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# State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq: August 2007

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## Introduction: The Sunni Insurgency in Iraq

When the U.S. first invaded Iraq in March 2003, the mission was expected to be short-term and tightly focused on neutralizing the former Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. Yet, while deposing Saddam and his cronies proved relatively uncomplicated, the U.S. and its allies did not sufficiently plan for post-war governance and reconstruction, causing Iraq to quickly fall into a chasm of anarchy and lawlessness. Before long, three categories of “bad actors” had stepped forward to fill this gaping political vacuum: organized criminal networks, Shiite-run militias (primarily the Mahdi Army and Badr Corps), and Sunni-led insurgent organizations (including Al-Qaida). Overall, of the three categories, armed Sunni militant factions have long since been the most problematic, waging an unrelenting campaign of violence against the Iraqi government, the U.S. military, and (at times) even innocent sectarian victims. Much to the chagrin of their adversaries, during the last four years, the Sunni insurgents has demonstrated remarkable ingenuity, a unity of purpose, and a surprising resilience.

This report, “State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq”, is intended to offer readers a clearer understanding of the changing dynamics behind the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, based primarily upon a critical analysis of open source intelligence and propaganda material published by insurgents themselves, and also by the U.S. and Iraqi governments. It follows up on a previous inaugural version released through Globalterroralert.com in December 2006. The report is divided into five sub-sections, as follows:

- **Part I: The Rise of Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI)** [Page 1]
- **Part II: Conflict Over Al-Qaida’s Expansion** [Page 9]
- **Part III: Emergence of the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF)** [Page 15]
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- **Part V: Conclusions** [Page 30]

## Part I: The Rise of Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI)

To understand the logic lurking behind the establishment of the “Mujahideen Shura Council” in early 2006 and, subsequently, the “Islamic State of Iraq”, one must first appreciate the nature of the conflict in Iraq as seen through the eyes of Al-Qaida. For those who pay homage to the message of Usama Bin Laden, the full-scale U.S. military invasion of Iraq in 2003 was viewed through the same exact lens as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the ethnic-Serb offensive against Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s, and the still-ongoing Russian military operation targeting insurgent and terrorist bands in the central Caucasus. Given the right opportunity, during each of these “crusader invasions”, various local Muslim fighters and foreign mujahideen volunteers were able to band together—at least for a time—and open a “gateway to jihad” across their entire region. These jihadi frontlines (the chief of which can presently be found in Iraq) represent the soul and essential engine driving forward Al-Qaida and its affiliates. For more than two decades, they have served as terrorist laboratories where disparate foreign extremists from around the world could assemble together, receive military

training, be tested under live fire, and—perhaps most importantly—could develop a sense of organization and strategic hierarchy that would persist long after the end of any one war. Likewise, Al-Qaida and other Arab mujahideen organizations with firsthand experience managing military activities on active jihadi frontlines have taken great pains to document their experiences—both positive and negative. The purpose of publishing these remarkably frank narratives is, at least in part, to guide the actions and decision-making of future generations of mujahideen leaders.

By the end of 2005, even Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was forced to concede that events in Iraq appeared to be following the same inevitable path for his movement as to what had befallen his “Arab-Afghan” brethren in Bosnia-Herzegovina a decade earlier. At the height of their military prowess in late September 1995, the Muslim-led Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBiH) suddenly halted their final offensive against Serb forces in the Vozuca region under pressure from U.S. and European diplomats and contrary to the insistent demands of Algerian, Egyptian, and Saudi mujahideen commanders. As the Arab fighters there noted bitterly in reflection, “the most hated thing for the mujahid is the peace of the enemy.”<sup>1</sup> By ending the Bosnian war and putting the country on the road to recovery, the November 1995 Dayton Peace Accords effectively strangled the jihad in the Balkans. Thousands of mujahideen eager to avenge war crimes against Bosnian Muslims were instead being told by their estranged former allies in Sarajevo to abandon their abortive mission, uproot, and return home. It was a bitter lesson for mujahideen commanders around the world about how Western-style politics and diplomacy could be used to “sabotage” the growth of military frontlines and divide the ranks of unified Muslim forces against hardcore extremist elements.

Ten years later, the same troubling divisions appeared to be emerging between local and foreign mujahideen fighters inside Iraq over participation in U.S.-sponsored democratic national elections in December 2005 (coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the Dayton Accords). Only days before the anniversary of the signing of Dayton, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s Al-Qaida faction in Iraq issued shrill warnings to its supporters that “the Crusaders are preparing for the new ‘Dayton’ conspiracy by forming an alliance with the fools amongst the Sunnis.”<sup>2</sup> When Zarqawi threatened in September 2005 to massacre any Sunnis or Shiites who dared to vote in democratic elections, the influential Iraqi Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) aimed a stinging rebuke directly at him:



“There is no religious basis allowing you to take your revenge on the innocent while ignoring the true criminals... it is impossible for someone who claims to rely on the laws of Allah to make his decisions based on emotions and personal grudges. Such a dangerous statement only serves the most deadly wishes of our enemies—the desire to tear apart our country and to initiate a battle amongst the faithful... The best course of action for those who came to help eliminate the foreign occupation in our land is advocacy, not killing and annihilating the perspectives of others... the threats made [by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi] ... have damaged the image of the jihad and take away from the success of the jihadi resistance project in Iraq.”<sup>3</sup>

The worst fears of Al-Qaida seemed to be coming true. The Iraqi Muslims who they had come to “save” were rejecting them as “troublemakers” and instead embracing “the peace of the enemy.” Stunned and outraged, Al-Qaida wasted no time in responding to this affront.

<sup>1</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>2</sup> “Al-Qaida Statement on the Battle of Amman.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=38817>. November 10, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0905/zarqawi-amsulema.pdf>.

The group released a video of Zarqawi spokesman Abu Hamza al-Baghdadi (a native of Baghdad) who admonished the willingness of moderate Sunnis to abandon those who came from afar to fight on their behalf in exchange for shared rule with the Shiites:

“Anyone who attempts to distinguish between Iraqis and non-Iraqis with regards to jihad in the cause of Allah and helping to determine the destiny of the nation, then he would be mistaken... May Allah be our witness, we say to you that the fingernail of any foreign mujahid who is fighting in Mesopotamia... is worth more than a country full of those who follow al-Sistani, al-Jaafari, al-Hakim, al-Sharastani, and Chalabi... Anyone who forsakes his own country and comes to Mesopotamia in order to declare jihad in the cause of Allah and who remains steadfast in the Muslim homeland is superior to any native Iraqi who runs away from battle, delivering himself into the hands of the oppressors and attempting to distinguish between the Iraqis and the non-Iraqis.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite Al-Qaida’s propaganda blitz, the December 2005 round of national elections went ahead peacefully and with the participation of large numbers of both Sunnis and Shiites. In a country that has been rocked by seemingly endless violence for three years, election day was a time of unusual calm as insurgents laid down their weapons and took to the ballot boxes. In the aftermath of the voting, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi issued a new audio recording, bitterly criticizing the Iraqi Islamic Party and other Sunni Muslims for supporting the election: “This is a call to the Sunnis, in general and the followers of the Islamic Party in particular... Where are you being led to? Don’t you have any fear of Allah? ...it was very clear to everyone that the crusader enemy was losing, and then you threw a rope to save him... May Allah curse the leaders of the Islamic Party and those who collaborated with them... [who are causing] the destruction of the Sunnis.”<sup>5</sup> Though the December election was far from perfect, the mere fact that Iraqi Sunnis were willing to consider participating in a unified, secular regime along with majority Shiites was a clear rejection of Al-Qaida’s fanatical agenda in favor of negotiated peace. After the events of December 15, 2005, Al-Qaida commanders realized that their only hope for continued survival in Iraq lay in re-connecting with and re-assimilating into their native Sunni base.

Al-Qaida’s strategic response began to take visible shape only weeks later. Without warning, on January 16, 2006, Al-Qaida’s Media Wing issued a new communiqué announcing the formation of a joint military alliance with various like-minded Iraqi insurgent factions, to be known as the “Mujahideen Shura Council” (MSC).<sup>6</sup> The basic concept behind the MSC appears to harken back to happier times for Al-Qaida during the siege of Fallujah, when various Sunni mujahideen factions were forced into a brief unity of cause and purpose. Back then, other mainstream Iraqi insurgent groups like the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) were still proud to claim joint military operations with Al-Qaida. The notorious Jordanian Zarqawi stepped backwards from his politically awkward position of public prominence and instead hid in the shadows of a mysterious

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<sup>4</sup> “Al-Qaidat ul-Jihad Organization presents audio recording of Shaykh Abu Hamza al-Baghdad, Head of the Shariah Committee.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=33194>. September 21, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> “Al-Qaida’s Media Wing presents an audio recording of Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=46821>. January 8, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> “A Statement Announcing the Formation of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=47781>. January 15, 2006.

Iraqi appointed to head the MSC: “Abdullah Rashid al-Baghdadi”, supposedly a native of the capital Baghdad.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning with the formation of the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) in January 2006, Al-Qaida managed to achieve a certain degree of success in consolidating control over the larger ongoing Sunni insurgency in Iraq. This creeping expansion continued steadily despite the landmark killing of Al-Qaida leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 and aggressive U.S. military efforts aimed at paralyzing Al-Qaida activity in Iraq. When native Iraqi insurgent commanders did on occasion agree to merge their fighters with the MSC, they were handsomely rewarded for their loyalty. The relatively unknown Al-Ghurabaa Movement—led by Abu Abdullah al-Jaburi (a.k.a. Muharib Abdullah Latif al-Jaburi)—was welcomed as a founding member of the MSC in January 2006. Al-



**Al-Ghurabaa Commander  
Abu Abdullah al-Jaburi**

Qaida commanders quickly thrust al-Jaburi into the limelight as a public spokesperson for the MSC—and later as the “official spokesman” of Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, in the end, only two significant Iraqi insurgent factions ever consented to join the MSC: the Army of the Victorious Sect (joined January 15, 2006)<sup>9</sup> and the Army of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah (joined January 28, 2006).<sup>10</sup>

As a consequence, though the MSC was ostensibly created for the purpose of seamlessly integrating Sunni mujahideen under a shared banner, Al-Qaida nonetheless embodied the overwhelming force and ideological direction within the MSC. Virtually all of the propaganda and statements released by the group bore the unmistakable signature of Al-Qaida’s media wing in Iraq. As months passed, the MSC continued to fail in attracting major interest from competing groups like Ansar al-Sunnah and the IAI—leading Al-Qaida’s commanders in Iraq to dramatically remodel their shadow organization in order to buttress its appeal and Islamic legitimacy. On October 15, 2006, the MSC declared the official formation of an “Islamic State of Iraq” encompassing the provinces of Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salahuddin, Ninewah, Babil, and al-Wassat—allegedly with the joint support of a host of new tribal partners and mujahideen factions, including the Al-Fatihin Army.<sup>11</sup> By placing their mujahideen alliance under the seeming authority of an Islamic State and appointing a locally-based “Amir al-Mumineen” (“Leader of the Faithful”), Al-Qaida endeavored to increasingly isolate Sunni insurgent competitors who stubbornly insisted on remaining outside Al-Qaida’s umbrella. Within weeks, in a further, largely cosmetic effort to increase diversity and dilute the looming footprint of Al-Qaida within the so-called “Islamic State”, Abu Omar al-Baghdad also announced the creation of an “expanded Shura Council consisting of three elements from each faction that has joined the Islamic State, regardless of the number of fighters it has or the scope

<sup>7</sup> “The Announcement of the Name of the Mujahideen Shura Council Commander.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=48643>. January 20, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq Announces the News of the Martyrdom of its Official Spokesman.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125939>. May 3, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> “A Statement Announcing the Formation of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=47781>. January 15, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> “The Army of Ahlus Sunnah waal Jamaah: We are at the Service of the Mujahideen Shura Council.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=50181>. January 28, 2006; See also: “The Mujahideen Shura Council Welcomes the Army of Ahlus Sunnah waal Jamaah to the Council.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=50291>. January 29, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> “The Mujahideen Shura Council Presents Glad Tidings to the Muslims Everywhere by Announcing the Establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=90617>. October 15, 2006.

of its operations. Moreover, it contains a representative of each tribe and several other experts and specialists.”<sup>12</sup>

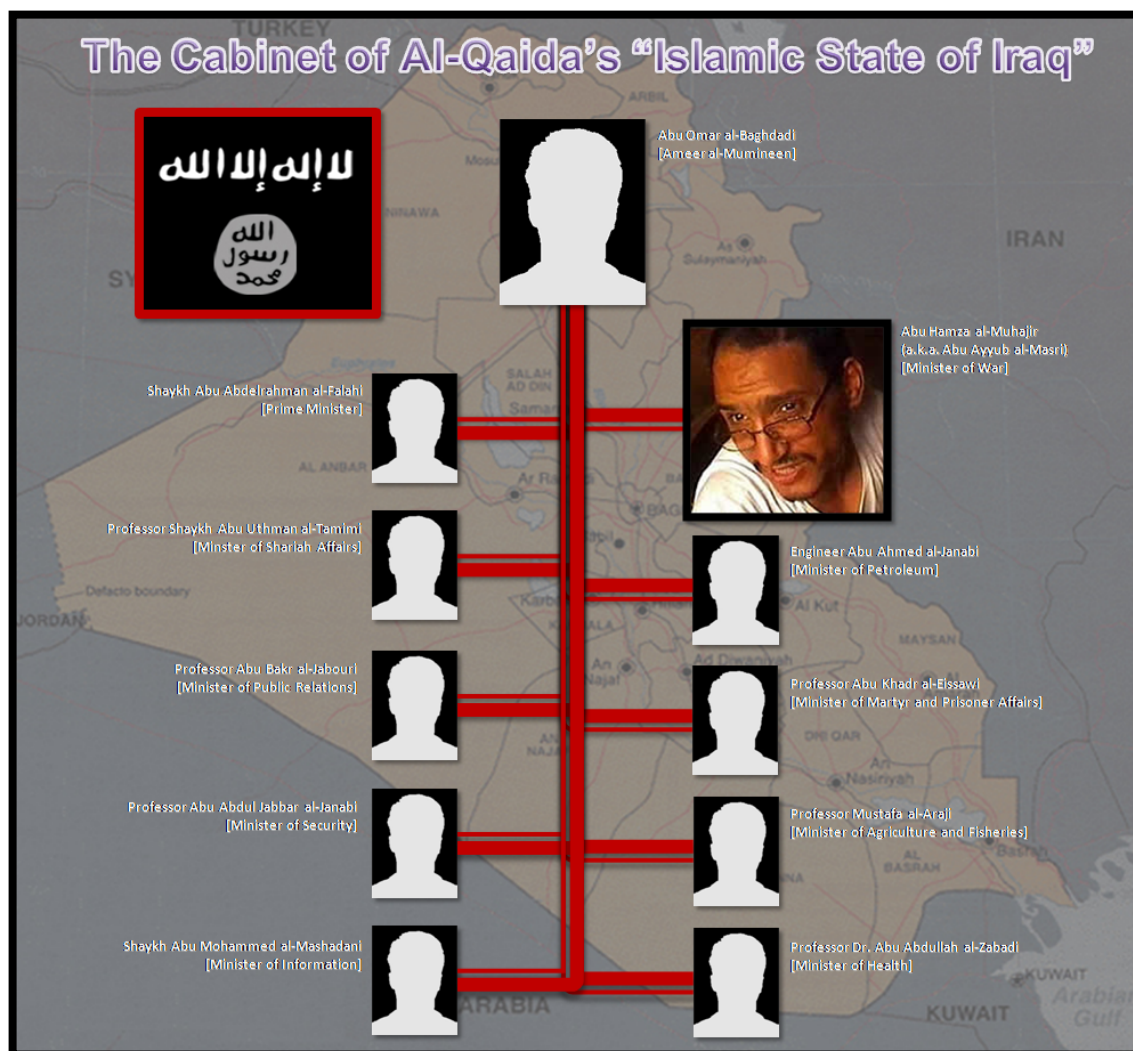
The reported decision by the Al-Fatihin Army to collaborate in Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State” significantly bolstered its apparent credibility. Jaish al-Fatihin, one of Iraq’s most active and prolific insurgent groups, first emerged in January 2006 when it broke off from the larger Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI). Yet, only hours after the MSC announced their new joint venture, the media wing of the Al-Fatihin Army denied that it was involved in any coalition of the sort and admitted that it was actually “surprised” by the MSC announcement: “Perhaps it happened inadvertently, but we were not made aware of [the formation of this alliance], neither directly nor indirectly.”<sup>13</sup> Enraged that the dispute had been made public, the MSC fired off an icy rebuttal insisting that “four out of five of the former Jaish al-Fatihin brigades have recently sworn allegiance to the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq under the command of brother Abu Abdullah al-Iraqi. It was agreed at the time with the commander of the brigades... to keep the groups under the name of the Al-Fatihin Army.”<sup>14</sup> Six months later, Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” remained conspicuously silent when the central leadership of Jaish al-Fatihin announced that it was officially joining the ISI’s comparatively-moderate political rival, the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF).

