

COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

# BOMBERS, BANK ACCOUNTS, & BLEEDOUT

AL-QA'IDA'S ROAD IN AND OUT OF IRAQ



EDITOR  
BRIAN FISHMAN

AUTHORS  
PETER BERGEN  
JOSEPH FELTER  
VAHID BROWN  
JACOB SHAPIRO

HARMONY  
 PROJECT

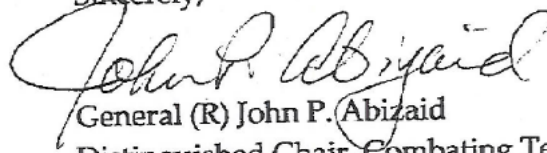
## Foreword

The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC) launched the Harmony Project in order to release and analyze documents from the Department of Defense's classified Harmony Database. The Harmony Project unearths and releases documents that reveal the inner-functioning of al-Qa`ida, its associated movements, and other security threats. Harmony documents released by the CTC are always accompanied by an analytical report, but the primary purpose of this process is to make these primary sources available to other scholars. Rather than the final word, CTC Harmony reports should be considered an invitation to further scholarship.

This is the CTC's fifth major Harmony Report. The first, *Harmony and Disharmony: al-Qa`ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities*, explored ways to introduce doubt and mistrust into al-Qa`ida's bureaucracy. The second, *al-Qa`ida's (mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa*, revealed al-Qa`ida's frustrated efforts to infiltrate East Africa. The third, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Debates in al-Qa`ida*, described al-Qa`ida's most important internal disagreements, including on the wisdom of the 9/11 attacks. The fourth, *al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, was based on al-Qa`ida in Iraq's personnel records for fighters entering Iraq through Syria. This report, *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: al-Qa`ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, expands on the first Sinjar Report, introducing new documents and new analysis to provide a better picture of al-Qa`ida in Iraq's operations and its prospects for the future.

This report could not have been completed with the support of numerous people. The Department of Social Sciences at West Point, led by Department Head Colonel Michael Meese and Deputy Department Head Colonel Cindy Jebb, constantly encourage the CTC to continue to find new ways of understanding contemporary threats. The CTC itself is blessed with exemplary leadership. Outgoing Director LTC Joseph Felter has led the CTC with tremendous energy, excitement, and focus. The Incoming Director, MAJ Reid Sawyer, has the vision, intelligence, and tenacity to lead the CTC to even more success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John P. Abizaid". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

General (R) John P. Abizaid

Distinguished Chair, Combating Terrorism Center

## Editor's Note

This report is structured differently than previous Harmony Reports. Unlike earlier reports, we divided this text into chapters credited to specific authors. *The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the US Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the US Government.*

We intentionally approached authors with very different perspectives: academics, journalists, and individuals with extensive experience traveling on both sides of the Syrian/Iraqi border. The CTC hopes that this approach demonstrates how Harmony Documents can be used by academics, journalists, and government agencies to understand al-Qa`ida and the situation in Iraq.

Chapter 2, by Joseph Felter and I, is based largely on our previous CTC report based on the Sinjar Records, *al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*. We have enjoyed the opportunity to take a *second* look at these documents. Chapter 4, which is based almost entirely on the personal travels of the author, is written anonymously to protect both the author and his sources on the ground in Syria and Iraq.

It has been a pleasure to work with Peter Bergen, Wahid Brown, Joseph Felter, and Jacob Shapiro on this project. Their insight and perspective is invaluable. The group has also been very patient as we worked through the sometimes frustrating process of releasing previously classified documents—a process slowed further by my own travels and research agenda.

Dr. Assaf Moghadam provided immense support to the production of this report and to reshaping the CTC's Harmony Project. Assaf's humility and professionalism are a credit to him and an example to both his colleagues at the CTC and the cadets at West Point. Katherine Cleary provided exceptional support as well. She copy-edited the entire project, finding and fixing many substantive and grammatical miscues. The report is better because of her effort.

For questions about this report, please contact the individual authors directly or Brian Fishman at: [brian.fishman@usma.edu](mailto:brian.fishman@usma.edu).

Brian Fishman  
July 22, 2008

# Table of Contents

## 1. *Executive Summary*

*Key Findings*

*Policy Recommendations*

## 2. *Introduction*

## 3. *Figures: Maps, Tables, Charts*

## 4. *Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: Al-Qa`ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*

### **Chapter 1. Foreign Fighters in Historical Perspective: The Case of Afghanistan**

*By Vahid Brown*

Chapter 1 explains the role foreign fighters played during the anti-Soviet Jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s, providing context that is critical to understanding the role that foreign fighters currently play in Iraq. Brown's discussion of Afghan Arabs alienating local Afghani mujahidin is particularly relevant considering the formation of anti-al-Qa`ida movements in Iraq. The chapter also helps us measure the prospect of foreign fighters in Iraq contributing to violent movements outside of Iraq, whether in the Arab world, Europe, or the United States.

### **Chapter 2. The Demographics of Recruitment, Finances, and Suicide**

*By Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman*

In Chapter 2, Felter and Fishman expand on their preliminary analysis of the Sinjar Records released in December 2007. Incorporating even more data on foreign fighters in Iraq and using new analytical techniques, Felter and Fishman assess the factors that may have contributed to foreign fighters traveling to Iraq and explore the networks that funnel those fighters to Iraq. They provide the first hard evidence that foreign fighters of Saudi origin contribute more money to al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) than individuals from other countries, explore the dynamics of AQI's logistics networks in Syria, and offer an open-source assessment of the percentage of suicide attacks in Iraq committed by foreign fighters.

### **Chapter 3. Bureaucratic Terrorists: Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's Management and Finances**

*By Jacob Shapiro*

In Chapter 3, Shapiro explores al-Qa`ida in Iraq's finances and bureaucracy. Analyzing AQI's spending patterns and accounting structures, Shapiro provides new insights into what the organization prioritizes and how it controls its agents. Among other insights, Shapiro reveals that AQI receives a large percentage of its funding from foreign fighters and likely has become more bureaucratic to rein in operators who use violence wantonly and thereby degrade fundraising opportunities. Shapiro also offers creative recommendations on how to use these insights to undermine AQI.

### **Chapter 4. Smuggling, Syria, and Spending**

*By Anonymous*

Chapter 4 describes AQI's smuggling efforts between Syria and Iraq's Nineveh Province. Drawing on his extensive experience on the ground, the author describes smuggling networks and tribal relations, two elements critical for AQI's human smuggling and the movement of goods and money. Importantly, Jihadis looking to leave Iraq may use these same networks to exit the country. The author also assesses AQI's spending patterns in the border region.

### **Chapter 5. Beyond Iraq: The Future of AQI**

*By Peter Bergen*

Chapter 5 looks to the future. Where will Jihadis in Iraq go if they leave? Using historical analogies and an assessment of current political dynamics around the Middle East, Bergen analyzes AQI's interests and opportunities to bring Iraq-style violence to other locations, in the Mideast and beyond. He concludes that the number of fighters leaving Iraq will be relatively small, but they will be highly-skilled, and reminds us that a US withdrawal from Iraq will not necessarily end the flow of foreign fighters.

### **Addendum A: Author Biographies**

# Executive Summary

This report is the second by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point to assess the demographics, procedures, finances, and leadership of al-Qa`ida's foreign fighters, especially those currently fighting in Iraq. The first Sinjar report is available on our website at: [www.ctc.usma.edu](http://www.ctc.usma.edu).

## Key Findings

This report analyzes al-Qa`ida in Iraq's (AQI) operations from spring 2006 to summer 2007 and is being issued with a trove of AQI documents captured by coalition forces near Sinjar, Iraq. The documents include almost 600 AQI personnel records for foreign fighters crossing into Iraq, AQI contracts for suicide bombers, AQI contracts for fighters leaving Iraq, narratives written by al-Qa`ida's Syrian smugglers, and AQI financial records. The CTC also acquired demographic information on all Third Country Nationals (TCNs) in detention at Camp Bucca, Iraq. Most of this data has not previously been released to the public. The key findings of the report are as follows:

### **Saudi Arabia and Libya supplied the most fighters in the Sinjar Records.**

Saudi Arabia contributed the highest number of foreign fighters to al-Qa`ida's fight in Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007, followed by Libya. Of the 576 fighters in the Sinjar Records that listed their nationality, 41 percent (237) were of Saudi Arabian origin, and 19.2 percent (111) were Libyan. Syria, Yemen, and Algeria were the next most common countries of origin with 8 percent (46), 8.1 percent (44), and 7.1 percent (41), respectively. Moroccans accounted for 6.1 percent (36) of the fighters and Jordanians 1.9 percent (11). Nearly all of the home countries listed were in the Middle East or North Africa, although the sample also includes individuals from France (2), Great Britain (1), and Sweden (1). On a *per capita* basis, Libyan fighters (18.55/1 million) entered Iraq at a much higher rate than Saudi Arabia (8.84/1 million).

### **Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt were the source of most of the foreign fighters detained in Camp Bucca, Iraq.**

As of April 7, 2008, the United States was holding 251 foreign fighters at Camp Bucca, Iraq. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria each contributed 19 percent of those fighters. Libyans comprise only 3 percent of foreign fighters held at Camp Bucca. Saudi Arabia and Libya contribute a relatively smaller percentage of the detainees held in Camp Bucca than were listed in the Sinjar Records.

**Foreign Fighters contributed approximately 75 Percent of suicide bombers between August 2006 and August 2007.**

Of the 376 fighters in the Sinjar Records that designated their “work” in Iraq, 212 (56.4 percent) were listed as suicide bombers. Assuming that this rate holds for all Jihadis listed in the Sinjar Records—and that the records are an accurate indicator of future behavior—foreign fighters accounted for approximately 75 percent of suicide bombings in Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007.

Many of AQI’s foreign fighters sign suicide contracts before entering Iraq to guarantee they will commit a suicide attack, which suggests AQI must convince and compel many incoming fighters to commit suicide attacks. The contracts suggest that would-be bombers who renege will not be allowed to fight in Iraq; some state that break the contract immediately divorce their wife.

The plurality of suicide bombers entering Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007 were Saudi. However, the Sinjar Records challenge the notion that Saudi foreign fighters are more likely than fighters from other locations to become suicide bombers, as Libyan and Moroccan nationals registered as “suicide bombers” at a higher rate than their Saudi counterparts.

**AQI is a wounded organization.**

Tribal disaffection, the surge in Coalition and Iraqi Forces in 2007-2008, and AQI’s self-destructive penchant for violence have all contributed to the organization’s decline. The number of foreign fighters entering Iraq every month has declined to between 40 and 50, and many foreign fighters are now trying to leave the country. AQI is largely concentrated in and around the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. AQI still desires and is capable of generating large-scale asymmetric attacks, but is unable to control territory with impunity as it could two years ago.

**There Syrian foreign fighter network is effective, but not uniform.**

The amount of money fighters in the Sinjar Records paid to their Syrian Coordinators varied dramatically depending on the Syrian Coordinator. Likewise, some Syrian Coordinators worked almost exclusively with fighters from specific countries, and likely with specific Coordinators in fighters’ home countries. In other words, there is not one network in Syria for ushering fighters into Iraq, there are many. Despite the structural incongruities, AQI’s network provided a regular, predictable flow of fighters into Iraq.

**There is a strong risk of blowback from Iraq. Relatively small numbers of Jihadis will “bleedout” to fight elsewhere, but they will likely be very dangerous individuals.**

The Iraq war has increased Jihadi radicalization in the Muslim world and the number of al-Qa`ida recruits. Foreign fighters in Iraq have also acquired a number of useful skills that can be used in future terrorist operations, including massive use of suicide tactics, organizational skills, propaganda, covert communication, and innovative improvised explosive device (IED) tactics. Some AQI fighters that have already trickled out of Iraq have bolstered violent movements in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. This trend will likely continue. Although the threat to Europe and North America is real—French officials have tracked 24 fighters from France that have traveled to Iraq—fighters are most likely to join established Jihadi groups in areas of weak government control, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Lebanon.

Not all AQI fighters leaving Iraq will remain militant. AQI requires some exiting fighters to sign contracts demanding they not join other Jihadi groups. It is unclear whether the provision is designed to protect the Jihadi organizations in case the exiting fighters are under surveillance, ensure the fighters do not join AQ’s Jihadi competitors, or if these fighters have angered their AQI hosts.

US withdrawal from Iraq may not end the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq. A withdrawal that leaves swaths of Iraq ungoverned may provoke a resurgence of foreign fighter travel to Iraq. If Jihadis believe Iraq remains a viable arena for Jihad, or they sense an opportunity to humiliate the US, they will travel to Iraq even after a withdrawal, much as an earlier generation of fighters arrived in Afghanistan long after the Soviet Union withdrew.

**Smuggling across the Syrian/Iraqi border has tribal roots.**

AQI capitalizes on the extensive tribal smuggling networks across the Syrian/Iraqi border, much of which has traditionally received explicit or tacit support from Syrian and Iraqi officials. The smuggling takes a number of forms, each of which requires unique expertise. Livestock smuggling is the most prevalent, and usually takes place on unmarked trails away from established border crossings. Cigarettes and other bulk items are often moved in trucks through border crossings, which requires bribing border guards. High-value items such as electronics require larger bribes and better intelligence about border officials. Human smuggling often takes place on the same trails as livestock smuggling. There is ample evidence that AQI uses criminal smugglers, who they do not fully trust, to cross the border. AQIs effort to monopolize



smuggling networks, which impeded Sunni tribal leaders from much of their traditional livelihood, was an important element convincing Iraqi tribes to cooperate with US forces.

**Foreign Fighters contribute large sums of money to AQI, including a majority of its Border Sector 1 funding.**

Financial reports show that AQI's Border Sector 1 relied on three sources of funding: transfers from other leaders in AQI; fundraising from local Iraqis; and money brought by foreign suicide bombers. In AQI's Border Sector 1, near Sinjar, incoming foreign fighters contributed more than 70 percent of the group's operating budget. In that sector, 38 percent of AQI's budget was used to purchase weapons and another 38 percent to import and sustain its personnel. Other AQI sectors likely had very different fundraising dynamics.

**Saudi Arabian Jihadis contribute far more money to AQI than fighters from other countries.**

Fighters from several nations contributed money to AQI, though Saudi Arabian nationals contributed a disproportionately large amount, totaling 46 percent of the overall funds received from foreign fighters. Furthermore, the mean contribution of Saudi fighters was \$1,088, far higher than that of other nationalities. Of the 23 fighters that contributed more than \$1,000, 22 were from Saudi Arabia.

**AQI is highly bureaucratized, which may be a sign of operational failure and internal mistrust within the organization.**

AQI is highly bureaucratized, forcing its agents to provide detailed accounting of inlays and expenditures, urging both incoming suicide bombers and fighters leaving Iraq to sign contracts, and auditing its various sub-units. AQI, like al-Qa`ida in general, is plagued by "agents" and intermediaries whose preferences diverge from those of the Jihadi "principals." Despite the security costs of increasing its paper trail, AQI's leaders were compelled required regular accounting reports from their underlings, likely because of graft and criminality.

**Jihadis headed to Iraq were recruited predominately through local networks, rather than through the Internet.**

As noted in the CTCs first Sinjar Report, foreign fighters who ended up in Iraq appear overwhelmingly to have joined the Jihad through local Jihadi sympathizers (33.5%) and personal social networks (29%). Only a few Jihadis appear to have met their local coordinators directly through the Internet. There is

also a high likelihood that many foreign fighters traveled to Iraq in groups, and may have made the decision to travel there collectively.

**AQI has produced fewer, but far more skilled, fighters than the “Arab-Afghans” did in the 1980s.**

The foreign fighters in Iraq share important similarities—such as country of origin and ideology—with the so-called “Afghan Arabs” that traveled to Afghanistan to fight Soviet and Afghan-communist forces in the 1980s. But there are important differences as well. Foreign fighters in Iraq have seen more combat than their predecessors in Afghanistan. In addition, they have shown greater ability to innovate critical tactical skills, such as IED development and suicide bombings.

Although the overall military impact of the foreign fighters for the Jihad in Afghanistan was minimal, the presence of Afghan Arabs had important consequences. Most importantly, the Afghanistan experience helped radicalize thousands of Jihadist activists from all over the world. The recruitment networks attracted volunteers, while training camps radicalized foreign fighters. Similar problems may bedevil the United States and its allies who face a growing body of alumni of the Iraqi Jihad.

The Afghan experience also had some negative implications for al-Qa`ida that may apply to the current “Jihad” in Iraq. Foreign fighters in Afghanistan alienated local Afghans due to their extremist tactics and by preaching a puritanical ideology. At times, such disputes erupted into violence, especially when splinter groups of highly radicalized Afghan Arabs operated independently of their organizational leadership.

