Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) Chief's Killing

Why is News?

The National Directorate of Security (NDS) recently declared that the chief of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) had been killed.

What is the story behind?

- The NDS, the Afghan Intelligence declared that the AQIS' chief Asim Umar was killed in a US-Afghan raid on a Taliban compound in Helmand on September 23, 2019.
- Till date, the AQIS official media or their social media accounts have neither confirmed nor accepted this claim.
- Taliban termed the report as fabricated propaganda making no comment on AQIS or Umar.
- It is highly likely that Umar, India born, has been killed.
- However, his death is not going to halt concerted efforts by AQ/AQIS network to re-calibrate its activities in South Asia, especially in India.

How did they spread in South Asia?

- After the killing of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011 and with the rise of AQ In Iraq (or ISIL) in 2013, most experts believed that the AQ network had lost its capability to mount a global jihad.
- ISIL became the principal challenge to international security worldwide.
- The AQ top leadership, which included Chief Ayman al Zawahiri, continued to operate from the Af-Pak region.
- However, AQ media also started churning out audios, videos and online magazines on South Asia.
- The key faces of such propaganda were Asim Umar, and Ustad Ahmed Farooq, a Pakistani of solid standing amongst jihadis of the region.
- Their sermons targeted India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, US and Pakistan.
- This group had already started identifying themselves as AQ in South Asia, suggesting a South Asia-focused AQ branch.
- It exhorted the Muslims of these countries to wage jihad in their own countries against pro-West governments.
- The AQIS was formally declared on September 3, 2014, through a video in which **Asim Umar** as the **chief** and **Usama Mehmood** as the

spokesperson of the group.
- Soon, the group started claiming the killing of prominent intellectuals in Bangladesh and participating in Afghan jihad along with the Taliban.

What happened in India?

- The Sambhal resident Mohd Asif and Cuttack-based Maulana Abdul Rehman were arrested by the Delhi Police special cell in 2015.
- This established that Umar was originally from Sambhal and his name was Sanaul Haq.
- He studied at Deoband with Rehman and later fled to Pakistan where he joined Harkat ul Mujahideen.
- The arrests pointed out that **AQIS was trying to recruit cadres in India** for training in Pakistan and Rehman was aiding the process.
- The Delhi police charge sheet stated that Rehman disclosed how, after his training in a LeT camp in Muzaffarabad (PoK), he was taken by LeT operative Farhatullah Ghori to Rawalpindi Jail.
- There he met LeT operational chief Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi.
- The LeT link of Rehman made it very clear that **AQ- LeT- Pak ISI link was intact**.
- AQIS was a new name for the same set of jihadis focussed on targeting Indian interests apart from that of other region.

What are the activities by the AQ media network?

- It has been churning out substantial propaganda, including bringing out ISIL-style updates of its daily actions against its enemies.
- Their channels are now reporting activities of all branches together under the brand name “As Sahab media”.
- It added on these channels was a video posted by AQ chief Zawahiri on Kashmir in July 2019 calling for jihad in Kashmir.
- It asserted that Pakistan had prevented Arab Mujahideen from coming to Kashmir after the withdrawal of Russia from Afghanistan.
- In an AQIS video, Usama did some Pakistan bashing for them betraying Kashmiris, but called for attacks on Indian interests.
- Portraying killed-Kashmiri commanders as heroes, the video clearly aimed at radicalising and recruiting cadres in Kashmir, mainland India and South Asia.
- Through a clip of Pakistan PM Imran Khan preventing Pakistanis from joining jihad in Kashmir, it tried to show him as a traitor of the Muslim cause.

What is the challenge to South Asia’s security?

- The principal challenger has always been the **AQ network** which includes the Afghan Taliban, factions of the TTP, LeT, JeM, HUJI.
- The Taliban was posturing to give counter-terror assurance to the US with regards to severing its ties with the AQ.
- The AQ network has become more aggressive with its propaganda, and is calling for attacks across South Asia.
- The group has reposted a lot of old propaganda, including those showing the Pakistani army in poor light.
- This seems to be a design to mask the connections of the group with the deep state in Pakistan.
- All recent activities of the AQ and AQIS suggest that the group is making all-out efforts to recruit cadres from across South Asia.
- The call for a tehreek from Kashmir unifying the jihadis of South Asia has the potential to exploit an emotive issue.
- It has called for attacks on Indian interests, not just in India, but also beyond India.
- The intensity of its propaganda and the current strength of the group across many parts of the world makes it a potent network.

Source: The Indian Express

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering