

Profile: ABD AL-HADI AL-IRAQI

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The mission championed by Usama Bin Laden would not have been possible without the diligent cooperation and support of other key members of Al-Qaida's Shura Council. Among those veteran members of that council who continued on after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States to play a key role in Al-Qaida's operations in Afghanistan is an Iraqi Kurd known as Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi (a.k.a. Nashwan Abdel Razzaq Abdel Baqi, Nashwan al-Tamir). Born in Mosul in 1961, Abd al-Hadi is reputed to be a former Major in the Iraqi army under Saddam Hussein, gaining substantial frontline combat experience during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Later, he allegedly took part in the local activities of Islamist groups in northern Kurdistan and eventually traveled on to Afghanistan, where he joined the stream of arriving jihadi recruits in the late 1980s.¹ Abd al-Hadi has openly vowed that Afghanistan "means a lot to me, and it is... the land of preciousness, pride, and sacrifice. Its people hold special importance among the Muslims because Allah relied on the hands of the men of this country to help revive jihad after it had almost disappeared from anything other than the pages of books."² However, unlike some of his more veteran peers from the Al-Qaida leadership, Abd al-Hadi did not join Al-Qaida until approximately 1996, around the same time Usama Bin Laden and his entourage returned from their years spent in exile in Sudan.³

In May 1996, coming under increased international pressure from the United States and other nations, the regime in Sudan ordered Usama Bin Laden and his associates to leave the country. Once again, Bin Laden's attention returned to Afghanistan. While Bin Laden had been living in exile in Africa, large parts of Afghanistan had come under the control of a growing military force, the extremist Taliban militia. In a secret memorandum to other Al-Qaida leaders, military chief Abu Hafs al-Masri endorsed the Taliban as an attractive new ally for Al-Qaida. He explained, "The position [of Taliban leaders] towards the Arabs who fought Jihad in Afghanistan is an excellent one, a great welcome and an acknowledgment of what the Arab Mujahideen have sacrificed and their right to stay in Afghanistan as Muslims and as Mujahideen... Our duty towards the Taliban movement is to stand behind it, support it materially and morally, especially that its regional and international enemies are working night and day to put an end to it and make it fail."⁴

Al-Qaida Shura Council member Abu al-Hasan al-Masri later recalled, "The Taliban came to Jalalabad when we were with Shaykh Yunus Khalis (may Allah have mercy on him). Mullah Muhammad Umar sent a letter and sent a delegation from his side to Shaykh Usama asking him to move from Jalalabad to Kandahar... Mullah Muhammad Umar, out of concern for Shaykh Usama and because he knew the Shaykh from before,

¹ "Who is Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi?" <https://shamikh1.biz/showthread.php?t=57223>. January 1, 2010.

² Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. "Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi." July 27, 2002.

³ "Who is Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi?" <https://shamikh1.biz/showthread.php?t=57223>. January 1, 2010.

⁴ Government Exhibit GX-300B. United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York.

wrote to him and told him to come to Kandahar.”⁵ Following discussions with Bin Laden and his entourage in Kandahar, Taliban leader Mullah Umar agreed to open Afghanistan’s doors to foreign mujahideen fighters and make the country “a land to migrate to and a launching pad for Jihad. The sons of monotheism were encouraged to flock to it from everywhere, and the Islamic Emirate hastened to welcome those arriving throngs and enabled them to fulfill the obligation of preparing by opening training centers and camps and providing them with protection.”⁶

In exchange for safe haven back inside Afghanistan, Al-Qaida provided the Taliban, among other things, with religious legitimacy in Salafi-jihadi circles, financial assistance, and battlefield support against their adversaries—principally, the so-called Northern Alliance of Ahmad Shah Massoud, Abdulrashid Dostum, and other former Afghan mujahideen commanders. In September 1996, the Taliban finally seized the capital Kabul, consolidating their control over most of the country and squeezing the Northern Alliance into a narrow pocket of northeastern Afghanistan near Massoud’s traditional base of operations in the Panjshir Valley. However, the bitter conflict quickly ground to a halt when the Taliban’s predominantly Pashtun units attempted to move northeast from Kabul into Tajik-ruled areas. Massoud’s forces refused to budge and a stalemated frontline formed.