**AQI’s permanent Border Sector personnel are vulnerable to coercion.**

Family men with property dominate the Border Sector’s permanent establishment. Many are motivated by financial gain more than ideology. To the extent that they can be identified, such individuals are highly vulnerable to pressure, and may be susceptible to being turned and used as agents.

**AQI is increasingly linked to al-Qa`ida’s senior leaders**

AQI did not exist before the US invasion, but the organization has grown progressively more integrated with al-Qa`ida Central, especially following Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s death.

## Policy Recommendations

### **Encourage governments to crackdown on local Jihadi recruitment networks.**

Stopping Jihadis before they enter Iraq is critical. Early interdiction is best achieved by creating incentives and providing support to states to stop would-be fighters and suicide bombers before they leave for Iraq. As noted in the CTC's first Sinjar report, the Sinjar Records identify recruiting "hot spots" within countries—most notably northeastern Libya. The US should focus development and civil society aid toward these regions. Such information can reduce the cost of interdiction by helping states focus their intelligence and outreach efforts.

### **Create and share a universal database to track foreign fighters, insurgents, and terrorists.**

The US government still does not maintain an integrated database of Jihadis (foreign fighters, insurgents, and terrorists). The database needs, above all, to map the "facilitative nodes" that bring young men into the Jihad, such as websites, operational planners, financiers, and local Jihadi networks. Captured documents like the Sinjar Records, captured foreign fighters, and suicide bombers identified forensically are a good building block for such a database. Friends and family are the backbone of terrorist recruitment networks, so this investigatory work should include an effort to identify friends and/or family members who brought the suicide attackers into the Jihad. The database should be widely shared among allies and cooperative governments.

### **Target Syria's criminal smuggling networks.**

AQI's reliance on criminal and smuggling networks exposes the group to the greed and uncertain commitment of mercenaries. Governments may be able to use financial incentives and creative security guarantees to gain cooperation from these criminal networks. Offering a large bounty for foreign fighters may be more attractive than the payments Syrian coordinators/smugglers can expect to receive from AQI, or the cash they can take from the fighters traveling to Iraq. It is likely that individuals who provide logistical support are less committed to the cause than the group's permanent staff in Iraq or traveling Jihadis. This difference in commitment can be exploited. One way to do so is to encourage Syrian authorities to offer amnesty or reduced punishment for known Syrian coordinators in exchange for cooperation.

### **Coordinate Counter-Terrorism Efforts with Arab and North African countries.**

Fighters flowing out of Iraq threaten Arab states more than they threaten the US

or European countries. The US should use the prospect of AQI fighters trickling home to convince countries to locate and destroy al-Qa`ida's logistical networks. Even when direct US aid is inappropriate or inexpedient, the US should quietly support communication and information-sharing between Arab and North African states threatened by AQ. Many countries, including Saudi Arabia, Libya, and even Syria will be more likely to assist the US as the outflow of fighters increases. The Syrian government has willingly ignored, and in some cases may have assisted, foreign fighters headed to Iraq. Nonetheless, al-Qa`ida is a major threat to Syria. Now that AQI's fighters are filtering out of the Iraq, Syria may be more willing to cooperate on efforts to interdict them.

**Recognize that some US allies still see Jihadis as useful policy tools.** Saudi Arabia and other Arab states are fearful of increased Iranian influence in Iraq. So long as these governments view foreign Sunni militants in Iraq as a bulwark against the dominance of Iranian-influenced Iraqi leaders, they are less likely to crackdown completely on well-placed Jihadi financiers operating from Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. Limiting the real and perceived influence of Iran in Iraq's domestic political and security situation may therefore be a necessary first step to gain greater cooperation from some Saudi authorities.

**Support programs aimed at increasing civil liberties and political rights.** Low levels of civil liberties are a powerful predictor of the national origin of foreign fighters in Iraq. Increasing civil liberties and political rights at the national level in countries producing the largest number of militants may be impractical except as a long-term goal. However, because individual recruitment in these countries is concentrated in a few localities, national-level change may not be necessary. Instead, efforts to improve local governance and the professionalism of security services in these 'hot-spot' communities may be both feasible and effective.

**Creatively strengthen the Syrian/Iraqi border.** Increased surveillance along the Syrian/Iraqi border is critical. The US should invest in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance technology to improve monitoring along the border and support the Iraqi Border Police in doing the same. When possible, the US, Iraqi, and other governments should cooperate with Syria on such activities. Non-kinetic programs can raise AQIs smuggling costs. Raising the salary of border officials and increasing the punishments for corruption will increase AQI's financial burden without kinetic activity that can alienate a potentially hostile population. The largest item in the Sinjar organization's budget was weapons and equipment. By undertaking programs that increase the cost of accessing these goods, Coalition forces may increase the costs of insurgent organizations.

# Introduction

## Characterizing the Threat Posed by AQI

At times during the US occupation of Iraq, al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) has been the most important threat to US forces. But it has never been the largest insurgent organization in Iraq, nor the most deeply ingrained in Iraqi society. Indeed, al-Qa`ida in Iraq has weakened substantially over the last 18 months, primarily because Iraqi Sunnis turned against the organization. This is a critical success for the United States and Iraqi governments and a boon for everyday Iraqis. However, it will not resolve Iraq's fundamental political problems. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq demands our attention because it remains a tactical threat to American troops and, even in decline, has the potential to spread violence beyond Iraq's borders. The United States must distinguish between its campaign against AQI and the larger (and more difficult) task of building a stable, peaceful Iraqi government capable of governing Iraq independently. Conflating contemporary success against AQI with the more persistent challenge of resolving of Iraq's political problems is not only wrong; it is dangerous.

## A Note on Names

This report uses three names to identify different incarnations of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI). "Al-Qa`ida in Iraq" is the broadest; it refers to the group created in the fall of 2004 by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. In January 2006, AQI created the Mujahidin Shura Council (MSC), which claimed to be a collection of insurgent groups, but was dominated by AQI. Many of the Sinjar Records are printed on MSC letterhead. Finally, al-Qa`ida in Iraq created the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in October 2006. Unlike the MSC, which was little more than a media front, the ISI was intended to be a substantive political organization. Sinjar Records from early 2007 forward were created on ISI letterhead. Today, al-Qa`ida diehards claim that AQI has been completely replaced by the ISI. Such a claim overstates the ISI's capability; it aims to bolster the group's legitimacy in and outside of Iraq. In this report, the term "al-Qa`ida in Iraq" refers to the organization over its entire lifespan, even during MSC and ISI periods.

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq, in all its forms, has operated largely independently of AQ Central. As Peter Bergen argues in Chapter 5, al-Qa`ida's central leaders have increased their authority over AQI since Zarqawi's death, but they have never completely controlled AQI. AQI is a hybrid organization of ideologues and criminals, Iraqis and non-Iraqis, frighteningly sophisticated thinkers and fools. It

is simultaneously a part of the global Jihad and a peculiarly Iraqi phenomenon. To oversimplify AQI is to underestimate it—something we should all avoid.

## **Documents**

The primary purpose of the CTC's Harmony Project is to make documents revealing the inner-workings of terrorist organizations available to the academic community. This report is being released in conjunction with a large number of new documents. On September 11, 2007, Coalition forces in Iraq raided a suspected al-Qa`ida safe house in Sinjar, a western Iraqi town ten miles from the Syrian border. The operation recovered a trove of records documenting the background and flow of foreign fighters entering Iraq. The CTC previously released the Sinjar Records—a compendium of more than 600 personnel records recorded by foreign fighters entering Iraq from August 2006 through August 2007.<sup>1</sup> This report includes more information about these fighters and the organization that employed them: contracts signed by some of those foreigners aiming to be suicide bombers and fighters in Iraq, contracts signed by fighters leaving Iraq, accounting sheets explaining how much money different units had spent. The mere existence of such documents offers extraordinary insight into AQI and illustrates the threat of trained fighters leaving Iraq to fight elsewhere. In addition to information on foreign fighters included in the Sinjar Records, we also have been able to release the numbers and home countries of all “third-country nationals” currently held at Camp Bucca, the primary US detention facility for such individuals in Iraq.

A few of these new documents are not easily categorized—narratives describing events, or correspondence between AQI members. Some are versions of statements released by AQI online and have already been seen by researchers. Others, including a detailed tale by an AQI coordinator in Syria, provide a tremendous insider's look into the dangerous world AQI inhabits.

The CTC cannot vouch for the authenticity or accuracy of these records, except to confirm they were authorized for release by the Department of Defense. Readers should be aware that analyzing data captured on a battlefield is fraught with risk. These documents offer astounding insight into al-Qa`ida's methods and behavior, but they are an incomplete, imperfect record. Readers and researchers should be wary of conclusions solely based on these records.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Richard Opiel, “Foreign Fighters in Iraq Are Tied to Allies of the U.S.,” *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 2007, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/22/world/middleeast/22fighters.html>.

# Figures: Maps, Tables, and Charts

## Chapter 1

N/A

## Chapter 2

- Figure 1: Page 33 *Sample Sinjar Record: Original and English Translation*
- Figure 2: Page 34 *Foreign Fighters by Country of Origin*
- Figure 3: Page 35 *Foreign Fighters per Million People*
- Figure 4: Page 36 *Third Country Nationals Held at Camp Bucca*
- Figure 5: Page 37 *Hometowns of Saudi Arabian Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 6: Page 38 *Hometowns of Libyan Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 7: Page 40 *Hometowns of Moroccan Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 8: Page 40 *Hometowns of Algerian Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 9: Page 41 *Hometowns of Syrian Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 10: Page 41 *Hometowns of Yemeni Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 11: Page 42 *Hometowns of Tunisian Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 12: Page 42 *Birth Year of Foreign Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 13: Page 44 *Stated Occupation of Fighters in the Sinjar Records*
- Figure 14: Page 45 *Method of Foreign Fighter Introduction to Travel Coordinator*
- Figure 15: Page 47 *Route to Iraq*
- Figure 16: Page 48 *Syrian Coordinator Network Map, August 2006—August 2007*
- Figure 17: Page 49 *Syrian Coordinator Abu Abdullah's Network*
- Figure 18: Page 50 *Syrian Coordinator Abu Abbas's Network*
- Figure 19: Page 51 *Map of Syria*
- Figure 20: Page 52 *Entry of Foreign Fighters from August 2006—August 2007*

- Figure 21: Page 53 *Nationalities of Fighters Contributing Money to al-Qa`ida*
- Figure 22: Page 54 *Social Network of Fighters Contributing Financially to AQI*
- Figure 23: Page 55 *Social Network of Fighters Contributing More than \$1000 to AQI*
- Figure 24: Page 56 *“Work” Assignment in Iraq by Nationality*
- Figure 25: Page 57 *Suicide Bomber Recruitment Mechanism*
- Figure 26: Page 58 *Financial Contribution by “Work” Assignment*
- Figure 27: Page 64 *Reuven Paz Findings on Foreign Fighters*
- Figure 28: Page 65 *Cordesman/Obaid Estimates of Foreign Fighter Nationality*

### **Chapter 3**

- Figure 1: Page 73 *ISI Fundraising*
- Figure 2: Page 74 *ISI Spending*

### **Chapter 4**

- Figure 1: Page 82 *Map of Nineveh Governorate*
- Figure 2: Page 84 *Northern Iraq Transportation Map*
- Figure 3: Page 94 *ISI Logistical Records*
- Figure 4: Page 95 *Mean Variation in Foreign Fighter Arrival Dates*
- Figure 5: Page 96 *Size of Fighter Groups Crossing Syrian Border*

### **Chapter 5**

N/A



## Chapter 1

# Foreign Fighters in Historical Perspective: The Case of Afghanistan

By Wahid Brown

### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Jihadi movement is fundamentally a globalized, transnational phenomenon. It is their global ethos and international networks that primarily distinguish Jihadi militant groups like al-Qa`ida from parochial Islamist resistance and irredentist groups that seek to achieve more limited objectives. One of the most significant consequences of this characteristic in recent decades has been the Jihadi internationalization of regional or national conflicts that involved Muslim populations. Wherever Islamic communities have been perceived as under siege, the broader Jihadi movement has raised the pan-Islamic call for Jihad, gathering volunteer fighters from any country where would-be *mujahidin*—fighters of Jihad—could be successfully recruited.

The Sinjar Records analyzed in this report provide a unique insight into this process and illustrate the consequences of Jihadi globalization for the insurgency in Iraq. But Iraq is by no means the only battlefield to have witnessed an influx of foreign Muslim fighters; late-twentieth century conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya, and the Philippines each played host to a “Muslim Internationale” of foreign fighters that flocked to these places to support their co-religionists. In all of these cases—and Iraq is no exception—the involvement of foreign fighters followed a pattern and utilized resource networks that emerged during the 1980s in Afghanistan. There, during the course of the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet invasion, the mold for the internationalization of all subsequent Muslim battlefronts was cast. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the paradigmatic case of Afghanistan and thus to provide critical historical context for our understanding of the foreign fighter phenomenon in Iraq.

Not since the Spanish Civil War has a major conflict been as closely associated in the popular imagination with foreign fighters as Afghanistan’s war of anti-Soviet resistance during the 1980s. The Afghanistan experience is the model upon which all subsequent efforts to internationalize—and attract foreign volunteers—

have been based. Indeed, many of the same recruitment networks that were used to funnel money, guns, and mujahidin to the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad were subsequently employed to generate recruits for conflicts in other parts of the world. Meanwhile, the South Asian logistics infrastructure that was created to train foreign volunteers to fight Soviet invaders has been transformed into the world's most important resource network for training transnational Jihadi terrorists.<sup>2</sup> The purported role of traveling Jihadis in defeating the Soviet superpower is central to the propaganda efforts of al-Qa`ida and related groups, and thus the experience of foreign fighters in the anti-Soviet Jihad has become a core part of the broader Jihadi movement's internal mythology.

Any discussion of foreign fighters in Afghanistan is complicated by the wide variation of international involvement in the conflicts there since the 1970s. Many countries, including the United States, committed military resources to Afghanistan's warring parties at various times over the past three decades.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Afghanistan's national borders do not reflect the division of regional tribal groups, but rather cross through several of them, means that all conflicts in the country are bound to involve "foreign fighters" from bordering nations when members of Afghani tribal and ethnic groups (Pushtuns, Tajiks, Baluchis, *etc.*) come across the fluid political borders to defend and support their kinsmen in Afghanistan proper. Similarly, the long-standing links between Afghanistan's Shi'a and Iran, which is a religious and intellectual center for Shi'a all over the world, have compelled Iran to involve itself in Afghanistan's struggles.<sup>4</sup> Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also involved. More than two hundred NGOs provided aid in Afghanistan during the country's wars, which in many cases accounted for a significant amount of the material resources available to the mujahidin groups.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> On this transformation of mujahidin training networks see Mariam Abou Zahab and Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The nature and scope of the involvement of foreign governments in conflicts in Afghanistan is treated in detail in William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (Hampshire, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the Shi'a parties in the anti-Soviet resistance and their ties to Iran, see Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 9.

<sup>5</sup> No less than 256 NGOs have been involved in aid to Afghanistan, with more than 50 operating in Afghanistan directly. See Helga Baitenmann, "NGOs and the Afghan War: the Politicisation of Humanitarian Aid," *Third World Quarterly* 12:1 (1990): 62-85; and Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 131-4.

The following brief overview of foreign fighters in Afghanistan is restricted to the relatively informal movement of would-be (Sunni) mujahidin to Afghanistan from outside of South Asia, treating their presence in western Pakistan as part and parcel of their involvement in Afghanistan's various Jihads.<sup>6</sup> The discussion will also be restricted chronologically to the anti-Soviet Jihad of the 1980s, ending with the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989. The presence and role of foreign fighters in the current theater of operations in Afghanistan will not be addressed. Suffice it to point out that the dynamics of foreign fighter involvement that pertained during the anti-Soviet Jihad largely held true during the Taliban years, as they do to a lesser extent today.

## THE ANTI-SOVIET JIHAD: 1979-1989

### Background

While the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979 was the primary impetus for the subsequent influx of most foreign fighters, developments in the 1960s and '70s laid the groundwork and helped determine the nature of this foreign involvement. The leadership of Afghanistan's anti-communist activist networks had forged links with Arab Islamist organizations—including militant groups—in the '60s and '70s. Following their departure from Afghanistan in 1974, these leaders developed critical relationships with Pakistan and Gulf Arab countries from their exile headquarters in Peshawar, a city that would remain the capital of the mujahidin resistance movement for many years to come.

