Al-Qaeda's online media strategies:
From *Abu Reuter* to *Irhabi 007*

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Sammendrag

Denne rapporten tar for seg den globale jihadbevegelsens Internett-baserte mediekampanje. Den undersøker i hvilken grad al-Qaeda har utviklet og opererer i henhold til en mediestrategi. Rapporten baserer seg på primærkilder fra jihadistiske nettsider: den ser først på dokumenter ført i pennen av jihad-strateger som omhandler bevegelsens bruk av media; deretter analyserer den jihadistiske mediegrupper og det materialet de produserer og distribuerer på Internett.

Analysen tar for seg blant annet innhold, målgruppe, strategiske målsetninger og modus operandi for jihadbevegelsens mediekampanje. Rapporten hevder at Internett er en mer funksjonell kanal enn tradisjonell massemedia for al-Qaeda, fordi Internett tillater bevegelsen å kontrollere informasjonsflyten. Videre fremstår al-Qaedas mediekampanje på Internett som særlig viktig fordi den synes å sette dagsorden blant støttespillere og plasserer jihad i en bredere kontekst. Den Internett-baserte mediekampanjen til al-Qaeda synes så langt å ha vært rettet særlig mot sympatisører, men henvender seg i økende grad også til nye målgrupper, inkludert ikke-Muslimer i Vesten.

Rapporten søker til slutt å sammenligne jihad-strategenes anbefalinger og bevegelsens faktiske bruk av Internett som en mediekanal. Den finner at det på den ene side er stor grad av samsvar. På den annen side, fordi både anbefalingene og mediebruken er flerstrenget, konkluderer rapporten med at det finnes ulike mediestrategier, gjenspeilet i en rekke simultane jihadistiske mediekampanjer på Internett. Selv om rapporten viser at jihadistene også bruker andre mediekanaler enn Internett er det betegnende at deres online mediekampanje er i kontinuerlig vekst. Dette antyder at jihadistene oppfatter Internett som et virkningsfullt middel for strategisk kommunikasjon.

English summary

This study examines the online media campaign of the global jihadist movement. It seeks to determine whether al-Qaeda has developed a strategy for its media operations, and to what extent the jihadist media operators adhere to such a strategy. Drawing on primary sources from jihadist websites, the study identifies a number of recommendations about the use of media offered by jihadist strategists. The study goes on to examine the jihadist media companies and the material they produce and distribute online.

Analyzing online jihadist media material – including text, audio and video – the study seeks to identify primarily the modus operandi of the media campaign, target audiences, and strategic goals of communication. The study finds that the Internet, which allows the jihadists to exercise ownership and control over mass media outlets, has a wider functionality than mainstream media. Moreover, the significance of the jihadist online media campaign lies, to a large extent, in the media groups' ability to act as authorities by setting the agenda among supporters and framing the jihad. While the campaign so far seems to have targeted mostly supporters of the global jihadist movement, a current trend points to increasing efforts to reach new groups, and specifically the West.

This study offers a comparison between the jihadist strategic recommendations and the actual jihadist use of the Internet as a media channel, and finds a certain degree of coherence between the two. Yet, as both recommendations and media activity are multi-faceted, the study concludes that there in fact exist a number of strategies, leading to a host of jihadist online media campaigns cohabitating the web. Although the study shows that the jihadists use also other media channels than the Internet, the online jihadist media campaign is in fact growing and frequently opening new fronts, thus pointing to a jihadist perception of the Internet as a purposeful vehicle for strategic communication.

Contents

Preface

Notes on Arabic Transliteration

ا	ā	ر	r	ف	f
ب	b	ز	z	ق	q
ت	t	س	s	ك	k
ث	th	ش	sh	ل	l
ج	j	ص	ṣ	م	m
ح	ḥ	ض	ḍ	ن	n
خ	kh	ط	ṭ	ه	h
د	d	ظ	ẓ	و	w, ū
ذ	dh	ع	c	ي	y, ī
		غ	gh	ء	'

Long vowels are rendered ā, ū, ī.

Diphthongs are rendered ay, aw.

Tā' marbūṭa is rendered -a in pausal forms, -at in iḍāfa.

Articles preceding "sun-letters" are not assimilated.[1]

Hamzat al-qaṭ^c is marked.

Hamzat al-waṣl is not marked.

Arabic words and names that appear in the text will be given in italics and transliterated according to the above remarks. Certain Arabic names and words have become well-known to a non-Arabic audience, and seem to have obtained a standard form in the English language. Such names and words will be given in the English form throughout the text, and transliterated and given in italics in brackets only the first time they appear, for example: Osama bin Laden ('Usāma bin Lādin); jihad (jihād). Footnotes citing Arabic language sources will include the Arabic original and English translation in brackets.

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[1] In cases where assimilation of article preceding a "sun-letter" has become a standard form of a name, the name will be given in this standard form, for example *As-Saḥāb*, *At-Tibyān*.

I. Introduction and background

1   Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature and extent of the jihadi media campaign, and in particular the use of the Internet as a media channel. It has been argued that a 'war of ideas', or a 'struggle for hearts and minds', is a significant part of the conflict between the West and the global jihadi movement in the 21st century, and that a large part of this war is being fought in the realm of the media. Such statements are espoused by participants from both sides in the conflict. For example, in July 2005, Ayman al-Zawahari (*'Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī*), al-Qaeda's (*al-Qāʿida*) second-in-command, declared that: "We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. We are in a media battle for the hearts and minds of our *umma*".[2] And from the other side, the U.S. Defense Quadrennial Report of February 2006 states that: "Victory in the long war [on terrorism] ultimately depends on strategic communication by the United States and its international partners".[3]

Given what appears to be an increasing focus on media and communication in this conflict, questions arise about how the jihadists influence communication using media outlets that allow ownership and control over information. According to a 2006 International Crisis Group report, "the role played by such forms of communication appears to have been systematically undervalued".[4] Nevertheless, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has expressed concerns about the allegedly successful manipulation of the media by terrorists, stating that: "Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but [...] our country has not".[5] In fact, the jihadists seem to have undertaken a vast media campaign. The increasing numbers of jihadist-controlled media outlets that have been established over the last years are particularly noteworthy. Arguably, one of the main reasons for this phenomenon is the expanding access to new media, and especially the Internet, which offers new ways and effects of communication. It also may stem from an increased and widely promulgated awareness of the possible benefits of the use of the media and the Internet for terrorist activities.

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[2] Untitled Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, intercepted by American intelligence, July 2005, available in Arabic original and English translation, www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_arabic, (accessed 22 March, 2007).

[3] United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report,* February 6, 2006, p.92, www.defenselink.mil/qdr/ (accessed: 10 March, 2007).

[4] International Crisis Group, *In their own words: Reading the Iraqi insurgency*, Middle East Report No. 50, 15 February 2006, www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3953&l=1 (accessed 10 February 2007).

[5] "US losing media war to al-Qaeda"*, BBC News*, 17 February 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4725992.stm (accessed 12 June, 2006). Indeed, Rumsfeld's comments may stem from the rather limited success of some of the public diplomacy initiatives instigated by the U.S. since 9/11 2001, including the establishment of media outlets in the Middle East, See Smith and von Hippel, "Ideology and the battle of ideas", in Smith and Sanderson (ed.), *Five years after 9/11: An Assessment of America's War on Terror*, Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2006.

A preliminary hypothesis for this study would therefore suggest that the jihadist movement operates within a pronounced strategy concerning the use of the media, and that the Internet plays a crucial role in this strategy, facilitating the accomplishment of strategic goals for communication.

This hypothesis is supported by previous research in the field of 'terrorism and the media', and will be further developed after a review of the relevant literature. The study will subsequently examine the hypothesis by analyzing empirical data. First, strategic documents, speeches and letters of prominent jihadists will be studied in order to identify a possible declared media strategy. Secondly, the jihadists' own online media outlets and the material they produce will be analyzed in order to determine the nature and extent of this phenomenon. Finally, the study will attempt to compare the declared goals of communication with the actual jihadist use of online media, with a view to establishing whether there exists a comprehensive, applied media strategy on the part of al-Qaeda.

2 Methodology

As a basic interpretative qualitative examination, this study seeks to "discover and understand a phenomenon or a process, and the perspectives and worldviews of people involved".[6] Qualitative studies can be inductive or deductive, i.e. building or testing theories and hypotheses. This study will, deductively, test some existing theories about terrorism and the media, but as it strives to understand the specific and relatively new phenomenon of jihadism and the Internet, it will also inductively seek to reach new understandings.

As the focus is placed on the phenomenon of global jihadism, most of the data used in this study has been collected directly from jihadist sources. Many of these sources have previously been left out of similar examinations. One can argue that this is not necessarily a product of their relative insignificance, but rather because of their difficult accessibility: the sources are mostly in the Arabic language, and, probably due to the illegal nature of the jihadist movement, much of the material is guarded, for example, by password protected websites. Tellingly, the most prominent jihadist websites have a password protection system. However, this does not necessarily mean that these are the sole sources of authentic material, and much of the material on protected websites ultimately reaches other open sites, sometimes also in translation. The author has had access to some such restricted material, but has, whenever possible, used open and extensively distributed media in the research. Another concern when dealing with Internet sources is the sometimes short validity of URL's, which, like password protection of sites, restricts re-examination of sources. Yet, the topic of this study – online media – requires the use of websites as primary sources. Therefore, all source material is filed in the author's archive and can be accessed upon request.

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[6] Merrian, Sharan B. and Associates, *Qualitative Research in Practice, Examples for Discussion and Analysis',* California: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

The empirical jihadist media samples used in the analysis of this study cover a timeframe of four months, from September to December 2006. However, the author has studied the field since 2005, and some previously gathered media material will be incorporated in this study in order to present a more comprehensive picture of the jihadist media campaign. Empirical data concerning the media strategy will include older material, as a strategy denotes a long-term plan, and therefore should be proposed before the actual plan is put into action.[7] Furthermore, since the jihadist online media campaign is ongoing, the author has chosen to mention some significant developments that have taken place after this period that further illustrate the media jihad as it emerges from the period of research.

Empirical Data

The qualitative research methodology that will be employed in this study seeks to use as broad an empirical data base as possible. This data base can be separated into two main categories.
The first category consists of data that sheds light on the jihadists' own perspectives on the use of media. It includes texts of various natures, ranging from written letters and audio-visual speeches to more ideological and strategic material. However, they are all produced by jihadists, and include comments on the use of the media. These texts will be examined in an attempt to determine whether a pronounced media strategy exists. The second category of data comprises the jihadist media itself. As mentioned above, the focus will be on online media channels or publications. This data comprises primary sources and *prima facie* evidence of the present state of the jihadist online media use. It will be subject to a qualitative content analysis, and tested against the research hypothesis. By comparing the results of the analysis of data from the two categories, the study hopes to indicate the level of coherence between the jihadists' own 'theory of communication', and their 'practice of communication'. This, again, is a potential sign of the existence or absence of a comprehensive, applied jihadist media strategy.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Since the 1980s, content analysis has become an increasingly important tool and the fastest growing technique in media analysis.[8] Content analysis serves different purposes, such as describing characteristics of communication and making inferences about the antecedents and consequences of communication.[9] This kind of analysis scrutinizes different elements of communication, namely the *source*, the *channel*, the *message,* and the *recipient*. According to Ole R. Holsti, such an analysis may be operationalized by asking the questions *who*, *why*, *how*, *what*, *to whom*, and *with what effect*.[10] While the answer to the last question with regards to the consequences of communication certainly could be interesting, it lies outside the scope of this study. The other elements will therefore form the basis of analysis for the data gathered in categories one and two, i.e. the jhadist strategic texts and the media material.

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[7] See definition of strategy in this study, p23.
[8] Neuendorf, K. A., *The Content Analysis Guidebook,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002.
[9] Holsti, Ole R., *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities,* Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969.
[10] *Ibid.*

Holsti's method places itself within an analysis tradition that views content as a property of the source of a text.[11] Critics of this method, such as Krippendorff, argue that this kind of approach fails to acknowledge the analyst's conceptual contributions to the reading of a text, and that it ignores the fact that message/content may have multiple meanings.[12] Rather, he recommends a context based analysis. However, Holsti does treat the issue of manifest versus latent meaning, and states that "reading between the lines" is important in the interpretation stage in order to draw meaningful conclusions from the data.[13] This study's use of content analysis will include the perspectives of contexts and latent meanings.

3   Previous research

The following survey of previous research on terrorism and the media seeks to provide a basis for understanding the phenomenon of jihadism and online communication, and aims to facilitate the establishment of a research hypothesis for this study.

Media and Terrorism

Research in the field of terrorism and the media has, with little dissent, concluded that the two phenomena are closely linked.[14] Many definitions of terrorism contain the aspect of communication, and even more specifically, the media: "If terrorism is a strategy characterized by symbolic attacks on symbolic targets, it is also a strategy characterized by the intentional manipulation of the news media".[15] This statement describes one side of the relationship, while the other side is illustrated by the claim that "dangerous media hype of terrorist 'spectaculars' [is the result of] fierce competition of an increased market share of the audience".[16] This reveals a symbiotic relationship, in which terrorism is dependent on the media in order to spread a message, and the media on terrorism, not only to sell its product, but also in order to satisfy an ever increasing news- and sensation-thirsty public.[17] Yet, despite a mutual need between the two, the relationship also involves mutual distrust.[18] While, on the one hand, terrorists often feel used by the media in sensational reporting that may fail to mention their grievances and goals, the media, on the other hand, may have reason to fear terrorists, as journalists on several occasions have become the victims of terrorist acts. Furthermore, it is worth keeping in mind that terrorism is a phenomenon that long precedes modern mass media, and that the spread of terror historically

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[11] Krippendorff, 2004.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Holsti, 1969, p.12.

[14] For a contrasting view, see Michel Wieviorka who argues in favor of a less significant relationship between terrorism and the media, and promotes four kinds of relationships: "pure indifference", "relative indifference", "media-oriented strategy", and "total-break", in Wieviorka, Michel, *The making of terrorism,* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 43-44.

[15] Martin, Gus, *Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives and Issues,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003, p. 281.

[16] Wilkinson, Paul, "The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment", *Terrorism and Political Violence,* Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 1997, p. 55.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Wilkinson, Paul, "The Media and International Terrorism", in Crenshaw, M. and J. Pimlott (ed.), *Encyclopedia of World Terrorism*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1997, p. 675.

has relied on oral communication: the violent wing of the Zealots, the Sicarii of the 1st century, as well as the Assassin sect of Shiite Islam operating in the Middle Ages, spread their terror by word of mouth in the mosques and marketplaces.[19] Therefore, one may argue that the development of the mass media is hardly the primary cause for the spread of terrorism and can certainly not be blamed for its existence. Yet, developments in media have been viewed in relation to developments in terrorism, and researchers have argued that paradigmatic shifts in mass media have been accompanied by new and more deadly forms of terrorism.[20] Technological innovations within the printing press during the 19th century were readily used for communication purposes by Russian and Balkan anarchists. Moreover, the year 1968 has been said to mark both the launch of the first television satellite, and the birth of international terrorism. Live audio-visual broadcast to an international audience may have forwarded the causes of more spectacular forms of terrorism, as exemplified by Palestinian terrorists' airliner hijacking operations in Europe in the 1970s.[21]

With the development of mass media, modern terrorism has been portrayed as an act of communication,[22] and has specifically been named "mass-mediated terrorism", indicating an existential link between terrorism and publicity via the mass media.[23] As terrorism is often politically motivated violence, it usually aims to convey a specific message, often to governments and policymakers. The immediate victims of terrorism may be randomly or selectively chosen, yet they are often merely instrumental in the terrorists' calculus of obtaining both publicity and impact on the enemy target and a wider audience through the media.[24] This description identifies some of the participants in what has been called "the informational battlefield"[25] - a battlefield in modern conventional conflicts, but particularly in asymmetrical conflicts in which terrorists are often involved. Thus, mass communication technologies appear to have become weapons of war, and the phrase 'information is power' has become something of a truism.[26] In order to obtain power (of information), terrorists, who feel they lack access to traditional mass media communication as they do not share the mainstream views of society, have come to understand that they can adapt their methods and styles of violence to attract the media.[27] These adaptations include the degree of violence applied, attacking on symbolic targets, and the performance of very spectacular deeds.[28]

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[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Lia, Brynjar, *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism,* London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

[21] Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

[22] Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, London: Sage Publications, 1982.

[23] Nacos, Brigitte L., *Mass-Mediated Terrorism, The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Maryland, 2002.

[24] Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication.*

[25] Martin, *Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives and Issues*, p. 289.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Nacos, Brigitte L., *Mass-Mediated Terrorism, The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism.*

[28] Martin, Gus, *Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives and Issues.*

The discussion above focuses on the relationship between terrorism and the international and national mass media. However, it is important to bear in mind that, as Wilkinson pointed out in 1997, terrorists communicate on two different levels:

> "The mass media provides a means to get the terrorist message to the population at large, but rarely replace the terrorists' own press releases, communiqués, pamphlets and magazines, [however] the terrorists' own methods of propaganda generally have very little circulation".[29]

This is an important point, and while the latter part of the statement may have been true almost a decade ago, it can be questioned in light of today's expanded use of the Internet. However, also more recently, Brigitte L. Nacos touches upon this issue as she states that traditional media channels are more important in terrorists' publicity calculus than the Internet. Yet, at the same time she describes the Internet as a means of bypassing the gatekeepers of traditional media, thus offering terrorists nearly unlimited communication.[30] Another assessment which supports the idea that terrorists benefit from using their own media outlets, such as the Internet, rises from findings that traditional media coverage does not lead to public approval,[31] either of the terrorists or their causes.[32] The attention that so-called sensationalist media coverage lends to terrorism is rarely positive and often does not portray terrorists and their causes in the way that the terrorists perhaps would wish for. This indicates that news prepared and presented by the terrorists themselves potentially could be more advantageous to their cause.

The advent of the Internet constitutes one of the most recent paradigmatic shifts in mass media, and may therefore be expected to have a profound impact on the nature of terrorism. Specific studies about the Internet and terrorist groups point to a number of aspects that have been influenced by this new technology, ranging from finance, training, data collection, to operational tactics, and the shaping of public opinion and communication.[33] Gabriel Weimann usefully distinguishes between the instrumental and the communicative use of the Internet by terrorists.[34] He states that "at this point, terrorists are using the Internet for propaganda and communication more than they are attacking it".[35] The communicative aspect includes using the Internet to advance an organization's political, religious and ideological agenda. It is also said to facilitate new relationships between an individual and a virtual community.[36] In the case of jihadism and

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[29] Wilkinson, Paul, "The Media and International Terrorism", p. 675.

[30] Nacos, Brigitte L., "Terrorism and Media in the Age of Global Communication", in Hamilton, Daniel S. (ed.), *Terrorism and International Relations,* Washington DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2006.

[31] Downes-LeGuin, Theo and Bruce Hoffman, *The Impact of Terrorism on Public Opinion: 1988 to 1989*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-225-F.F/RC, 1993.

[32] Laquer, Walter, *The Age of Terrorism*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1987.

[33] Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*.

[34] Weimann, Gabriel, *Terror on the Internet*, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006.

[35] Weimann, Gabriel, "Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges", Paper for the International Studies Association Convention 2004, p. 7. For a study on the instrumental uses of the Internet, see Denning, Doroty E., "Activism, Hacktivism and Cyberterrorism: The Internet as a tool for influencing foreign policy", in Arquilla and Ronfeldt (eds.), *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy*, Rand Corporation, 2001, pp. 239-288.

[36] Sageman, Marc, *Understanding Terror Networks,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

the Internet, al-Qaeda is labeled "unique among all terrorist groups" in understanding the communicative potential of the Internet.[37] With a widespread network of websites[38], allowing flow of information from leaders to supporters, and among supporters, the "online propaganda strategy of al-Qaeda takes advantage of the anonymity and flexibility of the Internet".[39] The paradigmatic shift in terrorism caused by the Internet lies primarily in the possibility to "bypass censorship and communicate directly with external audiences", as exemplified by the copious Internet-transmitted beheadings of hostages by salafi-jihadists in Iraq in 2004.[40]

A growing body of scholarly studies treats jihadism and the use of the Internet as a media channel. Dr. Brynjar Lia argues that jihadist web media production differs from traditional media production in that it expands the quantity and quality of the material.[41] Furthermore, media producers sometimes seem to have a weak organizational affiliation to militant groups or to the command structure, which allows them to speak with a relatively autonomous voice, and to operate through networking, rather than according to hierarchical structures.[42] Another study on the online jihadist media campaign concludes that as technology permits the widespread distribution of the global jihadist message, the opportunity arises to forge transnational alliances and for interaction to occur between dispersed points.[43] The jihadist online media campaign potentially maintains and increases the social support base, promotes amateur terrorism, and preserves the narrative of modern jhadism.[44] In addition to such academic studies, policy papers and magazine and newspaper articles provide frequent, if only partial, examinations of the jihadist media campaign, and the media companies.[45] Furthermore, several individuals and private organizations monitor and analyze jihadist groups' daily activities, including their media efforts, on the Internet, and present their findings on their websites.[46]

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[37] Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism.*

[38] Assessed by Gabreil Weimann to be more than 50 in 2006. See, Weimann, *Terror on the Internet*, p. 67.

[39] "Jihad Online, Islamic Terrorists and the Internet", *Anti-Defamation League*, 2002, www.adl.org/internet/jihad_online.pdf (accessed 10 September 2007).

[40] Lia, Brynjar, *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism,* p.181.

[41] Lia, Brynjar, "Jihadi Web Media Production", Paper presented at the conference 'Monitoring, research and analysis of jihadist activities on the Internet – Ways to deal with the issue', Berlin, Germany, 26-27 February 2007, www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00092/Jihadi_Web_Media_Pro_92100a.pdf (accessed 1 October 2007).

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Jordan, Javier, Manuel R. Torres, and Nicola Harsburgh, "The Intelligence Services' Struggle Against Al- Qaeda Propaganda", *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence*, Volume 18, Issue 1, Spring 2005, pp. 31-49.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] See for example, Yassin Musharbash, "Al-Qaida's German Blog", *Spiegel Online International*, 30 August, 2006, www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,434404,00.html (accessed 10 September 2007), or Trabelsi, Habib, "Al-Qaeda takes jihad to media four years after 9/11", *Middle East Online*, 9 September 2005 (via LexisNexis), or Kimmage, Daniel and Kathleen Ridolfo, "The Iraqi Insurgent Media, The War of Images and ideas", *RFE/RL Special Report*, Summer 2007, http://realaudio.rferl.org/online/OLPDFfiles/insurgent.pdf (accessed 10 September 2007).

[46] See for example, *Internet Haganah* (http://haganah.us)*, SITE Institute* (www.siteinstitute.org)*, MEMRI* (www.memri.org/jihad), *Counterterrorism Blog* (http://counterterrorismblog.org/). All accessed October 2007.

Finally, when studying the media and terrorism, researchers have typically sought to decipher the various ways that terrorists use the media. A much cited study by Schmid and de Graaf identifies as many as 30 different insurgent terrorist uses of the news media.[47] The list includes both active and passive uses, ranging from "communication of (fear-) messages to audience" to "obtaining information about public reaction to terroristic acts".[48] The list seems comprehensive, but, as the authors note, is primarily a survey of examples with overlapping elements. Furthermore, scholars within the field have pointed to incoherence in Schmid and de Graaf's list: it mixes strategic and tactical uses of the media.[49] While Schmid and de Graaf's study deals with terrorism as a phenomenon, other more recent studies specifically treat jihadism and its media strategies. A 2006 study by Corman and Schiefelbein entitled "Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas", concludes that the most important jihadist strategic uses of the media are to legitimize and propagate the movement, and to intimidate opponents.[50] Furthermore, the study stresses the importance of "sophisticated, modern methods of communication and public relations" for the jihadist movement, and points to how jihadists use both the traditional mass media and new media channels. Yet, the study relies primarily on older al-Qaeda documents, and the authors acknowledge the risk that it may be analyzing an organization of the past. Nevertheless, its assessments on the jihadist use of the media are functional, and will, along with supplementary theories, serve as a framework for this study.

A Constructivist Approach: Framing Terrorism

According to the assessments above, terrorism itself can be viewed as political communication. Perhaps more than the deed itself, the actual terrorist message, presented in text, picture or audio-visual format, qualifies as such communication. Media communication in general, and political communication in particular, has long been subject to the theory of framing. The term framing refers to the selection of some aspects, and exclusion of others, in the promotion of a perception of reality. By emphasizing certain aspects, making them more salient in a communicating text, a particular *problem definition*, *causal interpretation*, *moral evaluation* and/or *treatment recommendation* is promoted.[51]

The concept of news framing thus refers to how media channels present a topic within interpretative structures, consciously or unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events.[52] News framing is related to the concept of agenda setting, and has been explained as its second level. Agenda setting, at a first level, puts a particular issue, event or actor in the audience's mind, and framing, at a second level, makes some aspects of the matter more salient

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[47] Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*.
[48] The full list of terrorist uses of the media is quoted in Appendix I.
[49] Gerrits, Robin P. J. M., "Terrorists' Perspectives: Memoirs", in Paletz and Schmid (ed.), *Terrorism and the Media*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1992.
[50] Corman, Steven R., and Jill S. Schiefelbein, "Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas", *Consortium for Strategic Communication*, Arizona State University, April 20, 2006.
[51] Entman, Robert M., "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", *Journal of Communication,* Volume 43, Issue 4, 1993, pp. 51-58.
[52] Norris, Pippa, Montague Kern and Marion Just (ed.), *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public,* New York: Routledge, 2003.

than others.[53] These two processes represent an important aspect of political communication, as it is expected that they influence public opinion. Therefore, it is likely that governments and interest groups alike will make an effort to make their frame 'valid', and hence the one that will be used by the media channels. [54]

Concerning terrorism, it is suggested that "terrorist events are commonly understood through news frames that simplify, prioritize, and structure the narrative flow of events".[55] It appears that the U.S. government created a certain frame with its rhetoric after the 9/11 terrorist events, introducing the 'war on terror'. The interpretation of the events included 'an act of war' on civilization (*problem definition*) by evil people (*moral evaluation*) motivated by hate of freedom (*causal interpretation*) against which the world should unite through a 'war on terror' (*treatment recommendation*).[56] It is important to bear in mind that the development of a frame suggests that the events could be interpreted in alternative ways. In the case of 9/11, many groups disagreed with the U.S. official frame, among them the jihadists, representing the other side in the conflict. Therefore, it is likely that members of this 'other side' have developed their own frames, and that they use alternatives to the mainstream media to present the events from their point of view. Theories of framing indicate that communication is not simply the transmission of data, and suggest that individuals play a vital role in constructing meaning. [57] This idea places itself within the broader theory of constructivism, also called social constructivism. Constructivism appeared primarily in the late 1960s, advanced by the seminal work "The Social Construction of Reality" by Berger and Luckman.[58] This became an increasingly important approach in the field of International Relations (IR) in the 1980s, offering an alternative to the well-established theories of realism and liberalism. However, constructivism places itself in the much earlier sociological tradition, with strong roots in the works of Emil Durkheim and Max Weber.[59] Durkheim's theories on the role of ideational factors in social life and how ideas become socially constructive are of importance to constructivism. The same goes for Weber's approach to the normative, as well as instrumental, roles of meaning and significance: "We are cultural beings endowed with

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[53] McCombs, Maxwell and Salma I. Ghanem, "The Convergence of Agenda Setting and Framing", in Reese *et al.* (ed.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, New Jersey and London: LEA Publishers, 2001.
[54] Pan, Zhongdang and Gerald M. Kosicki, "Framing as a Strategic Action in Public Deliberation", in Reese *et al.* (ed.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, New Jersey and London: LEA Publishers, 2001.
[55] Norris, Pippa, Montague Kern and Marion Just (ed.), *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public,* p.10.
[56] Archetti, Christina, "Understanding what shapes the news: The elite press and the framing of 9/11 in the US, France, Italy and Pakistan", Paper presented at the Conference Media Change and Social Theory, Oxford, UK, 6-8 September 2006.
http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/staff/c.archetti/Understanding_What_Shapes_the_News.doc (accessed 2 June, 2007).
[57] Delwiche, Aaron, "Agenda setting, opinion leadership, and the world of Web logs", First Monday Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet, www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_12/delwiche/index.html (accessed November 2006).
[58] Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York: Garden City, 1966.
[59] Ruggie, John Gerhard, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge", *International Organization*, 52, 4, Autumn 1998, pp. 855-885.

the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and lend it *significance*".[60] Constructivism, consequently, deals with human consciousness and its role in international society. It distinguishes between a material reality and a social reality, and claims that social reality is constructed and therefore always susceptible to change.[61] Rather than asking what social realities are, IR constructivists ask how social realities become what they are. Constructivists generally focus on the causal force of ideational, discursive, and linguistic factors in world politics, and argue in favor of a reconceptualization of power, with relevance for, amongst others, non-state actors. Furthermore, they highlight the role of transnational movements and processes in international affairs.[62]

Given this brief introduction to constructivism in international relations, the statement that "constructivism seemed to be the best placed [approach] to account for such a religious, transnational movement [like] al-Qaeda"[63] appears reasonable. In a 2006 article, Marc Lynch claims that al-Qaeda, as part of the global jihadist movement, "has undergone a 'constructivist turn', employing not only violence but also a dizzying array of persuasive rhetoric and public spectacle toward the end of strategic social construction".[64] According to Lynch, al-Qaeda, with its Islamist ideas, is inherently constructivist in its orientation.[65] But, allegedly, structural factors have also influenced this 'reality'. These structural factors include the absence of a territorial base, and a globalized field of contention shaped by new media and information technologies. With these new media technologies, and focusing on the salience of religion, al-Qaeda frames world politics as a clash of civilizations, and places the power of radical Islamism on the same level as that of the state system.[66] This may point to a jihadist attempt to create a competing frame to the U.S. 'war on terror' frame mentioned above. For the purpose of this study, which focuses on the global jihadist movement and its use of new media technologies, a constructivist approach will be applied to help interpret the meaning and significance that the actors, the jihadists, ascribe to their collective situation. While the study does not aim to explore the jihadist message or ideology, it will take a constructivist approach in its attempts to decipher the frames used in jihadist media.

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[60] Max Weber, quoted in Ruggie, John Gerard, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge", p. 856.

[61] Eriksson, Johan and Giampiero Giacomello, "The Information Revolution, Security and International Relations: (IR)relevant Theory?", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2006, pp. 221-244.

[62] Nexon, Daniel, "Realism and Constructivism", *the Duck of Minerva Weblog*, 26 September, 2005, http://duckofminerva.blogspot.com/2005/09/realism-and-constructivism.html (accessed 5 September, 2006).

[63] Lynch, Marc, "Al-Qaeda's Constructivist Turn", *Praeger Security International,* 5 May, 2006, http://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?d=/commentary/Lynch-20060505-Lynch-20060505.xml (accessed 10 December, 2006).

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] Lynch, Marc, "Trans-National Dialogue in an Age of Terror", *Global Society* 19, 2005, pp. 5-9.

[66] Lynch, Marc, "Al-Qaeda's Constructivist Turn".

4 Formulation of research hypothesis

The assessments mentioned above form a broad basis for approaching the jihadist media. The main purpose of this study is to define the extent of the jihadist media strategy, and specifically the use of jihadist online media channels. Previous research has determined that the media plays an essential role for terrorists, and specific research on jihadism today suggests a vital role for new media technologies, such as the Internet. These two observations constitute the starting point of this study.

From a constructivist point of view, the jihadist message spread through online channels can be seen as a socially constructed idea, framed by a specific worldview. Using the Internet as a media channel, it seems that the jihadists are able to present news stories within a jihadist frame. Therefore, this study suggests that the possibilities for agenda setting and framing may be among the main reasons for establishing and using Internet channels.

Moreover, the jihadist message may aim to achieve strategic goals of communication. This brings us back to the reasons for using the media, or in this case using the Internet, as a media channel. Corman and Schiefelbein's study on jihadist media strategy proposed three main strategic goals of communication: legitimization, propagation and intimidation. It is also useful to look to Schmid and de Graaf's influential list of terrorist uses of the media. Despite the fact that these uses are not specific to jihadism, and do not take into consideration the use of new media technologies, many seem to be valid for this study.[67] Interestingly, when re-categorizing the alleged overlapping, yet relevant, terrorist media uses in Schmid and de Graaf's list, the same three strategic goals as mentioned above - legitimization, propagation and intimidation - emerge.[68] Therefore, one may go on to assume that these three goals – purportedly the most important in media communication for terrorists in general, and jihadists in particular – also will be observed when examining the current media jihad. Consequently, one may suggest a hypothesis which states that the jihadists use the media in order to propagate the movement and its cause, to legitimize the movement and its activities, and to intimidate opponents.

An analysis of empirical data will determine if the goals of the media jihad, both from a strategic perspective designed by jihadist strategists, and in reality as seen through the media channels, correspond with these proposed uses. Furthermore, it is interesting to assess whether a theoretical framework proposed mainly for the traditional media, also applies to the study of new media such as the Internet.

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[67] This study focuses on the jihadists' own media outlets and therefore only considers Schmid and de Graaf's 22 active uses of media. Furthermore, some active uses clearly do not apply to terrorists' own media channels, and are therefore also disregarded – these are: 'demanding publication of manifesto under threat of harm to victim', 'occupation of broadcasting stations', 'using journalists as negotiators' and 'verifying demand compliance by the enemy'.

[68] This author has interpreted uses nos. 2, 3, 7, 10, 12, 19, and 21 from Schmid and de Graaf's 1982 list to correspond to 'propagation of the movement'; uses nos. 8, 13, and 22 to correspond to 'legitimization of activities'; and uses nos. 1, 5, 9, 11, 14, 15, and 17 to correspond to 'intimidation of opponents'. See Appendix I for Schmid and de Graaf's list.

The research hypothesis could be summarized as follows: *The jihadists operate within a pronounced strategy concerning the use of the media. The Internet, playing a crucial role in this media strategy, allows the jihadists directly to frame their message, and to use it in order to reach the following strategic goals of communication: propagation of the movement and its cause, legitimization of the movement and its activities, and intimidation of opponents.*

5   Definition of terms

Before embarking on a further discussion and an analysis of the jihadist use of the media, a few terms central to the research hypothesis of this study need to be defined. The following definitions provide information about the background of certain terms, as well as their significance for the purpose of this particular study.

Terrorism

The saying 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' reflects the seemingly inherent difficulties in defining terrorism. On a global level, several attempts to reach a common definition have been unsuccessful, and governments, international organizations, and private agencies, thus operate with separate characterizations of the phenomenon. Scholars in IR and related fields often employ the UN Academic Consensus Definition:

> "Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individuals, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorists (organizations), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought" (Schmid, 1988).[69]

However, modern terrorism allegedly differs in character from traditional terrorism, often lacking a discernible organizational structure or an identified central command, and operating with less easily defined aims or identified objectives, which potentially makes it more lethal.[70] Furthermore, modern terrorism often incorporates an international or transnational aspect, adding the involvement of "citizens or the territory of more than one country".[71]

Global jihadism may be defined as modern terrorism, and will be further defined below. However, first, a closer look at how the jihadists themselves use the term terrorism seems warranted. Despite the fact that terrorism, in contemporary use, is commonly perceived as being highly pejorative, denoting a lack of legitimacy and morality, and that, consequently, very few

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[69] Definitions of Terrorism, UN Academic Consensus Definition, Alex Schmid, 1988, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/terrorism_definitions.html (accessed 15 May, 2007).
[70] Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism.*
[71] US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism,* quoted in Lia, Brynjar, *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism*, p. 11.

groups have described themselves as being terrorists, the jihadists regularly promote themselves as *'irhābiyyūn* ("terrorists"). However, one may argue that the Arabic word, from the root *r-h-b,* carries different connotations than the English term. The jihadist ideologue *'Abū Muṣʿab al-Sūrī* claims that "'terrorism' is an abstract word [which] can carry a good or a bad meaning", adding "we refuse to understand this term according to the American description".[72] *Al-Sūrī* separates between "blameworthy terrorism" (*'irhāb madhmūm)* and praiseworthy terrorism (*'irhāb maḥmūd)*, the latter indicating terrorism undertaken by the righteous that have been unjustly treated. A Quranic verse which is often used by today's jihadists to legitimize terrorism in Islam is verse 60 of *Sūrat al-Anfāl,* which calls to "prepare to strike terror into the enemies of God" (Q 8:60). The deceased Saudi cleric Shaykh *Ḥamūd bin ʿUqlā' al-Shuʿaybī* stated that terrorism may be "legitimate, sanctioned and ordered by God, [and] is to prepare strength and be mobilized for resisting the enemies of God and his prophets".[73] Based on the same arguments, convicted Bali bomber *Mukhlaṣ* concluded in his writings: "This is why the word *irhabii* is popular with Arabs to refer to a terrorist".[74]

Global Jihadism

The concept of jihad (*jihād*) goes back to early Islamic jurisprudence, and is sometimes referred to as the sixth pillar of Islam, although it has no official status.[75] The basis of the jihad is generally found in the Quran (*al-Qur'ān*), the *sunna* and the *'aḥādīth* (plural of *ḥadīth*), denoting the transmissions of statements and actions of the Prophet Mohammad. Jihad literally means "striving", and denotes any activity, personal or communal, carried out by a Muslim in order to follow the path of God. Certain scholars, particularly Shiites, separate between the greater and the lesser jihad. The greater jihad is the personal, nonviolent struggle to lead a good Muslim life. However, the lesser jihad is the violent struggle for Islam. This latter striving is the usual meaning of jihad.[76] Stemming from a fundamental principle of the universality of Islam, jihad consists of military action with the objective of defending *Dār al-'Islām* (the Abode of Islam) against external aggression, and also of the expansion of Islam. As such, jihad has been presented as an obligation for Muslims. The individual obligation is called *farḍ ʿayn*, and denotes the duty of all Muslims to take part in jihad. It may include direct fighting, financial contribution, charity or prayers. The *farḍ kifāya* denotes the collective obligation to wage jihad.[77] The doctrine of jihad in modern Islam furthermore emphasizes *jihād al-daʿwa*, indicating the spread of Islam by peaceful means, also termed *jihād al-lisān* ("jihad of the tongue") or *jihād al-qalam* ("jihad of the pen").[78] Disregarding previous doctrine and historical traditions, some modern Islamic scholars have

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[72] 'Abū Muṣʿab al-Sūrī, "دعوة المقاومة الاسلامية العالمية" ("Call to Global Islamic Resistance"), Dec. 2004, available on http://mobasher.110mb.com/AbuMusabSyrian.htm (accessed 5 October 2006).

[73] Shaykh Ḥamūd bin ʿUqlā' al-Shuʿaybī, "معنى الارهاب وحقيقته" ("The Meaning and Truth of Terrorism"), *Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa l-Jihād* website, 20 November, 2001, www.tawhed.ws/r?i=676&PHPSESSID=6e7cd3991ebce2b89175bbbacb81ca16 (accessed 10 October 2007).

[74] Aly Ghufron bin Nurhasyim (name as given in English), aka *Mukhlaṣ*, quoted in Fealy, Greg and Virginia Hooker (eds.), *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: SEAS Publications, 2006.

[75] Tyan, E., "Djihad", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2nd Edition, 1960-2005.

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] Peters, Rudolph, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam,* Marcus Wiener Pub., expanded edition 2005.

argued that today this is the most important form of jihad, as intensive communication is possible without having to resort to military expeditions.[79] In fact, today's global jihadist movement, as we will see, combines the violent jihad with the jihad of the tongue and the pen. Yet, the current jihadist media campaign is a supplement to violent activities, and would make little sense alone, as, to a large extent, it works to promote violence and to place the violence within a political and religious framework.

