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## Former Al-Qaida Operatives Launch New Militant Group in Pakistan

Noor Zahid  
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A Pakistani militant holds a rocket-propelled grenade in Shawal, in Pakistan's tribal region of Waziristan, Aug. 5, 2012. Two former al-Qaida members have reportedly formed a new militant group, calling it Ansar al-Sharia Pakistan.

A new al-Qaida-inspired militant group, which has recently emerged in Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi claims to act as a platform for militants who have grown disaffected with the Islamic State militant group (IS) in the country.

The group, Ansar al-Sharia Pakistan, was reportedly formed by two former al-Qaida members who had severed ties with the organization in early 2017. Since then, the group has been involved in several attacks in Karachi, according to Pakistani counterterrorism authorities.

“The Ansar al-Sharia group started killings in Karachi since the beginning of this year and claimed responsibility for killing an army officer on Faisal Highway [in Karachi],” Major General Mohammad Saeed, the head of Rangers paramilitary security force in Karachi, told local media. He added the group has been focusing attacks on “the police only.”

The group was allegedly created to operate as a platform for militants who have parted ways with IS in the country, it said in an online statement. It claimed to be active in several parts of the country.

“We give glad tidings to Muslim Ummah that a large number of Mujahideen from Karachi, Punjab and tribal areas are leaving ranks of IS and announce disassociation with [it],” the group said in an announcement through a Twitter account, adding that IS has “spread differences” and “secession instead of unity.”

The group has vowed to continue its struggle through “jihad” against “infidel and apostates.”

Though the newly-emerged group asserts no official affiliation with al-Qaida and other foreign militant organizations, the group said its ideology is inspired by Osama bin Laden, al-Qaida’s slain founder.

VOA was unable to independently verify the authenticity of the Twitter account.

According to the counterterrorism department of Karachi police, Ansar al-Sharia has a presence in areas between Sindh and Baluchistan provinces.

“Unfortunately, according to the names that have come up in the investigation, their kill team has three young men who have masters [degrees] in applied physics,” Maj. Gen. Saeed said.

Pakistani media reported the terror outfit also has female members. Police have reportedly arrested four women, including a doctor, suspected of membership in the group.

Pakistani authorities have vowed action to seize members of the group in the country, including in Karachi.

A police officer has reportedly been arrested for links with an alleged Ansar-al-Sharia member in Karachi, Pakistani media reported.

Al-Qaida’s branch in South Asia, known as al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), has been active in the region. Several militant groups in Pakistan that had an ideological association with bin Laden’s al-Qaida, have pledged allegiance to AQIS.

Much of AQIS’s power is concentrated in Karachi and IS has also claimed presence in in Pakistan’s largest city.