To buttress their faltering efforts forward, the Taliban requested arriving foreign militants to travel to the frontline with Massoud and serve as shock troops in the ongoing back-and-forth battles. After Al-Qaida’s leadership moved to Kandahar to join Mullah Umar and the Taliban, several of the group’s Shura Council members “took part in a number of battles in the ranks of the Taliban.” Initially, Shura Council member Abu al-Hasan al-Masri was assigned “the responsibility for the Arab brothers on the Kabul frontline.”⁷ According to senior Al-Qaida leader Khalid al-Habib, “The Shaykh [Bin Laden] assigned to him the task of defending the Kabul frontline side by side of the Islamic Emirate.”⁸

The initial frontline forays by Al-Qaida personnel appear to have generally resulted in failure. Despite the presence of Al-Qaida’s foreign jihadists, in October 1996, Massoud’s fighters launched a sudden stiff counterattack on Taliban forces, splintering them in disarray and forcing a Taliban retreat back to Bagram airbase north of Kabul.⁹ Casualties among the Taliban and its motley allies were high and morale was low. This appears to be what former Saudi Al-Qaida operative Ahmed al-Darbi references in his sworn deposition when he discusses the deep disillusionment following the “breaking-in of the front lines” that killed “many Arabs” and led “many of the fighters, especially the

⁵ As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” July 8, 2008. <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=185183>.

⁶ As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Knowledge is For Acting Upon.” September 10, 2006. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=84585>.

⁷ As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” July 8, 2008. <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=185183>.

⁸ As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” July 8, 2008. <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=185183>.

⁹ “Afghan government forces recapture key military positions.” CNN. October 19, 1996. <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9610/19/afghanistan/index.html>.

Saudis... to stop fighting with the Taliban and we returned to Saudi Arabia.”¹⁰ Al-Darbi acknowledged that, at the time, he questioned whether Al-Qaida’s leadership was “serious in the fight against the Ahmad Shah Massoud forces... I felt it was just a civil war and it does not mean jihad for me.”¹¹

One of the issues plaguing the Taliban’s battlefield performance was its poor level of coordination and communication with its Arab and Pakistani jihadi allies, not all of whom knew each other or even spoke the same language. The Taliban needed a skilled partner with military command experience who could be relied upon to execute coordinated battlefield strategies. Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi later recalled:

“A few months passed since the decision was made to participate in the fronts of northern Afghanistan, and I chose the first group of mujahideen who spent long periods of time in a front in northern Kabul, and I formed from amongst them a patient and benevolent group that cannot be described due to its forth-giving and sacrifice... As a leader for them, it was chosen to be... a roaring lion who I accompanied since 1997, and we did not separate except for a few months, until he went to Yemen in an attempt to travel to Chechnya... He is Abdul-Salam al-Hadrami, and O’ how much I miss him...He was martyred during an American raid, along with Jumaboi al-Uzbeki, in Mazar-e-Sharif.”¹²

American Taliban fighter John Walker Lindh offered his own description of how this military alliance functioned to journalist Robert Young Pelton. Lindh noted that Taliban frontline forces were divided between “the Afghans, and they have the non-Afghans. I was with the separate branch of the non-Afghans... It’s called Ansar. It means the helpers.”¹³ Lindh explained:

“Ansar is composed of different branches according to ethnic groups. It’s because of management and of course, we all have the same cause, which has nothing to do with ethnicity or anything like that. But the language is divided into Bengali and Pakistani and Arabic. So the Arab section of the Ansar is funded by Osama bin Laden. Also the training camps that the Arabs train in before they come to the frontline are all funded by Osama bin Laden... originally, I came with the Pakistanis, but they sent me to the Arabs because I don’t understand Urdu.”¹⁴

According to Al-Qaida’s then-Deputy Commander Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi—“may God be pleased with him”—was serving in the capacity of “commander of the Arab Mujahideen in the Kabul front and then afterwards the deputy commander of the Ansar Brigade before the [U.S.] invasion.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Deposition transcript of Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Haza al-Darbi. United States v. Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi. Testimony given: August 15-16, 2017. Pages 79, 87.