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<sup>12</sup> “Al-Furqan Media Foundation: An Audio Recording of the Amir al-Mumineen Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, May Allah Protect Him.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=101740>. December 22, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> “The Shura Council of the Al-Fatihin Army: Regarding Our Inclusion in the Hilf al-Mutayibeen.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=90531>. October 14, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> “The Mujahideen Shura Council issues a Statement on the Allegations by the Al-Fatihin Army.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=90693>. October 15, 2006.



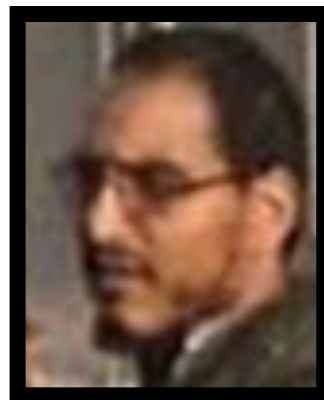
In April 2007, the “Islamic State of Iraq” issued a public declaration identifying the various individuals responsible for “cabinet positions” within the developing organization.<sup>15</sup> The ISI cabinet was listed as follows: Shaykh Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (Amir al-Mumineen); Shaykh Abu Abdelrahman al-Falahi (Prime Minister); Al-Qaida commander Shaykh Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, otherwise known as “Abu Ayyub al-Masri” (Minister of War); Professor Shaykh Abu Uthman al-Tamimi (Minster of Shariah Affairs); Professor Abu Bakr al-Jabouri (Minister of Public Relations); Professor Abu Abdul Jabbar al-Janabi (Minister of Security); Shaykh Abu Mohammed al-Mashadani (Minister of Information); Professor Abu Khadr al-Eissawi (Minister of Martyr and Prisoner Affairs); Engineer Abu Ahmed al-Janabi (Minister of Petroleum); Professor Mustafa al-Araji (Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries); and, Professor Dr. Abu Abdullah al-Zabadi, (Minister of Health). The various pseudonyms featured in the list suggest that the ISI leadership is almost exclusively Iraqi in origin (other than “Minister of War” Abu Hamza al-Muhajir). However, the personal biographies or specific credentials of these ranking “Cabinet Ministers” are virtually unknown.

Though much of his background still remains a mystery, more facts are becoming certain about Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (a.k.a. Abu Ayyub al-Masri), successor to the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as commander of Al-Qaida in Iraq (and the official “Minister of War” of the

<sup>15</sup> “Al-Furqan Media Wing Declares the Members of the Cabinet of the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=122910>. April 19, 2007.

“Islamic State of Iraq”). In September 2006, the Iraqi government released a video seized in a raid southwest of

Baghdad featuring Abu Hamza al-Muhajir explaining how to construct a car bomb. Pointing at various wires, Abu Hamza explains, “We prepare this vehicle as we did with other vehicles in the past.”<sup>16</sup> Though there has been some controversy over the precise identity of Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, the voice of the individual in the video distributed by the Iraqi government bears a remarkably high degree of similarity to corresponding audio recordings of Abu Hamza al-Muhajir released directly by Al-Qaida. Furthermore—although Al-Qaida has never publicly confirmed his true country of origin—it would appear that other major Sunni Islamist insurgent groups in Iraq fully believe Abu Hamza to be from Egypt. While in the midst of a bitter dispute with Al-Qaida (discussed later in this report), a spokesman for the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) derisively referred to the Al-Qaida commander as “Abu Hamza al-Masri”<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the reason that Al-Qaida has been so evasive in confirming



**Abu Hamza al-Muhajir**  
(a.k.a. Abu Ayyub al-Masri)

these details is a desire to avoid a potentially divisive political controversy over whether it is appropriate for a foreign national from Egypt to be leading the jihadist movement in Iraq.

In July 2007, the U.S. military held official press briefings to denounce the “Islamic State of Iraq” as nothing more than “a virtual organization in cyberspace” created for propaganda reasons by Al-Qaida. According to Brigadier General Kevin Bergner (spokesman and Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Effects, Multinational Force Iraq – MNF), to further the myth of the ISI, Al-Qaida leader Abu Hamza al-Muhajir created a “fictional political head... who has never been seen”: Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. Bergner charged further that al-Baghdadi is purely “a fictitious... character” and “actually an actor” named Abu Abdullah al-Naima.<sup>18</sup> Bergner identified one of the key human sources of these revelations as Khaled Abdul-Fattah Dawoud Mahmoud al-Mashhadani (a.k.a. Abu Shahed), an Iraqi Al-Qaida operative captured by U.S. forces on July 4. Al-Mashhadani—formerly a commander with the extremist Ansar al-Sunnah Army—acknowledged serving as a conduit for messages between Al-Qaida leaders in Iraq and their colleagues in other countries. Bergner described al-Mashhadani’s admissions to his American interrogators:

“In his words, “The Islamic State of Iraq is a front organization that masks the foreign influence and leadership within al Qaeda in Iraq in an attempt to put an Iraqi face on the leadership of al Qaeda in Iraq’... To make al-Baghdadi appear credible, [Abu Hamza al-Muhajir] swore allegiance to al-Baghdadi and pledged to obey him, which was essentially swearing allegiance to himself since he knew that Baghdadi was fictitious and a creation of his own... Mashhadani confirms that [al-Muhajir] and the foreign leaders with whom he surrounds himself, not Iraqis, make the operational decisions for al Qaeda in Iraq, and to be clear, al Qaeda in Iraq is run by foreigners, not Iraqis... [al-Muhajir] increasingly relies only on foreigners, who make up the majority of the leadership of AQI. He does not seek nor trust the advice of Iraqis in the organization... [Al-Muhajir] has increasingly become more isolated and paranoid, especially of the Iraqis within al Qaeda in Iraq, as operations have killed or captured additional AQI leaders. Mashhadani, in his own words, says, ‘The idea of al-Baghdadi is very weak now because other insurgent groups have realized that the concept of al-Baghdadi is controlled by the al Qaeda foreign fighters in Iraq.’”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.mnf-iraq.com/images/stories/daily/2006/October/vbied-video-iii.wmv>.

<sup>17</sup> “The Islamic Army of Iraq: An Audio Statement on Recent Events by Dr. Ali al-Nuaimi.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=133014>. June 4, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> “Press briefing with Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131). July 18, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> “Press briefing with Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131). July 18, 2007.

The ISI has rejected these charges by the Pentagon, characterizing them as part of an ongoing propaganda campaign designed to draw attention away from “crusader failures” in Iraq: “The latest lie is their claim that they have allegedly captured ‘the link to Shaykh Usama’—may Allah protect him—and stating that this person has confessed that the Amir al-Mumineen Abu Omar al-Baghdadi is a fictitious character. This is a complete lie and there is no truth to it.”<sup>20</sup> Conversely, Iraqi Defense Ministry spokesman Mohammed Askari has also questioned the accuracy of al-Mashhadani’s account, insisting that ISI commander Abu Omar al-Baghdadi is indeed a real person: “Al-Baghdadi is wanted and pursued. We know many things about him, and we even have his picture.” However, when pressed on the issue, Askari refused to release the supposed photograph or any additional information about al-Baghdadi “because it could jeopardize attempts to capture” him.<sup>21</sup>

Despite persistent efforts to paint its movement with an indigenous Iraqi face, there seems little doubt that foreign fighters from such countries as Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and North Africa continue to play a major role in the activities of Al-Qaida’s network in Mesopotamia. MNF Brigadier-General Kevin Bergner recently charged that “approximately 60 to 80 foreigners are lured to Iraq in any given month by al Qaeda” of which “approximately 70 percent transit through Syria.” Moreover, according to Bergner, between 80 and 90 percent of the numerous terrifying suicide bomb attacks executed in Iraq “are being carried out by foreign-born al Qaeda terrorists.”<sup>22</sup> This unusual demographic was put on public display in March 2007 when the official “Al-Furqan Media Wing” of Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” released a new propaganda video titled “The Knights of Martyrdom”, paying homage to operatives who have

executed recent suicide bombing attacks. The trio of “martyrs” (i.e. suicide bombers) profiled in the video included “Abu Azzam al-Muhajir” from Saudi Arabia and “Abu Walid al-Shami” from “Greater Syria” (likely of Palestinian or Lebanese origin).<sup>23</sup> This video represents the awkward paradox now faced by Al-Qaida propagandists, who are caught between the priority of maintaining the façade of “Iraqification” versus the explicit need to continue enlisting foreign volunteers to join the mujahideen in Iraq (particularly to serve as suicide bombers). In an April 2007 online interview, a Palestinian representative from Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” told an audience of international supporters, “our most urgent need is for martyrs [suicide volunteers], we need martyrs more than anything else.”<sup>24</sup>



Saudi national Turki al-Mani

As indicated by such video recordings as “The Knights of Martyrdom”, the neighboring Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains a major source of foreign-born fighters recruited by Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq.” In late March 2007, Al-Qaida supporters announced the death of Saudi national Turki Bin Abdelaziz al- Mani, who was killed earlier that same month during a clash with U.S. military forces in the western Anbar province of Iraq. Al-Mani was the younger brother of Khaled al-Mani (a.k.a. Khallad al-Najdi), a senior Saudi Al-Qaida leader who was

<sup>20</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq: About the Latest Lies of the Crusaders.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=142269>. July 23, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Susman, Tina. “U.S. says Iraqi militant nonexistent.” *Los Angeles Times*. July 19, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> “Press briefing with Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12786&Itemid=131](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12786&Itemid=131). July 11, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> “Al-Furqan Media Wing Presents Part One in the Knights of Martyrdom Series.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=113463>. March 2, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Paltalk Online chat session with “Abu Adam al-Maqqisi.” April 27, 2007.

<http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0507/isimaqqisi0507.pdf>.



himself killed in Iraq in January 2006. During his own stint with Al-Qaida, the elder Khaled al-Mani had succeeded in achieving infamy while serving as the deputy commander of a crack “special forces” unit under the personal supervision of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Khaled’s “glorious” death amidst the jihad in Iraq soon inspired his younger brother Turki back in Riyadh to follow in his footsteps:

“ [Turki] was deeply affected by the martyrdom of his brother Khaled... When his brother died, [Turki] became more ambitious, and developed a stronger relationship with Allah. He also became more passionate about defending the land of Islam and dying as a martyr like his brother, if Allah desired it. He packed and prepared himself and traveled to the land of jihad: Iraq... He charged [into battle] with his longtime friend, the martyr, Allah willing, Atheban al-Dosari... [who] died in February 2006... Finally, the day arrived—Thursday, March 5, 2007—when... our brother Turki fell during the rays of dawn, covered in his blood after he was hit by the bullets of the infidels, following the path of his brother, fulfilling his duty and passing it onto the next.”<sup>25</sup>

Targeted raids by the U.S. military have taken a considerable toll on prominent foreign-born jihadists who have come to Iraq to fight alongside Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State.” Based upon accumulated intelligence information, on June 23, 2007, U.S. forces conducted a security operation at a location south of Hawija (in north-central Iraq) in search of high-value terrorist suspects. Immediately upon the arrival of U.S. military forces, four armed individuals attempted to

flee in a vehicle and were subsequently shot and killed in a brief firefight. The dead suspects reportedly included Turkish national Mehmet Yilmaz (a.k.a. Khalid al-Turki), a “known terrorist and senior leader in al-Qaeda who operated a cell that facilitated the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq for al-Qaeda operations... Yilmaz was an al-Qaeda leader who led a group of Turks to Afghanistan in 2001 to fight against Coalition Forces. Intelligence reports indicate he was wounded in the fighting there and went to Pakistan for treatment, where he was captured by the government in 2004 and deported to Turkey. He was released in late 2005 and returned to al-Qaeda operations in 2006, moving his operations to Iraq.”<sup>26</sup> Separately, the U.S. government has also alleged that, while living in Pakistan, Yilmaz was a “close associate” of admitted 9/11 terrorist mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.<sup>27</sup> The other slain men accompanying Mehmet Yilmaz near Hawija included Turkish nationals Mehmet Resit Isik (a.k.a. Khalil al-Turki) and Ahmed Sancar (a.k.a. Khattab al-Turki) who allegedly had “performed key communication and logistic roles for al-Qaeda in Iraq and coordinated with other senior al-Qaeda facilitators.”<sup>28</sup>



(L): Mehmet Yilmaz (a.k.a. Khalid al-Turki)  
(R): Mehmet Resit Isik (a.k.a. Khalil al-Turki)

Only days later, on June 29, the U.S. military executed another security raid east of Fallujah that allegedly killed Egyptian national Abu Abdelrahman al-Masri. According to MNF sources, Abu Abdelrahman “was a known terrorist and senior leader in al-Qaeda... [who] worked directly for [Abu Hamza al-Muhajir]... Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Masri fought with [Abu

<sup>25</sup> “Allahu Akhbar: News of the Martyrdom of the Younger Brother of the Martyr Khallad.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=117511>. March 25, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> “High-level senior al-Qaeda leader killed during Coalition operations.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12572&Itemid=21](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12572&Itemid=21). June 27, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> “High-level senior al-Qaeda leader killed during Coalition operations.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12572&Itemid=21](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12572&Itemid=21). June 27, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> “High-level senior al-Qaeda leader killed during Coalition operations.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12572&Itemid=21](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12572&Itemid=21). June 27, 2007. See also: “Senior al-Qaeda in Iraq foreign terrorist identified.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12929&Itemid=21](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12929&Itemid=21). July 19, 2007.

Hamza al-Muhajir] in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003, and later came to Iraq with him.”<sup>29</sup> After being captured and briefly imprisoned in Iraq, Abu Abdelrahman relocated to nearby Syria in 2005 where “he began working with the network that facilitates the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq.” Less than two years later, Abu Abdelrahman al-Masri returned to Iraq to join Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, while “his associates traveled to Pakistan and Afghanistan to personally discuss external planning with al-Qaeda senior leaders.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite the well-documented flow of Al-Qaida personnel into and out of Iraq, there are still lingering questions over the exact relationship between Al-Qaida’s central leadership in Afghanistan and its local mujahideen franchise in Iraq run by Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. Past interviews with reputed Al-Qaida spokesmen in the West—including Dr. Saad al-Faqih—would tend to indicate that contemporary Al-Qaida networks active in Saudi Arabia and Iraq wield a considerable degree of operational autonomy from Usama Bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Likewise, according to recent statements by American military officials—rather than exerting explicit command-and-control, what Bin Laden offers to Abu Hamza al-Muhajir consists primarily of “a flow of strategic direction, of prioritization, of messaging and other guidance.” These same officials have conceded that the consistency and degree to which even that “is implemented... is one that varies.”<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, Al-Qaida’s franchise in Iraq has made it clear that it is making significant efforts towards organizing and coordinating Al-Qaida’s international terrorist operations. In June 2006, Al-Qaida published the nineteenth edition of its “Distinguished Martyrs” series, relating the story of “Abu Nasser”—a Libyan mujahideen commander who had traveled throughout Turkey, France, and Italy. According to his Al-Qaida biography, after earning glory on the battlefield in Iraq, “Abu Nasser became involved in something else. He trained a large number of brothers in bomb-making and formed military cells outside of Iraq. He was able to complete what he had endeavored to do. Allah willing, perhaps the lord will enable us to hear good news from them [the military cells] soon.”<sup>32</sup>

## **Part II: Conflict Over Al-Qaida’s Expansion**

Al-Qaida’s decision in mid-2006 to form the “Islamic State of Iraq” was a bold and, in some ways, potentially risky move. Without consulting a single prominent Islamic cleric for their prior consent, Al-Qaida appointed a “Leader of the Faithful” whose political authority supposedly governs over all Sunni Muslims living in Iraq—yet whose credentials are still virtually unknown to most Iraqis. This rather presumptuous edict was received with raised eyebrows even in some fundamentalist circles, who cautioned about the dangers of rushing the course of jihad and prematurely attempting to declare the formation of an Islamic State in Iraq. By upping the ante in this fashion—advertently or inadvertently—Al-Qaida also put other Sunni Iraqi insurgent groups in the uncomfortable position of either consenting to join under Al-Qaida’s banner or else being drawn into a contentious public debate over the suitability of Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” serving as the unifying force behind the Sunni insurgency.

Even as native Sunni factions struggled to keep their grumblings private, they continued to be antagonized by the increasingly arrogant behavior of Al-Qaida fighters brandishing their pseudo-Islamic authority. Soon, Al-Qaida’s ruthless efforts to hijack unilateral control over the Iraqi insurgency brought it into direct conflict with other dominant

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<sup>29</sup> “Another senior al-Qaeda leader identified, killed.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12609&Itemid=128](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12609&Itemid=128). June 30, 2007.

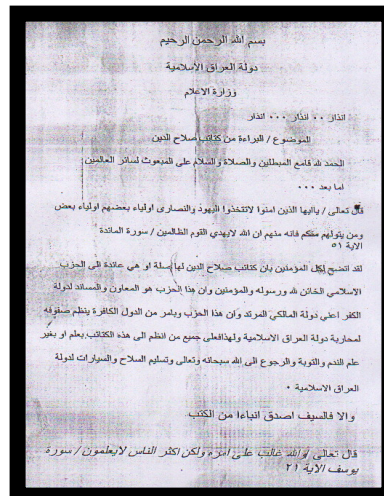
<sup>30</sup> “Another senior al-Qaeda leader identified, killed.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12609&Itemid=128](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12609&Itemid=128). June 30, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> “Press briefing with Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12908&Itemid=131). July 18, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> “Mujahideen Shura Council: Number 19 of the ‘Distinguished Martyrs’ Series.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=71245>. June 26, 2006.

Sunni militant factions. In early January 2007, Arabic-language flyers were posted in the Ameriyah neighborhood of western Baghdad in the name of the “Islamic State of Iraq.” The flyers accused the “Salahudeen Brigades” (the military wing of the Iraqi Islamic Resistance Front, JAAMI) of engaging in treacherous behavior by supporting political dialogue with the Iraqi government:

“...It is now obvious to the believers that the Salahudeen Brigades are connected or originate from the [Iraqi] Islamic Party, which has betrayed Allah, his Prophet, and the believers. That same Islamic Party is an ally and supporter of the... apostate government of al-Maliki who is fighting the Islamic State of Iraq under the orders of the infidel countries. Therefore, anyone who has joined these brigades either knowingly and unknowingly should ask for forgiveness, return to the path of Allah, and turn over their weapon and vehicles to the Islamic State of Iraq...”<sup>33</sup>



In response, the Salahudeen Brigades issued a firm denial, insisting “we have been opposed to the so-called ‘political agenda’ since its establishment.” Nonetheless, in this early stage, the group still sought to downplay its quarrel with Al-Qaida: “We think that the statement [from the Islamic State of Iraq] about our brigades was forced upon them, and therefore we ask them to publish a clear and sincere statement about their position among the mujahideen.” The Salahudeen Brigades blamed the misunderstanding on “ever-present efforts” by the U.S. and Iranian governments “to weaken the unity of the jihad... We ask all of the jihadist brigades: the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI), the Ansar al-Sunnah organization, the... 1920 Revolution Brigades, the Mujahideen Army, the Al-Fatiheen Army, the Al-Rashideen Army, and the Iraqi Jihad Union to recognize the events happening around them.” Nonetheless, the group concluded its response with a murky threat that seemed directed as much at Al-Qaida as “arch enemies” America and Iran: “We caution anyone who is trying to provoke us and we swear to retaliate against anyone who attempts to target us.”<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, Al-Qaida stepped up its public pressure on fellow Sunni insurgents to put aside their “petty concerns” and “do the right thing” by joining the “Islamic State.” On March 13, the ISI released a new audio statement from its emir, or commander, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi that railed against the “media conspiracy” aimed at dividing the Sunni insurgency, including allegations that the ISI had been resorting to physical force in order to secure the cooperation of fellow insurgent groups. Yet, despite his initial pretenses towards mujahideen unity, Abu Omar then went on to haughtily suggest that other Sunni insurgents in Iraq were not up to the task of fighting U.S. and Iraqi government forces on their own without the help of Al-Qaida:

“How is Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers if there was no ‘Mujahideen Shura Council’ or the Islamic State? And how things will go if the Islamic State’s soldiers laid down their weapons and stopped Jihad? The answer is known. The honor will be violated; the crops and the cattle will be exterminated. And if you don’t believe it, I ask any fighting group which claims the perfect methodology, the pure banner, and the might in front of [our] enemies, to publish three filmed military operations for breaking into American headquarters—or even just one filmed operation for breaking into just a [single] American military barracks... We consider the members of other

<sup>33</sup> “Important and Serious Political Statement Regarding What was Published About Our Brigades in Ameriyah.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=104680>. January 10, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> “Important and Serious Political Statement Regarding What was Published About Our Brigades in Ameriyah.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=104680>. January 10, 2007.

Jihadi groups in Iraq as our brothers, but they are disobedient because they didn't do today's duty (which is working together under one flag).”<sup>35</sup>

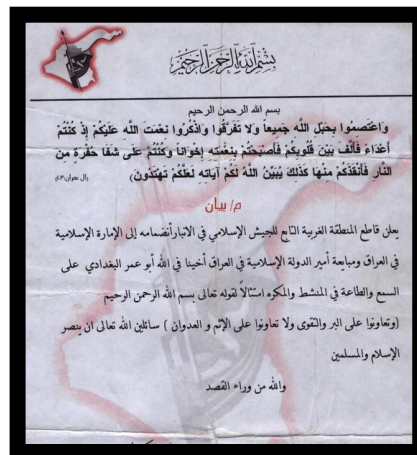
Though Abu Omar al-Baghdadi did not specify as to which competing insurgent factions his criticisms applied, the organization that was undoubtedly most irritated by them was the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI). Founded by ex-Iraqi military, paramilitary, and intelligence personnel in 2003, the IAI has since grown into one of the largest and most influential Sunni insurgent groups active in Iraq. From its very inception, the IAI established a reputation for itself as being a sophisticated, indigenous, and more-mainstream alternative to Al-Qaida and the Ansar al-Sunnah Army. However, the IAI has nonetheless routinely used terrorist tactics as part and parcel of its military operations. In November 2003, the IAI organized and videotaped a shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile attack on a DHL Airbus A300 leaving from Baghdad International Airport. In April 2005, the IAI organized and videotaped a shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile attack on a civilian Blackwater Mi-8 helicopter twelve miles north of Baghdad. The video showed IAI personnel summarily executing the lone survivor of the crash, co-pilot Lyubomir Kostov. Between 2003 and 2006, the IAI has admitted responsibility or has been otherwise implicated in the kidnapping and abduction of nearly a dozen foreign civilians in Iraq; including French journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, Christian Science Monitor journalist Jill Carroll, U.S. security consultant Ronald Schultz (who was murdered during his captivity), and Italian journalist Enzo Baldoni (who was also murdered during his captivity).



For the length of its existence, the IAI has maintained an awkward détente with Al-Qaida forces in Iraq. While the group has conducted occasional joint operations with Al-Qaida since at least mid-2004, the IAI has—in the past—carefully distanced itself from some of Al-Qaida's more controversial irredentist positions. When Al-Qaida threatened to kill any Iraqi—Sunni or Shiite—who dared to participate in U.S.-sponsored national elections, the IAI issued a communiqué in late 2005 along with other insurgent groups clarifying, “we are not against any proposals which extract our nation from its present ordeal provided that they do not interfere with our Shariah Law... and are not empty media slogans.” Yet, with a growing sectarian conflict brewing between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq during 2006, certain factions within the IAI were increasingly drawn

into the orbit of Al-Qaida's Mujahideen Shura Council and, later, the “Islamic State of Iraq.” In late November 2006, the IAI boasted that it had succeeded in assassinating a notorious Shiite militia commander, Abu Deraa, with the apparent help of Al-Qaida's Islamic State.<sup>36</sup> Days later, in early December, a copy of a statement branded with the IAI logo appeared on the Internet that was not officially released by the IAI's media wing. The communiqué purported to be an independent oath of allegiance on behalf of IAI units based in the western Anbar province to Al-Qaida's Islamic State and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.

During this lengthy period of time, the IAI's media wing conspicuously avoided discussion of whether it intended to formally join the “Islamic State of Iraq.” This policy of silence continued virtually unabated until April 5,



<sup>35</sup> “Al-Furqan Media Wing Presents Audio Recording of Amir al-Mumineen Abu Omar al-Baghdadi: ‘I Am Aware of My Lord.’” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=115391>. March 13, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> “Islamic Army in Iraq: Statement by the Intelligence Wing Regarding Abu Deraa.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=98591>. November 30, 2006. See also: “Islamic State of Iraq: Announcement of the Elimination of the Enemy of Muslims, the Dog of the Magus named Abu Deraa.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=99047>. December 3, 2006.

2007, when the IAI suddenly issued an unprecedented and crippling new communiqué, loudly decrying “the unlawful practices of the brothers from Al-Qaida.”<sup>37</sup> Throughout its statement, the IAI insisted on dismissively referring to Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and his associates with the moniker “Al-Qaida” (as opposed to the more respectful “Islamic State of Iraq”), accusing them of threatening “to kill some members of our group if they refuse to accept the banner of Al-Qaida, or the various other names it uses.” According to the IAI, “We were paying them heed only to stop their evil, to limit the struggle with our enemies, and to avoid acquiring additional enemies any time we can. We did this so we would not humiliate ourselves in front of our enemies.”<sup>38</sup> Finally pushed beyond the limit of their patience, the leaders of the IAI decided to break their long-held silence and publicly charge Al-Qaida with the commission of grave errors “relating to the misinterpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, the origin of the faith, and what is most sacrosanct, such as Muslim blood, money, and behavior”:

**Alleged statement from IAI fighters in Anbar swearing loyalty to the “Islamic State of Iraq”**

“...they became determined to harm our holy movement in every way... They know (as does everybody else) that this group [the Islamic Army in Iraq] has no Baathists in it, and there is no connection in any way between our group and the Baath Party, nor the Baathist ideology, nor the organization, nor its field activity. They [Al-Qaida] accused our group of participating in different ideologies and Islamic parties. All of this is a lie. And, on another occasion, they said that our group belongs to the intelligence agencies... These people went so far as to even kill some of the brothers from our organization with no justification, by this point the count stands at 30. And they refused to stop doing this. They made other jihadist groups into their enemies too. This rift changed into confrontation with other groups like the 1920 Revolution Brigades, which is still continuing now between them in Abu Ghraib. One of the incidents was the killing of one of their field commanders, brother Harith Tahir al-Dari. They also killed some of the personnel from the Mujahideen Army and some of the members of the Ansar al-Sunnah Army, and they have threatened the Iraqi Islamic Resistance Front (JAAMI), despite the burden undertaken by these groups to maintain the jihadist project and to keep it on target. But our patience [with them] has only made them more aggressive, and they have allowed the killing of Muslims, especially easy targets like the muezzins [callers to prayer], and civilians—some of whom are from the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS). It has become normal for them to target average Sunnis, especially the rich. Either they pay or they will kill them. Also, they will try to kill anyone who critiques them, disobeys them, or points to their mistakes, as it has become a simple matter and easy to explain. It has become the norm to rob people and take their money. It has become the norm to stigmatize people with the label of ‘infidel’ and ‘apostate.’”<sup>39</sup>

These accusations, if true, seemed to confirm the worst possible fears among supporters of the Iraqi jihad: that Al-Qaida’s network in Iraq had evolved into a gang of Takfiri extremists bent upon the needless bloodshed of fellow Muslims (including other mujahideen), akin to the latter days of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria. The allegation by the IAI that Al-Qaida was involved in the assassination of former 1920 Revolution Brigades commander Harith Tahir al-Dari is especially noteworthy. Al-Dari was the nephew of Dr. Harith Sulayman al-Dari, head of the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) and Iraq’s most prominent Sunni cleric—who had himself previously clashed with Al-Qaida leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi back in September 2005.<sup>40</sup> This assassination was indicative of Al-Qaida’s escalating contempt for the elder Dr. al-Dari, the AMS, and the local Sunni Muslim Brotherhood in Iraq.

Predictably, the IAI’s leadership was infuriated by public statements made by Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi that appeared to be critical of the indigenous Sunni insurgency. In their April 5 statement, the IAI explained, “We did not rush to answer

<sup>37</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq Issues a Response to the Messages of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=119646>. April 5, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq Issues a Response to the Messages of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=119646>. April 5, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq Issues a Response to the Messages of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=119646>. April 5, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> <http://english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=1572>.

these accusations because we have been waiting for Allah to bestow his guidance upon them, and for them to realize their mistakes and... in order to deny giving opportunities to our enemies, the Americans, the Safawi, and their allies. But because our Imams have not said anything, we are now forced into clearing up some of these issues so that we leave no room for misunderstanding or accusations.” Directly mocking the words of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi from his March 13 audio recording, the IAI scoffed:

“Some will say, ‘What would the situation of jihad be in Iraq if there was no Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) or Islamic State? How would things be if the soldiers of the Islamic State lay down their weapons and stopped their jihad?’ The answer is well known... Do you think that generous Allah will not safeguard four years of continuous jihad filled with sacrifices? What can explain this arrogant behavior over the Muslim mujahideen and the attempt to negate the efforts of others unless they follow them in their unacceptable actions? Al-Qaida has challenged the mujahideen to execute a single attack on an American base... All of our friends and enemies know [us] well and can bear witness to the great deeds achieved by the Islamic Army in Iraq, including hundreds of attacks on military bases, some of which were completely destroyed, by the will of Allah. For example: the two big bases, the first of which was the ‘Golden Base’ in Jurf al-Sakher which took place in 2003, even before Al-Qaida’s network was established in Iraq... [We have also carried out] many other operations, a thousand each month on average, and we ask Allah for acceptance and guidance. We have not mentioned this before because we prefer action over words. One cannot simply ignore other groups who are executing numerous blessed operations which have been seen and heard by everyone. How can all this be erased? ...Brother Abu Omar [al-Baghdadi] has transgressed against the entire Islamic nation and against the platform of the ancestors of our ummah and its clerics by making strange laws and verdicts. An example of this is him treating all Muslim lands as controlled by infidels, and [deciding that] we have the same obligation to fight Arab armies as fighting the occupying crusaders... And his verdict about the entire jihadist movement being ‘disobedient’ without any explanation... Then, he accused the [insurgent] groups of desiring a truce with the Americans, and thus, obviously, he does not understand the difference between conditional negotiations and surrender. With regards to our Islamic Army movement, we say that it is permitted to negotiate with the enemies, even though we have not negotiated with the Americans and Safawi until now... and we do not know of any jihadist faction that has negotiated with the Americans.”<sup>41</sup>

In concluding their embarrassing exposé of the “Islamic State of Iraq”, the IAI issued an “urgent call” to “the commanders of Al-Qaida, especially mujahid Shaykh Usama Bin Laden—may Allah protect him—who is well-known to be careful with the blood of Muslims, as well as his charity and his fear of the Day of Judgement—to adhere to his religion and execute his judicial and organizational responsibility as the commander of Al-Qaida, to make sure that all the facts have been revealed before judging anyone. He [Bin Laden] and his Al-Qaida field commanders are solely responsible for every action taken by their followers on the Day of Judgement. As words are not sufficient anymore, then, action must be taken to correct their path.” Likewise, the IAI also called upon “all the members of Al-Qaida in Iraq, to re-examine yourselves and to fear Allah for what you have done, and those who have sinned should rush to redeem themselves before Allah.”<sup>42</sup>

Needless to say, the April 5 IAI communiqué caused an explosion of contentious debate and quarreling across the global extremist community. Both Al-Qaida and the IAI are based upon parallel Salafi Muslim religious ideologies, and both organizations express at least some degree of respect for Usama Bin Laden. The IAI’s propaganda wing has produced many video recordings—such as “Juba Sniper” (a.k.a. “Baghdad Sniper”)—that have become classic viewing not just for Iraqi insurgents, but also for Al-Qaida supporters. Yet, it was these very credentials that lent so much weight and credibility to the IAI’s allegations against Al-Qaida’s franchise in Iraq. For the U.S. military to question the legitimacy of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and the “Islamic State of Iraq” was nothing new; but for fellow Sunni militants themselves to

<sup>41</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq Issues a Response to the Messages of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=119646>. April 5, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq Issues a Response to the Messages of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=119646>. April 5, 2007.

accuse Al-Qaida of “arrogance”, fratricide, and bullying and to openly ridicule “the various other names it uses” (i.e. “the Islamic State of Iraq”)—this was indeed groundbreaking.

Within days, on April 16, the “Islamic State of Iraq” issued a surprisingly conciliatory audio recording in response from Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. Seemingly taken aback by the litany of allegations from the IAI, Abu Omar attempted to smooth over the rift that had been created. In the recording, he pleaded, “O’ our brothers from the Ansar al-Sunnah Army and Mujahideen Army, the friendship between us is deep... And O’ my sons from the Islamic Army in Iraq, know that my blood is before yours and my honor is before yours, and, by Allah, you will not hear from but good things from us, and will not see but good things from us, so rest assured and be soothed, because what is between us is stronger than what some of them think... And O’ soldiers of the 1920 Revolution Brigades, yes, Satan tried to divide us, the Satan of the Islamic Party and its evils, but the wise people from your Brigades calmed the situation and sat with their brothers from Islamic State to remove the fuse of discord and instead plant a seed of goodwill, and we hold their hands by Allah’s will... We swear before Allah that we do not purposefully shed the sacred blood of a Muslim as long as he follows our prayers, faces our qibla, and eats our dhabiha [meat slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law].”<sup>43</sup> In his audio recording, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi also sought to respond to fundamentalist critics of the “Islamic State of Iraq” who had questioned whether it was yet appropriate to be declaring an “Islamic State”:

“When we declared the Islamic State, we were not trying to pick the fruit before it became ripe. However, the fruit fell freely and we picked it with safe and clean hands before it fell into the mud. Look at what happened after the Soviet Union collapsed and the Islamic nations were scattered away from the communist center. They became easy prey for communist and secular ideologies. And what happened after the mujahideen—both the Muhajireen [foreign fighters] and the Ansar [native fighters]—reached the capital of Serbia during the war in Bosnia? Simply put, [they were stopped by] the Dayton Peace Accords for alleged peace. And what happened after the fruit fell in Afghanistan, and the enemy was defeated during the era of the various factions? There was murder, ruination, and devastation, which still carry a stigma of disgrace for everyone who took part in it. O’ Islamic Nation, we are determined not to repeat this tragedy and not to lose the fruit again, for the believer is not to be stung twice from the same source.”<sup>44</sup>

On May 4, 2007, Al-Qaida leader Abu Hamza al-Muhajir issued his first audio recording since the release of the April 5 IAI communiqué and the corresponding appearance of IAI spokesman Dr. Ibrahim al-Shammari on the Al-Jazeera satellite television network. Abu Hamza scoffed at widespread rumors of infighting amongst the mujahideen in Iraq: “All what you hear on news channels concerning the internal fight among the jihadist groups or among our blessed clans, is mere lies and fabrication and a mere desperate attempt to break the unity of the jihad... When we announced to our Islamic State, we did expect this and more... Accordingly, here come ‘Al-Arabiya’, ‘Al-Iraqiya’, ‘Al-Hurra’, and ‘Al-Jazeera’ and... each tries to convince people that the soldiers of the Islamic State are liars, killing innocents and the poverty-stricken; whereas they know very well about the falsehood of their sayings.”<sup>45</sup> Abu Hamza also rejected the verdict by moderate Sunni Muslim leaders in Iraq rendering Al-Qaida as “Khawaarij” and “Takfiris” (heretical fanatics):

“We say to our brothers in the military armed forces from the so-called Muslim Brotherhood that we can read these incidents well... On the same day in which two factions of the Islamic Party announced their union, the leaders of the Islamic Party announced war on the ‘Takfiris’, meaning

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<sup>43</sup> “Speech by Amir al-Mumineen Shaykh Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, Commander of the Islamic State of Iraq: ‘The Harvest of Past Years in the Al-Tawheed State.’” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=122288>. April 16, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> “Speech by Amir al-Mumineen Shaykh Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq: ‘The Harvest of Past Years in the Al-Tawheed State.’” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=122288>. April 16, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> “Speech by the Minister of War of the Islamic State of Iraq Abu Hamza al-Muhajir: ‘Perish in Your Rage.’” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=126265>. May 4, 2007.

the mujahideen of the Salafi trend... [Our enemies] do also think that you are at their disposal in their war against Islam and Muslims... We say to you, with full grief, sadness, and pain, "By Allah, we hate shedding your blood, and when you shed ours... Do you then, men of God, accept us ruling you with Islam? ...O, you, the leaders of the Islamic Party: tomorrow you will be standing before Allah—and you, [Iraqi Sunni Vice President] Tariq [al-Hashimi], will know who the real Takfiris and who the real liars are. Is it he who blows himself up outside the gates of Abu Ghraib prison... or is it he who defends the occupiers... and fails to flinch while defaming the honor of his daughter and her Muslim sisters in Mesopotamia?"<sup>46</sup>

It should be noted that while both Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir were quick to play down reported tensions between Al-Qaida's "Islamic State" and other mujahideen factions, neither one explicitly apologized for the serious charges leveled by the IAI. On April 18, 2007, the 1920 Revolution Brigades issued their own response to Abu Omar's April 16 audio recording, explaining that the group had "closely followed" and "welcomed" Abu Omar's pleas for reconciliation: "We are all hoping that this speech will actually be implemented so that all of us can unite as one and we can point our guns towards the infidel occupier and his supporters." However, the 1920 Brigades added:

"One of the things that we liked about this speech was the self-criticism that we have been looking for, for a long time. Unfortunately, we had hoped that this self-criticism would be more clearly presented in order to benefit the mujahideen in Iraq, especially the soldiers of the Islamic State of Iraq. We took note that this speech did not directly and clearly point out the mistakes made in the battlefield by soldiers from the Islamic State of Iraq; moreover, this speech did not make any attempt to apologize for their mistakes. Such an apology would have helped to calm emotions... in the context of this speech we were hoping that Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi would have presented more guidance to his soldiers."<sup>47</sup>

### **Part III: Emergence of the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF)**

In the wake of the very public split between Al-Qaida's "Islamic State of Iraq" and the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI), the stage was set for the IAI to declare the formation of its own competing pan-Islamic political coalition: the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF). On May 2, 2007, the RJF issued its founding statement, explaining that in order "to achieve the goals of jihad in the way of Allah, and to confront local, regional and international challenges, an agreement has been made between the three groups—the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Mujahideen Army and the Shariah Council of the Ansar al-Sunnah Army—to establish a united front under the name of Reformation and Jihad Front."<sup>48</sup> The document laid out the detailed mission statement of the RJF, focusing on the need to safeguard the wealth and lives of innocent Muslims, avoiding the pitfalls of fanaticism, and the adoption of realistic political goals that are in tune with the present geopolitical circumstances. The RJF also called upon "all the other Sunni jihadist groups... to join this Front because it is from and for them, and especially the 1920 Revolution Brigades."<sup>49</sup>

It should be noted that—just as Al-Qaida dominates the "Islamic State of Iraq"—conversely, the RJF appears to be disproportionately influenced by the IAI. The initial RJF Internet website REFORMANDJIHADFRONT.ORG was registered and paid for by IAI online

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<sup>46</sup> "Speech by the Minister of War of the Islamic State of Iraq Abu Hamza al-Muhajir: 'Perish in Your Rage.'" <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=126265>. May 4, 2007.

<sup>47</sup> "1920 Revolution Brigades Issue Statement Regarding the Remarks Made by the Commander of the Islamic State of Iraq." <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=122634>. April 18, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> "The Founding Statement of the Reformation and Jihad Front." <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125736>. May 2, 2007.

<sup>49</sup> "The Founding Statement of the Reformation and Jihad Front." <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125736>. May 2, 2007.



couriers.<sup>50</sup> Following the sudden disappearance of REFORMANDJIHADFRONT.ORG, the RJF’s communiqués have been published exclusively on ALBORAQ.INFO, official web forum of the IAI. Meanwhile, statements issued from the RJF have strongly echoed many of IAI’s recent complaints about Al-Qaida in Iraq. On May 12, 2007, the RJF issued its second official communiqué reporting that “twelve of our mujahideen, mostly field commanders from the Mujahideen Army, were killed in an insidious ambush set up by some of our former comrades who we did not expect to betray us in such a cruel and savage way.” The Front blamed the incident on a fit of jealous rage by “those who work in darkness and who try to bury the nascent (front) using the most brutal means of violence and treachery... We consider the brothers from the Al-Qaida network fully responsible for this heinous crime and we call upon them to adopt the correct religious stance by handing over the criminal murderers to the Shariah Court of the Reformation and Jihad Front.”<sup>51</sup>



As of August 2007, the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF) includes two major insurgent organizations apart from the IAI (both of which have long been associated with the IAI):

- **The Mujahideen Army**

The Mujahideen Army (in Arabic, “Jaish al-Mujahideen”) first emerged publicly in late 2004 and early 2005 as a close ally of the IAI. For several months during mid-2005, the two groups issued joint propaganda statements—and even conducted military operations together, such as the May 2005 downing of a Blackwater Mi-8 helicopter north of Baghdad. Like the IAI, the Mujahideen Army is comprised almost exclusively of native Iraqi Sunni Muslims, including suspected former members of Saddam Hussein’s military. Despite this, the Mujahideen Army is virulently opposed to the Baath party and refers to the former Iraqi dictator as “the tyrant Saddam.” The group has also boasted in press releases that many of its weapons were originally stolen from abandoned Iraqi army depots. Fighters loyal to Jaish al-Mujahideen specialize mostly in small-scale mortar, rocket, IED, and sniper attacks, as opposed to spectacular suicide car bombings. During 2006, its most noteworthy operations included the alleged downing of U.S. Apache helicopters with shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and an unusual succession of attacks specifically targeting British military forces in Baghdad and Basrah.

According to the U.S. military, the Mujahideen Army and its leaders have been, at various times, “associated” with Al-Qaida’s network in Iraq.<sup>52</sup> MNF forces in Iraq have accused the former Baghdad-based propaganda chief of the Mujahideen Army of “record[ing] videos and digitiz[ing] them to compact disc for distribution to various Jaysh al-Mujahideen and al Qaeda in Iraq terrorist groups... the videos would be used to recruit terrorists and foreign fighters, as well as to provide information on potential targets for other terrorists.”<sup>53</sup> In late January 2006—in response to Danish and Norwegian political cartoons lampooning the Prophet Mohammed—the Mujahideen Army issued a furious edict calling “upon all our platoons in Jaish al-Mujahideen to attack whatever they possibly can in

<sup>50</sup> “Registrant Organization: IAI” and “Registrant Email: [money\\_detailsiai@yahoo.com](mailto:money_detailsiai@yahoo.com).” WHOIS search on REFORMANDJIHADFRONT.ORG.

