

# JUMPING ON THE CALIPHATE CARAVAN

OVERVIEW OF THE JIHADI BANDWAGON  
EFFECT TRAVERSING ASIA AND AFRICA

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CENTER FOR SECURITY POLICY PRESS

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*Jumping on the Caliphate Caravan:  
Overview of the Jihadi Bandwagon Effect Traversing Asia and Africa*  
is published in the United States by the Center for Security Policy Press,  
a division of the Center for Security Policy.

March 25, 2015

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- **Jumping on the Caliphate Caravan:**  
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### **Introduction:**

A public outcry over beheadings of American journalists by Muslim terrorists spurred the reluctant United States (U.S.) President, Barak Obama on 10 September 2014 to initiate a four-point plan<sup>1</sup> to “degrade and ultimately destroy” the “not Islamic” Islamic State (IS). Notwithstanding, the group continues territorial conquests, forcible imposition of Islamic Law, annihilation of indigenous non-Muslim communities in Syria and Iraq, and is seeking new alliances and outposts in strategic areas of Africa and Asia. Indeed, during his address on U.S. operations against IS, President Obama noted that the greatest emerging threats emanate from the Middle East and North Africa.

This article focuses on selected emerging threats in Asia and in Africa as they present themselves in accordance with the global Islamic agenda. The research finds that the rise of IS and its claim to a revived caliphate<sup>2</sup> is inspiring Muslims around the world, and is emboldening armed non-state Muslim actors in Asia and Africa, including Al’Qaeda (AQ), and energizing their efforts to form subversive Islamic statal entities within their respective spheres of influence. The resurgence of the global jihad movement in Asia and Africa is driving armed conflict in these already unstable, fragile regions and is threatening a cascade of failing states. Spearheading an ambitious effort to dissolve the Western nation-state system and erase borders imposed upon these restive regions per the European colonial Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 by exploiting under-governed areas experiencing gaps in capacity and security, IS, AQ, and other jihadist forces sharing similar objectives, despite differences, are advancing their collective goal to unify Islamic governance under one global caliphate ruled by Islamic Law, i.e. shariah.

This report seeks to shed light on this process; and to raise the level of awareness regarding how the 21st century elevation of the Islamic prophet Muhammad's seventh century dictums and deeds are providing justification and motivation behind jihadi military assaults across multiple fronts, and increasingly threatening both regional and global security. Finally, the author suggests that a holistic strategy replace the piecemeal counter-terrorism approach to address the threat, and accordingly contributes several recommendations.

### **Focus on Asia**

#### ***Al-Qa’eda Central’s Counter-Caliphate Response to the IS Caliphate***

Al-Qa’eda Central (AQC) chief Ayman al-Zawahiri’s belated response<sup>3</sup> to the IS June 2014 declaration of a self-proclaimed caliphate<sup>4</sup> in Syria and Iraq and the rendering that all other jihadist entities are invalidated by its establishment<sup>5</sup> was calculated and graduated: (a) snub the breakaway AQ group; (b) release in July 2014 AQ’s inaugural online issue, *Al Nafir* or *Call to Arms*<sup>6</sup>, which, echoing the late Usama Bin Laden,

trumpets this terrorist network's renewed oath of allegiance to Mullah Mohammed Omar, leader of the Afghan Taliban and Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan<sup>7</sup> and commissions AQ branches everywhere to recovering lost territory for the "coming State of the Caliphate;" (c) the September 2014 roll-out of another AQ branch, Qaedat al-Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent (QJIS)<sup>8</sup>, with designs on India, Bangladesh, and Burma; proclaim QJIS' loyalty to Omar and venerate him as "Emir of the Believers" – a coveted designation that lends legitimacy to the authority of a qualified caliph or other such sovereign<sup>9</sup>; and issue an Abdullah Azzam-style call-up<sup>10</sup> for jihad to the ummah<sup>11</sup> to "revive its caliphate," apparently beginning on the Indian subcontinent<sup>12</sup>; (d) by extension, in November 2014 – release, via QJIS, an Abdullah Azzam-style call-up for a *fard ayn* jihad<sup>13</sup>, emphasizing that it is a global obligation to wage jihad with one's person against the America-led coalition in Iraq and Syria, thus evoking an Islamic legal ruling per the rules of jihad that makes it a *compulsory personal duty* for every Muslim man, woman, and child worldwide to join in the fighting without asking permission in order to "defend" Islam, establish shariah, and support jihadists fighting in this theater; and an appeal to jihadists therein to unify and close ranks – incontrovertibly under the AQ brand with IS in compliance – in order to eliminate the "American aggression."

