

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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## ISLAMIC STATE IN GREATER SAHARA SETS SIGHTS ON BURKINA FASO

*Jacob Zenn*

In late 2019, Islamic State (IS)'s Sahel-based fighters under the leadership of Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi surged ahead of their al-Qaeda rivals in the Group for Supporters of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin—JNIM). Major attacks on soldiers in Niger and Mali and, to a lesser extent Burkina Faso, indicated al-Sahrawi's group, which is commonly known as Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), was a force to be reckoned with in the Sahel. France accordingly designated ISGS as the number one terrorist threat in the Sahel, convened with Sahelian leaders to redouble counter-terrorism efforts against ISGS, and rolled back its previous stated plans to reduce French troops in the Sahel ([Al-Jazeera](#), November 6, 2019; [France24](#), January 15).

Throughout 2020, JNIM also combated ISGS and gained the upper hand ([nordsudjournal.fr](#), April 21). ISGS now appears to be on weaker footing than its JNIM archrival, but ISGS may be carving out parts of Burkina Faso as its main area of operation where, unlike Mali and Niger, it can be stronger than JNIM. This is

demonstrated by several major ISGS attacks in Burkina Faso in recent weeks.

On November 11, for example, ISGS conducted an attack on a military convoy in Tin-Akoff, Oudalan Province, northern Burkina Faso, killing 14 soldiers ([lefaso.net](#), November 12). While Oudalan straddles the borders of Mali and Niger, the neighboring Seno Province only borders Niger. It was in Seno Province that ISGS carried out several other attacks in the same week as the Oudalan military convoy attack ([Twitter/AlerteTemoin](#), November 13). Since JNIM is also active in these areas, ISGS' new stronghold is emerging in this Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso axis alongside, and potentially in increasing competition with, JNIM.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), whose Sahelian offshoot is JNIM, historically operated in this axis. In the early 2010s, al-Sahrawi himself was also involved with AQIM, including for trafficking and kidnapping operations. Al-Sahrawi, who reportedly married a Fulani woman in order to integrate into cross-border communities in recent years, is, therefore, not unfamiliar with this terrain ([rfi.fr](#), March 27, 2017). Although al-Sahrawi had not been heard from since Abubakar al-Baghdadi praised him in an April 2019 audio, IS again highlighted

him in a November *al-Naba* newsletter interview ([Al-Furqan](#), April 29, 2019; [Twitter/oded121351](#), November 14). While recounting ISGS' rivalry with JNIM and aspects of AQIM history, al-Sahrawi also confirmed that he remained ISGS' leader and he was indeed alive.

Meanwhile, AQIM's leadership vacuum since French forces, backed by the United States, killed Abdelmalek Droukdel in June has been resolved ([France24](#), June 5). AQIM's new leader, Abu Obaida Yusuf Annabi, is a long-time Algerian jihadist with a record of focusing on the Sahel and Nigeria in his video speeches (see [Militant Leadership Monitor](#), September 6, 2018; [al-Andalus](#), March 2010). Moreover, JNIM's own leadership remains intact, including the Tuareg Malian Iyad ag Ghaly and Malian Fulani Hamadou Kouffa, who is among Iyad ag Ghaly's deputies.

Even with al-Qaeda's overall leadership in flux amid reports that Aymen al-Zawahiri is dead, AQIM and JNIM's capable leaderships should allow them to withstand ISGS. In fact, ISGS' operations in Burkina Faso may indicate an uptick in its strength in that particular border region. However, on the whole, ISGS appears to be in strategic retreat vis-à-vis JNIM.

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## AUSTRIA AND SWITZERLAND ATTACKS REVEAL ISLAMIC STATE'S WEAKNESS IN EUROPE

*Jacob Zenn*

On November 24, a woman, whose name was not immediately released, stabbed two shoppers in the popular tourist city of Lugano, Switzerland, which is near the Italian border ([De Telegraaf](#), November 24). Swiss authorities revealed the attacker had in 2017 attempted to travel to Syria to join Islamic State (IS), but was caught in Turkey before crossing the border into Syria. She initially met an IS fighter online and would have married him if she was able to reach Syria.