Within the history of modern militant Islamism, dating back to the 1930s, global jihadism is a relatively new phenomenon. It appeared in the mid-1990s, when Osama bin Laden (*'Usāma bin Lādin*) declared the West to be the greatest enemy of the Muslim world, and urged his followers to fight this enemy, irrespective of natural and territorial boundaries.[80] The jihadist focus thus shifted from the near enemy to the far enemy, and supporters of the global jihad started carrying out attacks in the West as well as on foreign interests in the Muslim world. Bin Laden specifically framed the image of the current enemy as "the Jews and the Crusaders" (*al-yahūd wa l-ṣalībiyyūn*), pointing to the Christian U.S., and to Israel. However, al-Qaeda's vision of the enemy is based on a wider, and, notably, historic interpretation. The term "Crusaders" points to early invasions of Muslim land, and identifies any party that is perceived as invading *Dār al-'Islām*. For example, bin Laden has made parallels between the American intervention in the Gulf War and the Mongol invasion of Iraq in the 13th century.[81] This historical interpretation of the term "Crusaders" suggests that the jihadists frame the image of their enemies independent of geography, values, or religion. Other states, also non-Western states, may qualify as enemies if they choose to invade *Dār al-'Islām*. However, in the current global jihad, the jihadists have specifically pointed out the West as their main enemy. Moreover, Israel ("the Jews") is not necessarily a direct target, as it is, for instance, for the Palestinian group *Ḥamās* (Hamas), but is rather seen as the United States of America's agent in the Middle East.

Global jihadism is often mentioned in connection with salafism – an Islamic revivalist movement aiming to restore the authentic Islam from the time of the Prophet and to reestablish an Islamic state.[82] While it, in many cases, is correct to label al-Qaeda elements as salafi-jihadists, one should be aware of the different components of salafism.[83] Quintan Wiktorowicz argues that salafists share a common religious perspective, based primarily on the idea of *tawḥīd* ("monotheism"), but that disagreement over strategy has created three factions. These are the

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[79] *Ibid.*

[80] Publicly manifested with the 1996 "Declaration of war against the American Occupier of the Land of the two Holy Places" (اعلان الجهاد على الامريكيين المحتلين لبلاد الحرمين), and the 1998 "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders" (بيان الجبهة الاسلامية العالمية لجهاد اليهود والصليبيين).

[81] Osama bin Laden's message, November 2002, transcript from *BBC Monitoring*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2455845.stm (accessed 20 September, 2007).

[82] *Salaf* means "ancestor" or the "ancient one", and refers, in Islamic terminology, to the companions of the prophet Mohammad (*al-ṣaḥāba*), the generation following them (*al-tābiᶜūn*), and the following generation (*tābiᶜū al-tābiᶜīn*).

[83] Wiktorowicz, Quintan, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* 29, 2006, pp. 207-239.

"purists", who focus on non-violent methods, the "politicos", who apply the salafi creed to the political arena, and finally, the "jihadis" who take a militant position and encourage violence and revolution.[84]

Al-Qaeda was the vanguard and base for global jihadism, and its training camps in Afghanistan provided supporters with ideological information, paramilitary training and personal relations. With the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, this organization was dissolved, and its remnants reorganized themselves into a decentralized movement, today often referred to as al-Qaeda-inspired Islamism (radical Islamism) or the global jihadist movement.[85] Despite the fact that al-Qaeda no longer seems to exist as a conventional organization, the term 'al-Qaeda' will be used interchangeably with the phrase 'the global jihadist movement' in this study.[86] The global jihadist movement will include the old cadres of al-Qaeda previously based in Afghanistan, also labeled 'al-Qaeda Central', regional al-Qaeda affiliated groups, and individuals adhering to the global jihadist ideology (called 'jihadists' or 'mujahideen').

The *'Umma*

The Arabic word *'umma* signifies people, community or nation. In modern times it is commonly used to mean the nation of Islamic states, or the community of believers, denoting the whole Muslim world. The Quran reveals a chronological development of the sense of the word, from a generic application, to religious communities, and, finally, to a more inclusive meaning of humanity in its potential toward becoming Muslim.[87] As a politico-social order, the *'umma* came into being in Medina after the Prophet Mohammad's *hijra* ("migration") from Mecca in 622. Mohammad and his Meccan followers formed a political agreement and a formal group with the clans of Medina, which was called the *'umma*. This *'umma* resembled earlier Middle Eastern forms of society, but differed in one crucial respect: it merged political and religious communal organization.[88] This has characterized later Islamic states that are based on sharia (*sharīᶜa)*, the Islamic law. The jihadists frequently refer to the concept of the *'umma*, and use the term to denote the totality of Muslims, promoting a sort of pan-Islamic nationalism.[89]

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[84] *Ibid*, p. 208.

[85] Hegghammer, Thomas, "Irak-konflikten i radikal islamistisk ideologi", *Internasjonal politikk*, Vol. 63, Issue 4, 2005, pp. 351-370.

[86] It is worth noting that while al-Qaeda no longer has the same level of centralized organization as before, the group has reportedly recently been re-organized and has been able to establish new bases in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. See, "The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland", *National Intelligence Council*, July 2007, www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070717_release.pdf (accessed 20 September, 2007).

[87] Denny, F.M., "Umma", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2000.

[88] Lapidus, Ira M., *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 2002.

[89] For a description of 'pan-Islamic nationalism', see Hegghammer, Thomas, "Political Violence in Saudi Arabia: The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula", Paper presented at Princeton University, 2 March 2007, http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00091/Political_Violence_i_91403a.pdf (accessed 1 October 2007).

Media, Old vs. New

The word medium (pl. media), may be described as "an intervening substance through which something else is transmitted or carried on",[90] or, "a channel or means of communication".[91] A medium is thus a carrier of information. It provides organized means of transmission or storage of information, such as fact, opinion, entertainment, *et cetera*. In modern times, media is generally perceived as a truncation of the term media of communication. A medium of communication comes between the source and the intended audience, and communication can be a one-way process (broadcast), or a two-way process (interpersonal and interactive).[92] The term mass media is used to denote the section of the media specifically designed to reach a very large audience. It was coined in the 1920s, with the advent of nationwide radio networks, mass-circulation newspapers, and magazines. During the 20th century, the growth of the mass media was driven by new technology, and in the last part of the century, specifically by the Internet and the World Wide Web.[93] The distinction between 'old' and 'new' media is not always precise. The adjective 'new' carries many meanings, and may point to various aspects of communication based on modern technology, for instance its alleged democratic, or individual character, or its ability to transform social relationships.[94] Some of these aspects may be observed in the online jihadist media campaign. However, the following definitions are based rather on a technological perspective: 'new media' will denote all forms of media enabled by digital technology, such as web sites, email, CD/DVDs, and interactive television. 'Old' or 'traditional' media, on the other hand, are the traditional means of communication and expression that existed before the new media, specifically the printed press, radio and TV. 'Mainstream media' will be employed to denote media sources other than 'jihadist-controlled media'.

Strategy

A strategy is a long term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Originating from the Greek *strategia,* meaning generalship, it was confined to military matters.[95] However, today, the word is commonly used in many disparate fields. There still seems to be a common perception that strategy is an idea that creates a course of action following a hypothesis, implying that a certain future position offers an advantage for acquiring some designated gain. The description of the idea is generally prepared in prescriptive documentation. Borrowing from IR game theory, a strategy is furthermore a plan for dealing with every possible move from every (all) player(s) in the game.[96] Accordingly, in this study, a jihadist online media strategy denotes a documented plan for the use of the Internet, aiming to achieve an advantageous position in the future (for the

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[90] Definition of "Medium", *The Free Dictionary*, www.thefreedictionary.com/medium (accessed 5 October 2006).
[91] Allen, Robert (ed.), "Medium", *The New Penguin English Dictionary,* Penguin Books Ltd., 2000.
[92] Noll, Micheal A., *The Evolution of Media,* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007.
[93] Chun, Wendy Hui Kkyong and Thomas W. Keenan (eds.), *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader,* London: Routledge, 2005.
[94] Hassan, Robert, and Julian Thomas, *The New Media Theory Reader*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006.
[95] Allen, Robert (ed.), "Strategy", *The New Penguin English Dictionary.*
[96] McLean, Ian and Alistair McMillan, "Strategy", *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics,* Oxford University Press, 2003.

jihadists), while also taking into account methods for countering the enemies' (the West and local governments') media moves.

II. Jihadist media strategy in theory

Frequent media appearances, both before and after 9/11, indicate that "the organization [al-Qaeda] has operated according to a deliberate and calculated media strategy".[97] The existence of such a jihadist media strategy, including a strategy for the use of the Internet, is one of the main assumptions of this study. In order to reveal a possible strategy, the following chapter presents al-Qaeda's official statements, theoretical texts, and correspondence that deal with the use of media. The selection of texts has been prepared according to the technique of relevance sampling. The author has searched through a large amount of mostly textual material thought to contain pertinent information, and presented the "population of relevant texts". The texts are deemed relevant or important based upon their content, but also on the authors' authority (the al-Qaeda leadership and prominent strategists) and on supporters' and analysts' interest in the text (as seen for example in online readers' assessments). Categories of strategic texts presented in this study include selections from the al-Qaeda leadership, from prominent jihadist strategists, and from the jihadist media establishments. There is a risk that the sample has failed to incorporate important works about the use of the media. However, it includes relevant texts that circulate on the jihadist web today, and seeks to include relevant articles from earlier jihadist publications. In fact, central jihadist documents are known to be repeatedly re-published on web forums, and it seems that without such wide distribution they will only have a limited impact on the movement. Therefore, as this study includes documents from the most active jihadist web forums, it provides, arguably, sufficient information in order to present main jihadist ideas about the use of the media.

6 The al-Qaeda leadership

Previous studies stress that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are "a leadership duo that is both media-savvy and productive".[98] Even if their media appearances attract wide-spread attention, few of their texts that are available to the public focus on how they use the media. Taking into account the fact that the West and the general public are the intended audience of many of their speeches, it is perhaps quite natural that they do not disclose their strategies.

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[97] Thomas Hegghammer, "Dokumentasjon om al-Qa'ida – Intervjueer, kommunikéer og andre primærkilder, 1990-2002", ("Documentation on al-Qa'ida – Interviews, Statements and Other Primary Sources, 1990-2002"), *FFI/rapport*-2002/01393, 2002, http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2002/01393.pdf (accessed 1 June, 2007).

[98] Hegghammer, Thomas, "Al-Qaida statements 2003-2004 – A compilation of translated texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri", *FFI/rapport*-2005/01428, 2005, http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2005/01428.pdf (accessed 10 July 2007). See also Riedel, Bruce, "Al-Qaeda strikes back", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007, www.foreignaffairs.org/20070501faessay86304/bruce-riedel/al-qaeda-strikes-back.html (accessed 10 September 2007).

Nevertheless, a close reading of their official statements and other publications reveals certain strategic thoughts about the use of the media on their behalf.[99]

Osama bin Laden

A recurring topic in Osama bin Laden's speeches is the role of the Western media, or more precisely, how the Americans exploit their advantageous media position, rely on psychological warfare, produce deceptive lies about the mujahideen, and drowse the community by keeping people occupied with minor matters. On the other hand, bin Laden states that the Western media is not just harmful to the jihadists, but it also terrorizes its own people by speculating and spreading propaganda about al-Qaeda, adding fear and helplessness to the psyche of the people of Europe and the United States: "What the enemies of the U.S. cannot do, its media is doing".[100]

Bin Laden has offered advice on how the jihadists themselves can use the media. In his "Offer of armistice with Europe" published April 14, 2004, he "ask[s] honest people, especially ᶜ*ulamā'* ("Islamic scholars"), preachers and merchants to form a permanent committee to enlighten the European peoples of the justice of our cause [...] they can make use of the huge potential of the media".[101]

Bin Laden sees the potential of the media in the fact that "it enters every home" and "touches the entire public" due to the communication revolution.[102] This is something he was aware of long before 9/11. When asked by CNN journalist Peter Arnett in March 1997 about his future plans, bin Laden responded: "You'll see them and hear about them in the media, God willing".[103] However, renouncing using the media for protracted periods of time also seems to be a bin Laden strategy: "our silence is our real propaganda".[104] The latter appears to have been bin Laden's main strategy over the last year.[105]

Ayman al-Zawahiri

Ayman al-Zawahiri generally conveys the same ideas about Western and "apostate" media as bin Laden. Furthermore, al-Zawahri treats in particular the effects that negative media campaigns

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[99] Several jihadist websites offer compilations of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri audio and video files, see for example http://mobasher.110mb.com/Jihad_leaders.htm (accessed June 2007).

[100] Bin Laden, interview in Pakistani newspaper *Ummat*, 28 September, 2001, via www.khilafah.com/1421/category.php?DocumentID=2392&TagID=2v (accessed June 2005).

[101] Bin Laden, "رسالة الهدنة مع الغرب" ("Offer of Armistice with the West"), April 14, 2004, see www.archive.org/download/hygNGF/454.mp3 (accessed 10 July 2007).

[102] Bin Laden, audio tape attacking Muslim scholars, July 2003, transcript reproduced in Thomas Hegghammer, "Al-Qaida statements 2003-2004 – A compilation of translated texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri".

[103] Peter Arnett's interview with Osama bin Laden, *CNN*, 1997, reproduced in Thomas Hegghammer, "Dokumentasjon om al-Qa'ida – Intervjueer, kommunikéer og andre primærkilder, 1990-2002".

[104] Bin Laden, interview in Pakistani newspaper Ummat, 28 September, 2001, see www.khilafah.com/1421/category.php?DocumentID=2392&TagID=2v (accessed June 2005).

[105] During the editing of this study, in September 2007, bin Laden appeared in three media releases on the occasion of the 6 year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The propaganda effect of more than one year's absence from the media was then seen in the widespread attention he received (as compared to the lower level of attention generated by prolific media speaker al-Zawahiri).

have on the global jihadist movement. He draws his ideas from his experience with *Jamāᶜat al-jihād* ("Egyptian Islamic Jihad", EIJ) during the 1980s and 90s. In his book "Knights under the Prophet's Banner", he illustrates his view on negative media influence with the story of the unintentional killing of the child *Shaymā'* during an unsuccessful attack on the Egyptian Prime Minister *ᶜĀṭif Ṣiddīqī*.[106] The Egyptian government subsequently launched a media campaign in which it claimed that *Shaymā'* was the target of the EIJ attack. According to al-Zawahiri, this led to a significant decline in public support for the group. Analysts have labeled this the "Shayma-effect"[107], and for al-Zawahiri it seems to have been epoch-making evidence of the importance of public opinion.

The focus on public opinion appears again in al-Zawahiri's letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (*'Abū Muṣᶜab al-Zarqāwī*), the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.[108] Reproaching al-Zarqawi's brutal beheading scenes spread across the World Wide Web, al-Zawahiri states: "the general opinion of our supporters does not understand that [it is justified], and this general opinion falls under the malicious, perfidious, and fallacious campaign by the deceptive and fabricated media".[109] Returning to his book "Knights under the Prophet's Banner", al-Zawahiri suggests that "the jihad movement must dedicate one of its wings to work with the masses".[110] In concluding, al-Zawahiri offers advice to the future generation of the jihadist movement: "We must get our message across to the masses of the nation and break the media siege imposed on the jihad movement".

Neither of the two leaders of al-Qaeda has to this author's knowledge proposed any strategies about the use of online media in publicly available statements and texts. Their main focus remains on the harmful effect of the Western media on the jihadist movement – yet also its sometimes unintentional support to the movement through coverage that intimidates the Western public.

7   Jihadist strategists

"Jihadist strategic studies" is a relatively new phenomenon within the extensive textual universe of the global jihadist movement.[111] This genre rose as a result of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was considered an attack on Islam by radical Islamists. Rather than seeing the need to present rationales for jihad, these radical elements directed their attention to developing a

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[106] Ayman al-Zawahiri, "فرسان تحت راية النبي" ("Knights under the Prophet's Banner"), via http://alarabnews.com/alshaab/GIF/28-12-2001/Zawahri.htm (accessed 10 July, 2007). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.
[107] Brachman, Jarret and William McCants, "Stealing al-Qaeda's Playbook", *Combating Terrorism Center Report*, February 2006, www.ctc.usma.edu/Stealing%20Al-Qai%27da%27s%20Playbook%20--%20CTC.pdf (accessed 15 March 2007).
[108] Untitled letter from al-Zawhiri to al-Zarqawi, intercepted by American intelligence, July 2005, available in Arabic original and English translation, www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_arabic (accessed 22 March, 2007).
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] Ayman al-Zawahiri, "فرسان تحت راية النبي" ("Knights under the Prophet's Banner").
[111] The term "jihadist strategic studies" was coined by Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer in their article "Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged al-Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings", in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (5), September-October 2004, pp. 355-375.

strategy for jihad. Marked by a secular tone and applying Western terminology and academic sources, jihadist strategic literature takes an analytical and empirical approach to how to wage jihad.

'Abū Muṣʿab al-Sūrī

In his "Call to Global Islamic Resistance", published online in January 2005, ideologue *Muṣṭafa bin ᶜAbd al-Qādir Sitt Maryam Nāṣir*, better known as *ᶜUmar ᶜAbd al-Ḥakīm* or *'Abū Muṣʿab al-Sūrī*, provided the global jihadist movement with what appears to be a unique and substantial strategic template.[112] The 1600-page treatise offers a detailed analysis of the movement's past, present and future.[113]

One of the chapters is entitled "The Theory of Media and Incitement in the Call to Global Islamic Resistance", or "Public Information and Advocacy for the Global Islamic Resistance Movement".[114] What *al-Sūrī* labels "the advocacy drive" is a four-level strategy including the following elements: Audience, Content of Message, Style of Message, and Delivery System of Message. Based on these four components, *al-Sūrī* analyses the media campaign of the jihadist movement. He states that, in the past, the advocacy drive failed because of four deficiencies. One, the target audience was only the elite segment. Two, the content of the message treated the question of governance. Three, the style of the message was egoistical, uncompromising, threatening, impassionate and non-appealing to the masses. Finally, the delivery system of message was through clandestine written ways.

However, developments on the jihadist media front during the Bosnian and Chechen wars [1992-95, and 1994-96 and 1999-present], particularly with the use of Compact Discs, video tapes and the Internet, turned that campaign into a huge success, claims *al-Sūrī*. He furthermore cites four other reasons for this media success. First, it targeted the *'umma* at large. Secondly, the message focused on the obligation to join the jihad in order to prevent foreign aggression – an idea religiously deep-seated within the public and comprehensible to them. Thirdly, the style was passionate and inspiring, including the promise of victory and rewards. Fourthly, the delivery system included publications and magazines, and electronic media.

Based on these historical examples, and the lessons learned from them, *al-Sūrī* presents a set of recommendations for today's jihadist advocacy drive. First, it must target the *'umma* in its entirety, including foreign language (non-Arabic) speakers, and opponents of the movement must be targeted with "threatening messages". Secondly, the content of the message must focus on the injustice committed against the *'umma* through history, from the Prophet's life to "modern day

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[112] 'Abū Muṣᶜab al-Sūrī, "دعوة المقاومة الاسلامية العالمية" ("Call to Global Islamic Resistance").

[113] For a detailed description of *'Abū Muṣᶜab al-Sūrī* and his work, see Lia, Brynjar, *Architect of Global Jihad. The life of al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri*, London: Hurst, forthcoming 2007.

[114] 'Abū Muṣᶜab al-Sūrī, "نظرية الاعلام والتحريض في دعوة المقاومة الاسلامية العالمية" ("Theory of Media and Incitement in the Call to Global Islamic Resistance"), Chapter 8, section 8 (pp. 1437-1500), in "عوة المقاومة الاسلامية العالمية" ("Call to Global Islamic Resistance"). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

conspiracies against the Islamic world". It should also emphasize achievements in preserving the Islamic faith, such as narratives of resistance and martyrdom. Furthermore, the message should be educational and disseminate information about military science and warfare through training manuals and personal battlefield experiences. The content in the message should also include Quranic textual material and fatwas for religious legitimacy. Thirdly, the style of the message must be tailored to different audiences, and reflect the levels of awareness, culture and education of the public. Fourthly, the delivery systems of the message must combine modern and popular means of communication. The foremost of these are the Internet and satellite TV, and *al-Sūrī* stresses the utilization and manipulation of computer capabilities and mass transmission over the World Wide Web. However, he does not dismiss the role of printed material, the mosques, and oral transmission, in order to reach the segments of the population that do not have access to, or are incapable of using, modern technology.

Another interesting component of the advocacy drive is the establishment of "Incitement and Media Brigades". *Al-Sūrī* recommends that "those qualified [technically, linguistically and religiously] for such a mission undertake the formation of cells for advocating and disposing for jihad, and facilitate the enterprise of jihad by providing comprehensive information and guidance". The Media Brigades are responsible for the achievement of the jihadist advocacy drive as outlined above.

It is important to bear in mind that the use of the media is only one element of a comprehensive jihadist strategy discussed by *al-Sūrī*. Nevertheless, on several occasions in his treatise, *al-Sūrī* reveals a general perception that Western counterterrorism efforts include an aggressive media war aimed at slandering the image of the jihadists, and states that jihadist propagandists engaging in similar activities against the West will play the crucial role in breeding the Global Islamic Resistance.

To conclude, *al-Sūrī*'s media strategy seems to focus on influencing public opinion and offering detailed advice on the four components: audience, content, style, and means of delivery of the message. It is conceivably the most comprehensive media strategy available for the global jihadist movement.

'Abū ᶜUbayd al-Qurashī

Al-Sūrī's ideas have sometimes been interpreted as being a development of al-Qaeda strategist *Abū ᶜUbayd al-Qurashī*'s work.[115] In an article published in the jihadist magazine *al-'Ansār* in 2002, *al-Qurashī* positioned the global jihadist movement within the framework of 4th generation warfare (4GW).[116] The theory of 4GW was developed by American Colonel William S. Lind, and appeared in the Marine Corps Gazette in 1989 in an article entitled "The changing face of war:

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[115] Black, Andrew, "Al-Suri's Adaptation of Fourth Generation Warfare Doctrine", *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor,* Volume 4, Issue 18 (September 21, 2006), www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370137 (accessed 10 January, 2007).

[116] 'Abū ᶜUbayd al-Qurashī, "حروب الجيل الرابع" ("Fourth Generation Warfare"), *al-'Ansār* No. 2, January 28, 2002. The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

into the fourth generation".[117] Lind defines 4GW as nonlinear, geographically dispersed warfare, involving non-national/transnational entities such as religion or ideology. Moreover, it depends upon new technology, and includes a sophisticated form of psychological warfare through the manipulation of the media.[118] *Al-Qurashī* claims that 4GW is upon us, with al-Qaeda's demonstration of "superiority of the militarily weaker side" and "defeat of nations by stateless opponents".

Regarding the use of media, *al-Qurashī* cites Lind and other Western strategists: "Television news broadcasts may become more damaging weapons than armored brigades", "psychological influence [...] will seek to destroy support for the fighters among the enemy's own people", and " influence over the media and other information networks [...] manipulates public opinion". However, *al-Qurashī* claims, the media is the front where America holds an advantage in today's 4GW. Therefore, he calls upon the jihadist movement to give extra attention to the media and to produce serious and targeted communication in order to break the American media blockade and to regain the positive effect of the movement's "heroic actions in creating sympathy and support in the Islamic world".

Al-Qurashī's media strategy emphasizes the influence on public opinion, including both the enemy and the supporter public. He does not give specific details as to how to influence public opinion, but his media strategy nevertheless seems to represent a noteworthy contribution in the category of jihadist strategic studies, as it exclusively employs Western theories and sources to support its arguments.

’Abū Bakr Nājī

’Abū Bakr Nājī[119] is the pen name of the author of the online book "Management of barbarism", published on the web by the al-Qaeda affiliated "Center for Islamic Studies and Research".[120] *Nājī*, described as a so-called rising star in the jihadist movement, outlines a "grand strategy for defeating the U.S." based on Western studies of management and military and political theory, as well as the history of the jihadist experience.[121] He states, much as *al-Sūrī*, that the jihadists have been unsuccessful in the past because of the role of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, and particularly because of the latter's media campaign which has convinced the masses of U.S. invincibility. However, according to *Nājī*, with the one remaining superpower engaged in occupations in the Islamic world, the jihadists now face a great propaganda victory. He acknowledges that it is unlikely that the U.S. can be defeated militarily,

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[117] Lind, William S. (*et al*.), "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation", *Marine Corps Gazette,* October 1998, pp. 22-26, www.d-n-i.net/fcs/4th_gen_war_gazette.htm (accessed 10 January 2007).

[118] *Ibid.*

[119] A well-known pen-jihadist from his articles with the magazine "صوت الجهاد" ("The Voice of the Jihad").

[120] ’Abū Bakr Nājī, "ادارة التوحش" ("Management of barbarism"), *Center for Islamic Studies and Research*, via www.tawhed.ws/c?i=62 (accessed 10 January 2007). Original version and English translation also available from the Combating Terrorism Center: www.ctc.usma.edu/Management_of_Savagery.pdf (accessed June 2007).

[121] Brachman, Jarret M., and William McCants, "Stealing al-Qaeda's Playbook".

but claims that a clash is important for communication victories in the short term (and for the political defeat of the U.S. in the long term).

"Management of barbarism" refers to the period of chaos after the collapse of a state, for instance as a result of jihadist operations, and *Nājī* offers advice on how to exploit and control such a situation. His "path of empowerment" guides the jihadists through the required steps. A first goal is to destroy the authority of America and spread confidence in the souls of Muslims by "revealing the deceptive media to be a power without force".[122] According to *Nājī*, the enemy is weak with regard to battle, and balances this weakness with the use of gadgets, including a deceptive "media halo". Therefore, he claims it is imperative to understand the media policies of the adversary in order to win the military and political battles.

Nājī's plan seems to include both a military and a media strategy, the latter targeting the masses with the goals that they join the jihad, offer positive support, and have a negative attitude towards the enemy. The media strategy also targets enemy troops with lower salaries with the intention of encouraging them to leave their service, and also aiming to recruit officers of Muslim armies to the ranks of the mujahideen. A media plan which seeks to justify jihadist operations, especially to the masses, must be established, *Nājī* argues. *Nājī's* focus on the masses seems to dominate his media strategy, as "the masses will be our back and support in the future". Another target audience for the media is the "evil sheikhs", who question the jihadist cause and must therefore be refuted.

Nājī gives detailed examples of how a media plan should complement a militant operation: an announcement given in connection with a hostage-taking operation multiplies the attention it draws, and a statement alone prior to an attack on oil facilities will perhaps increase the price of oil (supporting the income of the Muslim people).

These examples apply mostly to the traditional media and are based on the idea that sensational operations draw the attention of the world media and influence opinion. *Nājī* does not specifically treat the use of new media in his communication strategy, but does refer to, and encourages, the use of the Internet. For instance, he suggests reference sources for doctrinal and military tactics which are all available online.[123]

In conclusion, it seems that *Nājī*'s media strategy focuses on defeating government and Western control over information delivery. It acknowledges the important role of public opinion and stresses that the masses are the main target of the jihadist media campaign: the campaign must justify the jihad in order for the masses to support the global jhadist movement.

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[122] 'Abū Bakr Nājī, "ادارة التوحش" ("Management of barbarism"). The following quotes ibid, unless otherwise noted.
[123] *Nājī* recommends the reading of "The encyclopedia of Jihad" (a collection of texts from Afghanistan, now available online), *al-Battār* online magazine, the writings of *al-Qurashī* in the online *al-'Ansār* magazines, and the works on the *al-'Uswa* website.

Sayf al-ᶜAdl

Sayf al-ᶜAdl is a former colonel in the Egyptian Special Forces who joined the jihad in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, becoming a military adviser to al-Qaeda. He has published extensively in the jihadist magazines *Ṣawt al-Jihād* and *al-Battār*, particularly on security and communications. *Sayf al-ᶜAdl* is currently believed to be under house arrest in Iran.[124]

One article that appeared in *al-Battār* Issue no. 7 was entitled "Information and Counter-activities".[125] It is a book-style article explaining the concept of public opinion and how to exploit it for the benefit of the jihadists. It informs the reader about the "character of public opinion" in different societies, how to measure public opinion, and, most importantly, it presents ways to influence public opinion. These include repetition of an issue in different media outlets; presentation of facts, as opposed to fake rumors in society; diverting the attention of the masses to a topic they previously did not know of; and arousing emotions in the audience in order to win sympathy – but only by sticking to the truth. The article is another illustration of the apparent importance the global jihadist strategists give to the opinion of the masses.

More recently, *Sayf al-ᶜAdl* has been in the limelight due to the text "al-Qaeda's strategy until 2020". In 2005, Jordanian journalist *Fu'ād Ḥusayn* authored a book entitled *Al-Zarqāwī – al-jīl al-thānī lī l-Qāᶜida* ("Al-Zarqawi: al-Qaeda's second generation"), in which he synthesized the views of several al-Qaeda leaders and presented them in a seven phase strategy for the development of the global jihadist movement in the two first decades of 21ˢᵗ century.[126] On the jihadist web forums, where the strategy seems to be highly popular, the "2020 strategy" document has been attributed to *Sayf al-ᶜAdl*. While it treats the media rather briefly, it is worth noting that its second phase, the "Eye-opener stage" (*marḥalat fatḥ al-ᶜuyūn)*, aims to inform both supporters and adversaries. Here it is argued that, through the Internet, electronic jihad should be carried out to propagate al-Qaeda's ideas, and open the eyes of the Islamic *'umma* to see the truth about the United States of America. Iraq is designated as the epicenter for the jihad in this second phase, running from 2003 until 2006. In retrospect, it appears that Iraq has been the main theater of the jihad in this period, and the source of an intensive jihadist online media campaign. However, *Sayf al-ᶜAdl*'s second phase exceeds the timeframe of 2006. Comments have also been made as to whether this "strategy" is really a strategy: published in 2005, the first phases are rather observations of the present. Nevertheless, one can argue that *Sayf al-ᶜAdl*'s alleged signature on the text and the widespread attention it received on the jihadist web makes it an important and influential piece.

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[124] "Saif al-Adl", *CTC Harmony Profiles*, Combating Terrorism Center, http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/profile_pdf/Saif.pdf (accessed 10 September 2007).

[125] Sayf al-ᶜAdl, "الإعلام والنشـاط المُضاد", ("Information and Counter-Activities"), *al-Battār Magazine*, No. 7, 2003. Reproduced by *al-Nūr* media organization in the e-book: "النظرية الاعلامية" ("Media theory"), via www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=23399 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[126] Ḥusayn, Fu'ād, "الزرقاوي الجيل الثاني للقاعدة" ("Al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda's second generation") Lebanon: Dar al-Khayal, 2005.

’Abū Ḥudhayfa's Letter to *’Abū ᶜAbd ’Allāh*

In June 2000, an unknown, presumably Saudi, jihadist under the name *’Abū Ḥudhayfa* sent a letter to his mentor bin Laden (also known as *’Abū ᶜAbd ’Allāh*) and presented his views on the leadership skills and tactics required for Al-Qaeda to achieve victory.[127] Emphasis was given to political and military methods, as well as public relations strategies and information management techniques.

’Abū Ḥudhayfa begins the letter with a critique of previous media campaigns, or more specifically the lack of well-coordinated campaigns. He comments on jihadist operations in Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya and Afghanistan, which he claims, generally, lacked a PR aspect. "People resorted to Western foreign media to quench their thirst for the true news". The author sees a potential for utilizing these past events for publicity purposes, for example, by publishing biographies of the martyrs. However, the media should be up-to-date and cover events as they occur. As soon as possible after an attack, he argues, the movement should also take responsibility in public, in order to "affirm the movement's credibility to the people".

’Abū Ḥudhayfa also focuses on the psychological and emotional effects of jihadist media, suggesting that the informational apparatus should emphasize martyrdom operations. Published recordings of martyrdom wills and operations are thought to arouse the nation and rally mujahideen to join the movement. *’Abū Ḥudhayfa* explicitly links this practice to the Palestinian organization Hamas, and encourages the jihadists to imitate this technique.[128]

On an organizational level, *’Abū Ḥudhayfa* stresses that the information work must be carried out by individuals within the regular cadre of the movement, bound by commitment and a contract, and not only by volunteers. The information section, "the link between the movement and the Muslim masses", must be separated organizationally from the political section. Yet, political and informational functions are combined, both being linked to the military function, and "all acting together harmoniously to serve the ancestral jihad plan".

’Abū Ḥudhayfa offers details with regard to means of communication, concentrating on new media. He suggests using e-mail, and points to how large website locations can be used to store files on the Internet. He also highlights the importance of establishing a website for bin Laden that collects all his written and audio-visual communication, adding: "I hope that anxiety over security does not hinder progress in this field". While security is often a key component of texts dealing with the use of new communication technology, *’Abū Ḥudhayfa* instead focuses on the desire of the people to receive information: "People are thirsty for information and impatiently waiting for your [bin Laden's] news".

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[127] *’Abū Ḥudhayfa*, "A memo to Sheikh Abu Abdullah", 2000, available through Combating Terrorism Center website, Arabic version: http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/AFGP-2002-003251-Orig.pdf, English translation: http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/AFGP-2002-003251-Trans.pdf (accessed 2 July 2007). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

[128] It is interesting to note that al-Qaeda began recording martyrdom wills and operations only after 2000, seemingly in line with the recommendations in *’Abū Ḥudhayfa*'s letter.

This letter was sent to bin Laden in the year 2000, and it appears that it may have had great influence on the media practice of al-Qaeda Central, and later on regional branches. The recording of martyrs' wills started with the operation on September 11, 2001, and the USS Cole attack in 2000 would have been taped, had the jihadist cameraman not overslept.[129]

ʾIbn ʾA*ḥ*mad al-Salīm

In 2003, *At-Tibyān* Publications, a jihadist online publishing house specifically known to translate ideological texts, issued a document entitled "39 ways to serve and participate in jihad".[130] Written in Riyadh by *Muḥammad bin ʾAḥmad al-Salīm*, it offers advice on various ways to carry out jihad. As the Saudi Arabian jihadist milieu showed pioneering efforts in the media jihad – despite, or perhaps because of *ʾAbū Ḥudhayfa* critique above – it is perhaps not surprising that this text offers strategies for media campaigns, and, in particular, incorporates the electronic jihad.

Advice number 21 (of 39) highlights the importance of distributing news about the mujahideen among Muslims. Allegedly, the benefits of this activity include recognition by the community of the unity of the movement, which provides a base of support to the mujahideen, and sows optimism among the community. Furthermore, it breaks the media blockade of the enemies, who, *al-Salīm* claims, have gained control of most media outlets. In his critique, *al-Salīm* singles out the London-based pan-Arab daily newspaper *al-Sharq al-ʾAwsaṭ*, which he urges his fellow brothers to boycott. As for the media work of the mujahideen, *al-Salīm* suggests the use of the traditional media, but also other means, including web forums and online chatrooms, electronic mailing lists, and the printing and distribution of news from Internet sites.

Advice number 34 concerns "Electronic jihad", thus treating the use of new communication technology more specifically. The Internet is described as a "blessed medium" to distribute and follow the news, to defend the mujahideen by responding to false allegations, and to publicize their ideas and goals. *Al-Salīm* adds that the Internet offers the advantage of reaching millions of people in seconds. He suggests an "Internet project", in which designated cells use web forums to discuss jihad and republish or prepare articles. Media content, or "subject threads in the forum", should include incitement to jihad, defense of the mujahideen, ideological consciousness-raising for jihad, scholarly support and studies in Islamic law about jihad, and exposing of secular and heretic opponents of jihad. *Al-Salīm* reveals a system for continuous operations of the "Internet project": one cell member should post news, articles, or other information every day, while the others should comment and stimulate general participation.

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[129] Wright, Lawrence, *The Looming Tower,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

[130] *Muḥammad bin ʾAḥmad al-Salīm*, "39 ways to serve and participate in jihad", *at-Tibyān Publications*, 2003, www.tibyan.com/article.php?id=1170 (accessed June 2005). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted. The original Arabic version was published elsewhere and probably earlier. This author has only had access to the English version.

8   The media establishments

The establishment of a large number of jihadist media groups – seemingly in accordance with
recommendations from the strategists – has been followed by the publication of templates and
outlines for their work. Habitual strategic goals include "breaking the Crusader control over the
media" and "disseminating true information about the global jihadist movement". Tactics for
reaching these goals have also been presented. Below are two examples of such texts that
combine strategic thought and tactical advice, published by some of the largest jihadist media
groups. The texts are recent, and highlight what seem to be new trends in the jihadist media
strategy.

Global Islamic Media Front and *Najd al-Rāwī*
In August 2006, the Global Islamic Media Front published a message entitled "A Working Paper
for a Media Invasion of America" on jihadist websites.[131] The message was signed by *Najd al-
Rāwī*, until then an unknown pen-jihadist, who nevertheless received great attention on the
forums.

The document presented a plan to invade the U.S. media and offered examples of means and
methods to be used to succeed in this plan. *Al-Rāwī* emphasized the importance of a media war
accompanying the military war. This media war should target and seek to influence a Western
public. *Al-Rāwī* therefore explained the need for English-proficient individuals to translate
jihadist messages, and to write articles and powerful messages. He pointed to the need for people
with experience in working with graphics, and finally for people to ensure quality control of the
English material, in terms of both language and religious content. Suggested projects include
"English translations of statements of the Shaykhs of Jihad [...] to throw fear into the American
people's hearts", and translations of subtitles in videos of jihadist military operations. Among the
targets for using these products *al-Rāwī* lists American forums, American Pal Talk chat rooms,
American newspapers and magazines, and TV stations with websites. Finally, he argues that well-
known American writers, such as Thomas Friedman, Samuel P. Huntington, Francis Fukuyama,
and research groups such as the RAND Corporation, should be addressed.

The document seems rather unique due to its detailed advice on how to reach the West, and its
naming of specific persons and institutions to target. It also represents a seemingly growing desire
among media-jihadists to reach a wider public, and to focus specifically on the audience in the
United States of America. It seeks both intimidation of a mass U.S. audience, and academic
discussion with the U.S. elite in order to counter their ideas and theories.

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[131] *Najd al-Rāwī*, "ورقة عمل- غزو أمريكا إعلامياً" ("A working paper for a media invasion of America"),
posted by Global Islamic Media Front, on *al-Firdaws* Forum, 11 August 2006,
www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=15792 (accessed 2 September 2006). The following quotes *ibid*,
unless otherwise noted.

Al-Fajr Media Center

An article that appeared in the October 2006 issue of *al-Fajr* Media Center's "Technical Mujahid" magazine is another recent contribution to the theoretical literature on media jihad.[132] Written by a member of the "Information Bureau of the Islamic Army of Iraq", under the pen-name *al-Burāq*, it echoes prevailing statements about the role of the media, such as: "The jihadist media in our present age has become a mainstay in the battle of Islam against the crusaders and the nations of unbelief".

The article also strengthens *al-Rāwī*'s strategy of targeting the West. "Inflicting psychological damage on the enemy is the primary mission of the jihadist media", states *al-Burāq*. He supports his view by referring to the tradition of the Prophet, from the collections of *al-Tirmidhī* and *al-Nasā'ī*: "ᶜ*Abd 'Allāh bin Rawāha* used to recite poetry satirizing enemies in the mosque, and was reproached by ᶜ*Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb*. The Prophet intervened and said: His words will be more powerful against them [the enemies] than a rain of arrows".[133]

Apparently, *al-Burāq* envisions a jihadist media strategy based on the use of information technology, particularly the Internet, which includes words, sound, and image. He also highlights the importance of film production. In order to reach the enemy, and especially the family of the soldiers, he suggests creating sites that operate in the major languages of the world, in particular in English.

Finally, *al-Burāq* warns that the jihadists are facing a strong enemy who "has in his hands the weapons of technology and tremendous scientific development" – however, the enemy lacks the faith that guides the jihadists on their way, thereby shortening the technological lead of the enemy.

9   Summary

Despite the different nature of the above texts (speeches, interviews, books, articles, and postings on web forums) and authors (leaders, recognized strategists, and newcomers) the ideas concerning the role of the media that are presented seem to be based on a relatively similar set of assumptions.

A common point of departure for the texts is the perception of the media superiority of the enemy. All seem to agree that the enemy, both the West and local governments, effectively has used its advantageous media position against the jihadist movement. Nevertheless, the strategists disagree on how to deal with the media of the enemy, and recommendations range from boycotting local papers, to entering and using Western online media outlets, or simply to leaving it to terrorize its own people.

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[132] Al-Burāq, "نريده في عقر دارهم" ("We want it inside their country"), مجلة المجاهد التقني ("The Technical Mujahid Magazine"), no 1, October 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=39586 (accessed September 2006). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

[133] *Al-Tirmidhī* and *al-Nasā'ī* are two of the six major Sunni *ḥadīth* collections.

The jihadist strategists generally agree on the fact that they have failed in their attempts to communicate strategically in the past. One reason for the failure is that their communication has reached only the elite. Therefore, the masses are highlighted as the most important audience. However, the message should be tailored to different groups in society, an idea that illustrates the concept of audience segmentation. Jihadists separate clearly between friendly and adversary audiences. Friendly audiences include both current and potential supporters, and adversary audiences include fallen Muslims/apostates (near enemy) and the West/unbelievers (far enemy). A separation between audiences with different level of education is also suggested.

Consideration of public opinion is another recurring issue in the jihadist media strategy. Considering the balance between "necessary" violent operations and negative reactions in public opinion, strategists are painfully aware of the fatal consequences of having public opinion turned against the movement. They therefore recommend that the main concern should be that of public opinion - through mass distribution of justification of their violent activities. Mass distribution is also expressed in more general terms: the idea that any issue should be advertised repeatedly in different outlets reflects the concept of media profusion.

Justification, as mentioned above, is thus a major objective of the media strategy. Justification, or legitimization, should be based on both religious and historic evidence. Other goals of communication that are mentioned in, or can be derived from, the strategic texts in the above include: education of supporters, intimidation of enemies, and propagation of the movement (gaining support, motivation and encouragement). Indeed, *al-Sūrī*'s entire theory about using the media is entitled the 'incitement theory', highlighting the role of propagation of the movement through the media.

While the texts outline an organizational separation between, for example, political, military and informational work, they also call for the coordination of militant operations and communication efforts. It seems to be argued that a successful information campaign adds to the value of violent activities.

Targeting the Western enemy through media is not a new idea among jihadists, yet more recent texts have a stronger focus on this aspect. One can argue that this is explained by the fact that while bin Laden and his allies were able to reach the West through mainstream media a few years ago, security measures now restrict such communication flows. Therefore, a desire to address the West has re-emerged. This is expressed in the suggestions to translate media material into foreign languages, and to influence and use Western media outlets.

Finally, in most of the selected texts one can observe an emphasis on new media. *Al-Sūrī*, for example, attributed much of the recent media success of the jihadist movement to the use of new communication technology. While the texts praise and advise on the use of Internet channels such as chat forums, Pal Talk, and online newspapers, few substantial analyses of the benefits of new versus traditional media are offered. Yet, timeliness of the delivery of the message, and the large number of recipients online are highlighted in this respect. The texts also advise the exploitation

of the multimedia options that online media offers. However, as focus is placed also on the use of print media, it seems that the simultaneous use of new and traditional media is a preferred jihadist media strategy.

It is worth keeping in mind that this summary synthesizes a number of independent texts, produced at different times, with a different public in mind. Each text alone presents a strategy for the use of the media, and was most likely never intended to be seen in relation to other such strategies. Yet, the fact that these texts are all available and widely distributed online opens up the possibility that practitioners of the media jihad have consulted one or more of the strategies, and operate accordingly.

The following chapters deal with the jihadist media practice. They offer an overview and analysis of jihadist media groups and the material they produce, which possibly will reveal connections between theory and practice in the jihadist media strategy.

III. Jihadist media in practice

10 Transitions in the media jihad

From Print...

Osama bin Laden reportedly displayed a "natural instinct for publicity",[134] and "even when he was a relatively young man, [he] was thinking about his media strategy".[135] His early thoughts about media strategies predated the launch of new communication technologies, and therefore mainly included the printed press, radio, and television.

Osama bin Laden started his militant jihadist career in Afghanistan, among the "Afghan Arabs" supporting the Afghan mujahideen in their struggle against the Soviet occupation. *ᶜAbd 'Allāh ᶜAzzām*, bin Laden's mentor, had already established the Services Office (*Maktab al-Khidamāt*) in 1984 in Peshawar, to administer the Arab mujahideen, and act externally as a media office. *ᶜAzzām* also financed a number of the many Arabic language publications - in the 1990s more than 20 - that were published in the area. [136]

Bin Laden supported these activities, and in 1984 started financing the magazine *al-Jihād*, a publication designed to attract money and recruits to the Afghan cause. In order to spread the cause further, he also invited mainstream journalists to Afghanistan to document his battles against the Soviets. At the end of the 1980s, Egyptian filmmaker *'Issām Dirāz* started shooting a documentary about bin Laden and his movement, which resulted in three released films. A

[134] Atwan, Abdel Bari, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*, London: Saqi, 2006, p.159.
[135] Bergen, Peter, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, New York: Free Press, 2006, p. 425.
[136] Zaydān, Aḥmad Mu'affaq, *The "Afghan Arabs" Media at Jihad,* Islamabad: The Pakistan Futuristics Foundation & Institute, 1999.

biographer, *Ḥāmid Mīr*, also followed bin Laden during the 80s, but has yet to publish his biography.

Bin Laden also assisted in establishing a media office in London in 1994, called the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC). The office was led by *Khālid al-Fawwāz*, and published and distributed bin Laden's statements and letters between 1994 and 1998. It allegedly also served as a vehicle for messages between various al-Qaeda cells, and facilitated interviews with bin Laden for a number of international media outlets. [137] Bin Laden gave his first interview to a representative of the Western press, Robert Fisk from the British newspaper the Independent, in 1993. His first interview to a global TV network was given to CNN in March 1997. At the time, bin Laden allegedly chose CNN over BBC and CBS's 60 minutes show, because of the larger audience CNN would reach.[138] In 1999, bin Laden gave his first television interview in Arabic to the satellite channel al-Jazeera (*al-Jazīra*).

By the end of 1999, bin Laden had stopped giving interviews, and his communications were instead recorded by the media committee of al-Qaeda, incidentally headed by a jihadist with the catchy nom-de-guerre *'Abū Reuter*. Tapes were then given to the Arab media for further distribution.[139] The main reason for bin Laden's halt in media appearances was allegedly due to the Taliban's - bin Laden's host in Afghanistan - concern with his careless handling of media situations. Reportedly, bin Laden gave press conferences from camps in Afghanistan that the Taliban had denied existed.[140] This resulted in great embarrassment for the Taliban, who subsequently confiscated all of bin Laden's means of communication, including his satellite phones.[141] However, bin Laden seems to have been reluctant to give up the media limelight, and *'Abū Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī*, strategist and former media adviser to bin Laden, reproached him for jeopardizing their safe haven by disobeying the Taliban: "I think our brother [bin Laden] has caught the disease of [television] screens, flashes, fans and applause".[142]

Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda movement were also very well aware of the effects of 'events as communication', and planned operations with the objective of receiving maximum mainstream media attention. For example, allegedly, one of the reasons that the U.S. embassy in Kenya was targeted in 1998 was the idea that taking the life of the female American ambassador would generate more publicity than that of a male.[143] As for the 9/11 events, bin Laden reportedly described them as a set of communications:

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[137] Indictment, US vs. bin Laden, http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/reports/pdfs/binladen/indict.pdf (accessed 10 March 2007).

[138] Bergen, Peter, *Holy War, Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, London: Phoenix, 2002.

[139] *Ibid.*

[140] Lia, Brynjar, *Architect of Global Jihad. The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri,* pp. 286-87.

[141] Bergen, Peter, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*.

[142] Cullison, Alan, "Inside al-Qaeda's Hard Drive", *Atlantic Monthly,* September 2004, www.theatlantic.com/doc/200409/cullison (accessed 10 May 2007).

[143] Wright, Lawrence, *The Looming Tower*.

> "These young men... said in deeds, in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed all other speeches made everywhere in the world. The speeches are understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs - even by the Chinese. It is above all what the media said".[144]

However, the jihadists have expressed skepticism and mistrust towards the mainstream media, accusing them of manipulating the jihadist message.[145]

...to Online...

At the same time that the jihadists were relying mainly on mainstream media, new technologies were entering the communication sphere. Despite initial debate during the 1980s about whether or not it was consistent with Islamism to use any kind of technology of Western origin, the movement soon came to embrace the Internet and the World Wide Web. *ᶜAbd 'Allāh ᶜAzzām* was reportedly a fierce advocate of the use of new electronic technology, and encouraged his followers, among them bin Laden, to exploit the potential of this evolving medium.[146]

By 1995, radical Islamist groups had started using email lists to disseminate information. Simultaneously, designated jihadist media groups started to operate on the web. The term 'media group' describes entities that present themselves as producers, reproducers, and distributors of jihadist material. These groups can be affiliated with a specific group or with groups in a specific country, or only loosely associated with the global jihadist movement in general. Many stand out as being highly productive, spreading news and other communications to and from geographically scattered cells of the movement, and, just as importantly, to the public at large.

The oldest online jihadist media group is probably the Islamic Media Center (IMC). Allegedly founded already in 1991, it produced online material "in a time when the Internet was a new thing".[147] The IMC was known to distribute training manuals, and it also produced films. However, since 2005, the IMC has been inactive. The websites 'alneda.com' and 'maalemaljihad.com' are other vanguards of the online media jihad.[148]

Another example of an early online media group is *ᶜAzzām* Publications. *ᶜAzzām* Publications, named after the Palestinian *ᶜAbd 'Allāh ᶜAzzām*. It began operations in late 1996 through a website (www.azzam.com) and a post office box in London. It described itself as "an independent media organization providing authentic news and information about Jihad and the Foreign

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[144] Osama bin Laden, in unauthenticated videotape, November 2001, reproduced in Hegghammer, Thomas, "Dokumentasjon om al-Qa'ida – Intervjueer, kommunikéer og andre primærkilder, 1990-2002".

[145] For a recent example, see a note from *as-Saḥāb* about the "[...] counterfeiting of the facts and altering the purposes and objectives of the [bin Laden] speech by al-Jazeerah". Posted on *al-Ḥisba*, " بلا تلبيس ("السحاب للإنتاج تقد إلى أهلنا بالعراق ـ رسالة من الشيخ أسامة" ("No deception, *as-Saḥāb* Production presents, To our People in Iraq – letter from Shaykh Osama"), 23 October 2007, www.alhesbahonline.net/v/showthread.php?t=150312, (accessed 23 October, 2007).

[146] Atwan, Abdel Bari, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*.

[147] Lia, Brynjar, "Jihadi Web Media Production'.

[148] For details on 'maalemaljihad.com', see Atwan, Bari Abdel, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda,* p.127. For information about 'alneda.com', see Di Justo, Patrick, "How Al-Qaeda Site Was Hijacked", *Wired*, 8 October 2002, www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2002/08/54455 (accessed 10 September, 2007).

Mujahideen everywhere [...] based entirely on the Internet".[149] *ᶜAzzām* Publications offered news, articles, videos, and photos on its website, and financed its business through the sale of books and cassettes. Much of the material focused on Bosnia, Chechnya and Afghanistan, the most important jihadi fronts at the time. Indeed, the Chechen jihadi site 'www.qoqaz.net' was allegedly linked to *ᶜAzzām* Publications.[150] While the latter site still exists (although under a new URL), the *ᶜAzzām* website was shut down shortly after 9/11 2001, and only old *ᶜAzzām* publications now circulate on the web.

At-Tibyān Publications has existed since at least 2001, and has operated on a number of websites.[151] The publishing house specializes in translation and subtitling of ideological works of al-Qaeda, and presents figures such as *ᶜAbd 'Allāh ᶜAzzām, Ḥamūd bin ᶜUqlā' al-Shuᶜaybī, 'Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī*, and *Nāṣir al-Faḥd*. Currently, *at-Tibyān* seems to be inactive as the *at-Tibyān* publications circulating on the web observed by this author are dated no later than early 2006. However, there a web forum exists called *at-Tibyān* and a blog called *at-Tibyān* Publications.[152] It is not known whether these sites are official *at-Tibyān* Publications sites: the blog has been inactive since February 2006 and the discussion forum is closed for registration.[153] One should, however, be aware of the important role that *at-Tibyān* has played in the jihadist media campaign in the past, and indeed continues to play through its previous publications which are still available online.[154]

A more recent and perhaps better known representative of the jihadist online media campaign is the late al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. With his video-taped and Internet-distributed scenes of hostage beheadings, he made the media jihad notorious across the world. Such brutal, yet relatively sophisticated, jihadist online media campaigns did not end with al-Zarqawi. On the contrary, the media jihad seems to be a business on the rise – a fact illustrated by the establishment of a large number of new online media groups during the last few years. Some of these currently active groups will be dealt with in depth in the case studies presented below.

It is worth noting that the emergence of such Internet-based media groups marked not only a shift from print to online, but also to a large extent appears to have facilitated the move from the use of mainstream (Western and local) media to media outlets operating in the name of al-Qaeda and the global jihadist movement. While al-Qaeda also in the past exercised ownership and control over information through publication of printed magazines and newspapers, they did not, to the same

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[149] "FAQs about Azzam Publications", *ᶜAzzām Publications*, via www.confuddled.com/board/messages/7/8.html?1054157383 (accessed 10 June, 2007).
[150] *Ibid.*
[151] For example: http://tibyaan.atspace.com/, http://www.tibyan.tk/, http://www.tibyan.com, http://www.tibyanpubs.com.
[152] *At-Tibyān* Publications blog: http://tibyan.blogspot.com/. The blog links to the *at-Tibyān* forum: www.at-tawheed.com, (both accessed 15 May, 2007).
[153] The forum is closed for registration as of May 2007. When registration was open, two Muslims needed to vouch for new member applicants.
[154] See, for example, posting on Islamic Networking Forum, "All Tibyan Publications on Permanent Links Insha Allah", 20 December 2006, http://talk.islamicnetwork.com/showthread.php?t=12294 (accessed July 2007).

extent, control information about the movement that was spread to a wider audience. The Internet seems to have opened the way for media groups to operate more independently, and to cover a broader and wider audience. Online jihadist-controlled media channels have thus emerged as a crucial supplement to mainstream mass media.

... and Beyond

While the online scene currently seems to be the main theatre for the jihadist media campaign, and new jihadist media companies continue to emerge on the Internet, other developments in the media jihad have become visible with time. They point to a slightly different use of the Internet, as well as to the use of other channels of communication.

First of all, the use of non-jihadist controlled online media outlets is increasingly common. In what is perhaps an attempt to reach a wider audience, jihadists have started to employ Western online outlets that exercise little control over content. User-generated blogs and video sharing sites, such as YouTube (www.youtube.com) and LiveLeak (www.liveleak.com), now contain a large collection of jihadist videos. These videos are mainly from Iraq, but numerous recordings from other al-Qaeda fronts are also available. Moreover, one can observe on these sites productions from the main jihadist media companies, such as *as-Saḥāb* and Global Islamic Media Front, though the companies appear to not distribute the films themselves. Instead, individuals who support the movement seemingly post the videos, which are often followed by hostile discussions between online users.[155] Jihadists in discussion forums have also discussed the possibility of entering pro-jihadist information on American chat rooms or on Wikipedia, yet it is unknown whether this has actually taken place.[156] Nevertheless, signs seem to be emerging of a jihadist trend that is seeking to use and influence media outlets other than those under their control, and, in particular, Western media outlets.

New technologies have also entered the jihadist media scene. Early in 2007, jihadists started streaming TV broadcasts online.[157] While this service lasted only for a few months, a satellite TV station, established by jihadists in 2005, is still available. A TV channel, called *al-Zawrā'*, appears as a Sunni insurgent satellite television station that broadcasts footage of attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. It began broadcasting from Iraq, but was eventually closed down by U.S. forces. It then moved its broadcast to the Egyptian government-controlled satellite network NileSat, where it remained until technical problems forced it to move again in February 2007. Subsequently, French Eutelsat Communications hosted *al-Zawrā'*, before Western pressure forced it to move to the Dubai-based network Arabsat. Arabsat is owned by 22 countries of the Arab League, with Saudi Arabia as the principal shareholder. *al-Zawrā'* is owned and run by *Mishān al-Jabūrī*, an exiled member of Iraq's Parliament currently based in Syria. The videos aired on *al-Zawrā'*, also known as Muj-TV, are allegedly taken from insurgent websites. *Al-*

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[155] See for example: www.youtube.com/user/KhateebJihad (accessed 2 July 2003).

[156] Posting on *al-Firdaws* English Forum, "Psychological Warfare", 22 March 2007, http://alfirdaws.org/vbss/showthread.php?t=7835 (accessed 6 June 2007).

[157] The jihadist media group the Global Islamic Media Front established a TV service called the "Caliphate Voice Channel" that in January 2007 launched online streaming broadcasts.

Jabūrī himself has reportedly also gone on air to spread his personal views of the conflict in Iraq. Lately, *Al-Jabūrī* and his *al-Zawrā'* channel have united fronts with the anti-al-Qaeda elements of the Iraqi insurgency, but continue to air statements, music and graphic videos of attacks on Western forces.[158] The distribution of media material through cell phones has also become increasingly common. Videos in the 3GP format, designed for easy use on mobile devices, are made available online, and some jihadist forums operate sub-forums entitled "mobile forums". In addition to videos in a cell phone friendly format, these contain jihadist cell phone wallpapers, and images formatted for cell phones.[159] One can argue that the use of satellite-based TV and cell phones aims to further expand the audience of the jihadist media. While the satellite station is certainly accessible only to people with access to Arabsat, by using cell phones, images and messages may still reach a number of those without Internet access.

In addition to the innovative methods described above, the jihadists continue to use mainstream media. However, rather than using it primarily to spread their ideas, as they did earlier, it now appears to serve as a source of information. News stories in Western and local media about jihadism, the conflict in Iraq or in Afghanistan, offer the jihadists information about their opponents, such as developments in counterterrorism issues, Western military progress or retreat, and Western public opinion of the conflict.[160] Jihadists may also take advantage of mainstream media and general public information, such as timetables, information about electricity grids, *et cetera,* in order to identify future targets.[161] Mainstream press sources, in addition to assessments from Western academic and official institutions, are often observed circulating on the jihadist web.[162] Private counterterrorism enterprises, which, for example, provide English translations of jihadist material, are also referenced in jihadist forums in the English language.[163] These are passive uses of the media, and may as such be labeled a second dimension of the media jihad.

The practice of physically targeting journalists and media workers may be considered a third dimension. This aspect of the media jihad lies outside the main focus of this study, but merits mentioning as it appears to be increasing in scale. Attacks on media personnel is a phenomenon heavily observed in Iraq, where, as of July 2007, as many as 194 journalists and media assistants

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[158] "As-Sahab: The rise of new media through al-Qaeda's eyes", *The Layalina Review on Public Diplomacy and Arab Media*, Vol. III, No. 12, May 25- June 27, 2007, www.layalina.tv/press/PR_III.12.asp#article2 (accessed 10 June, 2007).

[159] "Internet Intelligence Report", *Terrorism Research Center*, August 2, 2007, Ed. 3, Vol. 31, www.terrorism.com (accessed 5 August 2007).

[160] See for instance, "How Jihadist Internet Forums are Used to Inform Mujahideen of News from Western Media", *MEMRI*, Special Dispatch Series - No. 1615, 8 June 2007, www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=jihad&ID=SP161507 (accessed 15 June 2007).

[161] The 9/11 Commission Report cites specific cases in which the hijackers used the Internet for such purposes, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, Authorized Edition, pp. 157, 164.

[162] See for example posting on *al-Firdaws* English Forum of an article from the Jamestown Foundation, www.alfirdaws.org/vbe/showthread.php?t=11942 (accessed August 2007).

[163] See for example posting on *al-Firdaws* English Forum of a SITE commentary on an al-Zawahiri speech, /www.alfirdaws.org/vbe/showthread.php?t=10950/ (accessed 6 July 2007).

have been killed since March 2003.[164] One may argue that this is perhaps a predictable result of a violent conflict. However, evidence suggests that such attacks are also part of a strategy by the global jihadist movement. Texts issued in the name of al-Qaeda in Iraq, as well as individuals on the discussion forums and in jihadist strategic literature, deal with al-Qaeda's apparent problem with the coverage of 'terrorism' in the mainstream media.[165] What the jihadists perceive as misinformation, or lack of support for their cause, is criticized, and they call for revenge on journalists who "publish materials injurious to the cause of the mujahideen".[166] From being mostly focused on Iraqi media workers, this violent strategy seems to have expanded, at least rhetorically, to target also Arabic satellite channels such as *al-ᶜArabiyya*, *al-ᶜIrāqiyya* and al-Jazeera, "mouthpieces of the Crusader and Jewish occupation".[167] In recent developments, this practice has spread to other groups, as female journalists in Palestine and Afghanistan have also been particular targets of Hamas and the Taliban, respectively.[168]

11   Restrictions with Internet-based media

The Internet has emerged as a main vehicle for the dissemination of jihadist information and propaganda, and appears to have contributed greatly to the ability of an increasing number of jihadist media groups to gain a foothold in the information world. Yet, from the above information, it seems obvious that the Internet, and the jihadist online media channels, are not the only means of communication used by the jihadists. This may stem from the recognition that a diversified media campaign is more functional in order to reach the jihadists' goals. But, it also perhaps arises from recognition of the fact that using the Internet as a media channel does indeed include certain limitations. According to this author, the main restrictions with the use of the Internet as a media outlet lie in the following three aspects: difficult Internet access for supporters, and jihadist and counterterrorism security measures.

As will be observed in the analysis of jihadist media material below, a main target audience seems to be supporters and potential supporters, and more specifically, Arabic-speaking Muslims. The majority of individuals belonging to this group are, allegedly, located in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). As a matter of fact, Internet access in this region is highly irregular, and the percentage of Internet users per total population varies from 15.2 in Morocco, to 6.6 in Saudi Arabia, and 0.1 in Iraq.[169]

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[164] This number according to "Reporters Sans Frontières", www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=43. "Committee to Protect Journalists" reports 110 killed journalists, www.cpj.org/index.html (both accessed 10 July 2007).

[165] Ulph, Stephen, "Al-Qaeda extends threats to journalists and intellectuals outside Iraq", *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 2, Issue 14 (July 22, 2005), http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369748 (accessed 10 July, 2007).

[166] *Ibid.*

[167] *Ibid.*

[168] See for example "Threats undermine media freedom in Afghanistan", *The Hindu*, June 12 2007, www.hindu.com/2007/06/12/stories/2007061208231200.htm, or "Gaza TV women protest at threats", *BBC news*, 4 June 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6720445.stm (both accessed 15 June 2007).

[169] Numbers according to http://opennet.net/research/profiles (accessed 10 July 2007).

The case of Iraq is indeed an interesting one. This study will argue that Iraq is the source and catalyst for the most extensive part of the jihadist online media campaign. Yet, this is the country in the MENA region with the lowest number of Internet users.[170] Under the regime of *Ṣaddām Ḥusayn*, information sharing, including the use of the Internet, was heavily controlled. The new Iraqi government ratified the Iraqi constitution in 2005, guaranteeing freedom of expression, and, reportedly, has not restricted Internet access or exercised filtering or censorship.[171] It appears that the use of the Internet is restricted rather by the state of war in the country. For instance, the power supply sometimes only covers a few hours of electricity per day in Baghdad.[172] On the other hand, the low number of Internet users in Iraq is perhaps misleading, as cyber cafés are now becoming more common. The U.S. Department of Defense has in fact spent more than USD 165 million on establishing Internet cafés, and the blogging community in Iraq is know to be very active.[173] In other MENA countries, freedom of expression is often restricted through technological, legal and physical means. The region as a whole has been labeled "one of the most repressive Web environments in the world".[174] This, in addition to a high number of illiterates, seemingly undermines the role of online jihadist media. However, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of jihadists are recruited from the educated strata of the society,[175] and therefore may have the means to circumvent restrictions.[176]

Due to the illegal nature of the global jihadist movement, the jihadists themselves have also taken measures to restrict access to their media material. Despite the articulated goal of the jihadist media to reach the widest possible audience, parts of their production remain accessible only to initiated members. Most of the media material is distributed on jihadist discussion forums, and new releases are often published on the most prominent forums before reaching other sites. Such prominent jihadist forums are generally password protected, and while many of them are open for registration, others require personal connections or screening through communication with the moderator before new members are accepted. The use of forums, as opposed to official websites for groups, may in itself be interpreted as a security measure, as forums are only open to member participation, and forum owners may disclaim responsibility for (illegal) content posted by visitors.[177]

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[170] Internet users in Afghanistan also number 0.1 % of the population, source: www.opennet.net (accessed 10 July 2007).

[171] "Iraq", OpenNet Initiative, http://opennet.net/research/profiles/iraq (accessed 10 July 2007).

[172] Zavis, Alexandra, "In Iraq, another summer of power shortages", *LA Times Online,* 14 August 2007, www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-heat14aug14,0,2993091.story?coll=la-home-world.

[173] "Iraq", OpenNet Initiative, http://opennet.net/research/profiles/iraq (accessed 15 August 2007).

[174] http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena.

[175] Marc Sageman, in his *Understanding Terrorist Networks,* 2004, claims that "most mujahideen have a higher technical education", pp. 162-3.

[176] Research on Internet filtering in the Middle East and North Africa reports that "some technologically sophisticated user groups went as far as developing their own circumvention tools [...] that enabled users to access blocked Jihadi-oriented Web sites." Source: http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena.

[177] Al-*'Ikhlāṣ* Forum, for example, presents the following notification: " المشاركات في هذا المنتدى لا تخضع للرقابة ولا تعبر بالضرورة عن رأي الموقع" ("Postings on this forum don't undergo censoring, and don't necessarily represent the views of al-*'Ikhlāṣ*"), www.ekhlaas.ws/forum/ (accessed July 2007).

While production of jihadist media material is probably carried out relatively 'safely', distribution on the Internet remains a critical security point, as material may be traced back to individuals. Sometimes a video production is released online weeks or months after the production date indicated in the opening scene. The time gap between production and release probably reflects the period it has taken the material to move from one place to another, and may indicate a certain level of cautiousness or tribulations occurring on the way. Technologically sophisticated solutions for protecting material, such as steganography and encryption - knowledge thought to be in the possession of online jihadists[178] - are unlikely to be used for media material. Again, one can assume that the lack of such measures reflects the goal of achieving a wide distribution of the jihadist media campaign.

From their side, counterterrorism officials both in the West and the Middle East closely monitor the jihadists' steps on the Internet. This has sparked a debate about whether one should seek to close down jihadist websites, or rather allow them to stay online, and continue their surveillance in order to gain insights about the movement. This debate also pertains to the issue of balancing security and civil liberties.[179] The body of laws, on national and international levels, regulates the measures that may be taken against such websites, and while a legal framework controls certain criminal activities on the Internet (such as child pornography, identity theft, credit card fraud, etc.), online propaganda activities seem to have been partially 'protected' by the concept of 'freedom of speech'.

Yet, over the last years, the increased awareness about terrorists' online propaganda activities has led to the establishment of resolutions and statements by various authorities. For example, UN Security Council Resolution 1624 (2005) calls to "prohibit by law incitement to commit a terrorist act or acts",[180] and, the Plan of Action of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288), 2006, calls on member states to "a- coordinate efforts at the international and regional levels to counterterrorism in all its forms and manifestations on the Internet," and, "b- use the Internet as a tool for countering the spread of terrorism [...]".[181] A G-8 declaration dated July 16, 2006, confirmed the commitment to "develop and implement an effective strategy to counter terrorist propaganda and recruitment".[182]

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[178] The jihadi magazine مجلة المجاهد التقني ("The Technical Mujahid") No. 2, March 2007, offered detailed instructions on the use of steganography tools, and presented encryption software developed by jihadists.

[179] See Weimann, Gabriel, *Terror on the Internet*, pp. 173-242, or Pillar, Paul R., "Counterterrorism after al-Qaeda", *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004, pp. 101-113. For a pre-9/11 2001 assessment on the topic, see Pedahzur, Ami, and Magnus Ranstorp, "A Tertiary Model for Countering Terrorism in Liberal Democracies: The Case of Israel", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2001, pp. 1-26.

[180] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1624 (2005), 14 September 2005, http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/510/52/PDF/N0551052.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 30 July 2007).

[181] United Nations General Assembly, Resolution: The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, A/RES/60/288, 8 September 2006, http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/361eea1cc08301c485256cf600606959/1ef6e139f9f1786f852571fe0069ff46!OpenDocument (accessed 30 July 2007).

[182] G8 Summit Declaration on Counter-Terrorism, St. Petersburg, 16 July, 2007, http://en.g8russia.ru/docs/17.html (accessed 30 July 2007).

Despite these efforts, it has been noted that "the small number of suspects arrested for dissemination of propaganda may indicate the lack of legal basis and difficulty in investigating these types of crimes".[183] Nevertheless, recent cases in Europe indicate that increased action is being taken: on July 5, 2007, *Younes Tsouli*, aka online jihadist *'Irhābī 007*, was convicted for inciting to commit acts of terrorism,[184] and, on July 26, 2007, five British Muslim men were sentenced for downloading and sharing extremist terrorism-related material.[185]

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that most jihadist websites are hosted by Western, and especially U.S., Internet Service Providers (ISPs), that often are unaware of the identity of their clients, and the content on their sites.[186] ISPs have a legal authority to remove sites that violate the law, or that abuse regulations stated by the ISP itself. Therefore, a preferred method by some in the counterterrorism business is to notify ISPs that host jihadist websites, that they have "both the ability and the obligation to remove such sites from their servers".[187] During the summer of 2007, private initiatives carried out a 'notification campaign' which resulted in the disruption of a handful of jihadist websites.[188]

Finally, one should be careful when crediting either counterterrorism efforts or jihadist security measures with the disappearance from the web of jihadist sites, which perhaps may not be more than "the result of a series of unrelated events like unpaid Internet Service Provider bills, incompetent [jihadist web-] administration, and technical failures".[189]

IV. Case studies

A jihadist online media group has been described as an entity that presents itself as a media establishment, and acts as a producer and/or distributor, of written and audio-visual material on the Internet, evidently supporting al-Qaeda's salafi-jihadi ideology. It is possible to classify the large number of such media groups according to different criteria. On a functional level, the distinction between producers and distributors is conspicuous, yet many groups belong to both categories. Another useful, and less overlapping, categorization is the separation between local and global jihadist media groups. The term *local* may sound somewhat unfit as 'al-Qaeda' in this study is used interchangeably with 'the *global* jihadist movement'. Yet, there is a clear distinction between media groups that serve al-Qaeda Central and the whole movement, and groups that are

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[183] Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), March 2007, www.europol.europa.eu/publications/TESAT/TESAT2007.pdf (accessed 30 July 2007).
[184] "Three jailed for inciting terror", *BBC News*, 5 July 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6273732.stm (accessed 30 July 2007).
[185] Casciani, Dominique, 'Students who descended into extremism', 26 July 2007, *BBC News*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6916654.stm (accessed 30 July, 2007).
[186] Carmon, Y., (*et al.*), "The Enemy Within: Where are the Islamist/Jihadist Websites Hosted, and What Can Be Done about It?", *MEMRI Inquire and Analysis Series - no 374*, 19 July, 2007, http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=IA37407 (accessed 30 July, 2007).
[187] *Ibid.*
[188] "When freepers "attack"", *Internet Haganah blog*, posted 22 July, 2007, http://internet-haganah.co.il/harchives/006152.html (accessed 30 July, 2007).
[189] "Internet Intelligence Report", *Terrorism Research Center*, July 26, 2007, Ed. 3, Vol. 30.

affiliated with local branches of al-Qaeda. A local media group is not necessarily physically based in the region it serves, but its media material is focused on issues relevant to the local node, while at the same time supporting the al-Qaeda cause. Local jihadist media groups exist in the spheres of al-Qaeda's main fronts, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and North and East Africa. Their online presence is often a development of their traditional media activities, yet for some more recent groups it is solely Internet-based. Global jihadist media groups seem mostly to have been conceived through and on the Internet.

The following presentation and analysis of jihadist online media groups begins with the global establishments, and seeks to incorporate the major groups currently active on the Internet. It then discusses the local groups, concentrating on two major fronts, namely Iraq and North Africa/the Horn of Africa. These two fronts have been the most active during the time of research, and are particularly interesting due to the large number of media groups they incorporate. Media material from these two fronts will be subject to content analysis. Other local media fronts will be treated only briefly in this study.[190]

12 Global media groups

12.1 As-Saḥāb

a. Background

Among the global media groups, *As-Saḥāb Media Production Establishment* takes the throne as a popular, highly productive and authoritative institution.[191] An obvious reason for its prominent position is that it is as the al-Qaeda leadership's exclusive media outlet: it has produced the entire collection of Osama bin Laden's and Ayman al-Zawahiri's audio and video tapes since late 2001. *As-Saḥāb* ("the Clouds") also promotes other high-level jihadists to the public, and produces jihadist documentaries and media material on military operations from Afghanistan.

As-Saḥāb presented its first major project on the Internet in the summer of 2001. It was a nearly two-hour-long video called "The destruction of the American Destroyer [USS] Cole".[192] While the video did not contain actual footage of the attack, it presented previously unseen recordings of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and clips from al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. The video was translated into English. This was the first al-Qaeda propaganda piece that showed signs of the relatively high technical sophistication, cinematic effects, unique footage, and foreign language capabilities that would later be characteristic of *as-Saḥāb* productions.

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[190] Jihadist media groups are continuously appearing on the Internet, thus making it difficult to present a comprehensive survey of such groups. The following section of the study presents the jihadist online media groups that were most active during the last halft of 2006 and the first half of 2007.

[191] Arabic original name: مؤسسة السحاب للإنتاج الإعلامي

[192] "تدمير المدمرة الامريكي كول" ("Destruction of the American Destroyer Cole"), *As-Saḥāb Production*, 2001.

Few facts are known about the operational system of *as-Saḥāb*. *As-Saḥāb* probably operates out of Pakistan or Afghanistan, in the vicinity of the possible hide-out of the al-Qaeda leadership. Indeed, top al-Qaeda figures seem, at least in the past, to have been linked to *as-Saḥāb*: *Khālid Shaykh Muḥammad*, the alleged mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks as well as other al-Qaeda attacks, revealed in a court hearing that "I was the Media Operations Director of as-Sahab [...] under Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri".[193] On another operational level, it is said to have several cameramen and couriers at its disposition, and one *as-Saḥāb* tape allegedly goes through a large number of links -of persons unknown to each other - before it reaches its final form and destination. One assumed cameraman of *as-Saḥāb*, interviewed by ABC News in June 2003, claimed that *as-Saḥāb* uses minivans as mobile studios for the editing of its videos.[194] Another kind of a covert studio was discovered by Pakistani police in a secret basement in Waziristan in 2004, containing equipment used for editing audio-visual material.[195] It is important to bear in mind that the seemingly high quality of the *as-Saḥāb* productions can be relatively easily obtained with handheld battery cameras, low-cost, commercial digital editing equipment, and only a minimum of technical knowledge.

Many of the tapes of the al-Qaeda leaders have been aired at least partially on the Qatar-based satellite TV station al-Jazeera before finding their way to jihadist Internet sites. Others are released directly on the web. *As-Saḥāb* currently does not operate a website, but relies on distribution on the jihadist web forums. Al-Jazeera has denied any link to *as-Saḥāb* and al-Qaeda, and claims that the tapes are anonymously delivered to them, often at the Pakistani al-Jazeera office in Islamabad.[196] The al-Jazeera bureau chief in Pakistan has also, on a few occasions, met with emissaries of al-Qaeda in order to receive their tapes.[197] Their distribution on the Internet seems to be facilitated by the *al-Fajr* Media Center, which is mentioned as a 'source' for the *as-Saḥāb* material.[198] Additionally, an "army of volunteers" is responsible for the widest possible circulation of the tapes.[199] More specifically, it has been suggested that the relatively well-known and now arrested online jihadist Younis Tsouli, also known as *'Irhābī 007*, has been involved in *as-Saḥāb'*s media campaign. A short-lived website, www.as-sahab.com, launched in November 2005 was, according to fellow jihadists, the creation of *'Irhābī 007*.[200]

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[193] Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024, March 10, 2007, www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10024.pdf (accessed 16 July 2007).

[194] Gannon, Kathy, "Al-Qaeda's Media Machine", *ABC News*, 23 June 2003, http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=2111045&page=3 (accessed 2 February, 2007).

[195] Author's conversation with Alexis Debat, *The Nixon Center*, Washington D.C., March, 2007.

[196] "Al-Jazeera: Bin Laden tape obtained in Pakistan", *MSNBC News*, 30 October, 2004, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6363306/ (accessed 10 October 2006).

[197] "Al-Jazeera bureau chief confirms receiving 'bin Laden' tape", *Asian political News*, 18 November 2002, via www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDQ/is_2002_Nov_18/ai_94330882 (accessed 10 October 2006).

[198] See further elaboration on this point in the section below on *al-Fajr*.

[199] Hassan M. Fattah, "Al-Qaeda increasingly reliant on Media", New York Times, September 30, 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/09/30/world/30jordan.html?ex=1317268800&en=fb3722198f902aae&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss (accessed 10 October 2006).

[200] Kohlman, Evan F., "The Real Online Terrorist Threat", *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 2006, Vol. 85 Issue 5, pp. 115-124.

A statistical analysis of *as-Saḥāb* issuances from 2002 until 2007, offered by the IntelCenter[201], illustrates a steady growth of publications until 2005, with 6, 11, 12 and 16 respective issuances a year, and then a sharp increase in 2006, which saw a total of 58 distributed tapes.[202] As of March 11, 2007, *as-Saḥāb* had released 13 tapes, indicating continuing prolific production.[203] The IntelCenter categorizes the tapes into three groups: "bin Laden-tapes", "al-Zawahiri tapes", and "Other *as-Saḥāb*" (including other prominent jihadists and operational videos). Throughout the period, "bin Laden" represented 16% of the total issuances, "al-Zawahiri" 31%, and "Other *as-Saḥāb*" 53%. For 2006, their numbers are respectively 10%, 26% and 64 %. These observations essentially seem to be in accordance with the results from the period of research in this study: From September through December 2006, *as-Saḥāb* produced 4 Ayman al-Zawahiri tapes, and 24 other *as-Saḥāb*. However, no Osama bin Laden tapes were issued during this period, which was also a trend for the first half of 2007.[204] The numbers above give al-Zawahiri 16 % and other *as-Saḥāb* 84 % of the media share. Another, and more operational, way of categorizing the *as-Saḥāb* productions for the period September – December 2006 is to separate them between the video/audio messages from prominent jihadist, and the operational videos. These two categories represent 40% and 60% of the total *as-Saḥāb* media issuances, respectively.

b. Content Analysis

In the following, a sample of *as-Saḥāb* productions will be analyzed. The selection of tapes includes material of different character: one video speech by the American Adam Gadahn, one 9/11 commemoration tape, one video speech by Ayman al-Zawahiri, and one operational video.

i. A video tape entitled "An Invitation to Islam" was published on jihadist websites on September 2, 2006.[205] It is a 48 minute tape, including a short introduction by al-Zawahiri, and a lecture delivered by Adam Gadahn, also known as ᶜ*Azzām al-'Amrīkī*.[206] Al-Zawahiri's introduction, in which he presents Gadahn as a brother who has "responded to this noble, divine call", is given in Arabic, with English subtitles. Gadahn's message is in English, with Arabic subtitles. The lecture opens with an invitation to all Americans and other unbelievers - specifically U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan - to join Islam. Gadahn goes on to discuss the benefits of Islam over Judaism, Christianity, and other religions, and treats extensively the ignorance of the unbelievers, which he

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[201] The IntelCenter is a private company providing "the intelligence, counterterrorism and first responder communities with information about terrorist groups and other threat actors", *IntelCenter*, www.intelcenter.com/aboutus.html (accessed 10 September 2007).