The lionization of Omar is a rebuke to the IS self-appointed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi<sup>14</sup>, referred to as "*khalifah* Ibrahim" and considered "leader [emir] for Muslims everywhere" by a growing list of supporters impressed with his qualifications, particularly because he claims descent from the Quraysh tribe of Islam's prophet, Muhammad: the model jihadist<sup>15</sup>. It is an attempt by al-Zawahiri – perceived by some among the newer generations of jihadists to be starchy and presiding over a waning network – to stimulate steadfastness within AQ's ranks as key affiliates like Al-Qa'eda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) grapple with divided loyalties and resultantly lose seasoned jihadists to IS<sup>16</sup>. Whether al-Zawahiri will have enough sway over his far-flung and diffused post-9-11 network to prevent high-level defections to IS remains to be seen. Barring reconciliation per his prescription, al-Zawahiri is signaling that he does not intend to leave the IS caliphate project to progress along its askew course without a robust response from his network.

### ***Progress Report on IS Caliphate Project and Related Security Concerns***

Undeterred, al-Baghdadi's caliphate project is pressing ahead, as is his slick media campaign. Some Iraqi officials claimed U.S.-led airstrikes occurring between 7-8 November 2014 injured or killed al-Baghdadi, but once again they were proven wrong<sup>17</sup>, and this time IS used the occasion to not only demonstrate its resolve in the face of the attacks, but to deliver a major announcement while it had the attention of a worldwide audience: IS released five audio messages between 9-10 November featuring pledges of allegiance to al-Baghdadi<sup>18</sup>, which were followed by a 17-minute audio message that surfaced on 13 November with a male speaker believed to be al-Baghdadi, who contradicted the Iraqi officials' claims<sup>19</sup>. The man delivering the message referenced events that took place following the November airstrikes, and he defiantly used the occasion to announce the expansion of the IS caliphate project into Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. Moreover, he announced the nullification of existing Muslim

terrorist groups and organizations within those Arab lands – a harbinger, per the June caliphate declaration, that as IS troops roll in, “**the legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations become null**”<sup>20</sup>.” To underscore the group’s expansion into areas of the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, he also accepted the *bay’a* or oath of allegiance from several jihadist collectives and jihadist groups based within the aforementioned states, thereby demonstrating that IS has a toehold in these areas; and he appointed *wali* to serve as provincial leaders over *wilayah* or provinces designated for IS’s newly proclaimed sphere of activity. In December 2014, U.S. officials acknowledged that although other IS top leaders were killed in the U.S.-led airstrikes, al-Baghdadi was, indeed, still alive<sup>21</sup>.