<sup>51</sup> “The Reformation and Jihad Front Issues Statement on Crimes in al-Dora.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=127623>. May 12, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> “Jaysh al-Mujahideen terrorist lieutenant and propaganda chief captured.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=3079&Itemid=128](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3079&Itemid=128). November 24, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> “Jaysh al-Mujahideen terrorist lieutenant and propaganda chief captured.” [http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=3079&Itemid=128](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3079&Itemid=128). November 24, 2005.

these two countries specifically, and in other countries who also follow in their lead.”<sup>54</sup> The group’s language grew more dire in response to public comments by Pope Benedict that were likewise viewed by extremists as defamatory to the Prophet Mohammed. The group threatened in an official statement to “smash the crosses in the house of the Roman dog.”<sup>55</sup> It even claimed credit for a joint mortar attack on November 20, 2006 targeting a U.S. base in the town of Dili Abbas (north of Baqubah) alongside fighters from Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq.”<sup>56</sup>

Yet, the Mujahideen Army has wavered back and forth in its stated jihadist political platform and there are other indications that the group may be merely blustering in an attempt to capitalize on international media attention. Many months have passed since the group issued its grim threats against Denmark, Norway, and the Vatican—with no apparent sign of any Mujahideen Army terror cells preparing for attacks in those locations. Furthermore, rather than endorsing Al-Qaida’s strictly anti-Shiite platform, Jaish al-Mujahideen issued a statement in May 2006 actually condemning needless ethnic and sectarian warfare between Iraqis. The statement celebrated the “beautiful display” of “national unity” following the 1920 Iraqi nationalist revolution, and blamed the “American occupation” for the current internecine strife between “Sunnis, Shiites, Arabs, Kurds, Muslims, and Christians.” It concluded, “We must work courageously and with a sense of national and religious responsibility for the sake of future generations, so that we may spare them of the evils of ethnic and racial extremism and segregation.”<sup>57</sup> This is hardly the language that one would expect to see from hardline Salafist militants aligned with Al-Qaida—which, in the past, has referred to the territory of Iraq simply as “the Land of the Two Rivers” in order to avoid giving any credence to Iraqi nationalism.



On May 4, 2007, the Mujahideen Army confirmed its acquiescence in joining the RJF when it reprinted yet another copy of the RJF’s founding statement on radical jihadist Internet forums under its own name.<sup>58</sup> Like the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI), as of June 2007, news updates from the Mujahideen Army are no longer being carried on mainstream Al-Qaida web forums because of lingering resentment for the IAI’s public attack on Al-Qaida. Instead, Mujahideen Army propaganda releases are now being exclusively hosted on the IAI’s official web forum (ALBORAQ.INFO).

- **The Al-Fatihin Army (a.k.a. “The Conquerors Army”)**

The Al-Fatihin Army (in Arabic, “Jaish al-Fatihin”) is a Sunni insurgent faction that first emerged in July 2003, and shortly thereafter, “when the time was right, joined under the banner of the Islamic Army in Iraq.” The group remained generally under the IAI umbrella until January 2006, when it announced that it was splitting from the larger group in order to reunite some “independent factions” and to better accommodate “the

<sup>54</sup> “The Mujahideen Army Issues a Communiqué Regarding the Grave Offense Against the Blessed Prophet Mohammed.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=50528>. January 30, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> “The Mujahideen Army Shariah Council Issues a Statement Regarding the Statements by the Pope in the Vatican.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=85431>. September 16, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> “A Joint Operation With Our Brothers from the Mujahideen Shura Council.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=97072>. November 21, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> “The Mujahideen Army Issues a Statement Regarding Ethnic Extremism and Segregation.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=63876>. May 18, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> “The Founding Statement of the Reformation and Jihad Front.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=126105>. May 4, 2007.

requirements of the next phase [of the insurgency]."<sup>59</sup> It immediately claimed credit for some of IAI's most memorable operations over the past four years, including the capture of several Western hostages in 2004. Though relations between the IAI and the Al-Fatihin Army since the split have generally been amicable, there have also been occasional episodes of "partisan" bickering between the two. The Al-Fatihin Army claims to consist of approximately ten combat brigades with an active presence across central and western Iraq, including Anbar, Ninewah, Diyala, and Baghdad.<sup>60</sup>

When the Al-Fatihin Army broke apart from the IAI in early 2006, speculation was rampant that the group was motivated by hardline jihadist sympathies. In a lengthy diatribe, the group addressed "those who have participated in the political process... out of good intentions" who had "hoped to spare Sunni blood, and reverse the wrongdoing to our religion by changing the constitution through the Parliament. We tell these people: the means do not justify the ends... even if his intention is good, as it is in your case... We, the Al-Fatihin Army, consider the fact that we have nothing to do with this infidel government and this ridiculous political process a gracious deed in blessed Allah's name... This current infidel government will only be established over our skulls and torn body parts. It is either Islam or secularism."<sup>61</sup>

On May 1, 2006, the Al-Fatihin Army issued another statement responding to "recent rumors that have been spread about dissension and quarreling between jihad factions, and that the tribes are in disagreement with some of these groups and that they are engaging in negotiations and secret deals with these groups in order to attack another specific group [presumably Al-Qaida]." The communiqué continued:

"We, the commanders of the Al-Fatihin Army, state that these rumors about our struggle are mere lies and American tricks... designed to incite internal strife between these groups. It is totally false that groups including the Al-Fatihin Army desire a confrontation with Al-Qaida's network in Mesopotamia. We regard [Al-Qaida] fondly... as Shaykh Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri recommended them to us... And, thus, we state that any report containing such repugnant content is nonsense and a fabrication. We remain steadfast alongside our brothers from Al-Qaida's network in Mesopotamia and all the other groups fighting the crusaders and their allies."<sup>62</sup>

Exactly mimicking the behavior of Al-Qaida's network in Iraq, the Al-Fatihin Army issued a statement in July 2006 congratulating the Al-Qaida-backed Islamic Courts Union militia on their "great victories" in Somalia.<sup>63</sup> And though it condemned the controversial bombing of the Shiite Askariya mosque in Samarra (widely blamed on Al-Qaida), the Al-Fatihin Army added, "we regard Shaykh [Ayman] al-Zawahiri as a role model in this era of jihad, and it is he who has advised not to target the Shiite mosques."<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, this past spring, the Al-Fatihin Army began show some apparent signs of softening in their political approach. On March 21, 2007, the group released a communiqué from its commander, Abu Hassan al-Basri, who insisted that it was necessary for various mujahideen factions fighting in Iraq to "respect each other's perspectives as long as they are within the boundaries of the law, and for each of us to accept criticism and

<sup>59</sup> "The Founding Statement of the Al-Fatihin Army Organization."

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=52146>. February 7, 2006.

<sup>60</sup> "The Al-Fatihin Army: A Response to the Statements of Dr. Ibrahim al-Shammari."

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=91125>. October 17, 2006.

<sup>61</sup> "Our Position Regarding the Political Process." <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=62820>. May 11, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> "The Al-Fatihin Army: A Statement Regarding the Alleged Fighting Between Our Mujahideen and Al-Qaida in Iraq." <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=61227>. May 1, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> "The Al-Fatihin Army: Congratulations to Our Brothers from the Islamic Courts on Their Victories in Somalia." <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=77384>. July 29, 2006

<sup>64</sup> "The Al-Fatihin Army Condemns the Bombing in Samarra."

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=54595>. February 22, 2006.

evaluation... The world [should know] that we are not a threat and we must work to correct some of the... misconceptions among some Muslims and most of the infidels... that Islam is a religion of violence and that the mujahideen are savage killers... [bent upon] fighting against science, education, and development. We must open our doors and hearts to all Muslims and convince them that the mujahideen do not pose a threat to them, and that the biggest danger to them lies in secular systems.”<sup>65</sup> Two months later, on May 29, the Al-Fatihin Army issued an official statement acknowledging that “after studying the platform of the Reformation and Jihad Front and consulting the brothers from its Shura Council, the leaders of the Al-Fatihin Army have announced the decision [of our organization] to join this blessed front.”<sup>66</sup> Curiously—unlike either the IAI and Mujahideen Army—the Al-Fatihin Army continues to publish its propaganda material through both Al-Qaida-sponsored Internet forums and also simultaneously on the IAI news forum at ALBORAQ.INFO.

Though the participation of the Mujahideen Army and Al-Fatihin Army in the RJF seems relatively clear, there are serious questions (some of which remain to be answered) regarding the “Shariah Council” representatives from the Ansar al-Sunnah Army who also apparently agreed to join the IAI-led political front. The two primary dissidents in question—“Abu Sajjad” and “Shaykh Abu Hind”—had already left the Ansar al-Sunnah Army even prior to the formation of the RJF. On April 18, 2007, Ansar al-Sunnah’s top commander Abu Abdullah al-Hassan bin Mahmud issued an open letter to express his sadness at “hearing the news broadcast on one of the satellite channels mentioning that our ‘Shariah Council’ has left our group... To clarify, we inform you that what really took place was the departure of two men from our leadership... we inform you that the Shariah and Judicial branches are still active parts of our organization; therefore, we deny the news about their separation and independence.”<sup>67</sup> The group explained that Abu Sajjad and Abu Hind were asked to leave Ansar al-Sunnah because of “ecclesiastical issues... such as calling for unity amongst the different factions. Although the principle in its essence is acceptable to us and we (Ansar al-Sunnah) have worked on its implementation since the beginning of the occupation, we realized that one group—in particular—was deviating from the principles of Shariah and was causing problems that negatively impacted the unity of the rest of the groups. Still, [they] insisted on having them as a partner. Despite this being the case, we still have much respect for both of our brothers.”<sup>68</sup>

Following the announcement of the founding of the RJF, supposedly with the involvement of Ansar al-Sunnah’s “Shariah Council”, the Ansar al-Sunnah Army quickly issued a harsh reaction denying having any part in the RJF and echoing much of their previous allegations about Abu Sajjad and Abu Hind. On May 3, the group issued a communiqué addressed directly to the leaders of the IAI-sponsored Reformation and Jihad Front:

“We decided to postpone writing this letter to you until we realized that you were continuing with your false allegations that were mentioned in your first official statement after your group [the RJF] was established. In that statement you mentioned that your front includes the Shariah Council of Ansar al-Sunnah. Therefore, we have decided to inform everyone that there is no body in Ansar Al-Sunnah under [that] name... The way in which your statement was formulated and posted indicates the degree of confusion amongst the brothers who joined the above-mentioned front, when truly the main issue is the departure of two leaders, Abu Sajjad and Abu Hind, from Ansar al-Sunnah... We ask you to fear Allah and do not allege things that we have not done... We

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<sup>65</sup> “Statement by Abu Hassan al-Basri, Official Spokesman of the Al-Fatihin Army to World Leaders.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=116836>. March 21, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> “The Al-Fatihin Army: Declaration of Our Joining the Reformation and Jihad Front.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=131426>. May 29, 2007.

<sup>67</sup> “Ansar al-Sunnah: An Official Denial Statement.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=122622>. April 18, 2007.

<sup>68</sup> “Ansar al-Sunnah: An Official Denial Statement.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=122622>. April 18, 2007.

hope that your actions were the result of an innocent mistake because we do not wish to engage in arguments and fighting in the media, as this will take away from the focus on jihad.”<sup>69</sup>

Apart from the aforementioned groups, several other Sunni insurgent organizations have held back from formally joining the RJF, however, have given other public indications that they are still cooperating operationally with the IAI and RJF. These military “allies” of the RJF include:

- **The Al-Rashideen Army**

According to Abu Mohammed al-Zubaydi, chief of the Al-Rashideen Army politburo, the Al-Rashideen Army (in Arabic, “Jaish al-Rashideen”) was “established at the first day of the occupation, and began to collect weapons from the former Iraqi Army military camps [in] the suburbs of Baghdad. The Army announced its existance[sic] at the same day when our fighters carried out an attack against a US occupation patrol after nine days of the occupation of Baghdad.”<sup>70</sup> The Al-Rashideen Army has since expanded its network of personnel and conducts regular military operations—most commonly rocket and mortar barrages—in various provinces in central, northern, and western Iraq (including the capital Baghdad).

Like the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Al-Rashideen Army has also sought to produce English-language propaganda in order to shape public opinion in Europe and the United States. This propaganda includes two video recordings released in the spring of 2006 containing messages to U.S. President George Bush read in English by the Al-Rashideen Army’s “Operations Director” Abu Dujanah al-Baghdadi.<sup>71</sup> In these messages, al-Baghdadi insisted that all the “big talk” from American leaders about the insurgency being limited to fighters loyal to ex-dictator Saddam Hussein was “crap” and that only “self-supported... committed Muslims” were fighting enemy forces in Iraq.<sup>72</sup> When Arabic-language satellite news channels aired reports in March 2007 alleging that the Al-Rashideen Army had begun negotiations with the U.S. military to fight a mutual war against Al-Qaida, the group issued an emphatic public denial, adding, “we have no disagreement with any group of mujahideen... the media should stop broadcasting such false news and identify the sources of these lies... We are continuing on the path of Jihad until we are victorious and expel the occupiers from our land or else we achieve martyrdom.”<sup>73</sup>

In May and June 2007, both the IAI and the Al-Rashideen Army offered indications that they were working in partnership with each other. On May 1, the Al-Rashideen Army claimed a joint rocket attack with IAI fighters targeting a U.S. base in the al-Adl neighborhood of Baghdad.<sup>74</sup> On May 22, the Al-Rashideen Army claimed a joint mortar attack that had taken place the previous day (also targeting a U.S. base in the al-Adl



<sup>69</sup> “A Letter From the Leadership of Ansar Al-Sunnah to the Reformation and Jihad Front.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125894>. May 3, 2007.

<sup>70</sup> “Interview with Al-Rashideen Army.” *Islamtoday*. July 21, 2007.

[http://www.islamtoday.net/articles/show\\_articles\\_content.cfm?id=37&catid=76&artid=9740](http://www.islamtoday.net/articles/show_articles_content.cfm?id=37&catid=76&artid=9740).

<sup>71</sup> “Open Letter from the Al-Rashideen Army to the President of America.” <http://www.w-n-n.net/showthread.php?t=8458>. March 25, 2006; and “The Second Open Letter to the President of America from the Al-Rashideen Army.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=62238>. May 8, 2006.

<sup>72</sup> “Open Letter from the Al-Rashideen Army to the President of America.” <http://www.w-n-n.net/showthread.php?t=8458>. March 25, 2006.