[202] "Al-Qaeda Messaging Statistics", *IntelCenter*, www.intelcenter.com/QMS-PUB-v2-9.pdf (accessed 20 March, 2007).

[203] This number is according to the IntelCenter statistics. The author's own research suggests an even higher number; seven al-Zawahiri tapes, 14 videos in the series "Hellfire for Americans in *Khurāsān*", and one *'Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī* tape.

[204] There were no bin Laden tapes issued during the first half of 2007. However, during the editing period of this study, in September 2007, Osama bin Laden featured in three *as-Saḥāb* productions: one video and two audio tapes were issued on the occasion of the 6th commemoration of the 9/11 2001 attacks.

[205] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "دعوة للإسلام" ("An Invitation to Islam"), 2 September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=16291 (accessed 10 October 2006).

[206] Gadahn is an American convert to Islam who appears as an al-Qaeda spokesman toward the West. He was charged with treason in the United States in October 2006 for his propaganda activities with al-Qaeda.

argues is both willful and the result of efforts by Western political and religious authorities. Gadahn also addresses the moderate Muslims, attacking "interfaith dialogue" as a misinterpretation of the Quran. He furthermore preaches unification of state and religion, and the rejection of "false Gods" such as governments and the UN – "creators of tyranny and oppression". Gadahn's performance generally appears as a diatribe against the West, juxtaposed with an invitation combining enticement and fright.

"An Invitation to Islam" addresses "all Americans in particular and all Western people in general". The message is presented in the English language by an American, possibly strengthening its appeal to Westerners. However, the speech is subtitled in Arabic, making it accessible also to Arabic speakers. It addresses specifically non-Muslims, urging them to embrace Islam, but also calls for Muslims to join the Jihad. The message of Adam Gadahn is different in style than his previous messages, something he comments on himself in his speech: "it will be alleged by others that this message represents an unusual and suspect change in tone. It will be said they used to say they want to slit the throats of the infidels, now they say they want to invite them to Islam". Compared to Gadahn's previous threats of attacks (on Los Angeles and Melbourne in 2005[207]), this message does seem to mark a shift towards a slightly different rhetoric. In effect, one can argue that it resembles the truce offered by bin Laden[208]: Gadahn offers forgiveness to all unbelievers who repent. Also, Gadahn appears concerned about the fate that awaits the West, and with his "heartfelt invitation", Gadahn seems to add a personal approach to the video. He mentions his own experiences with Christianity and Islam, but does not embark on a sophisticated religious rhetoric. In simple language, and with only a few references to and quotes from the Bible and the Quran, he seeks to compare the two religions. His alleged intimate knowledge of Western societies appears in anecdotes from his life in the United States, and in references to Western personalities. He also treats Western ideas, such as the "American dream", which he denounces, and the concept of the "clash of civilizations", in which he depicts the Western culture as barbaric. He appears intent on shortening the gap between himself and his audience, while elevating himself as someone with knowledge about "the right religion", who has "chosen the right path". In the video, Gadahn is shown sitting in front of a computer and a row of Arabic books, both symbols of knowledge. His appearance in a white Pakistani dress, turban, and long beard, stands in contrast to his American accent, another example of Gadahn trying to combine Western characteristics with what he deems "the right path" - jihadism. The main strategic goal of the "Invitation to Islam" video seems to appear in the title: Propagation of the Movement. Thus, the video represents an approach to recruitment of those who are normally considered to be the enemies of the movement.

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[207] "رسالة الى شعوب الغرب" (Letter to the People of the West"), video message, *As-Saḥāb* Production, September 2005.
[208] Osama bin Laden offered a truce with Europe in the spring of 2004, following the Madrid train bombings. Bin Laden's message is reproduced in Hegghammer, Thomas, "Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004 – A compilation of translated texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri".

ii. The video entitled "Manhattan raids: Knowledge is for acting upon" was published on occasion of the fifth anniversary of 9/11.[209] The 91 minute production does not have one single protagonist, but presents a number of prominent al-Qaeda figures, and appears as an educational documentary film reviewing the grievances of the al-Qaeda movement. The narrator is an unnamed individual. The video begins with a review of the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the consequent "expulsion of Palestinians from the Holy Land", accompanied by historic footage from the 1948 war. It further condemns the previous presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia, and the West's exploitation of the oil in the Middle East. The American invasion of "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" is heavily criticized, as well as the UN-embargo of Iraq in the 1990s, and the U.S.-led invasion and subsequent occupation in 2003. The documentary claims that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were planned long before the 9/11 attacks, as part of a Zionist-Crusader plot to take over Muslim lands. These views are presented through old recordings of statements by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Adam Gadahn, *ᶜAbd ᾿Allāh ᶜAzzām,* and Shaykh *Ḥamūd bin ᶜUqlā᾿ al-Shuᶜaybī*, the latter offering theological justifications for al-Qaeda's jihad. Clips of the 9/11 hijackers' recitations of wills are also featured, some of which are previously unseen, such as those of *Wā᾿il al-Shihrī* and *Hamza al-Ghamdī*. They point to their wrongly imprisoned brothers, in particular the blind Shaykh *ᶜUmar ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān*, and invoke previous successes of al-Qaeda, such as the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the attack on USS Cole in the Gulf of Aden. Extensive footage from Manhattan on 9/11 2001 is aired at the end of the video, perhaps underlining the extent of success that *as-Saḥāb* attaches to the 9/11 attacks. The general message of the film is that injustices are being perpetrated against the *᾿umma*, and, in response, it is the duty of Muslims to wage jihad.

The documentary film "Manhattan Raids" has multiple potential audiences. It targets potential supporters with knowledge of the movement, and reasons of justification for its existence. It also incites existing supporters, pointing to the success of al-Qaeda. Moreover, by showing footage of the 9/11 attacks and suffering Americans, and using Arabic narration and English subtitles, intimidation of the enemy appears as an underlying goal of communication of the documentary. In essence, the film appears as an educational piece. One of its assets lies in its professionalism and technological sophistication. A narrator guides the viewers through history, accompanied by old and new footage carefully put together. It teaches its viewers about the history of the Arab people, linking the suffering of Muslims in general, and Palestinians in particular, to the jihadist cause. Personalities with high symbolic value feature in the video, offering authority (bin Laden and al-Zawahiri), religious significance (*᾿Ibn ᶜUqlā᾿ al-Shuᶜaybī*), and recruitment drive (the so-called martyrs from 9/11). The fact that some of the footage has not been shown prior to the release of this video adds to its authoritative and exclusive character. The different personalities mentioned above all emphasize different aspects of jihad: the video includes legitimization of the movement's violent activities, outlining the historic rationale for al-Qaeda's fight and its religious justification, as well as a call for participation in jihad as a personal duty. Moreover, the eulogy of the 9/11 martyrs, in effect branding them as role models, and the presentation of the attacks as successes worthy of imitation, point to propagation as a goal of communication.

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[209] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "غزوة منهاتن: العلم للعمل" ("The Manhattan raids: Knowledge is for acting upon"), 9 September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb (accessed 10 October 2006).

iii. On December 20, 2006, *as-Saḥāb* released a video of a speech by al-Zawahiri, entitled "Realities of the Conflict between Islam and Unbelief".[210] Apparently, the speech aims to educate the *'umma*: it presents legal and factual points of view concerning critical events in the Islamic world. Al-Zawahiri begins by reminding his public of the Balfour Declaration, which he points out as being a historic starting point and example of the Crusader animosity to Islam. He then claims that the main goals of the jihad are the implementation of sharia and recovery of land which was once the land of Islam. Al-Zawahiri sends several messages: to the *'umma*, claiming that Palestine is the cause of every Muslim; to the mujahideen in Afghanistan, praising their strong resistance; to the Democrats in the U.S., reminding them that they are considered the same as Republicans, and that the Mujahideen, not the Democrats were the winners of the midterm elections [in November 2006]; and to the American people, whom al-Zawahiri calls a people who has neglected the voice of morality, justice, principles, and intellect. Subsequently, al-Zawahiri begins a discussion of the role and duties of the Muslim *'umma* towards the Western aggression, criticizing the support of the moderate Muslim clerics to the Crusaders, and calling upon Muslims to use all methods of popular protest against the enemies, such as demonstrations, strikes, and boycott of products. Finally, al-Zawahiri sends his greetings to all fronts of the global jihad, from Chechnya and Turkey, via Iraq, to Algeria and Somalia.

Al-Zawahiri's message is explicitly addressed to Muslims in Palestine, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, Chechnya, Somalia, and Algeria in particular, and to the Muslim *'umma* in general. He also addresses the American people. The message is spoken in Arabic, and has English subtitles. A part of the video was shown on al-Jazeera. "Realities of the Conflict between Islam and Unbelief" appears more aggressive than Gadahn's "invitation". Al-Zawahiri conveys his message through a structured speech, in which he presents enumerated points and messages to named groups. As promised in the introduction, Al-Zawahiri provides factual and religiously legal arguments in his discussion, yet his rhetoric is rather religious. Comparing the sharia, or "divine law", to international law, he quotes the Quran thirteen times, referring only six times to international or Western law or agreements.[211] He also refers to recent events, such as the U.S. midterm elections and the Bush-*Malikī* meeting in Amman, both in November 2006, thus proving his knowledge about current affairs, as well as underlining the recent date of the recording of the video. However, al-Zawahiri also refers to historic events, drawing parallels between the Soviet defeat by the mujahideen in Afghanistan, and the current situation of the Americans in the same country. This rhetoric represents a reminder to the *'umma* of the 'invincibility' of the mujahideen: seen in the recent historic context of Arab military defeats, it may seek to undermine a (military) inferiority complex of Muslims. To both the West and the Muslim *'umma*, al-Zawahiri presents ultimatums. To the West: to stop attacking Islam or to come under attack. To the Muslims: to live on "the margins of the new world order" and receive due punishment on the day of judgement, or to join the jihadists. He reinforces his words by repeating well-known phrases, such as bin

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[210] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "حقائق الصراع بين الإسلام والكفر" ("Realities of the Conflict between Islam and Unbelief"), 22 December 2006, http://alfirdaws.org/vbss/showthread.php?t=5438 (accessed 2 January 2007).

[211] These are: the Balfour Declaration, UN Resolution 1701, the UN Charter, the Oslo Accords, the Sykes-Picot agreement, the French law against the wearing of the *ḥijāb*.

Laden's: "as you bomb, you will be bombed, and as you kill, you will be killed". However, he praises the faithful mujahideen, and seems intent on creating unity in the *'umma* – a word he repeats as many as 42 times – by addressing "brothers" across the globe. Intimidation of the enemy stands out as an apparent strategic goal of communication in al-Zawahiri's piece. Moreover, it seeks propagation by inciting supporters, and possibly recruiting Muslims who are not yet supporters by offering facts that arguably legitimize the jihadist cause.

iv. The series of videos under the name "Hellfire for Americans in *Khurāsān* [Afghanistan]"[212] are generally short recordings of attacks. Titles read, for example, "Attack on military vehicle in Helmand", and, "Attack on American camp". A typical video is the "Rocket attack on American base in *Khūst*", issued on jihadist websites in October 2006.[213] The 3:34 minute video is introduced with computer-generated graphics of rockets firing at a map-shaped and flag-colored North American continent. The entire video is accompanied by *nashīd*[214], and only a few exulting exclamations are heard in Arabic. The video has captions explaining the events on the screen. It shows soldiers arriving on the battlefield at night. They prepare the weapons, and finally fire rockets into the dark. Then the mujahideen, rejoicing, are informed through Intercom that the attack was successful. However, the video does not show the actual damage inflicted by the attack.

The operational video consists of short clips, recorded during night, and is therefore of low visual quality. The value of the video, and its appeal to the public, seems to lie in the direct view that it offers of mujahideen activities. Showing an allegedly successful attack, one can argue that it presents the movement as a strong, talented, and victorious force. Moreover, the operational video is presented with religious chanting and only Arabic caption, indicating a probable main target group of supporters of the movement. Its most likely goal seems to be propagation by incitement among supporters, and more specifically direct recruitment of new fighters. Furthermore, it is known that jihadist groups, at least in the past, have used recordings of successful attacks to prove their credentials to sponsors.[215] This may be another goal of the films in the series "Hellfire for Americans in *Khurāsān*".

c. Summary – as-Saḥāb

As the above analysis indicates, *as-Saḥāb*'s observed strategic goals of communication include propagation, intimidation, legitimization, and education. *As-Saḥāb* distinguishes itself on the global jihadist media scene by two characteristics: it is the exclusive producer of bin Laden and al-Zawahri tapes, and it has a strong focus on audiovisual productions.

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[212]The original Arabic title is "محرقة الامريكان في بلاد خراسان".

[213] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "رماية الصواريخ على قاعدة امريكية بمنطقة خوست" ("Rocket attack on American base in *Khūst*"), 26 October 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb (accessed 30 October 2006).

[214] *Nashīd* is an Islamic song, traditionally performed *a capella,* with the aim of educating listeners about the Islamic religion.

[215] For a short description of how jihadist groups use the media, and specifically the Internet as a fundraising tool, see Rogan, Hanna, "Jihadism Online – A study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes".

First, *as-Saḥāb* has become known as the official al-Qaeda media bureau, and seems to be the only jihadist media company with direct links to bin Laden and al-Zawahri. It also seems to have exclusive access to recordings of other prominent individuals, such as the 9/11 "martyrs". It is also worth noting that, while some jihadist media establishments remain focused on a local audience, *as-Saḥāb* targets a wider public. This is evident in its meticulous work of subtitling (in English and Arabic) and in the global issues it often addresses. One can argue that one of the reasons for this outward-oriented media strategy is the fact that *as-Saḥāb* productions feature figures that are prone to receive attention outside of their immediate sphere, such as the leadership of al-Qaeda, and Adam Gadahn. However, it is worth noting that while statements by the al-Qaeda leadership previously drew vast media attention, mainstream Western and Arab audiences seem increasingly inured to the numerous al-Zawahiri speeches. During winter 2007, few of his released speeches seem to have received noteworthy attention in mainstream media. Yet, *as-Saḥāb* remains a particularly popular media outlet among supporters; new productions are advertised in advance, and generate widespread praise from web forum members.[216]

Secondly, *as-Saḥāb* has chosen to focus on audio-visual productions, unlike most other jihadist media outlets that include - or even solely employ - written texts.[217] Compared to other types of media, sustaining audio and video productions requires relatively significant economic and human resources. For *as-Saḥāb*, these resources seem to be in place, allowing the group to produce multimedia productions that employ a wide range of means in order to influence its audience. It remains an open question as to whether audio-visual means are more efficient than other methods, but *as-Saḥāb*'s prominent position on the global jihadist media scene, and its remarkable continuous increase in activity, is at least noteworthy.

It is also worth noting that the increased productions from the *as-Saḥāb* media campaign accompany a decline in al-Qaeda operations. According to an IntelCenter study, the period covering 2006 to March 2007 saw the lowest number of attacks allegedly directed by 'al-Qaeda Central' since 2002.[218] Speculations over whether media efforts are linked to operational planning, consequently making media activity an indication of pending violent activities, are therefore uncertain. What seems perhaps more likely, is that as long as no new 'al-Qaeda Central' attacks are carried out, the leadership relies on an intensified *a- Saḥāb* media campaign in order to remain the center of attention of both its supporters and opponents.

Regarding social construction, *as-Saḥāb* productions place the jihadist movement and its fight within the frame of the 'clash of civilizations'. The Western civilization is depicted as the evil force opposing the Muslim people and the *'umma*, whom *as-Saḥāb* (or its protagonists) pretends

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[216] For example, an *as-Saḥāb* video released in August 2007 on the jihadi forum *al-'Ikhlāṣ* received 12 pages of comments over three weeks, see http://www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=73309 (accessed 30 August 2007).

[217] A few books have also been published by *as-Saḥāb*. These are old publications re-published on the Internet, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri's "إعزاز راية الإسلام" ("Cherish the banner of Islam").

[218] "Jihadi Ops Tempo Statistic v. 1.5", IntelCenter, 16 March 2007, http://www.intelcenter.com/JOTS-PUB-v1-5.pdf (accessed 10 April 2007). The IntelCenter study excludes attacks carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other insurgency arenas.

to represent. Violent activities are therefore carried out in defense of the allegedly long-suffering *'umma*, in a struggle where the mujahideen are presented as an invincible military force. The al-Qaeda leaders, promoted through *as-Saḥāb*, speak to U.S. and European state leaders, in effect placing themselves on the same level.

Finally, the prominence of *as-Saḥāb* seems to lie essentially in the characters it features, and its access to unique video footage, both old and new. Early on, *as-Saḥāb* set the standard for technological sophistication of jihadist media productions, and was for a while one of only a few quality producers. However, it has recently been accompanied by a number of other jihadist media companies.

12.2 Global Islamic Media Front

a. Background

The Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) – by name truly a *global* media group - is one of the longest existing and most prolific jihadist media groups.[219] Before becoming known as the GIMF it operated under various names, among them the Global Islamic Media (GIM), which was established and run by a person in Canada by the (cover) name *'Abū Banān*. The GIM was hosted on Yahoo!groups, and founded on June 29, 2001. An earlier website maintained by *'Abū Banān*, named *al-ghurabā'*, linked to the GIM Yahoo!group, and referred to it as a source that "brings to you the real and true news from trustiest sources".[220] A few months after the establishment of GIM, it had registered 633 members. When the group was closed down in April 2004, its membership had reached 6500 members.[221] At this point, the group changed its name to the Global Islamic Media Center (GIMC), but this group also soon ceased to operate.

In August 2004, the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) was established, possibly by *'Abū Banān* and fellow technology-savvy supporters of the jihad. They first operated a website located in France, but the group has since then relied on numerous IP addresses/websites.[222] The GIMF has become a widely recognized and distributed source of jihadist news, and has therefore been dubbed, quite incorrectly as will be further elaborated on below, "the mouth-piece of al-Qaeda". During the last year (2006-2007), the GIMF has not had one official website, but rather operated on many affiliated sites. GIMF productions thus appear on a number of websites, and in particular on the most prominent jihadist web forums. Some of the jihadist forums even host subsections dedicated solely to the posting of GIMF material.[223] An old GIMF site is also still available, today functioning as an archive of its previous productions.[224] This archive dates back to at least 2003, and the works that are gathered there are signed both by GIMC and GIMF. The archive

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[219] Arabic original name: الجبهة الإعلامية الإسلامية العالمية.

[220] Jeremy Reynalds, "Was al-Qaida Related Media Chief Connected With First World Trade Center Bombing?", The American Daily, 25 May, 2004, www.americandaily.com/article/1305, (accessed 09 November 2006) .

[221] All numbers, *ibid*.

[222] The French domain website: http://jabha.ifrance.com/jabha/.

[223] See for example *al-Firdaws* Forum, "أرشيف إصدارت " ("Archive of releases"), www.alfirdaws.org/vb/forumdisplay.php?f=50 (accessed 28 November 2006).

[224] Archive for the Global Islamic Media Front: http://online2005.100free.com/ (accessed 10 June 2007).

consists only of written texts, despite the fact that over the last couple of years the GIMF has also been well-known for its production of audio-visual material.[225] The most recent GIMF-affiliated sites include blogs in Arabic, English, and German, as well as a German language forum.[226] In fact, German appears as an important GIMF language, and individuals based in Austria have been linked to the group.[227] Moreover, a Canadian citicen was arrested on charges of being affiliated to the GIMF.[228]

Despite disclosures in connection with recent arrests, it is difficult to assess the identity of the persons that are behind the GIMF today. The nom-de-guerre, *'Abū Banān,* is no longer present in the jihadist online landscape, and others have taken over the GIMF leadership. The emir of GIMF has, since September 2005, been *Salāhuddīn II*, and his deputy, *Aḥmad Wāthiq bī 'Allāh*. The statements that are issued from the GIMF are usually not signed by name. The identity *murāsil*, meaning correspondent, is used for posting on the forums. However, from time to time, the above mentioned leadership of GIMF has signed statements or articles. Another well-known figure of the GIMF is the late Dr. *Sayf al-Dīn al-Kanānī*. He was a member of the founding committee of the GIMF, and allegedly head of its Public Relations. *Al-Kanānī* died in a car accident in September 2006, and was then eulogized as "a lion of the Media Front" and "a Knight of the jihadist media".[229] The identity of other members of the GIMF, working on the production of the group's media material, is also unknown. *Wāthiq bī 'Allāh* has stated that "the Front does not belong to anyone. It is the property of all Muslims and knows no geographical boundaries. All IT and communication experts, producers and photographers...are welcome to join".[230] On several occasions the GIMF has allegedly posted job advertisements asking supporters to fill "vacant positions for video production and editing statements, footage and international media coverage about militants in Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Chechnya and other conflict zones where militants are active".[231] The work of the GIMF is thus most likely assisted by ordinary,

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[225] Previously distributed audio-visual material includes, for example: audio clips of lectures of *'Abū Muṣᶜab al-Sūrī* (2005), compilations of bin Laden's speeches regarding attacks on petroleum infrastructure (February 2006), Candid Camera (2005), Top Ten Insurgency Videos from Iraq (August 2005), The Mujahideen World Cup (June 2006). Available at the FFI film database.

[226] http://gimf.wordpress.com/ (accessed December 2006), http://gimf1.wordpress.com/ (accessed December 2006), www.jabha.info (accessed December 2006), http://gimf.22web.net/ (accessed January 2007), http://Orion2005.100free.com (accessed February 2007), www.freeweb.com/y/modules/news (accessed June 2007).

[227] Yassin Musharbash, "Terror Arrests in Vienna: Austria's Jihad by Telecommute", *Spiegel Online International*, 13 September 2007, www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,505618,00.html (accessed 15 September 2007).

[228] "Canadian Arrest Linked to Austrian Terror Suspects", Spiegel Online Ineternational, 14 September 2007, www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,505801,00.html, (accessed 15 September 2007).

[229] Posted on al-Firdaws, "تعزية من الجبهة الإعلامية الإسلامية العالمية لوفاة أخينا سيف الدين الكناني رحمه الله" ("Condolences from the GIMF at the death of our brother *Sayf al-Dīn al-Kanānī*, may God have mercy on him"), September 2006, http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=17123 (accessed 17 December 2006).

[230] Habib Trabelsi, "Al-Qaeda turns to media jihad four years after 9/11", *Middle East Online,* September 8, 2005, access via LexisNexis.

[231] "Al-Qaeda posts job ads on Net", *Herald News Services*, 8 October 2005, access via LexisNexis.

technology-savvy supporters of the jihadist movement.[232] Furthermore, it is possible that much of the work is carried out in decentralized locations. However, despite a seemingly lose network of contributors, the Front appears to have, at least on paper, a fixed structure. An organizational map from 2005 shows the following sections: Printing and Distribution, Technical Media, Artistic Media, Communication (Letters), Audio, Video, Enlightenment, Translation, Books and Publications.[233]

The declared goal of GIMF, as a base of Islamic information on the Internet, is to "denounce the Zionist enemy" and to "break the Zionist control over the media and terrorize the enemies".[234] An article written in the name of GIMF, shortly after its establishment in August 2004, by a certain '*Abū Hamza al-Jazā'irī* ("*Abū Hamza* the Algerian"), promotes the idea of a globally coordinated jihadist media community: "These days, our enemies the Crusaders and the Zionists control the different media, and it is in our interest to strive and to put in all our efforts to make our own media force built on the basis of Islamic Sharia. Now we can exploit the international net of information (the Internet)".[235] The author states that GIMF already represents such a global media network, but it is "unsatisfactory, weak, fragmented and uncoordinated". He calls for a coordination of all jihadist media, despite ideological differences between various movements, such as the Salafi-Jihadi, the Wahhabi, and the [Muslim] Brotherhood-based movements. He also calls for the participation of women in the media jihad. Finally, the author gives 10 recommendations to the jihadist media community. The recommendations concern attracting media savvy people, cooperating with different media groups, and translating and distributing news stories. However, the news should not just cover the actions of the mujahideen, but also economic, political, scientific, and ethical issues, since the struggle with the West is a doctrinal and ideological struggle. The last advice calls for "patience and steadiness for the truth, whatever tribulations and problems impede the path of the Islamic Media".[236]

The deputy of GIMF, *Aḥmad Wāthiq bī 'Allāh*, published in September 2006 an article in which he proudly observes that GIMF has reached far larger goals than it originally dreamt of: "Who could have imagined that the front [GIMF] would reach this size [?] Who could have imagined

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[232] A GIMF announcement of their campaign, the "Media Sword Campaign", initiated in June 2007, stated that the brothers of the GIMF are "students in schools, universities and institutes, teachers in classes and doctors in clinics... some of them are married and others are single", see posting on *al-Nuṣra*, www.alnusra.net/vb/showthread.php?t=21047 (accessed 12 July 2007).

[233] Posting on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "سلسلة كيف نواجه الإعلام الصليبي " ("Series: How we confront the crusader media"), 27 April, 2005, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=1325 (accessed 28 August 2006).

[234] Posting on *al-Hanayn* Forum, "نداء من الجبهة الإعلامية الإسلامية إلى وحدة الصف" ("Call from the GIMF for unity"), 9 September 2004, www.hanein.net/modules.php?name=Forums&file=viewtopic&p=2922 (accessed 26 February 2007).

[235] Posting on the Islamic Future Forum, "الجبهة الإعلامية الإسلامية العالمية" ("the Global Islamic Media Front"), 15 July, 2005, http://www.islamic-f.net/vb/ (accessed 12 December 2006).

[236] *Ibid.*

that the jihadist films should obtain such importance [?]".[237]*Wāthiq bī 'Allāh* notes that the dream of GIMF from the start was only to publish articles, but that gradually, and with continuous effort, the GIMF established and reached new goals. He continues: "[...] and one day the dream of meeting sheikh Osama [bin Laden] may come true".[238] This point is noteworthy because it indicates a distance between GIMF and the al-Qaeda leadership. There is apparently no connection or contact between the two, despite assessments by Western media that GIMF is an "al-Qaeda mouthpiece".[239] GIMF regularly praises the al-Qaeda leadership and other prominent jihadist figures, including media jihadists, such as *'Irhābī 007*. The now well-known producer of media material, *'Irhābī 007*, or *Younis Tsouli*, was arrested in Britain in October 2005, but had at that point already manifested himself as a pioneer of jihadist media. GIMF's praise of *'Irhābī 007* does not necessarily indicate that he was part of the organization, but demonstrates how highly esteemed his work was and is still. *'Irhābī 007* probably operated independently on the jihadist web, but it is not unthinkable that GIMF has made use of some of his online material. Indeed, GIMF has republished some of the work of *'Irhābī 007* after his arrest, such as the "Great encyclopedia of ways to disrupt Crusader and Jewish websites".[240]

GIMF publishes material that includes statements and video footage of operations of many different jihadist groups. Lately, a majority of these groups have been Iraqi based insurgent groups. As far as is known, GIMF does not belong to, or officially cooperate with, any of the insurgent groups. Moreover, it is not very likely that GIMF actually produces all the statements and videos from these groups; rather it gathers information from various jihadist websites for its GIMF productions, and re-organizes, re-produces and re-distributes this material.

Issuances from GIMF include written texts of ideological, religious, military, and technical nature. The organization also publishes two online magazines on a weekly and monthly basis. Audio-visual issuances include video speeches and military operational videos, and GIMF often offers subtitling of previously produced videos. GIMF has also produced and distributed militant jihadist video games. Yet, the technological pride of GIMF has been a TV broadcast service called the Caliphate Voice Channel (CVC), previously known as the Voice of the Caliphate. It was launched in September 2005 as a series of video recordings in the format of news programs.[241] The Voice of the Caliphate was broadcast sporadically throughout the first year -

[237] Posted on al-Firdaws Forum, *Aḥmad Wāthiq Billāh*, "موعد مع اسامة بن لادن" ("Appointment with Osama bin Laden"), September 2006, http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=16593 (accessed December 2006).
[238] *Ibid.*
[239] See for example, Trevelyan, Mark, "Al Qaeda German mouthpiece resurfaces on the Web", *Reuters*, 21 September 2007, http://www.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idUSL2179642220070921 (accessed 25 September 2007).
[240] Posted on *al-Burāq* forum, "الجبهة الإعلامية تقدم:موسوعة إختراق مواقع الصليبيين واليهود التي كتبها إرهابي 007" ("The Media Front presents: Encyclopedia of destruction of Crusader and Jewish sites written by Irhabi 007"), 2 May, 2006, www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=10394 (accessed 12 October 2006).
[241] It reported events from Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, and even the U.S (Hurricane Katrina), and aired interviews with spokesmen of the Iraqi jihadist groups. One special broadcast was also dedicated to the sentencing of al-Jazeera journalist Taysir Alluni.

only 7 broadcasts were aired. In December 2006, the merger of the *al-Firdaws* TV with the Voice of the Caliphate was announced:

> "A handful of your brothers, whose hearts are full of pain because of the current conditions of our *'umma*, are joining efforts in an enormous media project. This project is to support those who are on the frontlines, to disseminate their Jihad and struggle, to enlighten and inform people of their approach and view and to refute all suspicions, rumors and fallacies. Your brothers in *al-Firdaws* Jihadist Forums are joining their beloved brothers in the Global Islamic Media Front. This recognized union is a landmark and the joined efforts will augment future work. Based on which, we declare: *Al-Firdaws* InterVision Channel is to join Caliphate Voice Channel under the flag of Global Islamic Media Front and under the name: Caliphate Voice Channel".[242]

This event increased the level of activity of the Caliphate Voice Channel (CVC); shortly after, it announced the start of streaming broadcasts. During the first months of 2007, CVC released weekly programs of their news shows, and aired their programs daily. However, since March 2007, this service has been off-line.

b. Content Analysis

The following presents an analysis of selected media material that seeks to represent the width of GIMF's production.

i. The magazine *Ṣadā al-Rāfidayn* ("Echo of Mesopotamia") is presented by GIMF as a weekly news publication containing information about the jihad and the jihadists in Iraq. It publishes summarized statements from the various jihadist groups in the country. The general goal for every edition of the *Ṣadā al-Rāfidayn* is achieving the widest distribution possible, and, "by the help of the brothers and sisters to spread it to relatives, friends, the public, in the mosques, and printing and reading it aloud, and also attaching it to emails and to send it to online groups".[243] Publication of the *Ṣadā al-Rāfidayn* started in August 2006, and has continued on a weekly basis throughout the year.

Groups covered in the magazine are: the "Mujahideen Shura Council/the Islamic State of Iraq", *'Ansār al-Sunna*, *al-Jaysh al-'Islāmī fī l-ᶜIrāq*, *Jaysh al-Rāshidīn*, *Jaysh al-Fātiḥīn*, *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn*, *'Aṣāᶜib al-Jihādiyya al-ᶜIrāqiyya*, and *Katā'ib Qassās al-ᶜĀdil*. The statements in the magazine are only of (military) operational character. A notice repeatedly claims that only operations that have led to critical human or material loss are considered in the list. The list describes the operation briefly, giving the date and location of attack, and often the type (martyrdom, sniper, bombing) and result of attack (human/material losses, number of killed,

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[242] Posting on World News Network, " صوت الخلافة تقدم:: بيان انضمام قناة الفردوس المرئية إلى صوت الخلافة" ("The Voice of the Caliphate presents: Statement about the joining of the *al-Firdaws* Vision Channel with the Voice of the Caliphate"), 16 December 2006, www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=16571 (accessed 15 May 2007).

[243] See for example posting on the *al-Firdaws* Forum, " الجبهة الإعلامية تقدم نشرة (صدى الرافدين) العدد الثامن" ("The Media Front presents the release of (Echo of Mesopotamia) no 8"), 30 September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=17315 (accessed 19 October 2006).

"crusader/unbeliever Shiite" target). On the last page of each edition of *Ṣadā al-Rāfidayn*, *ḥadīths* are quoted.

The magazine *Ṣadā al-Rāfidayn* facilitates access to statements from the above mentioned groups. However, it is worth noting that this service is offered online by many media companies, and one may therefore wonder whether this magazine, which calls for distribution of its printed version "in the mosques etc", is also intended for people without Internet access. Its simple design is indeed suitable for printing. The magazine is only presented in Arabic, and seems to target supporters, or potential supporters, with information about the military success of the movement. The *ḥadīth* quoted in each issue may possibly have a religiously legitimizing effect. Generally, it is likely that the main strategic goal of communication of this magazine is propagation of the movement, by glorification of military capacities and martyrdom.

ii. Another GIMF magazine, *Ṣadā al-Jihād* ("Echo of Jihad"), is a monthly electronic publication.[244] It was incorporated in GIMF's production in November 2006, though the magazine had already been published for a year.[245] The *Ṣadā al-Jihād* magazine generally contains short and medium length articles by different authors, and treats a number of topics. Most of the authors are unknown, while a few are recurring contributors to the jihadist web, such as Dr. *Hānī al-Sibāʾī* of the "Al-Maqreze Centre for Historical Studies" in London, and the Kuwait-based Muslim cleric *Ḥāmid al-ʿAlī*. Thematically, the *Ṣadā al-Jihād* usually offers articles under the following entries: Events, Sharia Questions, Analysis, Martyr stories, Military lessons, Women in Jihad, Jihadist Poetry, Letter to the prisoners, and Letters, as well as other entries specific to each issue. Geographically, it covers events and questions related to Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Somalia, in addition to global Islamic topics. In addition, it includes 'miscellaneous boxes', such as one labeled "Number Sniper" offering random statistical information, such as the number of Americans killed every year in the U.S., number of religious believers in the U.S. versus Britain versus France etc, or another labeled "Cultural Questions", to which answers are to be submitted to the magazine by email, via the address http://sdajhad.arabform.com.

The *Ṣadā al-Jihād* magazine is also an Arabic language only publication, but with its large selection of thematically different articles, it seems to aim at a wide readership. It is worth noting

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[244] Published for example on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "الجبهة الإعلامية تقدم مجلة (صدى الجهاد) العدد العاشر" ("The Media Front presents the magazine (Echo of Jihad), No. 10"), 18 November 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=20512 (accessed 20 December 2006).

[245] There have been speculations as to whether or not *Ṣadā al-Jihād* is the successor, or at least an alternative, to the popular jihadist magazine *Ṣawt al-Jihād* published by "al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula" from October 2003 until November 2004, See: Paz, Reuven and Moshe Terdman, "Africa: The gold mine for al-Qaeda and global jihad", *Sofir Internet Research*, 11 June 2006, www.sofir.org/sarchives/005627.php (accessed July 2007). However, in January 2007, a new issue, the 30th, of *Ṣawt al-Jihād* was published, in which it sent "special thanks" to GIMF for continued support. At the same time issue No. 13 of *Ṣadā al-Jihād* was distributed on the jihadist websites. This indicates the distinctiveness of the two magazines, yet the reciprocal awareness among its publishers. GIMF support towards *Ṣawt al-Jihād* mentioned in the magazine may refer to the redistribution of old *Ṣawt al-Jihād* articles on the jihadist forums by GIMF during the last two years.

that it has a special section for articles regarding women in jihad. The magazine seeks to engage readers with different interests and from different cultural and educational levels; sections regarding news, legal issues, military tactics and poetry certainly resonate with different minds. It is a more sophisticated publication than the above mentioned Echo of Mesopotamia. Its strategic goals of communication are multiple: propagation of the movement in general is seen in incitement by the spreading of news, martyr stories, and in emotional approaches of poetry; legitimization is offered with reference to the sharia, but also emotionally with heavy focus on the treatment of fellow Muslims and jihadists taken prisoners by the enemy; education is evident in "fact boxes", as well as in military lessons presented in the magazine.

iii. An example of a text about political and military strategy is Oweis Bradley's "al-Qaeda and the Mercury generation".[246] Bradley is the pen name of an al-Qaeda strategist who has published extensively on the web over recent years.[247] Quotes from *Hānī al-Sibā'ī* introduce the text - "The new generation of al-Qaeda is a generation that surpasses continents" - as well as the annual report by the U. S. State Department about terrorism - "It is expected that we will meet an enemy well adapted to new circumstances in the years to come". Bradley describes the old generation of al-Qaeda as the leaders that generated the clash and triggered the confrontation, and who are leading the way for the next generation. Whereas the old generation was known to the security services, partly because they lived with and fought the Soviets in Afghanistan, the new generation has the advantage of being unidentified to the world, and therefore highly operative. Bradley quotes Francis Fukuyama and James Woolsey in order to explain how the West perceives the ideology of extremist groups based on Wahhabism and Islamic fundamentalism. As for the "anonymous second generation al-Qaeda", Bradley mentions attacks in London, Madrid and Saudi Arabia as examples of successes where unknown mujahideen surprised the world and created political crises. He concludes that the "mercury cadres are the core of the guerilla warfare, and the [al-Qaeda] organization has entered a phase which is tougher on the crusaders than ever before, which must be well exploited by the mujahideen".

Oweis Bradley's text targets an Arabic speaking public, but does probably not speak to the masses. Rather, it addresses an elite segment of the jihadist movement with knowledge of Western academia and strategic thought about terrorism, as it names and cites Western academics without further introduction. The text does not offer a strategy for the future, but analyses the past and praises strategic victories of the movement. Bradley's description of the failure of Western security forces versus the success of al-Qaeda probably aims to create pride among followers, and possibly to recruit new supporters. Propagation of the movement is therefore a main goal of the text. It is unclear what the term mercury in "mercury generation" signifies. Bradley does not seem to speak about a specific group of people, although this may be an explanation.

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[246] Posting on al-Firdaws Forum, " الجبهة الإعلامية تقدم القاعدة .. والجيلُ الزئبقي" ("The Media Front presents al-Qaeda and the mercury generation"), 20 September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=16860 (accessed 10 October 2006).
[247] The identity of Oweis Bradley is unknown to this author; it is worth noting that his choice of a Western sounding pen name remains quite unusual in jihadist circles.

iv. An example of a TV 'broadcast' is the Caliphate Voice Channel fifth video released on the Internet on November 6, 2006.[248] It was a news analysis of the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq. A masked mujahid, the anchor, appears in the setting of a newsroom, behind a desk with videos running in the background. The anchor presents the analysis, which discusses the importance and timeliness of the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq, and the deceitful response of the U.S. and the Shiites to this event. The analysis states that the "Crusaders", unsuccessfully, have sought to discredit the new leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, *'Abū Hamza al-Muhājir*, with unreliable media reports and political lies. The timing of the establishment of the Islamic State was therefore highly appropriate, so was the fact that this happened in Iraq, with its unique geographical location for the liberation of Palestine. This "reality" has allegedly made Washington discard its plans to partition Iraq: "The true situation in Mesopotamia is the final defeat of the unbelievers and the complete disintegration of the American Crusade project", the anchor concludes victoriously. The video then finishes with video clips from *as-Saḥāb*.