Concerns mount as al-Baghdadi’s caliphate project expands from Syria and Iraq outward to the Persian Gulf countries and North Africa. In the Persian Gulf, **concerns over the IS expansion program** include: (1) vulnerability of Saudi Arabia’s energy infrastructure and further agitation among the restive Iranian-backed Shi’a populace in the kingdom’s oil-rich Eastern Province<sup>22</sup> – concerns heightened by the 5 January 2015 IS attack on a Saudi northern border patrol<sup>23</sup>, the 23 January death of Saudi King Abdullah<sup>24</sup> and a potential succession crisis<sup>25</sup>, and the 22 January collapse of Yemen’s government<sup>26</sup>; (2) exploitation and further destabilization of failing Yemen, positioned on the Strait of Bab al-Mandab along a Red Sea oil shipping route in the backyard of the Gulf States, and grappling with the 22 January Iran-backed Shi’a coup by powerful Houthi tribes<sup>27</sup>, and an AQAP insurgency; and (3) a deepening Sunni-Shi’a cleavage triggering widespread violence throughout the region. In North Africa, concerns over the IS expansion program include: (1) a security environment growing more complex and dangerous as Egyptian forces battling jihadists groups in the Sinai increasingly must contend with an IS presence that is energizing this theater and acting as a magnet for foreign jihadists wanting to participate in a long-awaited epic battle to obliterate Jews and to usher in apocalyptic End Time events per Allah’s dictates<sup>28</sup> (2) further destabilization of Libya that could tip this failing state over to terrorist state status as it reels under assaults emanating from well-armed alliances of domestic militias seizing and holding strategic territory, a strong AQ presence, and an influx of foreign jihadi groups setting up outposts – some of these groups seeking to establish ties with IS, which is expanding its presence here<sup>29</sup>; (3) heightened vulnerability of Algeria and its energy infrastructure<sup>30</sup> as Algerian forces face renewed lethal attacks<sup>31</sup> from the Algerian-rooted, regionally networked core AQIM, which has been fighting<sup>32</sup> to overthrow this state to make it part of a revived caliphate<sup>33</sup>, and whose veteran defectors to IS remain in the country<sup>34</sup>; and (4) added vitality to the Islamic insurgency in this sub-region, which would further destabilize the continent.

As an added concern, IS is currently making inroads into Pakistan and Afghanistan, states where AQ is deeply rooted, thereby inching closer to the Indian subcontinent, where al-Zawahiri is operating. Recent developments in the AfPak area are as follows: (1) IS is working Pakistan’s key cities and refugee camps, where it is distributing booklets written in the local languages, and it is purposing to lure AQ and Taliban leaders over to al-Baghdadi<sup>35</sup>. (2) Pakistani and U.S. officials inform that Pakistan-based ex-Guantanamo detainee Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost<sup>36</sup>, who swore allegiance to al-Baghdadi, is actively recruiting for IS in Pakistan and Afghanistan<sup>37</sup>. (3) Pledges of allegiance to IS and to al-

Baghdadi by mid-level Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commanders and officials materialized in a video released on 10 January 2015<sup>38</sup>. The Long War Journal, which analyzed the video, assessed that it was likely produced in October 2014<sup>39</sup>. Speaking on behalf of the **recently formed Khorasan Media group** that released the video was former TTP spokesman Sheikh Maqbool aka Shahid Shahidullah. Maqbool introduced Hafiz Saeed Khan as overall **emir of the Khorasan Shura consultation council**. Khan previously served as the TTP's emir for the tribal agency of Arakzai, Pakistan. Maqbool also claimed that consent to nominate Khan as emir came from jihadists in Kabul and Kunduz, Afghanistan who were unable to attend the shura meeting. The shura council reportedly consists of mostly low to mid-level former TTP militants. New IS pledges by those appearing in person on the video came from Logar and Kunar, Afghanistan; from Islamabad, Peshawar, and Lakki Marwat, Pakistan; and from AfPak via Jawad, pledging new allegiance to IS and representing Abtalul Islam (Heroes of Islam) Foundation, a jihadi media group that pledged allegiance to IS in July 2014. A new pledge to IS came from a TTP Pakistani faction called the Sa'ad bin Abi Waqas Front, which emerged in Logar, Afghanistan. Previous pledges to IS reiterated in the video came from representatives from Hangu, Peshawar, Kurram, and Khyber, Pakistan. Claims of IS pledges not delivered in person at the shura council, according to Maqbool, came from Kunar and Nagarhar, Afghanistan; and from Khyber Agency, Bajaur Agency, Dir, and Waziristan, Pakistan.

The IS-aligned media groups, the recently formed Khorasan Shura and its emerging emir, and the pledges emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan indicate that **IS is not only gaining support, but is also building an infrastructure in South and Central Asia**, where AQ has traditionally maintained a presence.