The leadership of Afghanistan's Islamist movement emerged during the 1960s from a group of scholars of Islamic law who all followed a similar course of study, the pinnacle of which was a graduate degree in *Shari'a* studies from Cairo's al-Azhar University, the preeminent institution of religious learning in the modern Sunni world.<sup>7</sup> At al-Azhar, these men all developed links with and

---

<sup>6</sup> Iranian aid to Afghan fighters (Shi'a and otherwise) over the past three decades is an extremely complicated question that lies outside the scope of this study. Aside from the Iranian connection, foreign mujahidin who have traveled to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets or support the Taliban have been overwhelmingly Sunni. For overviews of the history of Iran's involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan, with emphasis on the period of Taliban rule, see Adam Tarock, "The Politics of the Pipeline: The Iran and Afghanistan Conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 20:4 (1999): 801-19; and Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity," *Human Rights Watch* 13:3 (2001): 35ff.

<sup>7</sup> As noted by Barnett Rubin, the faculty of theology at Kabul University was established in 1952 in collaboration with and under the sponsorship of al-Azhar, and in the early 1970s "half of the teachers in the faculty of theology [in Kabul] had degrees from al-Azhar." See Barnett R. Rubin,

came under the ideological influence of the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*). It was thus the Egyptian strand of Islamist thought—associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the writings of Sayyid Qutb—rather than the Pakistani strand—centered on the thought of Abul Ala Maududi—that defined the movement in Afghanistan, a fact which helps to explain the predominance of Egyptian Islamism in the intellectual roots of al-Qa`ida and other Jihadi groups that were born out of the Afghan Jihad.<sup>8</sup> Burhanuddin Rabbani, ‘Abdu’l-Rabb Rasul Sayyaf and Sibghatullah Mujaddidi all studied at al-Azhar, led anti-communist Islamist groups in Afghanistan in the 1960s and ‘70s, and went on to lead, respectively, three of the seven main Sunni mujahidin organizations during the anti-Soviet Jihad.<sup>9</sup> A leader of another of these organizations, Muhammad Yunus Khalis, though not an al-Azhar graduate, introduced the thought of Sayyid Qutb to Afghanistan by publishing, in 1960, the first translation of one of the latter’s works into an Afghani language (Dari).<sup>10</sup>

Initially, the Afghani Islamist groups had few links to foreign organizations. That changed after 1973, when Mohammed Daoud Khan overthrew the monarchy of his cousin Zahir Shah in a coup d’état.<sup>11</sup> In response to the state

---

“Arab Islamists in Afghanistan,” in *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?*, ed. John Esposito (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 182.

<sup>8</sup> On the Afghan Islamist leadership and the role of Egypt in Afghani Islamism, see Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, ch. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Brief profiles of Rabbani, Mujaddidi and Sayyaf can be found in J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1986), App. B. See also Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), ch. 9, on their leadership of mujahidin parties. All three of these men now serve in various capacities in the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

<sup>10</sup> Khalis translated Qutb’s first major work, *Social Justice in Islam*, under the Dari title *Islam va edelat-e edjtemay*; Qutb’s *Milestones*, as well as his Qur’an commentary, were translated by Burhanuddin Rabbani in 1969, Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, p. 70; for a more detailed account of the introduction of Islamist literature during this period see David B. Edwards, “Summoning Muslims: Print, Politics, and Religious Ideology in Afghanistan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 52:3 (1993): 609-28. Khalis, who died in 2006, was closely connected to virtually every important Jihadi development in Afghanistan; prior to his assumption of the title of “Commander of the Faithful” (*amir al-mu’minin*) as head of the Taliban, Mullah Muhammad ‘Umar was a field commander in Khalis’ Hizb-e Islami organization, and it was Khalis who served as Usama bin Ladin’s first host upon the latter’s return to Afghanistan in 1996.

<sup>11</sup> As Rubin notes, “[t]he Islamists had been in contact with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and communicated regularly with the Pakistani Jama’at-i Islami, but no available evidence indicates that they received significant outside financial support while they remained in Afghanistan.... In Pakistani exile after Daoud’s coup, the Islamists sought foreign aid.” Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 83.

repression that followed, most Islamist leaders fled Kabul to Peshawar, Pakistan, where they began to receive support from Pakistan's military and Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), as well as from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.<sup>12</sup> Burhanuddin Rabbani spent half of 1974 in Saudi Arabia and secured a year of support for the Islamists-in-exile, but by 1976 Saudi Arabia cut off the money as it sought a closer relationship with the Daoud government.<sup>13</sup> In 1975, the Pakistani military and ISI provided extensive support for the exiled militants to plan and execute a series of regional uprisings against the Daoud regime. Despite this support, the attempted rebellion proved to be a total failure.<sup>14</sup>

After the failed insurrection, the exiled leadership regrouped in Peshawar. In April 1978, Daoud was assassinated and his government toppled in a communist coup led by a faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. The leadership vacuum led to an almost immediate uprising in many regions of the country and greatly accelerated foreign involvement in Afghanistan's internal conflicts. The first foreign fighters entering the country in the name of Jihad arrived at this time. As noted by Anthony Hyman, referring to the period between the April 1978 coup and the December 1979 Soviet invasion:

Even in the first phase of the struggle against the Soviet-backed Kabul regime, there was a small foreign Muslim presence, composed of Pakistani, Egyptian, and other Arab volunteers, including medical doctors as well as fighters. Some black American Muslims and Muslim Filipinos from Mindanao also came to fight.<sup>15</sup>

The communist coup also alarmed Western and Muslim governments, most of whom saw it as evidence of Soviet encroachment into the region. Five months prior to the Soviet military invasion, US President Jimmy Carter authorized \$500,000 in covert aid to the Afghan rebels.<sup>16</sup> Fundraising and recruitment networks were also quickly established throughout the Muslim world, particularly in Arab states, often in partnership with local infrastructures of the Muslim Brotherhood.

---

<sup>12</sup> Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, p. 75; Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, pp. 82ff.

<sup>13</sup> Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, pp. 74f.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Hyman, "Arab Involvement in the Afghan War," *The Beirut Review* 7 (1994): 74f.

Though this statement is supported by evidence from the Harmony documents to be discussed below, nearly all other sources on the Afghanistan wars (erroneously) date the entry of foreign mujahidin to 1980 at the earliest.

<sup>16</sup> Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Fought the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 143f.

One of the documents from the Harmony Database provides a window into this earliest stream of foreign mujahidin into Afghanistan. Written by Abu'l-Walid Mustafa Hamid in 1994 at the al-Faruq Jihadi training camp in Khost, Afghanistan, the narrative describes Abu'l-Walid's encounters with a delegation of Afghani Muslim clerics from Paktia Province at a mosque in Abu Dhabi during the spring of 1979.<sup>17</sup> The delegation was traveling in the Gulf Arab states seeking aid for the nascent Jihad against the Kabul regime. Abu'l-Walid was inspired by their religiously-rooted appeals and, after making independent contact with Jalaluddin Haqqani in Paktia—a field commander who was allied with Yunus Khalis and later with the Taliban—Abu'l-Walid himself traveled to Pakistan that summer and proceeded to Paktia Province *via* Peshawar.<sup>18</sup> For the next two decades, he would be one of the most prominent “Afghan Arabs,” as foreign mujahidin in Afghanistan came to be known.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Soviet Invasion and the Jihad Rush**

In December of 1979, fearing the collapse of Afghanistan's communist government, the Soviet Union's 40<sup>th</sup> Army invaded the country, occupied the capital, killed the then-president, Hafizullah Amin, and installed Babrak Karmal as head of state. An atheist superpower had invaded and occupied a Muslim country; calls for a retaliatory Jihad were immediate and widespread throughout the Islamic world. The initial efforts to recruit foreign fighters, as well as to manage the mujahidin insurgency within the country, were directed out of Peshawar by groups that came to be known as “resistance parties.” Many of these organizations were led by Afghanistan's exiled Islamist leaders mentioned above.

---

<sup>17</sup> Harmony Document AFIG-2002-600087. This part of this narrative was also published by Muhammad al-Shafi'i in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* on October 26, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Haqqani became an increasingly important recruiter for Arab fighters over the course of the anti-Soviet war; by the mid-1980s he had opened offices in Gulf Arab countries to raise funds and volunteers and his area of control around Khost in Paktia Province was often the first battlefield to which foreign fighters were dispatched. As Coll notes, “Haqqani became a militant folk hero to Wahhabi activists.... In part because of Haqqani's patronage, the border regions nearest Pakistan became increasingly the province of interlocking networks of Pakistani intelligence officers, Arab volunteers, and Wahhabi *madrassas*.” Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Ladin, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 157.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the Jihadi career of Abu'l-Walid see my profile of him on the Combating Terrorism Center's website, available at [http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/profile\\_pdf/Abu'l-Walid.pdf](http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/profile_pdf/Abu'l-Walid.pdf).

At first, there were dozens of such organizations, representing diverse ethnic and ideological constituencies within Afghanistan. Leftist and other secularist parties were progressively sidelined, however, as were those representing the smaller ethnic groups. The Pakistani government favored groups that were Islamist in ideology and largely Pashtun in membership, and used selective support to advance its national interest.<sup>20</sup> In early 1981, the Pakistani government announced that it would thenceforth recognize only six (a number soon increased to seven) resistance parties, having the effect of totally freezing out minority and non-Islamist parties, which ceased at that time to have any significant representation in the anti-Soviet insurgency.<sup>21</sup> The official parties were all Sunni, and the three groups most ideologically committed to radical Islamism received the most foreign aid and attracted the greatest number of foreign volunteers. These were Ittihad-i Islami, led by ‘Abdu’l-Rabb Rasul Sayyaf; Hizb-e Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; and a break-away faction with the same name—Hizb-e Islami—led by Yunus Khalis. Sayyaf, a fluent speaker of Arabic, had the most extensive links in the Gulf Arab states and was able to raise the most money and volunteers from those countries.<sup>22</sup>

Fighters were recruited in a wide variety of ways throughout the world; magazines and newsletters, itinerant speakers, Islamic conferences and the existing socio-political networks of Islamist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood were all used to attract would-be mujahidin to fight for their beleaguered coreligionists. The concurrent rise of revolutionary Islamist movements in other parts of the world helped to prepare the ground for this recruitment. Moreover, in some of the countries hosting such radicals, governments encouraged their troublesome Islamist subjects to take their fight to Afghanistan; in some cases these governments “emptied their prisons” of militant Islamists and sent them to fight the Soviets.<sup>23</sup> Pakistan instructed its embassies abroad to grant visas without restriction to anyone applying to join the Afghan Jihad, and established training camps near the Afghanistan border, which ultimately processed tens of thousands of foreign fighters.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> For details on the geopolitical considerations that shaped foreign assistance to the mujahidin and which led to the vast majority of this aid going to Pashtun (often radical) Islamist groups, see Coll, *Ghost Wars*, *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> Amstutz, *Afghanistan*, pp. 107f. For a recent analysis of the formation of the seven mujahidin parties, see Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending*, ch. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in Afghanistan,” p. 79; Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 82f.

<sup>23</sup> Milton Bearden, “Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires,” *Foreign Affairs* 80:6 (2001): 24.

<sup>24</sup> A former ISI brigadier general stated that 80,000 mujahidin passed through Pakistan’s training camps for the Afghan Jihad between 1983 and 1987. Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 199.

### Accounting for the “Afghan Arabs”

During the first half of the 1980s the role of foreign fighters in Afghanistan was negligible and was largely un-noticed by outside observers. The flow of volunteers from the Arab heartland countries was just a trickle in the early 1980s, though there were more significant links between the mujahidin and Central Asian Muslims—especially Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs.<sup>25</sup> Individuals like the above-mentioned Abu’l-Walid were recruited in the early years *via ad hoc* outreach campaigns initiated from within Afghanistan, but by 1984, the resources being poured into the conflict by other countries—especially Saudi Arabia and the United States—had become much greater, as had the effectiveness and sophistication of the recruitment efforts.<sup>26</sup> Only then did foreign observers begin to remark on the presence of outside volunteers.

The repression of Islamist movements in the Middle East contributed to the acceleration of Arab fighters leaving for Afghanistan. One important process was the Syrian regime of Hafez Assad’s brutal campaign against the Jihadi movement in Syria, led by the “Fighting Vanguard” (*al-Tali’a al-Muqatila*) of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. The crackdown initiated an exodus of Vanguard militants to neighboring Arab states.<sup>27</sup> By 1984, large numbers of these men began making their way from exile in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan toward southeastern Afghanistan to fight the Soviets.<sup>28</sup> Amman, Jordan appears to have been a particularly important hub from which these recruits were gathered and sent on to the Jihad.<sup>29</sup> A similar exodus of Egyptian militants from Asyut

---

<sup>25</sup> By the middle of the decade there were frequent clashes between Soviet Central Asian security forces in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and the Kazakh republic and demonstrators and rioters supporting the Afghan mujahidin; see Alexandre Bennigsen, “Preface,” in *Afghanistan: The Terrible Decade, 1978-1988*, ed. Curtis Cate (New York: American Foundation for Resistance International, 1988), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>26</sup> The growth and particulars of foreign aid to the mujahidin are widely documented, but see Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, ch. 9.

<sup>27</sup> For an insider’s account of this failed anti-government Jihad, see the Harmony Document by Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, “Lessons Learned from the Jihad Ordeal in Syria,” AFGP-2002-600080. Abu Mus’ab al-Suri went on from the failed Syrian Jihad to participate in the anti-Soviet conflict in Afghanistan, where he eventually rose to a position of influence in the wider Salafi Jihadi movement as a theorist and Jihadi strategist.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Davis, “Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* 5:7 (1993): 327-31.

<sup>29</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in Afghanistan,” pp. 79f.



occurred in the same period, after a four-day uprising in that province was crushed by the Egyptian security services.<sup>30</sup>

1984 was also the year that 'Abdullah 'Azzam established the *Maktab al-Khidamat*, or Afghan Services Bureau, an organization that proved to be extremely effective in raising funds and volunteers for the Afghan Jihad throughout the world. Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri joined the anti-Soviet struggle *via* the Services Bureau, and, following 'Azzam's assassination in 1989, the organization was transformed into al-Qa`ida.<sup>31</sup> The Services Bureau established recruitment offices throughout the world, and 'Azzam's personal tours to mosques abroad had an electrifying effect on many Muslim communities, bringing ever-increasing numbers of fighters to the Afghan fronts.<sup>32</sup>

Two years after the formation of the Services Bureau, Usama bin Ladin pioneered the creation of military training camps exclusively for "Afghan Arabs," a phenomenon that grew markedly in the 1990s. The first such training facility, known as *al-Masada*, or the "Lion's Den," near Jaji, Afghanistan, was built in 1986, and the following year became the scene of the first important battle between an entirely foreign fighter contingent and Soviet troops.<sup>33</sup> Although not a decisive victory for the foreign mujahidin, the battle was a major media coup for the Arab volunteers, on account of the fact that bin Ladin had specifically requested the presence of Arab journalists. According to *Jihad* magazine, published by 'Azzam's Services Bureau, after the publicity generated by the Jaji battle, "the youths started coming in waves."<sup>34</sup> Ironically, and largely due to bin Ladin's media campaign, the greatest influx of foreign mujahidin came at the twilight of the anti-Soviet conflict, adding to the post-Soviet legacy of

---

<sup>30</sup> Davis, "Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan."

<sup>31</sup> For a lucid account of this history, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qa`ida and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006), *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> In 1986 the Services Bureau opened its first American office, in Tucson, Arizona. See Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 155. The Al-Kifah Refugee Services Center in Brooklyn, New York, then under the leadership of the "Blind Shaykh" 'Umar 'Abd al-Rahman, was another important U.S. hub in 'Azzam's far-flung network; see author's Harmony profile of Ali Mohamed, available at [http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/profile\\_pdf/Ali-Mohammed.pdf](http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/profile_pdf/Ali-Mohammed.pdf), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> For accounts of the Jaji battle, see Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qa`ida's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 47-59. Despite a tendency in later al-Qa`ida propaganda to portray these events as taking place under the autonomous leadership of bin Ladin, the Lion's Den and the Jaji military operations were under the over-arching control of Sayyaf's *Ittihad-i Islami*, with which bin Ladin and his foreign fighters were at that time affiliated. See Bearden, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires," p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, p. 57.

widespread violence and political instability that characterized Afghanistan for years to come.

By the time the Soviet Union withdrew its last troops in February of 1989, many thousands of foreign fighters from throughout the world had come to fight in Afghanistan. In all, the “Afghan Arabs” hailed from no fewer than forty-three countries.<sup>35</sup> The exact number of these foreign mujahidin is impossible to determine, and even rough estimates vary widely between authors. In 1989, the CIA’s station in Islamabad, Pakistan, estimated the number of Arab fighters in Afghanistan at that time at about four thousand, mainly fighting under Sayyaf’s leadership.<sup>36</sup> Pakistani intelligence had similarly estimated that “between 3,000 and 4,000 Arab and foreign volunteers were at any one time training or serving in various fronts inside Afghanistan.”<sup>37</sup> Estimates of the total number of “Afghan Arabs” that fought over the course of the anti-Soviet conflict (1979-1989) also vary widely, anywhere from twenty-five, forty, and even one hundred thousand.<sup>38</sup>

Extensive research has been conducted on this phenomenon for some countries of origin—Algeria and Egypt in particular—but even in these instances the informal and clandestine nature of recruitment networks for foreign fighters means that all estimates must be considered ball-park at best. One recent monograph by a London-based Arab journalist cites French military reports and an Algerian journalist that had estimated, respectively, that 3,000 or 4,000 Algerians had gone to Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup> The same work cites a “sociological study” carried out by Algerian intelligence of 800 Algerian volunteers who fought in Afghanistan during the 1980s.<sup>40</sup> According to that study, the age group most

---

<sup>35</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 201.

<sup>37</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Milton Bearden, “Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires,” p. 24, suggests that “as many as 25,000 Arabs” may have fought and/or trained in Afghanistan during the 1980s (a number that echoes Anthony Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” p. 79); Anthony Davis, “Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan,” proposes that the number is “well over” 40,000; Rashid, in *Taliban*, p. 130, gives the number of 35,000 under the category of “Muslim radicals from 43 Islamic countries... [who] would pass their baptism under fire with the Afghan Mujaheddin,” and, under the broader category of “Muslim radicals [who had] direct contact with Pakistan and Afghanistan and [were] influenced by the Jihad,” gives the estimate of “more than 100,000.”

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Muqaddam, *al-Afghan al-Jaza'iriyun: min al-Jama'at ila'l-Qa'ida* (Algiers, 2002), pp. 16f, 53.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19f.

heavily represented among those who volunteered for Jihad in Afghanistan was 33-42 years old, accounting for 66.45 percent of the sample; the next largest group (18.09 percent) fell between the ages of 43 and 52, while those under the age of 27 made up the smallest statistical portion—only 0.75 percent. If the Algerian experience was representative of the larger foreign fighter phenomenon in Afghanistan, the rank and file “Afghan Arab” was on average much older than the typical foreign volunteer currently fighting in Iraq. According to data from the Sinjar Records, the average age of Iraq’s foreign fighters is 24-25 years old.<sup>41</sup>

Estimating which countries produced the most “Afghan Arabs” is as difficult as determining the total number of volunteers. Many authors have weighed in on this question, though in the absence of discrete data sets these must be considered purely impressionistic. Data in the Harmony documents and the writings of Arab veterans of the Afghan war lend support to Anthony Davis’s assertion that in the first years of the 1980s “the pioneers were from the Arab heartland of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and the Occupied Territories, where a tradition of clandestine radicalism and armed struggle was strong and state repression was vigorous.”<sup>42</sup> In the later years of the Jihad, however, “significant numbers of activists and students from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Sudan” began to change the makeup of the “Afghan Arab” contingent.<sup>43</sup> This impression was somewhat supported by Hyman, who wrote that “the majority [of foreign volunteers] came from the poorer fringes of the Arab world, including Sudan, Chad, Mauritania, Somalia, and Yemen, while the organizing cadres, from the outset, were from Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Palestine.”<sup>44</sup> Saudi Arabia is prominently absent from both of these lists, and Hyman noted that there are “fewer reported cases of Arab volunteers from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.”<sup>45</sup> However, Hyman’s findings were contradicted by the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi who was invited by bin Ladin to visit the Jaji camp complex in

---

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qa`ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2007), available at <http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf>, p. 24. Interestingly, in both the Algerian study and in the Sinjar records, the most common hometown for Algerian foreign fighters in both Afghanistan in the 1980s and Iraq in the 2000s was El Oued.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, “Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan.”

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

1987; he subsequently wrote that, “most [foreign volunteers] come from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Algeria, Libya, and Morocco.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Influence and Consequences**

The overall impact of foreign fighters in the anti-Soviet Jihad has been deemed by most Western and academic observers to have been marginal at best. Many of these writers, and even some Islamist and Jihadi thinkers, argue that the presence of foreign fighters negatively complicated the war and introduced persistent problems that continue to bedevil Afghanistan today.<sup>47</sup> In terms of the broader international consequences of the “Afghan Arab” experience, however, there is no debate: the anti-Soviet Jihad radicalized thousands of Islamist activists from all over the world, many of whom went on to establish Jihadi organizations and spread Islamist violence in their home countries.

Not surprisingly, foreign veterans of the anti-Soviet Jihad tend to over-emphasize their role in the military defeat of one of the world’s superpowers. In recruitment propaganda, al-Qa`ida’s leaders frequently refer to the “decisive victory” that the Arab volunteers delivered to the cause of Islam by pouring into Afghanistan in the 1980s.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the military contribution of foreign fighters was negligible until the last years of the Soviet engagement, at which time foreign fighters under Sayyaf’s control did help repel a Soviet advance in Paktia Province.<sup>49</sup> These eleventh-hour victories had no influence on the ultimate outcome of the war, however, as Gorbachev had begun the process of Soviet withdrawal more than a year before the Jaji battles.<sup>50</sup> In the final analysis, as noted by Hyman:

The impact of Arab volunteers fighting in, or contributing to, the Afghan *Jihad* was in many respects marginal to the course of the struggle in Afghanistan as a

---

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, p. 58. Note that all seven of these countries figure in the list of the nine most common countries of origin of foreign fighters in Iraq according to the Sinjar records. See Felter and Fishman, *Al-Qa`ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq*, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Abu’l-Walid al-Masri, for instance, writing during the midst of ongoing hostilities against the Kabul government after the Soviet withdrawal, frequently records his exasperation at the military weaknesses and ideological excesses of the Arab volunteers. See, e.g., Harmony Document AFGP-2002-600092, pp. 44f. (pp. 57f. of the English trans.); see also part seven of Abu’l-Walid’s “Chatting on the Rooftop of the World” as serially published by Muhammad al-Shafi’i in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Oct. 30, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> For examples and analysis of this rhetoric, see Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 84ff.

<sup>49</sup> See Bearden, “Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires,” p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> See Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, ch. 6.

whole. Indeed, it is arguable that such participation had as much of an indirect impact in the Arab world as on the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>51</sup>

For much of the war, the foreign volunteers were a burden on the Afghan mujahidin that did the bulk of the fighting against the Soviets. Because Pakistan directed the majority of foreign support to the most radical Islamist resistance parties—Sayyaf’s Ittihad in particular—the foreign recruitment networks tended to bring in radical Salafi volunteers, commonly known as Wahhabis. The Saudi- and Pakistan-funded training camps near the Afghan border further radicalized foreign fighters, so that those entering Afghanistan were ideologically committed to a strict and idealized vision of Islam that often contradicted the religious practices of Afghani Muslims. Early on in the anti-Soviet Jihad, this ideological divide led to violent clashes between Afghan mujahidin and Wahhabi volunteers. Many Wahhabi volunteers opposed, among other things, the Afghan practice of decorating the graves of fallen mujahidin with colored flags and had begun destroying these perceived “idolatries.” The Afghans understandably had little patience for this desecration of their fellows’ graves.<sup>52</sup> Sayyaf’s men in particular often clashed with other mujahidin parties—rather than Soviet troops—over such issues.<sup>53</sup>

In 1984, the mujahidin leader Jamil ur-Rahman became extremely radicalized by Wahhabi volunteers and broke from Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e Islami to found the Jama’at al-Da’wa (“Preaching Group”). The newly founded group taught that Afghans living in government-controlled areas were infidels (*kafirun*) who should be killed by ur-Rahman’s followers.<sup>54</sup> In 1989, Jama’at al-Da’wa declared an independent Islamic emirate in Kunar province, where the group enforced the harshest interpretations of *Shari’a* law and carried on an intra-mujahidin war against Hekmatyar’s party.<sup>55</sup> In 1988, an official at the US Embassy in Islamabad, after touring the Afghan front lines, reported that there was “growing frustration, bordering on hostility” among Afghan mujahidin

---

<sup>51</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 152; Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, pp. 82ff.

<sup>53</sup> Rasul Bakhsh Rais, *War Without Winners: Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition After the Cold War* (Karachi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 186f. See also Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, p. 136 (discussing Sayyaf’s hostility for the Sufis, a fundamentally important population within Afghanistan’s religious landscape).

<sup>54</sup> Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 89; Davis, “Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan”; Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 83.

<sup>55</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” pp. 80f.

toward “radical Arabs,” who were perceived as being supported by Pakistan and the ISI.<sup>56</sup>

The foreign radicals further alienated the Afghani mujahidin by employing extraordinarily violent tactics. Commentators point to the Salafi Arabs’ practice of suicide operations and “martyrdom-seeking” in general, which was culturally alien to the Afghani mujahidin and considered tactically foolish in the extreme.<sup>57</sup> The Arab volunteers further acquired, as noted by Hyman, “a reputation for brutality and senseless cruelty.”<sup>58</sup>

The arrogant, bigoted behavior of Arabs in the southern border provinces of Afghanistan provoked friction and a backlash among Pashtun tribesmen and their allies. In particular, it was their treatment of captured Afghan women in Kunar and Nangrahar provinces in the winter of 1988-89, which provoked keen resentment among Afghans. They were accused of being responsible for forced marriages and rape, as well as many casual killings.<sup>59</sup>

Foreign fighters further worsened the plight of Afghanistan’s war-torn population by restricting the access of Western or secular aid organizations, allowing only Muslim charities and NGOs to operate unmolested. This practice continued in the 1990s under the Taliban. In some places, such as Jama’at al-Da’wa-controlled Kunar, Western aid workers were frequently attacked by foreign mujahidin.<sup>60</sup> An “interior minister” of the “Islamic Emirate of Kunar” declared from Kunar’s main mosque in October 1988 that “[f]oreign[,] blue-eyed elements intend to approach your province and help you, but you should neither accept their assistance nor permit them to enter Kunar.”<sup>61</sup> Regarding violence against Western aid workers in 1989 and ’90, a Human Rights Watch report made the following assessment:

---

<sup>56</sup> Excerpts of the diplomatic cable can be found in Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 183. One of the most successful of the Afghan mujahidin commanders, Ahmad Shah Massoud, reported in 1997 that: “My Jihad faction did not have good relations with the Arab-Afghans during the years of Jihad. In contrast they [the Arab-Afghans] had very good relations with the factions of Abdu’l-Rabb Rasul Sayyaf and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. When my faction entered Kabul in 1992, the Arab-Afghans fought in the ranks of Hekmatyar’s forces against us. We will ask them [Arab-Afghans] to leave our country. Bin Ladin does more harm than good.” Rashid, *Taliban*, pp. 132f.

<sup>57</sup> See Davis, “Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan,” and Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” p. 85.

<sup>58</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” p. 85.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 89.

<sup>61</sup> Hyman, “Arab Involvement in the Afghan War,” p. 82.

Although such attacks have occurred throughout the duration of the conflict, the changed character of the war, and international moves toward a political settlement appear to have exacerbated tensions among the parties, leading to an increase in such attacks. In addition, the influence of Saudi Arabia and the efforts by some of its clients, including Sayyaf, Hekmatyar and the various Wahhabi groups, to enforce stricter adherence to Islamic law has heightened suspicion of Western aid agencies as vehicles for the spread of un-Islamic and, especially, Christian values. Organizations that have employed Afghan women or have attempted to provide health and education assistance to women refugees have been particularly targeted, as have the Afghan women employed by them.<sup>62</sup>

The alienation of local Afghani forces undermined the efforts of transnational Salafi Jihadi groups like al-Qa`ida for the next two decades.<sup>63</sup> Today, similar forms of cultural and religious extremism thwart al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the Islamic State of Iraq from garnering popular support among the Iraqi people.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

The Afghan-Arabs were not a decisive factor in the eventual military defeat of the Soviet Union, but the influx of thousands of foreign fighters from all over the world proved that a local conflict could be “marketed” globally to provide a unifying focus for would-be militants. The international networks established for the support of the Jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s evolved in subsequent decades into the global network of Salafi Jihadi activists, many of whom were directed to similar conflicts, first in Bosnia, then areas of the former Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and the Horn of Africa. The paradigmatic experience of Afghanistan would be played out again and again.

In the Peshawar offices of the mujahidin resistance parties, Islamists from different parts of the world were able to make lasting connections with one another, develop shared ideological and strategic perspectives, get hands-on experience organizing violent action against a perceived enemy of Islam, while

---

<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Forgotten War: Human Rights Abuses and Violations of the Laws of War Since the Soviet Withdrawal* (Feb. 1991), ch. 5, available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1991/afghanistan/>.

<sup>63</sup> See Vahid Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa`ida from 1989-2006* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2007), *passim*, available at <http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq3.asp>.

<sup>64</sup> See Brian Fishman, *The Imaginary Emir: Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's Strategic Mistake* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2007), available at <http://ctc.usma.edu/pdf/ISI--al-baghdadi%20fictitious2.pdf>.

simultaneously developing and strengthening financial and personal support networks across dozens of countries. When the communist superpower was defeated and withdrew its armies in 1989, many of these foreign volunteers felt that their struggle was just beginning and that the resources and experiences developed during the anti-Soviet Jihadi should be utilized now for new purposes: taking the Jihad global. The foreign fighter experience in the Afghan resistance gave birth to global Jihad and the consequences continue to be felt today throughout the world.



## Chapter 2

# Becoming a Foreign Fighter: A *Second* Look at the Sinjar Records

By Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman<sup>65</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Since the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Iraq has been a lightning rod for Jihadis, many of whom have traveled to Iraq to fight. The Sinjar Records—a collection of more than six-hundred foreign fighter personnel records collected by al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI)—allow us to answer critical questions about these travelers. Where are they from? How do they get to Iraq? Who helps them? What do they bring with them? And what do they do once they get to Iraq?

This chapter expands on our previous analysis of the Sinjar Records, *Al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, focusing more on the financial contributions of foreign fighters in Iraq and the networks that supported their travel.<sup>66</sup>

### Description of the Data

The initial cache of documents provided to the CTC contained over 700 biographic records of foreign fighters entering Iraq through Syria during the August 2006-August 2007 period. After eliminating blanks and duplicates and resolving additional translation inconsistencies, the CTC examined 590 translated records of fighters that, we believe, entered Iraq *via* the Syrian border.<sup>67</sup> It is not clear how large a percentage of foreign fighters in Iraq are recorded in the Sinjar Records, or if the Sinjar Records are representative of the overall population of

---

<sup>65</sup> The authors would like to thank Alan Krueger for helping to identify a number of key patterns in these data and for anchoring our analysis of the nationality of foreign suicide bombers.

<sup>66</sup> See Felter and Fishman, *Al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq*. See: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf>. The previous report also includes more information about al-Qa`ida's history in Iraq. Some of the analysis and graphics in this chapter were generated using Palantir software. See [www.palantirtech.com/sinjar](http://www.palantirtech.com/sinjar) for additional analyses of the Sinjar Records.

<sup>67</sup> The data supporting the findings in this chapter has been updated, and in some cases recoded for accuracy, from the initial report by Felter and Fishman, *Al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq*. Data is available upon request.

foreign fighters. Both conditions introduce uncertainty into our conclusions. Thus, although the Sinjar Records are the best source for demographic information on foreign fighters in Iraq, statistics generated from the Sinjar Records alone may not accurately reflect Iraq's entire population of foreign fighters. The Sinjar Records contain varying amounts of detail on the fighters' background, group affiliation, travel to Syria, and intended role in Iraq.<sup>68</sup> Some records contained considerably more detail than others. Figure 1 below shows a typical record in this sample in both original Arabic and in English translation.

Figure 1: Sample Sinjar Record: Original Arabic and English Translation





استمارة  
شخصية

Document Number: NMEC-2007-657689  
Type of Translation: Full  
Date Completed: 15 September 2007

[Pages 2 to 6 of 207]

الاسم	تركي بن عبدالعزيز بن ابراهيم
الكنية	أبو الوليد
الخطوان	الجزيرة - حي السويدي
الهواتف	أخوه 0502029449 المنزل 4256145
المواليد	4-10 - 1406 هـ
المنسق	يعوقب
المهنة في بلده	
الحمل	مقاتل
الأمانات	جواز - 500 ريال - ساعة
تاريخ الدخول	3- شوال - 1427 هـ
طريق الدخول	أبو حمد
التوزيع	أبو خالد
وصايا الأخ	1-
	2-
	3-
	4-
	5-





[The Mujahidin Shura Council]

Personal Information Form

Name:	Turky Bin-'Abd-al-'Aziz Bin-Ibrahim
Alias:	Abu-al-Walid
Address:	Saudi Arabia, al-Suwaydi neighborhood
Phone Numbers:	home 4256145 His brother: 0502029449
Date of Birth:	22 DEC 1985
Coordinator:	Ya'uqib
Occupation in Homeland:	
Duty:	fighter
Items Entrusted:	Passport - 500 Riyal and a watch
Date of Entry :	25 OCT 2006
Route of Entry:	Abu-Hamad
Assigned to:	Abu-Hamad
Last Will and Testament:	
1-	
2-	
3-	
4-	
5-	

Border Administrative Official  
Shahin

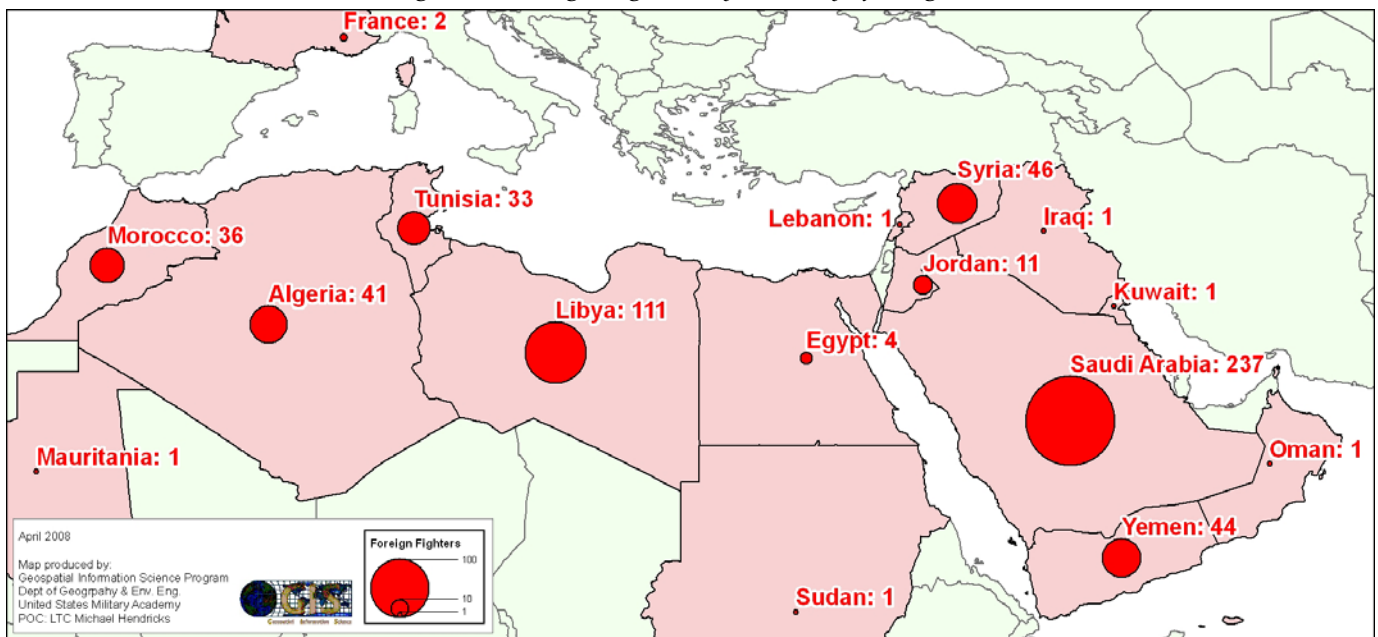
<sup>68</sup> After recording and comparing information contained in the translated records, the CTC determined that a number of the nearly 700 original records provided to the CTC by the US Department of Defense (DoD) were likely duplicates of the same individual. These records were deleted from the sample leaving 590 records with varying amounts of information used in this updated study. We continue to identify translation errors and other discrepancies in the data and will continue to refine the accuracy of the data set that supports this report. The Sinjar data and all unclassified data supporting CTC publications are available on request.

## GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN OF FIGHTERS

### Country of Origin

Twenty-one countries were listed in the Sinjar Records as the origin of one or more fighter. Saudi Arabia contributed the most fighters; Libya contributed the second highest number of fighters. Of the 576 fighters that listed their nationality, 41 percent (237) were of Saudi Arabian origin, and 19.2 percent (111) were Libyan. Syria, Yemen, and Algeria were the next most common origin countries with 8.1 percent (46), 8 percent (44), and 7.1 percent (41), respectively. Moroccans accounted for 6.1 percent (36) of the fighters and Jordanians 1.9 percent (11).<sup>69</sup> Nearly all of the home countries listed were in the Middle East or North Africa, though the sample does include individuals from France (2), Great Britain (1), and Sweden (1).

Figure 2: Foreign Fighters by Country of Origin

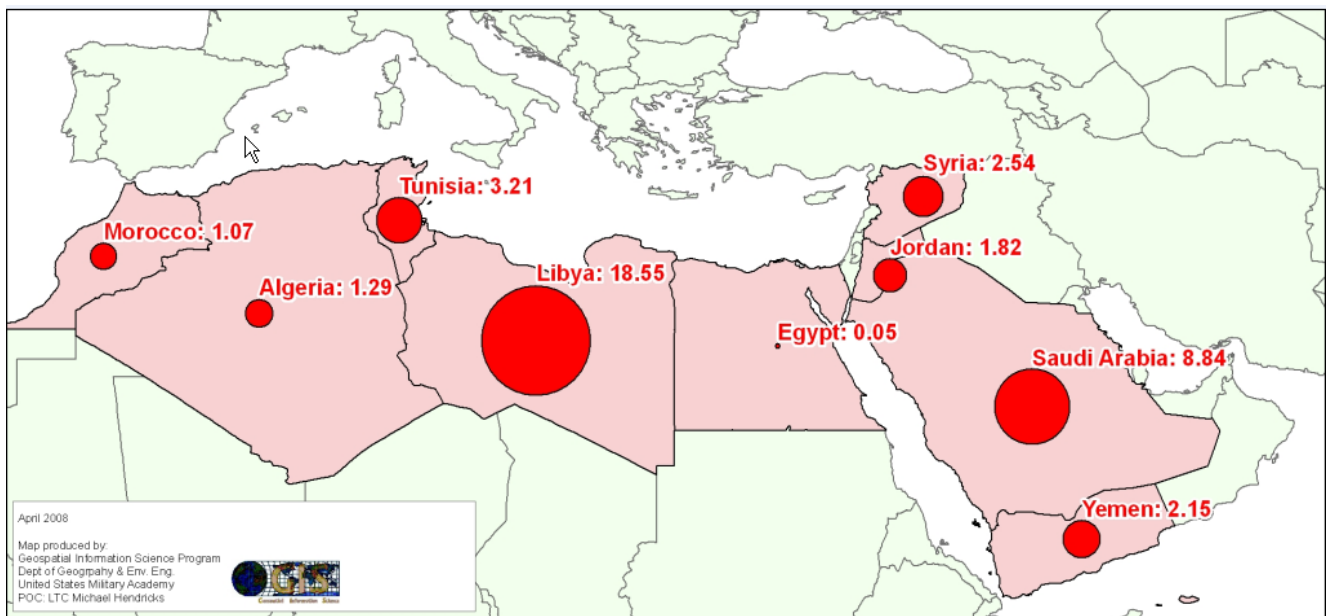


The Sinjar Records confirm studies concluding that Saudi Arabia contributes the largest number of foreign fighters in Iraq. Conversely, the documents suggest a much larger Libyan contingent than previously assessed. No prior study indicated that more than 4 percent of foreign fighters in Iraq were Libyan. Indeed, a June 2005 report by NBC quoted a US government source indicating that Libya did not make a top ten list of origin nationalities for foreign fighters in

<sup>69</sup> The "Other" category included two fighters from France and one fighter each from Bosnia, Belgium, England, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, Sudan, and Sweden.

Iraq.<sup>70</sup> As late as July 15, 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* cited a US Army source reporting that only 10 percent of all foreign fighters in Iraq hailed from North Africa. Yet the Sinjar Records indicate that the number of North Africans is much higher—over 19 percent of the fighters in the Sinjar Records came from Libya alone. Additionally, Libya contributed far more fighters *per capita* than any other nationality. At 18.55 fighters per one million people, the Sinjar Records suggest that Libya contributed fighters at a rate over twice that of Saudi Arabia. Most of the Libyan recruits came from cities in North-East Libya, an area long known for Jihadi-linked militancy.<sup>71</sup>

Figure 3: Foreign Fighters Per Million People



### Camp Bucca Detainees

As of April 7, 2008, 251 third country nationals (TCNs) were being detained alongside approximately 24,000 Iraqis by Coalition forces in Iraq. Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia account for the largest number of non-Iraqi detainees in Camp Bucca, the primary US detention facility for such prisoners. Libyans make up less than 4 percent of the TCNs detained. The discrepancy between the Sinjar

<sup>70</sup> Lisa Meyers, "Who are the Foreign Fighters?" *MSNBC*, June 20, 2005, available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8293410/>.

<sup>71</sup> Kevin Paraino, "Destination Martyrdom," *Newsweek*, Apr. 28, 2008. Felter and Fishman's first look at the Sinjar Records contains more background information on the shift toward Libyan fighters. See Felter and Fishman, *Foreign Fighters in Iraq*, available at [http://www.ctc.usma.edu/foreign\\_fighters/](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/foreign_fighters/).

Record's evidence of large numbers of Libyan fighters in Iraq and the number of Libyans detained at Camp Bucca may be explained several ways. First, patterns of foreign fighter infiltration have likely changed. Some of the fighters in Camp Bucca have likely been there for several years. Second, Libyan foreign fighters tend to become suicide bombers at very high rates compared to their counterparts, which makes them less likely to be detained in Camp Bucca.<sup>72</sup>

*Figure 4: Third Country Nationals Held at Camp Bucca*

<b>Origin Country</b>	<b>Number Detained (As of April 7, 2008)</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>	<b>Religion</b>
Syria	48	19.1%	Sunni-46, Shi'a-2
Egypt	47	18.7%	Sunni
Saudi Arabia	42	16.7%	Sunni
Jordan	19	7.6%	Sunni
Sudan	19	7.6%	Sunni-17; Shi'a-2
Iran	11	4.4%	Christian-1; Shia-10
Kuwait	9	3.6%	Sunni
Libya	9	3.6%	Sunni
Tunisia	8	3.2%	Sunni
Yemen	8	3.2%	Sunni
West Bank,	5	2.0%	Sunni
Algeria	3	1.2%	Sunni
Belgium	3	1.2%	Sunni
Mauritania	3	1.2%	Sunni
Turkey	3	1.2%	Sunni
United Arab Emirates	3	1.2%	Sunni
Lebanon	2	0.8%	Shi'a
Morocco	2	0.8%	Sunni
US	2	0.8%	Sunni
Kyrgyzstan	1	0.4%	Sunni
Pakistan	1	0.4%	Sunni
Somalia	1	0.4%	Unk
Sri Lanka	1	0.4%	Hindu

### **City/Town of Origin of Fighters in the Sinjar Records**

Of 576 records that included the country of origin of the fighters, 429 also contained information on the home city/town from which the fighters hailed. The most common cities that the fighters called home were Darnah, Libya and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with 52 and 51 fighters, respectively. The next most

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Colonel James Brown, commander of Camp Bucca Coalition Detention Facility, Oct. 2007- Mar. 2008, Apr. 8, 2008. Col. Brown discussed a number of his observations and those of his soldiers as to the behavior of indigenous Iraqi detainees and TCNs.

common hometowns listed in the Sinjar Records were Mecca, Saudi Arabia (43), Benghazi, Libya (21), and Casablanca, Morocco (17).

#### *Saudi Hometowns*

One hundred ninety-nine of the records of Saudi Arabian fighters listed in the Sinjar Records included a hometown. As expected, Riyadh—the most populous city in the country—was the most common city of origin with 24.8 percent (51) of Saudi fighters. Mecca contributed 21.6 percent (43), Al-Jawf 8.0 percent (16), Jeddah 7.5 percent (15), Medina 5.5 percent (11), and al-Ta’if 4.1 percent (8). The remaining 65 fighters hailed from towns scattered across Saudi Arabia. The cities of Sharurah, Al Jawf, Taif, and Buraydah are home to a significantly large number of fighters relative to their population as depicted in Table 1 below.

*Figure 5: Hometowns of Saudi Arabian Fighters in the Sinjar Records*

<b>City/Town<sup>73</sup></b>	<b>Number of Fighters</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate: Fighters per Million</b>
Riyadh	51	5,455,363	9
Mecca	44	5,797,971	8
Al Jawf	16	361,676	44
Jeddah	15	2,800,000	5
Taif	11	553,000	20
Medina	11	1,512,076	7
Buraydah	9	505,845	18
Al Qasim	7	1,016,756	7
Al Bahah	5	377,739	13
Tabuk	5	740,351	7
Sharurah	3	60,000	50
Al Kharj	2	300,000	7
Al-Ahsa	2	908,366	2
Amlaj	2	80,000	25
Yanbu	2	293,000	7
Najran	1	416,457	2
Abha	1	1,150,000	1
Zulfi	1	60,000	17
Baljurashi	1	Unknown	Unknown
Bisha	1	300,000	3
Sakakah	1	114,000	9
Tathlith	1	70,000	14
Unaizah	1	130,000	8

<sup>73</sup> Regions within Saudi Arabia such as Hijaz and al Sharqiyah were not included in this list.

### *Libyan Hometowns*

The vast majority of Libyan fighters that included their hometown in the Sinjar Records resided in the country's northeast, particularly the coastal cities of Darnah 58.4 percent (53) and Benghazi 23.6 percent (20).

*Figure 6: Hometowns of Libyan Fighters in the Sinjar Records*

<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Number of Fighters</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate: Fighters per Million</b>
Darnah	53	80,000	663
Benghazi	20	636,992	31
Sirt	5	70,000	71
Ajdabiyah	4	165,839	24
Misratah	3	100,521	30
Al Burayqah	1	505,845	2
Wadi an Naqah	1	Unknown	

The small coastal town of Darnah produced the plurality of all Libyan fighters in the Sinjar sample. Benghazi is the next most common Libyan hometown. Both Darnah and Benghazi have long been associated with Islamic militancy in Libya, in particular for an uprising by Islamist organizations in the mid-1990s. The Libyan government blamed the uprising on “infiltrators from the Sudan and Egypt,” and at least one of the militant organizations—the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (jama'ah al-libiyah al-muqatilah, LIFG)—claimed to have Afghan veterans in its ranks.<sup>74</sup> The uprisings were extraordinarily violent. Libyan leader Muammar al-Qadhafi used helicopter gunships in Benghazi, cut telephone, electricity, and water supplies to Darnah, and famously claimed that the militants “deserve to die without trial, like dogs.”<sup>75</sup>

Today, the LIFG is an important partner in al-Qa`ida's global coalition of Jihadi groups. The late Abu Layth al-Libi, LIFG's Emir, reinforced Benghazi and Darnah's importance to Libyan Jihadis in his November 2007 announcement that LIFG had joined al-Qa`ida, saying:

It is with the grace of God that we were hoisting the banner of Jihad against this apostate regime under the leadership of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which sacrificed the elite of its sons and commanders in combating this regime

<sup>74</sup> Elie Austa, “Fundamentalist Unrest,” *Agence France Presse*, Mar. 26, 1996.

<sup>75</sup> “Libya Said to Seal Off Area Following Unrest,” *Agence France Presse*, Mar. 25, 1996.

whose blood was spilled on the mountains of Darnah, the streets of Benghazi, the outskirts of Tripoli, the desert of Sabha, and the sands of the beach.<sup>76</sup>

The Sinjar Records suggest a dramatic increase in the number of fighters traveling from Libya after March 2007—a surge that may explain why earlier studies of foreign fighters did not mention many Libyan fighters. Of the 111 fighters in the Sinjar Records recorded entering Iraq from August 2006 to March 2007, only nine were listed as Libyan. More than three times as many Libyans were recorded entering Iraq from March 2007 to August 2007 than in the previous six months. Of the 88 fighters listed as entering the country in that timeframe, 28 were Libyan. Because the data is incomplete and may not be a random sampling, we must draw conclusions very carefully. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests a real surge in the number of Libyans entering Iraq.

It is not clear why Libyans started arriving in Iraq in larger numbers in spring 2007, though LIFG was building closer ties with al-Qa`ida throughout that year. In March 2007 Abu Yahya al-Libi—the LIFG’s senior ideologue and rising star in the global Jihadi movement—called for unity in Iraq, and encouraged “mujahidin” everywhere to support the ISI:

...our brothers are in need of the backing and aid of the Muslim peoples, with their bodies and wealth, with shelter and prayer, and with incitement.... There is no way to establish and preserve states other than Jihad in the Path of Allah and Jihad alone.... This is the path, and anything else is from the whispers of Satan.<sup>77</sup>

Despite Abu Yahya’s calls for supporting the ISI, LIFG did not officially swear allegiance to al-Qa`ida until November 2007. Nevertheless, the increasing prominence of LIFG figures—including Abu Yahya and the late Abu Layth al-Libi—in al-Qa`ida’s high command may be a function of the group’s logistics capacity, including its demonstrated ability to move people effectively around the Middle East. It is also possible that tribal groups or prominent local leaders in Northeast Libya encouraged their followers to travel to Iraq.

