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Malam Bana Musaid Reflects on His Time as Boko Haram's "Number Four"

Jacob Zenn

Boko Haram's largest and most prominent faction, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), has had no official leader since Abu Musab al-Barnawi was detained and overthrown in an internal coup in 2019 (france24.com, March 15, 2019). The rival "Shekau" faction, in contrast, has been led by a militant named Bakura since Shekau's death by suicide bombing during an ISWAP-led offensive in 2021 (punchng.com, June 17, 2021). Nonetheless, beyond Bakura and al-Barnawi—who maintains a leading role in ISWAP, but is not the official leader—few top commanders in either faction have been known to the public.

A rare opportunity to hear from another commander, Malam Bana Musaid, came when a German journalist travelled to Borno to interview him in March (welt.de, March 30). The account of the 52-year old Musaid, who has since surrendered to Nigerian authorities, appears credible and is consistent with known information about the other factions. At the same time, he

offered new information about ISWAP and Shekau's faction.

The Life Story of Shekau's Fourth-Ranked Lieutenant

Musaid claimed to have been the "number four" in Shekau's faction, serving as its "Justice Minister" until he lost hearing in one ear (during a grenade attack) and subsequently defected. This led the Shekau faction to put a bounty on Musaid's head. His initiation into the group occurred in the 1990s, when he, like Shekau, began following Boko Haram founder Muhammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Nigeria. In yet another odd similarity, both Shekau and Musaid were perfume salesmen at the time (Telegram, May 10, 2019).

Notable was Musaid's claim that Boko Haram obtained weapons from sources in Chad after Nigerian security forces killed Yusuf in 2009. In contrast, Yusuf's son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, had claimed that the group received weapons from Niger after Yusuf's death. Although the security forces in Niger and Cameroon have both arrested arms suppliers for the Boko Haram factions active in their respective territories, one of the Shekau faction's main arms suppliers

was, in fact, based in N'Djamena, Chad ([PMNewsNigeria](#), July 3, 2015).

As Justice Minister, Musaid carried out death sentences against his faction's enemies with Shekau's approval. Unlike ISWAP, however, Shekau's fighters were free to loot from villages; this provided the "salaries" of Shekau's foot soldiers. ISWAP, in contrast, sought to win the respect of (and gain popular support from) local communities, relying on funding from Islamic State (IS) since 2016, when IS ejected Shekau from ISWAP. Musaid noted that Shekau had communicated with Abubakar al-Baghdadi, but Shekau's rejection of al-Baghdadi's calls for restraint in harming civilians led to IS cutting ties with the former ([Sahara Reporters](#), January 4, 2022).

Lastly, while the Nigerian government and US Treasury Department have accused Nigerian businessmen in the Middle East, and specifically the UAE, of funding ISWAP and Shekau's faction, Musaid claimed businessmen in Libya funded the group ([treasury.gov](#), March 25, 2022). This allegation is consistent with evidence found by Cameroonian authorities, which suggested that a businessman, Alhaji Abdallah, was funding ISWAP and Shekau's faction through professional ties he had with groups in Libya ([journalducameroun.com](#), June 25, 2017). This funding, in addition to taxation on civilians that ISWAP and Shekau's faction impose in their territories, has enabled the group to become well-funded.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Musaid's injury and Shekau's death provided the former with an opportunity to defect. The Nigerian government's "Safe Corridor" program is specifically designed for defectors like Musaid ([vanguardngr.com](#), May 12, 2023). While repentant jihadists like Musaid have entered the program since Shekau's death, other members of his faction have instead simply rejoined ISWAP. Unless more commanders follow Musaid's footsteps,

ISWAP will continue to benefit from Shekau's death and his faction's increasing dominance of the Nigerian jihadist environment.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Militant Leadership Monitor.

A Profile of Wadhawa Singh Babbar: The Pakistan-Based Leader of the Pro-Sikh Babbar Khalsa International

Syed Fazl-e-Haider

Wadhawa Singh Babbar is the leader of Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), or "Tigers of the True Faith," which is a proscribed terrorist and separatist organization operating in India's state of Punjab. BKI is struggling to establish a state for Sikhs known as "Khalistan," by means that include violence ([Ministry of Home Affairs, India](#), July 1, 2020). The group formed after the 1978 Baisakhi (a Sikh community festival celebrated to mark the beginning of the Sikh New Year). At that time, clashes took place between two sects of the Sikh community: Akhand Kirtani Jatha (a sect of Sikhism dedicated to the Sikh lifestyle) and Nirankaris (a sect of Sikhism that accepts the authority of a living guru or spiritual guide). At present, BKI is an international organization, which is active in Canada, the US, UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Norway, and Pakistan ([Times of India](#), October 15, 2011).

