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THE AL-QAIDA UMBRELLA NETWORK

- **Al-Qaida's Committee in Mesopotamia/Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC)**

Since the formation of the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) in January 2006, Al-Qaida has made significant progress towards achieving its goal of dominating the larger ongoing Sunni insurgency in Iraq. This expansion has continued steadily despite the landmark killing of Al-Qaida leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 and other aggressive U.S. military efforts aimed at paralyzing Al-Qaida activity in Iraq. Though the MSC was ostensibly created for the purpose of seamlessly integrating Sunni mujahideen, Al-Qaida still represents the overwhelming force and ideological direction within the MSC. Virtually all of the propaganda and communiqués released by the group bear the unmistakable signature of Al-Qaida's media wing in Iraq.

Initially, only two significant Iraqi militant factions merged with the MSC: the Army of the Victorious Sect (joined January 15, 2006) and the Army of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah (joined January 28, 2006). However, following ten months of relentless sectarian warfare in Iraq, MSC representatives finally made tangible progress in their efforts to convince other major insurgent groups to join alongside them. On October 15, in conjunction with newly-announced partners Jaish al-Fatihin ("Army of the Conquerors") and Jund al-Sahaba ("Army of the Prophet's Companions"), the MSC declared the official formation of an "Islamic State of Iraq" in the provinces of Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salahuddin, Ninewah, Babil, and al-Wassat.

The reported decision by Jaish al-Fatihin and Jund al-Sahaba to collaborate in the "Islamic State" significantly bolstered its apparent legitimacy. Jaish al-Fatihin first emerged in January 2006 when it broke off from the larger Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) and immediately claimed responsibility for many of IAI's most spectacular operations (including the kidnapping of foreign hostages). Since then, Jaish al-Fatihin has developed into one of Iraq's most active and prolific insurgent groups. By contrast, the smaller and highly secretive Jund al-Sahaba has focused its efforts on dramatic bombing attacks in urban areas targeting Shiite civilians—including a July 27 car bombing in the Karadah neighborhood of eastern Baghdad (killing 32), an August 10 bombing outside a Shiite shrine in Najaf (killing 35), and a September 23 car bombing at a gas station in Sadr City in eastern Baghdad (killing 34).

Yet, there are still lingering questions over the disposition of the groups who have reportedly joined the Islamic State of Iraq. Only hours after the MSC reported that they had formed an alliance with Jaish al-Fatih, the media wing of the latter group denied that it was involved in any coalition of the sort and admitted that it was surprised by the MSC announcement: Perhaps it happened inadvertently, but we were not made aware of [the formation of this alliance], neither directly nor indirectly. The MSC, in turn, fired off their own lengthy rebuttal accusing Jaish al-Fatih's media wing of being oblivious to reality and insisting that four out of five of the former Jaish al-Fatih brigades have recently sworn allegiance to the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq under the command of brother Abu Abdullah al-Iraqi. It was agreed at the time with the commander of the brigades... to keep the groups under the name of the Al-Fatih Army. Significantly, Jaish al-Fatih's media wing continues to issue its own independent communiqués and video recordings— in stark contrast to Al-Qaida's other insurgent partners in Iraq.

Over the past twelve months— aside from Jund al-Sahaba and Jaish al-Fatih— a number of smaller Iraqi insurgent factions have also joined Al-Qaida in the MSC (and its heir-apparent, the Islamic State of Iraq):

- Ansar al-Tawheed Movement (*joined MSC; January 15, 2006*)
- Al-Ghurabaa Movement (*joined MSC; January 15, 2006*)
- Islamic Jihad Movement (*joined MSC; January 15, 2006*)
- Al-Ahwaal Brigade (*joined MSC; January 15, 2006*)
- Jamaat al-Murabitin (*joined MSC; March 23, 2006*)
- Ansar al-Tawheed wal Sunnah Movement (*joined MSC; October 12, 2006*)
- Fursan al-Tawheed Movement (*joined Islamic State of Iraq; November 29, 2006*)
- Jund Millat al-Ibrahim (*joined Islamic State of Iraq; November 29, 2006*)

In his most recent speech, the new commander of the Islamic State — Abu Omar al-Hussaini al-Qurashi al-Baghdadi (a native of Baghdad)— has likewise indicated that nearly thirty other Iraqi tribal leaders have separately agreed to join under the Al-Qaida coalition banner. According to Abu Omar, these Shaykhs hail from some of Iraq's most influential Sunni tribes, including: al-Dulaim, al-Jabbour, al-Obaid, Zoubaa, Qays, Azza, al-Tai, al-Janabiyeen, al-Halalyeen, al-Mushahada, al-Dayniya, Bani Zayd, al-Mujamaa, Bani Shammar, Ineza, al-Suwaitah, al-Nuaim, Khazraj, Bani al-Heem, al-Buhayrat, Bani Hamdan, al-Saadun, al-Ghanem, al-Saadiya, al-Maawid, al-Karabla, al-Salman, and al-Qubaysat.

In a further cosmetic effort to increase diversity and dilute the looming footprint of Al-Qaida within the so-called Islamic State, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi also announced the creation of an expanded Shura Council consisting of three elements from each faction that has joined the Islamic State, regardless of the number of fighters it has or the scope of its operations. Moreover, it contains a representative of each tribe and several other experts and specialists.

ALLIED SUNNI EXTREMISTS

Ansar al-Sunnah Army (a.k.a. Jaish Ansar al-Sunnah, JAS)

The Ansar al-Sunnah Army was formed in 2003 from mixed Kurdish and Arab remnants of the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group based in Kurdistan. Ansar al-Sunnah is one of the few Iraqi insurgent groups other than Al-Qaida to openly advocate its support for Usama Bin Laden, to carry out suicide bombing attacks, and to distribute beheading videos on the Internet. Among the more notable terrorist attacks claimed by JAS include:

- In August 2004, Ansar al-Sunnah operatives kidnapped a group of 12 civilian contract workers from Nepal, accusing them of working with the United States. A week after the abduction, frustrated at the lack of media attention, Ansar al-Sunnah militants brutally massacred the twelve men with knives and automatic weapons. A video of the execution was subsequently distributed on the Internet.
- In December 2004, a locally-recruited Ansar al-Sunnah suicide bomber detonated an explosive inside a dining area at a U.S. base in Mosul, killing 22 and wounding dozens. The attack itself was video-recorded by JAS representatives positioned nearby, and the video was subsequently distributed on the Internet.
- In May 2005, Ansar al-Sunnah operatives abducted and executed 44-year old Japanese security guard Akihiko Saito, the lone survivor of an insurgent attack on a civilian convoy in western Iraq.

JAS is distinct from Al-Qaida in the sense that it is comprised primarily of native Iraqi Salafists, including many Kurdish Islamist fighters. In fact, JAS is the only major insurgent group in Iraq to publish its magazines and propaganda materials in both Arabic and Kurdish language versions. Several notable targets chosen by JAS for bomb attacks– such as the offices of secular Kurdish political parties and the Turkish embassy in Iraq– distinctly reflect the Kurdish origins of the group. Today, Ansar al-Sunnah operates across a vast swath of northern and western Iraq, and has been particularly active in the cities of Mosul and Baghdad.

Despite its peculiar ethnic disposition, Ansar al-Sunnah has been more closely associated with Al-Qaida in Iraq than any other major insurgent group still independent of Al-Qaida's Islamic State. In September 2006– even prior to the foundation of Al-Qaida's Islamic State – reports began to circulate that serious discussions and planning sessions were being held in the western Anbar province between representatives of Al-Qaida's Mujahideen Shura Council and Ansar al-Sunnah, with the ultimate objective of formulating an acceptable merger between the two groups no later than the end of October. Yet, three months later, there still has been no official acknowledgment of such talks, nor has either group suggested such an alliance is in the immediate offing. Neither has JAS given any indication it is ready to lay down its arms short of the creation of a Sunni Islamic state; in mid-December, the group publicly rejected the idea of an amnesty-for-peace agreement with the Iraqi government, insisting the blood of our people which is flowing like rivers in the streets of Baghdad and elsewhere at the hands of the crusaders and Shiites will not be spilled in vain.



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

Islamic Army in Iraq (a.k.a. Jaish al-Islami fi al-Iraq, IAI)

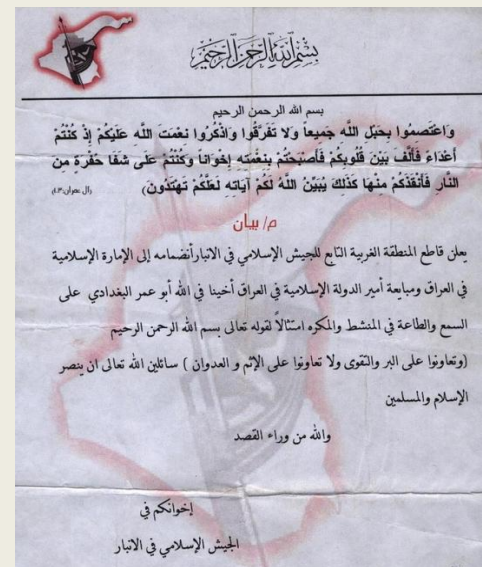
The Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) first emerged publicly in 2003 and has since grown into one of the largest and most influential Sunni insurgent groups active in Iraq. From its very inception, the IAI has established a reputation for itself as being a sophisticated, indigenous, and more-mainstream alternative to Al-Qaida and the Ansar al-Sunnah Army. However, the IAI has nonetheless routinely used terrorist tactics as part and parcel of its military operations:

- In November 2003, the IAI organized and videotaped a shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile attack on a DHL Airbus A300 leaving from Baghdad International Airport.
- In April 2005, the IAI organized and videotaped a shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile attack on a civilian Blackwater Mi-8 helicopter twelve miles north of Baghdad. The video showed IAI personnel summarily executing the lone survivor of the crash, co-pilot Lyubomir Kostov.
- Between 2003 and 2006, the IAI has admitted responsibility or has been otherwise implicated in the kidnapping and abduction of nearly a dozen foreign civilians in Iraq; including French journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, Christian Science Monitor journalist Jill Carroll, U.S. security consultant Ronald Schultz (who was murdered during his captivity), and Italian journalist Enzo Baldoni (who was also murdered during his captivity).

For the length of its existence, the IAI has maintained an awkward *détente* with Al-Qaida forces in Iraq. While the group has conducted occasional joint operations with Al-Qaida since at least mid-2004, the IAI has— in the past— carefully distanced itself from some of Al-Qaida's more controversial irredentist positions. When Al-Qaida threatened to kill any Iraqi— Sunni or Shiite— who dared to participate in U.S.-sponsored national elections, the IAI issued a communiqué in late 2006 along with other insurgent groups clarifying, we are not against any proposals which extract our nation from its present ordeal provided that they do not interfere with our Shariah Law ... and are not empty media slogans. In contrast to the secretive nature of Al-Qaida, the IAI even appointed an official public spokesperson— Dr. Ibrahim al-Shammari, a political science professor at Baghdad University.

Yet, over the course of the last year, the IAI has increasingly been drawn into the Al-Qaida-inspired sectarian war between Sunnis and Shiites. In December 2005, the IAI first took credit for insurgent attacks on an Iraqi Shiite militia, the Badr Corps. Four months later, in April 2006, the IAI began to claim responsibility for operations targeting the rival Mahdi Army, another Shiite militia run by firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. In late November, the IAI boasted that it had succeeded in assassinating a notorious Shiite militia commander, Abu Deraa, with the apparent help of Al-Qaida's Islamic State.

For the first time in its existence, there is evidence to suggest that a significant IAI faction is interested in finally joining alongside Al-Qaida. In early December, a copy of a statement branded with the IAI logo appeared on the Internet that was not officially released by the IAI's media wing. According to that statement, IAI units based in the western Anbar province have already agreed to join Al-Qaida's Islamic State and have even sworn an oath of allegiance to Al-Qaida's newly-appointed leader of the faithful in Iraq, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. It should be noted that, as of yet, there has been no official confirmation of the authenticity of the statement and the IAI media wing has remained totally silent regarding reports of high-level, ongoing negotiations with Al-Qaida leaders.