---

<sup>76</sup> *As-Sahab* video released November 3, 2007, on the Al-Boraq Islamic Network; see OSC FEA20071104393586.

<sup>77</sup> See Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Iraq Between Stages, Conspiratorial Intrigue*, Al Firdaws Jihadi Forums on March 22, 2007. See also Michael Moss and Souad Mekhennet, “Rising Leader for Next Phase of Al Qaeda’s War,” *New York Times*, Apr. 4, 2008. Jihadis worldwide were, however, divided over the strategic wisdom and religious acceptability of declaring the state.



### *Moroccan Hometowns*

Twenty-six of the 36 Moroccan fighters (72.2 percent) in the Sinjar Records listed their hometown. Of those, 65.3 percent (17) hailed from Casablanca while another 19.2 percent (5) were from Tétouan. The findings are somewhat surprising because terrorism researchers have focused on Tétouan as a hotbed of recruitment for travel to Iraq. Anecdotal reports suggest this focus is appropriate, but the Sinjar Records are a reminder of the larger picture of radicalization and mobilization in Morocco.

*Figure 7: Hometowns of Moroccan Fighters in the Sinjar Records*

<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Number of Fighters</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate: Fighters per Million</b>
Casablanca	17	2,933,684	6
Tétouan	5	320,539	16
Tangier	3	669,685	4
Taroudant	1	69,489	14

### *Algerian Hometowns*

Twenty-two of 43 Algerians listed in the Sinjar Records noted their hometown. Of those, 36.4 percent (8) were from El Oued and 22.7 percent (5) were from Algiers. El Oued's eight foreign fighters is conspicuous given its small population. The capital city of Algiers, with over 25 times the number of residents of El Oued, had just five fighters listed.

*Figure 8: Hometowns of Algerian Fighters in the Sinjar Records*

<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Number of Fighters</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate: Fighters per Million</b>
El Oued	8	139,362	57
Algiers	5	3,518,083	1
Baraki	2	107,972	19
Constantine	2	507,224	4
M'Sila	1	140,048	7
Sétif	1	246,379	4
Oran	1	683,250	1
Wadi Suf	1	133,933	7
Calitos	1	Unk	

### *Syrian Hometowns*

Thirty-five of the 49 Syrians (71.4 percent) in the Sinjar Records listed their hometown. Syrian recruitment was widely dispersed except for Dayr al-Zawr, which accounted for 45.7 percent (16) of the Syrians listed. Dayr al-Zawr is the

capital city of a Syrian regional state by the same name that borders Iraq. The city itself is likely an important logistical center for moving foreign fighters to Iraq. It sits at the juncture of the main highway north from Damascus and East from Aleppo.

*Figure 9: Hometowns of Syrian Fighters in the Sinjar Records*

<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Number of Fighters</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate: Fighters per Million</b>
Dayr al-Zawr (region)	11	1,015,000	11
Idlib	5	1,264,000	4
Al Dayr (city)	4	160,000	25
Dar'a	4	839,000	5
Latakia	3	879,000	3
Al Hasaka	2	1,134,000	2
Al Tal	2	43,774	46
Aleppo	1	4,037,000	<1
Damascus	1	1,552,000	1
Hims	1	1,534,000	1

#### *Yemeni Hometowns*

Fourteen of the 27 Yemeni fighters that listed their hometowns in the Sinjar Records (51.9 percent) came from the capital city of Sana'a. Four fighters hailed from the port city of Aden.

*Figure 10: Hometowns of Yemeni Fighters in the Sinjar Records*

<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Number of Fighters</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate: Fighters per Million</b>
Sana'a	14	918,727	15
Aden	4	589,419	7
Gharib	2	Unknown	
Al Mukalla	2	Unknown	
Hadramawt	2	1,028,556	2
Jeddah al-Sham	1	Unknown	
Rimah	1	394,448	3
Shabwah	1	470,440	2
Ta'izz	1	Unknown	

#### *Tunisian Hometowns*

Nineteen Tunisians included their hometown information. Interestingly, more Tunisian fighters (7) listed Ben Arous as their hometown than the capital city of Tunis (5), which has twice the population.

Figure 11: Hometowns of Tunisian Fighters in the Sinjar Records

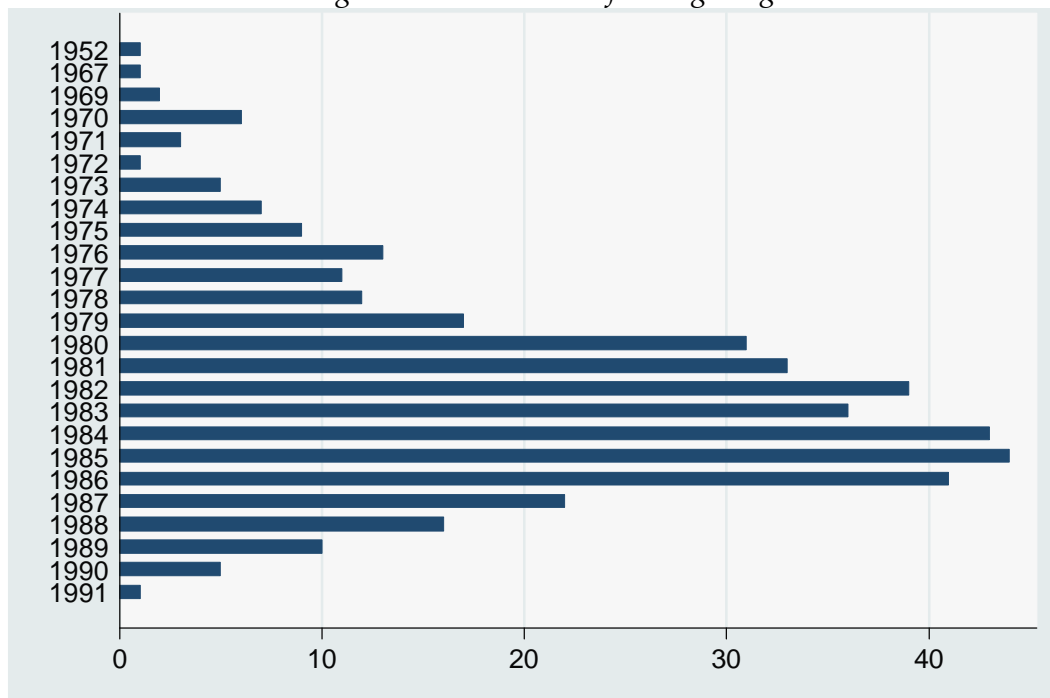
Hometown	Number of Fighters	Population	Fighters per Million Pop
Ben Arous	7	506,000	14
Tunis	5	1,074,900	5
Bizerte	3	524,000	6
Ariana	1	422,000	2
Gabès	1	448,700	2
Nabeul	1	422,000	2
Matir village	1	1000	1000

## AGE, EXPERIENCE, and OCCUPATION

### Age

The mean reported birth year of fighters listed in the Sinjar Records was 1982. Because the records are dated from August 18, 2006 to August 22, 2007, the average age of the fighters was 24-25 years old and the median 21-22 years old.<sup>78</sup>

Figure 12: Birth Year of Foreign Fighters



<sup>78</sup> The Sinjar Records span four months of 2006 and eight months of 2007.

The oldest fighter in the Sinjar Records, Muhammad Abd Al Fattah Muhammad Rashad, was 54 when he crossed into Iraq to conduct a suicide bombing. The youngest fighter in this group was Abdallah Abid Al Sulaymani from Al Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, who was born June 14, 1991. He arrived in Iraq on September 23, 2006—just three months after turning 15 years old. Five fighters were born in 1990—at least one of whom was still 16 when he entered Iraq.<sup>79</sup> Seven fighters were born in 1989 (16-17 years old) and 14 in 1988 – many of whom had not yet turned 18 by the time they came to Iraq.

The fighters' overall youth suggests that most of these individuals are first-time volunteers rather than veterans of previous Jihadi struggles. If there was a major influx of veteran Jihadis into Iraq, it may have come earlier in the war. The incitement of a new generation of Jihadis to join the fight in Iraq, or plan operations elsewhere, is one of the most worrisome aspects of the ongoing fight in Iraq. Indeed, the United States should not perceive gains against al-Qa`ida's Iraqi franchise as a fundamental blow against the organization outside of Iraq. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq developed largely independently of al-Qa`ida Central, using its own resources to grow. Even as AQI withers, al-Qa`ida writ large benefits from the specter of continued resistance to the United States. As long as al-Qa`ida is able to attract hundreds of young men to join its ranks, it will remain a serious threat to global security.

### **Experience**

The most common entry for “experience” in the 87 Sinjar Records containing such information was “Computers” (11) followed by “Weapons” (10). Six fighters claimed to have had prior military experience, three were proficient in English, and a number had various technical and engineering related backgrounds and skills.<sup>80</sup> Several of the fighters had notable “experience” including:

- Riyadh 'Awad Muhammad Al-Jahni from the town of Yanbu'a, who recorded “making F15 parts” before becoming a suicide bomber in Iraq.
- Fahd Halil Ballan Bin-Al-'Anzi, an electrical company worker from Saudi Arabia, who listed “website designer” as his experience.

---

<sup>79</sup> Many records included birth year, but not date of birth, which makes it difficult in some cases to determine whether several other fighters were seventeen or sixteen at the time they arrived in Syria.

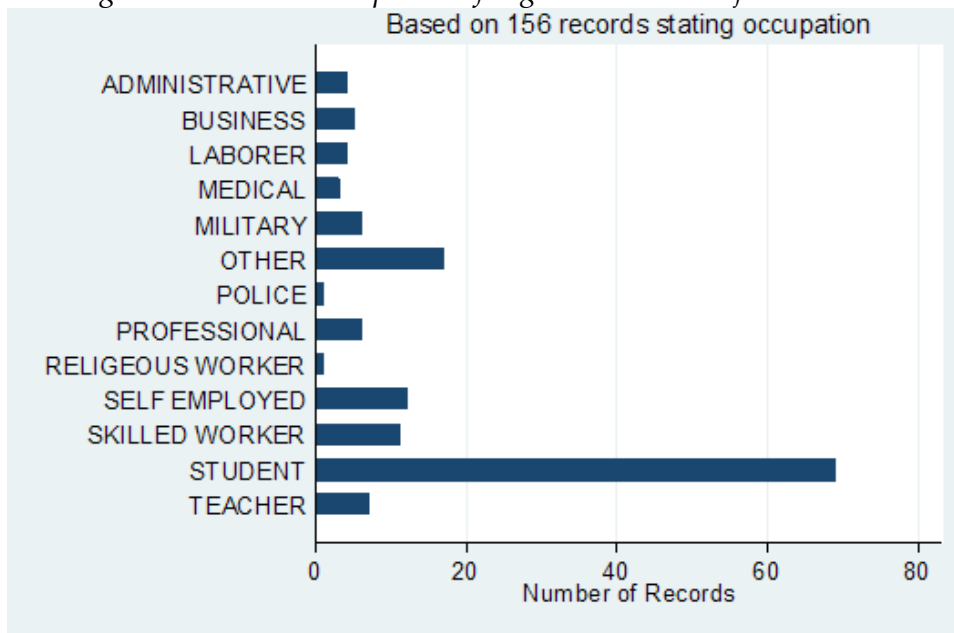
<sup>80</sup> While experience and occupation were often related, these were carried as two separate fields in the Sinjar Record forms.

- Adil Husayn Ali Hadi, a Yemeni from Sana’a, who claimed to have prior experience fighting in Afghanistan.

### Occupation

Of the 156 fighters in the Sinjar Records that recorded their occupation or profession, 42.6 percent (67) were students. The remaining entries for occupation varied considerably. Five teachers were recorded, as well as three doctors, and four engineers. The remaining responses varied widely, from the practical (military) to the more surprising (a massage therapist).

Figure 13: Stated Occupation of Fighters in the Sinjar Records<sup>81</sup>  
Based on 156 records stating occupation



<sup>81</sup> “Student” includes high school and university, secondary school, and religious schools. “Teacher” includes high school, university, and religious schools. “Military” includes veterans. “Professional” includes businessman, NGO, lawyers, and engineers. “Administrative” includes clerks, judges assistants, and doctor’s assistant. “Business” includes business merchant and weapons merchant. “Other” includes free jobs, employee, artist, painter, fitness trainer, massage therapist, bombmaker, and farmer. “Skilled worker” includes carpenter, electrician, furniture maker, and welder. “Unskilled worker” includes guard and driver. “Laborer” includes work in a factory.

## RECRUITMENT AND TRAVEL TO IRAQ

Many of the Sinjar Records indicate how the recruit was introduced to a Coordinator in his home country. It is not clear exactly what services these Coordinators provide the recruits, how closely tied they are to AQI, or if they serve a vetting purpose to ensure prospective fighters are capable. The records also include the names of the fighters' Syrian Coordinators who facilitated the travel of recruits through Syria and into Iraq. Such information is critical because it offers a glimpse of the fighters' initial recruitment and the logistics networks that transferred fighters across the Syrian border into Iraq.

### Recruitment and Initial Contact with Coordinators

Of the foreign fighters that explained how they met their local Jihadi Coordinator, a plurality said it was a "brother." In this context, "brother" is a term for co-religionists, not a familial reference. The Arabic term "Ikhwan" (brother) is a common term of endearment that Jihadis often use to describe people they consider devout Muslims or members of radical groups.

Figure 14: Method of Foreign Fighter Introduction to Travel Coordinator

Method of Introduction	Number of Records
Through a "brother"	33.5% (52)
Through a friend	29.0% (45)
Through a relative	7.1% (11)
Through a neighbor	5.8% (9)
By way of the internet	3.9% (6)
Through work	3.9% (6)
A new acquaintance	3.3% (5)
Through school	2.6% (4)
Mecca	2.0% (3)
Through a mosque	2.0% (3)
Other <sup>82</sup>	(8)

The prevalence of fighters listing "brother" as an initial contact suggests that local Jihadi organizations are critical conduits for fighters headed to Iraq. Not surprisingly, friends and relatives are also important pathways. Thus, the Sinjar data supports findings by Marc Sageman and others that personal social

---

<sup>82</sup> Other responses include two individuals by name- two each for Abu al Abbas, Abu Muhammed, and Abu Shaker, as well as two claiming "through a middleman."

networks often facilitate terrorist recruitment. Only three fighters, for example, claimed to have been introduced to their Coordinators through a mosque.

Interestingly, only six individuals claimed to have met their Coordinator through the internet. Of these six internet recruits, five were Syrian. The small number demonstrates the importance of real, tactile relationships to the development of terrorist organizations, but it does not mean that AQI's famed internet propaganda is useless. Such propaganda likely helped radicalize potential recruits before or after they met a local Coordinator. Security concerns likely reinforce the importance of physical relationships in the recruiting process. Coordinators—and recruits—likely feel they can trust individuals they meet in the real world more than virtual connections. Unsurprisingly, Jihadi veterans serve as recruiters. Three records indicate that the “brother” that introduced them to their Coordinator had returned from Iraq and one from Afghanistan.

