NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL

INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

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Prospects for al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan and Globally Through 2024

(U) Key Takeaway

██████ We assess that al-Qa'ida probably will prioritize preserving its sanctuary over conducting operational activity in Afghanistan during the next two years. We do not assess that al-Qa'ida has the personnel, infrastructure, or unique capabilities to pose a threat to the United States from Afghanistan at this point. Any changes to al-Qa'ida's presence in the country probably will occur gradually and are unlikely to include the capability to direct external operations through 2024. Al-Qa'ida probably will shelter a few leaders and conduct other activities in Afghanistan—such as media production, recruitment, facilitation, and training—that have the potential to enable or inspire attacks elsewhere. The group's trajectory in Afghanistan will continue to depend on Taliban will and ability to enforce restrictions; the conditions in Afghanistan relative to other geographic areas, including perceived CT pressure; and al-Qa'ida's leadership focus. The strength of the global network will continue to hinge on the capabilities of its affiliates and leaders' ability to drive a unified strategy.

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████████████████ **Key Judgment 1: Al-Qa'ida probably will prioritize preserving its safe haven over conducting operational activity in Afghanistan and is unlikely to reconstitute the capability to direct external operations from the country through 2024; it has little infrastructure in place in Afghanistan and can rely on the attack capabilities its affiliates in the Middle East and Africa possess.** Al-Qa'ida leaders will choose not to jeopardize their use of Afghanistan, which is one of only a few viable locations for leadership refuge.

████████████████ **Key Judgment 2: The threat from al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan will depend on the Taliban, the appeal of Afghanistan relative to other geographic areas, and leadership focus.** The Taliban's will and capability to restrict al-Qa'ida will be the primary factor that determines the threat emanating from Afghanistan. Thus far, the Taliban's strictures have by and large been observed by al-Qa'ida, and we assess that this probably will remain the case during the next two years, as the group recognizes the need for Taliban support to maintain a presence in Afghanistan. Al-Qa'ida leaders' perception of CT pressure also will influence Afghanistan's appeal as a place where they can live securely.

████████████████ **Key Judgment 3: The strength of al-Qa'ida's global network will depend on the capabilities of its affiliates and leaders' ability to drive a unified strategy, whether the group reemerges in Afghanistan or not.** Al-Qa'ida's decentralized structure allows affiliates to pursue regional objectives while receiving input and guidance from al-Qa'ida's relatively isolated leadership cadre, which continues to advocate for attacks against the West.