¹¹ Deposition transcript of Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Haza al-Darbi. United States v. Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi. Testimony given: August 15-16, 2017. Page 88.

¹² Al-Iraqi, Abd al-Hadi. “Under The Shades of Swords Part 9: The Battle of Qala-e-Jangi.” Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. May 2003.

¹³ “Transcript of John Walker Interview.” CNN. July 4, 2002.

<http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/12/20/ret.walker.transcript/>

¹⁴ “Transcript of John Walker Interview.” CNN. July 4, 2002.

<http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/12/20/ret.walker.transcript/>

¹⁵ Al-Zawahiri, Dr. Ayman. “Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner: Second Edition.” As-Sahab Media Foundation. November 27, 2010. <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=82499>.

As battlefield performance improved under the oversight of Abd al-Hadi and mujahideen guesthouses in Kabul bustled with more Al-Qaida recruits headed to the front, the Iraqi officer's reputation grew among both Al-Qaida personnel and the Taliban leadership. Increasingly, Abd al-Hadi served as a key conduit for communications between Al-Qaida and the Taliban. Reportedly fluent in five languages, he was ideally suited for the role of overseeing these communications.¹⁶ By 1999, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi "was responsible for the Arab fighters, and he was in charge of them and he also was the liaison between them and the Talibans."¹⁷ According to Ahmed al-Darbi, "there used to be Taliban units in the back he used to deal with, and also there used to be Pakistani units to the right, and he used to deal with them as well."¹⁸

Indeed, by the time of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi was a ubiquitous figure at the mujahideen frontline. Under questioning by Moroccan law enforcement officials, a member of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) who traveled to Afghanistan seeking assistance from Bin Laden arranged a preliminary meeting with Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi "the military official in charge of the Al-Qaida frontline forces in Kabul."¹⁹ According to the Moroccan, "I had asked him to intervene with the person in charge of Al-Qaida, so that the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group could benefit from the training camps run by Al-Qaida, especially after the Taliban government decided to close the training camps in Jalalabad."²⁰ As a result, Abd al-Hadi used his influence with senior Taliban officials to allegedly broker a meeting between the GICM and then-Taliban Minister of the Interior Mullah Abderrazak.²¹

In retrospect, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi insisted that "the blessed mujahideen attacks" targeting the U.S. on September 11, 2001 were merely a preemptory strike in anticipation of an inevitable U.S. attack on Afghanistan.²² He recalled how "we used to feel the acceleration of hostility, especially after the emergence of the Islamic Emirate [the Taliban], and we used to sense that an attack was growing near, through which the crusaders wanted to break the thorn and the tip of the spear of Islam embodied by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."²³ Despite the deaths of scores of his lieutenants and fighters during the U.S. retaliatory attack on Afghanistan and the sweeping retreat of Al-Qaida and the Taliban, Abd al-Hadi himself nonetheless managed to survive the resounding

¹⁶ "Who is Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi?" <https://shamikh1.biz/showthread.php?t=57223>. January 1, 2010.

¹⁷ Deposition transcript of Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Haza al-Darbi. United States v. Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi. Testimony given: August 15-16, 2017. Page 106.

¹⁸ Deposition transcript of Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Haza al-Darbi. United States v. Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi. Testimony given: August 15-16, 2017. Page 81.

¹⁹ Interrogation Record of Nouredine NFIA. Ministry of the Interior; Kingdom of Morocco. National General Security Directorate. Casablanca-Anfa Security Department. Judicial Police Service. August 8, 2003.

