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Prophecy & the Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent

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Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) are competing with each other for recruitment on the South Asian subcontinent. As has been the case in other regions where radical Islamists have congregated (including Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria), jihadi recruitment in the region covering Pakistan, India and Bangladesh is aided by competing claims of divine support.

Radical Islamists invoke the Hadith (the oral traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) to prophesize a great battle in India between true believers and unbelievers before the end-times. These references in the Hadith to the Ghazwa-e-Hind (Battle of India) infuse South Asia with importance as a battleground in the efforts to create an Islamic caliphate resembling the social order that existed at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632-661 AD).

The South Asian region has a long history with jihadi movements, dating back to the eighteenth century. During the 1980s, it became the staging ground for global jihad as part of the internationally-backed guerilla war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. At the time, radical Islamists poured into Afghanistan through Pakistan and received advanced military training to fight the Soviets. Later, many returned to their home countries to conduct terrorist attacks. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Pakistan-backed insurgency in Kashmir against India also stoked jihadism in the region.

The first generation of al-Qaeda commanders and ideologues were veterans of the anti-Soviet Afghan war. ISIS, too, has been influenced greatly by the so-called Arab-Afghans and their disciples. During the war against the Soviets and the ensuing Taliban rule, ancient prophecies of Khurasan – which includes modern Afghanistan – resurfaced to inspire jihadists and promise great heavenly rewards. These prophecies foreshadowed the appearance of the Mahdi or Messiah and the final battle between good (pure Islam) and evil before judgement day. According to one Hadith, an army with black flags would emerge from Khurasan to help the Mahdi establish his caliphate at Mecca.

This was not the first time that the Khurasan Hadith had been cited to mobilize Muslim soldiers. Sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad were often transmitted orally; formal written compilations did not emerge until more than a century after his death in 632 AD. This made it possible for rulers and commanders to conveniently cite the Hadith to justify political decisions or advance battle plans. The Hadith describing an army from the east wielding a black flag was used by the Abbasids to orchestrate their revolt against the ruling Umayyad dynasty in 747 AD. At the time, Abbasid partisan Abu Muslim organized an army with black flags in Khurasan to march east on Damascus.

Like most medieval prophecies, the Islamic ones also comprise metaphorical statements open to interpretation. One Hadith instructs true believers to join the nation from the east with black flags “even if you have to crawl over ice.”¹ Another says, “Armies carrying black flags will come from Khurasan, no power will be able to stop them and they will finally reach Eela (the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem) where they will erect their flags.”² This prediction of final victory was a convenient recruitment tool for al-Qaeda when it was firmly established in Khurasan during the Taliban era.

Prophecies attributed to the Prophet Muhammad were also an important part of jihadist propaganda during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Radical Islamists cited the Hadith about a war on the banks of the Euphrates over a mountain of gold that would portend the rise of Dajjal (representing evil) and the emergence of the Mahdi. The Mahdi’s defeat of Dajjal is believed by many Muslims to be the final sign of the day of judgement. The prospect of joining the final battle against evil before the end of the world served as an incentive for many believers to take up jihad. It was not difficult for clerics to suggest that the reference to the “mountain of gold” was a metaphor for Iraq’s oil reserves.

ISIS shares the stated desire of all Islamist groups to replicate the social order of Islam’s pristine era, the time of the Prophet Muhammad and of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs that followed him. Soon after declaring himself the modern-day caliph, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

named the provinces of his caliphate after the provinces of the early caliphate. These provinces, or wilayats, consist of Algeria (wilayat al-Jazair), Libya (wilayat al-Barqah, wilayat al-Tarabulus and wilayat al-Fizan), Sinai (wilayat Sinai), Saudi Arabia (wilayat al-Haramayn), Yemen (wilayat al-Yaman) and Afghanistan-Pakistan (wilayat Khurasan). ISIS propaganda often speaks of defeating the West while referring to it as Rum, the historic Arab name for the Roman Empire.