The attack, therefore, highlights some well-known routes of radicalization for Islamic State fighters and supporters, including the internet, romance, and finally, travel to Syria. Moreover, the attack follows others in France and the United Kingdom where attackers known to authorities have conducted attacks ([France24](#), October 17; [BBC](#), December 4, 2019). The hundreds of known Islamic State supporters in Western European countries makes it increasingly difficult for security agencies to not only monitor them, but also interrupt their plots if they act. France has begun to take the most aggressive measures to monitor suspected jihadists since a Chechen refugee beheaded a schoolteacher who showed his class the Charlie Hebdo cartoon mocking Prophet Muhammed ([elysee.fr](#), November 4).

What made the Lugano attack unique, however, is that virtually all Islamic State foreign fighters who have conducted attacks in Syria and Iraq or back in their home countries have been men. In Lugano, however, it was a woman. At the same time, the lack of sophistication of her attack and its inability to cause any deaths indicates she was likely a lone actor. This is a positive sign regarding Swiss measures to prevent more dangerous weapons from getting into the hands of IS supporters in the country. The fact that IS did not claim the attack further reflects the likelihood IS was not directly involved. Even if IS was involved, it would not necessarily claim or condone a woman attacker.

Meanwhile, in neighboring Austria, another attack by a man of Albanian descent with Macedonian and Austrian dual nationality took place on November 2 ([diepresse.com](#), November 2). This attacker had also attempted to travel to IS territories in Syria, but was stopped and detained in Turkey in 2018 before being extradited and detained again in Austria ([egm.gov.tr](#), November 8).

However, unlike the Lugano extremist, the attacker in Austria acquired a gun on the black market and used it to kill four civilians in his November 2 attack in Vienna.

The attacker in Austria also issued a video pledging loyalty to Islamic State, indicating his commitment to IS' cause ([dein.tube](#), November 3). However, it is unclear if IS knew about or directed the attack in advance. IS' claim of the attack, for example, did not demonstrate insider knowledge of the attack.

The trendlines following these most recent attacks in Lugano and Vienna show that IS supporters remain in Europe, including in countries like Switzerland and Austria that have seen significantly less jihadist violence than other countries in Western Europe over the past several years. However, attackers increasingly tend to be known to authorities and are unable to launch sophisticated attacks with multiple cell members like the 2015 IS-coordinated Paris attacks. Nevertheless, the shock of even these two attacks will likely lead more European countries—especially France and Austria—to demand stronger European border controls, more restrictive asylum processes, and greater powers to detain IS supporters, particularly those who have already demonstrated intent to join the group ([France24](#), November 5).

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## Islamic State Fighters' First Claimed Attack in Tanzania: Strategic Calculations and Political Context

*Sunguta West*

On October 15, Islamic State (IS) fighters in Mozambique staged their first claimed attack into southern Tanzania, killing at least 20 people in Kitaya, Mtwara Province. The fighters also burned down houses, destroyed an armored vehicle, and stole money and military equipment. Mtwara borders Palma district in the Mozambican Province of Cabo Delgado, which is the base of the group known as Ahlu al-Sunna Wal Jamaa or al-Shabaab ("The Youth") locally but officially as Islamic State in Central Africa Province (ISCAP) ([The Citizen](#), October 23; [Club of Mozambique](#), October 20).

Some ISCAP members were initially followers of Kenyan Islamist ideologue, the late Aboud Rogo, and resettled in northern Mozambique after Rogo was killed extrajudicially in a drive-by shooting in Mombasa in 2012. ISCAP also has religious, commercial, and training ties with jihadist networks in Kenya, Tanzania, and elsewhere in East Africa ([Club of Mozambique](#), June 14, 2018). The group, however, only started carrying out attacks in northern Mozambique in 2017 and has since killed an estimated 700 civilians. Like other Islamist militants in Africa, ISCAP demands that governments rule by *sharia* (Islamic Law) ([The Africa Report](#), July 29).

Since IS' 'territorial caliphate' in Syria and Iraq began collapsing, its leadership has been keen to expand in Africa. In August 2018, IS' former "caliph," Abubakar al-Baghdadi, indicated plans to create a Central Africa province (*wilaya*) ([Twitter.com/SimNasr](#), August 22, 2018). Less than one year later, in April 2019, IS claimed an attack in Beni, Democratic People's Republic of Congo (DRC), killing two soldiers and one civilian, which heralded the launch of ISCAP as a formal IS province ([The East African](#), April 19, 2019). By that time, attacks were also intensifying in northern Mozambique, whose fighters, along with the DRC insurgents, soon became subsumed under ISCAP.

