

## **Iraqi Insurgent Media: The War of Images and Idea**

**How Sunni Insurgents In Iraq And Their Supporters  
Worldwide Are Using The Media<sup>1</sup>**

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### **1. Key Findings**

- **Sunni insurgents in Iraq and their supporters worldwide are exploiting the Internet to pursue a massive and far-reaching media campaign.** Insurgent media are forming perceptions of the war in Iraq among the best-educated and most influential segment of the Arab population.
- **The Iraqi insurgent media network is a boon to global jihadist media,** which can use materials produced by the insurgency to reinforce their message.
- **Mainstream Arab media amplify the insurgents' efforts,** transmitting their message to an audience of millions.
- **The insurgent propaganda network does not have a headquarters, bureaucracy, or brick-and-mortar infrastructure.** It is decentralized, fast-moving, and technologically adaptive.
- **The rising tide of Sunni-Shi'ite hate speech in Iraqi insurgent media points to the danger of even greater sectarian bloodshed.** A wealth of evidence shows that hate speech paved the way for genocide in Rwanda in 1994.
- **The popularity of online Iraqi Sunni insurgent media reflects a genuine demand for their message in the Arab world.** An alternative, no matter how lavishly funded and cleverly produced, will not eliminate this demand.

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- **There is little to counter this torrent** of daily press releases, weekly and monthly magazines, books, video clips, full-length films, and even television channels.
- **We should not concede the battle without a fight.** The insurgent media network has key vulnerabilities that can be targeted. These include:
  - A lack of central coordination and a resulting lack of message control;
  - A widening rift between homegrown nationalist groups and Al-Qaeda-affiliated global jihadists.

## 2. Introduction

**Sunni insurgents in Iraq and their supporters and sympathizers worldwide are pursuing a massive and far-reaching media campaign that includes daily press releases, weekly and monthly magazines, video clips, full-length films, and even television channels. *Iraqi Insurgent Media: The War of Images and Ideas* casts light on this crucial yet understudied factor in the battle to shape perceptions in Iraq and the Arab world. The report surveys the products, producers, and delivery channels of the Sunni insurgency's media network; examines their message; and gauges their impact.**

The report shows that media outlets and products created by Sunni insurgents, who are responsible for the majority of U.S. combat deaths in Iraq, and their supporters are undermining the authority of the Iraqi government, demonizing coalition forces, fomenting sectarian strife, glorifying terrorism, and perpetrating falsehoods that obscure the accounts of responsible journalists. Insurgent media seek to create an alternate reality to win hearts and minds, and they are having a considerable degree of success.

But insurgent media also display vulnerabilities. The lack of central coordination impedes coherence and message control. There is a widening rift between homegrown nationalist groups and the global jihadists who have gathered under the banner of **Al-Qaeda in Iraq**. Moreover, insurgent media have not yet faced a serious challenge to their message on the Internet.

The popularity of online Iraqi Sunni insurgent media reflects a genuine demand for their message in the Arab world. An alternative, no matter how lavishly funded and cleverly produced, will not eliminate this demand. But this does not mean we should concede the battle without a fight. The vulnerabilities of insurgent media remain to be exploited.

### 2.1 Two Days in Iraq

Presented primarily in Arabic on an array of websites unknown to most Americans and Europeans, Iraqi insurgent media hover at the margins of mainstream reports in the form of a “claim of responsibility on an insurgent website”

or a “video posted to a jihadist forum.” Such marginal references fail to convey the scope and significance of an effort that encompasses daily press releases, weekly and monthly magazines, video clips, and even full-length films.

The extent of the insurgent media network is clearly evident in coverage of the events of March 25 and 26, 2007. By the violent standards of today’s Iraq, they were unexceptional days (see Figures 1 and 2). In central Baghdad, a suicide car bombing killed two Iraqis, while a roadside bomb in the capital claimed the life of a police officer. A mortar attack killed one in Al-Iskandariyah, 50 kilometers south of Baghdad. Four U.S. soldiers died in a bombing in Diyala Governorate, and another in an attack in Baghdad.

But those events are only half the story – the half told by news agencies, newspapers, television channels, and official statements. Iraq’s Sunni insurgency, the motley collection of armed groups fighting to evict U.S. forces and supplant rival domestic claimants to rule Iraq, had its own story to tell about what took place on March 25 and 26. Posted to sympathetic websites on the Internet, the insurgents sang the praises of their self-proclaimed quest to rid Iraq of foreign “crusaders” and domestic enemies.

The following are excerpts from some, but by no means all, of the statements issued by Iraqi insurgent groups on operations they claim to have carried out on March 25 and 26:

- The **Al-Fajr Media Center** reported on March 27 that “the ‘God Bless Its Men’ forces of the Islamic State of Iraq detonated a truck loaded with explosives near a gathering of crusaders in the Al-Bu Hayat region south of the city of Al-Hadithah in Al- Anbar Governorate, completely destroying four Humvees, killing 15 crusaders, and seriously wounding another 20. This took place on March 26, praise be to God. These operations were carried out in the course of the Raid to Avenge Honor<sup>2</sup> announced by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State of Iraq.”
- The **Just Vengeance Brigades** announced on March 27 that “the Lions of Truth from the Just Vengeance Brigades struck a group affiliated with the army of Muqtada the Filthy<sup>3</sup> with a Katyusha rocket in the Hayy al-Adil neighborhood near the Al-A’imma Husayniyah. This took place at 11:00 in the morning on March 25.”
- The **Mujahidin Army** announced on March 27 that “at 8:30 in the morning on March 25, a four-wheel-drive vehicle belonging to one of the companies that supplies the crusader bases north of Baghdad was destroyed by a blast from an explosive device planted on the side of the Samarra-Baghdad highway, killing and wounding those inside it” (see Figure 3).

<sup>2</sup> Islamic State of Iraq/Al-Qaeda (ISI/Al-Qaeda) announced the raid in March 2007 in retribution for the reported rape of a Sunni Iraqi woman identified as Sabrin al-Janabi by Shi’ite police officers in February 2007 (see Section 7.2, The Sabrin al-Janabi Case).

<sup>3</sup> Lit. “muqtada al-qadhir,” a disparaging pun on the name of Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical Shi’ite leader.



*Figure 1. An Iraqi boy passes by a damaged house after a mortar attack in Baghdad, March 26, 2007 (epa)*



*Figure 2. A British soldier takes position during a patrol in Al-Basrah, March 26, 2007 (epa)*

- **Ansar al-Sunnah** announced on March 26: “Guided by God, the Highest and the Powerful, your heroic brothers, lions of the Allies, on this day, March 26, at 12 noon, were able to attack a convoy of crusader forces using light and medium machine guns and RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades]. This took place in the door- and window-makersarea on the right side of Mosul.<sup>4</sup> By God’s grace, the attack led to the destruction and burning of a vehicle and the death and wounding of those in it. The brothers withdrew safe and sound, praise be to God” (see Figure 4).
- The **Al-Fajr Media Center** reported on March 27 that “a brave, daring brother, one of the heroes of the Islamic State of Iraq, a member of the Martyrdom-Seekers Brigade... set out on Monday, March 26, and plunged his explosives-laden car into a command post of the American crusader army at the Jerusalem intersection in the Al-Mafriq district of Diyala Governorate. Our heroic brother cried out, ‘Allahu Akbar,’ and detonated the car... killing more than 11 soldiers of the Idolatrous Guard<sup>5</sup> and destroying two Bradley armored fighting vehicles belonging to the American crusader army and killing and wounding those in them” (see Figure 5).



*Figure 3. A March 27, 2007, press release from the Just Vengeance Brigades*

<sup>4</sup> The right bank of the Tigris River, which divides Mosul, has a predominantly Sunni Arab population.

<sup>5</sup> Lit. “al-haras al-wathani,” a disparaging pun on “al-haras alwatani,” the National Guard.



Figure 4. A March 26, 2007, press release from Ansar al-Sunnah



Figure 5. A March 27, 2007, press release from ISI/Al-Qaeda distributed by the Al-Fajr Media Center

## 2.2 The War of Ideas

Much has been written about the war of ideas in the years since September 11, 2001. The 2003 war in Iraq, and the subsequent fate of the U.S.-led effort to remake that country, only sharpened the polemic. The two visions of Iraq presented above—one by the international media establishment, and another by the uncoordinated collective efforts of Iraqi insurgent groups—are a reflection of the daily skirmishes that take place not only on the battlefields of Iraq, but also in the ongoing struggle to direct the flow of information that shapes perceptions in the Arab world.

This report brings Iraqi insurgent media from the margins to center stage so that outsiders without a command of Arabic can glimpse the “other half” of what is happening in Iraq as it is presented by the other side. Section 3 surveys the media products created by Iraqi insurgents and their ideological allies inside and outside of Iraq. Section 4 examines the main producers of insurgent media. Section 5 looks at the delivery platforms of Iraqi insurgent media, from websites to print. Section 6 looks at the target audience, accuracy and coherence, message and ideology, and tendencies and trends in Iraqi insurgent media.

The report also includes two brief case studies:

- 1) a “day in the life” of Iraq’s insurgent media, highlighting the media products offered up by insurgents and their sympathizers on April 22, 2007; and
- 2) the coverage insurgent media provided of the Sabrin al-Janabi rape case as an example of the role insurgent and allied jihadist media play in inflaming Sunni-Shi’ite tensions in Iraq.

The report is intended for policy-makers, researchers, media professionals, and all other interested individuals. Its primary purpose is to make available

to a broad segment of readers material that might otherwise be inaccessible. Its authors hope that by doing so they will generate a lively and informed discussion of the war of images and ideas in Iraq, the Arab world, and beyond, and how we in the United States might wage it more effectively.

### 3. Products

At the heart of the insurgents' media endeavor are the products they create and distribute.

These run the gamut from simple press releases to slickly produced films. This section of the report surveys the range of those products, dividing them into two broad categories: text and audiovisual materials. The survey includes not only products created by Sunni insurgents fighting in Iraq, but also texts and audiovisual materials produced by groups and individuals sympathetic to the insurgency.

#### 3.1 Texts

Insurgents have been quick to embrace the latest technological advances to produce and distribute their media products, but text remains central to their media endeavor. Text materials have a number of advantages for insurgents beyond ease of production and distribution. The written word everywhere remains the preferred medium of record and authority. For insurgents, who are eager to present themselves not as ragtag bands of guerillas, but as the tip of the spear of a far larger and more significant movement, the creation of a body of written materials is a crucial indicator of the insurgency's durability and seriousness.

Texts are also the traditional medium of ideological discourse, another important component of the insurgency. While insurgent groups represent a variety of ideological platforms, hard-line Islamist rhetoric has come to predominate. As a February 2006 report by International Crisis Group<sup>6</sup> concluded, "[V]irtually all [insurgent groups] adhere publicly to a blend of Salafism<sup>7</sup> and patriotism, diluting distinctions between foreign jihadis and Iraqi combatants...." This remains true today, as the numerous text products created by insurgents and sympathizers clearly show, although the actual commitment of individual insurgent groups to global jihadist ideology is questionable (see Section 6.3, Message and Ideology).

<sup>6</sup> *In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*, February 15, 2006, International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=3953>).

<sup>7</sup> Salafism refers to a movement that takes the first three generations of Muslims ("al-salaf al-salih," or "the virtuous ancestors") as an ideal community and espouses what one might call a "radically traditionalist" approach to personal behavior, and even political systems. Jihadist Salafists endorse violent means to restore the early Islamic community's perceived way of life in the modern world. For more on Salafism, see *Understanding Islamism*, March 2, 2005, International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3301&l=1>).

### 3.1.1 Statements

The basic unit of insurgent media textual production is the statement, usually no more than one page in length. These can be divided into two basic genres. The vast majority of insurgent statements are, in effect, press releases announcing the conduct of an “operation” against coalition military forces, Iraqi government forces and institutions, or Shi’ite militias. A smaller number of statements clarify the positions of insurgent groups on political issues.

The sheer volume of statements issued by insurgent groups is striking. Forums and “news” sites such as **World News Network** aggregate statements and organize them, frequently with logos included to ease the identification of the insurgent group associated with each statement. In March 2007, for example, two websites, **World News Network** and **Mohajroon**, a jihadist forum with a special section for insurgent statements, together posted nearly 1,000 statements issued by 11 insurgent groups (see Figure 6).

#### 3.1.1.1 Operational Statements

As noted above, statements fall into two basic genres: operational press releases and general statements. Most operational statements announce suc-

cessful attacks on coalition forces, Iraqi government forces, and Shi’ite groups and militias. A smaller number of composite operational press releases provide an overview of operations conducted within a certain period of time or in a specific geographic region. Some announce text and audiovisual publications.

In form, insurgent operational statements strive to convey credibility by mimicking press releases issued by official organizations elsewhere. They bear the official logo of the issuing group even when they appear on Internet forums. The texts are formulaic and do their best to appear factual, providing the time and location of an attack, target, a brief description of the fighting, and damage estimates, from killed and wounded “enemies” to an enumeration of equipment destroyed.

A side-by-side comparison of an April 12 press release from the U.S.

Statements by Iraqi insurgent groups in March 2007*	
Group	Total number of statements
Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI)	249
Ansar al-Sunnah	196
Islamic State of Iraq (ISI/Al-Qaeda)**	162
Mujahidin Army	143
Shield of Islam	89
Jaysh al-Fatihin	39
Jaysh al-Rashidin	33
Just Recompense Brigades	26
Islamic Front of Iraqi Resistance (JAMI)	14
Jihadist Brigades of Iraq	12
1920 Revolution Brigades	3
Total	966
<p>*Source: <b>World News Net</b> and <b>Mohajroon</b> (aggregated). Statements that may have been posted elsewhere were not included in this table, which is intended to demonstrate the general media profile of the insurgent groups on two specific websites. Because press releases sometimes appear several days after the operations they announce, attacks claimed in these statements span a period that began before March 1 and ended before March 31.</p> <p>**Proclaimed in October 2006, the <b>Islamic State of Iraq</b> is the latest iteration of <b>Al-Qaeda in Iraq</b> (see Section 4.1.1, <b>Islamic State of Iraq</b>). The group is referred to in this report as <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b>. Other insurgent groups tend to refer to <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> as <b>Al-Qaeda in Iraq</b>. The terms are used interchangeably.</p>	

Figure 6. The “statements” section of the *Mohajroon Internet forum*



Figure 7. A side-by-side comparison of a U.S. Defense Department press release and a press release from ISI/Al-Qaeda

military and a “news report” issued by **ISI/Al-Qaeda** the same day and posted to **World News Network** illustrates the extent to which insurgents attempt to reproduce the form of official press releases while adjusting the content to serve their own purposes (see Figure 7).

The genre divisions are fluid. An operational press release announcing an attack may also express a political position on a topical issue, or it may contain a link to a video record of the attack. Moreover, not all operations are easily classified. An insurgent group may carry out an attack on a U.S. convoy or a mixed convoy of U.S. and Iraqi government forces. Targets are not always indicated. Nevertheless, most statements fall into a number of general categories. The breakdown of insurgent group statements in March 2007 on page 15 provides an overview of how insurgent groups present their activities.

The fluid nature of the insurgent media network renders definitive conclusions problematic. In the absence of a centralized system for collecting and distributing insurgent press releases, we cannot be sure that the monthly totals are anything more than approximate. Evaluating the veracity of the information contained in press releases is even more problematic (see Section 6.2, Accuracy and Coherence). Nevertheless, a number of preliminary conclusions emerge.

What the press releases represent is the image of themselves that insurgent groups would like to present—who, why, how, and how often they attack, and what results they claim to achieve. The resulting picture may not correspond to reality on the ground, but it is the picture the Sunni Iraqi insurgency paints of itself in its own words.

Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy that an insurgency that emerged to combat a foreign occupying force now claims to direct the majority of its attacks against fellow Iraqis.

While the largest single group of March 2007 press releases (357) detail attacks on U.S. and coalition forces, statements describing attacks on Iraqi government forces (296) and Shi'ite militias (143) come to 439, or more than half of the total number of single-attack statements (see Figure 8).

Press releases in an ongoing insurgency generally do not provide explicit reasons for carrying out attacks. But the rhetoric employed by virtually all Sunni insurgent groups suggests an implicate reason. Unlike the rhetoric of nationalist insurgencies, the Sunni insurgency in Iraq is surprisingly uniform in its use of religious rhetoric to describe its enemies.

The vast majority of the statements issued in March 2007 use religion-based, pejorative code words for the targets of attacks.

U.S. and coalition forces are called “crusaders” and “worshippers of the cross.” Iraqi police are “apostates.” Iraq’s National Guard is the “Idolatrous Guard.” The Shi’ite **Imam**

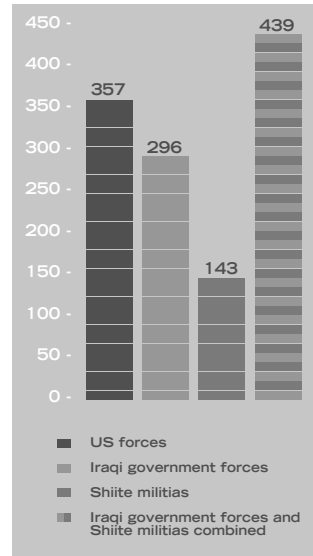


Figure 8. In March, 2007, insurgent statements that claimed a single “operation,” attacks against Iraqis outnumbered attacks against U.S. forces

Breakdown of statements issued by Iraqi insurgent groups in March 2007 on World News Network and Mohajroon\*

Group	Operations against U.S. forces	Operations against Iraqi government forces	Operations against Shi'ite groups and militias	Operations against Kurdish targets	Mixed operations	Composite operational statements**	Publication announcements (audio, video, and text)	Topical statements	Totals
IAI	80	105	47	0	9	6	1	1	249
Mujahidin Army	132	4	0	0	0	2	2	1	141
1920 Revolution Brigades***	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
ISI/Al-Qaeda	13	40	3	6	9	74	0	15	161
Jihadist Brigades of Iraq	8	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Ansar al-Sunnah	44	90	37	6	3	2	5	4	192
JAMI	13	0	0	0	1	0	13	1	14
Jaysh al-Rashidin	26	0	0	0	1	0	4	1	32
Just Recompense Brigades	0	15	11	0	0	0	0	0	26
Shield of Islam	20	37	30	0	0	0	0	0	87
Jaysh al-Fatihin	21	0	15	0	2	0	0	1	39
Totals	357	296	143	12	25	83	25	28	

\*It should be stressed that the breakdown tells us about the media impression insurgent groups created in March 2007 with their statements rather than the actual activities they may have carried out during the month. Moreover, a lag of several days sometimes occurs between the date of a claimed operation and the date of a press release. As a result, statements issued in March 2007 described operations carried out roughly from late February through late March.

\*\*Operations described in composite statements were not included in the breakdown of operations provided in the first three columns of this table, which is intended to convey the overall impression statements would make on a visitor to the forum(s) where they were posted, rather than provide an exhaustive analysis of all claimed operations.

\*\*\*The 1920 Revolution Brigades posts fewer statements than other insurgent groups. While the lack of statements by the group in the above chart reflects information available on the two websites used to collect the sample, statements by the group are available on other websites.

**Al-Mahdi Army**—named after the Mahdi, or redeemer, whose coming is supposed to herald the end of the world—is referred to as the “Army of the Antichrist.” Shi’a are termed “rejectionists” for their supposed rejection of true Islam. Thus, insurgents’ rhetoric implies that they fight U.S. and coalition forces because they seek to impose Christianity on Iraq, government forces because they have turned their backs on Islam, and Shi’a because they are heretics.

This explicitly religious framing of the conflict in Iraq renders insurgent rhetoric virtually indistinguishable from the rhetoric of the global jihadist movement.<sup>8</sup> Foreign jihadists have flocked to Iraq, but it should be recalled that Iraq has never had a robust domestic Islamist, let alone jihadist, movement. Moreover, there is no evidence that jihadist ideas hold any great appeal for Iraq’s Sunni population, which provides the bulk of the insurgency’s rank-and-file fighters. Nevertheless, jihadist rhetoric is the rule, not the exception, in most of the statements issued by Sunni insurgent groups, whatever their declared ideological beliefs may be.<sup>9</sup>

It is perhaps no accident, then, that the most media-savvy and politically vocal insurgent group is also the most openly jihadist. **ISI/Al-Qaeda**<sup>10</sup> is the latest iteration of an organization founded by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi and commonly known in the West as **Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia** or **Al-Qaeda in Iraq**. It issued 162 statements on **World News Network** and **Mohajroon** in March 2007, surpassed only by the **IAI** and **Ansar al-Sunnah**. Yet **ISI/Al-Qaeda** amplified its media presence by issuing a large number of composite statements (74), far more than any other group, with each one claiming responsibility for several attacks in specific regions within a set period of time (see Figure 9). Some of these composite statements summarize previously issued press releases on individual operations; others do not. While this makes it difficult to estimate the total number of operations for which **ISI/Al-Qaeda** claimed responsibility, it creates a media impression of an organization with fighters numbering in the tens of thousands, capable of carrying out intense, geographically dispersed activities.