In March, Indian authorities in Punjab claimed that the Babbar-led BKI is among nine groups actively involved in terrorist activities in Punjab ([Economic Times](#), March 22). This was after the Indian government designated Babbar a terrorist in 2020 for his involvement in attacks from across India's border with Pakistan; these actions had been performed with the aim of reviving militancy in Punjab ([Government of India](#), July 1,

2020). Indian authorities believe that Babbar is currently leading the BKI from Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore ([Times of India](#), October 15, 2011). Indeed, BKI has proven to be more resilient than other militant groups operating in Punjab, likely because it receives support from actors outside India, to include Babbar himself.

Early Life and career

Babbar was born in Punjab on July 17, 1954. His father, Amar Singh, was a resident of the village of Sadhu Chattha (near Kapurthala) in Punjab state ([Ministry of Home Affairs, India](#), July 1, 2020). Babbar's political career began when he joined a local Naxalite group—India's restive Maoist movement—in the 1970s. The Naxalites launched a rebellion, with peasants rising up to redistribute land away from landlords; this failed, frustrating Babbar. As a result, he conversely joined the far-right section of the Sikh movement, Akhand Kirtani Jatha, in 1978. Impressed by Tarsem Singh Kalasanghian, the top figure in the Khalistan movement, Babbar switched allegiances again, becoming a founding member of BKI. In 1981, he was accused of murder, having four cases set up against him by local authorities in Punjab; few details are available regarding said charges ([Indian Express](#), December 4, 2008).

Involvement in Terrorism

Authorities allege that Babbar recruited people from Punjab to carry out attacks against the Indian state. In addition, Babbar set up BKI's "preaching wings," which organized events on a regular basis. These events were held to garner public support for BKI's goal of establishing a separate state for the Sikhs, as well as recruit fighters to conduct terrorist attacks against the Indian people and their government ([Ministry of Home Affairs, India](#), July 1, 2020). These attacks included:

- The 1985 bombing of an Air India Kanishka plane, which killed 329 passengers;
- The 1995 assassination of Shri Beant Singh, who was the ex-Chief Minister of Punjab, in a suicide bombing at Chandigarh;
- The 2004 Bureil Jail break in Chandigarh;
- The 2005 bomb blasts at Liberty and Satyam Cinema Halls in New Delhi, which injured more than 40 people;
- The 2007 bomb explosions at Shingar Cinema in Ludhiana, Punjab, which killed six people;
- The 2009 assassination of Rulda Singh, who was the Chief of Rashtriya Sikh Sagat, in Patiala ([Ministry of Home Affairs, India](#), July 1, 2020); and
- The 2021 attack at Ludhiana court building in Punjab, which injured five people, including two women (Babbar allegedly executed the attack with the help of local gangsters in Punjab) ([India Blooms](#), December 24, 2021).

Babbar was also allegedly involved in last year's rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) strike on the Punjab police's intelligence headquarters at Mohali; no damage was reported ([Indian Express](#), May 16, 2022). The most significant charge levelled against Babbar, however, is the allegation that he ordered the assassination of the former Punjab Chief Minister, Beant Singh. Beant Singh was murdered in 1995 in Punjab's first-ever suicide-bombing ([The Print](#), September 2022). Under Indian law, a suspect's trial cannot proceed without their presence. As a result of Babbar's hiding abroad, he has not had to stand trial ([Indian Express](#), December 4, 2008).

Conclusion

Wadhawa Singh Babbar is allegedly operating from Pakistan and has emerged as a symbol of terror for the Indian authorities in the state of Punjab. BKI's ability to conduct high-profile attacks using

local members reflects the group's well-organized network in Punjab. This raises questions about the capacity and efficiency of India's intelligence and security agencies, which have failed to unravel the BKI network in Punjab over the past three decades. The India-Pakistan blame game over the use of proxies against one another has not benefited either country, as people on both sides of the border are the victims of attacks by extremist and separatist groups. Only bilateral cooperation and a joint counter-terrorism strategy can benefit the two nations; otherwise, militants like Babbar will take refuge on whichever side of the border they can, exploiting the two neighbour's rivalry.