**Islamic State's Ambitions in Tanzania**

ISCAP's attack in southern Tanzania underlines IS' ambition to expand its territory in Africa. While ISCAP has gained some success around Beni in DRC and Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, it has been slower to gain traction in Tanzania and Kenya, where, in contrast, al-Qaeda had success historically. In 2017, Tanzanian officials blamed an unidentified terrorist network for the killing of eight policemen in Kibiti district. Although the attackers had disappeared with the policemen's guns, officials said the attackers were linked to another attack in Dar es Salaam, in which the gunmen stormed Sitakishari police station and stole 17 guns. Four policemen were killed in that attack. The police later said they had killed four suspects in connection with the murders of the policemen in Kibiti ([The East African](#), April 22, 2017; [African News](#), April 14, 2017).

Therefore, with its first official attack claim in Tanzania, IS and ISCAP have scored a victory. Moreover, Tanzania's police inspector general estimated at least 300 militants took part in the attack before they retreated to Mozambique. This attests to large numbers of fighters involved in the operation ([The Citizen](#), October 23).

The jihadists gained access to Kitaya village after entering into Tanzania by sea and moving up Ruvuma River, which forms the border between Mozambique and Tanzania ([Club of Mozambique](#), October 20). Photographs of the attack that IS released on its social media platforms and that were released outside official IS media channels further showed an attacker decapitating a man and throwing his head on the road as well as weapons and ammunition that the fighters pilfered ([Club of Mozambique](#), October 20). In a video, the attackers were also heard speaking in Swahili, which is widely spoken in East Africa. They were also heard speaking Makua, which is a Bantu dialect in southern Tanzania and Mozambique, and Mwani, which is a Swahili dialect spoken in Cabo Delgado. This language diversity indicates northern Mozambique is a meeting point for East African jihadists from the Swahili Coast and perhaps elsewhere in East Africa ([Club of Mozambique](#), October 20).

Nearly a month after the October attack, Tanzanian police announced the arrest of an unspecified number of Tanzanians suspected to be travelling to join ISCAP in Mozambique. The alleged recruits were from Kigoma in the west, Mwanza in the north, and other parts of Tanzania. After these arrests, the police said they had learned that many Tanzanians were involved in the attack in Mtwara and local villagers had helped ISCAP identify tar-

gets, including houses to set ablaze ([Club of Mozambique](#), November 20).

### Tanzanian Leadership's Responses

ISCAP's Mtwara attack occurred on the eve of Tanzania's national elections, but information gathered from the videos indicates that the militants' motivations were unrelated to the polls. According to utterances heard during the attack, the motive was to kill "what they [the militants] considered infidels," and spread ISCAP's teachings in Tanzania ([Club of Mozambique](#), October 20). Incumbent president, John Pombe Magufuli, whose party is Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), won the elections by receiving 84 percent of the vote. However, his main challenger, Tundu Lissu of the Party for Democracy and Development (CHADEMA), said the elections were riddled with irregularities, such as ballot-stuffing ([Capital FM](#), October 29).

Ahead of Magufuli's inauguration, key opposition figures were arrested and later released with no charges. A senior police officer in Dar es Salaam later said they would be charged with acts of terrorism and endangering national security ([The Africa Report](#), November 5). These allegations were, however, not linked to the threat posed by ISCAP or any known violent threat.

In the past, Tanzania has frequently expressed its willingness to support global counter-terrorism efforts ([Daily News](#), March 12). Tanzania is also aware of the threats posed by ISCAP. In May, the government sent troops to the border with Mozambique to bolster security after ISCAP escalated attacks on security forces and civilians in nearby Cabo Delgado ([The Citizen](#), May 7). In August, Tanzania also carried out an operation on the border with Mozambique to flush out jihadists who were believed to be hiding in the forests there ([Club of Mozambique](#), August 11).

### Conclusion

The claimed attack in Tanzania by ISCAP represents a well-planned move that fits into IS and ISCAP's ambitious designs for the future. Congo and Mozambique are now part of IS' 'caliphate.' Security agencies in Kenya, Uganda, and especially Tanzania must continue to be on alert given the speed at which ISCAP is gaining ground.

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# Algerian Constitutional Amendments Create Conditions for Military Intervention in Libya

*Jacob Lees Weiss*

On November 12, the Algerian Constitutional Council confirmed amendments that were approved in the country's November 1 referendum, which allow the Algerian People's National Armed Forces (APN) to participate in operations outside the country's borders ([El Khabar](#), November 12). Missions must be approved by a two-thirds majority in each parliamentary chamber and be within the framework of the objectives of the UN, the African Union, and the League of Arab Nations ([al-Arab](#), October 25). The constitutional referendum was the flagship project of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who has sought to distinguish his government from that of his predecessor, Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

The referendum's voter turnout at a historic low of 23.7 percent indicates the referendum was not a success for Tebboune. Rather, it confirmed the widespread public apathy toward Tebboune's leadership since Tebboune took office in December 2019 ([El Watan](#), November 2). Tebboune's public absence since mid-October, apparently due to COVID-19 health concerns, has also evoked unhelpful comparisons with his predecessor, Bouteflika, who himself spent months in absentia during the latter end of his 20-year rule ([La Marseillaise](#), November 19).

While Tebboune has already received strong backing from French President Emmanuel Macron, he hopes that showcasing Algeria's value as a regional stabilizer will sustain this support and attract further buttress from other European powers concerned with instability in North Africa ([Asharq al-Awsat](#), November 21). With the specter of the 2019 popular revolution that ousted Bouteflika still very much present, Tebboune is unlikely to have forgotten how quickly longtime backer France abandoned his predecessor ([DW-News](#), March 8, 2019). Libya presents one arena where Algeria may consider a more interventionist foreign policy that, in turn, will win Tebboune support from abroad.

## Historical and Political Calculations

The low voter turnout for the November 1 referendum may not have legitimized Tebboune's government as much as he had hoped. However, the constitutional amendments presage a notable shift in Algeria's foreign policy. Since achieving independence in 1962, Algerian foreign policy has been dominated by a strict non-interventionist agenda. The only key exceptions were Algeria's support for the Polisario during its war with Morocco over the Western Sahara from 1975-1991 and Algeria's participation in the 1967 and 1973 wars against Israel.

Despite significant military strength, Algeria's role in conflicts in its borderlands, including the Sahel and Libya, has usually been limited to mediating between warring parties and threat containment. In the previous 30 years, instability in Mali has resulted in Algeria leading various peacekeeping efforts with occasional success. Most notably, in 2015, Algerian-led mediation yielded a ceasefire between the Malian government and various Islamist and Tuareg armed groups in what became known as the Algiers Accords ([Al-Jazeera](#), June 21 2015). However, the refusal to intervene militarily, perhaps out of fear of retaliation by the Mali-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM), resulted in Algerian influence diminishing in the Sahel amid the increasing U.S. and European military presence in the region.

Likewise, Algeria's reluctance to assert itself in the Libyan conflict has allowed the UAE, Turkey, and Russia, among other foreign powers, to intervene. Even Algeria's attempts to renew mediation efforts between parties in the Libyan conflict were ignored ([Al-Jazeera](#), June 23). Recent negotiations were held in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco instead ([Ahram Online](#), October 11). This came as a shock to Algeria, given that its commitment to a peaceful settlement in Libya based on national dialogue dates back six-years and had gained the support of the United States ([AL-Monitor](#), September 30 2014)

While Algeria's military strength will allow the government to explore new foreign policy approaches and possibly regain its lost regional influence, a more active role as a regional peacekeeper can also help fortify Tebboune domestically. The opaque ruling elite governing Algeria now ostensibly led by Tebboune has historically resorted to social welfare spending funded by hydrocarbon exports to legitimize its rule. However, Algeria's economic downturn coupled with the country's historic aversion to external debt has forced Tebboune to cut

public spending by half throughout 2020 ([Algerie Part](#), May 21).

While the government has promised a 4.3 percent rise in welfare subsidies in 2021, this will remain dependent on a significant increase in the price of hydrocarbon exports ([Arab News](#), November 16). The government's austerity measures reveal the improbability of it being able to continue long-term social welfare packages, particularly as foreign exchange reserves are likely to be exhausted within the next two to five years ([Dzair Daily](#), May 19). Without the ability to "buy" domestic stability, a strong Algerian role in peacekeeping efforts within the frameworks of the UN and the other regional organizations will be vital to safeguarding and legitimizing the Algerian government domestically.

### **Libya: The Perfect Arena?**

Although Algeria did not make any direct reference to Libya regarding the recent constitutional amendments, Libya must loom large behind these changes. The rationale for the amendments was probably that the high-profile nature of the Libyan conflict would provide Algeria with the perfect arena to showcase its value as a regional stabilizer. At the same time, Algeria could also achieve its long-term goal of securing its expansive 600-mile shared border with Libya.

Additionally, with the UN's success in achieving preliminary agreements to hold national Libyan elections within 18 months from November 2020, securing the ceasefire announced in October will be vital to putting an end to Libya's now nine-year civil war ([BBC Arabic](#), November 14). The ceasefire is likely to come under pressure from myriad foreign powers that are keen to continue exploiting Libya as a battlefield for geopolitical rivalries and ambitions. Given the absence of a UN troop deployment, the deterrence of an Algerian military peacekeeping force could be necessary to provide muscle to sustain the ceasefire agreement ([Al-Jazeera](#), January 21).

The fact that Turkey is Algeria's second-largest trading partner in Africa and Russia is Algeria's principal supplier of military armaments means Algeria is backing opposing sides in the Libyan conflict, which could play into its favor. Algeria would be able to point to these important relations as proof that an Algerian intervention in Libya would be without bias to either warring party. If Algeria can further convince the UN that that it can cooperate militarily and remain subservient to the UN's peacekeeping objectives, then a concrete Algerian deployment proposal could appear in the coming months.

### **Risks and Rewards**

The risks of military intervention in Libya might outweigh the benefits for Algeria. The Libyan conflict's complexity with its numerous militia groups and foreign powers with competing priorities means that any Algerian peacekeeping deployment would have to be nuanced and sensitive. Algeria's prior constitutional restrictions mean the country has a severe lack of relevant experience, which subsequently places doubt on the ability of its military to deploy to Libya without sufficient prior training and planning.

Even if Algeria ensures that any deployment to Libya is extremely disciplined, Algerian checkpoints, supply lines, and other military assets could come under harassment by both foreign and domestic militia groups keen to prolong the Libyan civil war. Such groups either depend on the Libyan conflict as a source of employment or use the insecurity inherent in Libya as a cover for criminal profit-making activities. With Algerian lives at risk, and the likelihood of an expensive and long-term endeavor, such a deployment could become unpopular domestically for Tebboune.

While the constitutional amendments may help Algeria regain some of its lost regional influence, the country will need to be careful about deploying to Libya no matter how tempting it might appear.

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# Islamic State Hind Province's Kashmir Campaign and Pan-Indian Capabilities

Animesh Roul

When Islamic State (IS) announced an Indian-based 'province' (*wilayah*) on May 10, 2019, IS effectively consolidated previously fragmented pro-IS jihadist entities under the IS Hind (IS-H) province banner. IS aimed to increase its recruitment and operational success in embattled Kashmir, which has a long tradition of Islamist militancy. However, IS also launched a propaganda campaign to have a broader pan-Indian impact. [1]

IS-H sought to unite diverse pro-IS Indian groups and individuals under its purview, including those from Kashmir to Kerala as well as those fighting alongside IS-Khorasan (IS-K) province in Afghanistan ([india-times.com](http://india-times.com), October 4, 2016). All IS-inspired groups or units, including initial groups such as Ansaru Khilafa (Supporters of the Caliphate) in Jammu and Kashmir and Jundul Khilafa (Army of the Caliphate), eventually became subsumed under IS-H. IS-H's opaque organizational structure notwithstanding, the organization was dominated by Kashmiri jihadists and has struggled to extend its influence throughout India.

This article explores the emergence and consolidation of IS-H and how Kashmir remains Indian jihadism's epicenter both in terms of IS' media and armed campaigns in the country.

## Kashmir: The Epicenter of Islamic State's Campaign

Since October 2014, IS has garnered support from Indian jihadist groups and individuals marked by a series of loyalty videos. One such early video pledge, for example, came from Karnataka-born Sultan Abdul Kadir Armar, who was a Lucknow Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama-trained Islamic preacher, former Indian Mujahideen leader, and head of the pro-IS Ansar al-Tawhid Fi Bilad al-Hind (Supporters of Monotheism in the Land of India). In October 2014, he urged Muslims to kill foreigners and Hindus and pledge their loyalty to Abubakar al-Baghdaadi before he himself was killed in Kobani, Syria ([Indian Express](http://Indian Express), October 5, 2014; [Al Isabah Media/Archive](http://Al Isabah Media/Archive), October 4, 2014; [Indian Express](http://Indian Express), March 20, 2015).

