**Background**

Al-Qaeda is an Islamic extremist organization founded in 1988 by Usama Bin Ladin and other Arab foreign fighters who fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, al-Qaeda fought to remove the US military presence from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia. In 1996, Bin Ladin declared war on the United States because of its presence in the Gulf region.

On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda hijacked and crashed four US commercial jets—two into the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon, and a fourth into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania—killing nearly 3,000. After the attacks, al-Qaeda expanded and established franchises, primarily across the Middle East and South Asia.

**Threat to New Jersey: Low**

Al-Qaeda lacks the presence and capability to carry out an attack in the United States or New Jersey. Although al-Qaeda remains intent on attacking the United States and US interests overseas, the group continues to experience a decrease in operational capabilities because of its involvement in regional conflicts, leadership losses, and competition with other terrorist groups.

- The last al-Qaeda-inspired plot in New Jersey was in 2007, when six individuals—known as the Fort Dix Six—plotted to attack Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in Burlington County.

- In 2015 and 2016, none of the detected attacks or plots in the United States had direct ties to al-Qaeda. Although influenced by multiple terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, plots and attacks in New Jersey, New York, California, and Tennessee mostly drew inspiration from Salafi-jihadism, a puritanical and literalist interpretation of Islam whose adherents view themselves as the only true Muslims and justify the killing of non-believers.

- Al-Qaeda continues to compete with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for recruits. Only one of the eight US persons arrested in 2016 for traveling or attempting to travel to join a terrorist group attempted to join an al-Qaeda affiliate—the Nusrah Front. The rest joined or attempted to join ISIS.

**US Nexus**


- In 2013, California authorities arrested a man attempting to travel to Pakistan to provide training to al-Qaeda. Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen was sentenced to 13 years in prison.

- After attempting to detonate an inert explosive in Manhattan’s financial district in 2012, Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

- In 2011, Jose Pimentel was sentenced to 16 years for plotting to use pipe bombs in New York City. That same year, Rezwan Ferdaus was sentenced to 17 years for a plot to attack the Pentagon and US Capitol with remote-controlled planes on behalf of al-Qaeda.

**Additional Resources**

- Zawahiri: Reasserting Authority
- Al-Qaeda: Leveraging the Nusrah Front in Syria
- Podcast Episode 30: Al-Qaeda’s Shifting Sands with Barak Mendelsohn
- Podcast Episode 10: Battle of the Brands—ISIS vs al-Qaeda

**Contact Information**

For more information, please contact NJOHSP’s Analysis Bureau at analysis@njohsp.gov or 609-584-4000.

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**Table: Al-Qaeda Affiliates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliate</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Formed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nusrah Front</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb</td>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Shabaab</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent</td>
<td>Indian Subcontinent</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listed in order of operational capability.