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How the Martyrdom of Asadullah al-Urgenchi and Abu Muhammad al-Uzbeki Inspires Future ISKP Recruits

Lucas Webber

Introduction

Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) has centralized and vastly expanded its media apparatus, while widening its scope to include more content about regional and international political topics beyond Afghanistan (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), May 6, 2022). The bolstered propaganda effort is intended in part to increase the group's reach and customize messaging to appeal to various ethnolinguistic target audiences ([Asia-Plus](#), August 1, 2022). One of the more notable aspects of this approach has been ISKP's intensified campaign to recruit, fundraise, and gain favor among Islamists in Central Asia, primarily in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), July 15, 2022). This involves, first, criticism and threats towards Central Asian governments; second, rocket attacks from within

Afghanistan directed at these countries; and, third, the exaltation of Tajik and Uzbek martyrs as examples to follow ([Caravanserei](#), April 19, 2022).

The third part of this propaganda campaign began with magazine profiles of ISKP militants Abu Muhammad al-Tajiki and Umar at-Tajiki. [1] The group then released biographies of Asadullah al-Urgenchi and Abu Muhammad al-Uzbeki to show the group's recognition of the important role that Uzbek figures have played in ISKP's historical development. In choosing these individuals, ISKP chose a prominent ideologue and a fighter to show the importance of both to the movement. In particular, al-Urgenchi's legacy lives on within ISKP's Central Asian contingent and the region's ISKP supporters more broadly. There are entire Telegram channels devoted to archiving and disseminating al-Urgenchi's lectures and works. The speeches and sermons of other former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) figures are also frequently shared on social media and messaging application groups. Their words and ideas remain highly influential among Uzbek and Central Asian radicals.

This is notable, as the center of gravity for Islamic State (IS) recruits from Central Asia was traditionally in the Middle East during the rise and fall of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria. With the loss of Baghuz, Syria in 2019, IS's Afghanistan-Pakistan branch has gradually become the leading destination for Central Asian jihadists. This is due to the ISKP propaganda campaign and the network's close geographical proximity to Central Asia ([Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst](#), August 31, 2022).

Asadullah al-Urgenchi

Issue 18 of ISKP's flagship English language *Voice of Khurasan* magazine, which is published by Al-Azaim Foundation for Media Production, features a biography of legendary IMU-turned ISKP ideologue Asadullah al-Urgenchi [2] The profiles of both al-Urgenchi and Abu Muhammad al-

Uzbeki are entries in *Voice of Khurasan's* "Memories of Shuhadah (Martyrs)" series about (mostly) foreign fighters who joined ISKP and gave their lives for the cause. The profile of al-Urgenchi started by introducing Urgenchi as "a *muhajir* (migrant) in the path of Allah, a mujahid who sacrificed his life in the field of jihad, and a teacher who fought jihad with his life, wealth, and tongue." Although he was not well known to the public—or even to researchers of jihadism in general—ISKP claimed that "among the Uzbek *Muhajirin* and *Ansars* (supporters), there are probably very few brothers who do not know this man" due to his poems, articles, books, and sermons that "found a place in the hearts" of the regional Islamic State movement ([Jihadology](#), November 25, 2022).

The author of the biography claims al-Urgenchi was born in 1976 to a family of intellectuals in the city of Urgench (inside Khorezm Region) in Uzbekistan. Throughout al-Urgenchi's youth, "he was the owner of a special virtue that befits him" and had lots of friends. Al-Urgenchi moved to Tajikistan in March 1999, and then travelled to Afghanistan later that year to join the Taliban under Mullah Muhammad Umar; al-Urgenchi would then go on to become a member of the IMU, where he pledged allegiance to the group's leader, Muhammad Takhir Farouk. From the first time they met, Farouk was immediately impressed by al-Urgenchi. Accordingly, al-Urgenchi was brought to Kabul and assigned a position at the IMU's propaganda outlet, "Jundullah." ISKP noted that the "jihadi arena was blessed with his creativity, as he had been serving the religion with his media works in the 2000s," and his first poem for the IMU was about *hijra* and tilted "Eslasam."

Following 9/11 and the American invasion of Afghanistan, al-Urgenchi and his IMU comrades moved from Afghanistan into Pakistan's Waziristan region, where al-Urgenchi had a son in 2002. ISKP described how in Waziristan he made videos, wrote books and poems, and edited the IMU's

official newspaper called "Khurasan Army." Because of this work, al-Urgenchi was eventually appointed to the top position of IMU's Jundullah by Amir Osman Adil, who had succeeded Muhammed Takhir Farouk as IMU leader after the latter's death ([Pakistan Press Foundation](#), February 4, 2011).