Reverting to historic names for Muslim countries summons Muslim pride for Islam's early conquests, when inspired Arabs went forth from the cities of Mecca and Medina in the Arabian Peninsula to create a vast caliphate incorporating parts of the erstwhile Persian and Roman empires. Invoking the Hadith and pronouncements from Islam's earliest period foreshadows the resurrection of Islam's lost glory; in addition to seeking reward in the hereafter, young Muslims are motivated to fight battles and seek victories that were ostensibly foretold fourteen centuries earlier by the Prophet.



Pakistani Sunni Muslim supporters of hard line pro-Taliban party Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Nazaryati (JUI-N) protest on the third anniversary of the death of slain Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, in Quetta on May 2, 2014. (BANARAS KHAN/AFP/Getty Images)

While much of the contemporary Middle East fell under Muslim rule during the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Muslims had to wait for several centuries before expanding their conquest to the Indian subcontinent. The Hadith predicting the great battle for India is often referred to as the Ghazwa-e-Hind Hadith, various versions of which have been recycled each time a Muslim leader or would-be conqueror attempted to raise an army to invade India.³

In one version of the Hadith, attributed to Thawban, a freed slave of the Prophet Muhammad, “[t]he Messenger of Allah said: ‘there are two groups of my Ummah whom Allah will free from the Fire: The group that invades India, and the group that will be with Isa bin Maryam, peace be upon him.’”⁴ Isa bin Maryam is the Quranic name of Jesus, whose return to earth alongside the Mahdi is held in Islamic tradition to be a seminal event of the end of time.

In another version, narrated by Abu Hurairah, one of the companions of Prophet Muhammed, “[t]he Messenger of Allah promised us that we would invade India. If I live to see that, I will sacrifice myself and my wealth. If I am killed, I will be one of the best of the martyrs, and if I

come back, I will be Abu Hurairah Al-Muharrar.”⁵ Al-Muharrar translates as “the one freed from the fire of hell.” In another version from Abu Hurairah, warriors “headed towards Sindh & Hind” were promised the reward of worldly success and freedom from Hell.⁶ Abu Hurairah quoted the Prophet Muhammad as saying, “[d]efinitely, one of your troops would do a war with Hindustan. Allah would grant success to those warriors, as far as they would bring their kings by dragging them in chains. And Allah would forgive those warriors (by the Blessing of this Great War). And when those Muslims would return, they would find Isa Ibn Maryam [Jesus] in Syria.”

Just as the prophecies of Khurasan became popular during the wars in Afghanistan, the Ghazwa-e-Hind divinations became a staple of the Islamist discourse after the launch of jihad in Indian-controlled parts of Kashmir in 1989. Throughout the 1990s, Pakistani official media also encouraged discussion of the Ghazwa-e-Hind Hadith to motivate jihadists. In fact, every major Pakistan-based jihadi group that launched terrorist attacks across the border claimed that their operations were part of the Battle for India promised by the Prophet. For these Pakistani groups, supported by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the target of jihad should be the modern state of India and its “occupation” of Kashmir.

For example, Lashkar-e-Taiba has often spoken of Ghazwa-e-Hind as a means of liberating Kashmir from Indian control. The group’s founder, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, has declared repeatedly that “[i]f freedom is not given to the Kashmiris, then we will occupy the whole of India including Kashmir. We will launch Ghazwa-e-Hind. Our homework is complete to get Kashmir.”⁷ Pakistani propagandist Zaid Hamid has also repeatedly invoked Ghazwa-e-Hind as a battle against Hindu India led from Muslim Pakistan. According to Hamid, “Allah has destined the people of Pakistan” with victory and “Allah is the aid and helper of Pakistan.”⁸

Several Islamic scholars, especially from India, have questioned the veracity of the Ghazwa-e-Hind Hadith and reject its repeated contemporary citation as “Pakistani terrorists’ anti-India propaganda.” According to Maulana Waris Mazhari of the Darul Uloom Deoband seminary in Uttar Pradesh, India, the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir was not jihad; the dream of establishing “Muslim hegemony throughout the entire world” was fanciful. “The term ghalba-e Islam, the establishment of the supremacy of Islam, used in the context of the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet (Hadith), refers not to any political project of Muslim domination,” Mazhari wrote, “but, rather, to the establishment of the superiority of Islam’s ideological and spiritual message.”⁹