Further underscoring the IS endeavor in the region, an audio taped speech released on 26 January 2015 titled, "Say, Die in Your Rage!" featured IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al Adnani trumpeting **IS expansion into "Khorasan," lands**, which include modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan and portions of other countries in close proximity, and announcing two appointments<sup>40</sup>: (1) former TTP commander Hafez Saeed Khan as "governor" of **Khorasan province**, and (2) a man identified as Mullah Adbul Rauf Khadim, an ex-Guantanamo detainee<sup>41</sup>, who was made "deputy governor" of Khorasan province. Afghan officials, including a general and a provincial governor, informed on 12 January 2015 that Mullah Adbul Rauf<sup>42</sup> recruited fighters for IS, flew black flags, and according to a tribal leader in the strategic Sangin district in the eastern Helmand province, battled Taliban fighters<sup>43</sup>. The evasive Mullah Adbul Rauf, whom authorities believe was formerly a senior Taliban commander in southern Afghanistan, was killed by a targeted U.S. airstrike in Helmand province on February 9, 2015<sup>44</sup>. He left behind IS representatives who have fanned out across Helmand province on a recruitment campaign, according to Gen. Mahmood Khan, deputy commander of the Afghan National Army 215<sup>th</sup> Corps, which in October 2014 assumed responsibility of camps Leatherneck and Bastion<sup>45</sup>.

The IS undertaking in this region is unfolding on the heels of what was suppose to be the formal end of U.S. and NATO combat operations in December 2014 in Afghanistan. In

light of that date, the IS, and other insurgent groups in the region, have been testing the waters to see where they could best exploit under-governed areas experiencing gaps in security. Acknowledging Afghanistan's enduring volatile security situation, the U.S. at this writing is again revisiting the controversial issue of the troop withdrawal schedule, with U.S. military and defense authorities advising that withdrawal be based on conditions rather than on dates, and President Obama willing to consider certain variations within defined elements of his plan, but remaining determined to end the U.S. military mission in this country by early 2017<sup>46</sup>.

As long as there is AQ and IS rivalry, and these terrorist entities remain robust, they are likely to demonstrate their wherewithal and operational capabilities by competitively and progressively launching innovative, daring, and spectacular attacks targeting common enemies in order to score points in the jihadi world, to win Muslims over to their respective caliphate projects, and to command the international limelight.

### ***AQ-IS Cooperation Evolving in the Midst of Their Rivalry***

Despite the deadly rivalry between AQ and IS, particularly in Syria between IS and AQ-affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, and apparently now in Pakistan via IS attacks on the AQ-linked Taliban, cooperation between the two entities is becoming more evident as the jihadi world struggles with overlapping loyalties to AQ and IS, and calls for them to reconcile and unite against the West amid U.S. airstrikes targeting the IS; the so-called Khorasan group, an AQ affiliate; and inadvertently, at least initially, Jabhat al-Nusra<sup>47</sup>.

Cooperation between AQ and IS surfaced in August 2014 on the mountains of east Lebanon along the porous border area between Lebanon and Syria, where Jabhat al-Nusra Front and IS militants are hiding. AQ and IS formed a "tactical battlefield alliance," and along with other Syrian rebel groups, they use the area as staging grounds for attacks against Syrian troops and militias loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the Qalamoun region north of Damascus, and for abductions and hostage-taking operations targeting Lebanese soldiers in the northwest border town of Aarsal<sup>48</sup>. The two groups in August overran Aarsal and engaged the Lebanese army in gun battles, then took hostages from the military and police and later executed four of them<sup>49</sup>. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported on 20 January 2015 that three more Lebanese men were abducted by IS, which, in the jihadi cost-benefit calculus, indicates that hostage-taking continues to yield good returns for terrorist groups operating in the area, particularly as their other sources of revenue are under attack, so more of this activity can be expected.

Prompted by the targeted airstrikes against IS in northern Iraq, which bolstered this group's popularity in Yemeni jihadi circles, on 14 August 2014 the Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) released a message of solidarity via Twitter that was circuitously directed at the IS: The message, inter alia, spoke of the duty to support the group's efforts against the U.S. airstrikes, and it provided advice on how to navigate enemy attacks, according to a translation by SITE Intelligence Group<sup>50</sup>.