This multi-media production relies on a broad range of communicative methods. The visual perception of the news broadcast (an anchor in a look-alike news network studio) may appeal to a wide audience, but the set-up (a masked anchor) probably seems absurd to a non-sympathizing public, possibly targeted through the use of English subtitles. The content of the news analysis probably resonates only with supporters of the movement: it attacks Western and Shiite interests. The textual message is reinforced with the graphic videos running in the background of the studio. In this regard, it is interesting to note that a GIMF production employs *as-Saḥāb* videos as visual background. As the news broadcast speaks of jihadist victory, its main goal of communication seems to be incitement and propagation of the movement.

v. On September 14, 2006, a video game entitled "The night of the Capture of Bush" was released online for free download, advertised as a "game for young mujahideen".[249] Its subtitle was "Quest for Bush", and the game was apparently a modified version of the commercial game "Quest for Saddam", produced by California based Petrilla Entertainment in 2003. "Quest for Bush" is a first person shooter game, evolving over several levels, where the gamer finally chases Bush. It is in English and Arabic, and by mid-October, it was reportedly downloaded a few thousand times on the Internet, and clips on YouTube were viewed 11,000 times.[250]

The video game "Quest for Bush" is an example of an interactive method of communication. The general popularity of video games among children makes this production a decoy for the recruitment of young supporters. It also represents a statement to the West: keeping in mind the

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[248] Posted on *al-Falūja* Forum, "التحليل الإخباري بمناسبة قيام دولة العراق الإسلامية" ("News analysis in the occasion of the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq"), CVC/GIMF production, 6 November 2006, http://www.al-faloja.org/vb/showthread.php?t=1436 (accessed 15 November 2006).
[249] Posted for example on *al-Burāq* Forum, "الجبهة الإعلامية تقدم ليلة القبض على بوش" ("The Media Front presents The night of the Capture of Bush"), 14 September 2006, www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=19341 (accessed 10 October 2006).
[250] Vargas, Jose Antonio, "Radical, Dude", *Washington Post Online*, 9 October, 2006, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/08/AR2006100800931.html (accessed 15 October 2006).

U.S. official strategy of free distribution of pro-American military games since 2002, officially aimed at U.S. Army recruitment, the "Quest for Bush" is a counter-attack on this tactic. Ironically, it also uses a modification of a program developed in the West.

c. Summary of GIMF

GIMF is a complex jihadist media group, involved in a number of different activities, widely distributed online, and seemingly generally acknowledged as an authentic source of information about the global jihadist movement. It is worth noting the twofold role of GIMF, as a distributor *and* a producer of media material. As a distributor, GIMF ensures wide online diffusion of material produced by other groups, generally after re-designing, translating, or subtitling the production. This indicates its vision of reaching the broadest possible public, including foreign language speakers. Indeed, a June 2007 GIMF project, the "Media Sword", included 6 language versions: Arabic, English, German, and French, as well as the rather unusual Spanish, and first-time Albanian translations.[251]

The presentation of media material above has focused on GIMF as a producer of jihadist media. In this capacity, GIMF also seeks to reach a wide audience, albeit, first and foremost Arabic speakers. Yet, GIMF differentiates between audiences of different educational levels and targets various age groups through its different productions and methods of persuasion. The main target group is still supporters and potential supporters of the jihadist movement. There are few attempts to address the enemy, at least not directly. However, it is important to keep in mind GIMF's articulated goal of reaching the enemy, and specifically the West. GIMF suggested the use of online media in order to reach the West. Also, when targeting supporters, GIMF productions are first and foremost distributed online, but GIMF also encourages the distribution of printed material, as well as oral dissemination. This probably follows the realization that a number of supporters are without access to the Internet, or even illiterates. As for the online media, GIMF is the jihadist media group that employs perhaps the widest range of means of communication: written texts, videos, TV broadcasts, and video games distributed to static websites, blogs and discussion forums, bear witness to a certain creativity. The variety and scope of GIMF media production indicate that a large number of individuals are involved. In particular, in view of their widespread geographical focus, it is likely that loosely affiliated persons in different locations contribute to the collection, production, and distribution of material.

As far as social construction is concerned, GIMF and its 'spokespersons' seek to present the jihadist movement as global and unified in its struggle against the evil, deceitful forces of the "Crusaders". The term "Crusader" frames the jihadist fight within a specific historic worldview: past, religiously based aggression against the Muslims defines the basis for today's conflict, as well as the rationale for a continued fight. The overall focus on the jihadists' military victories frames the movement as triumphant over its enemy in the ongoing conflict.

The strategic goals of communication observed in GIMF media material are, as mentioned above: propagation of the movement, education, creation of community, and legitimization of activities.

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[251] The "Media Sword" was set up with a website, see: http://albattarmedia.wordpress.com/.

Propagation of the movement, as in recruiting, boosting morale, and providing information about the jihad, is seemingly the main objective. Education is observed on religious, ideological, and strategic levels. Legitimization of activities is not as obvious, at least not the religious and historic legitimization that is seen elsewhere in jihadist media. GIMF's legitimization is rather indirect, by showing innocent Muslims suffering by the hands of the Crusaders. Creation of community as a strategic goal of communication is seen mainly with the focus on various geographical regions, and encouragement of interactivity by recurring calls for volunteers to join the media jihad. Finally, as the target audience is seemingly so far mainly supporters of the cause, intimidation of the enemy is not an obvious strategic goal of communication in the above examples. Yet, previous media issuances, such as the Mujahideen World Cup video, have been evident incidents of attempts to intimidate its enemies.[252]

12.3 Al-Fajr Media Center, and other media distributors

a. Background

Al-Fajr Media Center, as *as-Saḥāb*, seems to be attributed high internal prestige in the jihadist milieu. It distinguishes itself from *as-Saḥāb* in the sense that it is almost solely dedicated to distribution - and not production - of media material. The following will present *al-Fajr,* and similar jihadist media distributor networks. Since these groups do not produce their own media material, no sample of media productions will be analyzed in this section.

Al-Fajr Media Center began its campaign on the jihadist web early in 2006 as a distributor of jihadist news. During its time of operation, it has expanded its scope, representing an increasing number of jihadist groups, and distributing to an increasing number of websites. Operating a seemingly highly effective distribution system, it is still unclear exactly how *al-Fajr* works. Experts have suggested that "*al-Fajr* is a small number of individuals who have organized themselves into a tight network, they trust each other, and they've developed a really good distribution system".[253] A similar interpretation concludes that *al-Fajr* is a "group of individuals on the Internet who have taken upon themselves to be responsible for distributing authentic terrorist propaganda".[254] The timelines and accuracy of the *al-Fajr* news releases indicate that these individuals are well-coordinated internally as well as externally with their "clients". *Al-Fajr* does not operate a website, but distributes news to the jhadist forums.

Al-Fajr has, nonetheless, a reputation for distributing authentic material. Jihadist groups, such as those included in the "Islamic State of Iraq", rely solely on *al-Fajr* for distribution of their

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[252] The Mujahideen World Cup video was issued in June 2006, on the occasion of the Football World Cup. It compared clips from soccer matches with sniper attacks on coalition soldiers in Iraq, and asked "which goal is the best?". See "كأس العالم للمجاهدين" ("the Mujahideen World Cup"), GIMF Production, June 2006, http://mobasher.110mb.com/video.htm (accessed 2 July 2007).

[253] Aaron Weisburd, quoted in Pelley, Scott, "Terrorists take recruitment efforts online", CBS News, 4 March 2007, www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/03/02/60minutes/main2531546_page3.shtml (accessed 10 May 2007).

[254] Evan Kholman in NPR interview, "Tracking al-Qaida's Media Production Team", July 11, 2006, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5548044 (accessed 10 July 2007).

material, and disclaim all other sources.[255] Nevertheless, *al-Fajr* is aware of the possibility of copycats, and in June 2006, it issued a statement about "the fabrications of statements in the name of *al-Fajr*".[256] In this statement, it listed a number of forums and sites designated to post authentic *al-Fajr* newswires. These were *al-Ḥisba*, *al-'Ikhlāṣ*, *al-Burāq*, and *al-Firdaws* forums, the World News Network, and The *'Ansār* Mailing List. Since that time, the number of partners has increased.

The jihadist groups that are represented by *al-Fajr* include, most notably, the Islamic State of Iraq (formerly the "Mujahideen Shura Council"), *'Ansār al-Sunna*, *Qāʿidat al-Jihād* in Afghanistan, *al-Qāʿida fī 'Arḍ al-Ribāt* (Palestine), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (formerly the Salafist Group for Call and Combat), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, *Fatḥ al-'Islām* in Lebanon, and some Somali jihadist groups. All these militant groups have media wings that produce media material, but apparently have outsourced the distribution job to *al-Fajr*. Multi-media companies also rely on *al-Fajr*'s distribution network. These are: *as-Saḥāb*, *Labbayk* of the Taliban, and *al-Furqān* in Iraq. Furthermore, texts by prominent individuals within the movement, such as Shaykh ʿAṭīyat 'Allāh and *'Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī*, are published directly by *al-Fajr*.

The list above illustrates international coverage, and includes both newcomers and well-established jihadists. *Al-Fajr*'s efforts to incorporate new groups in the global jihadist media network are worth mentioning. By lending its name to new groups, or individuals that publish on the Internet, *al-Fajr* also seems to increase these groups' prestige, and proves the authenticity of their material. Somalia is an example of how *al-Fajr* boosted a relatively inexperienced online media operation. One of the first online multimedia propaganda pieces that emerged from the jihadists in the Horn of Africa during the escalation of the conflict in 2006 was distributed by *al-Fajr*.[257] The production appeared to be local, and was a Somali language version. What may have been added by *al-Fajr* was the Arabic title, "*Jaḥīm al-Murtaddīn fī l-Ṣomāl*" ("Hell for Apostates in Somalia"), a well-known label for al-Qaeda videos.[258] Due to *al-Fajr*'s wide distribution network, the Somali film was made accessible to a much larger audience than it seemingly was intended for: *Al-Fajr* assisted in lifting the jihad in Somalia to a global level. Moreover, this jihadist video of unknown producers received its 'stamp of authenticity' by *al-Fajr*. *Al-Fajr* has also released a small number of its own productions. These include, most notably, a publication

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[255] Posted on *al-'Ikhlāṣ* Forum, "تنويه من وزارة الاعلام" ("Notification from the Ministry of Information"), 6 November 2006, www.ekhlaas.info/forum/showthread.php?t=37851 (accessed 10 November 2006).
[256] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "بيان من مركز الفجر للإعلام بخصوص البيانات الملفقة" ("Statement from al-Fajr Media Center about fabricated statements"), 22 June, 2006, http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=13640 (accessed 2 February 2007).
[257] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "مركز الفجر للإعلام : يقدم : جحيم المرتدين في الصومال" (al-Fajr Media Center presents: Hell for apostates in Somalia"), 30 November, 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?p=86612 (accessed 10 January 2007).
[258] "Russian Hell", "Hell for Romans and Apostates in Iraq", "Hellfire for Americans in Afghanistan" are similar video titles used by al-Qaeda affiliated groups.

series entitled the "Technical Mujahid", which is dedicated to information technology issues, and focuses in particular on the secure use of computers and the Internet. [259]

Another distributor of jihadists' media is the "World News Network" (WNN, www.w-n-n.com). Unlike most other jihadist media companies, it operates a website that contains what is perhaps the most comprehensive database of statements and news reports from global jihadist groups. The WNN started operations during the summer of 2005, and ran its service for a year. After a break of six months, it has been active since December 2006. The website has sections for "Latest news worldwide", "[Jihadist] statements, reports and issuances", "Editorials and opinions", and an "English section". The "Latest news" section contains news pieces taken from online Arab and Western mainstream newspapers, as well as from online Islamic news sites. The sources include, but are not limited to, Qatar-based *al-Jazeera*, Lebanese *an-Nahār*, Jordanian *al-Ra'y*, U.S.-based *CNN Arabic*, UK-based *al-Quds al-ᶜArabī,* as well as Italian and Dutch news sources, and finally websites such as islamicnews.net, and islamtoday.net. "Statements, reports and issuances" include information about jihadist groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Algeria, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, *et cetera*, as well as publications from the media groups. The material includes official statements, films, and magazines. "Editorials and opinions" are mainly longer postings collected from the jihadist discussion forums, often written by senior members of the forums. Editorials are also included from mainstream media. Finally, the "English section" presents some of the jihadist news releases in English, but the WNN does not provide translations beyond what is already translated by other media establishments, or the jihadist groups themselves. It is worth noting that the WNN is slightly slower than other sites to present new releases. On the other hand, it is known to offer a comprehensive collection and to be a trustworthy source, partly because it presents official statements and commentaries from password-protected jihadist web forums.

Another means of distributing news is mailing lists. The *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* ("The Supporters Mailing List") announces on its registration site (www.ansar-jihad.net): "Don't be the last to know. Hurry up and join us. Receive the latest news of the jihad... and everything the mujahideen release". By signing up to their mailing list, members receive *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya*'s selected news picks. The majority of the news distributed by the group concerns the jihad in Iraq. Some of their messages are also distributed on the jihadist web forums.[260] In fact, *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* encourages its members to forward the news to the forums to help spread the jihadist message. *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* is also known to translate jihadist media material from Arabic to Western languages, such as English and French.

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[259] Posted for example on *al-'Ikhlāṣ* Forum, "مركز الفجر للإعلام يقدم: العدد الأول من مجلة المجاهد التقني " (al-Fajr Media Center presents: First issue of the magazine the Technical Mujahid"), 28 November 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=39586 (accessed 10 January 2007).
[260] For example on *al-Burāq* Forum, " قوافل الشهداء – في بلاد الرافدين" ("Caravan of martyrs in Mesopotamia"), 22 February 2007, www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=33034 (accessed 10 March 2007).

b. Summary – Distributor Groups

The jihadist media distributor groups work with the objective of conveying the message of groups or individuals to the largest possible audience. Through various online means, such as websites, mailing lists, or forums, they spread the jihadist news on a global scale.

Al-Fajr Media Center appears to be the most important distributor node. As a representative of some of the largest jihadist media establishments, and a mouthpiece for jihadist ideologues and militant groups, it seems to manage much of the global jihadist media campaign, and acts as a support network for the global jihadist movement in media affairs. *Al-Fajr* has not added much to the campaign with regard to content. However, the "Technical Mujahid" magazine is significant, representing a new genre and seemingly fulfilling a perceived need among the jihadists.[261] Rather than adding content, *al-Fajr* has come to hold an important role in expanding and coordinating the jihadist online media campaign. Regardless of the question of whether or not *al-Fajr* holds direct links to 'al-Qaeda Central', it seems to be understood as a reliable agent of the global jihadist movement. This is apparent in the trust that is placed in it by militant groups, such as the "Islamic State of Iraq". Its authority also seems to lie in the fact that *Al-Fajr,* and other distributor groups, have gained access to the most important jihadi web forums at an administrative level, acting as "correspondents" (*murāsilūn*) that are approved by the forum administrators.

In addition to carrying out a 'screening and authentification process' when selecting groups and news for publication, the distributors WNN and *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* also facilitate access to the messages: WNN's website acts as a relatively stable node for visitors, while *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* provides a constant flow of jihadist news delivered directly to the subscriber of their service. The translation service offered by *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* further expands the target audience.

With regards to strategic goals of communication of these media distributor groups, one may argue that the goal of the client group, which produces the material, is also the goal of the distributor. However, in general, the goal of expanding and coordinating the global jihadist media campaign seems to stand out, an activity that may translate into propagation of the movement and community-building.

13 Local media groups

Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq has become arguably the most important battlefield of the global jihad. Insurgency groups in Iraq affiliated with al-Qaeda have been active on the ground, and their media wings have been equally active distributing information on the Internet. This period has also seen the establishment of new Iraqi-centered media organizations operating on the web. In order to understand the current jihadist online media situation in Iraq, it

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[261] The editors of the jihadi magazine "The Technical Mujahid" stated that the magazine was founded as a response to the call for technical information made by the *'Amīr* of the Islamic State of Iraq. See for example *al-'Ikhlāṣ* Forum, "مركز الفجر للإعلام يقدم: العدد الأول من مجلة المجاهد التقني " ("al-Fajr Media Center presents: First issue of the magazine the Technical Mujahid"), 28 November 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=39586 (accessed 10 January 2007).

is helpful to review events since 2003, and in particular, during the last year (2006). The following analysis of the Iraqi jihadist media scene comprises the elements linked to "al-Qaeda in the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq]", including: first, a background narrative of al-Zarqawi's group, arguably the starting point of the jihadist online media campaign; and, secondly, background and analysis of its successors, the "Mujahideen Shura Council" and the "Islamic State of Iraq". Furthermore, background and analysis of other jihadist Iraqi-focused media establishments without group affiliation are included. Finally, a brief overview is provided of the media wings of the Sunni insurgency groups in Iraq. It can be argued that some of these groups may not necessarily form part of the global jihadist movement, but they are nevertheless included in the study in order to give a comprehensive understanding of the media jihad in Iraq.

13.1 Iraq

13.1.1 "Al-Qaeda in the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq]"

a. Background

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of "Group for Monotheism and Jihad" (*Jamāᶜ at al-Tawḥīd wa l-Jihād*), later "al-Qaeda in the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq]" (*Qā ᶜidat al-Jihād fī bilād al-Rāfidayn*), took the crucial step of mobilizing computer-savvy allies to fight against the U.S. occupation. His use of the media benefited the propagation of the jihadist movement globally, and also promoted the recruitment of foreign fighters to his ranks. Al-Zarqawi's first communiqué appeared on a jihadist web forum in April 2004, amidst a flurry of other audio-visual propaganda, including video clips of military operations, and photographs of suicide attacks. In particular, al-Zarqawi gained notoriety for videotaping beheadings of foreign and Iraqi hostages. While this practice spread to other groups in Iraq, Ayman al-Zawahiri, *'Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī,* and other leading figures in the global jihadist current, reprimanded al-Zarqawi for these gruesome practices.[262] Despite this controversy, al-Zarqawi's media campaign was generally perceived as a success within the global jihadist movement. One particular reason for this was the attention it received in the West. Al-Zarqawi appeared himself openly only in one video, in April 2006, less than two months before he was killed by U.S. forces in Iraq.[263] By that time, he had already transferred authority - and management of the media - to the "Mujahideen Shura Council".

The "Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq" (*Majlis Shūrā al-Mujāhidīn fī l-ᶜIrāq*) was formed in January 2006, and announced on the jihadist forums by the official spokesman of "al-Qaeda in Iraq", *'Abū Maysara al-ᶜIrāqī*. The "Mujahideen Shura Council" (MSC) was allegedly a coalition of six insurgent organizations, the most well-known of them "al-Qaeda in the Iraq" led by al-Zarqawi until his death in June 2006, after which *'Abū Hamza al-Muhājir* took over leadership. The other groups of the MSC were not well-known at the time, and probably included rather

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[262] See untitled letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, intercepted by American intelligence, July 2005, available in Arabic original and English translations, http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_arabic (accessed 15 March 2007).

[263] Al-Zarqawi possibly also appeared in the Nick Berg execution video, May 2004.

small organizations or armed factions.[264] In its first statement, the MSC declared its intention "to liberate Iraq from occupation, to unite and direct all mujahideen efforts and to raise the flag of Islam and Sunna".[265] The MSC has, since its formation, run a website, originally only in Arabic, but since March 2006 also in English.[266] The sites are hosted by Blogspot, a free automated weblog publishing tool. This MSC blog is administered by the "MSC Media Company", which posts statements about military operations carried out by its partner groups on a daily basis. The site also links to newly released jihadist videos, ranging from amateur recordings of ambushes, to technologically sophisticated audio-visual material. These productions are signed by both the "MSC Media Company" and other media establishments. Unlike most blogs, this one is not open for comments by its readers; it is purely a source of jihadist information. Until mid-October 2006, the MSC was an important component of the Iraqi insurgency, and the material from its media company a widely distributed jihadist source. At that point, the "Islamic State of Iraq" was established and the MSC became part of an even broader coalition.

On October 15, 2006, jihadist forums announced the establishment of the "Islamic State of Iraq" (*Dawlat al-ᶜIrāq al-'Islāmiyya*). The announcement was published by the "MSC Media Company" and distributed on several jihadist websites, and also accompanied by a video explaining the details of the new state. The MSC announcement brought:

> "good news from the land of the two rivers, from the land of the Caliphs, from Baghdad, home to the Caliphate, may God release it from the hands of the Crusaders and the Shiites. And this is the fruit of the tree of monotheism - watered by the blood of the martyrs – and the fruit has ripened and the time of harvest is approaching [...] The faithful mujahideen in the land of the two rivers present to the people of Islam in every place, and to the people of the Sunna in Iraq in particular, the announcement of the establishment of the state of truth, the state of Islam, that will rule by the law of Allah over humanity and over the land. [...] And we ask every Muslim in the world to support this state with money, men and prayer".[267]

The announcement of the establishment of the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISoI) caused much discussion, and a good portion of skepticism, on jihadist discussion forums and, in particular, in

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[264] The coalition partners in MSC were *al-Qāᶜida fī Bilād al-Rāfidayn* ("al-Qaeda in Iraq"), *Jaysh al-Ṭā'ifa al-Manṣūra* ("Victorious Sect Army"), *Sarīyat 'Ansār al-Tawhīd* ("Supporters of *Tawhīd* Platoons"), *Sarīyat al-Jihād al-'Islāmī* ("Islamic Jihad Platoons"), *Sarīyat al-Ghurabā'* (the Strangers Platoons), and *Katā'ib al-'Ahwāl* (the Calamities Brigades). Source: MSC, " البيان رقم 1 - بيان عن إعلان تشكيل مجلس شورى المجاهدين في العراق" ("Statement No.1 – Statement about the establishment of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq"), 15 January 2006.

[265] MSC, "البيان رقم 1 - بيان عن إعلان تشكيل مجلس شورى المجاهدين في العراق") ("Statement No.1 – Statement about the establishment of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq"), 15 January 2006, in " الأرشيفُ الجامعُ لبياناتِ مَجلس شُورَى المجُاهدِين" ("Comprehensive Archive of MSC Statements"), www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=33100 (accessed 6 March 2007).

[266] Arabic: www.albayanat.blogspot.com. English: http://press-release.blogspot.com (both accessed February 2007).

[267] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, " مجلس شورى المجاهدين يبشر الأمة بالإعلان عن قيام دولة العراق الإسلامية", ("MSC brings the good news to the *'umma* about the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq"), 15 October 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=18147 (accessed 15 November 2006).

the Arab press.[268] Part of the announcement video was aired on al-Jazeera, whereas Western media initially seemingly paid little attention to the whole incident.[269] However, despite initial doubt, the ISoI has proven to be a lasting concept, at least in the virtual world. Its impact on the ground in Iraq has yet to be analyzed, but it is noteworthy that the period following the announcement has been very violent.

The Islamic State of Iraq is now dominant on the weblog site that the MSC operated. The design of the site is identical, and the content is also of the same character, but whereas the statements used to be signed by the "MSC Media Company", they are now signed by the "Ministry of Information/ the official spokesman of the Islamic State of Iraq".[270] Moreover, a new website has been established, Islamic Iraq (http://islamiciraq.modawanati.com), also in blog format, and exclusively dedicated to information from the "Ministry of Information of the Islamic State of Iraq". The contributions on this site are posted by a certain *'Abū Qāᶜqāᶜ al-Tamīmī*, but a disclaimer states that "this site is a personal effort, and not an official site of the Islamic State of Iraq". Both this blog, and the former MSC blog, publish "news reports" from the different provinces of the new State, including information about military operations, and official statements from the State on political, religious, and military matters. The news reports give detailed accounts of the operations of the different partner groups in the "Islamic State of Iraq", and mention means, goals, and results of attacks. "Blessed martyrdom operations" carried out by their members and 'spectacular attacks' are usually presented in separate postings. Religious comments are provided by the State's "Sharia Court", whose rulings have been published on a few occasions. However, it is worth noting that, despite having a "Sharia Court", the "Islamic State of Iraq" relies on religious legal opinions and fatwas from outside scholars. On December 18, 2006, the "Ministry of Information" officially blessed such an opinion regarding "Jihad against the enemies".[271] Furthermore, political comments include focus on events in the United States, such as President Bush's speech before the midterm elections in November 2006.[272] They

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[268] For example ‏"بين الدولة الإسلامية ودولة المنطقة الخضراء"‏ ("Between the Islamic State and the Green Zone State"), *Al-Ghad*, 19 October 2006, http://alghad.jo/?article=4902 (accessed 15 November 2006); or ‏"مجلس شورى المجاهدين يعلن تأسيس إمارة إسلامية في العراق"‏ ("MSC announces the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in Iraq"), *al-ᶜArabiyya*, 15 October, 2006, www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2006/10/15/28296.htm (accessed 15 November 2006).

[269] But see: Poole, Oliver, "Sunni Insurgents declare own state, as Bush calls to reassure Maliki", The New York Sun, 17 October 2006, www.nysun.com/pf.php?id=41640 (accessed 30 November, 2006).

[270] The Islamic State of Iraq quickly established a Ministry of Information. Other ministries, such as Oil, War, Health, Security, Martyrs, and Prisoners, etc., were announced in a video on 19 April 2007, ‏"إعلان التشكيلة الوزارية لدولة العراق الإسلامية"‏ ("Announcement of the Creation of the Cabinet of the Islamic State of Iraq"), *Islamic Iraq*, http://islamiciraq.modawanati.com/26740/html (accessed 26 April, 2007).

[271] "The Islamic State of Iraq / blesses the statement "Call for the Sunnites in Iraq and the necessity of supporting them by the nation"", *Press Release*, 18 December 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/12/islamic-iraq-state-news-re_116647020053881538.html (accessed 22 December 2006).

[272] "The Islamic Iraq State / about the speech of the Roman's dog " Bush"", *Press Release*, 28 October 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/10/islamic-iraq-state-about-speech-of.html (accessed 3 December 2006).

also keep a focus on Iraqi internal affairs, such as the escalation of Shiite-Sunni violence.[273] One can observe a military and organizational focus. For example, a statement threatened revenge for "crusader" operations,[274] and another announced that two paramilitary groups had sworn loyalty to the leader of the ISoI, *’Abū ᶜUmar al-Baghdādī*.[275]

On October 31, 2006, the formation of the "*al-Furqān* Establishment for Media Production" (*Mu’assasat al-Furqān lī l-’Intāj al-’Iᶜlāmī*) was announced on the ISoI website and other jihadist websites.[276] Parts of the statement read:

> "The Ministry of Information in the Islamic State of Iraq is pleased to announce the formation of a media establishment that will handle audio and video dispatches, and all media issuances from the Ministry of Information in the Islamic State of Iraq, may Allah glorify and facilitate it. This establishment, with the Grace of Allah, shall be a distinct milestone on the distinguished course of the jihadi media, which occupies great prestige and conducts the struggle with the Crusaders and their followers to reveal the shame and falsity of the Crusader media. So await that which will please the faithful and frustrate the infidels and hypocrites. In the upcoming days, await our issuances in their new technical and informational format. We ask Allah for guidance and success and for that work to be for him".[277]

Al-Furqān is the name of the 25th *sūra* of the Quran, and means "the Criterion". The Criterion also refers to the Quran itself, as the decisive factor between good and evil. The announcement of *al-Furqān* Media Establishment points to this connotation: "*al-Furqān* distinguishes between right and wrong [...] and *al-Furqān* separates between the one who fights in the name of Allah and the one who fights in the name of Despotism". Interestingly, a statement from the "Ministry of Information" published a week later, on November 6, reminds the public that all its media issuances published on the Internet, both written and audio-visual, and including the issuances from *al-Furqān*, are collected from "*al-Fajr* Media Center" and the "Ministry of Information" disclaims all media material referring to the ISoI from other sources.[278] Since the announcement of the formation of *al-Furqān* Media Establishment, it has, as declared, been in charge of the audio-visual material issued by the ISoI. In December 2006, *al-Furqān* announced the start of a new series of media publications. The new films were to include the "Knights of Martyrdom" e.g., documentation of suicide operations, and "The hell of Romans and Apostates in the Land of

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[273] "The Islamic State of Iraq: About the recent Safawi (Shi'ah) escalation against Sunnis in Baghdad", *Press Release*, 29 November 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/11/islamic-state-of-iraq-about-recent.html (accessed 3 December, 2006).

[274] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "دولة العراق الأسلامية / تدين جريمة العدو الصليبي في الإسحاقي وتتوعد بالثأر" ("The Islamic State of Iraq/ condemns crusader enemy crime in *al-’Ishāqī* and threatens revenge"), 10 December 2006, http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=21919 (accessed 20 December 2006).

[275] Posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, "بيعة سرايا فرسان التوحيد وسرايا ملة إبراهيم لأمير المؤمنين" (Oath of loyalty by the Knights of Tawhid Squadron and the Millat Ibrahim Squadron to Emir of the Believers"), 29 November 2006, http://al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=24834 (accessed 5 December 2006).

[276] "اعلان عن قيام مؤسسة الفرقان للإنتاج الإعلامي" ("Announcement of the creation of al-Furqan Media Production Establishment"), *Islamic Iraq*, 31 October 2006, http://islamiciraq.modawanati.com/ (accessed 10 November 2006).

[277] *Ibid*.

[278] Posted on *al-’Ikhlāص* Forum, "تنويه من وزارة الاعلام" ("Notification from the Ministry of Information"), 6 November 2006, www.ekhlaas.info/forum/showthread.php?t=37851 (accessed 10 November 2006).

the two Rivers", consisting of short and medium length clips of military operations.[279] No videos in these series were published in 2006, but, *al-Furqān*'s productivity has risen noticeably in 2007.[280]

b. Content Analysis

The above discussion of MSC, ISoI, and *al-Furqān,* gives a general picture of the kinds of media issuances published from the global jihadist movement in Iraq. In the following, a sample will be presented of selected pieces representing a sample from "al-Qaeda in Iraq's" three successive media entities, and including productions of different character: video productions, audio speech, written news report, and political and military commentaries.

i. MSC operational videos are generally short clips of attacks. One example is the film posted on October 13, 2006, entitled "Killing of an Iraqi soldier by the Mujahideen".[281] The film, which is 1:30 minutes, includes two clips. The first is the "confession" of a captured Iraqi man, who, in front of the camera confirms that he is a soldier affiliated with the Ministry of Interior, and that he has participated in rape of Sunni women. The second clip contains the "implementation of God's judgment", and shows the execution of the man. The last scene is accompanied by *nashīd*.

The "Killing of a crusader spy" is an example of visual manipulation, showing the fear and suffering, and finally the brutal execution of a captured enemy. Presented only in Arabic, its main target group appears to be Arabs, in particular the Iraqi population, or other Arabs who cooperate with the 'Crusaders' or the Iraqi government. Intimidation of the enemy appears to be its strategic goal of communication.

ii. News reports from the "Ministry of Information of the Islamic State of Iraq" are issued on an almost daily basis, and cover all the provinces of the State, as well as all the member groups. Some serve to sum up a month's operations, others describe only one attack. A typical example is the news report dated November 28, 2006.[282] It contains two announcements. One regards the "Downing of six crusader planes north west of Baghdad". It states that the Mujahideen of the ISoI, in cooperation with the "Army of the Mujahideen", have responded to the recent directives from the leader of the ISoI calling for increased attacks against the "Crusader" forces, and especially against their planes and helicopters. The second announcement is a news report for the period October 20 – November 16, from the Iraqi province of *Dayyāla,* which depicts 51

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[279] Posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, "مؤسسة الفرقان للإنتاج الإعلامي تعلن عن سلسلة إصداراتها الجديدة" ("al-Furqan Media Establishment announces its new series of releases"), 6 December 2006, www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=25498 (accessed 10 April 2007).

[280] During the four first months of 2007, one "Knights of Martyrdom"-video and 22 "Hell for Romans and Apostates in the Land of the two Rivers"-videos have been issued on the jihadist web. Furthermore, in January 2007, *al-Furqān* revived the former MSC publication "Announcement of the Martyrs", publishing issue No. 27.

[281] Posted on *al-'Ikhlāṣ* Forum, "فلم لقتل جندى عراقى بيد المجاهدين" ("Film of the killing of an Iraqi soldier by the Mujahideen"), 13 October 2006, www.al-ekhlas.net/forum (accessed 1 November 2006).

[282] "The news report of the State 28-11-2006", *Press Release*, November 29, 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/11/islamic-iraq-state-news-report-of_29.html (accessed 10 January 2007).

incidents of military operations, including, among other things, assassinations, IED attacks, launching of missiles, and sniper attacks.[283]

Despite the fact that most messages from the "Ministry of Information" are translated and published on separate Arabic and English language blogs, the target audience seems mostly to be supporters of the Islamic State. The news reports carry information and emotional value for the fighters, and represent a form of dialogue between various parties of the State, such as the report confirming that the mujahideen have responded to operational requests by the leader of the State. A linguistic propaganda technique employed by the "Ministry of Information" is the naming of the USA as the "USL (Ex-America)". The USL stands for "United States of Losers", and is a simple, yet popularly resonated and comprehensible, attack on the enemy.

iii. On December 9, 2006, the ISoI responded to the "Iraq Study Group Report"[284] in a written commentary entitled "The Baker-Hamilton Report and the American Failure".[285] It states that the U.S. discourse is no longer about victory or defeat in the war in Iraq, but rather, that the only goal is to stop the Jihad in Iraq, and restrict its expansion to other areas. It compares "Baker-Hamilton" with the "Sykes-Picot agreement", claiming it is just another attempt to impede the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.[286] The commentary also condemns other Muslims, even other jihadist groups, for not supporting the Caliphate project, and for keeping a nationalistic profile. The commentary points to the history of the *'umma,* where nationalism and pan-Arabism have "reaped the rewards of the Islamic Jihadist revolutions". It concludes with a call to the jihadist brothers, urging them to be aware of the tricks of the American policy of establishing a secular Iraq, followed finally by Quranic quotes.

This commentary stands out as a short political-strategic document, based on historical examples of the failure of the *'umma* to create an Islamic Caliphate, urging Muslims to learn from these lessons, and be aware of the "political gimmick" of the U.S. government. However, the commentary does not go into great details, and is more religiously anchored than other jihadist strategic documents.[287] The drawing of historical parallels is a favored rhetoric style among the jihadists, as in the comparison between the 2006 Baker-Hamilton report and the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. The commentary targets both supporters and adversaries of the movement, and seeks to educate them at a political level.

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[283] It has not been possible for this author to verify the information in the statements, for instance, by comparing these statements with other sources on insurgents' attacks on allied forces in Iraq on the given dates.

[284] The Iraq Study Group Report was the product of a U.S. Congress-mandated Commission, headed by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, published in December 2006.

[285] "The news report of the State 09-12-06", *Press Release*, 10 December, 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/12/islamic-iraq-state-news-report-of_10.html (accessed 10 January 2007).

[286] The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was a secret agreement between the colonial powers, France and the United Kingdom, with Russia's assent, aiming to divide the Middle East between them after the First World War.

[287] See description of the phenomenon of 'jihadist strategic literature', Part II, Chapter 2, in this study.

iv. Another short commentary, signed by the "Ministry of Information" and issued on December 13, 2006, praises the "Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat's" (GSPC) raids on western workers in Algeria.[288] It mentions facts about the raid, and blesses the mujahideen in Algeria, "the grandsons of the hero of Islam *Ṭāriq bin Ziyād*". It calls for the establishment of an Islamic State in Algeria, and more generally urges all Muslims to revenge the harm done to Afghani and Iraqi Muslims, specifically denouncing the Shiites and the Crusaders.

It is essentially a message which targets supporters, seeking to incite members by showing a successful attack. Again, historical references are made, as the message rhetorically links GSPC's fight to the early days of Islam, evoking the 8th century victorious Muslim commander *Ṭāriq bin Ziyād,* who conquered the Iberian Peninsula. It also links the Algerian cause to the wider jihadist cause (Iraq and Afghanistan), and names the overall enemies as Israel, the West, and the Shiites. In effect, attacks on Shiites have become an increasingly important issue in the jihadist rhetoric, paralleling the escalation of Sunni and Shiite fighting in Iraq. It is furthermore worth noting that the numbers killed and injured in the GSPC raid reported by ISoI may be inflated. The commentary above states that "no less than twenty crusaders were killed" in the GSPC attack. Official Algerian and Western sources reported that one Algerian driver was killed and 9 Western workers injured. The original GSPC statement claiming responsibility for the attack did not mention specific numbers. Exaggeration of their own capabilities may serve to increase self-confidence among fighters, and could also be part of a psychological warfare against the enemy.

v. *Al-Furqān* released its first audio-visual production, a 58 minute film called "Release the one who suffers", on November 18, 2006.[289] The video depicts a raid on a police station in *al-Maqdadiyya* in Iraq, with the objective of releasing mujahideen prisoners.[290] Old video clips of jihadist leading figures, such as Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and *ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz al-Muqrin* (the former leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia), speak of the duty of every Muslim to wage jihad and to free their imprisoned brothers. Pictures and footage with evidence of torture in "apostate" prisons are also shown as admonition.[291] The film depicts preparation for the attack, including planning, prayer, and weapon collection, and shows clips from the attack and the liberation of the prisoners. This is followed by a description of the raid by *'Abū Farūq al-'Ansārī*, a field commander of the MSC. He claims that the attack took place in March 2006, and that it resulted in the death of 25 "apostate" policemen and the destruction of 42 vehicles, including two American airplanes. Furthermore, the commander warns the Crusaders of more attacks. Three mujahideen who were killed during the operation receive praise as martyrs in the film.

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[288] Posted on *al-'Umm* Forum, "دولة العراق الاسلامية / تبارك غزوة "بوشاوي" في الجزائر" ("The Islamic State of Iraq blesses the "Bouchawi" raid in Algeria"), 14 December 2006, www.al-ommh.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9967 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[289] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "مؤسسة الفرقان للإنتاج الإعلامي تقدم إصدارها المرئي" فكوا العاني "" ("*al-Furqān* Establishment for Media Production presents a video 'Release the one who suffers"), 18 November 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=20556 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[290] The film includes previously released clips by the MSC from the *al-Maqdadiyya* operation.

[291] Pictures represent American soldiers' alleged harsh treatment of civilians in Iraq, and the clips are taken from al-Jazeera TV, voicing stories of former inmates of Iraqi prisons.

The video "Release the one who suffers" is an audio-visual piece seemingly attempting to propagate and legitimize the movement. First, it shows a successful jihadist operation, probably intended to boost the fighters' morale. Secondly, it uses emotional techniques, by showing mistreatment of Muslims, probably to demonize the enemy and legitimize violence against it. The clips of speeches by jihadist leaders offer authority to the message, and seem to target the consciousness of Muslims concerning their duty to support suffering brothers. Thirdly, the video is religious and blatant in style, especially in the last part of the film, which praises the martyrs and offers Quranic recital and *nashīd*. The video only has Arabic audio and Arabic language captions, indicating an Arabic speaking target audience.

vi. On December 22, 2006, *al-Furqān* released an audio tape of a speech by *'Amīr al- Mu'minīn* ("Emir of the Believers") *'Abū ᶜUmar al-Baghdādī,* the leader of the "Islamic State of Iraq".[292] The 18:22 minute speech was entitled "Say, Truth has appeared and Falseness has vanished". It reviews the birth of the "Islamic State of Iraq", naming groups and tribal leaders that have sworn alliance to the State. *Al-Baghdādī* praises the State's Sharia Court, which it established to "mediate conflicts and quarrels", and gives examples of its work. He also describes the composition of the Shura Council, which consist of representatives of all member groups in the State. *Al-Baghdādī* laments the threats of nationalism, patriotism, and paganism that Iraq faces, and states that the Islamic State refuses to negotiate with its enemies. Instead, it offers a truce to U.S. President Bush, offering secure withdrawal within a month, on condition that all equipment and military bases are ceded to the Islamic State. The truce expires two weeks from the announcement, and *al-Baghdādī* urges President Bush not to "miss this historical opportunity [...] as you missed the opportunity of truce that was presented before you by Shaykh Osama bin Laden". Finally, despite his offer of armistice, *al-Baghdādī* calls on the mujahideen to prepare for battle. *Al-Baghdādī* concludes with the recitation of "slogans" for the mujahideen, quoting from the Quran.

The ISoI leader's audio speech targets both followers and enemies of the movement. To the enemies, it simultaneously offers a truce and threatens more attacks. However, the speech is given in Arabic and only distributed on jihadist websites, and therefore one cannot necessarily assume that it reached the intended U.S. audience. The producers also probably realized the limited reach of such a speech, and it is therefore expected that the general message was as much intended for followers as opponents. To followers, and the Muslim *'umma* in general, this audio speech offers basic information about the organization of the "Islamic State of Iraq". It points to the success of the state, and specifically the Sharia Court, hereby seeking to increase the followers' motivation. At the same time, it indicates the difficult situation of the State, as it urges increased military efforts and support. The speech seems to aim to propagate the movement, in addition perhaps to intimidating enemies.