A purported statement from IAI fighters in Anbar province swearing loyalty to Al-Qaida's "Islamic State of Iraq"

Mujahideen Army (a.k.a. Jaish al-Mujahideen)

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

According to the U.S. military, the Mujahideen Army and its leaders are associated with Al-Qaida in Iraq. Yet, during 2006, the Mujahideen Army has wavered back and forth in its stated political platform. In late January– in response to Danish and Norwegian political cartoons lampooning the Prophet Mohammed– the Mujahideen Army issued a furious edict calling upon all our platoons in Jaish al-Mujahideen to attack whatever they possibly can in these two countries specifically, and in other countries who also follow in their lead. The group's threats grew even more dire in response to public comments by Pope Benedict that were likewise viewed by extremists as defamatory to the Prophet Mohammed. The group threatened in an official statement to smash the crosses in the house of the Roman dog. Most recently, in late November, the Mujahideen Army proudly claimed credit for a joint mortar operation on a U.S. base alongside fighters from Al-Qaida's Islamic State.

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

OTHER MAJOR SUNNI INSURGENT GROUPS

Beyond Al-Qaida, its partners, and its various allies, there are approximately six other major Sunni insurgent groups currently active in Iraq. Though these groups often advocate a rigidly conservative Islamist platform, they are sufficiently distant from Al-Qaida's Islamic State at this time to be treated in a separate category. The groups are:

1920 Revolution Brigades

Al-Rashideen Army

Jihad Factions of Iraq (a.k.a. Asaeb al-Iraq al-Jihadiya)

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Army

Al-Qassas Brigade (a.k.a. Revenge Brigades)

Salahuddin al-Ayyubi Brigades (a.k.a. Iraqi Islamic Resistance Front, JAAMI)

Saraya al-Dawa wal Ribat (a.k.a. Missionary and Frontier Guarding Movement)

It should be noted that at least one of these organizations– the 1920 Revolution Brigades– appears to be sliding away from its previous nationalist orientation and gradually towards Al-Qaida. The commander of Al-Qaida's Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, recently announced that dozens of brigades and thousands of fighters from various groups– including specifically the Twentieth Revolution Brigades – have sworn an oath of allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq. If accurate, this transformation is quite curious– if not a bit paradoxical– given the basic ethos behind the 1920 Revolution Brigades. The name of the group itself refers to the 1920 nationalist revolution in Iraq, an event whose memory rarely evokes positive sentiments from extreme Salafists. In July, the 1920 Revolution Brigades even issued a statement supporting the Lebanese resistance – in other words, Shiite militants loyal to Hezbollah. The statement linked Hezbollah's battle against Israel with the confrontation of U.S. and British aggression in Iraq, and offered support to... our brothers in jihad in Palestine and Lebanon. In contrast, Al-Qaida in Iraq has been publicly at odds with Hezbollah ever since Abu Musab al-Zarqawi accused the Shiite party in early June 2006 of serving as a shield protecting the Zionist enemy against the strikes of the [Sunni] mujahideen in Lebanon.

The Al-Qaida Umbrella Network

- Ansar al-Tawheed Movement
- Al-Ghurabaa Movement
- Islamic Jihad Movement
- Al-Ahwaal Brigade

- Jamaat al-Murabitin
- Fursan al-Tawheed Movement
- Ansar al-Tawheed wal-Sunnah
- Jund al-Sahaba



Army of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah



Army of the Victorious Sect



Jund Millat al-Ibrahim

Al-Qaida in Iraq



Islamic State of Iraq



Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC)

Allied Sunni Extremists



Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI)



Al-Fatihin Army



Mujahideen Army



Ansar al-Sunnah Army

Other Sunni Insurgent Groups



Jihad Factions of Iraq



Al-Rashideen Army



Saraya al-Ribat wal Dawa



Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Army



Salahudeen al-Ayyubi Brigades



Al-Qassas Brigade