<sup>73</sup> “A Response to Claims Made by Some of the Satellite Channels.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=118903>. April 1, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> “The Al-Rashideen Army and the Islamic Army: Bombardment of the American base in the al-Adl Neighborhood.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125382>. May 1, 2007.

neighborhood) in coordination with IAI fighters.<sup>75</sup> Finally, on June 5, 2007, the IAI issued its own statement claiming yet another joint military operation with the Al-Rashideen Army—this time, a combined mortar and rocket attack on an Iraqi army checkpoint in Baghdad on June 4.<sup>76</sup>

- **The Al-Qassas Brigade (a.k.a. “the Revenge Brigade”)**

The shadowy Al-Qassas Brigade (in Arabic, “Kataeb al-Qassas al-Aadil”) publicly emerged in approximately March 2006 during the height of Sunni-Shiite sectarian tensions in Iraq. It has offered few details as to its precise political platform, infrastructure, or origins—however, statements released by the Al-Qassas Brigade closely resemble those of the Al-Rashideen Army. The primary focus of the “Revenge Brigade” is on targeting the Iraqi government, the Iraqi army, the Iraqi Interior Ministry, the Shiite Badr Corps, the Mahdi Army, and rogue Shiite death squads. It rarely—if ever—claims responsibility for insurgent attacks on U.S. forces.



In April and May 2007, the typically quite terse Al-Qassas Brigade claimed credit for a handful of operations across the Iraqi capital in partnership with fighters from the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI). On April 23, 2007, the Al-Qassas Brigade issued a statement claiming responsibility for a joint attack with the IAI that same day on a private residence in the al-Jihad neighborhood of southern Baghdad allegedly used as a torture chamber by the Mahdi Army and as a base from which to plan attacks on Sunni mosques.<sup>77</sup> On May 1, 2007, the Al-Qassas Brigade issued separate communiqués claiming two more joint attacks with fighters from the IAI—an April 30 shootout with Iraqi police in Nafaq al-Shurta in western Baghdad<sup>78</sup> and a May 1 mortar barrage fired on Iraqi army and Interior Ministry personnel in the Jamia neighborhood of western Baghdad.<sup>79</sup>



- **The Salahudeen al-Ayyubi Brigades (Iraqi Islamic Resistance Front, JAAMI)**

The Salahudeen al-Ayyubi Brigades are the military wing of the Iraqi Islamic Resistance Front (JAAMI). On May 30, 2004, the group distributed copies of its first official communiqué to Arabic-language news sources. According to the statement, the Salahudeen Brigades were formed as a coalition between several smaller Sunni insurgent factions who had been working underground ever since the U.S. conquest of Iraq in April 2003. The initial communiqué offered a solemn oath to “you our Iraqi brethren that the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance will usher in the end of the [U.S.-led] occupiers... The resistance’s quantitative operations and their heavy blows to the occupation have paved the

<sup>75</sup> “The Al-Rashideen Army and the Islamic Army: Bombardment of the American base in the al-Adl Neighborhood.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=129862>. May 22, 2007.

<sup>76</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq: A Joint Attack With the Al-Rashideen Army on an Apostate Checkpoint in Baghdad.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=133250>. June 5, 2007.

<sup>77</sup> “The Al-Qassas Brigade and the Islamic Army: Demolition of Hideout in al-Jihad Neighborhood.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=123673>. April 23, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> “The Al-Qassas Brigade and the Islamic Army: Clash With the Police in Nafaq al-Shurta.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125475>. May 1, 2007.

<sup>79</sup> “The Al-Qassas Brigade and the Islamic Army: Bombardment of a Group of Pagan Guard Soldiers and Interior Ministry Commandos.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125388>. May 1, 2007.

way to go public” based upon “a realistic and future-oriented vision.”<sup>80</sup> The Salahudeen Brigades conduct most of their operations in central and northern Iraq, particularly the provinces of Ninewah and Diyala. The organization appears to be associated—at least informally—with elements of the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood and has widely distanced itself from ex-dictator Saddam Hussein, “an individual who brought what happened to him upon himself. Blessed and glorious Allah will execute justice upon him.”<sup>81</sup>



On May 31, 2007, the Salahudeen al-Ayyubi Brigades released a video recording through their official website depicting a joint mortar attack with the help of IAI fighters targeting a unit of U.S. soldiers north of Baghdad.<sup>82</sup> Though this is the only recent publicized instance of cooperation between the two, it is very rare for the Salahudeen Brigades to acknowledge conducting any joint operations with other insurgent groups. The timing of the release of the video—at the height of the clash between the IAI and Al-Qaida—also cannot be ignored. In any event, it seems fairly natural that JAAMI would side with the IAI in its quarrel with Al-Qaida, especially since the Salahudeen Brigades were one of the first admitted “victims” of aggressive behavior by Al-Qaida in the name of the “Islamic State of Iraq.”

- **The Dera Islam Brigade (a.k.a. “Shield of Islam Brigade”)**

The Dera Islam Brigade first emerged publicly in late February 2007, and its origins are still virtually unknown. Like the Al-Qassas Brigade, the majority of the group’s attacks appear aimed at Iraqi security forces, and given its impressive media wing, it may in fact be a breakaway faction of a larger, pre-existing insurgent organization. What most distinguishes the Dera Islam Brigade is their sporadic use of suicide bombers—a tactic which is typically shared only by Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” and, on occasion, the likeminded Ansar al-Sunnah Army. On July 14, the Dera Islam Brigade triumphantly released a video of their “first” suicide car bomb attack targeting Iraqi Interior Ministry personnel.<sup>83</sup> Only weeks later, the group claimed to have executed the July 30 assassination of a Mahdi Army commander in the eastern Baghdad neighborhood of Madain using a suicide bomber in a GMC van packed with explosives.<sup>84</sup>

Though the Dera Islam Brigade has been listed here as a military “ally” of the IAI-led Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF), the precise extent of this relationship is still somewhat in contention. Following the formation of the RJF, Dera Islam claimed responsibility for a June 10 rocket and mortar barrage in cooperation with fighters from the Mujahideen Army (an RJF co-founder) targeting U.S. forces at Baghdad International Airport.<sup>85</sup> Yet, as recently as two months previous, the Dera Islam Brigade was instead working in conjunction with other Sunni insurgent organizations more closely associated with Al-Qaida. The group claimed credit for a March 30 clash with Iraqi army soldiers in

<sup>80</sup> Al-Hijazi, Namir. “Iraqi Sunni Resistance Factions Unify Ranks.” *Islam Online*. May 30, 2004. <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2004-05/30/article06.shtml>.

<sup>81</sup> “News of an Important Political Statement Regarding the Execution of Saddam.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=104002>. January 6, 2007.

<sup>82</sup> “The Salahudeen Brigades: Video of a Mortar Attack on Occupation Forces (in Cooperation With the Islamic Army).” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=131765>. May 31, 2007. See also: <http://arabic.jaamiiraq.com/modules.php?name=video&op=hilink&idd=262>.

<sup>83</sup> “Available Now: The First Martyrdom Operation of the Dera Islam Brigade.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=140838>. July 14, 2007.

<sup>84</sup> “Martyrdom Operation on Prominent Mahdi Army Commander in Madain.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=144097>. August 4, 2007.

<sup>85</sup> “The Bombardment of Baghdad Airport in Cooperation With Our Brothers From the Mujahideen Army.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=135472>. June 15, 2007.

Maqdatiya in a joint operation with the notorious Ansar al-Sunnah Army.<sup>86</sup> It also claimed responsibility for an April 1 C5K rocket attack on Baghdad International Airport with the assistance of the Iraqi Jihad Union (a.k.a. Asaab al-Iraq al-Jihadiya).<sup>87</sup> These latter operations—combined with Dera Islam’s unusual interest in suicide bombings—have convinced at least some Al-Qaida supporters that the insurgent group is actually edging in the direction of the “Islamic State of Iraq.”<sup>88</sup>

## **Part IV: Hot and Cold War Between the ISI and RJF**

When the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) initially formed the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF) in May 2007, the group undoubtedly hoped to woo the involvement of other Sunni insurgent factions who had similarly become victims of Al-Qaida’s aggressive expansion. Instead, the emergence of the RJF appears to have spurred at least two such organizations into deepening their partnerships with Al-Qaida’s rival “Islamic State of Iraq”: the Ansar al-Sunnah Army and the Iraqi Jihad Union.

- **The Ansar al-Sunnah Army (JAAS)**

The Ansar al-Sunnah Army was formed in 2003 from mixed Kurdish and Arab remnants of the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group based in northern Kurdistan. Ansar al-Sunnah is one of the few Iraqi insurgent groups other than Al-Qaida to openly advocate its support for Usama Bin Laden, to carry out suicide bombing attacks, and to distribute beheading videos on the Internet. In August 2004, Ansar al-Sunnah operatives kidnapped a group of 12 civilian contract workers from Nepal, accusing them of working with the United States. A week after the abduction, frustrated at the lack of media attention, Ansar al-Sunnah militants brutally massacred the twelve men with knives and automatic weapons. A video of the execution was subsequently distributed on the Internet. Four months later, in December 2004, a locally-recruited Ansar al-Sunnah suicide bomber detonated an explosive inside a dining area at a U.S. base in Mosul, killing 22 and wounding dozens. The attack itself was video-recorded by JAAS representatives positioned nearby, and the video was subsequently distributed on the Internet.

JAAS is distinct from Al-Qaida in the sense that it is comprised primarily of native Iraqi Salafists, including many Kurdish Islamist fighters. In fact, JAAS is the only major insurgent group in Iraq to publish its magazines and propaganda materials in both Arabic and Kurdish language versions. Several notable targets chosen by JAAS for bomb attacks—such as the offices of secular Kurdish political parties and the Turkish embassy in Iraq—distinctly reflect the Kurdish origins of the group. Today, Ansar al-Sunnah operates across a vast swath of northern and western Iraq, and has been particularly active in the cities of Mosul and Baghdad. Despite its peculiar ethnic disposition, Ansar al-Sunnah has been more closely associated with Al-Qaida in Iraq than any other major insurgent group still independent of Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State.” In September 2006—even prior to the foundation of Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State”—reports began to circulate that serious discussions and “planning sessions” were being held in the western Anbar province between representatives of Al-Qaida’s Mujahideen Shura Council and Ansar al-Sunnah, with



<sup>86</sup> “A Joint Operation With Our Brothers From the Ansar al-Sunnah Army in the al-Maqdatiya Neighborhood.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=119208>. April 3, 2007.

<sup>87</sup> “A Joint Operation With Our Brothers From Asaab al-Iraq al-Jihadiya.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=120325>. April 8, 2007.

<sup>88</sup> “The Dera Islam Brigade is in the Same Category as Ansar al-Sunnah and the Islamic State.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=144111>. August 4, 2007.



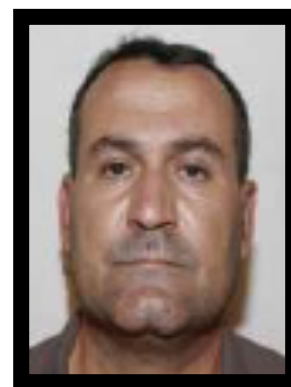
the ultimate objective of formulating an acceptable merger between the two groups.<sup>89</sup> According to a representative from Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” interviewed in April 2007, “the Ansar al-Sunnah Army, they are true lions and we do execute joint operations with them” but “there are internal reasons and circumstances inside the ranks of Ansar al-Sunnah that have prevented them from [openly] supporting the Islamic State of Iraq.”<sup>90</sup>

Aside from its sense of loyalty to Al-Qaida, JAAS had its own reasons to be hostile towards the IAI-backed Reformation and Jihad Front. The RJF’s founding treatise claimed the



allegiance and participation of commanders from the Ansar al-Sunnah Army—who had reportedly already resigned from their positions weeks previous. Ansar al-Sunnah was forced

to quickly issue a denial rejecting these “false allegations” about the splintering of their organization. It further suggested that the error was attributable to the general “degree of confusion amongst the brothers” who had founded the RJF.<sup>91</sup> Two weeks later, on May 16, Ansar al-Sunnah gave a strong further indication of its continuing support for Al-Qaida’s network. In an official communiqué addressed to “our brothers from the Islamic State of Iraq”, the group declared, “We have been delighted, as has every sincere Muslim all over the world, by what you are achieving in Iraq in your successive blessed operations which have wounded and confused the enemy—for example the martyrdom operation inside the parliament in the Green Zone



<sup>89</sup> “Allahu Akhbar: Information Indicating the Imminent Merging of the Ansar al-Sunnah Army and the Mujahideen Shura Council.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=85659>. September 17, 2006.

<sup>90</sup> Paltalk Online chat session with “Abu Adam al-Maqdisi.” April 27, 2007. <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0507/isimaqdisi0507.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> “A Letter From the Leadership of Ansar Al-Sunnah to the Reformation and Jihad Front.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=125894>. May 3, 2007.

[and] the blessed operation that led to the capture of three crusader soldiers... Hence we congratulate you for these heroic operations and we ask Allah Almighty to grant you success in more operations to defeat the corrupting enemy and to support Allah’s religion.”<sup>92</sup> In the wake of their ugly falling-out with the IAI, Al-Qaida was in need of good publicity and welcomed the vote of support from

**“Abu Wissam”, a captured Ansar al-Sunnah commander who allegedly served as a liaison to Al-Qaida**

JAAS. On May 19, the “Islamic State of Iraq” issued a response “thank[ing] the mujahideen in Iraq and mainly the mujahideen from the Ansar al-Sunnah Army who are fighting the enemies of Allah in order to raise high the flag of al-Tawheed and to fight the cross, the crusaders, and those amongst them. The words of Ansar al-Sunnah were a stab in the heart of the... enemies of our religion. It was a slap in the face of those who want to divide apart the supporters of al-Tawheed, jihad, and our beliefs.”<sup>93</sup> On June 30, the “Islamic State of Iraq” issued another statement claiming responsibility for “a joint operation with Ansar al-Sunnah” killing six U.S. soldiers “after a violent clash that continued for many hours with U.S. army forces in the al-Sada region near Baqubah... various weapons types were used and the mujahideen displayed the most glorious examples of courage and sacrifice.”<sup>94</sup>

- **The Iraqi Jihad Union (a.k.a. Aseab al-Iraq al-Jihadiya)**

The Iraqi Jihad Union (in Arabic, “Aseab al-Iraq al-Jihadiya”) was initially formed from a patchwork “nucleus of cells” that coalesced together shortly after “the fall of our former regime and the invasion of the infidel and crusader forces.” The cells included both “scholars of Shariah” and other native Iraqis with more practical “military experience.”<sup>95</sup> The Jihad Union continues to portray itself as “one of the first [insurgent organizations] to emerge following the... occupation.”<sup>96</sup> According to a founding statement issued in January 2004, “after choosing a name and putting faith in Allah, the soldiers of Allah began to collect money and weapons, and the number of recruits... grew.” The Iraqi Jihad Union began its operations in far western Iraq and gradually expanded eastward over time to the Iraqi capital Baghdad.<sup>97</sup> Over the last four years, the organization has become decidedly more fundamentalist in its public platform. The group even changed the design of its own logo, removing the three-starred Iraqi national flag and replacing it with the generic black flag of Islam. It has insisted that it is “not funded by any party, nation, or organization, internal or external.”<sup>98</sup>

Nonetheless, until mid-2007, the Iraqi Jihad Union still appeared to be a fairly mainstream Sunni insurgent group. When the Iraqi government issued an arrest warrant for Shaykh Dr. Harith al-Dari—the uncle of the former leader of the 1920 Revolution Brigades and a widely-known enemy of Al-Qaida’s network in Iraq—the Jihad Union issued a statement in solidarity with al-Dari, condemning the “cowardly, failed warrant” and



<sup>92</sup> “Ansar al-Sunnah: To Our Brothers in the Islamic State of Iraq.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=128589>. May 16, 2007.