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[292] Posted on World News Network, "وقل جاء الحق وزهق الباطل" ("And say: Truth has appeared and Falseness has vanished"), 22 December 2006, www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=16792 (accessed 10 January 2007).

c. Summary

Drawing from the information above about the media material from the "Islamic State of Iraq", one can conclude that the primary strategic goal of communication seems to be propagation of the movement through incitement of supporters in particular, and of Muslims in general. The messages also seek to intimidate the enemy, and target the Muslim enemy ("collaborators") more than the West. Addressing its Muslim audience, the Islamic State also seeks to inform them about its activities, as well as educate its audience on other events in the world – both in Western and Muslim spheres. Linking other areas to the Iraqi cause, it arguably seeks to build a global community for the movement. Furthermore, legitimization of the existence of the State, and the activities of the global jihadist movement, is generally seen in a historic view, admixed with religious and emotional arguments. However, legitimization is less salient here than in other jihadist propaganda, perhaps because the target audience is assumed already to be supportive of the movement. To a certain degree, the media pieces also function as channels for specific messages intended for specific persons, thereby fulfilling the strategic goal of direct dialogue.

13.1.2 Media jihad: Iraqi focus without group affiliation

In addition to the "Ministry of Information" and *al-Furqān*, which represent a number of the Iraqi global jihadist-insurgency groups, several media establishments without group affiliation have contributed to the Iraqi-focused jihadist media campaign. Some of these establishments are prolific producers of news and propaganda material, whereas others have only produced a few media issuances. Some operate their own websites, but most distribute their material on the jihadist forums.

a. Background

The Media Jihad Brigade

The Media Jihad Brigade (*Katībat al-Jihād al-'I^clāmī*) is one the most active of these establishments. After the launch of its campaign in March 2005, it became particularly well-known for its monthly "Harvest Reports" from Iraq. The aim of the Brigade is, according to its opening statement: "a full-scale propaganda war as the newest arm of the jihad [...] to influence the morale of our enemies … and expose the reality of what is happening to them in Iraq, so that the soldiers lose their faith in themselves and their commanders".[293] Allegedly, the Brigade particularly targets the U.S. and has "sent to the soldiers, their dependents and families frightening, terrifying letters to shake them to the core".[294]

The Harvest Reports have been published on a monthly basis since April 2005. They contain information about the losses that the Mujahideen in Iraq have inflicted on their enemies, including human losses, vehicle losses, aircraft losses, and war booty taken from the enemy. The Brigades claim that "the losses for the Crusaders are far more than what is mentioned in this report, due to inability to get accurate figures when using missiles and mortar bombs against the HQ of the

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[293] Cited in Ulph, Stephen, "Iraqi Propaganda War Begins in Earnest", Terrorism Focus, Vol. 2, Issue 6, 17 March 2005, www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369437 (accessed 10 January 2007).
[294] Cited in *ibid*.

Crusaders, due to concealing of many operations for security reasons, and due to difficulties of receiving press releases from all mujahideen groups on the ground".[295] The format of the Harvest Reports has changed significantly since it first was produced. Summaries of reports from April 2005 until April 2006 come in the format of PowerPoint presentations. However, the reports published during the fall of 2006 are presented as high quality videos, bearing resemblance to Western or Arab satellite TV productions. The October 2006 report, for example, shows clips of attacks, while scrolling text informs about the month's "harvest". A news feed runs on the bottom of the screen, presenting the most important attacks, or other significant events of the month. The Harvest Reports are available both in Arabic and English.

In addition to the focus on the jihad in Iraq, the Media Jihad Brigade has looked briefly to another geographical area. In December 2006, as the conflict in Somalia escalated and forum chatter about the issue flourished, the Brigade published a "Comprehensive file on Somalia". However, this is the exception of an otherwise Iraqi-focused media campaign.

The Iraqi Islamic Media Center
The Iraqi Islamic Media Center (*al-Markaz al-ᶜIrāqī al-'Islāmī lī l-'Iᶜlām*) has been less active during the time of research. While it has published one news report about clashes between Sunni mujahideen and Shiites in Iraq[296], it has distinguished itself from other media groups by focusing on the activities of the enemy. This has manifested itself in two publication series, one entitled "Know your enemy", and the other, "the Foreign Pen".

Two issues of the "The Foreign Pen" series have been published. They include Arabic translations of American policy papers concerning Iraq. One is a summary of a study published by the United States Institute for Peace entitled "Scenarios of the Insurgency in Iraq", by Alan Schwartz. [297] The study was published in the United States in October 2006, and distributed online by the Iraqi Islamic Media Center two months later.

So far, one "Know your enemy" document has been published. It treated the "Freemasonry and terrorist organizations in Europe", focusing in particular on the Italian Masonic Lodge and Gladio

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[295] The jihadist groups included in the Harvest reports are: *Dawlat al-ᶜIrāq al-'Islāmiyya* ("Islamic State of Iraq"), *Jaysh 'Ansār al-Sunna* ("Supporters of the Sunna Army"), *Jaysh al-'Islāmī al-ᶜIrāqī* ("Islamic Army of Iraq"), *Jaysh al-Fātiḥīn* ("Army of the Conquerors"), *Jaysh al-Rāshidīn* ("Army of the Rightly Guided"), *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn* ("Army of the Mujahideen"), *al-Jabha al-'Islāmiyya li l-Muqāwama al-ᶜIrāqiyya* (Iraqi Islamic Resistance Front, JAMI), *ᶜAṣā'ib al-ᶜIrāq al-Jihādiyya* ("Iraqi Jihadi Troops"), *Katā'ib Thawrat al-ᶜAshrīn* ("1920 Revolution Brigades").

[296] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "هل قرا احدكم هذا الخبر العاجل والهام جدا" ("Did any of you read this very important and urgent news"), 23 November, 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=20725 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[297] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "مستقبل العراق.. سيناريوهات حافة الخط" ("The Future of Iraq. Scenarios on the brink of danger"), 2 December 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=21357 (accessed 10 January 2007). Original English title "Scenarios for the Insurgency in Iraq", see http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr174.pdf (accessed 10 January 2007).

(the Nato clandestine stay-behind operation after WWII).[298] The author moves on to the Turkish branch "Kontrgerilla", and finally concludes in more familiar jihadist rhetoric, claiming that the Zionist forces maintain control over the entire "Western terrorist project", including Gladio, Mossad, and the CIA. The document is written by a certain *'Ūrkhān Muḥammad ᶜAlī*, and footnotes cite sources in English and the Dutch language.

The *Ḥaqq* Agency

The *Ḥaqq* ("Truth") Agency appears as a traditional news agency, reporting from Iraq. It distributes news on its own website, which has both Arabic and English versions.[299] While *Ḥaqq* covers events in which jihadists in Iraq are involved, its news has a particular focus on crimes committed against the Sunni population in Iraq. It also runs a section with weekly "Human Rights" reports, which describes Shiite atrocities against Sunnis. The multimedia section also contains several films showing Sunnis suffering, such as "Sunni in *Sawāfī* jail" and "Ugly crime: killing three Sunnis in Iraq".

In addition, the *Ḥaqq* agency has produced a few documentary films. One is a lengthy description of the clash between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq, entitled "*al-Shīᶜa al-Rawāfiḍ* – War on Islam".[300] Another documentary pays tribute to the jihadist media, and states that: "The media war has no less importance than the war of tanks, rockets and explosive devices".[301] The narrator claims that the jihadist media in Iraq operates on two levels. The first level concerns the jihadists, and aims to spread news about their operations, and the state of their soldiers. The second level aims to influence the general view of the Americans. An example of such an operation is the so-called "media bomb" that was detonated by the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) for the celebration of ᶜīd.[302] It was a video issued on the Internet on October 22, 2006, entitled the "Baghdad Sniper". It showed how the Iraqi sniper "Juba" – a nickname allegedly given to him by American soldiers – assassinated coalition soldiers in Iraq. The video was spread on jihadist websites, but also received vast attention in Arab and Western mainstream news outlets. The narrator comments on the success of the video in influencing the general public, while clips from news channels reporting on the case, such as CNN, Reuters, and al-Jazeera, are shown as evidence of its worldwide distribution. The film was apparently distributed over only three days, a fact that the narrator claims "demonstrates the technological abilities of the Media Resistance". *Ḥaqq* Agency's two documentary films were originally distributed only in Arabic, but the Sniper film was re-released with English subtitles in March 2007.

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[298] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "الماسونية والمنظمات الارهابية في اوروبا" (The Freemasonry and terrorist organizations in Europe"), 29 November, 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=21189 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[299] Arabic: http://www.76news.net/, English: http://76news.net/eng/index.php (both accessed March 2007).

[300] Posted on *al-Tajdīd* Forum, "الشيعة الروافض... حرب على الإسلام" ("Shia *Rawafid* [Dissenter]. War on Islam"), 29 December 2006, www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=f88765c0f166a58a98ed1489e1a22e7d&threadid=47854 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[301] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "الحرب الاعلامية وقناص بغداد" ("The Media War and the Baghdad Sniper"), 6 November 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=19828 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[302] The ᶜīd al-fiṭr is a Muslim holiday that marks the end of the holy month Ramadan.

Qāᶜidat al-Jihād **Media Brigade**

Late in December 2006, the *Qāᶜidat al-Jihād* Media Brigade distributed a video production, entitled "Yes to the State of the Islamic Caliphate [Iraq]".[303] It was an almost 5 minute slide show montage with pictures presenting the conflict in Iraq from a jihadist point of view: images of suffering Muslims in Iraq combined with pictures of American soldiers, Western, Israeli, and "apostate" Arab state leaders framed in burning flames, and crested with images of jihadist leaders such as bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and al-Zarqawi. Accompanied with *nashīd* and Quranic citations, it represents a standard jihadist propaganda piece. This was the only *Qāᶜidat al-Jihād* Media Brigade production observed on the web during the time of research.

Al-Burāq **Media Establishment**

Al-Burāq Media Establishment joined the online media jihad in September 2006.[304] Its opening statement, published September 5, announces that:

> "The role of the media in decision making is well-known, the media is a decisive factor, like money and military power. The media is part of the war that the Crusaders wage on Islamic Iraq. An army of masters of the media have fought the *'umma* to brainwash and intimidate the people. Part of the media war effort intended to justify the invasion, another to intimidate the Muslim Iraqi population. Now we are starting a new phase in our media war and we establish *al-Burāq* media establishment, a media enclave that will take care of the jihadi media inheritance which was formed by the orchestrators of Iraq, and will make it, if God wills, a flare that lights the way for those after us, to Jerusalem, and supports the sons of the *'umma* when they are confronted by suspicions and lies from the unbelievers. [...] *Al-Burāq* takes interest in digital and traditional media, its goal is to cover, follow, and analyze jihadist news from the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq], and put the news in a context that forms a true picture of what takes place in the country. There are tens of media organizations and centers in the media field, and *al-Burāq* does not aim at rivalry with these organizations, but rather at complementing them. Certainly, the media production in Iraq is huge. But it remains in the category of "news". Therefore we need a group that works with analysis of the news and extraction of lessons learned, of the reasons and results of this period of the jihad that is going on in Iraq now. [...] *Al-Burāq* Media Establishment will be the body that includes the previously known *al-Burāq* Islamic Network, and *al-Burāq* workshop."[305]

The *al-Burāq* Islamic Network is a jihadist web forum.[306] The *al-Burāq* workshop is a feature of the web forum, proposing projects for volunteers to assist in the media jihad.

Al-Burāq Media clearly has a focus on Iraq, and questions have been raised as to whether it is the media wing of the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI).[307] While *al-Burāq* Media has participated in

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[303] Posted on *al-Tajdīd* Forum, "نعم لدولة الخلافة الإسلامية" ("Yes to the State of the Islamic Caliphate"), 29 December 2006, www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=809492f164e8ab25ce0a1aa3d5808f40&threadid=47980 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[304] Website *al-Burāq* Media: www.boraqmedia.org. The website was registered on July 28, 2006, but not launched until September 5, 2006.

[305] Posted on *al-Burāq* Media, "انطلاق مؤسسة البراق الإعلامية" ("Launch of *al-Burāq* Media Establishment"), 5 September 2006, http://al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=18635 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[306] *Al-Burāq* Forum: www.al-boraq.com (accessed January 2007).

several media projects of the IAI, it also promotes other Iraqi jihadist groups. These groups are the MSC, *’Ansār al-Sunna*, *Jaysh al-Rāshidīn*, *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn*, *Katā’ib Thawrat al-ᶜAshrīn*, *al-Jabha al-’Islāmiyya lī l-Muqāwama al-ᶜIrāqiyya*, *Jaysh al-Fātiḥīn*, *ᶜAṣā’ib al-ᶜIrāq al-Jihādiyya*, and *Katā’ib Qassās al-ᶜĀdil*.[308] The *al-Burāq* Media website furthermore issues news about Iraq from various sources, including their own news, analysis, and reports, and news from international agencies, such as AFP, al-Jazeera, and CNN. *Al-Burāq* Media thus distinguishes itself to a certain degree from other similar news outlets by including sources other than jihadist ones. Also, a unique feature of *al-Burāq* Media is its workshop project. Self-declared goals of the workshop are to guide viewers to jihadist websites as alternative sources to the Western media, to move visitors on the jihadist web forums out of a passive state of receiving information and into an active state of participation and production, and to carry out large-scale media operations.[309] *Al-Burāq* promises to oversee this work by providing suitable venues for the meeting of brothers, and providing required material, designs, and links. It suggests that workshop projects should include the release of speeches, improvement and re-distribution of important publications, the design of banners, slide shows, and animation presentation. Finally, it notes that "this project will not apply and succeed without the participation of the brothers". Examples of workshop projects that were carried out during the fall of 2006 are workshop No. 18, "Translation of *al-Muhājir*'s speech to English and French", and workshop No. 19, "An archive compilation of all statements issued by the MSC".[310] Earlier projects include, among others, the collection and translation of speeches by Ayman al-Zarqawi, an anthology of Osama bin Laden speeches, and the release of names of officers in the Shiite *Badr* Corps in Iraq.

b. Content Analysis and Summary of Jihadist Media with Iraqi focus

The above describes the attributes of media issuances produced by media establishments in Iraq without a group affiliation. They seem to focus on the same cause, but vary slightly in their choice of topics, target audience, and strategies for conveying their message.

First of all, there is little information available about who run these establishments, other than supporters of the jihadist cause in Iraq. The fact that they have access to material from the Iraqi battlefield, such as news and video clips, suggests that they are based in the area, but other geographical locations are also possible. It seems that several of the establishments use volunteers in their work, such as the *al-Burāq* Workshop and the "Media Jihad Brigade", both of which openly call for contributors and manpower.

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[307] Posted on Infovlad website, "Al-Boraq Media", 6 September 2006, www.infovlad.net/?cat=1 (accessed 10 July, 2007).

[308] *Katā’ib Qassās al-ᶜĀdil* translates to "Brigades of the Just Slanderer". For translation of the other names of the groups, see footnote 267, in this study.

[309] Posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, "مـــا هي ورشــــة عمـــل البـــراق" ("What is the *al-Burāq* Workshop"), 12 May 2006, www.al-boraq.com/index (accessed 10 January 2006).

[310] Workshop 18, posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "خطاب(إن الحكم إلا لله)مكتوباً و مترجماً للإنجليزية و الفرنسية" ("Speech 'The rule is only for God' written and translated to English and French"), 16 November 2006, http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=20447 (accessed 10 January 2007). Workshop 19, posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, " الأرشيفُ الجامعُ لبياناتِ مَجلِس شُورَى المجُاهِدِيَن" ("Archive of all statements from the MSC"), December 2006, http://www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=33100 (accessed 10 January 2007).

Both supporters and enemies seem to be the targeted audience, at least according to their self-declared goals. For example, the "Media Jihad Brigade" stated that it targets U.S. soldiers and their families. However, this is not observed directly in their issuances. Still, their monthly Harvest Report comes in both Arabic and English versions, indicating a desire for a wider readership. Also, the *Ḥaqq* Agency targets speakers of these two language groups through its separate English and Arabic websites. *Al-Burāq* Media seems to take the translation a step further, also offering French material through its Workshop project. Finally, the "Iraqi Islamic Media Center" targets solely Arabic speakers, with translations of English language documents and news into Arabic. One can argue that the academic style suggests that the target audience belongs to an elite group. Conversely, the "al-Qaeda Media Jihad Brigade", which also offers productions in Arabic only, relies mostly on pictures and *nashīd*, and is therefore perhaps suitable also for the many illiterates in the Arab world.

There appears to be diverse strategic goals of communication, obtained through different techniques. A self-stated goal of the "Media Jihad Brigade" is to lower the morale of the enemy, something its Harvest Report might theoretically succeed in doing if it actually reaches the enemy. Moreover, the Harvest Report informs the mujahideen of their successes, with a possible desired effect of boosting the morale of fighters and supporters. The high technical sophistication of the Harvest Report videos arguably adds to the feeling of success. A different approach is taken in the *Ḥaqq* Agency's media productions, which focus on the defeats of and crimes against the Iraqi Sunni mujahideen. While the *Ḥaqq*'s strategic goal of communication also seems to be propagation of the movement, it describes the movement as harmed and unjustly treated, and therefore in need of support. Graphic and emotional techniques, such as showing tortured Sunnis, indicate this approach. Furthermore, the approach represents a means of legitimizing the 'revenge' activities of the mujahideen, although *Ḥaqq* does not seem to focus on such operations.

Ḥaqq also seeks to educate supporters of the movement with its documentaries. Perhaps even stronger examples of education efforts are the publications in the series "Know your enemy" and "Foreign Pen". The series offer material that arguably would remain out of reach for many Iraqis. *Al-Burāq* Media's many activities seem to seek to achieve the strategic goals of communication observed with the other groups, i.e., propagation, legitimization, and education. However, one additional goal can be seen in its workshop project: the effort to activate supporters and dynamically incorporate volunteers in the media jihad points to the objective of creating a strong feeling of belonging and a sense of community among supporters.

One can thus conclude that the main strategic goals of communication among these media establishments are propagation, legitimization, education, and the creation of a sense of community.

13.1.3 Other Iraqi insurgency groups' media wings

Finally, a number of other Iraqi militant groups, which did not swear loyalty to the "Islamic State of Iraq" in October 2006, also participate in the jihadist media campaign. During the fall of 2006, postings on jihadist forums and statements from these groups spoke about the relationship of the

Iraqi Sunni insurgency to al-Qaeda and the "Islamic State of Iraq". What appeared as hardliner global jihadists requested the unity of the Iraqi jihad under the al-Qaeda banner, whereas nationalist, specifically Baathist and Kurdish, forces argued in favor of a separation between the Iraqi and the global jihadist cause. This debate culminated in March-April 2007, when *'Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī*, the ISoI leader, accused the insurgency groups of cooperating with the US-backed Iraqi government. At the same time, mujahideen of the ISoI launched a series of attacks on Sunni Muslims, and killed the leader of the 1920 Revolution Brigades, *Ḥārith Ẓāhir al-Ḍārī*, who had refused to join the ISoI. In response, several of the Iraqi insurgency groups split over the issue of whether or not to support to the "Islamic State of Iraq". A breakaway faction of the 1920 Revolution Brigades, for example, established the anti-ISoI "Hamas-Iraq" group, and the "Islamic Army of Iraq" denounced the "Islamic State of Iraq" in an Internet issued letter, although the letter was later removed from the IAI website following reactions on jihadist forums. This 'Iraqi nationalist insurgency versus global jihad' debate received attention in the Arab and Western press, and the spokesman of the IAI appeared in an al-Jazeera interview where he explained his group's views.[311]

The internal debate among Sunni insurgency groups in Iraq about support to al-Qaeda and the ISoI indicates that the groups weigh evenly between nationalism and global jihadism. At this point, it is difficult to predict what the outcome of the dispute will be. Political analysts have suggested advantages for both the global al-Qaeda movement and for the Iraqi national unity government. Iraq holds a special place in the global jihad, and news of and by the Iraqi mujahideen constitutes an important part of the general global jihadist media campaign, as observed in the use of news reports and battlefield videos from various Iraqi groups in productions. Therefore, without categorically placing the Iraqi Sunni insurgency groups under the header of the global jihadist movement, a brief description of their media jihad will be included in this study.

The Islamic Army of Iraq
Al-Jaysh al-'Islāmī fī l-ᶜIrāq ("The Islamic Army of Iraq", IAI) is one of the largest insurgency groups in Iraq, and one that expressed anger with al-Qaeda in April 2007 – although previous information indicates a closer relationship.[312] On the media scene, the IAI spreads its material through various channels. Its "Military leadership" issues newsletters of an operational character, often several per day. Its "Central Media Organization" is responsible for the audio-visual material. Most notably, it has produced the infamous "Juba Sniper" videos, a joint venture with *al-Burāq* Media. The "Juba Sniper" was released in November 2005, followed by a sequel in October 2006. With the second video, a website (http://www.jubaonline.org) and a blog (http://juba-online.blogspot.com) were also set up in the name of Juba. The website links to the

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[311] الشمري: الجيش الأميركي وإيران وراء أكثر المفخخات بالعراق" (("al-Shammarī: The American Army and Iran is behind most of the booby traps in Iraq"), *al-Jazeera*, 11 April 2007, www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7616C26C-87E1-4BC3-849D-EA549863CC86.htm?wbc_purpose=Ba (accessed 10 May 2007).

[312] In an interview with *al-Fursān*, the spokesman of the Islamic Army of Iraq stated that IAI and the MSC [later part of ISoI] are unified in their religion and belief, but not yet militarily. Interview in the IAI periodic magazine, *al-Fursān*, 10th Issue, Oct 17, 2006.

films, and offers additional information in Arabic, English, and French. As the Ḥaqq Agency reported in its documentary about the "Juba Sniper" film, it received attention in the mainstream press, and also found its way to YouTube.

The IAI operates an Arabic language website (http://www.iaisite.info) where media issuances are published, but these are also distributed on various jihadist forums. Furthermore, IAI distributes a periodic electronic magazine, *al-Fursān*. In October 2006, Issue No. 10 was published online. The 67 page magazine contained articles about jihad in Iraq in particular, but also included more general topics. The first 10 first pages were dedicated to "Harvest", showing statistics on IAI's attacks for the first six months of the year. This was followed by sections for political, strategic, and military affairs, as well as religious topics, rounded off with jihadist poetry. It is worth noting that the IAI offers extensive coverage of American military affairs, such as American losses in Iraq and stories about American soldiers fleeing to Canada. The rest mixes conspiracy theories, such as "The Jewish-Kurdish relationship", boasting, for example "The jihad in Afghanistan, its tactics inspired by the Iraq method", and the customary Islamist ideology, here in the pen of *'Ibn Taymiyya*.

'Ansār al-Sunna

The *'Ansār al-Sunna* ("Supporters of the *Sunna*) Group is another major insurgency group in Iraq – and also a prolific contributor to the media campaign there. *'Ansār al-Sunna* was one of the groups that early on copied al-Zarqawi's media strategy, distributing video recordings of the decapitation of enemy hostages. While these are less frequently observed now, *'Ansār al-Sunna*'s Media Department issues recordings of military operations on a regular basis. These are generally short, relatively professionally produced video clips, depicting attacks with IED, mortars, etc. The Media Department issues daily written news reports about operations, and also official statements from the leadership of the group. Such statements have been issued, for instance, regarding topics such as an assessment of the closing of Baghdad University.[313] *'Ansār al-Sunna* also publishes an online periodical, "Harvest of the Mujahideen", of which Issue No. 34 was released in October 2006.[314] It contained information about the group's activities, comments on the Pope's remark on Islam, blessings from the Department of Law and Justice for Ramadan, and advice on security measures for the mujahideen "guerilla fighters".

The *'Ansār al-Sunna* does no longer operate a website. Until at least early 2005, it maintained a site, although it was constantly moving from one URL to another. Their media material is now distributed on the jihadist web forums.

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[313] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "حملة النصرة لإساتذتنا وطلبتنا في جامعات بغداد" ("Campaign for the victory of our professors and students at Baghdad University"), 5 December 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?p=88225 (accessed 10 January 2007).

[314] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "الآن جماعة أنصار السنة تقدم مجلة حصاد المجاهدين" ("*Ansār al-Sunna* Group presents Harvest of the Mujahideen Magazine"), 18 October 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb (accessed 20 October 2006).

Other Groups

Other insurgent groups in Iraq handle their media campaign in much the same way as *'Ansār al-Sunna*. Groups with media wings that are active on the Internet include, most notably, *al-Jabha al-'Islāmiyya lī l-Muqāwama al-ʿIrāqiyya* and its Military wing the *Katā'ib Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-'Ayūbī, Katā'ib Thawrat al-ʿAshrīn, Jaysh al-Rāshidīn, Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn, Jaysh al-Fātiḥīn, Katā'ib Qassās al-ʿĀdil,* and *ʿAṣā'ib al-ʿIrāq al-Jihādiyya*. The latter operates its own website in both Arabic and English[315], whereas the others rely on jihadist web forums for distribution of their news. Like *'Ansār al-Sunna,* their main production and distribution includes daily reports about military operations, often accompanied by video recordings.[316]

13.1.4   Summary of jihadist media in Iraq

The Iraqi jihadist media scene is diversified in the sense that it is comprised of a large number of different media establishments, using a wide range of methods in order to reach a number of strategic goals of communication. Yet, their media jihad has certain common features, and, moreover, features that are characteristic to Iraqi-focused jihadist media outlets.

First, a distinctive but perhaps less surprising characteristic is that the senders and receivers of the media material seem to belong to a rather limited group, consisting generally of Iraqis. Due to their extensive access to source material, senders seem to be located in, or at least have direct links with, Iraq, and while some material targets a Western public, a large majority of media issuances clearly address an Iraqi audience. As a result, media topics may cover events in the entire world, but the news is seen from an Iraqi jihadist perspective, and framed likewise. However, it is worth noting that the group of Iraqi media receivers also includes opponents – such as Shiites and Kurds. So, while serious attempts to intimidate the Western enemy are scarce, intimidation of non-jihadists Iraqis seems to flourish.

The strategic goals of communication generally correspond with those of other jihadist media, including propagation, education, and intimidation. Legitimization is also present, but seems to be less obvious than in other non-Iraqi media outlets. This may be explained by the fact that Iraqi media addresses primarily supporters who already adhere to the jihadist cause. Furthermore, one can observe direct communication (dialogue) between different Iraqi groups in their media issuances. Despite their close geographical location, war-torn Iraq may well prevent physical contact between the group members, leaving dialogue through media as the preferred option. On the other hand, it is worth keeping in mind the current low level of Internet access in Iraq.[317] Finally, the creation of a sense of community among Iraqi jihadists also stands out as a strategic goal of communication. One may argue that this is a goal inherent in most acts of communication – with the exception of intimidating communicative exchanges – but the incorporation of

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[315] www.iraqiasaeb.org/asaeb2007/index.htm (accessed January 2007).

[316] For an assessment of the Iraqi insurgency groups' discourse and communication strategies, see, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency", *International Crisis Group*, Middle East Report No. 50 – 15 February 2006, www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east___north_africa/iraq_iran_gulf/50_in_their_own_words_reading_the_iraqi_insurgency.pdf (accessed 15 September 2007).

[317] See Part III, Chapter 2, in this study: "Restrictions with Internet-based media".

individuals in the media work and the interactive media features nonetheless emphasize the specific community-building efforts of communication in Iraq.

The framework of the jihadist media of Iraq is, to a large extent, shaped by the ongoing war with U.S. and allied troops, and most issues that are treated in its media concern this conflict. The conflict is presented as an extension of the Crusader war, and a defensive struggle for freedom and human rights against the unjust invasion of Muslim land. As sectarian violence has increased in Iraq over the past years divergences between Sunnis and Shiites saturates the rhetoric. This dichotomy is even employed when referring to other geographical regions where the Sunni-Shiite relationship is not an issue, such as in Algeria. Furthermore, news focuses on defeats of the enemies, and the jihadists' own losses are framed as heroic martyrdom deaths. The portrayal of Iraqi jihadist institutions as being equal to state institutions is also noteworthy: The Iraqi jihadist media presents the "Islamic State of Iraq" with ministries, a court, and a leader who himself addresses U.S. President George W. Bush.

Finally, some of the media material coming out of Iraq appears more violent than other jihadist media. Examples are executions, in particular beheading, videos. While this has been characteristic of al-Qaeda branches in several places, the particularly aggressive theatre of war that Iraq has become seems to be reflected in the jihadist media issuances.

13.2 North Africa and the Horn of Africa

The African continent is not a new arena for salafist-jihadist currents. Local jihadist groups have trained and fought in numerous countries, in particular in North and East Africa, but also in other regions. In a recent development, some of these local groups have joined the global jihadist cause, adopted the name of al-Qaeda, and pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden. This development suggests a number of implications for the nature of the jihadist groups, such as shift in ideology, strategy, operational tactics, etc. However, interestingly, one of the most noticeable implications during the early merger period has been an intensification of media activity, which will be discussed below.[318]

It is worth keeping in mind the history of the close relationship between the al-Qaeda *'amīr* and the African continent: bin Laden had his base in Sudan from 1991 until 1996. During the stay in Sudan, bin Laden and his followers reportedly became increasingly radicalized, and behind the cover of being an entrepreneur and businessman, bin Laden established a number of training camps in northern Sudan. Despite the economic benefits he contributed to Sudan, the Islamist government that had welcomed him in the early 1990s succumbed to international pressure to expel bin Laden, who left for Afghanistan in 1996.[319] In addition, bin Laden supported, at least rhetorically, the Somali uprising in 1993, and has been charged with masterminding the bombing

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[318] Other studies also deal with the intensified use of the media by GSPC, see Boudali, Lianne Kennedy, *The GSPC: Newest Franchise in al-Qa'ida's Global Jihad*, The Combating Terrorism Center, April 2007, ttp://www.ctc.usma.edu/Kennedy-GSPC-041207.pdf (accessed July 2007).
[319] Bergen, Peter, *Holy War Inc.*, London: Phoenix, 2002, pp. 79-94.

of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. It is also believed that members of the al-Qaeda linked African bombing cell have used Somalia as a refuge.

Over recent years, the al-Qaeda leadership has clearly articulated an effort to incorporate North Africa and the Horn in the global jihadist community. Media announcements by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have repeatedly urged mujahideen to "go to Sudan" and "defend Islam in Darfur," or to "support [your] brothers in Somalia."[320] The Islamic State of Iraq also called "Muslims to stand with the brothers in Somalia" in December 2006.[321] In parallel, Shaykh *ᶜAṭīyat 'Allāh*, a prominent al-Qaeda ideologue released a document entitled "The greatest hopes of doing Jihad in Somalia,"[322] and from Kuwait, the well-known radical cleric Shaykh *Ḥāmid al-ᶜAlī,* issued a statement on "jihad against the hateful Christian Ethiopia".[323]

In Algeria the local jihadist movement, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), officially joined the global jihadist movement in September 2006, after public announcements by both al-Qaeda Central and the GSPC leadership on the Internet. A group in Somalia, the "Somali Liberation Brigade", also allegedly pledged allegiance to bin Laden in February 2007.[324]

13.2.1   Algeria; from GSPC to AQIM

a. Background

GSPC is an offshoot of the GIA, and was founded in 1998 by *Ḥasān Ḥaṭṭāb*, also known as *'Abū Hamza*. It follows the salafist ideology in its fight against the Algerian regime, as well as against French and American interests, and aims to restore the Caliphate. GSPC has remained more or less active in Algeria, and probably also in neighboring countries, since its establishment, despite infiltration and manipulation by the Algerian secret services. In September 2006, al-Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced the merger of GSPC into al-Qaeda in his

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[320] Osama Bin Laden,"يا أهل الإسلام" ("Oh, People of Islam"), audio speech, April 2006, or " رسالة إلى الأمة عامة و المجاهدين في العراق و الصومال خاصة " ("Message to the *'umma* in general and the mujahideen in Iraq and Somalia in particular"), video speech, July 2006, both: http://mobasher.110mb.com/Osama_bin_Laden.htm (accessed July 2007). Ayman al-Zawahiri, " بوش – بابا الفاتيكان – دارفور و الحروب الصليبية " ("Bush – the Pope of the Vatican – Darfur and the Crusader Wars"), video speech, September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=17259 (accessed October 2006).
[321] Posted on World News Network, "دولة العراق الأسلامية تدعوا المسلمين الى الوقوف مع إخوانهم في 12 الصومال" ("The Islamic State of Iraq calls Muslims to stand by their brothers in Somalia"), December 27, 2006, www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=17011 (accessed 10 January 2007).
[322] ᶜAtīyat Allāh, "إعظام الآمال بجهاد الصومال" (The greatest hopes by Jihad in Somalia), *'Abū al-Būkharī* Islamic Forum, December 28, 2006, www.abualbokhary.info/vb3/showthread.php?t=19965 (accessed 10 January 2007).
[323] Ḥāmid al- ᶜAlī, "الجهاد ضد أثيوبيا الصليبيّة الحاقدة" ("Jihad against the hateful Christian Ethiopia"), December 25, 2006, www.h-alali.net/m_open.php?id=252ccd52-e52f-1029-a62a-0010dc91cf69 (Date accessed: 10 January 2007).
[324] "Friends of Somalia Brigade Reports Bombings of Mogadishu Seaport and Somali Liberation Brigades Pledging to Usama bin Laden", SITE Institute, 5 February 2007, http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications250607&Category=publications&Subcategory=0 (accessed May 2007).

9/11 commemoration tape entitled "Hot Issues".[325] The GSPC leader, ᶜAbd al-Malik Drukdal, also known as 'Abū Muṣᶜab ᶜAbd al-Wudūd, responded in an Internet distributed letter a few days later, confirming the merger. GSPC has since increased its activities, both on the ground and in the media sphere.

Concerning communication, GSPC has faced many obstacles in a country where freedom of expression is restricted, and media is heavily controlled and manipulated by the regime. However, a media wing of GSPC has been present for a long time, and it has maintained an official website since at least 2005, although the site has been quite unstable.[326] An interview in January 2005 with the chairman of the Media Wing illustrates the importance GSPC attributes to their media efforts:

> "The Mujahideen in Algeria have suffered badly form the despicable media [...]
> Hence, the [media wing] is critical to re-acquainting the Islamic nation with jihad,
> showing them its objective, breaking the siege and media blockage around it, and
> refuting the falsehoods promoted by the infidels and apostates who are launching
> aggressive assaults on our Jihad".[327]

During 2006, GSPC increased its efforts in the use of media, and in particular online media. A mailing list was established, and news bulletins sent out on a weekly basis, the online magazine *al-Jamāᶜa* was continually published, and video recordings of operations were distributed online. These new media efforts allegedly followed recommendations from al-Qaeda Central in early 2006 that GSPC pay more attention to propaganda.[328] In fact, communications between GSPC and al-Qaeda were ongoing for a year before the merger,[329] and it may very well be that an increased media effort was one of the requirements for becoming part of the global movement. Or, rather than a requirement, al-Qaeda may have offered contributions and assistance to GSPC's media war. It is worth noting in this regard that *al-Fajr,* at some point during 2006, became the distributor for GSPC media material.

Despite this general surge in media activities, the immediate period after the GSPC – al-Qaeda merger did not experience great activity. Only a few statements claiming responsibility for attacks and ᶜAbd al-Wudūd's merger announcement were released. The first months of 2007, on the other hand, have been prolific, and multimedia productions have shown increasing technological

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[325] Posted on *al-'Ikhlāṣ* Forum, "قضايا ساخنة" ("Hot Issues"), *as-Saḥāb* Production, 10 September 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=32623 (accessed 15 September 2006).

[326] GSPC's website has been located on a number of URL addresses, such as www.jihad-algeria.com, www.salafiahweb1.tk, www.salafia.ne1.net, www.moon4321.net, http://moonnight1234.com, www.almedad.com/jama3a/. In June 2007 a new GSPC/AQIM website appeared: www.qmagreb.org/.

[327] "حوار مجلة الفتح مع الأخ أبي عمر عبد البر" ("Fatḥ magazine interviews brother 'Abū ᶜUmar ᶜAbd al-Birr"), *GSPC website*, January 2005, http://moonnight1234.com\pages\hiwar3.htm (accessed 23 June, 2006).

[328] Guidère, Mathieu, "Une filiale algérienne pour al-Qaida", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Novembre 2006, www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2006/11/GUIDERE/14167 (accessed 12 July 2007).

[329] According to a statement by 'Abū Muṣᶜab ᶜAbd al-Wudūd, September 13, 2006, " بيان وبشرى بانضمام ومبايعة الجماعة السلفية للدعوة والقتال" ("Statement and good news regarding the joining and the pledge of allegiance of the Salafist Group for Preacher and Combat"), *GPSC Website*, www.qmagreb.org\pages\join_qaeda.html (accessed 2 July 2007).

qualities. This new boost in activity followed the announcement of the changing of name from GSPC to "al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghrib" (AQIM), final proof of the new global status. During this period, the GSPC/AOIM media material was also distributed on global jihadist websites. Reportedly, AQIM also sent a video depicting preparation for attacks to al-Jazeera, a well-known al-Qaeda approach.[330]

The following content analysis of GSPC media material will focus on media pieces that emerged during the fall of 2006, including the merger announcement, a statement of responsibility for attack, and a statement refuting the Algerian media's coverage of the group.

b. Content Analysis

i. On September 13, 2006, the leader of GSPC issued a written document entitled "The Statement and Good News Regarding the Joining and the Pledge of Allegiance of the Salafist Group for Preacher and Combat".[331] It announces GSPC's merger with al-Qaeda, the "only organization qualified to unite the mujahideen". The pledge of allegiance to bin Laden is a response to the "Crusaders' war on Islam", and this step into the "melting pot" of Islam is reportedly the only solution for Algeria in order to avoid nationalism, and the division and fragmentation seen in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan. *ᶜAbd al-Wudūd* announces the continuation of jihad in Algeria "under his [bin Laden's] instructions", and hopes to be an inspiration for mujahideen and Muslims to unite. *Abd al-Wudūd*'s message is dedicated to "*Shaykh 'Abū ᶜAbd 'Allāh Usāma bin Lādin*". Throughout the text, he addresses the "dear Muslims". The text was published in Arabic, indicating an Arab audience. The statement is a written piece. It is signed by the GSPC leader, but is written in first person plural, "we", and speaks on behalf of the group. It lacks the personal touch of a video or audio speech. The text, besides stating the facts about the merger, includes a strong urge to other Muslims to follow the path of GSPC in uniting the jihadist movement. It paints a black and white picture of the world, rhetorically opposing good and evil: unity vs. dispersion, hypocrisy vs. faith, offence vs. charity, obedience vs. disobedience, and Muslims vs. infidels.

This text is an example of, on a first level, communication between scattered elements of the global jihadist movement. *ᶜAbd al-Wudūd* informs *bin Laden*, and the world, about this new affiliation. *ᶜAbd al-Wudūd* may not have a direct means of communication to *bin Laden*, although it is highly unlikely that the Internet is their only way of communication. The text represents dissemination of information to supporters, and Muslims in general. On a second level, the main strategic goal of communication of this message seems to be propagation of the movement, presenting al-Qaeda as a unified and strong alliance, and encouraging further recruitment to the global jihadist community. *ᶜAbd al-Wudūd* also presents legitimizing factors for joining al-Qaeda, such as in defence of the "Crusaders' war on Islam".

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[330] Whitlock, Craig, "From Iraq to Algeria, Al-Qaeda's Long Reach", *Washington Post* Foreign Service, 30 May 2007, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/29/AR2007052901967_pf.html (accessed 2 July 2007).