In 2015, al-Urgenchi, along with many other IMU militants, pledged allegiance to ISKP. Collectively, they cut ties with (and became enemies of) former allies, such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda ([The Express Tribune](#), August 7, 2015). Al-Urgenchi, his family, and much of the IMU returned to Afghanistan and settled in Nangarhar province. The article spoke of how highly regarded al-Urgenchi was as an ideologue and teacher, emphasizing the spiritual power he brought to ISKP's ranks; one IMU member stated that "Asadullah [al-Urgenchi] is my Sayyid Qutub." Al-Urgenchi continued to be a media force during his time with ISKP. The profile stated that "Khurasan [province] was the land of Islam and honor, where affairs were managed with new reforms, under the Caliph Abubakr al-Baghdadi, and Sharia was enforced." Thus, al-Urgenchi was given a large responsibility as the "promotional media officer of the [province]"—a position in which he served until his death.

The article explained how American forces conducted operations in the Tora-Bora region in October 2018, specifically hunting for al-Urgenchi. It is also mentioned that Uzbekistan's own intelligence operatives were looking for him at the same time. ISKP asserted the reason for this was that al-Urgenchi was very prominent and an "influential person among the sincere Muslims." According to ISKP, al-Urgenchi was on top of a mountain with his son browsing the internet on November 25, 2018, when he was killed by a drone strike. It is notable, however, that IMU accounts of al-Urgenchi's death contradict the details put forth by ISKP. IMU audio recollections circulated online claims that he was captured and executed by the Taliban in

2015. [3] Regardless of these discrepancies, al-Urgenchi's legacy lives on in the social media pages and messenger application channels that are devoted to his life and works.

Abu Muhammad al-Uzbeki

This trend continued in issue 20 of *Voice of Khurasan*, in which the life and legacy of Abu Muhammad al-Uzbeki was celebrated by ISKP. [4] Al-Uzbeki was born in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan in 1981 and relocated to South Korea for work in 2008, where he studied Islam more intensely. On the internet, al-Uzbeki found jihadist lectures by IMU figures, such as Tahir Yoldash, Juma Namangani, and Shaykh Abdul Wali Qari, and later ended up making contact with the IMU when researching the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). ISKP claims that al-Uzbeki had a dream in which IMU leader Tahir Yoldash told him that IJU had strayed from the true path of Islam, prompting his subsequent decision to join the IMU.

Al-Uzbeki moved around from Russia, to Azerbaijan, and finally Iran before landing in Miranshah, North Waziristan District in Pakistan among the IMU and other mujahidin. He was then sent for 15 days of military and religious training before participating in militant action. Afterwards, he performed various roles, ranging from driving personnel carriers to and from battle to serving as a combat medic ([Jihadology](#), January 17).

In late 2014, al-Uzbeki and other IMU fighters relocated from Pakistan to Afghanistan's Zabul, and later pledged allegiance to Islamic State in 2015 ([Caravanserai](#), October 7, 2016). Consequently, the IMU began to fight the Taliban, who ISKP now accuses of slaughtering the elderly, women, and children of over 150 IMU mujahidin. Al-Uzbeki was captured alive during the battles and then executed alongside other IMU fighters.

Conclusion

Just as prominent Uzbek jihadists and ideologues inspired Asadullah al-Urgenchi and Abu Muhammad al-Uzbeki to make hijrah and join the IMU, ISKP hopes the exaltation of these martyrs will appeal to and attract Uzbek and Central Asian foreign fighters. The stories of these two martyrs are intended to appeal to ethno-linguistic Uzbek populations and show how people like them have achieved jihadist success. In the past, ISKP has celebrated Uzbek suicide bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but these two in-depth profiles are unprecedented, marking an intensification of Uzbek-directed outreach for recruitment.

It is also notable that the Taliban's alleged execution of IMU fighters and slaughter of their innocent families looms large in Central Asian ISKP organizational lore. This is meant to evoke outrage and galvanize Uzbeks into supporting ISKP, as well as turn fence-sitters against the Taliban. ISKP also wants to incite followers to conduct attacks inside Central Asia, and such tales of these regional jihadist legends may move some to do so in the near future.

