center and lead author of the report. “In this way, the United States cannot afford to divorce counterterrorism from great power competition and solely focus on the latter without consideration of the former; the two can be inextricably linked, especially in Afghanistan and the region.”

Acknowledging the complexity of the organization's current structure and strategy, the report seeks to not only describe its evolution, but also assess al-Qaeda's current status across various regional affiliates and attempts to discern its future trajectory. At the same, the report concludes, al-Qaeda's current emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri is either dead or in decline, and the Global War on Terror has decimated several layers of al-Qaeda's leadership. Thus, the future of al-Qaeda will depend on the extent to which it can replace talented leaders, capitalize on the U.S. diminishing the focus on counterterrorism, and exploit the geopolitical and local sectarian tensions on which it thrives across regions.

ABOUT THE SOUFAN CENTER (TSC)

Based in New York, [The Soufan Center](#) is an independent non-profit center offering research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on global security challenges and foreign policy issues.

Follow us @TheSoufanCenter and visit <http://thesoufancenter.org/>

###