Mazhari pointed out that “the statement attributed to the Prophet regarding the Ghazwa-e-Hind is found in only one of the Sihah Sitta, the six collections of Hadith reports of the Sunni Muslims – in the collection by al-Nasai.” He rejected its current interpretations as “rhetoric of the self-styled jihadists” that is “based less on proper scholarly analysis of the Islamic textual tradition than on strident, heated emotionalism and a deep-rooted hatred and feeling of revenge.”¹⁰ It reflected a “distorted understanding of Jihad,” which started “in the very first century of Islam itself, when intra-Muslim wars were sought to be christened by competing groups as Jihads.”¹¹ In fact, Mazhari argued that the Hadith about Ghazwa-e-Hind would have been narrated by many more companions of the Prophet Muhammad and cited in multiple collections of the Hadith “considering the merits or rewards of the Ghazwa-e-Hind that it talks about.”¹² Given that only one companion of the Prophet reported it, Mazhari suggests that “it is possible that this Hadith

report is not genuine and that it might have been manufactured in the period of the Umayyad Caliphs to suit and justify their own political purposes and expansionist designs.”¹³

Even if the Hadith were true, Mazhari argues, “[t]he battle against India that it predicted was fulfilled in the early Islamic period itself, and is not something that will happen in the future. This, in fact, is the opinion of the majority of the Ulema, qualified Islamic scholars.”¹⁴ Mazhari saw the Ghazwa-e-Hind Hadith as an instrument of propaganda in “the proxy war engaged in by Kashmir by powerful forces in Pakistan in the guise of a so-called Jihad,” which he and other Ulema consider “nothing but deceit.” He also noted that there was no historic record of the Hadith being cited by the many Muslim conquerors of the subcontinent and the Ulema that accompanied them.¹⁵

Other Indian clerics have offered alternative explanations of the Hadith. Maulana Abdul Hamid Numani of the Jamiat ul-Ulema-i Hind (Society of Indian Islamic Scholars) says that this Hadith was fulfilled at the time of the Four Righteous Caliphs, when several companions of the Prophet came to India in order to spread Islam. Mufti Sajid Qasmi, professor at Dar ul-Uloom Deoband, believes that the Hadith might also refer to the invasion of Sindh by Arabs under Muhammad bin Qasim in the eighth century. On the other hand, Maulana Mufti Mushtaq Tijarvi of Jamaat-i Islami India has suggested that the Hadith is not genuine at all and perhaps a fabrication intended to justify Qasim’s invasion.¹⁶

Although the idea of Ghazwa-e-Hind as a war against the contemporary Indian state has not been universally accepted, it continues to feature in the jihadist discourse. Jihadists have differed on interpreting the Hadith, especially in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, when al-Qaeda was uprooted from Afghanistan and the Pakistani government led by General Pervez Musharraf chose to side, albeit only partially, with the United States. Divisions among jihadists about attitudes toward the Pakistani state and government are reflected in their interpretation of Ghazwa-e-Hind as directed solely against modern-day India or encompassing also Pakistan.

The defeat of the Taliban and the arrival of NATO forces in Afghanistan in 2001 shifted al-Qaeda’s major operations to Iraq and Yemen even though Osama bin Laden continued to hide in Pakistan. For some time, discussion of the epic battle for India diminished in the jihadi discourse while grand strategies for the expulsion of Western influence from the Middle East took center stage. The death of Osama bin Laden and the rise of ISIS, however, have revived global jihadist interest in Ghazwa-e-Hind.

The Pakistani offshoot of the Taliban, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has declared war on the Pakistani state, maintains that their war is the Ghazwa-e-Hind forecast by the Prophet Muhammad. In their interpretation, the reference to India is said to cover Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. In one May 2013 TTP video, entitled “Ghazwa-e-Hind 3,” footage of militants loyal to Mullah Fazlullah are supplemented with a critique of ISIS for limiting its jihad to Kashmir. According to Fazlullah, “the India jihad begins from Attock [in Pakistan]; the India jihad is in the land of Pakistan; the area of Lahore is in the India jihad; Multan is in India; all the towns of Punjab are in the India jihad that we are waging. Therefore, the Ulema should rise up and explain the borders of the India jihad, explain these sayings of Prophet Muhammad, explain to the public

the boundaries of India, which areas were in India 50 years ago, what were their boundaries...”¹⁷