The November 2014 U.S. airstrikes against Jabhat al-Nusra and IS reportedly led to “ceasefires and some cooperation at the local level” between these two groups in the interest of fighting “moderate” rebel groups in Syria<sup>51</sup>.

On 21 November 2014, senior AQAP member and cleric, Harith bin Ghazi al-Nadhari, rebuked IS over al-Baghdadi’s caliphate declaration and its expansion into Yemen; yet, he still expressed hope that divisions between IS and al-Nusra could be healed in Syria and offered hope of future unity between AQAP and IS if al-Baghdadi withdrew his fatwa claiming Yemen for his caliphate<sup>52</sup>.

Al-Nadhari, who was killed in a U.S. airstrike on 31 January 2015<sup>53</sup>, was leveraging the Islamic Salafia doctrine of *al-wala’ wa’l-bara’*: love for Allah, Islam’s prophets, and Muslims, and enmity and hatred toward non-Muslims and the Islamic perception of falsehood<sup>54</sup>. Although IS and AQ are at odds, in the face of a common enemy, this doctrine enables them to reach across the divide. Popular in the jihadi-sphere, deeply ingrained in the educational curriculum in Saudi Arabia, and widely taught among diaspora Muslims, this doctrine was expounded upon by the aforementioned Islamic strategist Abdullah Azzam, who espoused total separation between Muslims and non-Muslims: no sitting together, no living in the same dwelling, no celebrating non-Muslim holidays, no employing non-Muslims, and no accepting judgment under non-Muslim laws<sup>55</sup>. *Al-wala’ wa’l-bara’* helps explain why Western counter-terrorism operations with Muslim and Arab countries are typically unreliable and unfruitful, and it may hold the key to future reconciliation between IS and AQ.

The latest occurrence of cooperation between AQ and IS is apparently emerging from the January 2015 sophisticated<sup>56</sup> jihadist attacks in France. A pre-attack video titled, “Soldier of the Caliphate<sup>57</sup>,” released 11 January 2015 referencing the 7-9 January jihadi rampage involving the deadly shooting attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris<sup>58</sup>; and the fatal shooting of a policewoman in Montrouge in southern Paris, as well as the deadly hostage-taking situation at the Parisian Hyper Casher kosher supermarket<sup>59</sup>, sent red flags alerting authorities of possible coordination between AQ and IS. Amedy Coulibaly, the supermarket gunman, claimed allegiance to IS in the video, yet the video lacked the group’s usual markings<sup>60</sup>, and it is unclear if he had concrete connections to the group or if he was only ideologically endorsing it<sup>61</sup>. Coulibaly made a similar claim of allegiance to IS to CNN affiliate, BFMTV<sup>62</sup>. In the video, Coulibaly took credit for providing money and logistical help to Cherif and Said Kouachi, the French-Algerian brothers who carried out the magazine attack and who said they were working for AQAP. An arms dealer in Brussels known in the underworld turned himself in to local police and confessed to selling arms, ammunition, and a car to Coulibaly, leading to the discovery by federal police of purchase papers and other evidence in the dealer’s apartment they say back the confession; while Belgian press reports allege those arms were used by the Kouachi brothers in the Charlie Hebdo attack, and by Coulibaly in the Hyper Casher attack<sup>63</sup>. The Kouachi brothers’ claim to be working for AQAP was at least partially verified by the previously mentioned senior AQAP member, al-Nadhari, who confirmed in an audio recording published online 9 January the group’s responsibility for the actions of the Kouachi brothers<sup>64</sup>; and by AQAP commander Nasr Ibn Ali al-Ansi in a video that

surfaced on 14 January taking credit for the magazine attack on behalf of his group<sup>65</sup>. U.S. and French intelligence officials at this point in their investigations suspect that the attack was inspired by AQ, but not directed by AQAP<sup>66</sup>. Coulibaly demanded freedom for the Kouachi brothers during the supermarket hostage-taking incident<sup>67</sup>, and investigators learned that all three perpetrators, and Coulibaly's common-law wife, Hayat Boumeddiene, were close associates plugged into the same terrorist network<sup>68</sup>. Just before the supermarket attack, Coulibaly's common-law wife slipped out of France, and with outside help made her way to Tel Abyad, Syria, which is IS-controlled territory that is a two-hour drive to the IS stronghold, Raqqa<sup>69</sup>. Also, four men were arrested and face charges in France on suspicion of providing logistical support to Coulibaly<sup>70</sup>, potentially broadening the scope of the plot. Meanwhile, an audio recording was reportedly released on 26 January 2015 by IS media, Al-Furqan, believed to be the voice of IS spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, who praised recent attacks on Western soil, including the attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine, and called on Muslims in Western countries to target Crusaders, a reference to Christians and the Christian West<sup>71</sup>.

As the West continues to prosecute a protracted War on Islamic Terrorism, the undertaking, to some measure, is likely to catalyze AQ and IS cooperation. Although AQ and IS are engaged in a bitter rivalry, terrorist groups have a history of cooperating when they feel threatened by internal, regional, and international political and strategic conditions and events, and by states or superpowers<sup>72</sup>. In a drive for survival, terrorist groups forge alliances and augment their capabilities as they cooperate for mutual benefit, which results in increased killing capacity<sup>73</sup>. An example of cooperation between rival terrorist groups can be seen with AQ, a Sunni group, which learned about suicide bombings from Hizb'allah, a Shi'ite group; and their logistical cooperation came to light during the trial of AQ operatives involved in the east Africa embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998<sup>74</sup>, which, combined, killed 234 and wounded more than 4,650<sup>75</sup>.

Considering the evolution of cooperation discussed in these cases covering August 2014 to January 2015, taken as a whole, according to open sources, there is apparent cooperation, to varying degrees, and at least at varying lower levels, that is taking place between AQ and IS in the following ways: tactical and ideological, and possibly logistical. While tactical cooperation between lower-level AQ and IS operatives, including their sympathizers, will likely continue to occur sporadically, *al-wala' wa'l-bara'* will likely continue to deepen the duty-to-support sentiment among low- to mid-level members of these two groups, as well as their followers and supporters, as together they contend with a despised enemy using overwhelming firepower. Overall, this dynamic could form the basis for more cooperation at deeper levels which may be broader in scope, and could even have future implications for reconciliation between AQ and IS at the upper level. Before that could happen, AQ would have to overcome two major obstacles: (1) al-Bagdadi's moves to usurp al-Zawahiri's position as the spearhead of global jihad; and (2) fear that IS, in keeping with its predecessor, AQ in Iraq (AQI), may again tarnish the AQ brand as the ongoing brutal IS campaign continues to target Muslims<sup>76</sup>. AQI was an affiliate of AQC, which renamed itself Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and in May 2010, al-Baghdadi took over ISI<sup>77</sup>. AQI's own brutal insurgency created revulsion in the Islamic world because Muslims were also victims of the group's

guerrilla war against coalition forces and their domestic allies<sup>78</sup>. All told, determining factors for cooperation will include whether both of these powerful rivals could hold their own while facing a sustained campaign of enemy fire and whether their respective cost-benefit analyses determine that they do not need to combine their resources and capability. If they make amends at top level, it could be very dangerous, as the symmetrical alliance would involve two very capable partners: AQ with its far-flung, diffused network and enduring old-school ties, and IS with its deep pockets and mission-driven newer-generation appeal. If they determine that they can soldier on alone in their individual caliphate undertakings, then despite pressure in the jihadi world to reconcile, reconciliation may be shelved, at least for a while, in favor of lethal and spectacular competition.

### ***AQ Boosts Old Ties to South and Central Asia Terror Syndicate; Faces IS AfPak Push***

When al-Zawahiri established QJIS in September 2014, he formalized AQ's existing networked relationships with seasoned jihadist groups based in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in 2010 described this type of networked arrangement as a syndicate in the region<sup>79</sup>.

Like mergers, syndicates enable jihadist groups to pool resources in order to increase their lethality and resilience as they advance a common cause.