<sup>8</sup> The global jihadist movement is defined here as the constellation of groups that espouse the ideology promoted by Al-Qaeda. In its barest outlines, this ideology posits a worldwide struggle between faith and unbelief, the need to return to the ways of the “righteous ancestors” (“al-salaf al-salih”), the legitimacy of violence to achieve political aims (jihad), the permissibility of killing Muslims who have knowingly strayed from the faith (takfir), and the necessity of targeting the United States and Israel as the leaders of a global movement to destroy Muslim identity and subjugate Muslim lands.

<sup>9</sup> The use of religious rhetoric to justify a cause is not new to Iraq. Beginning with the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war, and again following the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussein employed Islamic rhetoric as a means of justifying state policy and unifying the population against outside enemies. For more see: Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, second edition, Westview Press, 2004, p. 297.

<sup>10</sup> See RFE/RL Newsline, October 16, 2006.

As befits the group's self-aggrandizing appellation, **ISI/Al-Qaeda** also employed the most sweeping rhetoric. **ISI/Al-Qaeda** purports to control the governorates of Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Ninawah (Mosul), Diyala, Salah Al-Din, Kirkuk, and parts of Babil and Wasit. Acting as a "state," **ISI/Al-Qaeda** issued statements through its "Ministry of Information." In line with this approach, **ISI/Al-Qaeda** put out more topical statements (15) than all other groups combined (see Section 3.1.1.2, Topical and Analytical Statements).

Finally, in keeping with its openly jihadist profile, **ISI/Al-Qaeda** was the only insurgent group to make frequent and consistent references to “martyrdom-seeking operations,” or suicide attacks. In March statements, **ISI/Al-Qaeda** claimed responsibility for four suicide attacks against Kurdish targets, two against Shi’ite militias, 25 against Iraqi forces, six against mixed targets, and six against U.S. forces, for a total of 43 suicide attacks.

### 3.1.1.2 Topical and Analytical Statements

Topical statements differ from operational statements in that they speak to issues broader than military operations (see Figure 10). Most topical statements are political, addressing issues within the Iraqi polity, although an important subgroup details changes within individual insurgent groups and relations between insurgent groups. Longer topical statements provide an analytical perspective on current events or important issues. We present below an overview of the major topical statements issued by insurgent groups in March 2007.

- The **2020 Revolution Brigades** issued three topical statements. One statement, released on March 26, rejected media reports that “jihadist groups”



Figure 9. Insurgents take pains to create visually engaging materials—on the left, an ISI/Al Qaeda summary of operations for March 2–15, 2007; on the right, an ISI/Al-Qaeda map of operations for March 2–8, 2007



Figure 10. Topical statements by the IAI, ISI/Al-Qaeda, and Mujahidin Army

might engage in dialogue with the “so-called Iraqi government.” Another mourned the death of a military leader. A third detailed condolences offered by the IAI, the **Mujahidin Army**, the **Jihadist Brigades**, and **Jaysh Muhammad al-Fatih** on the death of the **1920 Revolution Brigades** military leader.

- **Ansar al-Sunnah** issued four topical statements. A long statement on March 29 warned that the “crusader and Safavid<sup>11</sup> enemies” have reached a “dead end” and are using various ruses, such as the Baghdad conference in early March,<sup>12</sup> to dissuade Iraqis from their duty to fight a jihad. Another statement denied reports that several insurgent groups, including Ansar al-Sunnah, had joined forces. Another chastised two members of Ansar

<sup>11</sup> “Safavid” refers to the Safavid dynasty in Iran, which ruled from 1502 to 1722 and established Shi’ism as the state religion of Iran. In radical Sunni usage, “Safavid” is a disparaging term for Shi’a, implying that their true allegiance is to Iran.

<sup>12</sup> Representatives from Iraq’s neighboring states, the permanent five members of the UN Security Council, the Arab League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference met in Baghdad on March 10 to discuss Iraq’s security. See *RFE/RL Newsline*, March 12, 2007 and *Iraq: Views Of Security Conference Reflexy Sectarian Divide*, Kathleen Ridolfo, RFE/RL, May 13, 2007 (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/48A73746-F04A-40FC-9A63-94EC071111B5.html>).

al-Sunnah for participating in talks with other insurgent groups without obtaining formal permission to do so. A fourth statement, billed as a “special report” on March 12, condemned U.S. efforts to engage insurgent groups in negotiations.

- **Jaysh al-Rashidin** issued one topical statement. The group’s March 7 “politival analysis” discussed a meeting between Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and a group of former Iraqi Army officers, condemning it as a U.S.-sponsored attempt to garner support for the Iraqi government.
- **Jaysh al-Fatihin** issued one statement, signed by the group’s “official spokesman,” Abu al-Hasan al-Basri, and posted to **Mohajroon** on March 22. It hailed Russian President Vladimir Putin’s address at a security conference in Munich on February 10 as a sign of declining U.S. influence and warned “the mujahidin”<sup>13</sup> not to allow others to reap the fruits of their coming victory in Iraq as took place, in the writer’s view, in the aftermath of the successful jihad against Soviet occupiers in Afghanistan.
- **JAMI** issued a single statement on March 5 on the upcoming security conference in Baghdad, condemning it as an attempt to drum up support for the U.S. occupation on the part of the “so-called Iraqi government.” The statement dismissed the Iraqi government as an Iranian-influenced Shi’ite clique dominated by “racist, sectarian parties and militias.”
- **ISI/Al-Qaeda** issued 15 topical statements in March, more than all other insurgent groups combined. The titles indicate not only the general tenor of the group’s politival pronouncements, but also the group’s attention to its image in the media, with numerous denials of news agency reports and Iraqi government statements:
  - March 1: *The Collapse Of The Al-Maliki Plan*
  - March 1: *Ministry Of War Announces The Beginning Of The Raid To Avenge Honor*
  - March 2: *The Islamic State Of Iraq Denies The [Reported] Arrest Of 30 Of Its Sons In Al-Saqlawiyah*
  - March 5: *On Al-Maliki’s Meeting With Officers Of The Former Iraqi Army*
  - March 6: *The Islamic State of Iraq Denies The Truth Of A Report On The Arrest Of One Of Its Leaders*
  - March 9: *Denial Of The Killing Of 12 Soldiers Of The Islamic State Of Iraq*
  - March 9: *Denial Of News Agency Reports On The Return Of Some Of Those Who Were Liberated*

<sup>13</sup> Lit., “those who fight the jihad” (sing., “mujahid”). A rough English translation of the term as it is used here would be “holy warriors.”

- March 9: *A Gathering Of Hypocrites<sup>14</sup> And Quislings*
- March 10: *Continuing Lies Of The Safavid Government*
- March 11: *On The Conferences Of The Enemies of God*
- March 15: *The Islamic State Of Iraq: Program And Fundamentals*
- March 19: *Denial Of A Report On The Arrest Of One Of The State's Commanders*
- March 22: *Clarification On The Latest Events In Amiriyat Al-Fallujah*
- March 22: *Denial Of A Report On The Arrest Of The Ministers Of War And Oil*
- March 28: *Details On The Raid In The City Of Mosques [Al-Fallujah] Today*

It is important to note that at the level of topical statements, insurgent media products become intermingled with statements by sympathizers who are not themselves directly connected with the insurgency. This takes place

for two reasons: 1) the Internet forums that serve as the major distribution channel for insurgent statements (see Section 5.1.3, Forums and Message Boards) are primarily jihadist in outlook and post a wide variety of materials, including statements by prominent figures in the jihadist community, and 2) many of those figures address issues related to the Iraqi insurgency, and often respond to specific statements by insurgent groups.

More importantly, topical statements also reflect divisions within the insurgency. An April 5 statement by the IAI illustrates both the intermingling of insurgent and jihadist media, and a sharp polemic between two leading insurgent groups.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 11. The first page of the IAI's 4,500-word statement on April 5, 2007, criticizing ISI/Al-Qaeda

<sup>14</sup> The term “munafiqun,” generally translated as “hypocrites,” refers to individuals who converted to Islam at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (570–632) but did not profess true Islam. Radical Sunnis use the term today to describe Muslims they do not accept as Muslims. In context, the term refers to Sunnis who recognize the Iraqi government.

<sup>15</sup> For more, see: Al-Qaeda Tactics Lead To Splits Among Insurgents, Kathleen Ridolfo, RFE/RL, April 17, 2007 (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/04/ca95fafc-1e70-450aa4bf-9417b05caa3c.html>).

The **IAI** statement (see Figure 11), which ran to nine pages and 4,500 words, criticized **ISI/Al-Qaeda** for inflexible extremism, outright banditry against civilians, and attacks on insurgent groups that refuse to swear allegiance to the putative state. The Kuwait-based radical cleric Hamid al-Ali, who is sympathetic to the jihadist wing of the Sunni insurgency but not directly affiliated with any specific group, had issued a fatwa on April 4 that was similarly critical of **ISI/ Al-Qaeda**, questioning the wisdom of proclaiming a “state” in the absence of recognized prerequisites for statehood. Participants on jihadist forums treated both statements as part of the same debate, with some seeing the appearance of two closely timed statements criticizing **ISI/Al Qaeda** as evidence of possible cooperation between Hamid al-Ali and the **IAI**.

The subsequent course of the debate sparked by the **IAI** statement presented more examples of intermingling between insurgent group statements and contributions from representatives of the larger global jihadist movement. We list below some of the responses that appeared on major jihadist Internet forums to show the interchange between insurgent groups and jihadist thinkers, the rapid unfolding of polemics in the Internet, and the differences between insurgent groups revealed by the debate (see Section 6.3.2, Ideology and Section 6.4.3, Rift Between Nationalists and Jihadists):

- April 4: Hamid al-Ali issues a fatwa criticizing **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** for announcing the establishment of the **Islamic State of Iraq** in October 2006.
- April 5: The **IAI** releases a statement lambasting **ISI/Al-Qaeda** for extremism and violent methods in dealing with other insurgent groups. The statement specifically rebutted points made by **ISI/Al-Qaeda** leader Abu Umar al-Baghdadi in a March 13 audio statement.
- April 5: Jihadist writer Lewis Atallah posts an article criticizing the **IAI** for its statement.
- April 6: Jihadist thinker Atiya Allah posts a detailed, critical commentary on the **IAI** statement. Atiya Allah’s commentary is released by the **Al-Fajr Media Center**, which is affiliated with **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.
- April 6: The administration of the **Al-Boraq** jihadist forum posts its position on the **IAI** statement, coming out on the side of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.
- April 6: The **Global Islamic Media Front (GIME)**, an **Al-Qaeda**-affiliated organization, posts a statement on Hamid al-Ali’s fatwa.
- April 7: The administration of the **Mohajroon** jihadist forum posts its position on the **IAI** statement, expressing support for **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.
- April 7: Hamid al-Ali issues a new statement clarifying and reinforcing the points he made in his April 4 fatwa.

- April 7: The **Call for Global Islamic Resistance Center** posts a statement to forums calling for unity in the dispute between the **IAI** and **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.
- April 8: **GIMF** issues a statement responding both to Hamid al-Ali and the **IAI**; the statement also promises a response from **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.
- April 11: *Al-Jazeera* interviews **IAI** spokesman Ibrahim al-Shammari, who reiterates the **IAI**'s criticisms of **Al-Qaeda in Iraq**.
- April 12: **Ansar al-Sunnah** releases a statement on the "current situation."
- April 15: **GIMF** posts a statement on the danger of "fitna."<sup>16</sup>
- April 16: Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, leader of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, issues a statement on the gains and losses of four years of "jihad" in Iraq, rebutting the **IAI**'s criticisms.

### 3.1.1.3 Programmatic Texts

Insurgent groups also produce programmatic texts outlining their basic aims and beliefs. Groups that maintain dedicated websites usually post these under the heading "our creed" or "our program". For example, the **IAI** has a section titled Our Program on its site; the **Mujahidin Army**'s site has a page titled Meet Us; and **JAMI**'s site and the **Jihadist Brigades**' site have sections titled Who We Are. Other programmatic statements are posted periodically to sympathetic sites. **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, for example, issued a written summary of a March 13, 2007 audio statement by its leader, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, that was posted to jihadist forums on March 13 under the title Program and Fundamentals.

### 3.1.1.4 Inspirational Texts

Inspirational texts pursue the dual purpose of attracting new supporters and further motivating existing supporters. Given the fluidity of genre boundaries within the myriad products emanating from the insurgency, virtually all products perform an inspirational function. Two specifically inspirational genres can be isolated from the general mass of insurgent media products. They are martyr biographies and poetry.

#### 3.1.1.4.1 Martyr Biographies

A long-established fixture of jihadist literature, the biographies of martyrs present the lives of ideal, and usually idealized, holy warriors for emulation by others. The most common subjects of martyr biographies are either well-known fighters who have perished for the cause or lesser luminaries whose lives

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<sup>16</sup> "Fitna" refers to strife within the community of Muslims.

illustrate the dedication, piety, and courage that martyrs are supposed to possess.

Biographies of the best-known martyrs are sometimes lavish affairs. Abu Mus'ab al- Zarqawi, the most famous jihadist to have died in Iraq, was the subject of a downloadable “encyclopedia” that includes not only numerous materials on the Jordanian militant’s life, but also a complete collection of his statements, essays on his beliefs and influence, and statements on the jihad in Iraq by Osama bin Laden. Formatted as a 7.7-megabyte selfcontained mini-browser, the “encyclopedia” provides users with a table of contents and convenient graphics interface.

The development of martyr biographies illustrates the growing professionalism of the insurgent media network. In May 2005, a participant in a jihadist Internet forum posted a collection of 430 biographies of martyrs in Iraq culled from newspaper accounts, forum posts, and transcribed “wills” recorded by suicide bombers before their final attacks.<sup>12</sup> Formatted simply as a Microsoft Word document, the biographies are uneven in length and tone, and the overall impression of the collection is somewhat chaotic (see Figure 12).

A collection titled *Stories Of The Martyrs Of Mesopotamia*, though undated, appears to have been published later. Produced by the **Mujahidin Shura Council**, it is formatted more elaborately, with a full-color cover, graphic logos, and a background for each page (see Figure 13). Moreover, some of the martyrs who



Figure 12. A 2005 collection of “martyr biographies” culled from newspaper accounts, forum posts, and transcribed statements by suicide bombers



Figure 13. The cover of a book with “martyr biographies” issued by the Mujahidin Shura Council



Figure 14. The evolution of the biography of Abu Ahmad al-Karbuli, from a single-line entry in a 2005 collection of “martyr biographies” (left) to a two-page text in what appears to be a later compilation (right)

appeared in the collection in May 2005 as single-line entries, such as Abu Ahmad al-Karbuli, are the subjects of multi-page texts in the **Mujahidin Shura Council** collection (see Figure 14).

The development of “martyr biographies” demonstrates not only a trend toward increasing professionalism, but also a greater desire to exert message control. If early collections used materials from various sources, or simply provided lists of names, more recent compilations feature longer texts composed specifically by and for insurgent groups. The **Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production’s** periodical series of martyr biographies illustrates this tendency (see Section, 3.1.2 Periodicals).

### 3.1.1.4.2 Poetry

A number of insurgent websites contain poetry lamenting Iraq’s sufferings under occupation and urging resistance. Poetry is rarely presented in textual form, however, although the website of the **Jihadist Brigades** contains a number of poetic texts. Most poems serve as the words for songs, and this study examines them in Section 3.2.4, Songs.

The online Salafi library created by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a Jordanian-Palestinian cleric famed as the mentor of Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi and currently jailed in Jordan, contains 29 poems about the occupation of Iraq (see Figure 15). The website, titled *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* [Pulpit of Monotheism and Jihad] is no longer functional, but its contents can be downloaded from a number of other sites for installation at home with full functionality.

Hamid al-Ali, a Kuwait-based radical cleric who is sympathetic to the insurgent cause and frequently addresses related issues, has at times made topical statements in poetic form. After *Al-Jazeera* aired an interview with a Sunni woman identified as Sabrin al-Janabi,<sup>17</sup> who claimed to have been raped by Iraqi police, Al-Ali posted a poem on his website (see Figure 16) casting the issue in harshly sectarian terms. He asked, “Who has given the filth power over our Iraq so that the Magi<sup>18</sup> should be raised high and made rulers?” (see Section 7.2, The Sabrin al-Janabi Case).



Figure 15. Poems about Iraq on the *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* website



Figure 16. A poem by the Kuwait-based radical cleric Hamid al-Ali about the alleged rape of a Sunni woman by Shi'ite police officers

### 3.1.2 Periodicals

A number of insurgent groups and sympathetic media units produce monthly and weekly publications. These are usually posted to forums through free upload/download services<sup>19</sup> as both Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat documents. The more sophisticated periodicals are professionally laid out and feature lavishly formatted covers, full-color photographs, and charts

<sup>17</sup> According to an investigation ordered by Sunni-Arab Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, Sabrin al-Janabi, by her own admission, is a Shi'ite. This was published on the Sunni-led Iraqi Islamic Party's website. Despite this, Sunni-Arab insurgents have carried out attacks to avenge the "Sunni" woman's honor, including the killing of innocent Shi'ite civilians. See: *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 26, 2007. For the original statement by the Iraqi Islamic Party in Arabic, see: <http://www.iraqiparty.com/statements/statement148.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> A derogatory reference to Iranians, implying that they are still Zoroastrian fire-worshippers and not true Muslims.

<sup>19</sup> These services allow Internet users to upload large files to share with other users, who can then download the files. Examples include; [sendspace.com](http://sendspace.com) and [archive.org](http://archive.org), two sites frequently used to distribute insurgent (and jihadist) materials.



Figure 17. The cover of *Al-Fursan*, a magazine published electronically by the IAI

six pages of graphs breaking down the results of the group's military operations over the previous six months (see Figure 18).

We present below an overview of the contents of issue No. 10, which is dated Ramadan 1427 (corresponding to September 22, 2006):

### 3.1.2.2 Hasad al-Mujahidin

**Ansar al-Sunnah** has produced 41 issues of *Hasad al-Mujahidin* [Mujahidin Roundup], a more or less monthly publication (see Figure 19). *Hasad al-Mujahidin* is a relatively simple affair consisting primarily of summaries of **Ansar al-Sunnah**'s operational press releases on military operations. It occasionally reproduces documents, such as the ID cards of executed "spies" and other "enemies" (see Figure 20) but has virtually no photographs. Issue No. 39 was 25 pages long, and issue No. 38 was 32 pages long. The following are the contents of issue No. 39, dated February 2007:

### 3.1.2.3 Sada al-Rafidayn

The **Global Islamic Media Front** has produced 33 issues of *Sada al-Rafidayn* [Echo of the Two Rivers, a reference to the Tigris and Euphrates],

and graphs. We present below an overview of the major periodicals produced by Iraqi insurgent groups and sympathizers.

#### 3.1.2.1 Al-Fursan

The IAI has produced 12 issues of *Al-Fursan* [The Knights] (see Figure 17). The magazine, which appears on a more or less bimonthly basis, is in full color with numerous photographs. Issue No. 11, which appeared in January 2007, consisted of 39 pages and boldly announced on its cover, "In 2006, the Mujahidin of the Islamic Army Harvest 6,064 Americans." Issue No. 10 ran to 64 pages and opened with

which bills itself as a “weekly bulletin on the news and affairs of jihad and the mujahidin in the Islamic world” (see Figure 21). The bulletin is simple in

Article Title	Notes
Victories of Ramadan and the Program of Empowerment	One-page editorial
Statement 11 of 2006	By the military leadership of the <b>IAI</b>
Statement 12 of 2006	By the military leadership of the <b>IAI</b>
Overview of Military Operations in the First Half of 2006	Charts and graphs
Thousands of American Soldiers Flee to Canada	Article on the collapsing morale of the American home front
Groups of the Afghan Jihad: the development of their tactics as inspired by the Iraqi example	
American Spokesman: Losses at Camp Al-Saqr Reached Millions of Dollars	A U.S. spokesman confirms losses from an attack on a forward operating base in Iraq
Woodward: American Forces Face Four Attacks an Hour	Arabic translation of a statement by American journalist Bob Woodward



Figure 18. A graph detailing IAI military operations in the first half of 2006; taken from the December 2006 issue of *Al-Fursan*

Article Title	Notes
Meeting of the Issue: Interview with the official spokesman of the <b>IAI</b>	Includes questions from participants in the <b>Al-Boraq</b> Internet forum
Memoirs of a Mujahid: The Tough Test...and Strength from God	Story of a “mujahid” who escaped from detention at Camp Bucca
Belief: Strength in the Face of Adversity	Religious inspiration on the problems of Iraq
Islamic Law: Sincerity and Dedication	
Poetry: O, You Who Have Blamed Our Youth For Their Jihad	
Strategic Analysis: Leading Men toward Becoming Heroic Leaders	By Ahmad al-Shaybani, a field commander of the <b>IAI</b>
Media: Jihadist Media in Iraq...a New Victory	Article on the importance of media to insurgent operations
Islamic Studies: the Life of Martyrs	
Islamic Studies: Ibn Taymiyyah on Takfir	Article on takfir, the act of pronouncing a Muslim an unbeliever (kafir), as seen by the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyyah.
Islamic Studies: Islamic Groups Between Praiseworthy Perfection and Condemnable Extremism	
Islamic Studies: Excerpts from the Jihadist Program	
Military Studies: Military Doctrine and Principles of War in Islam	
Story of a Martyr: Sniper on the Road of Death	Experiences of a sniper who killed U.S. forces
The Oasis	Inspirational vignettes and thoughts
Images from the Jihad of the Prophet's Companions: Military Instructions from Caliph Umar bin Al-Khattab	
Political Analysis: Implementation of the New Middle East project in Iraq	On the purported U.S. project to dominate the Middle East
Hot Topics: Jewish-Kurdish Relations	
Scholarship and Jihad	

format, consisting primarily of operational press releases from various insurgent groups. It does not have pictures. Issue No. 29 contained 35 pages, while issue No. 30 contained 34 pages. Both appeared in March 2007. The following are the contents of issue No. 30:

3.1.2.4 Biographies of Notable Martyrs

The **Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production** has produced 34 issues in the series *Biographies Of Notable Martyrs*. The format is simple, with an illustrated cover followed by bare text. Issues vary in length, with some consisting of the biography of a single individual



Figure 19. The cover of *Hasad al-Mujahidin*, a magazine published electronically by *Ansar al-Sunnah*

Article Title	Notes
Editorial: Excerpts from Address by Shaykh Abu Abdallah al-Hasan Ibn Mahmud	Address by the head of <b>Ansar al-Sunnah</b>
Overview of Previous Operations	Brief descriptions of military operations, primarily from December 2006
Attacks, Ambushes, and Assaults on Command Posts	
Bombardments	
Executions of Spies and Apostates	
Sniper Operations	
The Courage of a Boy or the Bravery of a Man	Story of a young warrior
Summary of the Harvest	Statistics on enemies killed and equipment destroyed

Article Title	Notes
Statements Released on Saturday, March 24, 2007	Statements from <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda, the IAI, Shield of Islam, Just Vengeance Brigades, and Jihadist Brigades</b>
Statements Released on Sunday, March 25, 2007	
Statements Released on Monday, March 26	
Statements Released on Tuesday, March 27	
Statements Released on Wednesday, March 28	
Statements Released on Thursday, March 29	
Statements Released on Friday, March 30	
Some of the Operations Videotaped This Week	Internet addresses for downloading three videotaped attacks
Quotes in the Media	Quote by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi: "One must beware of those who become involved in these quisling agencies. For them, we have nothing but the sharp sword. Between us are nothing but nights and events that turn the heads of boys gray."



Figure 20. The ID cards of an “employee of the crusaders” and a member of the Imam al-Mahdi Army, a Shi’ite militia; Ansar al-Sunnah claimed in issue No. 39 of *Hasad al-Mujahidin* to have killed both



Figure 21. The cover of *Sada al-Rafidayn*, a magazine published electronically by the Global Islamic Media Front.



Figure 22. The cover of *Biographies of Notable Martyrs*, a periodical published electronically by the Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production

who died fighting in Iraq and others featuring more than one biography. Two recent issues—Nos. 30 and 31—bore the logos of both **Al-Furqan** and **ISI/Al-Qaeda** on the cover (see Figure 22).

Issue No. 31, released in early April, 2007, is 13 pages long and contains the biographies of four Egyptians who were among “the first delegations of martyrdom-seekers to Iraq.” Issue No. 30, titled *The Devoted Son*, presents a father’s narrative of his son, identified as an Egyptian named Aqil, who was one of the first foreign “martyrdom-seekers” to go to Iraq. The highly personalized account tells the story of an educated young man who gains access to jihadist circles through the Internet, travels to Mosul in Iraq, works in **Al-Qaeda**’s media unit in Al-Fallujah under the direction

of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, and finally blows himself up near a group of American soldiers. Like other narratives in the series, the portrait is didactic and idealized, depicting foreign suicide bombers in Iraq as paragons of virtue and examples for imitation.

### 3.1.2.5 Related Jihadist Periodicals

#### 3.1.2.5.1 Sawt al-Jihad

*Sawt al-Jihad* [Voice of the Jihad] first appeared in September 2003 as Al-Qaeda's premier online magazine dedicated to "affairs of jihad and the mujahidin in the Arabian peninsula." Since then, 30 issues have appeared, although the magazine went on a two-year hiatus before the appearance of issue No. 30 in February 2007 (see Figure 23). *Sawt al-Jihad* focuses on Al-Qaeda's efforts in Saudi Arabia, but it occasionally touches on issues related to the jihadist wing of the Iraqi insurgency.

An apparent shift in the magazine's position on the insurgency in Iraq reflects the increasing importance of Iraq to the global jihadist movement, of which *Sawt al-Jihad* is a prominent mouthpiece. For example, *Do Not Go To Iraq* by Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Salim (No. 7, December 2003) urged Saudis not to go fight in Iraq but rather to fight the Americans in Saudi Arabia first. The most recent issue (No. 30, January 2007), however, contained an



Figure 23. The cover of *Sawt al-Jihad*, an electronically published global jihadist magazine



Figure 24. The cover of *Sada al-Jihad*, a "monthly jihadist journal" published electronically by the Global Islamic Media Front

eight page article titled *Iraq, Yesterday and Today*, which lauded the efforts of foreign fighters in the cause of the Iraqi insurgency.

### 3.1.2.5.2 Sada al-Jihad

The **Global Islamic Media Front** has published 14 issues of *Sada al-Jihad* [Echo of Jihad], which is described as a “monthly jihadist journal” (see Figure 24). The most recent issue appeared in March 2007. It contained a brief report on the online television channel *Sawt al-Khilafah* [Voice of the Caliphate], operated by **ISI/Al-Qaeda**. The previous issue (No. 13, February 2007), featured a lead editorial on the reported rape of a Sunni Iraqi woman by Shi’ite police officers (see Section 7.2, The Sabrin al-Janabi Case).

### 3.1.3 Books

Iraqi insurgents, who find themselves pitted against a professional foreign army and a variety of domestic opponents, have authored few books. Others,

Title	Author	Publisher	Pages	Date	Notes
<i>Media Jihad: a reading of jihadist media in Iraq</i>	Abd al-Rahman Sallum al-Rawashidi	Wikalat Haq	221	Spring 2007	A detailed, sympathetic study of jihadist media in Iraq
<i>Advice and Instructions for the Mujahidin in Mesopotamia</i>	Anonymous	Center for Islamic Studies and Research (Al-Qaeda)	68	1424 (March 2003-February 2004)	
<i>The Destructive Programs in Iraq and Their Important Role in the Modern Crusader War</i>	Abd al-Muhsin al-Rafi'i	Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad	43	August 2005	
<i>Iraq from Occupation to Liberation: reality of the crisis and prospects for a solution</i>	Sayf al-Din al-Ansari, Abu Ubayd al-Qarshi, Abu Aymen al-Hilali, Abu Sa'd al-Amili	Al-Ansar	73	June 2003	Collection of essays; the same authors contributed essays to an earlier collection on the September 11 attacks
<i>The Future of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula after the Fall of Baghdad</i>	Yusuf al-Ayiri	Center for Islamic Studies and Research (Al-Qaeda)	68	July 2003	Author is a noted Saudi jihadist writer; he was killed in a shootout with Saudi security forces in May 2003
<i>Statements by Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, Part One: from April 19, 2005, to August 11, 2005</i>	Anonymous	Unknown	502	2005	Collection of nearly 1,000 statements by <b>Al-Qaeda in Iraq</b>
<i>Iraq and the Crusader Invasion: lessons and observations</i>	Abu Umar Muhammad bin Abdallah al-Sayf (Head of the Supreme Court in Chechnya)	Center for Islamic Studies and Research (Al-Qaeda)	52	Unknown	
<i>Announcement to the People of the Birth of the Islamic State</i>	Uthman bin Abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi	Al-Furqan (ISI/Al-Qaeda)	91	October 2006	Provides Islamic legal justification for <b>Al-Qaeda's</b> establishment of the <b>Islamic State of Iraq</b> in October 2006
<i>Examination of the Lessons of the War on Iraq</i>	Muhammad Abu Abdallah	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat	39	July 2005	
<i>Martyrs of Mesopotamia</i>	Abu Abd al-Rahman, former administrator of the jihad section of the Al-Arab Internet forum	Unknown	176	2005	Biographical sketches of 431 “martyrs” in Iraq gathered from newspapers and the Internet
<i>Response to the Doubts of Rumor-Mongers on the Mujahidin in Iraq</i>	Al-Shihab al-Thaqib	Unknown	56	April 2007	
<i>Signs of the American Defeat and the Challenges of the Post-American Period</i>	Dr. Abd al-Aziz bin Mustafa Kamil	Internet site Sayd al-Fawa'id	39	Unknown	
<i>Stories of the Martyrs of Mesopotamia, Part One</i>	Abu al-Barra' al-Sharqi, Abu Abd-al-Malik al-Maqdisi, Abu Ayyub al-Najdi	Mujahidin Shura Council	98	Unknown	Biographical sketches of “martyrs”



Figure 25. Electronically published books on Iraq by insurgent supporters

however, have compiled existing materials by and about the insurgency to create book-length texts. And leading thinkers in the global jihadist movement, which intersects with the insurgency at a number of key junctures, have dedicated lengthy works to the war in Iraq and its aftermath. Taken together, these works are part of a growing library of books that fall under the general rubric of insurgent media (see Figure 25).

The shortest of these works are perhaps more accurately classified as long essays, while the longest run to hundreds of pages. In general, books are under 100 pages. All are electronic publications, made available for downloading in Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat formats on websites sympathetic to the insurgency. We present in the table above a number of representative examples.

## 3.2 Audiovisual

Iraqi insurgent groups and sympathetic organizations and individuals produce a wide variety of audiovisual products to trumpet the insurgency's achievements and advance its goals. These range from short video clips of attacks on U.S. forces and other targets in Iraq to recorded addresses by insurgent leaders to longer films on various topics of relevance to the insurgency. We present here an overview of the main categories of audiovisual products created by the insurgency and its supporters.

### 3.2.1 Videotaped Attacks

Just as the operational press release is the basic unit of insurgent textual production, visual records of attacks are the basic units of insurgent video production. The two genres are closely related, and insurgent groups some-



*Figure 26. Stills from recent videos showing insurgent attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq*



times issue operational press releases along with links to download a video record of the attack (see Figure 26).

Hundreds of videotaped attacks are available on the websites that serve as the primary distribution network for insurgent and pro-insurgency materials (see Section 5.1, The Internet). Generally ranging in length from a few seconds to 1–2 minutes, and in size from a few hundred kilobytes to 10 megabytes, attack videos follow a standard format. Opening credits identify the group responsible for the attack and provide brief information about the operation. A religious message is often included as well, either in the form of a quote from the Koran or an utterance of the Prophet, usually at the very beginning of the video clip. For example, a 52-second-long **Mujahidin Army** video begins with three captions (see Figures 27–29).

Most insurgent groups take care to “brand” themselves, placing their logos in a corner of the screen for the duration of the video. Video production units affiliated with a particular insurgent group, such as **Al-Furqan**, which produces videos of attacks by **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, also place their logos on the video clips they produce (see Figure 30). Captions in some videos, such as an **Ansar al-Sunnah** recording of an IED attack on a U.S. truck, are modeled on the captions that accompany news footage on cable news channels like *CNN* and *Al-Jazeera* (see Figure 31).

At the heart of each video clip is the filmed record of an actual insurgent operation. The most commonly recorded operation is an IED attack on U.S. forces, usually in a Humvee or Bradley fighting vehicle. In these video clips, a stationary camera films a stretch of road and captures the moment when



Figure 27. Screenshot reads: “I seek refuge in God from Satan the rejected,” a phrase commonly recited by Muslims throughout the world before they begin to read a sura (chapter) of the Koran



Figure 28. Screenshot reads: “Media Office for the Mujahidin Army, Video-Production Section, presents...”



Figure 29. Screenshot reads: “By the grace of God, the destruction of a Humvee belonging to American forces and the killing and wounding of those inside it with an explosive device in West Baghdad”

an IED destroys a passing vehicle. Other frequently recorded operations include sniper and mortar attacks. The most prized videos, judging by download statistics, are the downing of U.S. helicopters and sniper attacks in which a U.S. soldier is seen falling to the ground.

When insurgents appear in videos, as they do in mortar attacks, they are masked. One can also find videos—particularly ones where an insurgent is reading a press statement—where the insurgent’s face is blurred so as not to reveal his identity. Voices are sometimes audible, with numerous cries of “Allahu akbar” usually serving as the audio backdrop to pictures of insurgents firing mortars, detonating IEDs, or engaging in other military operations. Most videos,



Figure 30. Global video-production group logos



Figure 31. Still from an Ansar al-Sunnah video using “cable news” captions

however, use jihadist songs as a soundtrack (see Section 3.2.4, Songs).

Most attack videos are filmed from a single angle with a stationary camera and present images of middling quality, although some videos are of extremely high quality and considerably more sophisticated. A three-minute video of a suicide car-bomb attack by **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** against a U.S. military installation featured multiple camera angles, a voiceover providing details about the operation, and a closing dedication to Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Some videos contain sardonic captions, such as an IED attack against U.S. troops by **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** in which a subtitle announces “their last moments” as the video shows a group of U.S. soldiers in a truck seconds before the attack.

### 3.2.2 Films

Major insurgent groups and affiliated media-production units also release longer films to convey messages that are broader than attack videos allow and more direct than written statements. Perhaps the best-known insurgent films are the two titles in the Juba series, produced by **Al-Boraq** for the **IAI**. The two films detail the exploits of a legendary **IAI** sniper, known as “the sniper of Baghdad,” who purportedly killed hundreds of U.S. soldiers. The second film is available for downloading in a variety of formats on a dedicated website in English and Arabic ([www.jubaonline.org](http://www.jubaonline.org)) (see Figure 32).

Like attack videos, longer films generally begin with a title sequence identifying the media unit and/or insurgent group that produced the film. Title sequences generally include a religious quotation. Jihadist songs make up the soundtrack in most films, while voiceovers and captions comprise the narrative.

Films are announced and distributed on the same websites that make other insurgent materials available, with banner advertisements to publicize the release and provide a link for downloading (see Figure 33). The video files are normally distributed through free upload-download services in a variety of formats (Windows, RealPlayer, DivX) and four file sizes, ranging from high-quality (up to 500 megabytes) to mobile-phone



Figure 32. The website of Juba, the “Sniper of Baghdad”



Figure 33. Banners advertising new films; each banner advertisement links to locations where the films can be downloaded



Figure 34. A typical page with download addresses for a film showing the various file-size options: high-quality, medium-quality, low-quality, and mobile-phone quality

quality (less than 10 megabytes) (see Figure 34).

Films cover a variety of subjects but break down into a number of established genres. The most common of these are:

- Compilations of attack videos, frequently organized as a “greatest hits” collection. Examples include **Ansar al-Sunnah’s** Top 20 (7:16 minutes) and the Al-Hanein Internet forum’s *God’s Victory Is Near* (24 minutes), a compilation of March 2007 operations by various insurgent groups. **Ansar al-Sunnah’s** *Top 20* is organized as a “competition” between brigades within the insurgent group to determine who can carry out the most visually impressive attack against U.S. forces. The video’s stated intent is to create a spirit of “healthy competition” within and between insurgent groups (see Figure 35).
- Profiles of martyrs and insurgents. Examples include the **Monotheism**



Figure 35. The title of Ansar al-Sunnah’s Top 20, a compilation of videotaped attacks organized as a competition between brigades within the insurgent group to determine who can carry out the most impressive action against U.S. forces

and **Jihad Group**'s 54-minute profile of the Palestinian militant and top aide to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, Abu Anas al-Shami, who was killed in Iraq in 2004; the **Mujahidin Shura Council**'s six-minute interview with Saudi fighters in Iraq; **JAMI**'s *Wedding of the Martyrs* (see below); and **Jaysh al-Fatihin**'s 69-minute *Abu al-Walid, Lion of Al-Khalidiyah* (see Figure 36).

- Detailed overviews of individual operations and campaigns. These videos follow a single operation from planning to execution, with video footage of all stages, and strive to underscore insurgents' professionalism and effectiveness. Examples include **Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia**'s 34-minute *Raid of the Emigrants And Supporters* and the **Mujahidin Army**'s 36-minute *Drawn Sword Raid* (see below). The 25-minute *Hunters Of Minesweepers*, produced by **Al-Furqan** for **ISI/ Al-Qaeda**, is a variant of this genre, detailing insurgent efforts to overcome hi-tech U.S. methods to fight IEDs (see below).
- Motivational films on the outrages and excesses committed by insurgents' enemies. While these initially concentrated on the actions of U.S. forces, the tone has become increasingly sectarian in recent years. Examples include *Ansar al-Sunnah*'s 28-minute *Just Vengeance*, detailing the capture and



Figure 36. The titles of the Mujahidin Shura Council's biographical documentary about a former Al-Qaeda military commander in Iraq (top), *Drawn Sword Raid* (middle), and *Hunters of Minesweepers* (bottom)

execution of Shi'ite police officers (see below) and **Ansar al-Sunnah's** 16-minute *Assaults On Sunni Homes*, showing the destruction of Sunni residences in Baghdad by U.S. and Iraqi National Guard forces.

Films generally lack release dates, although they can usually be dated by the announcements posted to the sites where they are distributed. The representative films below are all recent, released in 2006 and 2007, shown in the table below.

### 3.2.3 Recorded Statements

Insurgent groups sometimes package statements by leaders and prominent figures as audio or video recordings. **ISI/Al-Qaeda** does this more frequently than other groups, a likely reflection of the parent organization's penchant for presenting its leaders' statements in audio and video form.

Recorded statements are similar in form to attack videos and longer films, beginning with a title sequence and then proceeding to the actual statement. Some recorded statements stress major points by interposing key quotations between the title sequence and the body of the address. For example, a videotaped statement by the "judge" of **ISI/Al-Qaeda** released in April 2007 begins with sound bites against a backdrop of **ISI/Al-Qaeda** fighters in action. Some statements are read by a moderator posed behind a desk. A "commentary" on the establishment of the **Islamic State of Iraq** in October 2006 even showed a spokesman seated in a computergenerated "newsroom" with a coffee cup on the desk behind him (see Figure 37).

The table above shows representative recent major statements produced by insurgent groups.



Figure 37. A "commentary" on the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006; note the Mujahidin Shura Council logo on the wall, the Caliphate Voice Channel (CVC) logo in the upper right corner, and the computer-generated "newsroom"

### 3.2.4 Songs

Songs provide the soundtrack to many attack videos and virtually all longer films. In keeping with Salafi practice, male choirs perform songs without instrumental accompaniment. The tone is either martial, with gunfire and explosions audible in the background, or plaintive, with the former genre predominating.

The websites of some insurgent groups make available for downloading songs specifically focused on Iraq. The **JAMI** website, for

Title	Production	Length and Size (highest quality)	Notes
<i>Top 20</i>	<b>Ansar al-Sunnah</b>	7:16 / 108.6 mb	Top 20 recent attacks to “encourage rivalry among the mujahidin” and defeat the enemy
<i>Caravans of Martyrs</i>	<b>Mujahidin Shura Council</b>	59:52 / 610.6 mb	Lionizes “martyrs” in Iraq from an explicitly jihadist perspective, featuring statements by Osama bin Laden, interviews with fighters in Iraq, and images of training and attacks
<i>Hunters of Minesweepers</i>	<b>Al-Furqan (for ISI/Al-Qaeda)</b>	25:56 / 178.8 mb	A masked spokesman for <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> describes how <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> “specialists” have overcome U.S. forces’ use of signal disruptors to fight IEDs. The video strives to show that <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> is successfully combating hi-tech U.S. efforts to defend itself against IEDs.
<i>Drawn Sword Raid</i>	<b>Mujahidin Army</b>	36:03 / 125.5 mb	Documents an ambush from final planning to execution
<i>Knights of Martyrdom</i>	<b>Al-Furqan</b>	39:21 / 268 mb	Profiles of “martyrs” who carried out suicide bombings in Iraq
<i>Wedding of the Martyrs</i>	<b>JAMI</b>	30:11 / 194 mb	Story of a group of insurgents who were killed in a clash with U.S. forces. Begins as a “movie” with intercut footage of U.S. military patrol and insurgents setting up an ambush.
<i>Harvest of the Defeated in Mesopotamia</i>	<b>Al-Furqan (for ISI/Al-Qaeda)</b>	41:29 / 137.8 mb	Lambastes the participation of Iraqi Shi’ite leaders in the political process. Opens with a quote from Osama bin Laden condemning Shi’ite collaboration with Americans and calling for jihad.
<i>Just Vengeance</i>	<b>Ansar al-Sunnah</b>	28:33 / 238 mb	Billed as part of the series <i>The Throbbing Vein To Ward Off The Hatred Of The Rejectionists</i> , the film’s full title is <i>Just Vengeance Against Those Who Violated The Honor Of Our Pure, Free Sisters</i> . It comes as an apparent response to the al-Janabi case (see Section 7.2, the Sabrin al-Janabi Case). It shows the capture, interrogation, and execution of Shi’ite police officers in Diyala Governorate (see Figure 44).

Title	Producer	Length and Size	Approximate Release Date	Notes
<i>The Mujahidin’s Commitment To The Safety Of Muslims</i>	<b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b>	2:04 / 21.8 mb	April 13, 2007	This short film shows fighters from <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> calling off an attack on a U.S. convoy because a car with Iraqi civilians is in the vicinity. Although the format is highly unusual, it can be considered a statement, since it comes as an apparent response to the <b>IAI</b> ’s criticism of <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> for spilling the blood of innocent Iraqis (see Section 6.4.3, Rift Between Nationalists and Jihadists).
<i>To The Mujahidin Brothers</i>	<b>Ansar al-Sunnah</b>	18:25 / 7.5 mb	April 13, 2007	This audio address is a statement from <b>Ansar al-Sunnah</b> ’s leadership to other insurgents. It comes as part of the debate within the insurgency over the conflict between the <b>IAI</b> and <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> (see Section 6.4.3, Rift Between Nationalists and Jihadists).
<i>I Speak On A Sign From God</i>	<b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b>	28:07 / 13.5 mb	March 13, 2007	Audio recording of an address by <b>ISI/Al-Qaeda</b> leader Abu Umar al-Baghdadi
<i>Statement On The Attack On Sabrin al-Janabi</i>	<b>IAI</b>	17:32 / 45.6 mb	February 22, 2007	Audio recording against a video backdrop of a statement from the leader of the <b>IAI</b> on the reported rape of Sabrin al-Janabi (see Section 7.2, The Sabrin al-Janabi Case). The statement is read by “one of the mujahidin.”

example, offers a song in Iraqi dialect titled *Baghdad, You Are The Pride Of The Nation*. Most songs, however, are sung in standard Arabic intelligible throughout the Arab world and convey a general message extolling the virtues of jihad, lauding martyrs for their sacrifices, and denigrating perceived enemies. In fact, the majority of the songs used in insurgent films come from the larger body of songs produced by the global jihadist enterprise and do not mention Iraq at all.

Songs are much more than background music. With no musical accompaniment to obscure the clearly articulated lyrics, songs are the ideal conduit for an ideological message. The message is strikingly uniform and primarily jihadist.

*Baghdad, You Are The Pride Of The Nation*, sung in Iraqi dialect and available for downloading on the **JAMI** website, is an unusual example of nationalist text, a point underscored by the song’s understated, yet audible, musical accompaniment, which marks a departure from Salafi precepts. The melody and cadence are reminiscent of nationalist songs produced by the Saddam Hussein regime during the Iran-Iraq War. The song’s chorus states:

Baghdad, you are the pride of the nation. No harm or concern touches you. We are your men, the people of zeal. We redeem you with our blood and our life.

The song enumerates key cities where Iraqis have fought American forces—Al-Qa’im, Al- Hadithah, Mosul, and Al-Fallujah. And while it refers to the Americans as infidels—“In Al-Anbar we raised the banner, and not a single unbeliever is left in the province”—the tone is primarily nationalist, striving to show that a broad swath of Iraqis are resisting foreign occupation. The final verse is:

*This is my Iraq, with all of its young people.  
That has roared and exploded like a volcano,  
With its old people, its children, and its women,  
Terrifying every American soldier.*

But most films, which are the most popular vehicle for songs, use jihadist, not nationalist, materials in their soundtracks. The following films use songs that are also employed in media products created by global jihadist groups:

The words to *Caravans of Martyrs* come from a poem dedicated to the memory of Abdallah Azzam, a Palestinian who was the teacher of Osama bin Laden and played a central role in bringing Arab volunteers to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The song begins:

Film	Songs Used
<i>Caravans Of Martyrs</i> (Mujahidin Shura Council)	<i>Every Day Caravans Of Martyrs Set Off For Paradise Destroy The Night's Dark Injustice</i>
<i>Hunters Of Minesweepers</i> (Al-Furqan)	<i>God Is Great</i>
<i>Drawn Sword Raid</i> (Mujahidin Army)	<i>The Swords Speak Advance, Hero The Lion-Cub Cried Out</i>
<i>Harvest Of The Defeated In Mesopotamia</i> (Al-Furqan)	<i>They Are Not A Part Of Ahmad's Nation</i>
<i>Top 20</i> (Ansar al-Sunnah)	<i>Rise From Slumber</i>

*Every day caravans of martyrs set off for paradise with the approval  
of God,  
What can I say to describe their deeds— rhetoric is powerless and pens  
run dry.  
How great are the lions who filled the world with their exploits.  
Each of them scorned life to become a mujahid with faith and courage  
his weapon.*

*Destroy Night's Dark Injustice* urges listeners to “raise up the faith of Muhammad” and reminds them that they are the “army of Muhammad.” It closes:

*For Islam is power,  
Jihad and courage,  
Unity and brotherhood,  
And the path of Muhammad.*

*God Is Great*, O Heroes makes specific mention of Al-Aqsa,<sup>20</sup> but only as a symbol of a larger struggle between the forces of Islam and unbelief:

*Stand strong, Aqsa,  
The time of pride is coming.  
We will smash the thrones of tyranny,  
And will go to the battlefield like lions.  
Cannon shots ring out on the battlefield  
Along with the melodies of song.  
For the houris<sup>21</sup> are calling you to the battlefield,  
Rush to paradise, O brave one.*

*Swords Speak* decries the current plight of the Muslim world and recalls past glories soon to be restored:

*They would not have desecrated our holy places had lions ringed them,  
Vice and oppression have attacked, but where is the age of swords?  
They forgot that we are proud and will defend ourselves like lions.  
For it is we who trampled on horseback the thrones of foreigners.  
It is we who built our palaces from skulls.  
With whips we drove away the wives of Khosroe as booty.*

<sup>20</sup> The Al-Aqsa Mosque is part of Al-Haram al-Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary, located in Jerusalem's Old City. The mosque, with its black dome, is one of the three holiest sites in Islam. The Mosque serves as a center for study and prayer. It is in this building that Friday prayers are held each week. The Noble Sanctuary also houses the golden-domed Dome of the Rock, which was constructed as a mosque to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey.

<sup>21</sup> The houris are the virgins supposedly promised to martyrs in paradise.

*Advance, O Hero* employs a device much favored in jihadist rhetoric, combining imagery from the distant past and the immediate present. In this case, the blade of a sword is mentioned alongside the masks that cover the faces of militants in videos:

*Above the heads of the enemies,  
Raise the poisoned blade.  
Fill the universe with roars.  
My motto is 'I will not be defeated.'  
Artificial nations of the Christians,  
The masked lion-cub has come.  
I will crush you all,  
For I swear by God.*

*Arise From Slumber*, a jihadist song used in the soundtrack to **Ansar al-Sunnah's** *Top 20* compilation of attack videos, heralds the violent awakening of a new generation of holy warriors:

*Rise from your slumber for Islam has returned.  
We have marched in God's path and declared jihad.  
We have returned with the machine gun and today we are leaders.  
As individuals and as one, we have proceeded, an awakened generation,  
Knowing no life other than battle and strife.*

Finally, *Strike The Long-Awaited Blow*, another popular jihadist song used in a number of films about the Iraqi insurgency, makes specific reference to **Al-Qaeda's** September 11 attack on the United States:

*Strike the long-awaited blow  
And kill as many infidels as you wish.  
Strike the long-awaited blow  
And kill as many infidels as you wish.  
Turn my lands into a grave  
For the defeated armies of unbelief.  
How great is the longing for Hattin<sup>22</sup>  
And the repair of the world and the faith.  
How great is the longing for Hattin  
And the repair of the world and the faith.  
All of Palestine will be liberated  
By the long-awaited black banners.  
Destroy, destroy, do not make peace,  
Repeat the glories of the raid on  
Manhattan....*

<sup>22</sup> Muslim forces commanded by Salah al-Din (Saladin) defeated the Christian crusaders at Hattin in 1187, paving the way for the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem later that year.

### 3.3 Conclusions

The impressive array of products Sunni-Iraqi insurgents and their supporters create suggests the existence of a veritable multimedia empire. But this impression is misleading. The insurgent-media network has no identifiable brick-and-mortar presence, no headquarters, and no bureaucracy. It relies instead on a decentralized, collaborative production model that utilizes the skills of a community of likeminded individuals.

In its adoption of this production model, the insurgent-media enterprise resembles the global jihadist media endeavor that was already in existence when a U.S.-led military operation toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Global jihadist media provided a blueprint for the creation of insurgent media, and the foreign jihadists who flocked to Iraq to fight in the wake of the invasion spearheaded the drive to create a media presence for the insurgency. While a jihadist agenda is by no means common to all or even most Iraqi insurgent groups, insurgent media overlap with jihadist media at numerous junctures, and, as we shall see, reinforce their message.

#### 3.3.1 The Decentralized, 'Do-It-Yourself' Media Factory

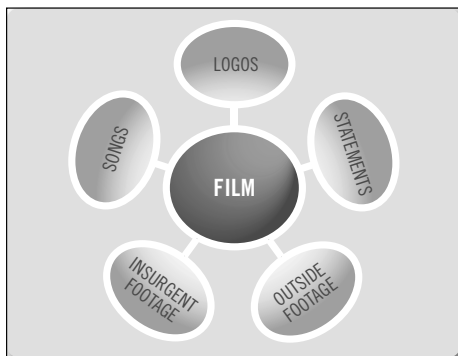
An insurgency, and particularly an insurgency consisting of numerous groups with often competing agendas, can hardly maintain a geographically fixed, identifiable, centralized brick-and-mortar infrastructure for media production. Iraq's insurgents and their supporters have overcome this obstacle through the active use of communications technology, the development of a do-it-yourself building-block method of media production, and the acceptance of a certain amount of message diffusion.

The use of communications technology is in and of itself the least remarkable aspect of the insurgent media endeavor. The Internet is a ubiquitous and familiar feature of the modern world, and insurgents' active use of Internet technology to create and disseminate their media products is as unremarkable as their use of explosives to make bombs or the telephone to communicate with each other. For the purposes of media production, it is sufficient to note that Internet communications allow insurgents and their sympathizers to transmit whatever materials they need, from video footage to texts, to wherever they need, to as many people as necessary to produce anything from a press release to an hour-long film. At the same time, the use of Internet technology allows insurgents freedom of movement and anonymity that other media platforms do not.

More noteworthy is the fact that insurgents' willingness to forego a centralized brick-and-mortar production infrastructure and their reliance on the Internet as the primary distribution channel for their media products have led to the emergence of a decentralized, building-block production model in

which virtually any individual or group can design a media product to serve insurgent aims and goals.

As the preceding overview of insurgent media products shows, both text and audiovisual products begin with simple units and proceed to more complex creations. For text products, the basic building blocks are operational press releases and topical statements; for audiovisual products, footage of insurgent activities and statements recorded by prominent insurgents and sympathizers (see Figure 38). Of these building blocks, only the footage of insurgent activities and statements by insurgent leaders need be recorded on location in Iraq. One or more individuals working anywhere in the world can create everything else.<sup>23</sup>



*Figure 38. Most of the elements needed to produce a film are already available on the Internet*

An individual with a link to an insurgent group can compose an operational press release anywhere. If the press release is based on fact, the individual need only receive a communication with the necessary information about the time, place, and specifics of an attack or event to write the press release and then post it to a dedicated insurgent website or sympathetic forum. If the press release is fiction, as is surely the case with the insurgency's more extravagant claims,

the task is even easier.<sup>24</sup> The same holds true for written topical statements.

In the case of short attack videos, only the footage of the actual attack need come from Iraq. Once an affiliated individual has received that footage and basic accompanying information, which can be transferred over the Internet or by mobile phone, he has only to add the insurgent group's logo, a short title sequence, and perhaps a soundtrack with a motivational song. He then uploads the resulting video product to a free upload-download site and posts an announcement to a forum. The video-editing software required to produce

<sup>23</sup> U.S. forces have on occasion reported seizures during raids of equipment that could be related to insurgent media production. For example, in a March 24, 2007, press release, MNF-Iraq reported the arrest of four individuals after soldiers discovered "a video camera and videotape in the vehicle's glove compartment showing the convicted individuals making impro[vised] explosive devices."

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that insurgent groups maintain an organized system of spokespeople who are known to be responsible for issuing statements. While there is nothing to preclude other individuals from issuing statements using these spokespeople's names, those statements would almost certainly be disavowed by the group in question. Previous experience shows that insurgent groups regularly monitor forum websites and are aware of the material being posted by sympathetic users. They are also acutely aware of user public opinion and political and theological debates on forums. This was most recently apparent in the polemic that ensued in the wake of the IAI's criticism of ISI/Al-Qaeda.

such a video is cheap and readily available. More importantly, the only material needed from Iraq is the actual footage of the attack. All of the additional elements required to create a video clip—insurgent group logo, songs, etc. —are readily available on the Internet (although insurgency-affiliated individuals producing videos are likely to keep such materials in a personal archive).

The production of a longer film represents a somewhat expanded variant of the same process used to create an attack video (see Figure 39). *The Wedding of Martyrs*, a 30-minute film produced by **JAMI**, depicts an insurgent ambush of a U.S. patrol and the subsequent “martyrdom” of a group of insurgents in an engagement with U.S. helicopter gunships. The film’s producers ingeniously interweave footage of insurgents with footage of a U.S. patrol, the latter evidently recorded by U.S. forces and obtained by insurgents, perhaps from a televised documentary or Internet source such as youtube.com. The alternating clips of U.S. forces on patrol and insurgents mounting an attack, which likely document two separate incidents, create the cinematic impression of a single event viewed from multiple perspectives. The remainder of the film draws on downloadable elements of insurgent propaganda, from logos to footage of the “martyrs’” funeral to hagiographic biographies presented in text form with accompanying still and moving images.

Larger text products can be produced using the same do-it-yourself, building-block approach. A magazine, for example, can easily be fashioned from



Figure 39. Elements used in the production of the JAMI film *Wedding of Martyrs*: the group’s logo, footage of U.S. soldiers, downloadable songs, an address by an insurgent group commander, and footage of insurgents in action

existing press releases augmented with a vividly formatted cover featuring available photographs and graphic designs. Both *Hasad al-Mujahidin* and *Sada al-Rafidayn* employ this model. More complex magazines, such as the IAI's *Al-Fursan*, simply include a wider range of materials, such as topical statements and articles specially written for the magazine, as well as statistics gleaned from operational statements. Books, such as a 500-page compilation of **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** press releases from 2006, can be produced in the same fashion.

### 3.3.2 Intersections with Global Jihadist Media

The global jihadist movement exemplified by **Al-Qaeda** and its offshoots had a well-established media presence long before the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the emergence of Iraq's Sunni insurgency. The best-known examples of jihadist media are videotaped addresses by Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, but the jihadist product array encompassed numerous written statements, magazines, books, and video films. Internet forums were, and remain, the primary distribution channel for these products. The Iraqi insurgency adopted these genres of media production wholesale, as the preceding overview of insurgent products indicates. It also augmented them with products specifically suited to the dynamics of an ongoing insurgency such as daily press releases and short video clips of attacks.

The Iraqi insurgency's adoption of global jihadist media techniques resulted from a symbiotic process. Foreign jihadists, primarily linked to **Al-Qaeda's** various iterations in Iraq, brought with them the media methods and practices already in the global jihadist arsenal. At the same time, new elements appeared in the context of the insurgency, such as daily press releases, which as noted earlier, appeared as a counter to Coalition Provisional Authority and U.S. military press releases and statements. Existing distribution channels took steps to accommodate these innovations. For example, jihadist Internet forums added sections specifically to post insurgent statements and press releases.

Global jihadist groups like **Al-Qaeda**, which already had a backlog of media experience, brought their ideology and experience with them to Iraq and imbued their new Iraq-focused media products with it. As Iraq's indigenous insurgents adopted the existing forms of global jihadist media in order to establish their own media presence, they also absorbed some of the content of jihadist media, although many Iraqi groups espoused ideological platforms closer to the traditional outlook of a national-liberation movement fighting to evict foreign occupiers.

The songs that make up the soundtrack to most insurgent video productions are a telling example of how this process works. While some specifically Iraqi "songs of resistance" exist, they are not as numerous, accessible, or effectively<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The most popular collections of jihadist songs are available in high-quality mp3 format on numerous websites.

produced as the many jihadist songs available online. This, it would seem, is why the bulk of insurgent video materials use jihadist, and not specifically Iraqi, songs in their soundtracks.<sup>26</sup> Thanks to the lyrics of the jihadist songs, the videos serve as a conduit for jihadist ideology.

In sum, virtually all insurgent media products, whether created by **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** or other groups, are extremely similar to global jihadist media products in form<sup>27</sup> and somewhat similar to them in content.

On the jihadist side, the symbiotic relationship with Iraqi insurgent media has a somewhat different significance. If insurgent media have benefited from the templates provided by preexisting jihadist media, global jihadists have reaped a propaganda windfall from the media products emerging from Iraq's Sunni insurgency. There are two reasons for this. First, the general context of the conflict in Iraq fits in perfectly with jihadist ideology, which posits a titanic struggle between the forces of unbelief, led by the United States, and the forces of faith, led by the mujahidin. Second, the images produced on a daily basis by the insurgency in the form of attack videos are grist for the jihadist propaganda mill, which relishes any and all depictions of "crusader" soldiers targeted in the Arab world.

Interestingly, this is not a two-way street. With the notable exception of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, Iraqi insurgent groups avoid obvious association with the global jihadist movement. Even if their rhetoric overlaps with that of the global jihadist movement, insurgent groups generally do not display on their web pages images linked with **Al-Qaeda**, cite statements from Osama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri, or use media products created by **Al-Qaeda** and its offshoots. As the polemic between the **IAI** and **ISI/Al-Qaeda** in April 2007 showed, Iraqi insurgent groups such as the **IAI** and the **Mujahidin Army** hold a fair amount of animosity for **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, which they blame for hijacking and defaming the "honorable resistance" (see Section 6.4.3, Rift Between Nationalists and Jihadists).

Nevertheless, the core media products made available globally through the Internet by Iraqi insurgent groups, whatever their ideological orientation or stance on **Al-Qaeda**, are, it should be stressed, also effective propaganda for global jihadists and their sympathizers. This is especially true in light of Muslim views on **Al-Qaeda** attacks against civilians, which evoke strong

<sup>26</sup> Iraqi nationalist songs tend to evoke a memory of a specific historical period, whether it be the Ba'athist era or the monarchy. Songs written during the Ba'athist era would not be used by the insurgent groups studied herein, because they refer to an Iraq few would like to return to. Although Sunni Arab insurgents fight for a return to power, they do not advocate a return to Iraq as it existed under Saddam Hussein. Other nationalist songs are hard to come by, even in Iraq, and particularly difficult to find and use in an electronic format. One telling example of the use of Iraqi songs is the **Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi Brigades'** restyling of a Ba'athist era song (see Section 3.2.4, Songs). The melody is the same but the lyrics have been changed.

<sup>27</sup> For an extensive overview of jihadist imagery, see the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point's *Islamic Imagery Project* (<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/imagery.asp>).



*These instructions, taken from a pro-insurgent website, show how to add a “news crawl” giving the latest “death toll” for U.S. forces in Iraq according to insurgents. The example above, from spring 2007, puts the tally for U.S. forces in Iraq at 35,280, roughly ten times the official U.S. death toll.*

disapproval.<sup>28</sup> Arab respondents to a recent poll overwhelmingly supported attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq, however.<sup>29</sup> Thus, insurgent media products showcasing attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq reinforce an aspect of the jihadist message that is viewed positively in the Arab world. In this light, it seems entirely logical that jihadist forums, which are ideologically closer to **Al-Qaeda** than to most insurgent groups, are among the primary distribution channels for the text, audio, and video products created by virtually all insurgent groups across the ideological spectrum.

In sum, **Al-Qaeda** and its supporters identify with the Iraqi insurgents' main purpose, which is to drive foreign forces from Iraq, and can use media materials stressing this point to garner support. But Iraqi insurgents, as already noted, do not necessarily identify with the tenets of **Al-Qaeda** and the global jihadist movement.

<sup>28</sup> See *Muslim Public Opinion On US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda*, World Public Opinion.org ([http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START\\_Apr07\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf)).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., “Majorities in Egypt and Morocco expressed approval for attacks on US troops in Muslim countries. Egyptians were those most likely to support such actions. Nine out of ten Egyptians approved of attacks on US military troops in Iraq (91%) and in Afghanistan (91%). Four out of five Egyptians (83%) said they supported attacks on US forces based in Persian Gulf states. Substantial majorities of Moroccans were also in favor of attacks on US troops in Iraq (68%), in Afghanistan (61%) and slightly smaller majorities supported attacks on those based in Persian Gulf states (52%).”

## 4. Producers

### 4.1 Iraqi Insurgent Groups

#### 4.1.1 Islamic State of Iraq (ISI/Al-Qaeda)

ISI/Al-Qaeda was previously known as the **Mujahidin Shura Council**; **Al-Qaeda Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers** (Tanzim Al-Qa'idah fi Bilad Al-Rafidayn); and the **Monotheism and Jihad Group** (Jama'at Al-Tawhid wa Al-Jihad). All three predecessor organizations were led by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, who was killed by multinational forces in June 2006. The "establishment" of the **Islamic State of Iraq** took place in October 2006, in all likelihood as an attempt to "Iraq-ize" a group with a large and prominent contingent of foreign fighters.

- **Who they are:** Known in Western media as **Al-Qaeda in Iraq**, the **Islamic State of Iraq** by its own account was established in October 2006 as a counter to the Kurdish region and the Shi'ite south, and purportedly includes the **Mujahidin Shura Council** and other groups. The "state's" media wing pledged to impose Islamic law on the inhabitants of the areas it claims to govern. The group is led by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, whom the Iraqi government claimed to have killed on May 1.<sup>30</sup> Although **ISI/Al-Qaeda** falls under the general ideological rubric of **Al-Qaeda**, it operates with considerable independence, and it is not at all clear that the **Al-Qaeda** central leadership, in whatever form it currently exists, is capable of exerting operational control or influence over **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.
- **Ideology:** **ISI/Al-Qaeda** adheres to a hard-line jihadist-Salafist ideology, including the strict imposition of Islamic law and a view of jihad as a global struggle between faith and unbelief.
- **Who they target:** The group has vowed to fight both multinational forces, Iraqi forces, and Shi'ite militias; it has also targeted civilians in several instances since 2003. It views the Shi'a as heretics.
- **Area of operations:** Al-Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah Al-Din, Ninawah, and parts of Babil and Wasit governorates.

**Media  
Production  
Logo:**



#### 4.1.2 Mujahidin Army in Iraq

- **Who they are:** Active in Iraq since 2004, the group claims to comprise solely Iraqi fighters, some of whom once served in the Iraqi Army under Saddam Hussein. Its members, however, claim no loyalty to Hussein or the

<sup>30</sup> See *RFE/RL Newslines*, May 3, 2006.

Ba'ath Party's "infidel creed." The group's official spokesman is Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Qaysi. It claims to reject national reconciliation or negotiations with the U.S. or Iraqi governments.

Al-Qaysi told Al-Jazeera television in a November 2006 interview that the founding members of the group were part of an underground religious movement prior to the 2003 war. They foresaw the fall of the regime and planned accordingly, seizing weapons and equipment from abandoned Iraqi Army positions.

- **Ideology:** A Sunni jihadist-Salafist group whose primary goal is to drive "occupation" forces from Iraq and install an Islamic government adhering to Shari'a law.
- **Who they target:** U.S. and Iraqi forces, and other "tools" of the occupation. Al-Qaysi has said that the group does not target civilians, including Shi'ite civilians.
- **Area of operations:** Baghdad, Al-Anbar, Diyala, and Salah Al-Din Governorates.

**Media  
Production  
Logo:**



#### 4.1.3 Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI)

- **Who they are:** Purportedly established in 2002 before the U.S.-led invasion as an underground organization, the **IAI** was proclaimed in May 2003. The group, which is purely Iraqi, claims to be bigger than **ISI/Al-Qaeda**. It includes former members of the Iraqi Army not loyal to the Ba'ath Party. It supports negotiations with the United States if certain conditions are met, including a timetable for the withdrawal of troops, and recognition of the legitimacy of the resistance rather than the portrayal of fighters as terrorists. It claims to hold no hostility toward Iraqi Shi'a, but sees Iran as a major threat to Iraq. Spokesmen include Ibrahim al-Shammari, Ali al-Nu'aymi, and Imad Abdallah. Al-Shammari stated in an April 11, 2007, interview with *Al-Jazeera* that the group has killed approximately 25,000 U.S. and coalition soldiers.
- **Ideology:** The group's primary goal is to drive coalition forces from Iraq. It also seeks to eliminate Iranian influence in Iraq. Only then, and once other conditions are met, will it seek the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq based on Shari'a law.
- **Who they target:** Coalition and Iraqi forces and Shi'ite militias supported by Iran. The IAI says it does not target civilians, unless they are working in support of the United States, Iran, or the Iraqi government. It permits attacks on oil installations and other vital infrastructure.
- **Area of operations:** Although it claims to be everywhere in Iraq, the group mainly operates in Baghdad, Al-Anbar, Diyala, and Salah Al-Din governorates.

**Media  
Production  
Logo:**



#### 4.1.4 Ansar Al-Sunnah Army (previously Ansar Al-Islam)

- **Who they are:** Ansar Al-Sunnah describes itself as an army of jihadists, scholars, and political and military experts dedicated to creating an Islamic state in Iraq. An outgrowth of the terrorist group Ansar Al-Islam, the army, established in September 2003, purportedly acts as an umbrella organization for several smaller jihadist groups. It is led by Abu Abdallah al-Hasan Ibn Mahmud. Comprised of both Iraqi and Sunni Arab (foreign) fighters, the group does not believe in “man-made laws” or democracy, and rejects negotiations with the United States and the Iraqi government.
- **Ideology:** The group seeks the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq adhering to Shari’a law.
- **Who they target:** U.S. and Iraqi forces, including Kurdish peshmerga, and those that work for them, as well as Shi’ite militias.
- **Area of operations:** Mosul, Baghdad, Al-Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah Al-Din governorates.

##### Media Production Logo:



#### 4.1.5 Iraqi Resistance Movement—1920 Revolution Brigades

- **Who they are:** A nationalist, jihadist movement established in June 2003, the group seeks to drive coalition forces from Iraq and establish a state upholding Islam and its tenets, including justice and no discrimination according to race, ethnic group, or religion. As the group’s name suggests, it is more nationalist-leaning than Islamist in outlook. The group, which includes former army officers, is an umbrella for more than a dozen “brigades.” Its creed vows to continue jihad until victory or martyrdom. The movement has denied numerous allegations of a connection to the Ba’ath Party. Its spokesman is Shaykh Abdullah Sulayman al-Umari.
- **Ideology:** To implement God’s law on earth and to rid Muslims of any and all deviations and non-Islamic practices.
- **Who they target:** U.S. and Iraqi forces and those working for them. It reportedly does not permit attacks on civilians or valuable targets such as electricity and oil installations, and does not permit attacks on schools. The group purports to have carried out more than 5,000 attacks in 2006, killing over 2,000 U.S. service personnel and injuring more than 7,000.
- **Area of operations:** Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala governorates.

##### Media Production Logo:



### 4.1.6 The Islamic Front of Iraqi Resistance (JAMI)

**The Islamic Front of Iraq Resistance (JAMI)** was established in May 2004 and comprises a mixture of former military officers and civilian fighters. The front's main military wing is known as the **Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi Brigades**.

Despite its name, **JAMI** is more nationalist than Islamist in outlook. Its key goal is to drive coalition forces from Iraq. As a policy, **JAMI** does not target Iraqi government personnel or installations, including the military. The group's attacks are aimed exclusively at coalition forces, and exhibit a fair amount of sophistication. While members of the group may possess superior fighting skills—due largely to its many former military officers—it does not appear to be particularly well-equipped. In March 2006, it issued a booklet on jihad in Iraq that stressed the need to take care of and safeguard weapons. It also warned against individual or small-group confrontation against the “occupier,” since the latter possessed military superiority.

**JAMI**'s political wing has strongly criticized all post-Hussein governments, and has rejected offers of national reconciliation with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's administration. It has on occasion, however, stipulated the terms under which it would be willing to join a national-reconciliation initiative.

In May 2007 **JAMI** merged with **Hamas-Iraq**, a breakaway group of the **1920 Revolution Brigades**. The groups vowed to completely merge their political and military units.

## 4.2 Virtual (Transnational) Organizations

In the vast majority of cases, it is impossible to determine who actually creates the media products disseminated on the Internet. Products are almost always “branded,” however, bearing the logo and name of either a specific insurgent group (see above) or a “media center.” The latter are virtual organizations usually associated with a particular group, or groups, and serve to confirm the official status of a media product. In many cases, a product may be associated with both an insurgent group and a media center. For example, press releases issued by **ISI/Al-Qaeda** appear on the **World News Network**'s statements section marked with the **ISI/Al-Qaeda** logo. At the bottom of the actual text of the press release, a note indicates, “Source: Al-Fajr Media Center”. We present below an overview of the main virtual (transnational) media organizations associated with the creation and distribution of insurgent media.

### 4.2.1 Al-Sahab Institute for Media Production

**Al-Sahab** [Clouds] is primarily associated with **Al-Qaeda**'s central leadership and leading figures in the Taliban, and it produces audio and videotaped statements by such figures as Ayman al-Zawahiri (see Figure 40). **Al-Sahab**



Figure 40. A statement by Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two figure in Al-Qaeda, produced by the Al-Sahab Institute for Media Production



Figure 41. The banner logo of the Al-Sahab Institute for Media Production

also produces videos showing attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan, including the series *Holocaust Of The Americans In Khorasan* and a magazine about the mujahidin in Afghanistan. **Al-Sahab**'s products are usually of high quality, with DivX the preferred format, and frequently feature English subtitles. The subtitles, which are likely aimed both at English-speaking Muslims worldwide and journalists in English-language media, reflect the globally directed focus of the **Al-Qaeda** core. **Al-Sahab** products are normally distributed to forums through the **Al-Fajr Media Center** (see below) (see figure 41).

#### 4.2.2 Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF)

The **Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF)** produces a variety of materials, including the monthly magazines *Sada al-Jihad* and *Sada al-Rafidayn*, as well as written materials and foreign-language translations of addresses by figures from **Al-Qaeda**'s central leadership (such as a recent French translation of a statement by Ayman al-Zawahiri). **GIMF** also produced a French translation of an **Al-Furqan**-produced **ISI/Al-Qaeda** statement on the Baghdad security plan. **GIMF** is strongly sympathetic to **Al-Qaeda** and **ISI/Al-Qaeda**. Against a backdrop of disputes among leading insurgent groups since the **IAI**'s early-April statement criticizing **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, **GIMF** has begun distributing articles as part of a series titled *Suppressing Strife In The Cradle*, apparently intended to bolster **ISI/Al-Qaeda**'s position in its conflict with rival insurgent groups (see Figure 42).



Figure 42. The banner logo of the Global Islamic Media Front



Figure 43. A banner advertising a release from the Al-Fajr Media Center

#### 4.2.3 Al-Fajr Media Center

As noted above, the **Al-Fajr [Dawn] Media Center** acts primarily as a distribution channel for products branded by **Al-Sahab**, **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, the **ISI/Al-Qaeda**-affiliated **Al-Furqan**, and other groups. For example, press releases issued by **Ansar al-Sunnah** on the **World News Network** are sourced to **Al-Fajr**. **Al-Fajr** occasionally appears in the guise of a production unit, as in an early-May release of a film announcing the “martyrdom” of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**’s official spokesman, Abu Abdallah Muharib al-Juburi. (see Figure 43).

#### 4.2.4 Al-Boraq Media Center

**Al-Boraq** mainly focuses on text production, although the organization also runs a forum with a wide variety of statements and archived products by other media organizations. Recent **Al-Boraq** products include a slickly produced, Flash-format text version of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**’s announcement of its cabinet (see Figure 44). In October 2006, **Al-Boraq** released a much quoted



Figure 44. The ISI/Al-Qaeda announcement of its “cabinet of ministers” on April 20, 2007, produced by the Al-Boraq Media Center



Figure 45. The banner logo of the Al-Boraq Media Organization

essay on jihadist media titled *Media Exuberance*; the essay warns that jihadists must create legitimate, authoritative “brands” to release media products that can compete with the offerings of mainstream media such as *Al-Jazeera* and *CNN*. The **Al-Boraq** website ([www.al-boraq.com](http://www.al-boraq.com)) offers two basic sections, one with statements and media products from a variety of insurgent groups, and one dedicated to statements by the **IAI**. The site also includes archives of **Al-Sahab** and **Al-Furqan** releases (see Figure 45).

#### 4.2.5 Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production

**Al-Furqan** is the primary media production center for **ISI/Al-Qaeda**. It produces virtually all **ISI/Al-Qaeda** films, audio and videotaped addresses, and the **ISI/Al-Qaeda**-affiliated periodical *Biographies Of Notable Martyrs*. An **Al-Qaeda**-affiliated center, **Al-Furqan** distributes its products to websites through the **Al-Fajr Media Center**.

### 4.3 Individual Producers

Thanks to the decentralized, “do-it-yourself” nature of the insurgent media enterprise (see Section 3.3.1, The Decentralized, ‘Do-It- Yourself’ Media Factory), virtually anyone can, in theory, create a pro-insurgent media product. In practice, this is discouraged. The **Al-Boraq Media Center** published a study in October 2006 titled *Media Exuberance*, warning that the ease of Internet-based media production is a threat to the credibility and authority of jihadist—and, by analogy, insurgent—media. Nevertheless, some prominent individuals are also producers of pro-insurgent media, as are contributors to jihadist forums.

#### 4.3.1 Hamid al-Ali

The Kuwait-based radical cleric Hamid al-Ali is an example of an authoritative individual producer of pro-insurgent media products. He maintains a popular website ([www.h-alali.net](http://www.h-alali.net)) with numerous materials on Iraq’s Sunni insurgency. For example, al-Ali posted a bitterly anti-Shi’ite poem to his website within hours of an interview by *Al-Jazeera* with a woman identified as Sabrin al-Janabi, who charged that she had been raped by Iraqi Interior Ministry personnel during a raid (see Section 7.2, The Sabrin al-Janabi Case). Al-Ali writes frequently on the threat of mounting Iranian influence. In

the recent conflict between **ISI/Al-Qaeda** and the **IAI**, al-Ali was critical of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, and his position earned him the enmity of many pro-**Al Qaeda** contributors to jihadist forums.

### 4.3.2 Forum Contributors

Contributors to forums, from mainstream to jihadist, frequently comment on insurgent activities in Iraq. Some of these comments are sufficiently extensive and detailed to qualify as media products in their own right. The most popular of these are often posted to several forums and gain widespread distribution on the Internet.

## 5. Delivering the Message

Sunni insurgent groups are in armed conflict with Iraq's central authorities, a large U.S. military force, Shi'ite militias, and, at times, each other. This creates serious obstacles to the maintenance of the brick-and-mortar infrastructure needed to operate traditional print and broadcast outlets. As a result, insurgent groups prefer to use the Internet to deliver their message.

The Internet is more versatile than traditional delivery platforms because it can serve as a vehicle for those platforms in addition to Internet-specific information platforms like websites. A website can be used to deliver a newspaper to Internet users just as easily as it can be used to deliver a radio station or television station. Recognizing the Internet's dual-use potential as a vehicle for both Internetspecific and traditional delivery platforms, this section of the report looks first at Internetspecific insurgent media delivery platforms, and then at more traditional print and broadcast platforms. The division is largely theoretical. In practice, insurgents tend to use the Internet to deliver all of the media products they create, from text to moving images.

### 5.1 The Internet

Because websites are multi-layered, they do not lend themselves naturally to categorization. For example, an organization's official website may contain statements from the organization's leadership, a blog by a member of the organization, and a forum for users to discuss the organization's activities. Nevertheless, we have divided the websites that comprise online Iraqi insurgent media into four broad categories: dedicated websites, sympathetic websites, forums, and blogs. While the divisions are not mutually exclusive, they provide a thumbnail guide to the insurgent media presence on the Internet. Unless otherwise noted, all content on the websites surveyed here is in Arabic.

The insurgent web is not static. Like insurgent groups themselves, which merge, emerge, and sometimes vanish or break up, websites are dynamic.

Many websites associated with the insurgency exist for a period of time and then vanish, either because hosts remove them, governments block them, or their creators decide to change addresses. What is important to note is that no single website ever acts as the sole distribution channel for insurgent materials. All of the media products insurgents and their supporters create appear on numerous websites, and if any single website is blocked or closed, dozens, and sometimes hundreds, of others are available to carry the same materials. The existence of multiple websites to disseminate insurgent media products constitutes a built-in failsafe mechanism, and ensures that while the insurgents' message may not always reach the world through the same distribution channels, some channels always exist to carry it.

This report provides a necessarily static snapshot of the insurgent web. During the writing and publication of the report, changes have taken place in the dynamic world of insurgent and insurgent-affiliated websites. Where possible, we have noted some of these changes. Others will have taken place by the time you are reading this report. Nevertheless, this synchronic overview of websites here, which captures a situation that existed in April/May 2007, is a structurally accurate representation of the diachronic reality of the insurgent web, in which sites shift over time, but a mutable array of dedicated websites, sympathetic websites, forums, and blogs remains to make insurgent materials available to web users.

### 5.1.1 Insurgent Group Websites

Dedicated insurgent websites openly proclaim their affiliation with a specific insurgent group. By definition, Iraqi insurgent groups do not have an "official" presence in the form of a geographically fixed headquarters. They do, however, have a more or less official identity in the form of a name, logo, leader, and ideological platform (see Section 4.1, Iraqi Insurgent Groups). The dedicated websites they maintain reflect this, even when the sites themselves disclaim "official" affiliation with a group, as is the case with the website of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.

Readers should bear in mind that insurgent groups are not static. Existing groups merge and sometimes disappear; new groups appear, as do larger formations consisting of several insurgent groups, such as the **Mujahidin Shura Council** and the newly announced **Front for Jihad and Reform**.<sup>31</sup> The insurgency's Internet presence has reflected these shifts, and will surely continue to do so in the future.

<sup>31</sup> The **IAI**, the Legal Commission of **Ansar Al-Sunnah**, and the **Mujahidin Army** announced the formation of a new front comprising the three groups in early May 2007. Within 24 hours of the announcement, the front had a dedicated website, banner, and logo. As of May 18, the website had only carried three statements by the front, though the three groups continued to release their usual volume of statements and videos on other websites and forums.

Finally, it is important to remember that a web presence is not the same as a presence on the ground. While some of the most important insurgent groups (see Section 4.1, Iraqi Insurgent Groups) also maintain relatively popular websites—**ISI/Al-Qaeda** and the **IAI**, for example—other groups that appear to be active on the ground do not have dedicated websites (such as **Ansar al-Sunnah**). By the same token, some of the websites detailed below belong to groups that may be largely media creations, with little or no real presence on the ground.

The following websites openly affiliate themselves with known Iraqi insurgent groups and serve as delivery platforms for the media products they create:<sup>32</sup>

#### 5.1.1.1 Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI)

The website of the **IAI** ([www.iaisite.info](http://www.iaisite.info)) contains the following sections:

- A home page with press releases detailing the group's most recent military operations, statements by its leaders and spokesmen, and other media products. Banner logos provide links to two recent films and the latest issue of the group's magazine, *Al-Fursan* (see Section 3.1.2, Periodicals).
- Official Statements—contains statements released the previous day.
- Our Program—the group's ideological platform.
- Video Releases—brings users to the sections of the Al-Boraq forum ([www.al-boraq.com](http://www.al-boraq.com)) with statements by the **IAI**.
- Contact Us—opens a form for submitting e-mail queries and comments.

The website does not have a search function. The link for Archive of Statements is inactive.

Registration data for the domain [iaisite.info](http://www.iaisite.info) as listed by [whois.net](http://www.whois.net):<sup>33</sup>

Domain ID:D13662056-LRMS

Domain Name: IAISITE.INFO

Created On: 03-Jun-2006 21:07:10 UTC

Last Updated On: 12-May-2007 07:06:30 UTC

Expiration Date: 03-Jun-2009 21:07:10 UTC

Sponsoring Registrar: Intercosmos Media Group, Inc. (R152-LRMS)

Status: CLIENT DELETE PROHIBITED

Status: CLIENT TRANSFER PROHIBITED

Status: CLIENT UPDATE PROHIBITED

<sup>32</sup> Unless otherwise noted, information on content and functionality was current as of May 14, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Registration data for other sites mentioned in this report can be obtained by entering the domain name into the form available at [www.whois.net](http://www.whois.net).

Status: TRANSFER PROHIBITED  
 Registrant ID: IMG-709656  
 Registrant Name: ali sultan  
 Registrant Organization: kabous  
 Registrant Street1: oman muscat  
 Registrant Street2:  
 Registrant Street3:  
 Registrant City: muscat  
 Registrant State/Province: quram  
 Registrant Postal Code: 118  
 Registrant Country: OM

#### 5.1.1.2 Mujahidin Army in Iraq

The website of the **Mujahidin Army in Iraq** ([www.nasrunminallah.net](http://www.nasrunminallah.net)) contains the following sections (see Figure 46):

- A home page with the latest news from Iraq, videotaped military operations, and group statements. The home page also contains a search function, interactive polls, a registration function, and a subscription function to receive e-mailed updates.
- Meet Us—description of the group and its ideological platform.
- Statements.
- Video—downloadable videos of military operations. It contains 11 videos, all dating from 2005.
- Koran—downloadable audio recordings of Koranic recitation.
- Hadith—utterances by the Prophet Muhammad.
- Sermons—downloadable audio recordings of sermons. These focus on jihad, with a number of sermons by Abdallah Azzam, a Palestinian who played a key role in organizing Arab volunteers who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s.
- Flashes—19 downloadable Flash films. The focus is on propaganda materials illustrating the evils of the “occupation” and the sufferings of the Iraqi people. A representative title is *The Cry Of An Iraqi Child*.
- Images—actual images are not available.
- Songs—downloadable songs glorifying jihad.
- Contact Us—an online form for sending messages to the group.
- Your Comments—comments from users.

The links to Printed Materials, Articles, and Literature do not work.



Figure 46. The website of the Mujahidin Army

### 5.1.1.3 Islamic Front of Iraqi Resistance: Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi Brigades (JAMI)

The website of the **Islamic Front of Iraqi Resistance: Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi Brigades** (arabic.jaamiiraq.com) contains the following sections:

- A home page with local and world news, recent statements, articles, videos and images of recent military operations, and downloadable posters.
- Political Statements—28 statements dating back to 2004.<sup>34</sup>
- Military Statements—87 statements dating back to 2004.
- Videotaped Operations—201 downloadable videos of military operations.
- Articles—28 articles. The most recent is *Poverty And Addiction Threaten Iran*.
- On the Islamic Legal Grounding of the Resistance—13 articles. The most recent is *Caution And Preparedness In Jihadist Activity*.
- Songs of the Brigades—six downloadable songs, nationalist in form and content.
- Slogan of the Brigades—an explanation of the symbolism in the group's logo.
- Images of Operations—170 images from the group's military operations.
- Posters—40 posters glorifying the group and, more generally, jihad in Iraq.
- Signatures—signatures for use by participants in online forums.
- Send Your Post—a form for submitting comments to the site.
- Who We Are—a short description of the group and its platform, dated December 22, 2006.
- Contact Us—online form for sending messages to the group.

All links are functional.

### 5.1.1.4 Jaysh Abi Bakr al-Siddiq al-Salafi

The website of **Jaysh Abi Bakr al-Siddiq al-Salafi** [Abu Bakr Al-Saddiq Salafist Army] (www.jaisha-bibaker.net) contains the following sections (see Figure 47):

- A home page with lists of the group's Most Beautiful Video-taped Operations (18 operations) and Latest Military Operations (over 50).



Figure 47. The website of Jaysh Abi Bakr al-Siddiq al-Salafi

<sup>34</sup> Statistics for this site reflect information current as of late March 2007.

- Videotaped Operations—a large archive of downloadable videos, all dating from 2005 and 2006.
- Military Harvest—links to Videotaped Operations.
- Military Publications—video compilations of the group’s military operations.
- Statements—two statements.
- Fatwas—responses to questions. Although the section’s title implies that the responses come from a jurist with Islamic legal qualifications, he is not identified.
- Koran—selected recitations from the Koran.
- Songs—11 songs glorifying jihad.
- Magazine—three issues of a magazine titled Echo Of The Mujahidin.
- Meet Us—a brief description of the group and its aims.
- Contact Us—online form for sending messages to the group.

As of May 14, 2007, the site was not functional. The web address carried a notice reading “This account has been suspended.”

#### 5.1.1.5 Jihadist Brigades of Iraq

The website of the **Jihadist Brigades** ([www.iraqiasaeb.org/asaeb2007/](http://www.iraqiasaeb.org/asaeb2007/)) contains the following sections (see Figure 48):

- A home page listing the group’s most recent statements on its military operations.
- Who We Are—brief description of the group’s beliefs and aims.
- Our Creed—long article on the group’s ideology.
- Military Statements—statements issued over the previous four-five days.
- Videotaped Operations—17 downloadable videos of military operations.
- Video Productions—non-working link to a film titled Tall Lances.



Figure 48. The website of the Jihadist Brigades of Iraq



Figure 49. The website of ISI/Al-Qaeda

- Political Statements—two statements, both dating to 2006.
- The Monthly Harvest—downloadable reports on previous months’ military operations, covers four months of AH 1427 (2006).
- The Annual Harvest—a list of military operations carried out in 2005.
- Articles—three articles, one on Shi’a and two on the Islamic resistance in Iraq.
- Audiovisual—12 jihadist songs.
- Poetry and Poems—three poems.
- Links—a list of jihadist web resources.
- Photo Album.
- Islamic Law of Jihad—an anonymous article on jihad from the perspective of Islamic law.
- Fatwas—three legal rulings, one of them titled *What Is A Spy And What Is The Ruling On Him In Islam*.

The site has a non-working link to an English version. All of the main links are functional.

#### 5.1.1.6 Islamic State of Iraq (ISI/Al-Qaeda)

The website of **ISI/Al-Qaeda** ([islamiciraq.modawanati.com](http://islamiciraq.modawanati.com)) describes itself as a blog and states, “This site is a personal effort and is not the official site of the Islamic State of Iraq.” Nevertheless, the “blog” functions for all practical purposes as the official site of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**. It contains the following sections (see Figure 49):

- A home page with recent statements and video productions. As of May 14, 2007, the most recent statement was dated April 20, 2007. Atop the home page are two banner advertisements for films.
- Archive—empty, statements on the home page go back only to March 10, 2007.
- Photo Album—five images, including the logo of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.
- Other Articles—recent statements by the group.
- Pictures of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al- Zawahiri, and Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi.

Most links are functional, although the link to additional statements at the bottom of the home page does not work.

The **ISI/Al-Qaeda** site does not have its own domain. It is hosted by [modawanati.com](http://modawanati.com), an Arabic-language blog site.

#### 5.1.1.7 Army of the Men of the Naqshibandi Order

The website of the **Army of the Men of the Naqshibandi Order** ([www.alnakshabania-army.com](http://www.alnakshabania-army.com)) contains the following sections:

A home page with two videos, an interview with the group's official spokesman, Dr. Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, from *Al-Zawra TV* (see Section 5.2.3, Television), and the group's eighth video release.

- Our Creed—article on the group's ideology.
- Our Jihadist Path—article on the group's understanding of jihad.
- Our Army—description of the group's armed units.
- Our Jihadist Operations (Videotaped)—links to 12 videotaped operations.
- Our Jihadist Operations (Unrecorded)—blank.
- Statements—four statements.
- Photo Library—86 images from the group's videos.
- Audio Materials—24 files, primarily poetry.
- Reading Material—four statements (same as Statements above).
- Contact Us—form for submitting queries and comments.

All of the main links are functional except for Snapshots for Cell Phones.

#### 5.1.1.8 Jaysh al-Rashidin

The website of **Jaysh al-Rashidin** [Al-Rashidin Army] ([www.theislam-sun.com](http://www.theislam-sun.com)) contains the following sections:

A home page with a short general article and a link to a film titled *Our Jihad Rebuffs The Ruse Of The Occupiers*.

- Videos—links to a large number of videotaped operations.
- Statements—operational statements.
- Jihad—fatwas on the conduct of jihad.
- Articles—three short articles.
- Spreading the Word and Guidance—three short articles.
- Know Your Enemy—three articles, including a short piece on fabrications by mainstream media.
- Fatwas and Legal Issues.
- Contact Us—a form for submitting queries and comments.

All of the links are functional except for a section called Between the Lines.

#### 5.1.2 Sympathetic Websites

The following websites do not affiliate themselves with specific Sunni insurgent groups but are sympathetic to their cause and sometimes post insurgent media materials as well as original materials based on or inspired by insurgent sources.

### 5.1.2.1 Albasrah.net ([www.albasrah.net](http://www.albasrah.net))

The section on Resistance and Liberation reproduces some statements from insurgent groups and links to downloadable videos of their operations against coalition forces. The section is available in Arabic and English, but the Arabic is far more detailed and contains more materials specifically sourced to insurgent groups (see Figure 50).



Figure 50. The website of Albasrah.net

### 5.1.2.2 Iraqpatriol.com ([www.iraqpatriol.com](http://www.iraqpatriol.com))

The section Field of Heroism details insurgent attacks against coalition forces and reproduces statements by insurgent groups claiming responsibility for military operations (see Figure 51).

### 5.1.2.3 Islammemo ([www.islammemo.cc](http://www.islammemo.cc))

Although with rare exceptions **Islammemo** pointedly refrains from citing insurgent sources, or even referring to specific insurgent groups, it provides comprehensive coverage of attacks on coalition and Iraqi government forces. The site's hard-line anti-Shi'ite stance fits in with the general ideological profile of most Sunni insurgent groups, and its reports are often posted to forums and message boards that distribute the media products of Iraqi insurgent groups. In mid-April, the site was briefly unavailable; it reappeared in May.

## 5.1.3 Forums and Message Boards

Forums are by far the most popular and widespread means of delivering insurgent media products. Forums allow participants to post messages to which other participants can add their responses, making them a lively platform for disseminating insurgent media products and discussing insurgent activity. It should be noted that while discussions sometimes touch on strategy and tactics, participants are aware that forums are a subject of interest for intelligence agencies and researchers, and they generally avoid mentioning operational specifics. Most of the forums listed below are jihadist and pro-**Al-Qaeda** in their general outlook, although each one has its own focus and flavor. The list is representative but far from exhaustive. All of the forums are in Arabic unless otherwise noted.



Figure 51. The website of Iraq Patrol

#### 5.1.3.1 Al-Tajdeed ([www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums](http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums))

**Al-Tajdeed** is primarily a Saudi dissident forum with a jihadist tone. The focus is global, but participants frequently post statements and videos from Iraqi insurgent groups in the forum's section on Issues of the Muslim Community and Events of the Moment. This section contained 36,131 threads and 127,089 posts on May 30, 2007.

#### 5.1.3.2 The Islamic Fluga [Al-Fallujah]

Forums ([www.al-faloja.com/vb/](http://www.al-faloja.com/vb/)) Named after the Iraqi city where U.S. forces battled insurgents, **Al-Fallujah's** section on Issues of the Islamic Community features regularly posted materials from insurgent groups. This section contained 4,037 threads and 14,243 posts on May 30, 2007.

#### 5.1.3.3 Mohajroon ([www.mohajroon.com/vb/](http://www.mohajroon.com/vb/))

**Mohajroon** is a password-protected jihadist forum, but the Statements section is open to all and offers a wealth of insurgent materials updated every few minutes. Insurgent statements and other media products are marked with the logos of the groups that produced them. The focus is broader than Iraq, with statements from organizations and groups spanning the globe, but Iraqi insurgent media products are the most numerous. The archive of Statements from the Mujahidin of Iraq included 11,560 threads and 42,452 posts on April 14, 2007, when the forum announced that it was ceasing operations. It has not been accessible since that date.

#### 5.1.3.4 Al-Firdaws ([www.alfirdaws.org/vb/](http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/))

The Statements and Reports section of **Al-Firdaws** provides a stream of constantly updated jihadist media materials, including offerings from Iraqi insurgent groups. This section contained 6,767 threads and 28,014 posts on May 30, 2007. Like **Mohajroon**, **Al-Firdaws** marks threads relating to a specific group with the group's logo. The forum contains a special archive of materials from the **Al-Sahab** video-production unit (51 threads), as well as a more general archive of media products from jihadist groups (106 threads).

#### 5.1.3.5 Al-Boraq ([www.al-boraq.com](http://www.al-boraq.com))

**Al-Boraq** is yet another extensive, frequently updated clearing house for insurgent materials. The forum has special sections for posted materials from the **Al-Sahab** and **Al-Furqan** video-production units, as well as the video-production units of **Ansar al-Sunnah** and the **Mujahidin Shura Council**. The archive of statements contained 6,385 threads and 31,057 posts in mid-May 2007. On May 30, 2007, **Al-Boraq**'s original URL became inactive and the site's administrators announced that it would be operating at 12.47.45.102/index.php and al-boraq.org.



Figure 52. The insurgent statements section of World News Network

#### 5.1.3.6 World News Network ([www.w-n-n.com](http://www.w-n-n.com))

**World News Network** is a message board—viewers cannot post comments. The Statements, Reports, and Releases section is a comprehensive and constantly updated overview of insurgent products, as well as jihadist media materials from elsewhere in the world (see Figure 52). This section contained 208 pages of statements, with approximately 60 statements per page, on May 30, 2007. **World News Network**

has an English section that is updated daily and consists primarily of statements from **ISI/Al-Qaeda**.

#### 5.1.3.7 Al-Nusra ([www.alnusra.net/vb/](http://www.alnusra.net/vb/))

**Al-Nusra** has a special section for statements by **ISI/Al-Qaeda** and a general section for Statements and Releases of the **Mujahidin** (see Figure 53). On May 30, 2007, the former had 2,649 threads and 10,068 posts, and the latter 7,783 threads and 24,401 posts.

### 5.1.3.8 Ana al-Muslim (www.muslm.net/vb/)

**Ana al-Muslim's** General section offers frequent discussions of issues relating to the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, although actual insurgent statements are only posted intermittently to this section. The forum's overall tone is jihadist and pro-**Al-Qaeda**. On May 30, 2007, the General section contained 91,887 threads and 714,961 posts.

## 5.1.4 Blogs

### 5.1.4.1 Albayanat (albayanat.blogspot.com)

The **News of the Mujahidin** blog posts insurgent statements on a daily basis, often with links to downloadable video clips of attacks.



Figure 53. Statements from ISI/Al-Qaeda on the Al-Nusrah forum

## 5.2 Print and Broadcast

### 5.2.1 Print

While the bulk of insurgent text materials are distributed solely on the Internet, some materials are also made available in print form. We present below an overview of insurgent print production.

#### 5.2.1.1 Newspapers

There are no newspapers specifically affiliated with insurgent groups.

#### 5.2.1.2 Leaflets, Pamphlets, and Periodicals

Insurgent groups spread their message on the ground through statements in the form of leaflets plastered on walls, signposts, and in mosques.



Figure 54. A leaflet distributed by Ansar al-Sunnah in Baghdad in fall 2006



Figure 55. A leaflet distributed by ISI/Al-Qaeda in Mosul in April 2007



Figure 56. A leaflet distributed by Ansar al-Sunnah in Mosul in February 2007

Leaflets address a variety of topics and can include threats, warnings, or instructions to the local population on issues of comportment and the like. For example, the **Ansar Al-Sunnah Army** distributed leaflets in Baghdad's Al-Jadiriya district in fall 2006 warning Sunni Arab university students and Shi'ite students not loyal to the militias to stay away from university campuses, as the army was about to undertake a mission to cleanse campuses of Shi'ite militias (see Figure 54).

Materials obtained by RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq correspondents in Baghdad and Al-Mosul illustrate an important difference between the statements made available on the Internet and the printed leaflets distributed within Iraq. The former are intended for an international audience and focus on the attacks carried out by insurgent groups and broader ideological issues. The latter are local in focus, as the following four leaflets from Mosul demonstrate:

- An April 5, 2007, leaflet signed by the Islamic Law Ministry of **ISI/Al-Qaeda** informs the residents of three villages outside Mosul that the group has decided to lift a blockade it recently imposed on the area (see Figure 55). The leaflet stresses that the blockade will remain in force on a number of other villages near Mosul.
- A February 31, 2007, leaflet signed by **Ansar al-Sunnah** in Mosul informs residents of Mosul that the group is not responsible for threats issued in its name by telephone and letters (see Figure 56). The group notes that it does

not use these means to issue threats and asks residents to inform it, through an email address provided in the leaflet, of those responsible so that it can punish them.

- A December 11, 2006, leaflet from the **Jihadist Truth Brigades** is titled *A Final Warning To Sheep Smugglers* (see Figure 57). The leaflet states that the smuggling of sheep to northern Iraq “and even beyond Iraq” is illegal and drives up prices, disturbing an already unsettled economy.
- An undated leaflet signed by the **Al-Faruq Umar bin al-Khattab Brigades** gives a final warning to the cellular-phone company Asia Cell for “cutting off and weakening the network in certain hotspots where truth strikes falsehood.” The leaflet warns that if Asia Cell fails to improve service in these areas, the brigades will “spill the blood” of Asia Cell employees and blow up its transmission towers (see Figure 58).

The four leaflets are noteworthy for more than their focus on purely local issues. They also illustrate the varied approaches of insurgent groups toward the local population. **Ansar al-Sunnah** leaflet reassures the local population that the group is not the source of unspecified threats, the **Jihadist Truth Brigades** leaflet warns smugglers that they are making life more difficult for other

residents by driving up prices, and the **Al-Faruq Brigades** leaflet directs a specific threat to the employees of Asia Cell.



Figure 57. A leaflet distributed by the Jihadist Truth Brigades in Mosul in December 2006



Figure 58. A leaflet distributed by the Al-Faruq Umar bin al-Khattab Brigades

The tone adopted by **ISI/Al-Qaeda** is strikingly different. While the leaflet informs residents of three villages that the group is lifting a blockade in order to ease their lives, the statement is imperious. After enumerating the villages that remain under blockade, the text states, “May the world know that we, sons of the Islamic State of Iraq, impose and lift blockades on any region we wish and at any time we wish.”

## 5.2.2 Radio

There are no known radio stations expressly affiliated with insurgent groups.

## 5.2.3 Television

### 5.2.3.1 Al-Zawra (Baghdad)

*Al-Zawra* is owned by Mish'an al-Juburi, a pro-Ba'athist agitator who once had close ties to Saddam Hussein's son, Uday. Al-Juburi reportedly stole millions from Uday Hussein in the 1990s and joined the opposition, returning to Iraq after the fall of the Hussein regime.

Elected to parliament first in the January 2005 transitional election and later in the December 2005 election for a permanent government, al-Juburi was stripped of his immunity from prosecution in October 2006 amid accusations that he and his son had embezzled millions intended to pay for paramilitary forces to guard pipelines that run from Baiji through the Salah Al-Din Governorate to Baghdad.<sup>35</sup>

It was at this point that Baghdad-based *Al-Zawra* television (see Figure 59), which was launched in November 2005, changed its format from an entertainment channel to a proinsurgency channel, broadcasting attack videos for the **IAI**, the **Mujahidin Army in Iraq**, **Jaysh Al-Rashidin**, **Jaysh Al-Fatihin**, the **1920 Revolution Brigades**, the **Naqshibandi Order Army**, and **JAMI**.

Its rhetoric is strongly opposed to the United States,



Figure 59. The logo of the *Al-Zawra* satellite television channel

<sup>35</sup> For more information, see the *RFE/RL Iraq Report*, February 6, 2006 ([http://www.rferl.org/reports/iraq\\_report/2006/02/6-100206.asp](http://www.rferl.org/reports/iraq_report/2006/02/6-100206.asp)).

Iran, and pro-Iranian Iraqi Shi'a. The channel also reflects al-Juburi's dislike of **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** and refuses to promote that group's operations or agenda.

*Al-Zawra*'s Baghdad headquarters was closed in November 2006 for inciting violence following the Iraqi Tribunal's handing down of a death sentence against Saddam Hussein. The channel was back on the air in a matter of days via the satellite transmitter Nilesat. Al-Juburi has claimed in interviews that Al-Zawra still broadcasts from Iraq using a mobile satellite truck.

Rumors as to Al-Zawra's location have abounded (Cairo, Irbil, Damascus, Paris, and even the Sunni imam Harith al-Dari's house) but none have been proven.

According to the U.S. State Department's 2006 Country Report On Human Rights Practices For Iraq, the Iraqi government in November recommended the continued closure of Al-Zawra "as well as a lawsuit against the owners and managers for airing training videos on how to build explosive devices, promoting calls to join terrorists and insurgent groups, and promoting killings and genocide against a large segment of the populace."

Egyptian authorities briefly stopped Nilesat from broadcasting Al-Zawra in late 2006 and closed down broadcasts altogether in February 2007; the channel continues to be broadcast via Arabsat.

### 5.2.3.2 Al-Rafidayn

The *Al-Rafidayn*<sup>36</sup> satellite channel is based in Cairo and broadcasts via Nilesat transmitters. Billed as an "independent" channel, *Al-Rafidayn* supports the Sunni Arab "resistance" and acts as the mouthpiece for the Muslim Scholars Association and its head, Harith al-Dari. The channel is critical of the United States and the Iraqi government, as well as Iranian interference in Iraq.

The channel reflects in its interviews and reporting the relationship between the Muslim Scholars Association and certain Shi'a critical of the U.S. and Iraqi governments including Ayatollah Jawad al-Khalisi.

Although the channel's staff has not been accused by the Iraqi government of inciting Iraqis to violence, they report on incendiary issues in a highly provocative fashion. For example, in January 2007, the channel ran a statement by the Muslim Scholars Association calling on former Iraqi Army commanders to prepare to liberate Iraq from the "occupation."

A frequent participant in *Al-Rafidayn*'s political talk shows is Iraqi pro-insurgent "political analyst" and former Ba'athist Nizar al-Samarra'i, who regularly touts the achievements of the "resistance" and the defeat of the U.S. project in Iraq.