It was, however, only in May 2016 that IS' "Homs Province" in Syria released its first official video message, which featured Indian fighters and was called "Bilad al-Hind (Land of India): Between Pain and Hope" ([Zee Hindustan](http://Zee Hindustan), May 22, 2016). The video urged Indian Muslims to travel to Syria and Iraq and called for jihad to avenge atrocities against Muslims in Kashmir, Gujarat, and Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, as well as for the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh by Hindu right-wing activists ([Jihadology](http://Jihadology), May 19, 2016).

In July 2017, reports of IS outreach in Kashmir emerged when another cell called Ansarul Khilafah in Jammu and Kashmir used Telegram to disseminate IS propaganda materials along with bomb-making and attack manuals ([Hindustan Times](http://Hindustan Times), July 18, 2017). IS' first attacks against Indian security personnel occurred soon after in Srinagar, Kashmir on November 17, 2017 ([Indian Express](http://Indian Express), November 20, 2017). Pro-IS militants also targeted separatist Hurriyat Party leader Fazal Haq Qureshi, who is pro-Pakistan but seeks a peaceful settlement with India and Pakistan, on February 25, 2018. Although Qureshi survived the attack, a policeman was killed in the gunfight. IS' semi-official Amaq news agency claimed both these attacks ([nationalheraldindia.com](http://nationalheraldindia.com), February 27, 2018).

After these two attacks, on March 11, 2018, three pro-IS militants, Syed Owais, Muhammad Eisa Fazili, and Mohammad Taufeeq, were killed in Anantnag area of Kashmir ([Deccan Chronicle](http://Deccan Chronicle), March 15). India's government and security agencies, which had initially denied IS' presence in Kashmir, finally admitted that IS had an underground existence in the state. The Director General of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Police also stated IS trendlines were a "worrying sign" ([Statesman](http://Statesman), February 27, 2018).

## The Establishment of IS Hind Province

IS publications and Indian security agencies' reports of jihadists' arrests since 2016 made evident that Kashmir-based pro-IS elements, who still often called themselves Jundul Khilafa, were operating under IS-Khorasan (IS-K) province in IS' organizational structure. [2] Therefore, it was unsurprising that following the March 2018 Anantnag encounter, India cracked down on the still embryonic pro-IS formations in Kashmir ([India Today](http://India Today), March 12, 2018; [Hindustan Times](http://Hindustan Times), June 22, 2018). In response, several attacks took place in Kashmir, including a June 16 operation claimed by IS-K targeting an Indian army

checkpoint in Srinagar ([Twitter/Terror\\_Monitor](#), June 18, 2018).

Later, in June 2018, a self-proclaimed IS “emir” in Kashmir issued an Eid al-Fitr message urging Muslims to carry out lone-wolf operations, with emphasis on vehicular attacks, and encouraging all Indian Muslims to support IS ([SITE](#), June 18, 2018). Half a year later, pro-IS elements in Kashmir were again active when the Kashmiri spokesman of Jundul Khilafa issued a statement honoring the martyrdom of another Kashmiri fighter, who targeted Indian security officials in Srinagar ([SITE](#), September 10, 2018).

Despite IS-H’s official formation in May 2019 with an inaugural attack claim to mark the occasion, the period surrounding that attack was unremarkable for the organization. IS-H otherwise conducted only several low-scale attacks targeting security officials, which may have been timed to coincide with and highlight their new presence ([The Print](#), May 12, 2019; [SITE](#), June 11, 2019). The nascent IS-H also suffered leadership losses due to existing schisms between militant groups in the region. Amid growing tensions between Pakistan-backed militants—such as Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)—and pro-IS militants in Kashmir, a senior IS-H leader, Adil Ahmad Dass, who was previously with LeT, was killed by his former comrades in Anantnag on June 26, 2019 ([Indian Express](#), June 29, 2019; [Firstpost](#), July 1, 2019).