<sup>93</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq: A Letter of Appreciation and Thanks to the Muslim Ummah.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=129195>. May 19, 2007.

<sup>94</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq: In Cooperation with Ansar al-Sunnah, the Killing of 6 Crusader Soldiers.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=138194>. June 30, 2007.

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.iraqiasaeb.info/nahn.htm>. September 2006.

<sup>96</sup> “The Iraqi Jihad Union: The Response from the Union in Support of the Sunni People.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=54861>. February 23, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.iraqiasaeb.info/nahn.htm>. September 2006.

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.iraqiasaeb.info/nahn.htm>. September 2006.

calling him “righteous” and “a great figure from the Sunni community.”<sup>99</sup> This is the very same Dr. Harith al-Dari who, in September 2005, openly labeled Al-Qaida leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi “dangerous” and blamed him for “causing damage to the image of the jihad.”<sup>100</sup>

In February 2007, the “Islamic State of Iraq” offered a first hint that forces within the Jihad Union were moving slowly in the direction of Al-Qaida. A statement issued by the ISI claimed that “dozens of brigades and thousands of fighters” from various jihadi organizations had sworn allegiance to Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, including the Ansar al-Sunnah Army and the Iraqi Jihad Union.<sup>101</sup> When conflicting Arabic-language news reports suggested that the Jihad Union was actually fighting against Al-Qaida, the former issued a communiqué maintaining, “we have no disagreement with any

group of our righteous mujahideen brothers.”<sup>102</sup> In April 2007, users on Al-Qaida-sponsored Internet news forums circulated another communiqué purporting to originate from the Iraqi Jihad Union’s Shariah Council (though not published through its usual channels). The letter was highly critical of the IAI’s decision to form the opposition Reformation and Jihad Front. Though it gently scolded the ISI to demonstrate “restraint and patience,” the Jihad Union also directly called upon the IAI “to apologize to our brothers from the Islamic State of Iraq.”<sup>103</sup>

Arguably the most convincing sign of its ideological drift, the Iraqi Jihad Union has claimed at least seven joint operations in conjunction with fighters from Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” between April and July 2007:

- April 5, 2007: Improvised explosive device (IED) attack on a U.S. armored personnel carrier in Ghazalia neighborhood of western Baghdad with the “full coordination and cooperation with our brothers from” the ISI.<sup>104</sup>
- July 4, 2007: Attack on Iraqi Interior Ministry checkpoints in al-Alam neighborhood in southwestern Baghdad.<sup>105</sup>
- July 10, 2007: Attack on Iraqi Interior Ministry checkpoint in the Saidiya neighborhood of southern Baghdad.<sup>106</sup>
- July 11, 2007: Attack on a “fake” checkpoint manned by Mahdi Army members in the Saidiya neighborhood of southern Baghdad.<sup>107</sup>
- July 12, 2007: Attack on an Iraqi Interior Ministry “Wolf Brigade”-run checkpoint in the Saidiya neighborhood of southern Baghdad.<sup>108</sup>



The former logo of the Iraqi Jihad Union, circa 2005

<sup>99</sup> “The Iraqi Jihad Union’s Politburo Issues Response to the Arrest Warrant for al-Dari.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=96947>. November 20, 2006.

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0905/zarqawi-amsulema.pdf>.

<sup>101</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq: A Notification from the Ministry of Information to All of the Satellite Channels.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=110351>. February 13, 2007.

<sup>102</sup> “The Iraqi Jihad Union: A Response From the Union to Several Media Reports.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=119278>. April 3, 2007.

<sup>103</sup> “The Response of the Union to the Islamic Army Statement About the Islamic State of Iraq.”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=121821>. April 14, 2007.

<sup>104</sup> “The Destruction of a Troop Carrier in Ghazaliya in Cooperation With the Brothers From the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=124996>. April 29, 2007.

<sup>105</sup> “An Attack on Interior Ministry Checkpoints in the al-Alam Neighborhood in Cooperation With the Heroes From the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=140064>. July 10, 2007.

<sup>106</sup> “A Clash With an Interior Ministry Checkpoint in Al-Saidiya in Cooperation With the Heroes of the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=140440>. July 12, 2007.

<sup>107</sup> “An Attack on a Fake Checkpoint of the Mahdi Army in Al-Saidiya in Cooperation With the Heroes From the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=141874>. July 21, 2007.

- July 13, 2007: Attack on a suspected hideout used by the Mahdi Army near the Ibrahim al-Khalil mosque in Baghdad.<sup>109</sup>
- July 13, 2007: Attack on an Iraqi Interior Ministry “Wolf Brigade”-run checkpoint near the Saiidiya neighborhood of southern Baghdad.<sup>110</sup>

Virtually all of the above-listed operations that have been conducted in partnership with Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” are attributable to a specific armed faction within the Iraqi Jihad Union known as the “Abu al-Dardaa Unit” from the “Al-Farouq Brigade.” The exact composition, leadership, and pedigree of this unit are still unknown.

Meanwhile, stinging from public accusations leveled by the IAI, Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” began a sweeping propaganda counteroffensive designed to undermine these charges. On April 27, a Palestinian soldier from the ISI known as Abu Adam al-Maqdisi was made available for an exclusive live web-based question-and-answer session for Al-Qaida supporters—during which he was specifically asked about the growing conflict between the ISI and IAI: “Regarding the [alleged] killing of 30 fighters from the Islamic Army in Iraq, this is false and completely untrue... I have no comment to make about [IAI spokesman] brother [Ibrahim] al-Shammari. We have no idea what the brothers in the media wing [of the IAI] are doing right now... Individuals [i.e. ISI fighters] can sometimes make mistakes and they will be punished for that. However, this does not represent the army of the Islamic State as a whole. We love our brothers in the Islamic Army of Iraq and we are united in our battle with the crusaders, but I would rather not discuss our problems with the IAI.”<sup>111</sup>

On May 14, the “Islamic State of Iraq” issued a public statement flatly denying any allegations that ISI fighters were responsible for incidents of fratricidal violence:

“With great pain, we have watched what has been broadcast by some satellite television channels saying that we have killed some of our brothers. We say to all Muslims, by Allah, we fight only... to repulse the enemies of Allah who target our Sunni people. How could we possibly kill a Muslim? ...the blood of the Sunni people is just as precious to us as our own, and what wounds them also wounds us... During the past two months you have seen the strikes of your brothers from the Islamic State of Iraq... and you will recall that your brothers in the Islamic State of Iraq are the ones who captured the crusader soldiers, and there is not a day that passes without a martyrdom operation somewhere in Mesopotamia... We say to anyone who has a problem with us, or even a simple dispute, it can never be resolved on the satellite channels and Internet forums. We want to assure the Islamic nation that the Islamic State of Iraq has scholars and judges who have lengthy judiciary experience and are quite talented in it. It only pleases us when we are brought criticisms of our soldiers and other personnel, and we tell all Muslims that our commander... watches day and night over the affairs of his subjects, and he orders the soldiers of the Islamic State to take care of our Sunni people and to treat them well. We say to the mujahideen, ‘Let the enemy lose his opportunity by concealing what occurs between the mujahideen, let us be one striking hand to smash the crusaders, Safawis [Persians], and apostates.’”<sup>112</sup>

A follow-up communiqué issued by the ISI on May 26 blamed ongoing atrocities (including a widely-condemned May 24 suicide car bomb attack on a Sunni funeral procession in Fallujah

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<sup>108</sup> “An Attack on an Interior Ministry Checkpoint in Saiidiya in Cooperation With the Heroes From the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=141873>. July 21, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> “An Attack on a Mahdi Army Hideout Adjacent to the Ibrahim al-Khalil Mosque in Cooperation With the Heroes From the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=141872>. July 21, 2007.

<sup>110</sup> “An Attack on a Wolf Brigade Checkpoint Near Saiidiya in Cooperation With the Heroes From the Islamic State of Iraq.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=141870>. July 21, 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Paltalk Online chat session with “Abu Adam al-Maqdisi.” April 27, 2007.  
<http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0507/isimaqdisi0507.pdf>.

<sup>112</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq: Refuting the Lies of the Satellite Channels.”  
<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=127979>. May 14, 2007.

that killed 40 people) on an elaborate “conspiracy between the so-called Islamic Party and the Anbar Salvation Council who have formed and continue to operate special units who kill and steal in the name of the mujahideen, especially fighters from the Islamic State.”<sup>113</sup>

Yet, the troubled state of affairs between Al-Qaida and the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) continued to worsen throughout May and into early June. On June 2, after IAI representatives appeared in Arabic-language news media to further condemn the behavior of the “Islamic State of Iraq,” the ISI again countered the IAI’s accusations as “untrue and falsified” and vigorously defended its own record: “over four years, our martyrdom [suicide] brigades were leaders in confronting the crusader campaign against the Islamic nation. The soldiers of the Islamic State were leaders in halting the Persian proxies, namely, the Badr Corps and the Mahdi Army. So ask the neighborhoods of Diyala to tell you about the courage of the soldiers from our State.”<sup>114</sup> Then, two days later on June 4, the IAI fired yet another stiff volley back at Al-Qaida, this time in the form of a remarkably explicit audio recording from IAI spokesman Dr. Ali al-Nuaimi. Once again, al-Nuaimi contemptuously refused to refer to Al-Qaida’s network by their preferred title, “the Islamic State of Iraq.” According to al-Nuaimi:

“... The conflict between the IAI and the Al-Qaida network (and its various other assorted names) began many years ago when they blew up the houses of four of our brothers in the Al-Yusifiyah area and killed others in Ramadi, Ishaqi, Taji, Haditha, Khalis, and many other places. As a result of these actions [by Al-Qaida], more than 40 brothers from the IAI were killed. Their crimes also included kidnapping operations, robberies, and establishing laws and rules that were unfair towards the organization [IAI] and its leaders. Despite all this, we were patient and exhibited restraint and availed ourselves of all legal means, including witness testimony, presenting evidence, and directly contacting their officials—among other things—to stop their actions. We also published several official statements regarding the subject but still they targeted the Sunni people, killing them and attacking their homes and their gathering places. These actions have had a negative impact on the entire situation and have turned Sunni urban centers into ghost towns... All of this resulted in an attack on the IAI in the al-Ameliyah and Hay al-Jamiyah areas that lasted for several days. During these attacks, brothers from the Al-Qaida network attacked brothers from our organization [the IAI] and kidnapped three of our brothers in al-Ameriyah as retaliation for an incident where an Al-Qaida network operative was killed while erasing slogans scrawled on one of the walls of the neighborhood. Nevermind the fact that we had no connection whatsoever with those scrawled slogans. Later, they attacked the Al-Maluki mosque with heavy fire and used the mosque’s loudspeakers to spread their false propaganda against our organization [the IAI] and against the Sunni people. They also spread lies about several Imams serving that area and against several others whose names they associated with the IAI. In that mosque [Al-Maluki], they shot to death brother Abu Teeba from the IAI—neither the sanctity of Muslim blood, nor the brotherhood of jihad, nor the sanctity of that place were enough to stop them from killing Abu Teeba. Then [the Al-Qaida network] attacked places in Al-Ameriyah where IAI brothers gather and the IAI brothers fought back. Then, the Americans suddenly appeared but the brothers from Al-Qaida did not fight them. Instead, they remained in their vehicles with their massive guns attached on the back, driving in front of the Americans. Has targeting the IAI become more important than targeting the Americans? Furthermore, this attack was directed against the Sunnis and their mosques, during which they [Al-Qaida] killed two innocent unarmed men praying in the Al-Tikriti mosque. During that attack, Al-Qaida used their snipers, RPGs, and mid-range weapons to attack the mosque. Later on, when the Americans implemented their curfew in the Al-Ameriyah neighborhood, the Al-Qaida network decided to launch an attack on the IAI in the Hay al-Jamiyah neighborhood and their attacks are still continuing now even as we speak... How can you justify your attacks on these people who are going through the most difficult time of their lives? We demand of you, why are you attacking the mosques?? ...Any attack against an individual from the IAI is considered an attack against the entire IAI and the organization has the legal right to retaliate for any attack against it, no matter what the reasoning or justification being offered... We consider Abu Hamza al-Masri

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<sup>113</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq: The Explanation of the Conspiracies against the Sunnis.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=130777>. May 26, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> “The Islamic State of Iraq: Statement About the Speech of Al-Shammari.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=132478>. June 2, 2007.

[a.k.a. Abu Hamza al-Muhajir] and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi responsible for the crimes of their men against the Sunnis and the mujahideen.”<sup>115</sup>

The increasingly bitter quarrel between the IAI and Al-Qaida was not generally well received by other Sunni insurgent groups. Even likeminded militant factions that may have sympathized with some of the IAI’s critiques of Al-Qaida still nonetheless objected to their decision to make the split so acerbic and so public. On June 4—the same day as Dr. al-Nuaimi’s recording was released by the IAI—the top commander of the Al-Rashideen Army (considered to be a relative ally of the IAI) issued his own audio statement addressing the split and urging the two sides to come to a mutually-agreeable solution: “You should not fight each other. You should consult, understand, and talk to each other so that you will be as one. Do not engage in fighting amongst yourselves because it will lead you to failure and it will weaken you as well. These battles and arguments will sow hatred and diminish collaboration between the various fighting groups... Right now there are intelligence forces that seek to destroy or damage our collaboration... to spread hatred among the different groups so that they will engage in a battle among themselves... O’ mujahideen, you are responsible for the blood of your soldiers. That blood should not be shed on anything other than in the cause of Allah, to prepare for the arrival of his religion, and to liberate the land of Islamic Iraq.”<sup>116</sup> Perhaps feeling the pressure from its own partners like the Al-Rashideen Army, on June 6, the IAI announced what appeared to be a sudden and dramatic reversal of its official strategy in dealing with Al-Qaida. An unusually terse communiqué explained that “an agreement has been reached between the Islamic Army in Iraq and Al Qaida in Mesopotamia to... the immediate cessation of all military operations between the two parties... to stop all forms of escalation between the two sides and the escalation of the media... [and] the formation of a judicial commission to resolve all outstanding issues between the two sides in a satisfactory manner.”<sup>117</sup>

However, by this point, the public declaration of a truce was simply insufficient to deflate tensions on both sides. Reflecting its patchwork infrastructure, the IAI suffered defections from its fighting units among those unhappy with the political status-quo—some to Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State” and others to new militant coalitions allied with the U.S. military against Al-Qaida. One of these breakaway factions, known as the “Revolutionaries of Ameriya”, is based in Baghdad and headed by a former Iraqi army captain known as “Saif” or “Abu Abed” who has, until recently, served as an IAI field commander. Abu Abed describes himself as a “friend” of the United States who began gathering covert intelligence on local Al-Qaida cells in Baghdad as early as January 2007. He claims that his force numbers approximately 100 men (American military observers peg it at closer to 40) and that its fighters are mostly drawn from the IAI and the 1920 Revolution Brigades.<sup>118</sup> At his headquarters at an empty Baghdad high school, Abu Abed recently told visiting journalists, “We need to return the services to the neighborhoods. Al Qaeda destroyed streets, schools, electricity, even mobile phone towers. They made the people here desperate... All I need and ask of the U.S. is protection for me and my fighters. We still apply the law.”<sup>119</sup> In early July, the state-run Al-Iraqiya television station played excerpts of a videotaped speech of a masked man identifying himself as a representative of the “Revolutionaries of Ameriya.” Among other things, the individual featured on the video declared, “We will fight the Qaeda organization until we bring

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<sup>115</sup> “The Islamic Army of Iraq: An Audio Statement from Dr. Ali al-Nuaimi Regarding the Recent Events.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=133014>. June 4, 2007.