Mergers involve high-end terrorist group cooperation as the parties fuse together, which greatly expands their capabilities. Mergers occur when the terrorist groups involved realize the power of working together, and when the parties are under assault or being dismantled and must unify to survive. A larger terrorist group, typically the stronger party, may absorb a smaller terrorist group, typically the weaker party, to enable the latter to survive, while the latter may bring to the table special competencies that could be leveraged by the former's infrastructure. A classic merger took place between Usama bin Laden's AQ and Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ)<sup>80</sup>. The merger was grounded in a mutually beneficial bond that dated back to the mid-1990s in Afghanistan, and it occurred gradually: first with bin Laden financing al-Zawahiri's nearly decimated and cash-strapped EIJ, and then with EIJ's functional and ideological integration into AQ. The merger became Al-Qaeda al-Jihad. During the process, al-Zawahiri swore allegiance to bin Laden and eventually became his deputy, and their cooperation developed at the strategic, operational, and logistical levels. Al-Zawahiri, a strategic thinker, brought to the merger EIJ's sophisticated use of suicide attacks and operational experience, and many Egyptian fighters that built the logistical backbone of the AQ network, which these two leaders jointly created. The AQ-EIJ fusion enabled AQ to make its international debut in 1998 with the simultaneous attacks on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and in Dar es Salaam, which expanded AQ's reach and elevated its profile. Al-Zawahiri, moreover, played a key role in planning the 9-11 attacks. In the post 9-11 environment, he and bin Laden served as the driving force behind the ideology and motivation for global jihad.

Essentially, Black's Law Dictionary<sup>81</sup> describes syndicates as involving associations of individuals formed to conduct and carry out some particular transaction in which the members are mutually interested. By extension, terrorist syndicates may involve associations of terrorist groups and mergers, mobile and stationary resource networks, and criminal, criminalizing, and compromised stakeholders that come together to conduct and carry out mutually beneficial transactions in order to better enable participants to advance non-conflicting objectives across a broad platform. Consequently, terrorist syndicate participants, to varying degrees, have the ability to tap into and leverage their pooled capabilities, competencies and knowledge resources, and financial and intelligence assets. The terrorist syndicate may form associations with other terrorist syndicates, and criminal syndicates, and plug into existing local, regional, and transnational pipelines in order to open up new opportunities, extend reach, and further enhance performance, agility, and resilience.

Formalizing existing networked relationships in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India in the framework of a terrorist syndicate whose participants – such as Omar's Afghan Taliban – are seasoned jihadist entities is likely to strengthen the foundation of al-Zawahiri's caliphate project going forward.

Another key participant in the terrorist syndicate in this region is the long-established Haqqani insurgent group and resource network (HN), which operates in the AfPak theatre and is the actual, but underreported, “fountainhead” of global jihad<sup>82</sup>. Robust generational ties exist between AQC and the HN, with the latter also committed to the establishment of a caliphate. Incubator for AQ and provider of battlefront access, the HN is adept at enabling call-ups and jihads, as demonstrated during the Afghan war against the former Soviet Union in the 1980s, and during the post-9-11 Afghan war against the NATO-led multinational forces. The HN uses mountainous geography and the shelter of Pakistan's close border to maintain a rear supply base, serving as a logistical facilitator for AQ to launch attacks beneficial to advancing common objectives. An inclusive and pragmatic strategic approach enables the HN to link diverse groups, including state and non-state actors, and its deftness brings fractious and rival terrorist groups into tactical alliances. Such local partnering furthers AQ's aims of bringing many terrorist groups into its fold to advance global jihad. Given its military prowess, the HN is a force multiplier for AQ, strengthening the latter's campaigns and helping fill its ranks with operatives, while the HN uses these fighters for local battles to expand its clout with key actors like the Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Longstanding ties also exist between AQC and franchise TTP aka the Pakistani Taliban, an insurgent umbrella group in the terrorist syndicate. However, these ties are unraveling, at least for now, as the TTP dissolves: The TTP's fruitless peace talks with the Pakistan government in early 2014 created a rift that caused TTP commanders to bolt, and the TTP to split into three core factions that all initially reiterated allegiance to Omar<sup>83</sup>. By mid 2014, TTP loyalties appeared to be cracking as some media took certain expressions of support for IS to mean official pledges of allegiance to al-Baghdadi<sup>84</sup>. In October 2014, more TTP leaders bolted and apparently pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi, which raised more loyalty questions<sup>85</sup>. By the turn of the year, pledges of