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Notes:

[1] Islamic State Khurasan Province: Al-Azaim Foundation's *Voice of Khurasan* magazine issue 16 (October 17, 2022)

[2] Islamic State Khurasan Province: Al-Azaim Foundation's *Voice of Khurasan* magazine issue 18 (November 25, 2022)

[3] Former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan member released an audio account which was recirculated on Telegram in early 2022

[4] Islamic State Khurasan Province: Al-Azaim Foundation's *Voice of Khurasan* magazine issue 20 (January 25, 2022)

Ustaz Ahmad Farooq's Lasting Legacy in the South Asian Jihadist Ecosystem

Riccardo Valle and Kiran Butt

In March, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)'s prominent *Hitteen* magazine published a 455-page book. It covered the life of former AQIS top ideologue Ustad Ahmad Farooq and was written by current AQIS deputy leader Atif Yahya Ghouri—an individual on the US Department of Treasury's list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists ([Twitter/TheKhorasanDiary](#), December 2, 2022). Published in July 2020, the book's purpose is not only to narrate the trajectory of Farooq, but also to use a widely known and prolific jihadist scholar and leader's life story to expand the organization's own narrative. [1]

Structured into fourteen chapters, the book stresses how Farooq demonstrated a natural inclination towards people, and was able to discuss with them different religious issues and convince them of his own ideas. Beyond being just a jihadist commander, Farooq's goal was to create a united jihadist front in the region. Notably, Farooq's main role was linking several militant outfits in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In particular, he devoted his work into training and coordinating "mujahideen" from the tribal areas, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after its inception in 2007.

For instance, when militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) clashed with Ahmadzai Wazir tribesmen in Wana in 2007, Farooq was sent there to mediate ([Dawn News](#), April 5, 2007). He then started a broad process of harmonization of all jihadist factions in Pakistan, which culminated in his assisting the TTP—especially the Mehsud tribe, which included TTP leaders Baitullah Mehsud and Waliur Rehman Mehsud. Likewise, he cemented the relations between Pashtun tribesmen and Punjabi

militants; he also became responsible for setting up and managing al-Qaeda's affiliate in Bangladesh, Ansar Bangla ([OutlookIndia](#), May 29).

Ahmad Farooq quickly rose to prominence through al-Qaeda's ranks thanks to his ability as an ideologue and strategist. Before becoming a top leader of al-Qaeda in Pakistan, he managed the organization's Urdu language media arm, As-Sahab Media Urdu, which helped him spread his narrative. When al-Qaeda in Pakistan was founded after the tragic incident of the Lal Masjid in 2007, Farooq was appointed deputy to its leader Dr. Arshad Waheed, despite his young age ([Dawn News](#), July 14, 2007). When Waheed was killed in 2008, Farooq was appointed—temporary at first, and then officially—head of al-Qaeda in Pakistan. Shortly afterward, in 2010, Farooq became part of al-Qaeda's Central Shura (a sort of ruling council), maintaining regular contact with Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri. In the eight years since al-Zawahiri's death in 2015, the delicate situation for militant organizations in the Af-Pak region has left organizations like al-Qaeda and AQIS in a precarious position. These shifting sands have proven fertile ground for Ahmad Farooq's ideology, which has become instrumental as a token of unity among al-Qaeda-linked jihadist entities in the region.

Farooq as an Ideological Unifier for Jihadist Movements

Considering the key roles that Farooq occupied as an ideologue in al-Qaeda in Pakistan and in AQIS—as well as AQIS's relationship with the TTP—AQIS sees him as one of the main sources of jihadist political and religious discourse. This made him ideologically attractive for jihadists. From October 2021 to September 2022, AQIS published a seven-part series in its official magazine *Nawa-e-Ghazwa-e-Hind* featuring speeches from Farooq on various topics. While some of these issues related to purely religious subjects, others delved into Pakistan's political and militant landscape. Farooq criticized Pakistan's

political parties at length for acting as nationalists advocating for secular ideologies and/or ethno-linguistic identities ([Blitz](#), September 5, 2022). [2] Prior to this, Farooq had extensively written about the political situation in Pakistan in two of his books, "Why Jihad in Pakistan" and "Jihad in Pakistan Must Continue," which address religious struggle in the country from different perspectives. Both can still be found on the TTP's official website, as they contribute substantial arguments to the group's overall narrative. Similarly, the TTP's emphasis on socio-economic issues in the country follows Farooq's approach, as found in his video "Pakistan's Problems and Solutions," which was published by As-Sahab Media Urdu.