<sup>116</sup> “An Urgent Appeal from the Al-Rashideen Army to the Jihadi Factions.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=132971>. June 4, 2007.

<sup>117</sup> “An Agreement Between the Islamic Army in Iraq and the Al-Qaida Network in Mesopotamia.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=133469>. June 6, 2007.

<sup>118</sup> Partlow, Joshua. “For U.S. Unit in Baghdad, An Alliance of Last Resort.” *Washington Post*. June 9, 2007. See also: Hennessy-Fiske, Molly. “Aided by U.S., militants widen reach.” *Los Angeles Times*. August 4, 2007.

<sup>119</sup> Hennessy-Fiske, Molly. “Aided by U.S., militants widen reach.” *Los Angeles Times*. August 4, 2007.

back the old situation of our district when the Sunnis, Shiites and Christians lived peacefully together.”<sup>120</sup>

Within only days of it being declared, it was clear that the offer of a truce from the IAI’s central command was not going to provide any immediate relief for its tensions with Al-Qaida. On June 16, Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” issued a statement mocking the IAI for the “baseless” behavior of Abu Abed and the “Revolutionaries of Ameriya”: “we don’t know whose statements should be believed, the official spokesman [of the IAI] or Abu Abed.”<sup>121</sup> There was also raw anger at the IAI for persisting in referring to the “Islamic State of Iraq” simply as “Al-Qaida”: “The first priority of the truce agreement—as we see it—should be calling the parties by the name that they have chosen for themselves... It has happened many times and we haven’t said anything about it (not calling us by our name [the Islamic State of Iraq]). The other party (the Islamic Army) shouldn’t call us by names other than our true name—even the enemies of Allah call us by the name that we have chosen for ourselves.”<sup>122</sup> The statement continued, “our position has been clear from the beginning, the leadership of the Islamic State forbid its soldiers from firing even a single bullet at their brothers in the Islamic Army... The Islamic State of Iraq was publicly accused by the Islamic Army of serious accusations... those accusations should be denied in public.”<sup>123</sup>

Widely distancing itself from the breakaway “Revolutionaries of Ameriya”, the IAI published another communiqué declaring that, following the internecine clashes in late May with Al-Qaida, the IAI had “withdrawn all of its fighters from the [Ameriya] district, so anyone who tries to speak in our name there is a big liar. On June 29, 2007, the religious department in the Islamic Army decided to oust Abu Abed for violating the formal platform of the Army, and for disobeying orders... therefore our organization is not responsible for him and he (and those with him) will bear the consequences of his actions.”<sup>124</sup> Despite its own criticism of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and the “Islamic State of Iraq”, the 1920 Revolution Brigades also rejected reports that its organization was involved in “clashes with the Al-Qaida organization in the Ameriyah neighborhood of Baghdad... we feel deep pain in our hearts upon hearing the news of fratricide... which should not be happening at this difficult time.”<sup>125</sup> Subsequently, the 1920 Brigades issued at least four separate communiqués denying media reports that its fighters were cooperating with the U.S. military in hunting Al-Qaida extremists in Iraq’s restive Diyala province—three on June 20<sup>126</sup> and an additional message on June 28.<sup>127</sup> On July 3, the 1920

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<sup>120</sup> Rubin, Alissa. “24 Iranians, held for illegal entry, escape from Iraqi prison.” *New York Times*. July 15, 2007.

<sup>121</sup> “The Islamic State in Iraq: Statement Clarifying the Recent Developments with the Islamic Army.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=135635>. June 16, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> “The Islamic State in Iraq: Statement Clarifying the Recent Developments with the Islamic Army.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=135635>. June 16, 2007.

<sup>123</sup> “The Islamic State in Iraq: Statement Clarifying the Recent Developments with the Islamic Army.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=135635>. June 16, 2007.

<sup>124</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq: A Press Release Regarding the Incident in al-Ameriya.” <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=30112>. July 25, 2007.

<sup>125</sup> “The 1920 Revolution Brigades: A Statement Regarding the Battle in al-Ameriya.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=131924>. March 31, 2007.

<sup>126</sup> “The 1920 Revolution Brigades Issue Denial Regarding Media Reports About Our Brigades Assisting the Occupation Forces in Their Aggression on Diyala.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=136281>.

June 20, 2007. See also: “The 1920 Revolution Brigades: A Response to the Statements of One of the American Commanders.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=136238>. June 20, 2007. See also:

“The 1920 Revolution Brigades: A Very Important Press Statement.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=136307>. June 20, 2007.

<sup>127</sup> “The 1920 Revolution Brigades Issue Statement to Our Fighting Citizens in Diyala.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=137825>. June 28, 2007.

Brigades published yet another statement denying any role in supporting U.S. efforts combating Al-Qaida, this time in the Abu Ghraib neighborhood of western Baghdad.<sup>128</sup>

On July 7—in one of the single worst episodes of violence of the Sunni insurgency—a suicide bomber driving a truck packed with 4 tons of explosives detonated himself in the Iraqi village of Ermeli, near Kirkuk in northern Iraq. The savage bombing reportedly killed at least 150 people, including innocent Sunni Muslims. Though no organization issued any public claim of responsibility, suspicion immediately turned towards Al-Qaida, which admittedly is responsible for executing the lion share of suicide bombing attacks in Iraq. Abu Adam al-Maqdisi, a Palestinian foreign fighter from Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq”, boasted in an online interview in April, “the martyrdom attacker resembles a smart bomb, he is a superb [weapon].”<sup>129</sup> A day after the bombing, the IAI-sponsored Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF) issued a formal statement condemning the incident as a needless atrocity: “These acts are in breach of the *Quran*... the deliberate killing of one believer has enormous consequences, so how can you kill tens or hundreds! ... We call on all jihadi groups... to announce their innocence from these criminal acts, condemn them and expose the people who stand behind them.”<sup>130</sup> The IAI issued a separate communiqué on July 25 to “denounce any act targeting the innocent citizens... one of our priorities is to preserve the lives and property of our nation sons. The military operations of our mujahideen... do not target innocent people; they are in support of these innocents, safeguarding them, and keeping injustice away from them.”<sup>131</sup>

Though neither the RJF nor IAI ever explicitly laid blame for these acts on Al-Qaida, there was an implicit challenge by mainstream Sunni insurgents to Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” to prove themselves blameless in the bombing in the face of telling circumstantial evidence. Meanwhile, despite all the protestations of unity and brotherhood, the hostility between the IAI and Al-Qaida has also continued ongoing in the other direction. On August 5, 2007, the Al-Qaida-allied Ansar al-Sunnah Army published yet another harshly-worded letter to the RJF regarding dissident JAAS commanders who have joined the RJF. According to Ansar al-Sunnah, these dissidents have repeatedly “attributed to themselves a position and a rank in Ansar al-Sunnah that they do not have.” JAAS further complained that though they had already “revealed these facts and asked the Reformation and Jihad Front to repudiate these lies, this still has not happened and now they are returning to the same game.”<sup>132</sup> In view of statements such as this, it can hardly be denied that the relationship between the ISI and the RJF remains antagonistic, even as both parties attempt to shield their infighting from the public eye.

## **Part V: Conclusions**

For those who analyze the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, the events of the last year have been remarkably revealing. The drive towards consolidation of power and influence by predominant insurgent organizations has created unprecedented internal friction and has demonstrated—quite vividly at times—that the Sunni militants at war with the U.S. and Iraqi governments are far from a monolithic threat. Indeed, these groups often are markedly distinct from each other—structurally, ideologically, and politically. Under public pressure from fellow Sunni insurgents, Al-Qaida’s network in Iraq has been forced into constantly attempting to justify and defend its use of suicide bombings and foreign fighters. The growing backlash against Al-Qaida’s network in Iraq represents the first real crack within the Sunni

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<sup>128</sup> “The 1920 Revolution Brigades: A Press Statement.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=138721>. July 3, 2007.

<sup>129</sup> Paltalk Online chat session with “Abu Adam al-Maqdisi.” April 27, 2007. <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0507/isimaqdisi0507.pdf>.

<sup>130</sup> “The Reformation and Jihad Front: An Important Statement About the Blasts in Toz Khurmato, South of Kirkuk.” <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=29002>. July 8, 2007.

<sup>131</sup> “The 1920 Revolution Brigades: A Statement Regarding the Battle in al-Ameriya.” <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=30112>. July 25, 2007.

<sup>132</sup> “The Ansar al-Sunnah Organization Responds to False Statements Including our Name.” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=144283>. August 5, 2007.



insurgency, and is likely the best available opportunity to leverage homegrown Iraqi Sunni nationalism against the countervailing forces of transnational Salafi jihadists. Yet, at least as of now, it is still not clear if the U.S. and Iraqi governments fully understand this opportunity, nor if they are doing their utmost to take advantage of it. To successfully end the insurgency in Iraq, the U.S. must reach an understanding with not only tribal elements, but local Sunni political and religious forces as well.

It should be understated that while there is currently strong animosity between Al-Qaida and the IAI, they still share enough in common that—albeit under limited circumstances—the two groups could nonetheless reconcile in the future and even resume cooperation with each other. The IAI has taken pains to limit its criticisms to Al-Qaida’s regional franchise in Iraq and emphasize its continuing political support for Usama Bin Laden and the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. On May 14, the IAI-led Reformation and Jihad Front issued a statement paying their respects to the “martyred” military commander of the Taliban, Mullah Dadullah. Dedicating poetry in his honor, the RJF called Dadullah a “knight among knights” and a “blessed Afghan lion”: “he fought well and [his life] represents a wonderful example in sacrifice and jihad.”<sup>133</sup> A week after declaring its June truce with Al-Qaida in Iraq, the IAI issued a second statement reassuring its supporters, “the peace agreement between us and Al Qaida in Mesopotamia is still standing and effective and we are holding fast in safeguarding the blood of the mujahideen.”<sup>134</sup> As long as Sunni insurgents in Iraq face an existential external threat, either in the form of encroachment from the U.S. or neighboring Iran, they will tend consolidate their joint efforts together with Al-Qaida. The IAI has complained bitterly about the U.S. “handing... control over the whole region to the Persian [Shiite] monster... Yes, Bush has achieved remarkable success for the Persian Iranian strategy and the area has become an easy prey for the Persians!”<sup>135</sup> Facing an impossible choice between Iranian domination or else a distasteful partnership with Al-Qaida, even the IAI would likely feel compelled to make certain compromises for the sake of Sunni unity.

Conversely, once that external threat becomes overshadowed by the typical fanatical excesses of Al-Qaida, then the focus will gradually turn back towards internal Iraqi politics. Even the most trivial of issues can become potential fodder for heated words and sharp divisions. A former faction of the 1920 Revolution Brigades known as “*Hamas in Iraq*” (nominally associated with the Muslim Brotherhood) has recently attracted the ire of Al-Qaida supporters by issuing an official statement congratulating the Iraqi national soccer team in their victory in the Asian Cup in late July 2007.<sup>136</sup> In an open letter to the American people, the IAI has emphasized the comparatively “reasonable” nature of its political demands and has insisted, “our message to the [U.S.] Congress was clear a long time ago: to pass a law requiring the withdrawal of your forces within a specific duration, making it an obligation... and hand over the country to its real people, not to Iran and its agents... The American administration has deceived its nation and has claimed that Iran is a strong country, but the truth is that [Iran]... was helped by Bush instead of weakening it.”<sup>137</sup>

Regardless of its ultimate outcome, the recent infighting between Al-Qaida and more mainstream Sunni insurgents has shed significant light on the debate over the “fictionality” of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and the extent to which the “Islamic State of Iraq” is nothing more than a “virtual organization on the Internet.” Despite harsh language and specific public warnings, both the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) and the 1920 Revolution Brigades continue to refuse to refer

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<sup>133</sup> “The Reformation and Jihad Front: A Eulogy in Response to the Martyrdom of the Military Commander of the Taliban Movement.” <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=128095>. May 14, 2007.

<sup>134</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq: Confirming Our Previous Position Regarding What Was Reported by Satellite Channels.” <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=27481>. June 15, 2007.

<sup>135</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq: A Message From the Commander of the Islamic Army to the American and Arab peoples.” <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=29742>. July 19, 2007.

<sup>136</sup> “*Hamas in Iraq: Congratulations on the Victory of the Iraqi National Team.*” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread?t=144391>. August 6, 2007.

<sup>137</sup> “The Islamic Army in Iraq: A Message From the Commander of the Islamic Army to the American and Arab peoples.” <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=29742>. July 19, 2007.

to Al-Qaida by its self-appointed title as the “Islamic State.” The same two groups have repeatedly shown little personal respect whatsoever for ISI “Amir al-Mumineen” Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, despite his “elite” sanctified status. The IAI’s repeated allegations about the ISI should be considered as admissions against their own natural interests and have arguably caused irreversible damage to Al-Qaida’s reputation and credibility in Iraq. Yet even the actions of Al-Qaida’s own professed allies create doubt over the legitimacy of the “Islamic State of Iraq.” Despite having ample opportunities to do so, the Ansar al-Sunnah Army continues to uneasily—and seemingly inexplicably—abstain from officially joining the ISI. In the face of this mounting evidence, one cannot help but conclude that the ISI still represents more of an aspirational political cover for Al-Qaida’s terrorist operations than a functioning reality on the ground.

Resolving the Sunni insurgency and returning peace to Iraq will require a more nuanced solution than either simply increasing levels of military forces or, conversely, an unconditional withdrawal from Iraq. Above all else, there must be an energetic effort to coopt local Sunni leaders and negotiate their participation in a thoroughly-reformed and more equitably-shared Iraqi government. As long as a majority of Sunnis continue to suspiciously regard the regime in Baghdad and its litany of security services as corrupt beyond redemption, it will be nearly impossible to convince Sunni fighters to lay down their weapons as a basic matter of self-defense. Needless to say, withdrawing from Iraq without first achieving a stable balance of power between Sunnis and Shiites will not only lead to the collapse of the current Iraqi government, but moreover, it could potentially spark a desperate and bloody sectarian war pitting Sunni insurgents against Shiite militiamen—a war in which only the ruthless fanatics from Al-Qaida would stand to gain.