The militant Islamist group Jamaat ul Ahrar, itself a member of TTP’s coalition, has argued that Hind at the time of the Prophet Muhammad referred to “a very large area which today includes Pakistan, Kashmir, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Burma.” The group invited Muslims to “aid the Mujahideen in Khurasan” and “to work for an Islamic state in Pakistan.” Jamaat ul Ahrar promised that “[o]ur jihad will not stop till Pakistan is conquered but we will keep fighting until entire Hind is under the Sharia of Allah. We shall keep going and conquer every country in our path [with Allah’s will] until we reach Filisteen (Palestine) and there we shall erect the black flags in al-Quds (Jerusalem).”¹⁸

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an affiliate of al-Qaeda, has also adopted the broader definition of battle for the Indian subcontinent by naming its Urdu-language magazine “Ghazwa-e-Hind.” The first issue of the magazine was posted on the Jamia Hafsa Urdu Forum (JHUF) – named after a seminary in Islamabad – on November 15, 2011. The magazine featured articles on jihad in Pakistan, including summaries of past speeches by Osama bin Laden and IMU scholar Abuzar Azzam.

One such article argued that the jihad in Pakistan did not depend upon the American presence in Afghanistan, as the jihadists were fighting for the implementation of Sharia in Pakistan and to avenge the deaths of prominent jihadists at the hands of the duplicitous Pakistani regime. “Undoubtedly, we will continue to wage jihad in Pakistan till we avenge the killings of Taher Jan, Abu Muhammad al-Turkistani, Baitullah Mehsud, Abdul Rahman al-Kanadi, Sheikh Osama bin Laden and many more,” argued IMU. “We will continue to fight till Islam arrives in Islamabad. It does not matter even if the Americans leave Afghanistan.”¹⁹

In May 2014, IMU released a video of its Mufti Abuzar Azzam discussing Ghazwa-e-Hind. He argued that “Hind” includes not just India but also Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Kashmir, Burma, and Bangladesh; and explained that the jihad in Pakistan – a part of Ghazwa-e-Hind – is necessary for the success of the jihad in Afghanistan – the jihad in Khurasan.²⁰

The recent revival of interest in the Ghazwa-e-Hind prophecy reflects rivalry between competing jihadi groups. Al-Qaeda, now led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, faces the prospect of extinction as its Arab cadres defect to ISIS, led by Baghdadi. Zawahiri has worked to build alliances with Pakistani jihadi groups and make inroads in India’s Muslim population because it helps him remain relevant in the face of ISIS.

Al-Qaeda has apparently sought support from Kashmiri and Uyghur groups for its expanded battle on the Indian subcontinent. In December 2013, Kashmir-based Dukhtaran-e-Millat (Daughters of the Nation) leader Asiya Andarabi revealed in an interview that a member of al-Qaeda had approached her to seek “the group’s support in the jihad in Pakistan for enforcement of Sharia and to start Ghazwa-e-Hind from Pakistan.”²¹ Moreover, the Pakistan-based Uyghur jihadi group Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) released a video in April 2014 proclaiming jihad against China as necessary for the fulfillment of the Prophet’s purported Ghazwa-e-Hind prophecy.²²

In September 2014, Zawahiri announced the formation of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which his ally Maulana Asim Umar reinforced with a call for global jihad by Indian Muslims. That same month, AQIS took responsibility for an attempt to hijack the Pakistan frigate PNS Zulfiqar in the Karachi navy yard. The operation was most likely undertaken by terrorists who had already been operating with one of several regional groups active on behalf of al-Qaeda. But in the event, al-Qaeda sought credit for the parent group, almost as if it sought to assert its brand against the appeal of ISIS. Zawahiri may be banking on the Pakistani state's entrenched policy of tolerating and supporting any group that targets India to ensure al-Qaeda's survival in the post-Osama bin Laden phase.