### **Route to Iraq**

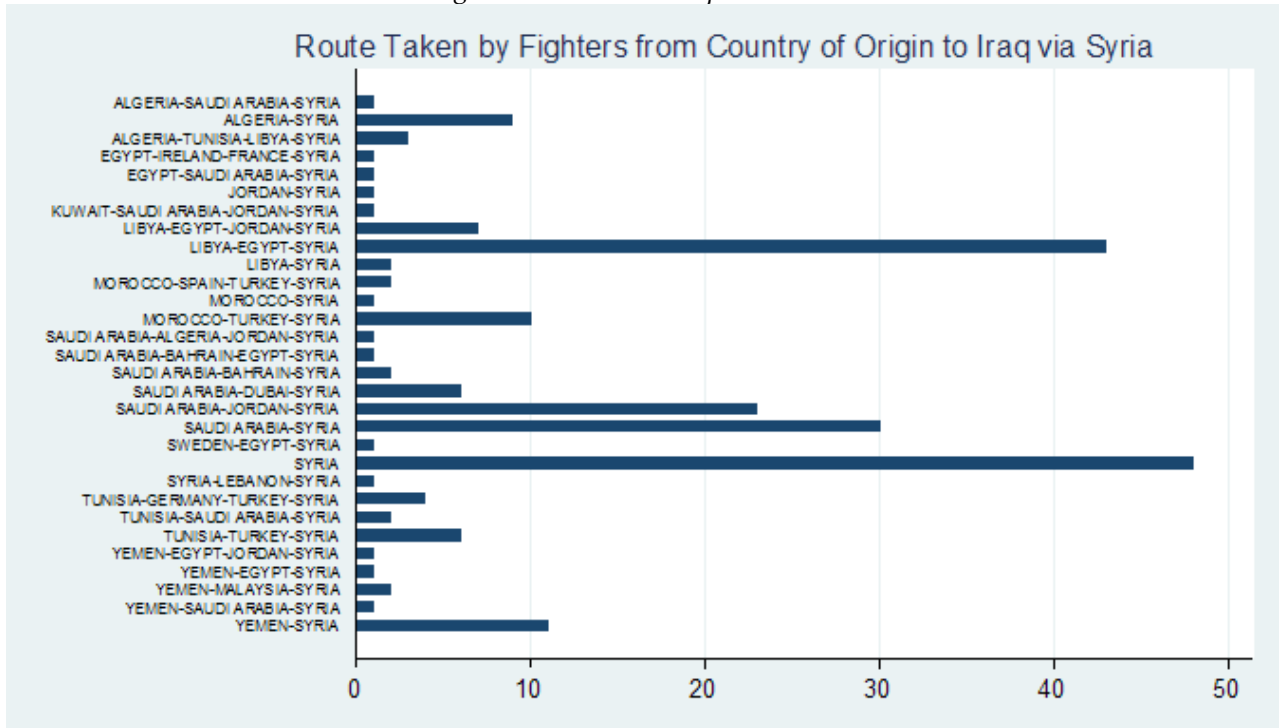
Most of the fighters in the Sinjar Records do not explain the route they took to Iraq, and those that did enter information used different methodologies. Some fighters included their home country as a stop along the way, while others did not. Some included “Iraq” as a stop on their way to Iraq. Some fighters listed Syria as a stop, while others seemed to think it was assumed.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, it is unclear what fighters considered a “stop.” For some, that may have been a country transited on the way to Iraq; others may have required a more extensive layover.

Despite these problems assessing the route fighters took to Iraq, it is clear that routes differed dramatically from country to country. Of the 63 Saudis that described their route to Iraq, 47.6 percent (30) listed a direct route from Saudi Arabia into Syria, while another 36.5 percent (23) noted that they traveled first to Jordan, then to Syria. Libyan fighters seemed to follow an established path through Egypt to Syria. Of the 52 Libyan fighters that listed their route to Iraq, 50 traveled first to Egypt and only two flew directly to Syria. From Egypt, 84.2 percent (43) flew directly to Syria while 13.4 percent (7) went to Jordan and then entered Syria. The Sinjar Records also hint at an established pathway from Morocco through Turkey into Syria. Of the twelve Moroccan fighters that described their route to Syria, ten flew directly to Turkey while the other two crossed first into Spain before traveling to Turkey.

---

<sup>83</sup> An example of this is Bader Shourie. Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657770.

Figure 15: Route to Iraq<sup>84</sup>



### Syrian Coordinators

Many of the Sinjar Records (187) listed information about the Syrian Coordinator or Coordinators that facilitated a fighter’s travel through Syria.<sup>85</sup> Using network analysis software, we are able to represent graphically how these Syrian Coordinators work together.<sup>86</sup> Figure 16 displays the network at a macro-level. Red rectangles represent Syrian Coordinators; blue rectangles represent individual border crossing events. Many of those crossings transported multiple fighters into Iraq. The most prolific Syrian Coordinator listed in the Sinjar Records is Abu-Umar, at the bottom-center of Figure 16.

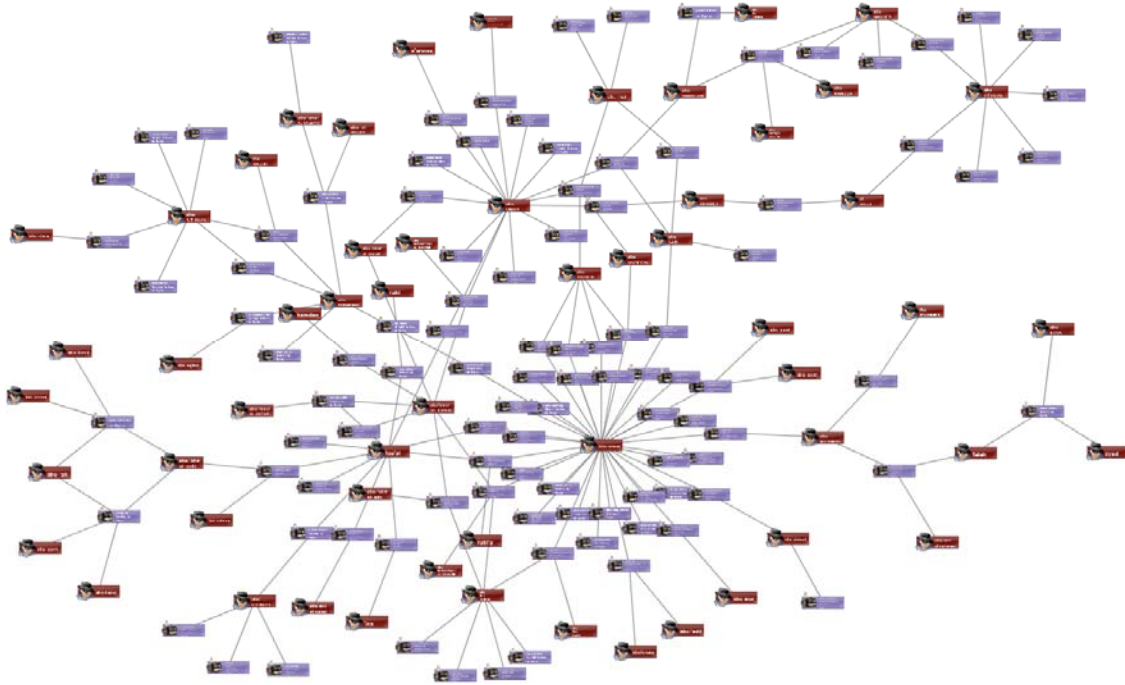
<sup>84</sup> The “Syria” category includes mostly Syrian fighters, but includes several others that only listed Syria.

<sup>85</sup> Only 13 records were found to have information on the length of time spent in Syria. Of these, the time ranged from one day to two weeks, with the median time being three days.

<sup>86</sup> The number of individual Syrian coordinators was determined after normalizing the names of the 187 total listed. To see more analysis of the Sinjar Records, visit: [www.palantirtech.com/sinjar](http://www.palantirtech.com/sinjar)



Figure 16: Syrian Coordinator Network Map, August 2006—August 2007



Many Syrian Coordinators take money from foreign fighters headed to Iraq. In the Sinjar Records, 53 of the 95 Syrian Coordinators identified by name are on record for exacting payment from the fighters from whom they coordinated entry into Iraq.<sup>87</sup> Saudi fighters made the most payments to their Syrian coordinators—in both frequency and magnitude—with 46 recorded payments averaging \$2,535.<sup>88</sup> Eight Yemenis and eight Algerians paid their Syrian Coordinators along with five Libyans, four Moroccans and three Tunisians. Eighty-eight percent (36 of 41) of the fighters who paid their Syrian Coordinators over \$500 were Saudi Arabian. The Sinjar Records indicate wide variation among Syrian Coordinators in the number and amount of payments extracted from foreign fighters. Abu-Umar was recorded receiving the most payments; 27 foreign fighters paid him.<sup>89</sup> Abu al-Abbas was recorded taking 11 payments and a certain Lua'ai took payment 6 times.

---

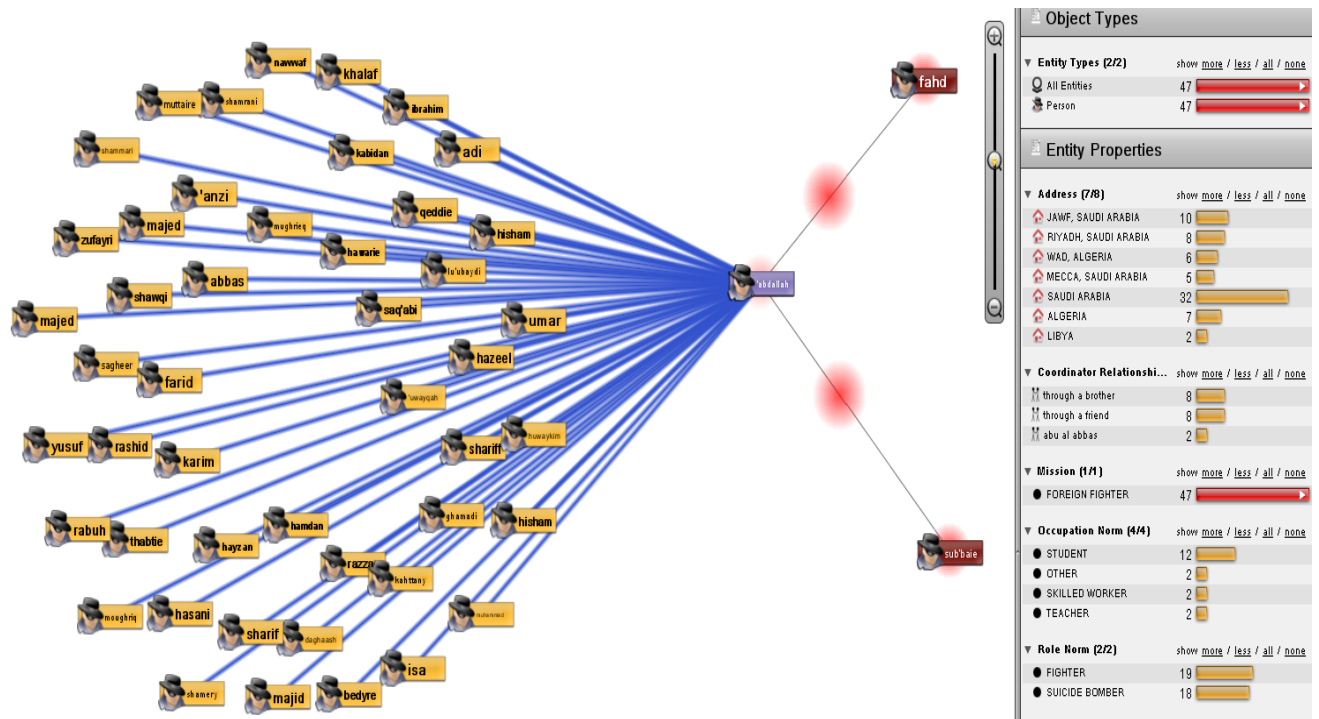
<sup>87</sup> This figure was determined using Palantir analytics, which made it possible to normalize many of the names of the Syrian coordinators.

<sup>88</sup> The payments ranged from \$19 to a surprising \$34,584 in the case of Adil Muhammad Abdallah Ruwayhil, a power company employee from Tabuk who spent six days in Syria before entering Iraq to conduct a suicide bombing.

<sup>89</sup> The English translation of these records list Abu-Umar fifteen times, Abu-Omar seven times, and Abu Umar al-Tunisi five times. Upon review of the original Arabic records, the CTC's translators concluded that these very likely referred to the same person.

Figure 17 depicts the network of 30 foreign fighters whose transit through Syria was coordinated by Abu Abdullah. Information in the records reveal that Abu Abdullah received payments only twice from among the 30 foreign fighters he coordinated, both of which were less than \$500. Abu Abdullah specialized in shepherding Saudi clients through Syria. His charges were equally likely to go on to become a “fighter” as a “suicide bomber” when they reached Iraq.

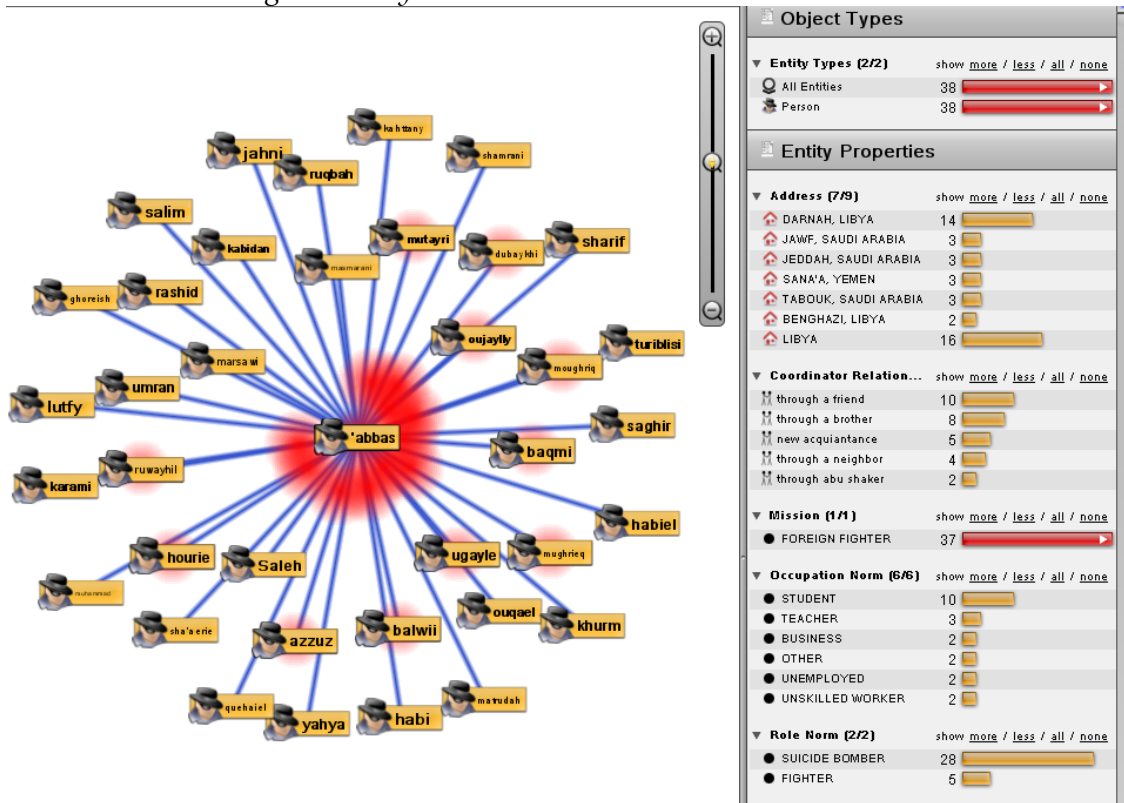
Figure 17: Syrian Coordinator Abu Abdullah’s Network<sup>90</sup>



While Abu Abdullah demanded few payments, other Syrian coordinators were less magnanimous. Abu ‘Abbas, depicted in Figure 18, appears to have made a considerable profit from his efforts. This type of profiteering seems to be the norm. Interestingly, Abu ‘Abbas coordinated predominately Libyan students—the majority from Darnah—and they overwhelmingly went on to “work” as suicide bombers in Iraq. The dichotomy between Abu Abdallah and Abu ‘Abbas suggests that Syrian Coordinators work primarily with fighters from specific countries, and likely with specific Coordinators in fighters’ home countries. In other words, there is not one network in Syria for ushering fighters into Iraq, there are many.

<sup>90</sup> Analysis and graphical representation made using Palantir.

Figure 18: Syrian Coordinator Abu Abbas's Network



### Routes Through Syria

The Sinjar Records do not provide much information about the fighters' travel inside Syria, but there is anecdotal evidence that Dayr al-Zawr was an important transit point for Jihadis hoping to infiltrate Iraq, at least until 2006. A December 2005 report in *Al-Hayah* tracked a group of Algerian and Saudi fighters trying to cross from Dayr al-Zawr, through the border town of Abu Kamal, and then into Iraq.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, a young Saudi who was captured in Iraq recounted how he arrived there after using the same pathway from Dayr al-Zawr, *via* minibus to Abu Kamal and by foot across the border to al-Qa'im.<sup>92</sup> Abu Umar, a Palestinian fighter who crossed into Iraq to train al-Qa'ida troops also described transiting Dayr al-Zawr on his way to al-Qa'im in Iraq.<sup>93</sup> Al-Muhajir al-Islami, a frequent poster to Syrian dissident websites explained that the Dayr al-Zawr section of the border was particularly easy to cross because of the links between tribes on either side of the border.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Muhammad Muqaddam, "Facts Disclosed by Fundamentalists," *Al-Hayah*, Dec. 8, 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Malfi al-Harbi, "Al-Shayi, a Victim that was Lured to Iraq," *Al-Riyad*, Nov. 21, 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Abu Umar, *Al Arabiyah* 1905, December 7, 2007

<sup>94</sup> See <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0805/roadtoiraq0805.pdf> Global Terror Alert does not list the original website, but it was likely the Syrian Islamic Forum that was hosted at [www.nnuu.org](http://www.nnuu.org) during 2005.