allegiance and reiterated pledges of allegiance to IS and to al-Baghdadi by mid-level TTP commanders and officials, as previously discussed, materialized in a video released on 10 January 2015<sup>38</sup>. As the IS continues in its efforts to bring disaffected TTP cadres into its fold, U.S. Intelligence officials told *The Long War Journal* that TTP lost more than 70 percent of its strength during the split.

The TTP split, however, notably gave rise to Jamaat-ul-Ahrar TTP (JuA)<sup>86</sup> in August 2014, which vowed to “continue armed struggle for the enforcement of Islamic Sharia<sup>87</sup>” to fulfill the parent TTP’s original objective of forming an Islamic state<sup>88</sup>. The JuA merged with TTP faction Ahrar-ul-Hind and brought in the powerful TTP chapter chief of the Mohmand Agency, Abdul Wali alias Omar Khalid al-Khorasani, a close associate of AQC’s al-Zawahiri. On 20 March 2012, Wali succinctly laid out the parent TTP’s game plan, which, per JuA’s vow, would carry over to this AQ-aligned merger:

***“The Taliban seek to topple the Pakistan Government, impose Shariah, seize Pakistani nuclear weapons and wage jihad until the Caliphate is established across the world.”***

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### ***A Closer Look at Nuclear-Armed Pakistan***

Pakistan’s nuclear sites are thought to be located in the north and west, in areas populated by Taliban and AQ supporters<sup>89</sup>. The country has suffered several terrorist attacks on its nuclear facilities and associated personnel since 2003<sup>90</sup>. Pakistan’s generals control the nuclear weapons, some of which are mobilized. The generals reportedly expressed concern that their Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, wants to bring Pakistan’s Taliban into a coalition government in his own drive to become emir of a caliphate<sup>91</sup>. The top brass is also worried that a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan would employ jihad to merge native Pushtuns in Pakistan and in Afghanistan per an old Afghan plan for the Pushtunistan region spanning both countries, including reaching into Pakistan’s sensitive north and west. Concerns over the military itself, and over Pakistan’s ISI also linger: Military personnel may be influenced by jihadist sympathies, despite a supposed post-9-11 purging of jihad supporters from its ranks<sup>92</sup>. An Islamic coup d’état could occur, either by the military, particularly the 10 Corps that guards the Kahuta nuclear weapons complex in Punjab Province, the Army General Headquarters, and the government’s seat of power in Islamabad; or by the ISI, some of whose civilian and military personnel provide freelance support for Islamic militants<sup>93</sup>. There are also mounting concerns that Pakistan and India, another nuclear-armed state, could slide into full-scale war,<sup>94</sup> which could include a cyber war dimension, over reported provocations by the Pakistan Army<sup>95</sup>.

Al-Zawahiri is likely using Pakistan as a safe haven<sup>96</sup>. If so, he is well-positioned to tap key participants in the terrorist syndicate to help advance his caliphate project if he weathers the IS challenge and the rift within his network<sup>97</sup>. Pakistan’s worsening fragility would facilitate al-Zawahiri’s endeavors: The Fragile State Index (FSI) informs that this country tumbled from #13 in 2013 to #10 in 2014, with the #1 slot representing the least stable state<sup>98</sup>. Another facilitating factor may be U.S. and NATO partners

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— Clare M. Lopez

Vice President for Research & Analysis  
Center for Security Policy

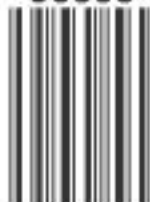
Published by the Center for Security Policy Press  
1901 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 201 | Washington, DC 20006  
For more information, see [securefreedom.org](http://securefreedom.org)

ISBN 9781511431644



9 781511 431644

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