[331] Posted on GSPC's website, "بيان وبشرى بانضمام ومبايعة الجماعة السلفية للدعوة والقتال" ("Statement and good news regarding the joining and the pledge of allegiance of the Salafist Group for Preacher and Combat"), 13 September 2006, www.qmagreb.org\pages\join_qaeda.html (accessed 2 July 2007).

ii. On December 11, 2006, the Media Wing of GSPC issued a statement of responsibility for the "*Būshāwī* raid".[332] The attack targeted "Crusader" workers of the Halliburton subsidiary company "Brown Root and Condor" in Algeria. According to the statement, the mujahideen detonated an explosion on a bus carrying at least 20 "Crusaders". The result was an unknown number of dead and wounded. The attack was presented as a humble gift to the Muslims who are facing a new "Crusader" campaign, and the GSPC mujahideen declared their intention to continue the fight until the defeat of their enemy. The statement ends with advice to Muslims in Algeria to stay away from the interests of the infidels to avoid the danger of being hurt in an attack against them.

The message is directed to the West, stating that 'we are able to target you and will target you until you leave our country'. It is also a message to Muslims in Algeria, of reassurance and admonition. The statement claiming responsibility for the attack seems factual, and does not boost or exaggerate the success of the mujahideen. It legitimizes the action by showing to the "Crusader campaign against Islam and all that is holy to it", and by evoking the long fight of the Muslims, once successful under the command of 8th century *Ṭāriq bin Ziyād*, of whom GSPC mujahideen claim to be the offspring (grandsons). The statement strives to show the mujahideen in a good light in the eyes of Muslims in the country, by emphasizing their view of Muslims as a non-target.[333] Again, a main strategic goal of communication seems to be propagation of the movement, by showing a successful attack, and presenting the mujahideen as a good force that protects the Muslims. Another goal of communication is intimidation of enemy, seen in the vow to continue fighting the "Crusaders".

iii. On December 21, 2006, the GSPC's Media Wing issued a statement entitled "Wealth of spoils... Facts or Illusions?".[334] It denies the allegations of the Algerian press, particularly *L'Expression*, that GSPC Emirs have engaged in conflict over the sharing of spoils of wealth, and that a named leader has been removed because of his involvement in financial corruption. This is allegedly only the latest of the Algerian media's efforts to tarnish the reputation of the mujahideen. The statement claims that GSPC's spoils of wealth is a myth, and that the movement is self-funded, and that its money goes to widows and orphans of the group's martyrs. It also challenges the Algerian media, whose integrity and independence is scoffed, to reveal the truth about corruption and looting among officers and government officials in Algeria, indicating the complicity of the media with the "true criminals". Finally, GSPC calls upon all Muslims to ignore the smearing campaign of the misleading media, and to provide GSPC with financial support, the "backbone of jihad".

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[332] Posted on GSPC website, "بيان تبني لغزوة "بوشاوي"التي استهدفت الأمريكيين" ("Statement of responsibility for the "Būshāwī" raid which targeted the Americans"), 11 December 2006, www.qmagreb.org\pages\bouchawi.html (accessed 2 July 2007).
[333] One of the reasons for the establishment of GSPC as a splinter group of the GIA was GSPC's opposition to the use of violence against civilians in Algeria that the GIA was known for. However, GSPC's activities have not always fallen in line with this position.
[334] Posted on GSPC's website "ثروة الغنائم... حقائق أم أوهام ؟" ("Wealth of spoils... Facts or Illusions?"), 21 December 2007, www.qmagreb.org\pages\tharwa.htm (accessed 2 July 2007).

The message is to "Muslims in Algeria in particular and to all Muslims in general". It essentially targets readers of Algerian newspapers. The statement seeks to deny accusations, and restore the image of the mujahideen. In doing so, it relocates the characteristics given to GSPC by the press to its enemies, picturing the Algerian military and government as corrupt and greedy, and the media as deceptive. GSPC presents itself as the good force, supporting widows and orphans, and as being a representative of the truth. The strategic goal of communication of this piece seems to be education of Muslims, and in particular Algerians, who are constantly being "misinformed". By this, it also seeks to propagate the movement, asking directly for financially competent supporters.

13.2.2   The Horn of Africa

a. Background

As the conflict in the Horn of Africa grew in intensity during the fall of 2006, a boost in online media activity was also observed. In fact, new jihadist media groups from the region appeared on Internet, and their material was published on prominent global jihadist websites. Some of this material was distributed by global jihadist media networks, as was the case also with Algerian jihadist media material.

A number of factors influenced the political and military situation in Somalia during the last half of 2006. Since June 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) had been on the rise, taking control over large parts of southern Somalia, and establishing an Islamic state based on sharia law. In December 2006, Ethiopian forces invaded Somalia, with support from the U.S., and defeated the political opposition of the ICU. However, its militant wing, the "Popular Resistance Movement of the Land of Two Migrations", other militant/jihadist groups[335], as well as clan-based warlords, have continued to fight the "Somali Transitional Federal Government" (TFG), which relocated from Kenya to Somalia in December, and the AU troops that were deployed in March 2007.[336]

From an online media perspective, the Somali Islamist movement has reportedly been active for years. Its media campaign has been described as two-faced: on the one hand presenting moderate viewpoints through the official ICU website, on the other, through an "unofficial campaign" spreading a radical message and linking itself to the al-Qaeda movement.[337] Since the fall of 2006, this latter campaign has been strengthened with the appearance of new media groups, increased support through the media from global jihadist groups, and continued support from the al-Qaeda leadership. Bin Laden's audio speech, issued in July 2006, was dedicated to the Muslim

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[335] For a description of Islamists in Somalia, see "Somalia's Islamists", *International Crisis Group*, Africa Report N°100, 12 December 2005, www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3830 (accessed 2 July 2007).
[336] "Somalia's Drama: Can the T.F.G. Do It?", *PINR*, 19 March 2007, www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=630&language_id=1 (accessed 2 July 2007).
[337] "Somalia Islamists join terror networks", *Afrol News*, 20 November 2006, www.afrol.com/articles/22785 (accessed 2 July 2007). The official website of the ICU is www.qaadisiya.com/ (accessed 10 September 2007).

'umma in general, and the people of [Iraq and] Somalia in particular.[338] In September 2006, al-Zawahiri echoed bin Laden's words, calling for support of Muslim brothers in Somalia, greeting Somalia's mujahideen, and warning about attacks on the "Crusader" presence in the country.[339] These calls for support seemed to be picked up first by members of the jihadist fourms, causing wide-spread Internet chatter. Soon, jihadist media groups joined the choir, issuing a symphony of written and audio-visual media material. Interestingly, both local and global jihadist media groups contributed to the media surge from Somalia, reinforcing the perception of unity between the Somali insurgency and the global jihadist movement. Productions in both the Somali and Arabic languages were released, but an increasing amount of Arabic language media has become available about Somalia. Furthermore, the Somali jihadists and their supporters have expanded their online arena, from locally to globally focused jihadist sites, and lately, increasingly to mainstream English language sites, such as YouTube. This indicates the desire not only to link up with the al-Qaeda movement, but also to spread the cause and gain support in the West and elsewhere.

As of the beginning of 2007, the online jihadist media activity concerning Somalia has reached a new high. Since January, an establishment named the "Friends of Somalia Brigades" has been operating website (http://amisomal.modawanati.com/) in Arabic, where it communicates attacks by Somali resistance groups, such as the "Popular Resistance Movement in the Land of Two Migrations", the "Youth of al-Qaeda Organization in Somalia", and "Somalia Liberation Brigades". Since March, the "Global Islamic Media Front" has taken upon itself to distribute the statements from and news about the "al-Qaeda Youth Movement in Somalia".

b. Content Analysis

The following analysis of media material concerning the conflict in the Horn of Africa includes the pieces that seem to have received the most attention on the jihadist websites during the fall of 2006.

i. A "Comprehensive file on Somalia" was distributed on the jihadist web forums in December 2006 by the Media Jihad Brigade.[340] The PowerPoint file contained slides with information about Somalia's history, geography, ethnicities, languages, economy, and the Islamic Courts, etc. Maps and pictures, a number showing local mujahideen, were also provided. The last chapter in the file was entitled "Greater Somalia", including former Italian, British, and French Somalia, as well as areas currently within the borders of Ethiopia and Kenya. It concluded: "Until we reach a solution for the Somali problem in the Republic and in the areas that are under Ethiopian and Kenyan control, Somalia will not experience peace".

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[338] "رسالة إلى الأمة عامة ومجاهدى العراق والصومال خاصة" ("Message to the *'Umma* in general and Iraq and Somalia in particular"), as-Saḥāb Production, 2 July 2006, http://ia310103.us.archive.org/3/items/LaDeN18/Iraq-Somalia_ozooo.WMV (accessed 2 July 2007).

[339] Posted on *al-' Ikhlāṣ* Forum, "قضايا ساخنة" ("Hot Issues"), *as-Saḥāb* Production, 10 September 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=32623 (accessed 15 September 2006).

[340] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "الصـــومال - ملف شامل" ("Somalia – a comprehensive file"), 13 December 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=22031 (accessed 10 January 2007).

The file was user friendly, letting the reader decide which topic to focus on, and time spent on each topic, etc. It contains mainly text, but also pictures. The information is predominantly of neutral, factual character; however, the content takes a pro-jihadist turn when treating the Islamic Courts, showing photos of Somali mujahideen, and when rallying for a "greater Somalia". The file was presented with only Arabic text, indicating an Arabic speaking audience. It presents largely basic facts about Somalia for a public without much prior knowledge of the country. However, it promotes one specific interpretation of the history of the region. It was posted to well-known jihadist websites, and released following a period of online chatter about Somalia, seemingly responding to a request for knowledge about Somalia from the global jihadist constituency. The "Comprehensive file on Somalia" seeks to educate supporters of the jihadist cause about a new geographical area of the jihad.

ii. A film entitled "Apostate hell in Somalia" was distributed on jihadist web forums by *al-Fajr* Media Center in December 2006.[341] The title was given in Arabic and Arabic *nashīd* was played. However all other text, written and spoken, was in the Somali language. The one hour film contained footage of Somali militants in training camps, undergoing military and theoretical instruction. It also showed the execution of attacks. It offered interviews with Somali jihadists, including one female *mujāhida*. Clips of bin Laden and other prominent figures of the global jihadist movement, including local leaders, were also added to the video.

Apostate hell in Somalia" places itself within a typical film genre of the global jihadist movement: the title reminds us of, for example, "Hellfire for Americans in Afghanistan", or "Hell for apostates and Romans in Iraq", and the composition of the film, showing training and attacks mixed with old clips of jihadist leaders' speeches, resembles other jihadist multi-media productions. However, the quality of the recording is poor. This may partly be due to the nature of the footage (outdoor training/attacks), and the fact that little editing seems to have been added. The film targets primarily local supporters, as the language of the film is Somali. However, the visual propaganda makes the message of the film obvious for non-Somali speakers as well, and its distribution on Arabic jihadist websites signifies that it targets supporters of the movement in general. The fact that it was distributed by *al-Fajr*, highly regarded among jihadists, indicates that it probably reached a wide jihadist audience. Using a female jihadist in the video may indicate a desire to reach Muslim women. Since the language of the film was Somali, this author has no means fully to analyze the content. As with similar Arabic language films, it is likely that the goal was to propagate the movement, and incite among supporters in Somalia. Its wide distribution seems to seek to create a link between the mujahideen in Somalia, and the global jihadist movement.

iii. In November 2006, The Media Brigades of Eritrea presented a 4:25 minute video. It had both Arabic and English captions, and was entitled "Ambush on a truck carrying war supplies to the

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[341] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "جحيم المرتدين في الصومال" ("Apostate Hell in Somalia"), 30 December 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?p=86612 (accessed 10 January 2007).

enemy".[342] It starts with an "orientation by the Emir of the group before the ambush". The footage shows local jihadists preparing for the attack. The audio of the Emir is in Arabic, but is almost unintelligible. The video then shows a clip from the attack on the truck, and finally footage with the caption "Mujahideen returns [sic] to their base without any casualties".

The ambush video from Eritrea is a typical operational video, showing a successful attack against the enemy. It seems to target a wide audience, with captions in English and Arabic. Videos of successful operations, such as this, seem generally to address supporters, as they offer no legitimization of the activity, but rather seek to incite and recruit fighters. A strategic goal of communication is then most likely propagation of the movement. While the video does not overtly state the nationality of the fighters, the fact that it is explicitly issued by an Eritrean media group may indicate that the film seeks to prove the existence and success of the mujahideen in Eritrea. This may also imply a further goal - to create the impression of unity between various jihadist groups in the region.

13.2.3   Sudan

Sudan, and the conflict in Darfur, have not generated the same level of online jihadist media activity. Repeated comments by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri from April to October 2006 – "encouraging the mujahideen and their supporters to prepare to manage a long-term war against thieves and Crusaders in western Sudan" – resulted in emerging interest in Darfur on the jihadist web forums, as in the Somali case. Most significant was perhaps a posting concerning "The way to Darfur", offering detailed information about the region and advice on how to travel to Darfur, indicating the existence of a training camp named *al-Hūr* ("Virgin of Paradise") in Sudan, accessible via a Libyan border crossing.[343] Other commentaries have focused on a religious aspect, providing information on Salafist oriented groups in Sudan, or military matters, praising the availability of weapons in the region. However, concerns over the lack of resources, such as food and water, as well as the likelihood of meeting a well prepared enemy who has learned from previous mistakes in Afghanistan and Iraq, have also been raised.[344]

With the exception of increased Internet chatter about Darfur and Sudan, no other online media presence seems to have established itself in Sudan. At the same time, no open source information indicates that there is, in fact, an organized jihadist presence in Sudan. Knowing that militant jihadist groups generally attribute great importance to media and communication efforts, and that a media wing is often part of the organizational structure of a jihadist group, one may speculate that absence of media activity indicates absence of an organized presence on the ground. Alternatively, the efforts at establishing a jihadist presence have not yet reached a point at which a media campaign is deemed useful.

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[342] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "كمين لشاحنة تحمل عتاد حربي للعدو" ("Ambush on a truck carrying war supplies to the enemy"), 30 November 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb (accessed 10 December 2006).
[343] Posting on *al-Nusra* Forum, "الطريق الى دار فور" ("The road to Darfur"), 2 October 2006, www.alnusra.net/vb (accessed 10 October 2006).
[344] "Emerging Interest in Darfur", Intel Report, *Terrorism Research Center*, 23 June, 2006, www.terrorism.com (accessed October 2006).

13.2.4   Summary of North Africa and the Horn

Recent media activities in North Africa and the Horn of Africa reveal interesting characteristics of jihadist online media, both locally and globally. Examples from Algeria and Somalia illustrate the interaction between different branches of the jihad on the media front, both on communicative and organizational levels. Communicatively, media appearances have been used for direct communication, for example between the GSPC and al-Qaeda leaderships, but also for general informative purposes between branches. Organizationally, the joining of GSPC was announced in an online statement. More importantly perhaps, was the involvement of acknowledged global jihadist media groups, such as *al-Fajr*, in the global distribution of local media material. The latter indicates a desire for community-building, not only from the local groups, which may wish to be associated with al-Qaeda, but also from the global movement, which seemingly wishes to incorporate the local struggles in the greater jihadist cause. It is also interesting to note an increase in online media use preceding or accompanying increased militant activity, or absence of media activity, as in the case of Sudan, where no jihadist actions have been claimed.

The frame proposed by the jihadist media of Africa, exemplified above, paints a black and white picture of the world, and presents the jihad as a good Islamic force fighting the evil infidel force, truly a binary opposition. It legitimizes the jihad as a defense against the "Crusader" war and corruption of the local government, which threaten the Muslim world. Furthermore, it links the current struggle to the early history of the Muslim *'umma*. Strategic goals of communication include, as mentioned above, communication and community-building. Also included are: intimidation of enemy – seen in threats of further attacks in Algeria; propagation of the movement – by explicitly asking for manpower and financial support; legitimization of activities – observed particularly on historical and political levels; and education of supporters – for example in the file on Somalia.

Finally, it is worth noting that no online jihadist media productions were observed from other African countries during the time of research. However, during the first half of 2007, productions emerged from both Libya and Morocco, as well as from a group calling itself " *'Ansar al-Sunna* in the Sahara".[345] This followed the announcement of the establishment of the "al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghrib" (formerly GSPC),[346] as well as continued rumors about another umbrella group, the "*Qāᶜidat al-Jihād* in the Arab Maghrib" (including Morocco, Libya,

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[345] The *'Ansār al-Sunna* in the Sahara runs a website on http://ansaar.30mb.com/ (accessed September 2007).
[346] *Maghrib* means "place of sunset" or "Western" in Arabic, and denotes the region of North Africa, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Western Sahara, and sometimes Mauritania.

Algeria),[347] and may indicate an increased effort to establish links between extremist groups across North Africa.[348]

13.3 Other local jihadist media groups

The following section includes a description of other local al-Qaeda fronts where the media jihad, despite holding a prominent place, seems to have been less vigorous during the time of research. Some of these fronts are pioneers in online media jihad, and represent a source of inspiration to more recent jihadist campaigns. Others are fronts currently developing their media jihad.

13.3.1 The Chechen jihad: Voice of the Caucasus

The Chechen conflict is mainly a nationalist independence struggle, marked by the first and second Chechen wars (1994-96 and 1999- present). The first war involved few foreign fighters, but media reports of Russian atrocities against the local population allegedly inspired a group of Saudis, led by *'Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb*, also known as *Ḥabīb ᶜAbd al-Rahmān*, to join the Chechen fighters in 1995.[349] The interwar period saw the establishment of Islamist charities in Chechnya, many of whom mixed charitable work with pursuit of militant jihad.[350] Moreover, *'Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb* established training camps and recruited a number of Arab mujahideen to the Chechen front, who fought alongside the Chechens. Yet, the financial aid from Islamists in the Middle East may have been more important than the combat support from foreign fighters, who, numerically speaking, formed a limited group.[351] Nevertheless, radical Islamism has marked the Chechen jihad, with its characteristic rhetoric and symbols. This was exemplified with the October 2002 hostage drama in the Dubrovka Theatre, where hostage takers, among them Chechen women in Middle Eastern robes and with *shahīd* ("martyrdom") belts around their waists, used typical Islamist words and expressions.[352]

On the media front, the mujahideen in Chechnya were pioneers in using videos and online channels. *'Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb* has been described as a "media genius",[353] and allegedly stated that: "the enemy used the media in his war against us, it is time to use the same weapon in our

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[347] See al-Arqam, Ahmad, "Moroccan source: Terrorist cell reveals plans for establishing Al-Qaeda in North African countries", Al-Sharq Al-Awsaṭ English edition, 8 December 2005, http://aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=1&id=2978 (accessed June 2007), or Burton, Fred, "Al-Qaeda's Pan-Maghreb Gambit", Stratfor, 21 November 2006, http://www.stratfor.com/products/premium/read_article.php?id=280903 (accessed June 2007).

[348] The "*Qāᶜidat al-Jihād* in the Arab Maghrib" has to this author's knowledge not taken responsibility for any acts, nor issued any written material, and it remains unknown as to what extent it actually exists as an organized movement.

[349] Vidino, Lorenzo, *Al-Qaeda in Europe, The new battleground of International Jihad*, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006.

[350] Wilhelmsen, Julie, "When separatists become Islamists: the case of Chechnya", *FFI/RAPPORT*-2004/00445, 2004, http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2004/00445.pdf (accessed 20 October 2007).

[351] *Ibid.*

[352] *Ibid.*

[353] Vidino, Lorenzo, *Al-Qaeda in Europe, The new battleground of International Jihad*, p. 205.

favor".[354] It is said that the Chechen media jihad was an important source of inspiration for the global jihadist movement's media strategy.[355] In particular, the concept of the video series "Russian Hell" has been copied by other jihadist groups.[356] The Chechen mujahideen, or their supporters, have operated a website since 1999, called *Ṣawt al-Qawqāz*, or the Voice of Caucasus.[357] The site is in Arabic and contains news, articles, interviews, martyr stories, and a magazine concerning the Chechen jihad. News letters from *Ṣawt al-Qawqāz* also regularly make their way to the jihadist forums. Another site related to the Chechen jihad is called "Kavkaz Center", and is promoted as an "international Islamic Internet news agency".[358] The site has a highly professional design, and offers different language versions (English, Russian, Ukrainian, Arabic, Turkish). It distributes news, films, and photos from the Islamic world, Caucasus and Russia, as well as "analyses", or strategic and ideological texts of prominent jihadists, such as *ᶜAbd 'Allāh ᶜAzzām*.

Generally, the Chechen jihadist media productions are specific to the Chechen jihad, and do not necessarily receive widespread attention on global jihadist sites. However, in September 2006, a project of cooperation between the *Ṣawt al-Qawqāz* Foundation for Media Production and the Global Islamic Media Front was advertised on the jihadist forums.[359] In fact, it was a video production by *Ṣawt al-Qawqāz*, distributed online by the Global Islamic Media Front. The 52 minute video paid tribute to the late *'Abū ᶜUmar al-Sayf*, a Saudi militant active in Afghanistan from 1986-88, and in Chechnya from 1996 and onwards, where he was a religious adviser and ideologue. *'Abū ᶜUmar al-Sayf* was reportedly killed in December 2005.

The Jihadist websites' emphasis on Arab militants in the Chechen conflict seeks to globalize the Chechen jihad. At a time when Iraq and Afghanistan are the main theatres of global jihad, it is important to be reminded of other conflicts where Arabs have played a significant role. Chechnya holds a high symbolic value, and while fewer Arabs go there now, it remains an important rhetoric component of the global jihad today.[360] The fact that news, and some of the videos from Chechnya, are in Arabic illustrates the outreach from the Chechen mujahideen to their Arab brothers. Therefore, the target audience seems to be supporters of the movement, and the objective of these media issuances to inform about the injustice carried out against Chechens, and

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[354] "Global Islamic Media Group Reports on Evolution in Media Jihad", *SITE Institute,* 10 May 2005, http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications44105&Category=publications&Subcategory=0 (accessed 2 July 2007).
[355] *Ibid.*
[356] For example "Hell for Romans and Apostates in Iraq", "Hellfire for Americans in *Khurāsān*", and "Hell for Apostates in Somalia".
[357] www.alqoqaz.net (accessed May 2007), previously www.qoqaz.com.
[358] http://old.kavkazcenter.com. Kavkaz Center is an independent, private project, reportedly operated from Sweden, see http://old.kavkazcenter.com/eng/about/ (accessed May 2007).
[359] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "ابو عمر السيف العالم المجاهد" ("*'Abū ᶜUmar al-Sayf*, the mujahid scholar"), September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=16214 (accessed 10 January 2007).
[360] The al-Qaeda leadership and others habitually mention Chechnya in propaganda pieces, such as Osama bin Laden's November 2002 audiotape message, in which he acknowledged the Moscow hostage takers. Osama bin Laden's message, 12 November 2002, *al-Jazeera*, reproduced in Hegghammer, Thomas, "Dokumentasjon om al-Qa'ida – Intervjuer, kommunikeer og andre priærkilder, 1990-2002".

the success of the Chechen struggle. The main strategic goal of communication seems to be propagation of the movement, and possibly inclusion of the Chechen jihad in the global fight, or in the global jihadist community.

13.3.2   Afghanistan

Qāᶜidat al-Jihād fī Khurāsan

Afghanistan is important to the global jihadist movement, as the professed place of the first modern mujahideen victory, and still an active battlefront. With this in mind, it is perhaps surprising that the level of media production there is relatively low. Yet, the global media company as-Saḥāb, probably located in neighboring Pakistan, takes good care of promoting the mujahideen in Afghanistan, and is probably the best suited vehicle with its large audience reach.

The branch of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan is called "*Qāᶜidat al-Jihād fī Khurāsan* [Afghanistan]". This branch has its own media committee, sometimes referred to as the "Drafting committee for Information Strategy of *Qāᶜidat al-Jihād*". A well-known member of this committee is *Ḥussām ᶜAbd al-Ruʾūf*, who is the editor of the group's online magazine, "Vanguards of Khorasan" (Ṭalāʾiᶜ Khurāsān). The first issue of the magazine was published in September 2005, and Issue Number 8 was released in February 2007.[361] "Vanguards of Khorasan", often a 100+ page publication, treats issues pertinent to the mujahideen in Afghanistan, such as analyses of American and allied forces, and accounts of their losses, and mujahideen martyrdom stories from Afghanistan. It has also contained a number of articles from the Pakistani English language press about the situation in Afghanistan translated into Arabic.

The media committee has published only a few other productions; one that circulated on the jihadist web in October 2006 was "A Study of the Victory of Islam", authored by the above mentioned ᶜAbd al-Ruʾūf. It was presented as

> "an analytical study of the Crusader occupation of Afghanistan, its aspects of weakness, manifestations of disintegration, the collapse of morale among file and rank, all highlighted by statements that show the reality in the battlefield and the significant progress achieved by Taliban, including the expectation of an imminent end to the occupation and the return of the Islamic Emirate, if God wills".[362]

In May 2007, al-Jazeera exclusively released an interview with the new leader of "*Qāᶜidat al-Jihād* in Afghanistan", *Muṣṭafa ʾAbū al-Yazīd*.[363] This was followed by an Internet-released

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[361]See posting on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "العدد الثامن - مجلة طلائع خرسان - الآن " ("Now - the magazine Vanguards of Khorasan – Issue 8"), 28 February 2007, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=27604 (accessed 3 March 2007).

[362] Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "دراسة نصرة الاسلام" ("A Study of the Victory of Islam"), 15 October 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=17516 (accessed 3 March 2007).

[363] "القاعدة تستأنف نشاطها بأفغانستان وتعين أبو اليزيد مسؤولا" ("Al-Qaeda resumes its activity in Afghanistan, and appoints Abu al-Yazid its official"), *Al-Jazeera*, 25 May 2007, www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7797A7AD-3F6E-4DFF-977C-9D34BFC3D4D6.htm (accessed 2 July 2007).

interview with him issued by *as-Saḥāb*.[364] *'Abū al-Yazīd* seems to be the first to appear publicly as an 'Amir of "*Qāedat al-Jihād* in Afghanistan".

The media committee of "*Qāᶜidat al-Jihād* in Afghanistan" issues mainly written online media material. All material is in Arabic. For more sophisticated productions, such as the video interview, it has relied on assistance from *as-Saḥāb*, which also provided English subtitles.[365] It is also worth noting that the distribution of all of its material is carried out by *al-Fajr* Media Center. To this author's knowledge, the group does not have an Internet site of its own. Interestingly, it follows al-Qaeda's tradition of using al-Jazeera as a vehicle for dissemination of information.

Taliban: The Media Wing of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and Labbayk Media Production Foundation

The Taliban is often described as a nationally-oriented Islamist guerilla organization, and does not categorically belong to the global jihadist movement. It will nevertheless be included here due to its close relationship with al-Qaeda, and the similarities of online media use observed between the two groups.

The Taliban ruled most of Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. It named the country the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", and chose Mulla Muḥammad ᶜUmar as its leader, or "Emir of believers". The Taliban ruled by Islamic fundamentalist ideology in Afghanistan, and imposed strict sharia on the population. During its reign, it harbored bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network, and bin Laden himself swore allegiance to Mulla ᶜUmar, despite their many conflicts and disagreements. Since then, the Taliban and al-Qaeda have been inextricably linked.

While al-Qaeda is represented in the media by *as-Saḥāb*, the Taliban uses the "Media Front of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" and a media foundation named *Labbayk* ("At Your Service") to air its propaganda. In an interview with the spokesman of the Taliban, Dr. *Muḥammad Hanīf*, in *al-ᶜArabiyya* on November 9, 2006, he claimed that there is no cooperation between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, or between *as-Saḥāb* and *Labbayk*.[366]

The Taliban's use of online media had a slower start than that of al-Qaeda, due much to its interpretation of Islamic law as prohibiting showing humans in pictures.[367] However, once the

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[364] Posting on World News Network, "لقاء مع الشيخ المجاهد / مصطفى أبو اليزيد" ("An encounter with Mujahid Sheikh *Muṣṭafa 'Abū al-Yazīd*"), *As-Saḥāb* Production, 26 May 2007, http://www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=25766 (accessed 2 July 2007).

[365] Part of the interview with *'Abū al-Yazīd* was also given in English, with Arabic subtitles.

[366] "لبيك وليد جديد ينافس الذراع الإعلامي للقاعدة" (*"Labbayk*, a newcomer competes with the media branch of al-Qaeda"), *al-ᶜArabiyya*, 12 November 2006, www.alarabiya.net/Articlep.aspx?P=28933 (accessed 10 December 2006).

[367] This was also a topic of discussion within al-Qaeda in the 1990s. In a June 2007 interview with *Manṣūr Dād 'Allāh*, the military leader of the Taliban (brother of former military leader Mulla *Dād 'Allāh*, killed in May 2007), he was asked why the Taliban were now utilizing television, radio, and the Internet when they banned these technologies during their reign. *Manṣūr Dād 'Allāh* responded that these technologies were "indispensable aids in our effort to get our message across to a broad public". Terrorism Research Center, Intel Report, July 5, 2007.

online media production of the Taliban started, it quickly seemed to take inspiration from other jihadist media outlets. It is worth noting that, as of the fall 2006, the entire modus operandi of the Taliban seems to have been influenced by other jihadist battlefronts, in particular Iraq. Military operations include tactics and weapons, as seen in Iraq, such as the extensive use of IEDs and hostage-taking and beheading of hostages. As with their counterparts in Iraq, the mujahideen of the Taliban have also begun filming these incidents and distributing the tapes on the Internet.

The Media Wing of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan operates a website, alemarah.org.[368] The site is in the Pashto language, but its news section is also available in Arabic and English (rudimentarily translated). Furthermore, the news reports are distributed on a number of the jihadist web forums on a daily basis. The Media Wing's news reports gather military operations of the Taliban, and include written text and pictures. They contain detailed information about the kind, place, target, and result of operation. The second media outlet for the Taliban is the media production company *Labbayk*, which specializes in multi-media productions. These productions are not signed by specific persons, but distributed online by *al-Fajr* media center. *Labbayk* productions include online photo albums and films. It is worth noting that some of its material seems to be reproductions of other media, especially *as-Saḥāb* productions.

The most obvious strategic goal of the Taliban's media campaign seems to be propagation of the movement among friendly audiences. Battle and martyrdom stories are commonly used for incitement among jihadists. To a certain degree, these same stories may also cause intimidation of adversaries. Furthermore, the Taliban aims specifically to intimidate its enemies through their filming of hostage situations.

It is interesting to note that the Taliban seems generally to have adopted many of al-Qaeda's tactics, and specifically the use of online media. The use of the same footage in productions by *Labbayk* and *as-Saḥāb*, for example, indicates a certain interaction between the two media foundations, despite their proclaimed distinctiveness.[369] Baghrām prison fugitive, *'Abū Yahyā al-Lībī*, as well as Taliban field commander, Mulla *Dād 'Allāh*, have also featured both Taliban and al-Qaeda productions. Mulla *Dād 'Allāh* has, in addition, carried out five interviews with al-Jazeera, the most recent in April 2007.[370] This last interview was given shortly before Mulla *Dād 'Allāh* was killed by allied forces in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, the Taliban media campaign includes written and audio-visual means of communication, and is aimed at both friendly and adversary audiences. The main strategic goals of communication are propagation of the movement and intimidation of opponents. Few

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[368] www.alemarah.org (accessed March 2007). Since April 2007: www.alemarah.8rf.com.
[369] A *Labbayk* photo album, released 1 December, 2006, contained material from an *as-Saḥāb* film, released September 16, 2006. This indicates that *Labbayk* borrows material from *as-Saḥāb,* and supports the assessment that the Taliban is learning in the field of media from al-Qaeda.
[370] "Profile Mulla Dadullah", *Al-Jazeera News,* 13 May 2007, http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/D4EA48B6-A42E-4ABB-82A4-0DDAF3439311.htm (accessed 2 July 2007).

examples of rhetorically sophisticated propaganda aiming at, for example, legitimization are observed.

13.3.3 Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia holds an important place for the global jihadist movement in general, and for the online media practice in particular. Generally speaking, Saudi Arabia - Osama bin Laden's homeland – is often portrayed as an exporter of recruits, ideology, and money to the global jihadist movement. For bin Laden and his followers, it represents the heart of the Islamic nation and faith, yet it has been tarnished by the leadership of a corrupt government and occupation by American forces. Saudi Arabia has therefore been a favored point of attack for al-Qaeda, in particular rhetorically, and since 2003 also physically. A significant presence of militant jihadists in Saudi Arabia manifested itself in a wave of attacks on local and foreign targets in 2003 and 2004, carried out in the name of "al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" (QAP). The subsequent crackdown by Saudi security forces on the group, with the arrest or death of key personnel, left the jihadist movement significantly weakened. However, it has proved to be persistent, demonstrating its continued presence by sporadic attacks since 2006.

Of specific interest to this study is the impact that Saudi efforts in the online media campaign have had on the global jihadist movement. The Internet was, in fact, not introduced in Saudi Arabia before 1999, yet has a relatively high penetration rate. The website *alsalafyoon.com* that appeared in 2000 was the first Saudi jihadist website, but was not linked to al-Qaeda. However, some of the webmasters of this site later reappeared in connection to well-known QAP websites, such as *al-Nida'* and *Ṣawt al-Jihād*. Indeed, al-Qaeda's Internet practice began in earnest with *al-Nidā'* ("the Call").[371] The alleged webmaster of *al-Nidā'* was Saudi radical Islamist ideologue *Yusuf al-ᶜUyayrī*, who distributed religious texts, fatwas, and messages from the al-Qaeda leadership on the site. It was active from at least 2001 until it was shut down in 2002, although it survived to some extent until 2003 by hiding files on a number of host sites. When *al-ᶜUyayrī* was killed by Saudi security forces in June 2003, members of jihadist chat forums lamented that it would critically harm al-Qaeda's technical abilities. However, it did not take long before "al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" established a website, *Ṣawt al-Jihād* ("Voice of the Jihad"), and a number of online magazines.

It is said that "[t]he public relations operation conducted since late 2003 by Saudi militants arguably ranks among the most extensive and professional campaigns by a terrorist group".[372] The QAP reportedly had a media bureau which was one of its most important and best protected units.[373] This unit produced magazines and released lengthy and high-quality films. Most notably,

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[371] The first al-Qaeda website is believed to have been *maalemaljihad.com* (milestones of holy war.com), set up in February 2000 by an Egyptian Islamic Jihad sympathizer. See Atwan, Abdel Bari *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*, London: SAQI, 2006.

[372] "Saudi Arabia Backgrounder", *International Crisis Group*, Middle East Report No. 31, 21 September 2004, http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east___north_africa/iraq_iran_gulf/31_saudi_arabia_backgrounder.pdf (accessed 2 July 2007).

[373] *Ibid.*

the QAP media production included online periodicals. The bimonthly magazine *Ṣawt al-Jihād*, launched in September 2003, covered primarily ideological and doctrinal issues, as well as news reporting. In December the same year, another bimonthly publication, the *Mu^caskar al-Battār,* was added to the publication list, dealing specifically with paramilitary training. Furthermore, in 2004, *al-Khansā'*, a jihadist magazine aimed exclusively at women, appeared online. This magazine, which appeared in only one issue, was published by the "Women's media bureau in the Arabian Peninsula", allegedly founded by the late QAP leader *^cAbd al-Azīz al-Muqrin*, and aimed to "show women how to reconcile the apparent contradiction of fighting jihad while maintaining family life".[374] The link between the latter magazine and the other QAP productions is uncertain. However, as with all online (jihadist) material, the physical or organizational affiliation is not as important as the perception of affinity obtained through a name: in this case the QAP leader *al-Muqrin.*

The *Ṣawt al-Jihād* magazine was published regularly for a year, before disappearing, according to some experts, due to a successful Saudi counterterrorism campaign. The magazine reappeared twice, the 29th issue in April 2005 and the 30th and hitherto last issue in late January 2007 after almost two years of absence. Both issues seem to have been the work of single individuals; the 29th issue by *^cAbd al-Azīz al-Anzī*, the sole surviving member of the original *Ṣawt al-Jihād* committee who was arrested in May 2005, and the 30th issue by a certain *'Abū ^cAbd 'Allāh al-Najdī*, who was arrested in June 2007. It is worth noting that the publication of the latest issue of *Ṣawt al-Jihād* coincided with a new violent incident in Saudi Arabia.[375] Furthermore, three months later, on April 27, 2007, Saudi security forces announced the arrest of 172 militants that reportedly were plotting to use airplanes to attack Saudi Arabia's oil fields and military bases.[376] One of the topics in the latest issue of *Ṣawt al-Jihād* was precisely the designation of oil installations as targets of terrorism. This incident alone does not indicate that media material functions as an indicator of future attacks. However, it suggests that increased media activity may be linked to increased operational capability. On the other hand, extensive media production may be used deliberately to create the perception of a strong movement. Thomas Hegghammer has claimed that observers probably overestimated the strength and capabilities of the QAP precisely due to its large and professional media campaign.[377]

During the publication stop of the QAP magazine, the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) redistributed a number of old *Ṣawt al-Jihad* articles. This effort was noticed by the QAP, who in *Ṣawt al-Jihad* No. 30 sent its greetings to their brothers in the GIMF, thanking them for their

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[374] Usher, Sebastian, "'Jihad' magazine for women on the web", *BBC News*, 24 August 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3594982.stm (accessed 2 July 2007).

[375] On February 26, 2007, 4 French nationals were killed by unknown gunmen. The incident was not reported to be linked to al-Qaeda.

[376] "Saudis arrest 172 terror suspects", *Al-Jazeera News*, April 27, 2007, http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/AC6AFEBC-BB90-4A4E-B011-CB6C4AF3CB86.htm (accessed 2 July 2007).

[377] Hegghammer, Thomas, "Saudi Arabia: Terror threat reduced - for time being", *Oxford Analytica In-Depth Analysis*, 28 February 2007, http://hegghammer.com/_files/Terrorism_in_Saudi_Arabia_-_Oxford_Analytica_Daily_Brief_-_28_February_2006.pdf (accessed November 2007).

continued support. It is also worth noting that it was the GIMF who distributed the new issue of *Ṣawt al-Jihad* to the jihadist web forums. Moreover, in June 2006, a number of previously unseen QAP videos dating from 2004 appeared on the Internet. Some suggested that Saudi security services had published confiscated material as bait, while others claimed this proved the existence of an undisclosed QAP media cell.[378] The 2007 revival of the QAP media campaign thus includes the release of the magazine *Ṣawt al-Jihad*, as well as arrests of individuals suspected of being affiliated with al-Qaeda and allegedly running websites that promote terrorism.[379] These signs should not be interpreted as more than they actually are, but potential further media activity from Saudi Arabia and the QAP merits close monitoring.

13.3.4   Egypt and the Levant

Egypt has long traditions in jihad, and may be labeled the cradle of jihadist ideology due to writers such as *Sayyid Quṭb*. Egypt's largest jihadist groups, "The Egyptian Islamic Jihad" (EIJ) and the "Islamic Group" (*al-Gamāᶜa al-'Islāmiyya,* GI), both off-shoots of the Muslim Brotherhood,[380] have been active since the 1970s, and have targeted both local and foreign interests in Egypt. After a brutal campaign of crackdowns and mass arrests waged towards the Islamist groups by the Egyptian regime in the 1990s, the GI signed a cease fire in 1999, which has largely been honored, while the EIJ has not been active inside Egypt since the 1990s.[381] Remaining EIJ members in Egyptian jails are reportedly considering following GI's path.