*Al-Rafidayn* also reports frequently on the operations of the insurgent group **IAI**.

<sup>36</sup> A reference to Iraq's two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates.

5.2.3.3 Al-Jazeera

The Doha-based, pan-Arab satellite channel has been an avid supporter of insurgents in Iraq since 2003. *Al-Jazeera* devotes part of its daily news coverage to Iraqi and **Al-Qaeda** insurgents through its broadcast of statements and videos by armed groups, as well as interviews with Sunni Arab insurgent leaders in Iraq. On April 11, 2007, *Al-Jazeera* conducted an hour-long interview with the spokesman for the **IAI**. In May 13, 2007, news broadcasts, *Al-Jazeera* covered an **ISI/Al-Qaeda** claim that it had captured three U.S. soldiers, played a tape by the **Mujahidin Army** showing the destruction of a U.S. Army Hum-vee, and detailed a statement by three insurgent groups blaming **Al-Qaeda** for the deaths of 12 of their field commanders.

5.2.3.4 Al-Firdaws (Caliphate Voice Channel)

Announced with considerable fanfare in a January 20, 2007, press release, the *Caliphate Voice Channel* (Sawt al-Khilafa in Arabic; the station’s logo identifies it as CVC) was conceived as an online television station to broadcast jihadist propaganda materials. According to the schedule included with the initial press release (see Figure 60), *CVC* broadcast a variety of jihadist materials, including “Selections of Jihadist Operations (Iraq)” and films by insurgent groups such as the **Mujahidin Army**, **Ansar al-Sunnah**, and the **IAI**. At present, CVC is no longer operating at the web address listed in the January 20, 2007, press release.

الجدول والبرامج 10-9-10 هـ			
1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)
2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)
البرامج 12-11 هـ			
1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)
2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)
البرامج 14-13 هـ			
1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	1- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)
2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)	2- أخبار الله و رسوله (البرامج)

Figure 60. The broadcast schedule of the online Caliphate Voice Channel

## 5.3 Conclusions

### 5.3.1 Reach and Impact

The reach of Iraqi insurgent media is global and seeks to promulgate a message that the resistance is conquering occupation forces in Iraq. **ISI/Al-Qaeda** has by far the largest reach and impact on would-be foreign fighters and its supporters, in part because of its ideology, which espouses a localized version of global jihad. The impact of its message across the Arab world can be seen in the numbers of Saudis, Egyptians, and Palestinians viewing their materials online (see Figure 61). It is also evidenced in the nationalities of foreign fighters detained in Iraq, with Palestinians being the exception, as they cannot easily travel and have not been found in large numbers in detention. It should also be noted that Syrian access to the Internet is heavily controlled by the state, and the number of Syrians viewing insurgent web pages is difficult to measure.

While it is impossible to gauge the full reach of the websites that distribute insurgent materials without access to internal administrative information, rough data obtained from alexa.com provide a general guide. As the accompanying graphs show, the most popular websites carrying insurgent and pro-insurgent materials are equal, and in some cases superior, in reach to many mainstream Arab media sites.

**ISI/Al-Qaeda** operates a sophisticated media machine that is more polished than those of homegrown insurgent groups. This could be due to a variety of factors, including its ability to make use of foreign financial support and professional graphic designers. They are able to outsource more easily than

home-grown insurgent groups, who are more likely to rely on support staff located inside Iraq. Nevertheless, all insurgent groups have their own media units responsible for promoting the groups' activities.

Home-grown insurgents are concerned primarily with the struggle for power within Iraq and do not see themselves as part of a larger, let alone global, movement (see Section 6.3, Message and Ideology). Nevertheless, their Internet-based media products reach a global audience and shape perceptions in the Arab world. While home-grown groups do not

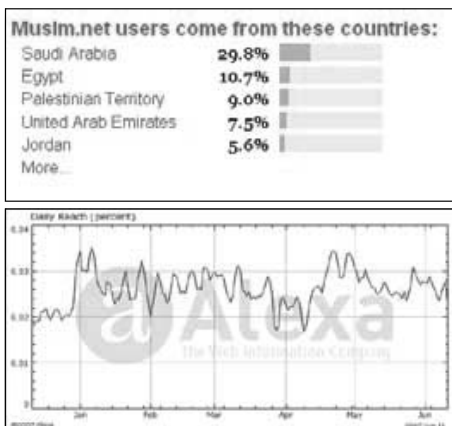


Figure 61. Materials from alexa.com showing the reach of the Ana al-Muslim forum (expressed as the percentage of all Internet users who visit the site) and a geographical breakdown of visitors

have a policy of recruiting foreign fighters, they may receive financial support from abroad—from the Iraqi diaspora or from sympathizers in other Arab countries—and their media efforts would only benefit such activities.

### 5.3.2 The Amplification Effect

There are a variety of means for amplifying the insurgent message. Materials posted to insurgent group homepages are regularly picked up and posted to broader forums. A message or video posted to one forum is then reposted to other forums, thereby amplifying the message to potentially thousands of Internet users (see Figure 62). From there, mainstream Arab media access the materials and use them in their print and broadcast reports. For example, Al-Jazeera often runs video clips from insurgent attacks in its newscasts.

In an April 11, 2007, interview with the spokesman for the IAI, *Al-Jazeera* showcased the infamous *Sniper Of Baghdad* video both in the lead-in to the interview and preceding and following commercial breaks (see Figure 63). On May 13, 2007, a typical broadcast day, *Al-Jazeera* news coverage included an **ISI/Al-Qaeda** claim that it had captured three U.S. soldiers, a tape by the **Mujahidin Army** showing the destruction of a U.S. Army Humvee, and a statement by three insurgent groups blaming **Al-Qaeda** for the deaths of 12 of their field commanders.

Mainstream Arab dailies also serve to amplify the message of the Sunni insurgency by using insurgent press releases and statements as the basis for their coverage of events in Iraq.

The release of a particularly graphic video, such as **ISI/Al-Qaeda's** recorded execution of 20 employees of the Interior and Defense ministries, is often treated as an event in and of itself. Among leading Arabic-language newspapers, *Al-Quds al-Arabi* stands out for its sympathetic coverage



Figure 62. Following the trail, from the ISI/Al-Qaeda website to a forum to a newspaper website to Al-Jazeera



Figure 63. Al-Jazeera interviews IAI spokesman Ibrahim al-Shammari; note the obscured face and IAI website address

of the insurgency and corresponding use of insurgent materials. The Saudi-owned dailies *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* also refer to insurgent sources and materials but make a greater effort to distance themselves from the subject matter.

Additionally, individual supporters offer compilation videos pieced together from material widely available on the Internet, showcasing images such as attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces, training camps, classes for insurgents, and armed insurgent presences on the street. Such images seek to convey a message that the insurgency is robust, active, and on the move in Iraq.

## 6. Analysis and Conclusions

### 6.1 Target Audience

Anyone with an internet connection can access insurgent media products directly. The delivery platform and nature of the material offered up by insurgents suggest that the primary target audience is young, technically savvy, educated, and often middle-class or above—a generation that will shape the future of the Arab world.

The dominant language of insurgent media is Arabic and the preeminent delivery channels are Arabic-language websites and discussion forums. Most of the audiovisual material is packaged in forms that require a high-speed Internet connection to download files running to several hundred megabytes (although smaller files are also available for users with dial-up connections). And because the bulk of audio-visual materials are available for downloading, not viewing online, they are best accessed at home, rather than from an Internet café, where downloading may not be advisable (because of surveillance) or possible (because of restrictions). Individual users can also reformat downloaded materials as DVDs or audiocassettes for local distribution.

Taken together, these factors point to a relatively well-defined profile for the average consumer of insurgent media products: A native speaker of Arabic with a strong interest in politics and access to a high-speed Internet connection. This consumer most likely resides in a Persian Gulf country, where high-speed Internet access is most widespread in the Arab world, and is probably a member of at least the middle class. Data collected from alexa.com on the geographical spread of visitors to the primary distribution sites for insurgent media support this, with the largest number of visitors to most sites coming from Saudi Arabia (although Egypt and the Palestinian territories are often high on the list as well).

Iraqis themselves, it should be noted, are not the apparent target audience for the insurgent media materials distributed on the Internet, although DVDs with insurgent films are available for sale in Iraq. Intermittent electricity throughout

Iraq and limited Internet access are the primary reasons for this.<sup>37</sup> Iraqis also have more pressing concerns. Evidence that insurgent groups treat Iraqis as a separate target audience is found in the printed leaflets distributed within Iraq

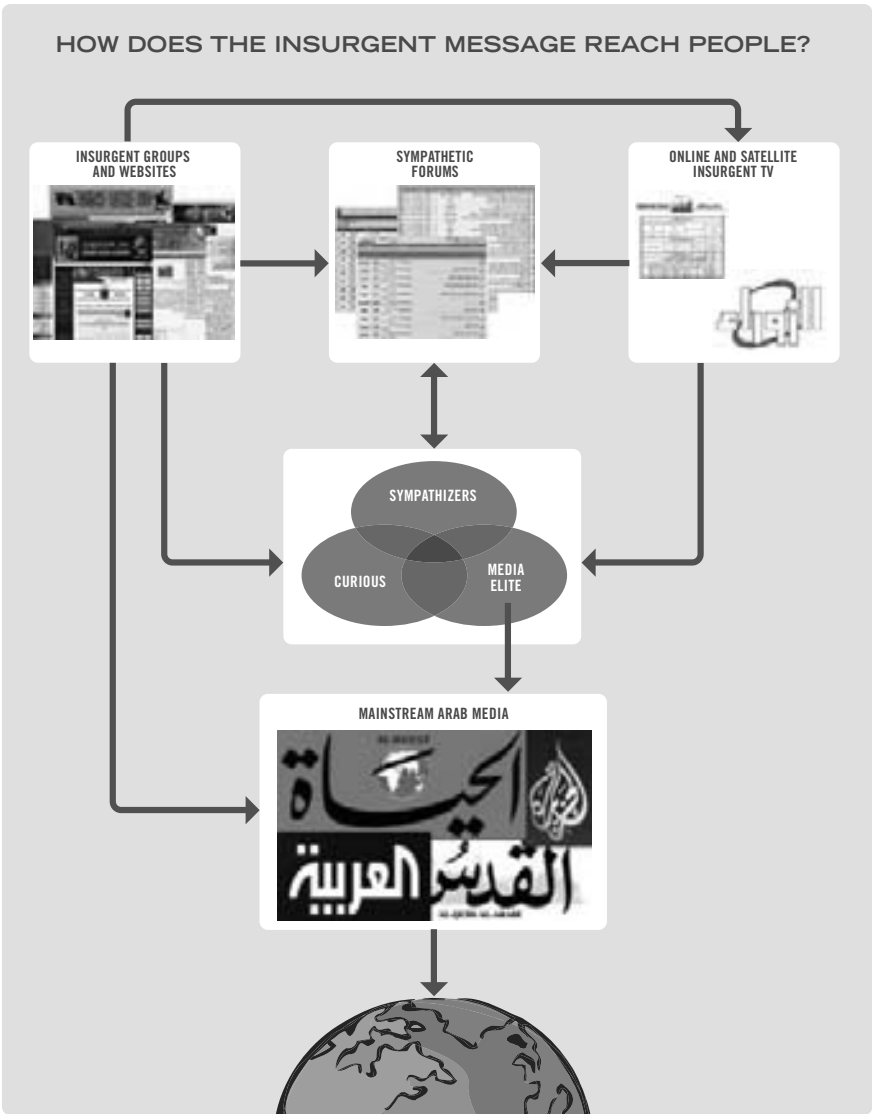


Figure 64. A diagram illustrating the distribution of insurgent media products from websites to consumers of mainstream media

<sup>37</sup> Given the state of infrastructure in Iraq, it is reasonable to assume that few Iraqis are viewing insurgent websites. As of mid-May 2007, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq reported that areas of the capital and some governorates were only receiving one hour of electricity a day. RFI's Al-Basrah correspondent reported on May 17 that the city had been without electricity for four days.

(see Section 5.2.1, Print), which adopt a different tone than materials created for global distribution and focus primarily on specific, local issues.

Within the community of “typical consumers,” two groups stand out (see Figure 64). The first are sympathizers who seek out insurgent materials on the Internet in order to obtain more details than they can find in mainstream Arab media. From the insurgent perspective, of course, sympathizers are important as a potential source of financial support. Recruitment appears to be of lesser importance to insurgent groups, some of which have stated that they neither need nor want foreigners to join the fight. Meanwhile, the group that makes the most active use of foreign fighters—**Al-Qaeda**, currently branded as the **Islamic State of Iraq**—seems to have little difficulty attracting foreigners to act as suicide bombers.

Just as important as potential financial backers are opinion makers, the second community within the “typical users” targeted by insurgent groups. These are the media professionals who create the content of mainstream Arabic-language media. It is, of course, their job to follow and report on the media activities of insurgent groups. For the insurgent groups, making materials available to media professionals ensures that the insurgent message reaches a larger audience through the “amplification effect” of mainstream media (see Section 5.3.2, The Amplification Effect).

### 6.1.1 Failsafe Mechanisms

The active public participation on Iraqi insurgent websites and forums ensures that statements, videos, and other insurgent propaganda, once posted to a site, are replicated on other sites. This failsafe mechanism ensures that if one site is shut down or goes offline, the content of that site is not lost. It can be accessed on a variety of other sites, thereby guaranteeing constant visibility and a steady flow of information potentially to millions of users each day.

## 6.2 Accuracy and Coherence

Insurgent media do not strive for accuracy. Their purpose is not to inform, but rather to score points in a battle for hearts and minds in the Arab world. As such, they advance numerous unverifiable claims that target a sympathetic consumer who is unlikely to believe the competing claims of alternative official sources and mainstream media.

A good example is the total number of U.S. soldiers insurgent groups claim to have killed. According to the U.S. military, confirmed U.S. deaths in Iraq stood at roughly 3,380 as of May 8, 2007. Insurgent groups put forward various numbers, but generally claim to have killed 25,000–35,000 U.S. troops. The number is not accurate, but it is, roughly speaking, likely to be credible to a reader, viewer, or listener who is hostile to the U.S. presence in Iraq,

sympathetic to the insurgent cause, and deeply skeptical of information from U.S. official sources.

Coherence is not a strong suit of insurgent media. In part, this is a natural consequence of the decentralized, “do-it-yourself” production paradigm (see Section 3.3.1, The Decentralized, ‘Do-It-Yourself’ Media Factory). The same lack of centralization and “do-it-yourself” production model that render insurgent media resilient and abundant acts as an impediment to overall coherence. For example, each insurgent group advances its own claims about the number of U.S. troops killed; taken together, they provide only a rough tally.

## 6.3 Message and Ideology

### 6.3.1 Message

The basic message of Iraqi insurgent groups is simple—they are a serious military force that is confronting and defeating the U.S. military, the collaborationist Iraqi government and its military forces, and Shi’ite militias. Most groups, whether global-jihadist or nationalist in orientation, now view Iranian Shi’ite influence as the primary threat to Iraq, and they reflect this in their statements and operations, which are frequently directed against Shi’ite targets. The U.S. presence, while still an important target, now figures less prominently amid a general sense that the United States is preparing to pull its forces out of Iraq in the foreseeable future.

Beyond this general message, insurgent groups have not succeeded in advancing anything resembling a political program that would extend to their vision of a future Iraq. In part, this is a reflection of the number of groups that comprise the insurgency and the resulting lack of coherence in the insurgent media network. On a deeper level, however, it points to a serious weakness in the insurgency, which has rejected the current political process in Iraq but has been unable to articulate a meaningful alternative beyond armed struggle, with no clear aim beyond defeating U.S. forces, the current Iraqi government, and Shi’ite militias.

### 6.3.2 Ideology

Despite the prevalence of jihadist rhetoric among Iraqi insurgent groups, their political statements reveal two distinct ideological visions of the struggle they are waging. One vision is that of a global jihad, in which the battle for Iraq is only a part of a larger clash of civilizations. The other is that of a more traditional national-liberation struggle. Recent statements by the **IAI** and **Al-Qaeda** underscore the difference.

In an April 11 interview with *Al-Jazeera*, **IAI** spokesman Ibrahim al-Shammari clearly defined his group’s struggle in national terms. Interviewer Ahmad Mansur asked, “Do your goals include causing America to fail abroad

or does your goal relate only to Iraq?” Al-Shammari responded, “No, our goal is the liberation of Iraq from the occupation it is experiencing—the Iranian occupation and the American occupation....”

Al-Shammari described Iran’s influence in Iraq, which he termed an “occupation,” as “more dangerous” than the U.S. “occupation.” He also stated that he knows of no “Shi’ite resistance” to U.S. forces, suggesting that U.S. and Iranian interests largely coincide in their dual “occupations” of Iraq. Nevertheless, Al-Shammari refused to cast the conflict in Iraq in purely sectarian terms, asserting that the **IAI** does not target “innocent” Iraqis—those who do not collaborate with foreigners—whether they are Sunni, Shi’a, Muslim, or Christian. He also stressed that all **IAI** fighters are Iraqis, and that its ranks include no “Arabs” from elsewhere.

By contrast, a mid-April 2007 address by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, leader of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, advanced an entirely different vision. Summarizing gains and losses on the fourth anniversary of the fall of the Hussein regime, Al-Baghdadi stated, “Let everyone know that our aim is clear: the establishment of God’s law, and the path to that is jihad in its wider sense.” Earlier in the address, he made it clear that “the outlines of the gains and losses in the past four years” indicate that “jihad has been adopted as the primary solution to drive out the unbelievers and apostates from Muslim countries.”

That their goal extends far beyond Iraq is clear from a recent essay by the **Al-Qaeda**-affiliated writer Abu Mariyah al-Qurashi. In the essay, which summarizes the final work by Abu Umar, a Chechnya-based Saudi radical who was killed fighting with Russian forces, Abu Mariyah provides a rare glimpse of Al-Qaeda’s understanding of Iraq’s role in the global jihad. We quote the passage in full:

The jihad in Iraq is a great historic opportunity that the mujahidin and true scholars must seize and exploit. The defeat of the crusaders in Iraq has far-reaching, historic implications for the region and the entire Muslim nation. These include halting the overall crusader advance that aims to devastate the [Muslim] nation, evicting them from Iraq, cleansing that country of their filth and unbelief, and establishing an Islamic state in Mesopotamia. The defeat of the crusaders in Iraq has significant implications for aiding the mujahidin in Palestine and Afghanistan. For those who have spent decades bemoaning the fate of Palestine and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the inability to reach the Holy Land, the chance has come. For the Christian, Protestant, and Jewish Zionists are within arm’s reach in Mesopotamia. So take the battle to them, kill them, and inflict great harm.

Moreover, there are ramifications for the network of collaborationist statelets and their ilk that the crusaders established through the Sykes-Picot Agreement to safeguard their aims and objectives in the region, defend the Jewish state in Palestine, and maintain its borders against attempts to defend Al-Aqsa and help oppressed Muslims. Their ruling regimes will

experience a great shock, God willing, when they see their overlord and defender, the United States, crushingly defeated in Mesopotamia. Undermining these statelets is necessary to break the defensive ring around the Jewish state in Palestine and help Muslims there. This blow, God willing, could be the historic beginning of the end for these quisling statelets or, to be more precise, colonies, which have become forward bases for the crusader campaign against Islam and Muslims.

This global focus stands in direct contradiction to the stated aims of the more nationalist insurgent groups. Perhaps the best statement of the “nationalist” position came in a May 2 statement by the **IAI**, the **Mujahidin Army**, and the Legal Commission of **Ansar al-Sunnah** announcing the establishment of a **Front for Jihad and Reform**.

Though couched in the religious rhetoric employed by all Sunni insurgent groups, the statement refrains from using specifically jihadist terms like “crusaders” and “apostates,” preferring instead to employ the nonreligious terms “occupiers” and “collaborators.” More importantly, while describing the struggle in Iraq as a “jihad,” the statement defines its goals in national, not global, terms: “The complete and actual withdrawal of the occupiers in all their forms and the establishment of God’s faith...”

In an oblique criticism of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, the statement stresses the need for moderation in matters of faith. The invocations that close the statement retain the national focus, asking God to “defeat the Americans and those who are with them and the Safavids and those who are with them.”

The statement and invocations make no mention of global aims or a broader jihad to remake the Arab-Islamic world. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the three signatories to the statement reject the legitimacy of the current Iraqi government and stress their refusal to take part in the political process as presently constituted.<sup>38</sup>

## 6.4 Tendencies and Trends

The most notable trends in the development of Iraqi insurgent media are growing attention to the importance of the insurgency’s media efforts, an increasingly sectarian focus, and a widening rift between nationalist and jihadist groups.