IS-H officially claimed its first attack in a gap of eight months in early February 2020 when its fighters targeted a paramilitary (Central Reserve Police Force) checkpoint on Srinagar’s outskirts ([Zee News](#), February 5; [kashmir.liveuamap.com](#), February 5). Later that same month, IS’ Arabic-language newsletter *al-Naba* claimed several previously unclaimed attacks in Kashmir ([Al-Naba No. 221](#), February 13). Further, on April 7, IS-H claimed another attack on the paramilitary forces in Anantnag ([The Week](#), April 8). Meanwhile, pro-IS-H al-Burhan media issued a statement threatening to target India’s external intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India’s counterterrorism agency called the National Investigative Agency (NIA), and Hindu right-wing organizations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ([SITE](#), February 11).

After April, IS-H was weakened substantially in its Kashmir strongholds and even weaker elsewhere in India due to persistent counter-terrorism operations. The group only carried out several small-scale grenade attacks

against security check posts in Kashmir in May and June 2020 ([Business Standard](#), February 12; [Zee News](#), September 4). Operational setbacks in terms of the deaths and arrests of IS-H fighters and a decreasing attack tempo, however, did not halt pro-IS propaganda. For example, pro-IS-H media group, al-Haqeeqah Media (Truth Media), released an online poster on May 22 to threaten attacks against Hazratbal Shrine, which is considered to be the holiest Muslim shrine in Srinagar because it contains Prophet Muhammed’s hair. However, IS considers “worshipping” this relic to be apostasy. Previously, al-Haqeeqah shared online posters threatening the Supreme Court building and the India Gate in Delhi and high-ranking officials, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi ([SITE](#), May 28; [SITE](#), May 22).

### **IS Hind Province’s Pan-Indian Plans and Media Operations**

Jundul Khilafa, which later reinvented itself as Ansarul Khilafa al-Hind and evolved into IS-H, had three official media units called al-Burhan, al-Qitaal, and al-Tazkirah, which spearheaded propaganda campaigns and promoted IS in Kashmir. [3] Al-Burhan media published *al-Risalah* (The Message) newsletter from October to December 2018 in Urdu and English and circulated two other issues in January and February 2019. The newsletter resembled IS’ flagship magazine, *Dabiq*, and sought to bridge the gap of communication between jihadists in Kashmir and ordinary Indian Muslims. *Al-Risalah* further addressed the turf war among Kashmir-based militants, such as HM, LeT, and al-Qaeda-supported Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, including their misplaced ideological goals and jihadist orientations. [4] Indeed, *al-Risalah* articles’ mentions battlefield sacrifices and tributes to slain members and criticisms against India and Pakistan triggered defections from existing Kashmiri militant groups to what soon became IS-H, which had Kashmir as its epicenter ([Deccan Chronicle](#), November 22, 2017; [Scroll](#), March 19, 2018; [New Indian Express](#), June 5, 2019). [5]

After IS-H’s formation, IS’ Arabic-language weekly magazine *al-Naba*, Issue 221, further published a scathing criticism against India’s new Citizenship Act in February 2020 and blamed the Act’s passing on democratic institutions and anti-Muslim government policies ([Al-Naba No. 221](#), February 13). Jundul Khilafa’s media houses, such as al-Qitaal, also engaged in propagating IS-H through its monthly magazine *Sawt-al-Hind* (Voice of India) distributed through Telegram. On February 24, *Sawt al-Hind*’s first issue was launched and called for



jihad in response to rights violations against Muslims throughout India. It further urged Indian Muslims to “wake up and fight against the atrocities” committed by the Hindu nationalist government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In addition, it demanded Indian Muslims to abandon peaceful protests and “rubbing shoulders with communists, atheists, Christians and secularists,” and to establish Islamic rule in India. The issue reproduced material from IS’ magazine *Rumiyah*’s first September 2016 issue, including tributes to slain IS-H fighters.

Meanwhile, *Sawt al-Hind* also quoted rival al-Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki’s now-famous line, “The caravan is moving, the more you delay in joining it, further, it will get away and the harder it will be to catch up with,” to invite al-Qaeda members to defect to IS-H ([Sawt al-Hind](#), February 24). The second *Sawt al-Hind* issue, among other themes, exploited the COVID-19 pandemic and urged Indian jihadists to target security forces deployed on the streets “with a sword or a knife or even a rope.” The issue argued COVID-19 was a “force” of God (Allah) “to create chaos among the non-Muslim countries, including India” ([Sawt al-Hind](#), March 25).