Despite previous significant Egyptian jihadist media campaigns, little online media activity has been observed lately. One exception is a faction of GI, led by *Muḥammad Khalīl al-Ḥukāyma*, who in August 2006 appeared in an *As-Saḥāb* video claiming that his faction had joined with al-Qaeda.[382] This issue was re-addressed by al-Zawahiri in his September, 2006 video, "Hot Issues". *Al-Ḥukāyma* has released a number of statements on the Internet during the last year, but these communiqués were not issued in the name of the "Media Office of al-Qaeda in the Land of *Kanāna* [Egypt]" before June 2007.[383] So far, only written pieces have been released from this new media group. With regard to *al-Ḥukāyma*, it is also worth noting that a new magazine called *Midād al-Suyūf* (The Sword's Ink) was released in October 2006, in which he authored an

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[378] Hegghammer, Thomas, "Weakened al-Qaida shifts to oil targets", Oxford Analytica Daily Brief, 9 November 2007, via http://www.forbes.com/2007/11/08/saudi-arabia-oil-cx-1109oxford_print.html (accessed November 2007).

[379] "Saudis arrest three for running 'terror' websites", *The Media Line,* 9 June 2007, http://www.themedialine.org/news/news_detail.asp?NewsID=17897 (accessed 9 June 2007), and "Saudis arrest 172 terror suspects", *Al-Jazeera News*.

[380] The Muslim Brotherhood, outside the focus of this study, has an active online presence, see www.ikhwanonline.com (accessed September 2007).

[381] Al-Zayyāt, Montasser, *The Road to al-Qaeda- The Story of Bin Lāden's Right-Hand Man,* London, Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press, 2004.

[382] "وحدة الصف" ("Unity of the Ranks"), *As-Saḥāb* Production, 6 August 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=29107 (accessed 2 July 2007).

[383] Al-Ḥukāyma operated a website during the fall of 2006. His statements have also been distributed on the jihadist web forums.

editorial and an article.[384] The magazine is affiliated to the jihadist web forum of the same name,[385] which, incidentally, in July 2007 announced the formation of the *Midad al-Suyūf* Media Establishment.[386] There is no known relation between this media establishment and the Egyptian *al-Ḥukāyma*, despite his contributions to its magazine.

While *al-Ḥukāyma* role in the global jihadist movement remains vague, his self-promotional Internet campaign, as well as al-Zawahiri's online response, have given him much attention, highlighting the significant role of media in the jihadist dynamic.

Jihadist militant groups in the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine), present both in the real and virtual world for some time, have increasingly entered the online media sphere for information and propaganda purposes during the spring of 2007. *Fatḥ al'-Islām*, based in Lebanon and consisting of local and foreign fighters, started issuing online statements already in the fall of 2006. With the escalation of the conflict with government troops in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon during the spring of 2007, the frequency of news releases, in written format only, also increased. Statements from the Media Office of *Fatḥ al'-Islām* are mostly letters of incitement, containing calls to "our people in the camps", and "Knights of Islam, in Lebanon in particular and in the whole world in general" to join the jihad.[387]

"The Movement for Islamic Jihad in Palestine", or "al-Quds Squadrons", complements the Levantine jihadist media scene with military accounts and videos of operations. Films seem indeed to be a popular means of propaganda here, and *'Arḍ al-Ribāṭ* ("Palestine") Media Foundation,[388] *Jund al-Shām* ("Soldier of the Levant") Media Department,[389] and *al-Qāᶜida fī Bilād al-Shām*'s ("al-Qaeda in the Levant countries") media wing, have also released videos in their online informational campaigns.[390] *Jaysh al-'Islām* ("Army of Islam"), based in Gaza, obtained world fame during spring 2007 with the claims of responsibility for and videos of the

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[384] Muḥammad Khalīl al-Ḥukāyma "افتتاحية" ("Editorial") and "ضرورة جهاز الامن , خاص للحركة الجهادية والاستخبارات" ("Exclusively for the jihadist movement, the necessity of the Security service and Intelligence"), in *Midād al-Suyūf* Magazine, No. 1, October 2006, www.almedad.com/vb, FFI majallat database.

[385] *Al-Midād* Forum: www.almedad.com/vb (accessed August 2007).

[386] Posted on *al-Midād* Forum, "بيان الإعلان عن مؤسسة مداد السيوف الإعلامية" ("Announcement about *Midād al-Suyūf* Media Establishment"), 5 July, 2007 http://www.almedad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=6030 (accessed 10 July 2007).

[387] For a compilation of statements from *Fatḥ al'-Islām*, see posting on *al-Nuṣra* Forum, "نداءالى فرسان الأسلام" ("Call to the Knights of Islam"), 25 April, 2007, www.alnusra.net/vb/showthread.php?t=17488 (accessed 15 June 2007).

[388] Posted on World News Network, "الإصدار المرئي الأول لمؤسسة أرض الرباط في بلاد الشام وهو بعنوان أتقعد ؟" ("The first video from *'Arḍ al-Ribāṭ* Establishment in the Levant, entitled Do you serve?"), 30 March 2007, www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=21938 (accessed 5 May 2007).

[389] Posted on *al-Hisba* Forum, "إننا قادمون" ("We are coming"), September 2006, www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=83905 (accessed 14 September 2006).

[390] Posted on World News Network, "وعادت الحروب الصليبية" ("And the Crusader wars continue"), 25 May 2007, www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=25716 (accessed 29 May 2007).

kidnapping of British BBC World journalist Alan Johnston.[391] Even after the release of Johnston, the issue was readily used for propaganda purposes, for example by media newcomer *Sawāram* Media, reportedly a subgroup of GIMF, which issued a statement claiming to have been involved in the negotiations for Johnston's release.[392]

Currently, there exists a myriad of militant jihadist groups in the Levant area, and much like Iraq, it is sometimes difficult to assess whether they belong to the global jihadist cause, or are rather driven by nationalistic, purely local, or even criminal agendas.[393]

V.   Characteristics of the online media jihad

The introduction of this study presented general studies on terrorism and media, and some rather specific examinations of jihadism and the Internet. Based on the previous theories about the terrorist use of media, a hypothesis for this study was outlined:

The jihadists operate within a pronounced strategy concerning the use of the media. The Internet, playing a crucial role in this media strategy, allows the jihadists directly to frame their message, and to use it in order to reach the following strategic goals of communication: propagation of the movement and its cause, legitimization of the movement and its activities, and intimidation of opponents.

These assumptions have served as guidelines for this study on the jihadist online media campaign. The study has thus far presented empirical evidence about the current state of jihadist media, and has by doing so only implicitly addressed the assumptions in the hypothesis. In the following, a more explicit examination of the different aspects of the hypothesis compared to the findings in the study will be presented.

14   Words vs. deeds: Media strategy in theory and practice

An issue pertinent to the aspect of consistency between jihadist media strategy and practice is the question of whether there in fact exists a strategy. This study has collected numerous texts by leaders and strategists of the jihadist movement, and has sought to identify theories about the use of media. As previously mentioned, it is important to keep in mind that these theories do not present a comprehensive media strategy. Rather, each theory seems to treat different elements. In a holistic perspective, one can therefore argue that the theories together represent a strategy for the use of media. Accordingly, this study argues that, in theory, there indeed seems to exist a basis for a jihadist media strategy. It is worth noting that the forms and content of this media strategy are prone to evolve over time: the jihadi media campaign appears as a constantly

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[391] Posted on *al-'Umm* Forum, "مناشدة من الاسير الان " ("The appeal of the prisoner Alan"), June 2006, www.al-ommh.net/vb/showthread.php?t=19040 (accessed 9 July 2007).

[392] Posted on World News Network, "بيان إلى أمتنا الإسلامية بخصوص الإفراج عن الصليبي جونستون " ("Statement to our Islamic nation about the release of Crusader Johnston"), 4 July 2007, www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=29379 (accessed 5 July 2007).

[393] For an assessment on jihadist groups in the Levant, and particularly *Fatḥ al-'Islām*, see Gade, Tine, "Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon: Between Global and Local Jihad", FFI Report, forthcoming 2007.

evolving phenomenon, which to a large extent is shaped by the jihadist media companies. As new companies emerge with new templates for their work, they arguably form part of the jihadist media strategy.[394]

Having determined that a potential strategy for the jihadist media campaign exists, the following discussion deals with the consistency between this strategy, as deducted from jihadist strategic literature, and current jihadist online media practice.

Old versus New Media

First, it is worth clarifying the relationship between new and traditional media in the jihadist media strategy. The 'media strategy in theory', as outlined above, indicates that the preferred method of distribution of jihadist media material includes a combination of new and traditional media. This study has focused solely on new media, mainly because the large amount of Internet-based media indicates that it is an increasingly important means of communication for jihadists today. The strategic advice from jihadist strategists, such as *al-Sūrī*, to combine new and old media appears to be carried out in practice by continuing the local distribution of old media, such as printed publications, while waging a global media jihad with new means online. Some of the online publications also seem intended for local print and distribution in the mosques and marketplaces, or at least, the media companies encourage such distribution. While this author possesses limited knowledge about the actual local distribution of traditional jihadist media – although it is well-known that CDs of speeches and violent operations along with print magazines are sold in marketplaces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan – it seems apparent that the traditional media, both Arabic and Western, is no longer the main vehicle for, or source of information about, the jihadist movement.

Mainstream versus Jihadist Media

On another note, one can argue that the jihadists have, over the last few years, placed less emphasis on mainstream media, both new and traditional: Lately, the global jihadist movement seems unable to receive continuous and extensive coverage in the mainstream media. In fact, since late 2001, due to the illegal nature of the al-Qaeda movement, no interviews or other publications from the jihadists have been released first in their entirety in traditional mainstream Western or Arabic media. Al-Qaeda remains a hot topic both in the West and the Middle East, but news about the movement in the mainstream media is allegedly presented consistently from a non-jihadist perspective. In parallel, one can observe the sharp increase in online publications with jihadist ownership and control.

One can also assume that the exclusion of the global jihadist movement from active participation in Western mainstream media stands in the way of the explicit goal of reaching the Western public. Several of the strategic texts suggested a more active approach towards the Western public, focusing on the importance of targeting the West, and encouraging the use of Western, in particular online, media. In fact, we have witnessed increasing efforts to translate media material

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[394] Such templates or strategic texts by the jihadist media companies have been treated briefly in the previous chapter on media theory.

into foreign languages. English is the main language after Arabic, but German, French, and Spanish are also used. In addition, the jihadists have made use of Westerners, such as the American convert Adam Gadahn, also known as *Azzām al-'Amrīkī*, who seemingly targets a U.S. public in English. Focusing on issues of alleged importance to Western society, such as U.S. foreign and domestic politics, may also be a way of targeting the West. Yet, thus far, the global jihadist movement seems mainly to have relied on media outlets with jihadist ownership and control in its efforts to reach Western societies. Consequently, since the jihadist sites remain difficult to access for outsiders due to password protection and frequent change of URLs, one can ask to what extent the message actually reaches the Western public. However, one should not ignore the role of mainstream journalists: jihadist media material is often picked up by mainstream, Western journalists, and presented in mainstream media outlets. This has been labeled a "two-step flow of information: terrorist to journalists via the Internet to the public".[395]

Audience Segmentation

Targeting the West seems to be part of a larger strategy of audience segmentation. Jihadist media strategists recommend the distribution of audience-tailored messages, and operate with a general separation between friendly and adversary audiences. It is also suggested that the audience's level of education is taken into consideration when producing media material. In practice, it is interesting to note that a large number of jihadist media explicitly states the target audience: "To the West" or "To the Brothers in Iraq" are typical titles of messages. Yet, messages with such titles may also contain material intended for other audience segments, and in many cases, the target audience consequently appears different than that communicated in the title. Thus, message titles may have more of a rhetoric value than truly revealing the final, or complete, target audience.

Furthermore, certain characteristics of a text, audio, or video production indicate a certain target audience, as shown in the content analysis of the media material. Language is one such easily detectable factor, and Western languages, as mentioned above, are increasingly used. One can also observe the use of other languages, such as Pashto, Urdu, Somali, and Albanian, indicating that the jihadists target a potentially Muslim, non-Arabic speaking public. Productions also seem to vary with regard to cultural and educational levels, as recommended in jihadist media strategy. Text and oral messages seem to target highly educated individuals with eloquence and argumentation on a sophisticated level. But they also include simple and straightforward messages that require little intellectual effort. Pictures and sounds are allegedly easily accessible to illiterates, and generally have great emotional resonance at all levels. Furthermore, we observe what seems to be audience segmentation along age and gender lines. Video games target the younger generation, whereas news reports supposedly tend to interest the more mature segments of the population. Women seem to be targeted with topics which seem particularly pertinent to them, such as family life.

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[395] Gabriel Weimann, quoted in Aft, Aaron, "Terror groups exploit Internet for Communications, Recruitment, Training", *JINSA Online*, 4 August, 2004, www.jinsa.org/articles/articles.html/function/view/categoryid/1930/documentid/2621/ (accessed 10 September 2007).

The above mentioned efforts seem to follow the specific recommendation, and the great concern of the global jihadist movement in general, to reach as wide an audience as possible. Jihadist strategists, such as *al-Sūrī* and al-Zawahiri, deplored the failure of previous jihadist media campaigns to reach the masses. While the elite segment of the jihadist movement is still identified as a target for certain productions, to date, one cannot exclude the possibility that the large and varied jihadist media productions have been more successful than in the past in reaching out to the masses. However, the problem with difficult Internet access for a large number of potential supporters remains an obvious obstacle to their success in this regard.

Public Opinion

A recurring topic among jihadist strategists, largely related to the issue of audience, is the question of public opinion. As previously stated, this study does not attempt to measure either the jihadist media campaign's influence on the public, or the public reactions to jihadist media. Nonetheless, it aims to treat the question of how the jihadist media strategy is aware of public opinion.

Opinion polls offer certain indications regarding public opinion of the global jihadist movement, and show that only a minority both in the West and the Middle East support al-Qaeda and its activities – although a notable number appear to support some of its ideas.[396] Accordingly, one may jump to the conclusion that the jihadist media campaign has failed to consider public opinion. However, certain characteristics of the media jihad suggest that some efforts may have been made in order not to repulse the general public. First, we have observed a decreasing number of videos showing the decapitation of enemies. This decline seems to have followed al-Zawahiri's letter to al-Zarqawi in Iraq, in which he stated that even though decapitation may be a legitimate practice, public opinion may not approve. Secondly, while jihadist media material still contains graphic, violent accounts and representations, it also seems to follow the book of jihadist media strategy as such acts are often accompanied by elaborate religious, historical and/or political legitimization. Legitimization, particularly if based on Islamic and salafist-jihadist terms, supposedly resonates specifically well with Muslims. When, in addition, it is based on historic arguments, it may also target a wider public of potential supporters. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that media material from Iraq that contains some of the most violent and possibly repulsive material also seems to be the most void of direct legitimization.

Organization of Media Groups

Jihadist strategists treat the organization of the media groups in their works. Due to the illegal nature of the global jihadist movement, it is difficult to gain access to information about how the theories are implemented in practice, and it has therefore not been examined in detail in this study. Yet, the recommendation by strategists to create media groups and information brigades as separate organizational entities certainly seems to be carried out. It is also evident that the media groups work closely with other organizational entities, as recommended by jihadist strategists.

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[396] See, for example, "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians, and al-Qaeda", *The Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland*, 24 April 2007, www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf (accessed 1 August 2007).

The work of the media groups seems to pick up on events carried out by the political and military wings of the movement, and strives to maximize the effect of these events. For example, videos of hostage situations, and translations of political or ideological speeches, add a media dimension to these events, making them more accessible and comprehensible to the public.

Furthermore, a picture of how different jihadist media groups organize - or fail to do so - has to a certain degree emerged during the research. Here, this study will mention only one dimension of this aspect, which has to do with profusion – an issue treated by jihadist media strategists. The jihadist media groups are aware of each other, and even state that they are not competitors, but rather supplement each other. Yet, they cover the same topics in a somewhat overlapping way, often leading to an abundance of reports about the same topic. This seemingly chaotic state of the jihadist media may have strategic value, as explained by the theorists. The repetition of a topic in different outlets and in different forms sets the agenda, states salience, and contributes to making the cause look more important and the group more powerful than is perhaps the case. This is something the jihadist media groups appear to have succeeded with over recent years, as they have used the Internet as a media outlet and sought to spread their message lavishly across the world. It is also worth noting that the main channels for online diffusion are the web forums, and not the static home pages of the media groups. This coincides with the suggestion of one strategist who encouraged the use of discussion forums precisely in order to generate active participation in the media jihad.

Refuting Mainstream Media

The basis for most jihadist comments and strategies about the media is the perception of control of the media by 'the West' and local governments and their consequent abuse of the media dominance to distort, silence, or discredit the jihadists. Returning to the introduction to this study, former U.S. Minister of Defense Donald Rumsfeld expressed his concern about the pre-eminence of media manipulation by terrorists. In fact, Rumsfeld's comment was perceived as a victory by some of the jihadist media groups, and as evidence of their success.[397] The fact that the perception of a jihadist media triumph for a moment reigned on both sides of the current battlefront may perhaps indicate that the jihadist media campaign has been more successful than in the past. However, this alleged success reveals nothing about the actual role of the jihadist media strategy in this effort, making it subject to speculation. However, what seems clear is that the jihadist media groups make continuous efforts to refute media reports from mainstream local and Western press, and generally improve the jihadist media campaigns.

Summary – Words versus Deeds

One may conclude that the majority of the theories put forth by jihadist strategists concerning the use of the media appear to have been incorporated in the actual jihadist media campaign. This does not necessarily mean that the campaign follows one jihadist media strategy. Rather, it seems that they have adopted a number of the suggested theories for the use of the media on a tactical level. In this study, it has been impossible to measure exactly the extent to which some of the

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[397] Posted on *al-'Umm* Forum, "بخصوص تصريحات رامسفيلد الأخيرة" ("About Rumsfeld's latest comments"), February 2006, www.al-ommh.net/vb/ (accessed September 2006).

recommendations presented in these theories, such as targeting the masses and considering public opinion, have been implemented. The other theories seem to be followed in the jihadist media campaign on the whole. Yet, one should remember that the media jihad campaign as presented in this study consists of a number of interlinked campaigns, driven by different local al-Qaeda branches and larger media companies. Thus, not all strategic recommendations are observed in all of the campaigns. Nevertheless, as all of the campaigns are carried out on the Internet, they tend to, intentionally or not, form a virtual whole, potentially perceived as one media jihad campaign.

15   Strategic goals of communication

The hypothesis of this study assumes that the jihadists seek to achieve a set of strategic goals of communication through their media campaign: *propagation* of the movement, *legitimization* of activities, and *intimidation* of enemies. The assumption is based on conclusions from Corman and Schiefelbein's study about jihadist media, and Schmid and de Graaf's theories about terrorism and media. This study's survey of jihadist strategic thought about the use of media has identified four explicitly articulated goals of communication, in fact adding the goal of *education* of supporters to the three goals mentioned in the above. In practice, this study has observed six different strategic goals of communication in the media jihad, including two additional goals: *dialogue* between members of the movement, and *community-building*.

These goals merit further elaboration. First, it is worth noting that these goals could be seen as overlapping, and are in any case prone to be interpreted as broad conceptual categories. For example, propagation of the movement may include a number of aspects, but is here intended to mean the spreading of the ideas of jihadism, and recruitment of new supporters, or strengthening of faith among existing supporters. Also legitimization of existence and activities of the movement has proven to include Quranic, historical, and political arguments, and can be presented by clerics and laymen. With regards to intimidation of enemies, one can argue that the mere existence of a jihadist media campaign may be perceived as intimidating. However, this study has considered only media material that specifically addresses the enemy in menacing terms as attempts to intimidate the enemy. Furthermore, education as a strategic goal of communication has, in this study, been interpreted as referring to material of a purely informational character. While the media companies are no longer usually in charge of the distribution of traditional training manuals,[398] education is indeed observed on religious, political, and military levels. One could argue that education, consequently, can be interpreted as a means to propagate the movement, in effect overlapping with that strategic goal of communication. Moreover, the concept of dialogue has only been considered as a strategic goal when two or more parties are involved and explicitly communicate through media issuances. Finally, the study has registered community-building as a strategic goal of communication when, for example, new or distant branches of al-Qaeda are promoted online, or when Muslim suffering in far away places is cited - seemingly with the goal of creating a transnational conscience and virtual solidarity. One can

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[398] The Islamic Media Center that operated until 2005 was known to distribute training manuals. While training manuals circulate on jihadist discussion forums and other sites, the jihadist online media companies generally do not participate in this business.

argue that this interpretation of community-building may in fact overlap with the goal of propagation of the movement. Therefore, more specifically, community-building denotes the encouragement of supporters to participate actively in the online media jihad.

Returning to the hypothesis, the three main strategic goals of communication for terrorists seem indeed to be present in the jihadist media campaign. These goals were mainly indicative of how terrorists use traditional media, such as the mainstream press and television. It is therefore interesting, but perhaps somewhat less surprising, to note that the jihadists have used the Internet as a similar basis for communication. Moreover, the Internet offers additional options for strategic communication. The Internet, acting as a channel for jihadist-based media, thus seems to facilitate the expansion of the media jihad outside the boundaries imposed by the role of traditional, mainstream media. For example, traditional mainstream media could allegedly not lend itself as well as the Internet to act as a platform for the education of supporters, nor would it perhaps represent a means for community-building, to the same degree. As for dialogue between groups or individuals within a terrorist movement, this could arguably take place indirectly in the traditional mainstream media, through, for example, coded messages, but it is more easily carried out through online media. The Internet, and the opportunity it offers for creation of 'personal' media outlets, consequently appears as a more suitable channel for terrorist communications than does traditional media, as it expands the functionalities of the jihadi online media campaign.

On the other hand, traditional mainstream media, as described by Schmidt and de Graaf, also offers passive uses.[399] As this study set out to examine jihadists' active uses of their own media outlets, these passive uses fall outside of its scope. Yet, some of the passive uses, potentially representing powerful means for terrorists, are indeed also employed through the Internet, and therefore merit mentioning. As noted above, mainstream media channels offer information that is easily spread to jihadist sites, and we have observed the jihadists using these channels to access information, such as the enemies' troops, public reactions to terror activities, and counterterrorism measures.[400] This passive use of the media is a secondary, yet non-negligible, strategic goal of the media jihad.

Having established that the jihadists use the Internet for different strategic goals of communication, it could be useful to try to assess the hierarchy of jihadist use of these goals. A preliminary statistical summary of the empirical material used in this study reveals 27 cases of propagation of the movement, 7 cases of education of supporters, 6 cases of legitimization, 5 cases of intimidation, 4 cases of community-building, and 2 cases of dialogue. Propagation of the movement thus seems to emerge as the considerably largest goal. This should perhaps not come as a surprise, as the goal of propagation is also the broadest conceptual category. It is maybe more surprising to observe the relatively high score of education, a use which was not included in Schmidt and de Graf's list. The other goals score rather evenly, with dialogue appearing as the least significant part of the media jihad according to this short survey.

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[399] See Appendix I in this study.
[400] See Part III, Chapter 1.3. "...And Beyond", in this study.

It is worth keeping in mind that one media production may, and typically does, contain several strategic goals of communication. All goals are observed relatively evenly with the different media companies. Still, community-building seems to be more important to local media groups which are geographically, and sometimes also linguistically and culturally, removed from the core al-Qaeda. There appears to be no other significant differences in the strategic goals of communication between local or global, or distributor or producer, jihadist media groups.

16 Framing jihadism

The hypothesis assumes that jihadist-controlled media outlets on the Internet facilitate the framing and construction of a jihadist worldview. Without going into details about the jihadist message or ideology, which is undeniably spread through the jihadist media, this study has nevertheless observed aspects of what seems to be a preferred jihadist framework for jihadist media self-narrative. A theoretical model for framing the 'war on terror' proposed four levels of perception: *problem definition*, *causal interpretation*, *moral evaluation*, and *treatment recommendation*. In addition to other observations, these four levels of perception will, in the following, be used to explain the jihadist framing of the conflict.

In fact, the jihadist problem definition seems to resemble ideas that have emerged from a Western sphere. The concept of a 'clash of civilizations' is repeatedly put forth in jihadist media as a basic explanation for its conflict with the West. In the jihadist frame, the Western civilization is the aggressive part that has provoked the conflict, and the U.S. current "imperialism" is seen as the latest manifestation of the Crusades. In fact, the behavior of the West and local regimes is allegedly a manifestation of an historical enmity toward Islam, presented as the reason for the jihadists' so-called current defensive war. The jihadist causal interpretation therefore seems to include the perception of self-defense of Muslims against evil forces. The moral evaluation appears to lie in the religious aspect, which highlights Islam as the one true religion, and reminds the Muslims about their personal duty (*farḍ ᶜayn*) to protect and spread their religion. A jihadist treatment recommendation disseminated through the media is seen in the call to unite the *'umma*, and continue to fight evil and defend Islam. A "middle way" is rejected as unacceptable, as moderate Muslim scholars and Muslims cooperating with allied troops (in Iraq, for instance) are considered apostates and traitors.

The killing of apostates, and other forms of violence, is, moreover, often presented within the terms of "moral disengagement".[401] Jihadists present violent actions as an inevitable result of compelling circumstances (the U.S. invasion of Iraq, for example) forced upon the weak, thereby "displacing the responsibility" to the enemy. Enemy targets are also "demonized" as oppressors and tyrants, and American soldiers in Iraq "de-humanized" as mere symbols of the Crusader state. Another rhetoric aspect is the "making of advantageous comparisons", in which the jihadist

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[401] Albert Bandura's theory of "Moral Disengagement" is referenced in Weimann, Gabriel, *Terror on the Internet*, pp. 54-61.

violence is compared to supposedly far more violent behavior of the enemy (for instance, torture in Iraqi prisons).

Furthermore, the jihadists frame their message as if they represent the whole *'umma*, e.g. all Muslims, pretending to defend Islam and Muslim rights. Moreover, messages are framed on a 'state-level' in Iraq, where the global jihadists have announced the establishment of a caliphate: the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq addresses Western state leaders, for example, offering them ultimatums. Jihadist military power is also presented as being on the same, and sometimes even on a superior, level as that of enemy states. For example, the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan in 1989 is frequently mentioned; it seems to represent the ultimate jihadist victory, and is by jihadists presented as the reason for the fall of the Soviet Union two years later. One could argue that Iraq now is emerging as an heir to Afghanistan in the jihadist social construction. The foreign occupation forces in Iraq are already determined to lose the war, as the Russians lost the war in Afghanistan, and the U.S. would subsequently be on the verge of loosing its world hegemony, according to the jihadist cause-effect logic. On the jihadist side of the battlefield, human losses are framed in positivist terms as martyrdoms.

Norris' theory about terrorism and framing suggests that news frames of terrorism "simplify, prioritize and structure the narration". It is intuitively evident that jihadist media would structure the account according to their priorities, thereby setting a certain agenda, and giving salience to certain issues. Mainstream news coverage of terrorism may well lend itself to simplification of the narration in order to reach its public. Jihadist-based media, on the other hand, seems to attempt to present a more detailed and comprehensive world view with its extensive coverage. Nevertheless, a rather analogous rhetoric is observed in various al-Qaeda online fronts. This rhetoric preaches an Islamic state based on sharia, refutes the Western, secular and democratic model, and is hateful towards the United States and supportive of Palestine. By employing a radicalized interpretation of the Quran, and reducing individuals and social and political mechanisms to stereotypes, the jihadists strive to present a simple, yet attractive, edict to their followers.

17 General observations

In an attempt to gather characteristics and particularities of the online media jihad that exceed the specific research questions of the hypothesis, this chapter seeks to sum up different qualities of the jihadist media campaign that have been observed during the analysis of empirical material.

Characteristics of Jihadist Media Groups
In addition to efforts to achieve strategic goals of communication and frame a jihadist worldview, the media groups also fill more tactical roles. A number of the largest and most well-known media companies, such as *as-Saḥāb* and *al-Fajr,* may be labeled 'authentificators': because of their long existence, and the persistence and alleged quality of their media campaign, such companies are seemingly acknowledged by online supporters as authorities – and the media material they produce as authentic. It is interesting to note also that when such companies act as

distributors of media material produced by sometimes unknown militant groups, the material appears to be just about automatically accepted by an otherwise relatively skeptical community of online jihadists. The logo of a senior media distributor company on a media issuance published by an official 'correspondent' thus seems to work as a stamp of authenticity of the material.

Furthermore, it seems that the media companies, both senior and junior, play a role as 'agenda setters' within the global jihadist community. First, the media companies apparently influence each other: a story published by one media company will often be picked up by the others, and make the 'tour of the web'. Secondly, the media companies seem to shape interests with the online community: it is common to find discussions on the jihadist web forums about topics that have been promoted through media issuances. The variety of the jihadist media, including videos, music, television, and games, appears to have something to offer to almost all supporters, and possibly influences or sets the agenda within the different strata of adherents to the jihadist media.

The abundance of jihadist media material that one can observe, and the overlapping coverage of issues, arguably turns the media companies into 'force multipliers'. This notion indicates that the media companies reinforce the importance of a certain issue by 'bombarding' the websites with it. Videos and messages are then reposted to other sites, often by individuals. Moreover, this 'force multiplier' role of the jihadist media companies can be found in the efforts to increase the value of a terrorist incident. One can argue that attacks, suicide operations, and hostage situations would perhaps not have been as 'profitable' for the jihadists without the attention that their media attracts to them.

Hierarchy and Organization of the Media Jihad

It seems fair to conclude that the Internet has facilitated the maintenance of a decentralized global jihadist movement. Indeed, this structure was probably vital for an organization that was deprived of its geographical base and scattered across the globe. Yet, there seems to be a certain hierarchy among the jihadist media groups, and just as there reportedly still exists a leadership of al-Qaeda, a few media organizations have seemingly emerged as 'leaders of the media jihad'. These are primarily the groups that have been presented as global media companies in this study, and that act as the main 'authentificators' and 'agenda setters'. It is, after all, these groups that often promote the numerous new jihadist online media groups.

When considering the jihadist web as a whole, the jihadist discussion forums emerge as the most important nodes. This is the space where media material is made available to supporters, and where seemingly important communicative exchanges take place. A trend seen over the last years indicates a shift away from the use of official, non-interactive jihadist websites for propagation of the media material. As previously mentioned, the local media groups seem to have outsourced this distribution work to 'professional media entities'. The distribution of media material to web forums appears to follow a rather sophisticated system, consisting of in-advance advertisement, responsible correspondents, and simultaneous releases on the most prominent forums. Consequently, the web forums seem to have materialized as the most important venue for jihadist media campaigns. One could argue that one of the reasons for this development is security

measures taken by the jihadists: permanent official sites are easier to track to individuals to, and to shut down, whereas owners or moderators of web forums may disclaim the responsibility for content on sites.

On another note, the use of discussion forums as the main vehicles for jihadist media material stands out as highly useful for observers of the media jihad. Monitoring these interactive sites gives an insight into the minds of ordinary jihadists, as well as the strategies, tactics, and ideologies they follow. It also reflects the status of jihadist media material: the commentaries that members of the forums express at the release of a new video or statement, as well as the number of downloads, may help interpret the importance and popularity – or lack thereof – of specific media companies and issuances. It should be noted that these main nodes of the jihadist media campaign are mostly in Arabic. The exceptions are a few prominent English, French, and German language discussion forums, accompanied by an increasing effort by the media companies to translate material into foreign languages. All media companies examined in this study are originally Arabic language initiatives.[402]

Arguably, the use of forums with active participation of members also makes the media jihad 'self-sustainable'. Forum members themselves provide the re-distribution of material, and also information about new URLs to often unstable sites. This assures continuity, not only of the media campaign, but also of the organizational architecture of a decentralized movement.

Media Activity and Operational Capacity

This study has suggested a link between jihadist media activity and militant operational capability. Case studies from Somalia indicated increased media efforts during a period of escalation of the local conflict, and media activity in Saudi Arabia preceded the exposure of a militant cell allegedly planning attacks. In Sudan - a potential, but still quiet, front for global jihadism with international presence and local jihadist supporters - neither online media nor terrorist activities have appeared. At the other end of the spectrum, Iraq emerged as a number one online media stronghold following the U.S.-led invasion and the subsequent conflict, although it took more than a year for the jihadist media campaign in Iraq to gain full force. Available information about jihadist groups has revealed that their usual internal structure includes a Shura Council with military, political, and media committees.[403] One can therefore perhaps assume that the one – media activity – follows the other – military capacity. Nevertheless, the Internet and the use of online media, seems to have somewhat modified this dynamic: a lone media jihadist located geographically far from the region he or she supports, such as *Irhabi 007* based in London, may well carry out a significant media campaign. The assumption about a link between media and militant operations therefore remains to be studied and clarified in greater detail.

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[402] Akil N. Awan claims that "[jihadist] websites catering to an English-language audience constitute a very small percentage of this body of media [...] and thus it is not easy to find high-quality English-language jihadist sites", in "Radicalization on the Internet? The Virtual Propagation of Jihadist Media and its Effects", *RUSI*, Vol.152, No. 3, June 2007, pp. 76-81.

[403] See, "Al-Qaeda's goals and structure", released by Combating Terrorism Center, document AFGP-2002-000078, http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/AFGP-2002-000078-Orig.pdf (accessed 10 July 2007).

Prominence of Media Jihad

When observing the jihadist web, it appears that the campaign carried out by the media groups fills a major role in this virtual world. Since the jihadist online media not only covers the traditional issues of the mainstream mass-media, but also facilitates, among other things, communicative exchanges on religious, military, ideological, and strategic levels, it is perhaps not surprising that it attracts substantial attention. Yet, it is well-known amongst observers of 'jihadism online' that the phenomenon also consists of other factors, such as financing, reconnaissance, or hacking, and promotes other voices than those spread by the media groups.[404] A pertinent question therefore remains: How important is in fact the jihadist online media campaign?

We know that in the past, high ranking jihadists have held important roles in the media jihad. Now imprisoned al-Qaeda strategist, *'Abū Muṣʿab al-Sūrī,* is revealed to have served as a media advisor to Osama bin Laden. Moreover, *Khālid Shaykh Muḥammad*, the alleged 9/11-mastermind, reportedly led *as-Saḥāb* Media Production Company in its early days, along with al-Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and assisted by online jihadist *'Irhābī 007*. Such familiar names offer authority to the media jihad. Today's leaders of the media groups seem to be less well-known, although it is difficult to assess their identity as the Internet offers relative anonymity to users.

Another possible means to determine the actual status of jihadist online media is the reference to such material as sources of inspiration in court testimonies of captured jihadists. Here, the Internet is frequently mentioned as a 'radicalizing factor', and jihadist video material is reportedly often seized in their property. The investigations following the Madrid train bombings, for instance, revealed the use of jihadist discussion forums and jihadist proselytizing websites, as well as specific jihadist online media material from the Global Islamic Media, *ᶜAzzām* Publications, *'Ansār al-Sunna* Media, and "al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula"'s media wing.[405]

Nevertheless, it may be difficult to assess the influence of the jihadist media campaign on supporters of the movement, and on general public opinion, a topic outside the scope of this study. Yet, compared to other functions of 'jihadism online', the media campaign seems, from these preliminary findings, to hold a prominent position, based on, if nothing else, its sheer quantity, increasing quality, and the praise it receives by online supporters, as well as the growing attention and concern by counterterrorism agencies.[406]

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[404] See Lia, Brynjar, "Al-Qaeda online, Understanding jihadist internet infrastructure", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Dec., 02, 2005, or; Rogan, Hanna, "Jihadism Online", *FFI-Rapport*- 2006/00915, 2006.

[405] Sumario 20/2004, auto de procesamiento del diez de abril 2006, Juzgado Central de Instrucción Nº 6 de la Audencia Nacional ("Proceedings 20/2004, Indictment of April 10 2006, Court of First Instance Number 6 of the *Audencia National* [Spanish National Court]), Madrid, 10 April, 2006, pp. 457, 489, 509-510.

[406] The prominence of the media jihad, based on quantity and popularity, is seen on for instance *al-'Ikhlāṣ* Forum: Out of a total of 75.657 threads and 502.333 replies, divided into 12 subforums, two subforums dedicated to media issuances received 21.631 threads and 194.603 replies. Media related threads constitute just under a third of all threads, and receive just over a third of all replies. Source www.al-ekhlas.net/forum/ (accessed July 2007).

VI.   Conclusion

18   A comprehensive, applied, jihadist media strategy?

This study's hypothesis suggested that the current jihadist online media campaign originates from a defined strategy for using the media for terrorist purposes. Findings from the analysis of primary sources have led this author to argue that there exist jihadist strategic thoughts about this issue, and that jihadist media campaigns, in most cases, adhere to these. It seems important to stress the plurality of this phenomenon. There appears to be not one jihadist media strategy and one media campaign, but rather a number of strategies, leading to a number of campaigns that cohabitate the jihadist web. Indeed, the phenomenon of jihadist online media is still developing, and it is difficult to determine its exact shape. Looking at the 'broader jihadist picture', the jihadist online media campaign, while facilitating the achievement of certain premeditated goals, seems also to play a role on a tactical level. In fact, the media jihad appears to serve an overall jihadist strategy rather than being an end in itself – just like the entire doctrine of jihad is commonly viewed not as an end but as "a means to rid the world of a greater evil". [407] Even so, the fact that the jihadist online media campaign is growing, frequently opening new virtual fronts, certainly seems to be a sign of a jihadist perception of the Internet as a purposeful vehicle for strategic communication.

Findings from this study further support this assumption: Jihadist online media is used for framing and agenda setting, and facilitates the accomplishment of a number of strategic goals of communication. Indeed, the fact that the jihadists exercise ownership and control over mass-media outlets on the Internet makes the jihadist media campaign more functional, i.e. facilitating the achievement of additional strategic goals of communication, than when relying on mainstream media channels. The Internet also allows for dispersed groups and individuals to participate in the media jihad, leading to increased quantity, and diversity, and decentralization of the campaign. On the one hand, this situation may promote a sense of community among geographically scattered jihadist supporters. Recent developments also indicate that the media jihadists make serious efforts to incorporate new target groups, with multi–language and –culture productions. On the other hand, a diversified and decentralized media campaign allows for internal debates and disputes to emerge in the open. It also may allow for critical voices to mix with the official jihadist message, potentially distorting the prevailing global jihadist narrative. Nevertheless, the jihadist online media campaign appears, so far, to be a driving force for the maintenance and development of the movement, as it spreads the messages of global jihadism, invites individuals to participate, educates, and creates and preserves bonds between various factions of the movement.

Although we have, in recent times, witnessed jihadist use of other channels of communication, the Internet and the jihadist online media groups will probably remain essential vehicles and drivers of the jihadist media campaign.

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[407] Tyan, E., "Djihad", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2nd Edition, 1960-2005.

Appendix A

Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, Sage Publications, London, 1982

List of insurgent terrorist uses of the news media (pp. 53-54):

A. Active Uses

1. Communication of (fear-) messages to mass audience
2. Polarizing public opinion
3. Making converts, attracting new members to terrorist movement
4. Demanding publication of manifesto under threat of harm to victim
5. Using media as conduits for threats, demands and bargaining messages
6. Verifying demand compliance by the enemy
7. Winning favourable publicity via released hostages
8. Linking message to victim
9. Misleading enemy by spreading false information
10. Winning publicity by granting interviews in the underground
11. Intimidating media by killing or wounding journalists
12. Advertising terrorist movement and cause presented
13. Arousing public concern for victim to pressure government to concessions
14. Discrediting victim by making his 'confessions' public
15. Discrediting enemy by making victim's 'confessions' public
16. Deflecting public attention form disliked issue by bombing it from frontpages
17. Announcing further actions
18. Using journalists as negotiators in bargaining situation
19. Inciting public against government
20. Occupation of broadcasting stations to issue message
21. Boosting one's own morale; Herostratism
22. Gaining Robin Hood image

B. Passive Uses

23. External communication
24. Learning new coercive techniques from media reports on terrorism
25. Obtaining information about identity and status of hostages
26. Obtaining information on countermeasures by security forces
27. Using media presence at site of siege as insurance against 'dirty tricks' by security forces
28. Creating fear with the enemy by media's exaggeration of own strength, thereby reducing likelihood that individual policemen dare to apprehend terrorist
29. Identifying future targets for terroristic violence
30. Obtaining information about public reaction to terroristic act

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