<sup>38</sup> According to media reports, Iraqi and U.S. officials have met with nationalist-leaning resistance groups on a number of occasions. For more, see *Amman Talks Could Bring Political Breakthrough*, by RFE/RL freelance contributor Sumedha Senanayake, November 3, 2006 ([http://www.rferl.org/features/features\\_Article.aspx?m=11&y=2006&id=B72EA5ED-56DD-4E4F-8106-033DE6814793](http://www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?m=11&y=2006&id=B72EA5ED-56DD-4E4F-8106-033DE6814793)), *Insurgent Groups Differ On Talks With Government*, by Kathleen Ridolfo, June 30, 2006 ([http://www.rferl.org/features/features\\_Article.aspx?m=06&y=2006&id=4312C166-5C5C-4DD3-86D2-446E0316E743](http://www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?m=06&y=2006&id=4312C166-5C5C-4DD3-86D2-446E0316E743)), and *Initiatives On Militias, Armed Groups Raise Concerns*, by Kathleen Ridolfo, RFE/RL Iraq Report, May 5, 2006 (<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iraq-report/2006/05/18-050506.asp>).

### 6.4.1 Attention to Media

The May 2, 2007, proclamation of the **Front for Jihad and Reform** signed by the **IAI**, **Mujahidin Army**, and Legal Commission of **Ansar al-Sunnah** appeals directly to “the people of the media, speakers and writers. They must tell the truth and cast their arrows at falsehood, for media is half of the battle.” **IAI** spokesman Ibrahim al-Shammari made a similar point in an undated interview posted to the **Muhaj-roon** forum in October 2006, saying, “If an opportunity arises to speak, even on foreign [satellite] channels, not only Al-Jazeera, I am ready, out of a desire to serve jihad in Iraq. As you know, we are in dire need of any media opportunity that will show the true face of jihad in Iraq.”



Figure 65. The cover of a 221-page symposium study of “jihadist media in Iraq” released by *Wikalat Haq*

A 221-page study of “jihadist media in Iraq” released by **Wikalat Haq** in spring 2007 is further evidence of the growing attention to the media component of insurgent efforts (see Figure 65). The study, which is strongly sympathetic to the Sunni insurgent cause, opens with the following quotation: “The leading lights of the jihadist media must recognize the importance of their role, for they are on the front lines just as the fighters are. A soldier cannot leave his trench, or else the enemy will attack him at his weak spot...”

The continuing stream of increasingly sophisticated media products distributed through failsafe Internet-based delivery channels comes as confirmation that insurgents are more aware than ever that they are engaged in a battle not just of bullets and bombs, but also a war of images and ideas. With Sunni insurgents fully conscious of the importance of media, and clearly skilled in the creation and distribution of information products, we must expect that their media endeavor will only grow in reach and sophistication.

### 6.4.2 Sectarian Focus

Against this backdrop of growing attention to media, the products themselves are more sectarian in focus than ever before. Insurgent groups treat the “Iranian threat” as a danger equal to or greater than the U.S. presence,

and insurgent statements claim responsibility for daily attacks against Shi'a-dominated branches of government and Shi'ite militias. While the political statements of nationalist groups such as the **IAI** eschew the rabidly anti-Shi'a rhetoric favored by **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, the distinction is often lost against the larger backdrop of sectarian violence and hate speech.

Recent films released by **Ansar al-Sunnah** and **ISI/Al-Qaeda** show graphic scenes of the Sunni insurgent groups executing Shi'ite employees of the Defense and Interior ministries (see Section 7.1, *A Day in the Life of Insurgent Media*). In both films, the executions are carried out in response to crimes allegedly committed by Shi'a against Sunnis, heightening a sense of mutually reinforcing sectarian reprisals. Another film by **Ansar Al-Sunnah** juxtaposes incendiary comments by Hazim al-A'raji, an aide to Shi'ite leader Muqtada al-Sadr, with footage of the gruesomely mutilated corpses of Sunnis. As al-A'raji urges "Shi'ite believers" to kill "loathsome Ba'athists" and "filthy Wahhabis" and assures the killers that they will go to paradise, the film's unmistakable message to Sunnis is that they face the gravest peril and must take up arms. The combination of hate speech and glorification of violence calls to mind disturbing parallels with the media campaign that preceded the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.<sup>39</sup>

### 6.4.3 Rift Between Nationalists and Jihadists

Finally, the rift between nationalist and jihadist groups within the insurgency (see Section 6.3.2, *Ideology*) appears to be widening, with insurgent media reflecting the split. Against a backdrop of basic differences in ideology, with nationalist groups limiting their goals to Iraq and jihadist groups spearheaded by **Al-Qaeda** seeing Iraq as part of a global struggle, open conflict has become more common.

The polemic between the **IAI** and **ISI/Al-Qaeda** that began in early April 2007 was a watershed moment, bringing to light conflicts over approach and

<sup>39</sup> The role of the media and hate speech in the Rwandan genocide has been extensively documented. For examples, see *The Graves Are Not Yet Full*, Bill Berkeley, Basic Books, 2001; *Shake Hands with the Devil*, Romeo Dallaire, Random House, 2003; *Leave None To Tell The Story: Genocide In Rwanda*, Alison Des Forges, Human Rights Watch, 1999; *Conspiracy to Murder: the Rwandan genocide*, Linda Melvern, Verso, 2004; *The Media And The Rwandan Genocide*, Allan Thompson, ed., Pluto Press, 2007; Rwanda, *Les Médias Du Génocide*, Jean-Pierre Chrétien, Jean-François Dupaquier, Marcel Kabanda, Joseph Ngarambe, Karthala, 1995; *Broadcasting Genocide: Censorship, Propaganda And State-Sponsored Violence In Rwanda, 1990–1994*, Article 19, 1996. See also the case materials of the "media" trial in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in which Hassan Ngeze, Ferdinand Nahimana, and Jean Bosco Barayagwiza were found guilty of incitement to genocide and other crimes. The cases are currently under appeal. Trial materials are available at: <http://69.94.11.53/ENGLISH/cases/Ngeze/index.htm> (Hassan Ngeze), <http://69.94.11.53/ENGLISH/cases/Nahimana/index.htm> (Ferdinand Nahimana), and <http://69.94.11.53/ENGLISH/cases/Barayagwiza/index.htm> (Jean Bosco Barayagwiza).

ideology that had simmered for months, if not years. The **IAI** statement sharply criticized **ISI/Al-Qaeda** for issuing baseless accusations against other groups, including the **IAI**; “threatening to kill members of the group [the **IAI**] if they do not swear allegiance to Al-Qaeda or its other names;” killing more than 30 members of the **IAI**, as well as members of the **1920 Revolution Brigades**, **Mujahidin Army**, and **Ansar al-Sunnah**; and killing unarmed Muslims and “soft targets” such as imams and individuals who issue the call to prayer.

The statement also leveled a direct challenge at the organizational model employed by **Al-Qaeda** not only in Iraq, but in other Arab countries, where various regional franchises now exist, such as **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula** and **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib**. The **IAI** appealed directly to Osama bin Laden, saying:

“He and his brothers in the Al-Qaeda leadership are responsible on Judgment Day for what is happening on account of their followers. It is not enough to wash one’s hands of their actions; one must also correct them. In the two collections of utterances of the Prophet by Abdallah bin Umar, the Prophet said, “Is not each of you a shepherd, and is not each of you responsible for his flock? The imam must look after his people, for he is responsible for them.” And Al-Faruq<sup>40</sup> says, “If a beast of burden should stumble in the mountains of Iraq or the Sham,<sup>41</sup> then I would believe that God will call me to account for it and ask, ‘Why did you not make the road passable?’”

The gist of the criticism is that **ISI/Al-Qaeda** is out of control in Iraq, its parent organization is unwilling or unable to bring it to heel, and Osama bin Laden is failing to live up to Islamic standards of leadership. It is a charge that the subsequent polemic, which included responses from **ISI/Al-Qaeda**, failed to disprove, in large part because Osama bin Laden remained conspicuously silent throughout the debate.

The formation of a **Front for Jihad and Reform**, bringing together the **IAI**, **Mujahidin Army**, and Legal Commission of **Ansar al-Sunnah**, came as the formal expression of these groups’ differences with **ISI/Al-Qaeda**. On May 12, 2007, just days after the Front proclaimed its existence, it issued a statement charging **Al-Qaeda in Iraq** with killing 12 field commanders, “most of them from the **Mujahidin Army**,” and asking **Al-Qaeda** to surrender those responsible to the Front’s courts for judgment. While the long-term ramifications of this internal conflict are difficult to predict, insurgent media will provide an invaluable window on its future development, as well as on other trends and tendencies within and around Iraq’s ongoing Sunni insurgency.

<sup>40</sup> Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second of the four “rightly guided” caliphs (634-644).

<sup>41</sup> Roughly equivalent to present-day Lebanon, Jordan, Israel/ Palestinian Territories, and Syria.

## 7. Annex: Case Studies

### 7.1 A Day in the Life of Insurgent Media: April 22, 2007

We survey here one day in the life of insurgent media – April 21. The overview provides a representative sample of the insurgent media products made available on April 21-22 across the delivery platforms enumerated in the report. Websites were accessed on April 22.

#### 7.1.1 Insurgent Group Websites

##### 7.1.1.1 Islamic State of Iraq

The group's website featured an announcement and download addresses for an April 20 videotaped statement by **ISI/Al-Qaeda's** official spokesman, proclaiming the formation of the State's "cabinet." As is usually the case with such offerings, the videotaped statement was available in a number of formats: high quality (53 megabytes), medium quality (8 megabytes), low quality (1.3 megabytes), mobile-phone quality (2.09 megabytes), and sound only (604 kilobytes).

The site also advertised a new film, dated April 20, titled *The Confessions Of 20 Men Affiliated With The Interior And Defense Ministries*. Produced by **Al-Furqan**, the six-minute film shows 20 men, all in uniform with IDs affixed to their chests, "confessing" to employment in the ministries of defense and the interior. A voiceover explains that **ISI/Al-Qaeda** captured men after the rape of Sabrin al-Janabi (see Section 7.2, The Sabrin al-Janabi Case) and gave the Iraqi government 48 hours to release Sunni women held in Interior Ministry prisons and surrender those responsible for the rape of Al-Janabi. The narrator announces that the deadline expired with no action taken and **ISI/Al-Qaeda's** court sentenced the "apostates" to death under Islamic law.

The film closes with the execution. The men kneel in a line along the side of a road, blindfolded, while a single individual kills them by shooting them in the back of the head with a pistol. In a clear indication that the violence is being carried out as a "media event," the execution is filmed from two camera angles; scenes recorded from one camera angle show both the gunman and the cameraman at his side who is recording close-up shots.

##### 7.1.1.2 Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI)

The group's website featured 11 press releases dated April 21, all of them covering operations conducted on April 19–20. They were titled (in translation):

- Shelling, bomb blasts, and sniper attacks against the occupiers and apostates in the city of Mosul

- Destruction of a Humvee belonging to the crusader forces in Al-Mushahadah district
- Killing of an American soldier by a sniper in north Baghdad
- Destruction of a transport vehicle for the Idolatrous Guard and killing of four in Salman Pak
- Killing of three members of the Apostate Army of the Antichrist in Al-Mada'in district
- Destruction of a vehicle belonging to the apostate Idolatrous Guard and the killing of three of them in south Baghdad
- Destruction of a pick-up truck belonging to Interior Ministry commandoes and the killing of two in Al-Latifayah
- Killing of three members of the apostate police with an explosive device
- Mortar strike against a group of the apostate Army of the Antichrist in Al-Mu'tasim district
- Mortar attack on the headquarters of the occupying American Army in Al-Mashru district
- Wounding of an American soldier by sniper in Al-Mushahadah district

#### **7.1.1.3 Mujahidin Army**

Although it was functional on April 22, the group's website did not feature any materials updated more recently than March 20 [2007].

#### **7.1.1.4 JAMI**

The most recently updated materials on the group's website dated to March 2007.

#### **7.1.1.5 Jihadist Brigades of Iraq**

The most recent operational statement on the group's website described an April 13 IED attack against Interior Ministry commandos that wounded two.

#### **7.1.1.6 Army of the Naqshibandi Tariqah**

The most recent material featured on the group's website was an April 1 statement on the possible unification of insurgent groups.

#### **7.1.1.7 Jaysh al-Rashidin**

The group's website featured an April 21 announcement of an IED attack against a U.S. Army Humvee and the "killing of those in it." The operational statement was accompanied by a downloadable 2.7-megabyte film lasting 30 seconds and showing an explosion at night. Available for downloading on the same page was a 56-megabyte, 10-minute film titled *Our Jihad Overcomes*

*The Occupiers' Ruse*, which shows an IED attack against a U.S. Humvee in Al-Dawrah and a missile attack against U.S. forces stationed at Baghdad Airport.

## 7.1.2 Forums

Many forums featured new and ongoing threads with insurgent materials on April 21. We survey two of the most popular forums. Sections featuring posted statements usually begin with a number of “fixed threads” on popular or noteworthy themes.<sup>42</sup> The overview notes those as well.

### 7.1.2.1 Al-Firdaws

The forum does not record the exact times of posted threads. The following materials were dated April 21:

- **Ansar al-Sunnah** (marked “breaking news”): Some of the operations of your brothers, the lions of Al-Hadithah and adjoining areas
- **ISI/Al-Qaeda** (marked “breaking news”): Elimination of three leaders in the gangs of the Army of the Antichrist in Baghdad
- **Ansar al-Sunnah** (marked “breaking news”): More than 20 explosive devices in addition to a violent clash with the crusaders and apostates
- **ISI/Al-Qaeda** (marked “breaking news”): violent attack; death of one of the most prominent aides to the rotten bastard Ammar al-Hakim<sup>43</sup>
- **ISI/Al-Qaeda**: News report for some southern districts of Baghdad Governorate
- **ISI/Al-Qaeda**: Martyrdom-seeking operation against a stronghold of the crusaders and apostates in Al-Saqlawiyah
- **ISI/Al-Qaeda**: Detonation of an explosive-laden vehicle against a crusader barracks in Al-Saqlawiyah district
- **ISI/Al-Qaeda**: News report for some parts of Al-Rusafah in Baghdad Governorate
- **Ansar al-Sunnah**: Destruction of a tank belonging to the Apostate Guard and the killing of two of its crew near the Al-Kurayat section in north Baghdad
- **Ansar al-Sunnah**: Some of the operations of your heroic brothers in Western district
- **Ansar al-Sunnah**: Destruction of a vehicle belonging to the commandoes and killing of two using an explosive-laden motorcycle in Al-Mada'in
- **Ansar al-Sunnah**: Execution of one of the apostates from the collaboratorist police in Diyala

<sup>42</sup> As new threads are posted to forums, they displace older threads. Administrators “fix” particularly important threads so that they remain at the top of the forum despite the addition of new threads.

<sup>43</sup> Shi'ite political leader described in the text as a “rotten Safavid heretic”.

- **ISI/Al-Qaeda** (marked “breaking news”): political statement titled *Collapse Of The Plans Of The Crusaders And Their Hangers-on*  
Fixed threads available on April 22 were:
- **Al-Furqan** presents issue No. 32 of *Biographies Of Notable Martyrs*
- **Al-Furqan** presents the film *Confessions Of 20 Employees Of The Interior And Defense Ministries*
- **Ansar al-Sunnah** presents the *Top 20* [compilation of attack videos]
- **Al-Furqan** presents [the film] *The Blowing Up Of A Headquarters Of The Peshmerga In Mosul Governorate*
- **Ansar al-Sunnah** presents an audio statement by the leadership of the group **Ansar al-Sunnah**
- **Al-Furqan** presents an audio statement by our master, commander of the faithful, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi [head of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**]
- **Al-Furqan** presents [the film] *Some Of The Efforts By The Soldiers Of The State To Protect Their Brother Civilians*

#### 7.1.2.2 World News Network

**World News Network** posted all of the materials noted above on **Al-Firdaws**. Also posted on April 21 were:

- **Mujahidin Army**: Missile attack on U.S. forces headquarters at kilometer 39
- **Mujahidin Army**: Destruction of a minesweeper with an explosive device in West Baghdad
- **Mujahidin Army**: Watch the destruction of a Humvee with a disguised explosive device in Al-Ramadi
- **Mujahidin Army**: Mortar attack on U.S. forces headquarters in Al-Fallujah

Fixed threads available on April 22 were:

- *The Nuclear Danger...Shelters and Reasons for Survival*: a packet of materials on the dangers of radiation and ways to survive the fallout from a nuclear attack, including an Arabic translation of an English text titled *11 Steps to Nuclear War Fallout Survival*
- **Al-Nusra** Campaign to Shelter the Palestinians of Iraq presents *Where to Flee? Materials On The Plight Of Palestinians In Iraq*.
- **Elite of the Jihadist Media** presents the republication of a book on the doctrine of monotheism. Download links did not work.
- **Al-Furqan** presents *Confessions Of 20 Employees Of The Interior And Defense Ministries*
- **1920 Revolution Brigades**: *Position On The Occupation, Its Institutions, And Collaborators* (political statement)

- **1920 Revolution Brigades:** Statement on the latest address by the Amir of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**
- **Ansar al-Sunnah:** Clarification of the official source that distributes **Ansar al-Sunnah**'s statements (April 18)
- **Ansar al-Sunnah:** Denial of the defection of the group's legal section (April 18)

## 7.2 The Sabrin al-Janabi Case

Manufacturing Sectarian Strife On February 19, *Al-Jazeera* broadcast an interview with a woman identified as Sabrin al-Janabi. She explained in a short, tearfilled monologue that four Interior Ministry officers had raped her earlier that day after detaining her on suspicion of aiding insurgents. The alleged rape of a Sunni woman by Shi'ite officers set off a round of sectarian recriminations between Sunni politicians and Iraq's Shi'ite-led government.<sup>44</sup> For Sunni insurgents and their supporters, the incident was a propaganda godsend, and insurgent media used it to full effect.

In a good example of how the insurgent message reaches the world through a variety of interconnected platforms, a participant in the **Ana al-Muslim** forum, one of the most popular jihadist forums on the web (see Section 5.1.3, Forums and Message Boards), posted a news report from the hard-line Sunni news site **Islammemo** on February 20. The **Islammemo** report stated that the insurgent group **Ansar al-Sunnah** had distributed leaflets "in several Baghdad neighborhoods threatening swift revenge against the Safavids who attacked the Sunni woman Sabrin al-Janabi." Noting that the leaflets were affixed to the doors of several Baghdad mosques, **Islammemo**'s correspondent explained that they vowed revenge and described the incident as a rebuke to those who call on the "resistance" to stop targeting "national forces."

By February 21, pro-insurgency jihadist forums were boiling with discussions of the latest outrage allegedly perpetrated by Shi'a against Iraqi Sunnis. The same day, the Kuwait-based radical cleric Hamid al-Ali, who frequently addresses Iraq-related issues and is a strong supporter of Islamist elements within the insurgency, posted a poem on his website dedicated to Sabrin al-Janabi. The verses were bitterly sectarian, asking, "Who has given the filth power over our Iraq so that the Magi should be raised high and made rulers?" The poem appeared within minutes on virtually all jihadist forums.

The same day, the **IAI** released a written statement titled *Support For The Female Believers*, vowing that "sleep will not avail us, our eyes will not close, and life will be intolerable until we exact vengeance for every free woman whose chastity and dignity have been taken away." **JAMI** put out a statement

<sup>44</sup> For more, see *Iraq: Rape Case Highlights Sectarian Power Struggle* Kathleen Ridolfo, RFE/RL, February 21, 2007 (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/02/22896c39-741d-4f69-980a-6602e5162912.html>).

on February 20, saying that “they have released their filthy dogs to tear into the bodies of our daughters and sisters.”

On February 22, as **Islammemo** reported Sunni demonstrations in Iraq calling for revenge, **Al-Furqan** released a statement by Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir, official spokesman of **ISI/Al-Qaeda**. In an 11:50 audio recording, Al-Muhajir announced that **ISI/Al-Qaeda** had readied 300 “martyrdom-seekers,” including 50 individuals from the Al-Janabi tribe, for suicide attacks. Also on February 22, the **Albayanat** blog posted a message from the **Mujahidin Army** to the “free women of Iraq” saying that the rape had revealed the “true face” of the Iraqi government and promising revenge attacks.

All four insurgent groups filled their statements with bitterly anti-Shi’ite rhetoric, blaming the rape of Sabrin al-Janabi on the “grandsons of Ibn al-Alqami.” The term refers to a Shi’ite minister who allegedly connived in the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in the 13th century. Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi popularized it as a derogatory catchall for Shi’a in Iraq, and its widespread use by insurgent groups in 2007 points to his enduring influence as an instigator of sectarian strife.

Insurgent groups cemented the status of the Sabrin al-Janabi case as a propaganda cause celebre by dedicating military operations to her. **ISI/Al-Qaeda** announced the Raid of Vengeance for Honor, the **IAI** Support for the Female Believers, and the **Mujahidin Army** the Winds of Rage Raid. What other groups implied with rhetorical broadsides against the Shi’itedominated government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, **JAMI** stated openly, urging insurgents to target “first the forces of the regime and commandos of the Interior Ministry, and second the occupiers.”