The third issue of *Sawt al-Hind* echoed the concept of Ghazwat-ul-Hind (Final Battle of India), which for the first time resembled the narratives pushed by al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and its affiliated Kashmiri jihadist groups ([Sawt al-Hind](#), April 22). Nevertheless, *Sawt al-Hind* regularly featured criticisms against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, including, for example, in Issue 2, which featured an article titled “Taliban: From Jihad to Apostasy” ([Sawt al-Hind](#), March 25). Also notable about *Sawt al-Hind* was its broadening of the perceived geographical influence of IS-H, calling on Muslims in Pakistan, Kashmir, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka and India to join and wage jihad.

Subsequent *Sawt al-Hind* issues had dedicated pages on other South Asian countries and praised IS attacks, including for example, arson in the Maldives in Issues 3 and 4 and a “sorcerer’s” beheading in Bangladesh in Issue 7 ([Sawt al-Hind](#), April 22; [Sawt al-Hind](#), May 23; [Sawt al-Hind](#), August 23). Similarly, the April 2019 Easter Sunday violence in Sri Lanka received mention in *Sawt al-Hind* Issue 3, with praise for the attackers’ “shedding the blood of Crusaders” and “glorifying the Caliphate.” *Sawt al-Hind* Issue 5 further distributed transcripts of IS official spokesperson Abu Hamza al-Quraishi’s audio statement in at least 14 languages, in-

cluding Maldivian Divehi, Urdu, and Bengali ([Sawt al-Hind](#), June 22). The magazine, whose ninth issue was released in October 2020, has continuously published jihadist interviews, honored slain fighters, provided news from Khorasan to Syria, and posted a gruesome image of the beheading of a French schoolteacher in October 2020. The most recent Issue 10 also carried an excerpt from the latest speech of IS spokesman Abu Hamza al-Quraishi, which urged Muslims to defend the honor of Prophet Muhammed, and mentioned incidents of blasphemy in the Indian Subcontinent and beyond ([Sawt al-Hind](#), November 20).

Although *Sawt al-Hind* has insinuated a pan-Indian subcontinent orientation, neither *Sawt al-Hind* nor other propaganda from IS-H has highlighted pro-IS developments in southern India, such as Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, or Andhra Pradesh, where efforts were previously made to recruit for IS ([One India](#), June 24). *Sawt al-Hind* magazine has nevertheless eulogized several suicide bombers from Kerala, who fought with IS-K, including Abu Khalid al-Hindi, who led the attack on a Sikh *gurdwara* in Kabul in March 2020, and Abu Rawaha al-Hindi, who conducted a suicide bombing at a prison in Jalalabad, Afghanistan in August 2020 ([Sawt al-Hind](#), September 22; [Sawt al-Hind](#), October 20). While these eulogies could be part of establishing influence for IS in southern India, they stand out as the exception, and not the rule.

## Conclusion

A look at the messaging in *Sawt al-Hind* and attacks perpetrated by IS-H demonstrates that the group’s fighters and areas of operations remain primarily in Kashmir. IS-H’s reach elsewhere, such as southern India, is more questionable, and southern Indian jihadists may be even more inclined to join IS-K rather than IS-H. The various online pro-IS and official IS media outlets that are attempting to reach out to India’s Muslim minority throughout the country nevertheless suggest it is possible, but still not imminent, that IS-H will eventually recruit and operate in parts of India beyond its Kashmir bases.

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and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Centre or the Government of the Netherlands.

## Notes

[1] For IS-H's messaging outreach urging all Indian Muslims to join the Caliphate, See, "O Muslim Brothers of India", Telegram Channel, @Al-Hindi, June 5, 2019; "So Where are You Going: A call to Muslims of India", *Sawt al-Hind*, No.1, pp. 5-7. Also See, "Preparation of Ghazwat ul Hind," *Sawt al-Hind*, No. 3, pp.6-8.

[2] See, for example, "Interview with the Wali of Khurasan," *Dabiq*, 13, p. 53.

[3] Jundul Khilafa, "Clarification Statement", August 5, 2018.

[4] *Al-Risalah* No. 4, November 2018.

[5] "Forward," *al-Risalah*, Vol.2 (1), p.4.