Additionally, AQIS relied on Farooq's writings to address relations with other jihadist groups, to include rivals and allies. In January 2022, AQIS shared a Farooq-authored article on relations between the TTP and AQIS, which stressed the need for unity of action between the two in order to avoid competition and possible supremacy of one organization over the other. The text was published in mid-2020, when the TTP and AQIS relations were tense due to the strategic posture of the former towards its conflict in Pakistan and the choice of the group's leader, Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, to publicly distance his organization from the notion of global jihad ([The Khorasan Diary](#), January 27). [3]

Farooq vis-à-vis ISKP and the Afghan Taliban

More recently, AQIS also published an article originally written by Farooq in July 2014 on Islamic State (IS) and Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP)'s war against the Afghan Taliban, with the aim of discrediting rival jihadist organizations. [4] Farooq was among the first top jihadist ideologues in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to publicly support the Afghan Taliban, and his arguments remain central in the AQIS's rejection of IS and ISKP. Prior to this article, Farooq had written a treatise in Arabic in 2013, which analytically

dismantled IS ideology vis-à-vis al-Qaeda; the book allegedly became very popular in Syria, and was distributed among al-Qaeda affiliates in the region. [5] Similarly, another of Farooq's articles (this one published in 2014) exposed IS's crimes against Taliban founder Mullah Muhammad Omar. [6]

Beyond just AQIS, al-Qaeda too has recently started to rely on Farooq as a tool to boost its own propaganda. In August 2022, al-Qaeda Central published issue 7 of its Arabic magazine *One Ummah*, which featured a eulogy of Farooq written by his childhood friend and close aid Ibrahim Ghouri in 2015. The text highlights connections between al-Qaeda Central and al-Qaeda in Pakistan by disclosing pictures of Farooq with al-Qaeda senior leaders and mentors ([Twitter/TheKhorasanDiary](#), August 26, 2022). Similarly, in December 2022, al-Qaeda published the first episode of the archived video series by late al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri called "Martyrs of Waziristan," which was dedicated to late AQIS leaders Qari Imran, Ahmad Farooq, and Dr. Abu Khaled. ([Twitter/NihadJariri](#), December 23, 2022). While only the episode of Qari Imran has been released, the second episode is expected to be dedicated to Farooq, as the latter was killed shortly after the former and both had been eulogized by late AQIS emir Asim Umar in early 2015.

Conclusion

AQIS, like al-Qaeda, is often dependent on the instructions given by the Afghan Taliban. In a letter exchange between AQIS emir Usama Mahmood and the TTP leadership in 2020, AQIS revealed its full support for the Afghan Taliban, while asking the TTP to lay down its weapons against Pakistan and not to damage relations between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani government. In the letter, AQIS disclosed its strategy of using Afghanistan as a platform for attacking targets and regions of Western allies, such as Kashmir, India, and Bangladesh. ([The Khorasan Diary](#), February 8).

In a context where AQIS has limited room for maneuver, the organization has to keep a low profile while relying on figures from the past to remain relevant. Ahmad Farooq is still a key figure who provided a unifying message for all the disparate jihadist organizations in Pakistan; Farooq remains a figure of admiration for groups that currently try to distance themselves from al-Qaeda for political reasons, such as the TTP. Although al-Qaeda confirmed Farooq's killing in 2015, his writings and ideology are still inspiring jihadist militants today ([Dawn](#), April 13, 2015).

A senior TTP leader who had been very close to Farooq revealed that he was a very visionary. He met Farooq in 2006, and until his last days he remained in contact with him. He also stated that Farooq's ideas and thoughts are still relevant, even as the tactics of jihadism evolve. [7] Overall, the impact of the legacy of Farooq's ideology rests in its anti-state narratives, which are commonly shared among militants across the jihadist spectrum. This is particularly true among former students of Farooq, many of whom are now in senior positions within AQIS and other regional jihadist organizations, *in primis*, the TTP.

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Notes:

[1] Hafiz Suhaib Ghouri [Atif Yahya Ghouri], *Aise Hoti Hain Islam Ke Rahnuma, Hitteen*, 2020

[2] *Nawa-e-Ghazwa-e-Hind*, page 18, November-December 2021 issue.

[3] *Nawa-e-Ghazwa-e-Hind*, page 19, January 2022 issue.

[4] *Nawa-e-Ghazwa-e-Hind*, page 64, December 2022 issue.

[5] Ahmad Farooq, *Be Like the Bee* (original in Arabic), 2013.

[6] Ahmad Farooq, *Mujahideen Ko Dar Pesh Ek Aham Fitna*, 2014.

[7] Remote interview conducted with the authors on May 2, 2023.