An AQIS spokesman explained on September 8, 2014 that AQIS seeks to raise the "flag of jihad" in the whole region, and that while they seek to "liberate" Indian Muslims from Hindus, Pakistan is its "doorstep" for jihad. The spokesman insisted that the Karachi "operation gives a clear message to India that Ghazwa-e-Hind has only just begun. We shall never forget your oppression of our brothers in Kashmir, Gujarat, and Assam; and you shall reap what you have sowed."²³

The formation of AQIS was announced only after ISIS leader Baghdadi proclaimed the revival of the caliphate during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in June 2014. In his call for global jihad, Baghdadi listed the countries and regions where mosques were being desecrated and Islamic sanctities violated. He argued in his video message that "Muslims' rights are forcibly seized in China, India, Palestine, Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus, Sham (the Levant), Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Ahvaz, Iran (by the rafidah, or Shia), Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco, in the East and in the West." Baghdadi exhorted, "So, raise your ambitions, O soldiers of the Islamic State! For your brothers all over the world are waiting for your rescue, and are anticipating your brigades. It is enough for you to just look at the scenes that have reached you from Central Africa, and from Burma before that. What is hidden from us is far worse. So by Allah, we will take revenge."²⁴

The newly proclaimed caliph's speech contained several references to India, Kashmir and Pakistan, in addition to Afghanistan, Burma and China. In the past, al-Qaeda has successfully recruited fighters from each of these countries and regions. Other than accepting Baghdadi's caliphate, Zawahiri's only option now seemed to be to protect his turf, to take advantage of Pakistan's rivalry with India and to rally groups that have pursued jihad in South Asia based on the Ghazwa-e-Hind prophecies.

Al-Qaeda's efforts to consolidate itself in the Khurasan-Hind battleground were complicated by groups in the region announcing their support for ISIS. In October 2014, Ansar al-Tawhid al Hind (Supporters of Monotheism in India) pledged allegiance to ISIS. The pledge came in an Urdu audio speech from the group's leader, Maulvi Abdul Rehman al-Hindi, and was made public by its media arm, al-Isabah.

Abdul Rehman al-Hindi had surfaced a year earlier with calls for Indian Muslims to join the group and wage jihad. Moreover, al-Isabah had released videos with titles such as "From Kandahar to Delhi." In pledging allegiance, Abdul Rehman al-Hindi spoke at length about the historical caliphates, describing the religious necessity of re-establishing such an entity. He

expressed support for the “sincere and lionhearted mujahideen” of ISIS and called upon all Muslims, and those in India in particular, to pledge allegiance to the group. As he concluded, “[a]fter the establishment of the Islamic State we do not consider allegiances to organizations and groups to be legitimate.”²⁵

“I take this opportunity,” Hindi intoned, “to call all Muslims, especially of India, to rise, aspire to be part of one Ummah, one army, under one leader, and break the shackles of humiliation and disgrace. This disgraceful pacifism will not benefit you, so why do you wait until your women are raped and blood of your sons spilled? And beware of the nationalistic democratic attitudes of some of our misguided Islamic organizations.”²⁶ Subsequently al-Isabah released a video eulogizing an Indian fighter killed in a suicide raid in Afghanistan, confirming that the group had turned operational.²⁷

In January 2015, ISIS announced the formation of the Khorasan Group, with former Taliban leader Hafiz Saeed Khan – also known as Mullah Saeed Orakzai – as its commander. The new ISIS offshoot covers Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh, as well as some parts of Central Asia – areas deemed by jihadists as part of the historic Khurasan and Hind mentioned in the Islamic prophecies.

One year earlier, Saeed had lost out in a power struggle within Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and so joined the ISIS bandwagon in an effort to reassert himself. His allies include several key members of the TTP now influential within the Khorasan Group: former spokesman Shahidullah Shahid, Khyber tribal region leader Gul Zaman, Peshawar chief Mufti Hassan, Kurram chief Hafiz Quran Daulat and Hangu leader Khalid Mansoor.²⁸

Pakistani officials, including Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, have dismissed ISIS’ claims of having a significant presence in the country, arguing that such claims are in fact manifestations of leadership conflicts within the TTP. According to these Pakistanis, the TTP remains the potent force in Pakistan’s northwest tribal region. However, in June 2014, a group calling itself al-Wafa Foundation for Media Production released a video entitled, “We are your Army in Pakistan.” In the video, one fighter named Habibullah Habib expressed brotherhood with ISIS and offered it money and men.²⁹