²⁰ Interrogation Record of Nouredine NFIA. Ministry of the Interior; Kingdom of Morocco. National General Security Directorate. Casablanca-Anfa Security Department. Judicial Police Service. August 8, 2003.

²¹ Interrogation Record of Nouredine NFIA. Ministry of the Interior; Kingdom of Morocco. National General Security Directorate. Casablanca-Anfa Security Department. Judicial Police Service. August 8, 2003.

²² Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. "Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi." July 27, 2002.

²³ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. "Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi." July 27, 2002.

battlefield defeat and disappeared with other senior Al-Qaida leaders into hiding. According to Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, at this critical juncture, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi became “the military field commander of Al-Qaida in Afghanistan.”²⁴

In early March 2002, the U.S. military and its partners launched a major operation targeting what appeared to be a large number of enemy forces massing in the Shahi-Kot valley in southeastern Afghanistan near Gardez. After more than two weeks of heavy fighting, Al-Qaida and the Taliban were finally flushed out—but not before downing a number of U.S. helicopters and inflicting numerous casualties. Despite being forced to flee, Al-Qaida propaganda painted the battle as a resounding success. Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi later recounted in Al-Qaida media:

“As for the losses of the Americans in the Shahi-Kot battle, I will speak about them as I am the commander of one of the groups that engaged in these battles. And honestly, they were vicious battles and the mujahideen who took part in them generally—and the Uzbeks in particular—showed heroism. And by Allah, the Americans were like sheep in that rainy night, huddled with each other fearing the bullets, and at one point, they all tried hiding under this rock, and at another point, under that one. And if they had found a tunnel or a hole in the ground they would have buried themselves under that. The casualties of the Americans which I myself verified and confirmed were 50 deaths, not counting the injuries and the wounded, the downing of two helicopters, the death of a collaborator, the destruction of truck vehicles, and the capture of 50 collaborators—who were released on the condition that they would remove their entire force from the battle, and they were 300, and they actually withdrew from there.”²⁵

When asked about the bloody battle, Al-Iraqi later remarked that Americans “try to fool the world with the stupid cowboy mentality, while in reality they live in a prison of terror and extreme fear.”²⁶

In July 2002, al-Iraqi was exclusively interviewed by the notorious Al-Qaida website known as “the Center for Islamic Studies and Research” (or “Al-Neda”), the brainchild of senior Saudi Al-Qaida operative Yusef al-Ayyiri. Abd al-Hadi was described in the interview as “the former frontline commander of the Arab mujahideen, one of the commanders during the Shahi-Kot battles in Gardez, and currently the commander in charge of monitoring and surveillance.”²⁷ Regarding his apparent change in title, Abd al-Hadi explained, “perhaps I would be needed for this mission one week, and the next week in another capacity. There is no actual difference between the military commanders and those responsible for monitoring and surveillance units, as both missions are based in the field.”²⁸

²⁴ Al-Zawahiri, Dr. Ayman. “Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner: Second Edition.” As-Sahab Media Foundation. November 27, 2010. <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=82499>.

²⁵ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

²⁶ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

²⁷ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

²⁸ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

The Iraqi Al-Qaida commander boasted of firing “a wave of rockets” at the U.S. embassy in Kabul, and for overseeing the ambush and execution of two accused “spies” working for a humanitarian organization.²⁹ He expressed little respect for Western journalists either, suggesting that they are “either spies or photographers that work for the Pentagon. Of course, the mujahideen are not blind to this fact, so they laid a trap for a convoy of reporters that had come to cover the stories of the battles in Shahi-Kot. One of the Taliban brothers stood in their path and threw a grenade at their vehicle, killing a Canadian journalist and an Afghani collaborator guarding them.”³⁰ Nor did Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi offer any sense of regret or remorse over the numerous human rights violations committed by Al-Qaida and the Taliban during their reign of terror over Afghanistan. He defiantly scoffed to Al-Neda, “the crusaders and their allies boast about the accomplishments and advancements that occurred after the era of the Taliban, but these accomplishments were not to build infrastructure but accomplishments in corruption like music concerts, dancing, daily singing programs, re-broadcasting the television, reopening theaters and cinemas and video stores in Kabul and elsewhere, and spread of sexual material which reached the furthest parts of Afghanistan.”³¹