Another Pakistani jihadi group, Caliphate and Jihad Movement, similarly pledged allegiance to ISIS and Baghdadi in July 2014, and claimed credit for four attacks in Hyderabad and Karachi. The group praised ISIS and offered itself as an “arrow of the arrows” to Baghdadi in Pakistan, and also congratulated the declaration of the caliphate, praying that it will extend to Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. The group then claimed responsibility for the four attacks in Pakistan’s Sindh province, which included the strikes on policemen in Karachi and the Latifabad area of Hyderabad between May 25 and July 6, 2014.³⁰

Jundallah (Soldiers of Allah), also based in Pakistan, followed Caliphate and Jihad Movement in pledging allegiance to Baghdadi. It promised to unify the ranks of fighters in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and India. In November 2014, a message posted on a jihadi online forum reported that Jundallah chief Ahmed Ghardan Abu Yahya had announced his pledge during a visit from a delegation led by ISIS’ Zubeir al-Kuwaiti. The message added: “Praise be to Allah,

many from the jihadi organizations, groups, and brigades in Khorasan and India agreed to meet with the delegation of the Islamic State. With permission from Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, you will hear another glad tiding.”³¹

While ISIS boasted of success in expanding into Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, AQIS has been active in producing recruitment and propaganda material in Bengali. The Bengali section of AQIS has released videos encouraging Bangladeshi Muslims to enter the jihadi battlefield.³² There have also been credible reports of al-Qaeda affiliates being active in the Muslim-majority Maldives, as several Maldivian nationals are believed to have traveled to Pakistan’s northwest tribal region for training alongside other jihadists.³³

In his speech announcing the formation of AQIS, al-Zawahiri had argued, “Bangladesh, which they claimed to have won from Pakistan so that it may get its freedom, is being turned into a subjugated surrogate of India. These anti-Islamic policies that assail Islamic beliefs, symbols and the noble Prophet of Islam are only a manifestation of complete subjugation to India. The events in Bangladesh enjoy the blessings of both India and America, since their interests in fighting Islam overlap, and this is why their bilateral relations are becoming stronger day by day.”³⁴

In what was clearly an effort to appeal to the anti-Indian sentiment among Pakistan’s jihadist in particular, Zawahiri railed against India. “It is democratic India that killed thousands of Muslims in Kashmir, Gujarat, Ahmadabad, and Assam... The events in Bangladesh and Burma are not too distant from the oppression and killings of Muslims in Kashmir or the racial cleansing in Assam, Gujarat, and Ahmadabad either.” He spoke of the need to “make a serious effort to bring an end to these oppressions on Muslims in Bangladesh, India, Burma and Sri Lanka” and reassured “our brothers and our people in Kashmir, Gujarat, Assam, and Ahmadabad who are living under the dark shade of Hindu occupation.”³⁵

Al-Qaeda appears to be attempting to maintain support among radical Islamists in the subcontinent by directing its ire at India. Its leaders have been active in Afghanistan and Pakistan since the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad and maintain close ties to the Pakistani-supported Afghan Taliban and Kashmiri jihadi groups. By focusing on India, al-Qaeda hopes to retain the support of Pakistan-backed groups, which interpret the Ghazwa-e-Hind Hadith to mean re-conquest of Hindu India without hitting Muslim Pakistan. Even in Zawahiri’s statement about AQIS, Pakistan was mentioned only as a country that needed to be brought under full Sharia rule while Hindu India was portrayed as the enemy of Islam.

ISIS, on the other hand, has accepted the allegiance of groups that are violently opposed to both the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. ISIS affiliates appear to have opted for the alternative interpretation of Ghazwa-e-Hind, offered by groups such as the TTP, to pursue jihad in all parts of historic Hind. Indeed, in an ominous declaration, one South Asian ISIS member proclaimed, “[o]ur struggle is ongoing and Insha’Allah after defeating Pakistan Army, we won’t just stop in Pakistan rather we shall continue our advance into Kashmir and India until the laws of Allah are implemented globally and the whole world comes under the rule of one Muslim Khalifah.”³⁶

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