During his Al-Neda interview, Hadi al-Iraqi described how Al-Qaida’s mission in Afghanistan had changed following the collapse of the Taliban regime in late 2001:

“Regarding the nature of the current missions... after the war paradigm shifted from organized warfare to urban warfare, the mujahideen became in need of a new kind of information that fit the urban warfare paradigm. In the past, the monitoring and surveillance units only used to receive secondary attention because the enemy forces on the frontlines could be clearly spotted without needing to canvass thoroughly, other than in a few cases. However, today, prior to initiating any operation, such jihadi missions—taking the form of urban warfare—are in need of enough information to secure the success of the operation, Allah-willing, and it is necessary to determine enemy numbers at a targeted site, their weapons, layout of the site, location of leadership, storage, trenches, and much more information. Being unaware of even one piece of this information could lead to terrible losses. So, we needed to focus on these surveillance units and devote sufficient effort and time towards monitoring and surveillance in order to familiarize ourselves with the enemy’s weak points and how to tire him without engaging in direct confrontations... I am in charge of the command of one of seven surveillance units, and it is the unit responsible for ‘strategic’ monitoring and surveillance, if you will. This group monitors targets in general and studies the nature of the enemy, his weapons, bases, and assembles the most extensive information about him—regardless whether this surveillance is initially being gathered for an imminent attack or not, as we must have access to a dynamic database of information about every target and every move by the enemy in every province before beginning any mission.”³²

²⁹ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

³⁰ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

³¹ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

³² Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

He concluded the interview by issuing an open appeal to Al-Qaida supporters that “the jihad is not finished in Afghanistan. Your brothers are patient and steadfast, they will not surrender their weapons, and they are determined to defeat the crusader alliance, Allah-willing, on the soil of the Hindu Kush... I send you this news from the battlefield and from the frontlines of sacrifices and courage—these sacrifices by the mujahideen, and especially the Taliban, may Allah make them victorious. [They] are in dire need of first your prayer, second your support for our cause by every means, and third, your financial support.”³³

By August 2003, Al-Qaida’s leadership was struggling to survive amidst a wave of senior operatives captured or killed by the U.S. and allied nations. The fall of 2001 saw the death of Abu Hafs al-Masri and the capture of training camp manager Ibn Shaykh al-Liby. In March 2002, al-Liby’s partner—the notorious gateway to Afghan jihad—Abu Zubaydah al-Falastini was arrested inside Pakistan. A year later, in March 2003, senior Al-Qaida operatives Khalid Shaykh Mohammed and Ramzi Binalshibh were also captured in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi. With these events in mind, on August 5, 2003, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi wrote an introduction to an Arabic-language book written by another Al-Qaida operative about the life of Abu Zubaydah, praising the imprisoned jihadi leader “who was captured by the Americans with the help of those who sold out their religion in Pakistan” and “a hero from the soldiers of Islam” who helped “repel the Jewish-Crusader offensive intended to uproot and destroy the first line of defense of the Islamic nation.”³⁴ In his introduction, Abd al-Hadi lamented, “And Afghanistan, and Iraq, and elsewhere tried to make spilling the blood of Muslims costly, and restore the prestige of the Islamic nation. O’ Abu Zubaydah, my apologies. Sorry a thousand times. And my apologies, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Liby, forgive us a thousand times. And apologies to all the prisoners, forgive us a thousand times. We will not let you stay like this, and we will not sheathe our swords until we witness the victory of this religion and the pride of its faithful.”³⁵

In April 2004, Pakistani-American Mohammed Junaid Babar was arrested in New York upon returning from a trip to Pakistan. Two months later, Babar pled guilty to charges of providing material support to Al-Qaida in Afghanistan and agreed to cooperate with law enforcement by providing information and sworn testimony regarding his contacts with Al-Qaida. Babar admitted to having multiple covert meetings with Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, who he understood at that point in time to be “the third in command within al Qaeda behind Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahri and the senior commander of al Qaeda’s fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan... who were fighting Coalition forces in Afghanistan.”³⁶ According to the latter’s account, “Hadi al Iraqi asked Babar to provide him with materials in support of al Qaeda's jihad activities in Afghanistan. Specifically, Hadi al Iraqi asked

³³ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Interview with the field commander Abdul-Hadi al-Iraqi.” July 27, 2002.

³⁴ Al-Adam, Abu Ubaidah Abdullah Khalid. “Commander Abu Zubaydah: As I Knew Him.” <http://tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?threadid:45815>. First published: September 2003.

³⁵ Al-Adam, Abu Ubaidah Abdullah Khalid. “Commander Abu Zubaydah: As I Knew Him.” <http://tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?threadid:45815>. First published: September 2003.

³⁶ Official Letter to the Honorable Victor Marrero; United States District Judge, Southern District of New York from United States Attorney Preet Bharara. “Re: United States v. Mohammed Junaid Babar.” November 23, 2010.

Babar to provide him with money and gear, namely, ponchos, shoes, socks, and sleeping bags.”³⁷

In August 2005, Abdel Hadi al-Iraqi reappeared once again in a video produced by Al-Qaida’s As-Sahab Media Foundation, “The War of the Oppressed” (a.k.a. “Harb al-Mustadhafeen”). Titled as “the commander of the Arab mujahideen in Afghanistan”, the Iraqi national was shown explaining a battle plan to a gathering of mujahideen fighters. He declared to the camera, “After the battles of New York and Washington, for the first time in its modern history, the Islamic nation has united towards one goal and one desire: [fighting] the greater enemy America... What the Americans are doing right now has never been done before by any fool in history: it has opened the gates of jihad for us in Iraq, and has united the entire world behind Mullah Mohammed Umar and Shaykh Usama Bin Laden.”³⁸

In early 2007, media reports surfaced claiming that Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi had finally been captured by the U.S. military. Shortly thereafter, another fellow Al-Qaida Shura Council member, Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (a.k.a. “Shaykh Saeed”) appeared in an As-Sahab video to mournfully confirm the news:

“Regarding the arrest of the brave brother Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi (may Allah free him, make him steadfast, and help him with His Help), we would like to clarify some of the things that accompanied the arrest of this champion. He was on his way to Iraq, as he was longing to fight the Americans in his birthplace and the cradle of his youth, and has asked the leadership to permit him to go to Iraq at an early stage, but had waited patiently until permission to travel was received about a year and a half ago. He was arrested in Turkey, and the treasonous government in Turkey handed him over to the Americans... Their punishment—from Allah and then from the Mujahideen—is definitely coming with Allah’s permission, and we ask Allah to grant steadfastness to the brother Abd al-Hadi and all Muslim captives and hasten their release from captivity.”³⁹

Similarly, in August 2010, Al-Qaida’s then-Deputy Commander Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri issued a stern message to Turkish Muslims complaining that their government has “arrested many Mujahideen and handed them over to America, where they suffer torture, oppression and torment, then are sentenced to long imprisonment or death. Among the most famous of these is the Mujahid Sheikh Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, may Allah free him.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Official Letter to the Honorable Victor Marrero; United States District Judge, Southern District of New York from United States Attorney Preet Bharara. “Re: United States v. Mohammed Junaid Babar.” November 23, 2010.

³⁸ As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Harb al-Mustadhafeen.” August 30, 2005. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=31057>.

³⁹ As-Sahab Media Foundation. “An Interview With Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid.” May 26, 2007. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=130663>.

⁴⁰ As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Mujahid Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri: Message to the Turkish People.” August 15, 2010. <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=27479>.