The Sinjar Records were captured far north of Abu Kamal, which suggests that the smuggling route for fighters into Iraq has shifted north. Nonetheless, the city of Dayr al-Zawr may still be an important logistics hub for fighters hoping to enter Iraq. Dayr al-Zawr sits on the road north from Damascus and east from Aleppo, which makes it a rational location for a logistics base, whether heading further east to the Iraqi city of al-Qa'im or north to Sinjar.

Figure 19: Map of Syria (Arrow indicates city of Dayr al-Zawr)



### Entry Date and Traveling Partners

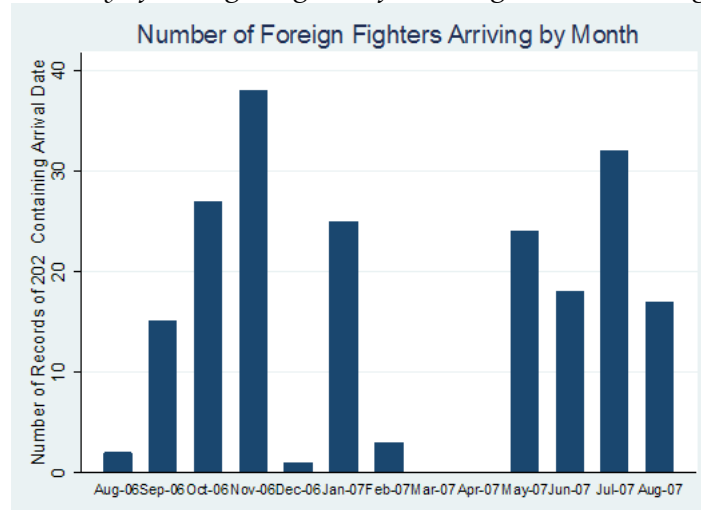
The Sinjar Records themselves do not provide much information about how individual fighters were recruited for the fight in Iraq. There is evidence, however, that many of the fighters signed up in groups to travel to Iraq. Of the 203 fighters that recorded their date of arrival in Iraq, 46.5 percent (94) arrived on the same day as another person from their hometown. This strongly suggests that fighters travel in groups and may even have been recruited simultaneously.

One of the larger groups began their journey in Darnah, Libya and arrived in Iraq on May 9, 2007. Abu-'Abbas, Abu al-Walid, Abu Bakar, Asad Allah, and Abu-'Abd al-Kabir all were *istishhadi*—martyrdom seekers. The five men did not sign up through the same local coordinator in Darnah. Abu-'Abbas, who listed his occupation as "Employee," signed up through a Coordinator named Qamar. Abu al-Walid and Abu Bakar—a student and a traffic cop—received support from someone named Saraj. Asad Allah and Abu-'Abd al-Kabir received help from a Coordinator named Bashar. Asad Allah was a teacher. None of the men knew their Coordinator before they decided to go to Iraq.

It is not clear if the five men traveled together from Darnah or in separate groups, but all five went to Egypt and then to Syria. If they were not already traveling together, the five probably were placed together as a group once in Syria. All five listed Abu ‘Abbas (who they unanimously liked) as their Syrian Coordinator. When the five men crossed into Iraq, they each contributed several thousand Syrian Lira to the ISI, but did not report any form of identification. Presumably, all five have since completed their mission in Iraq.

Even fighters from separate hometowns crossed the border in groups, but the dynamics of those groups have changed over time.<sup>95</sup> November 2006 was the most common month of entry for fighters in the Sinjar Records, when 38 fighters were recorded.<sup>96</sup> The second busiest month was July 2007. The Sinjar Records do not list any fighters entering Iraq in March or April 2007 and only 3 fighters are recorded entering in February 2007. The small numbers bolster the notion that the ISI’s logistic network was disrupted in early 2007, though it is possible that the records for that period were lost.<sup>97</sup>

Figure 20: Entry of Foreign Fighters from August 2006 – August 2007



<sup>95</sup> See “Studenten aus Niedersachsen kämpfen im Irak für al-Qaida,” *Der Spiegel*, Jan. 26, 2008.

<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, in December 2006, only one fighter was recorded and it was someone named Hafid, who started his journey in Belgium.

<sup>97</sup> It is possible to estimate the entry date for fighters in the Sinjar Records by tracking the watermarks and letterhead on the documents themselves. The Islamic State of Iraq was established in October 2006, which indicates that fighters recorded on ISI stationary entered Iraq after that date. Apparently, al-Qa`ida’s affiliates did not exchange their stationary immediately after the ISI was established. Some of the records on MSC stationary list fighters that arrived in November 2006—after the ISI had replaced the MSC. Of the 606 total records, 56.1% (340) are clearly listed as ISI recruits, while 16.8% (102) are listed on MSC stationary.

Eighty-one of the fighters that listed their date of entry arrived in 2006. They arrived over 16 days, which means that an average of 5.06 fighters arrived on each day of entry.<sup>98</sup> One hundred twenty-two fighters listed their date of entry in the eight months between January and August 2007. These 122 arrived on 49 entry days, or about 2.5 fighters per day of entry. While the total number of fighters who enter Iraq is greater in 2007, they appear to be entering Iraq in smaller groups. The reasons for this change are unclear. One possibility is that the widely-reported drop in political support for foreign fighters in Anbar province during 2007 meant that bringing large groups of foreign fighters through the province was riskier than in the past.

### FOREIGN FIGHTER FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO AQI

The Sinjar Records provide the most detailed unclassified picture of the financial payments made by foreign fighters to AQI. 149 foreign fighters contributed some amount of money to al-Qa`ida, presumably after arriving in Iraq. Donations to AQI are different than payments made to Syrian Coordinators and were listed in different fields in the Sinjar Records themselves. Whereas payments to Syrian Coordinators seem to be a payoff of some sort, donations to AQI seem to be aimed at sustaining the group's operations.

Saudi fighters provided donations most frequently, accounting for 45.6 percent (69 of 149) of the contributing fighters. While this is only slightly higher than the 41 percent of foreign fighters in the Sinjar Records who are Saudi, the Saudi fighters also contributed significantly larger amounts than their counter-parts. Figure 21 shows the percentage of individuals from each country that donated money to AQI, the mean contribution by nationality, and the range of donations.

*Figure 21: Nationalities of Fighters Contributing Money to al-Qa`ida*

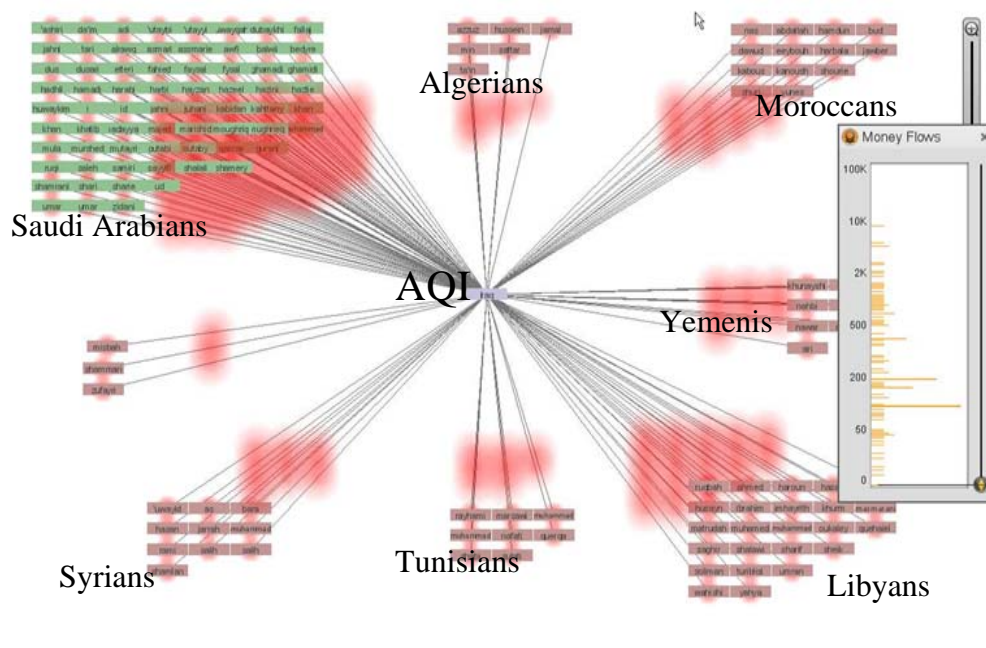
<b>Country</b>	<b>% Records w/ Contribution</b>	<b>Mean Cash Contribution</b>	<b>Range of Cash Contributions</b>
Saudi Arabia	29.1 % (69/237)	\$1088	.20—\$16,054
Libya	21.6 % (24/111)	\$130	\$20-\$400
Morocco	33.3 % (12/36)	\$206	\$20- \$829
Syria	21.7 % (10/46)	\$70	\$2-\$400
Yemen	22.7 % (10/44)	\$178	\$100-\$680
Tunisia	24.2 % (8/33)	\$1288	\$36-\$7974
Algeria	9.8 % (6/41)	\$311	\$88-\$855

<sup>98</sup> Chapter 4 has a similar analysis of group sizes entering Iraq.

Figures 22 and Figure 23 graphically display the financial contributions incoming fighters made to AQI. Individual fighters are grouped by country with financial contributions per individual depicted in red. Figure 22 depicts all payments by individuals regardless of the amount. This indicates a relatively even flow of payments across countries of origin.

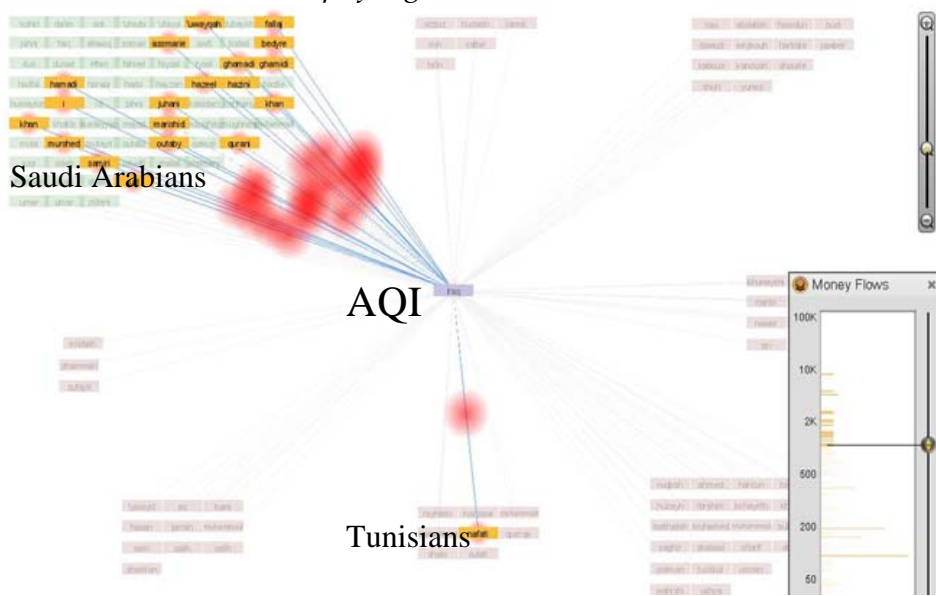
However, when the threshold of payments is increased to \$1000, the Saudi influence becomes clear. Of the 23 fighters that contributed more than \$1000, 22 were Saudi, along with a single Tunisian. The Tunisian was Radwan al-Nafati, a 25 year old who met his Coordinator (Abu Shayma in Lebanon) through a “brother” named Hamza in Turkey.<sup>99</sup>

Figure 22: Social Network Map of Fighters that Contributed Financially to AQI



<sup>99</sup> The record of Wisam Abdallah Jum’ah al Sharif, a 21-year-old geology student from Benghazi, Libya, indicates that he contributed 3,000 Syrian Lira, 100 US Dollars, and 25 Egyptian Piastras. The original Arabic record reports that he also gave 39,025 Libyan Dinar, which is equivalent to over 36,000 US Dollars. However, the authors decided to treat this as a likely error in transcription and thus the Libyan Dinar figure was not included in the subsequent analysis.

Figure 23: Social Network Map of Fighters that Contributed \$1000 or More to AQI



## WORK IN IRAQ

The majority of the Sinjar Records had a “work” field, a category that primarily distinguishes between fighters and suicide bombers.<sup>100</sup> The category seems to reflect the role fighters hoped to have upon their arrival in Iraq, but it might indicate an assignment determined by local administrators.

The translated versions of the Sinjar Records convert the Arabic word *istishhadi* in a variety of ways: as “martyr,” “martyrdom,” and “suicide bomber.” The word itself means “martyrdom seeker.” We have coded all such individuals “suicide bombers” in an effort to avoid confusion. Although al-Qa`ida’s ideology embraces the concept of becoming a martyr during the course of traditional military operations, the purpose of these personnel records was to enable commanders to allocate individuals for specific tasks efficiently. In such circumstances, *istishhadi* likely refers to individuals intended for suicide attacks.

Of the 376 fighters that designated their “work” in Iraq, 56.4 percent (212) were to be suicide bombers.<sup>101</sup> Another 42 percent (158) were designated traditional fighters. Several respondents listed more specialized tasks, including media operations (2), doctor (3), and legal skills (1). The documents do not indicate

<sup>100</sup> Types of work are listed in various ways in the original Arabic and in translation. Listings such as “combatant” and “fighters” were counted simply as “fighter.” Listings such as “martyr,” “martyrdom,” “suicide,” and “suicide mission” are counted as “suicide bomber.”

<sup>101</sup> After consulting with CTC translators and faculty, we grouped “martyr” and “suicide bomber” together, based on the connotation of martyr.



whether individuals volunteer for these roles, or if they are assigned. At least some incoming fighters were asked to sign contracts pledging to commit suicide bombings in Iraq rather than become fighters, suggesting that AQI struggled with entering fighters backing out of their pledge to become suicide bombers.

### Country of Origin and Suicide Bombings

Numerous observers have concluded that Saudi Arabians are over-represented in the ranks of Iraqi suicide bombers. One recent study analyzed 94 suicide bombers in Iraq and determined that 44 were Saudi, seven Kuwaiti, seven European, six Syrian and the remainder scattered across the Mideast and North Africa.<sup>102</sup>

The Sinjar Records support the conclusion that the *plurality* of suicide bombers entering Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007 were Saudi. However, the documents challenge the notion that Saudi foreign fighters are more likely than their comrades from other locations to become suicide bombers. In fact, Libyan and Moroccan fighters that listed their “work” in the Sinjar Records were much more likely to register “suicide bomber” than fighters from other nations.

Figure 24: “Work” Assignment in Iraq by Nationality

Country	Suicide Bombers	Fighters	Other	Total
Saudi Arabia	47.6 % (70)	50.3 % (74)	2.0 % (3)	147
Libya	85.0 % (51)	13.3 % (8)	1.6 % (1)	60
Morocco	91.6 % (22)	8.3 % (2)	0	24
Syria	65.5 % (19)	31.0 % (9)	3.1 % (1)	29
Algeria	10.7 % (5)	82.3 % (28)	2.9 % (1)	34
Yemen	45.9 % (17)	54.1 % (20)	0	37
Tunisia	41.7 % (10)	58.3 % (14)	0	24

Of the 237 Saudi fighters in the Sinjar Records, 62 percent (147) listed their “work.” Of these 147, 47.6 percent (70) planned to become suicide bombers. Among the 238 non-Saudis who listed their “work” in the Sinjar Records, 59.2 percent (141) were denoted as future suicide bombers. Libyan and Moroccan Jihadis were far more likely, as a percentage of their co-nationals who arrived in Iraq, to be listed as suicide bombers than were Saudi nationals. Of the 111

<sup>102</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez, “Suicide Terrorism in Iraq: A Preliminary Assessment of the Quantitative Data and Documentary Evidence,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29:6 (2006): 616-19.

Libyans in the Records, 54.4 percent (60) listed their “work.” Fully 85.2 percent (51) of these Libyan fighters listed “suicide bomber” as their work in Iraq and 91.7 percent (22) of the Moroccans intended to be suicide bombers in Iraq.

### Recruitment Mechanism

There is evidence that the relationship between a fighter and the Coordinator that introduced the fighter to Jihad in the first place may be correlated with that a fighter’s decision to become a suicide bomber. Fighters who met their Coordinators through blood relatives appear to be less likely to sign on for suicide missions than those who were introduced by an acquaintance. Interestingly, all six of the individuals who met their Coordinator through the Internet went on to become suicide bombers. Although these conclusions are fascinating, they are not statistically significant; readers should be careful not to draw firm conclusions from a relatively small sample. This is an area that demands more research.

*Figure 25: Suicide Bomber Recruitment Mechanism<sup>103</sup>*

<b>Method of Introduction</b>	<b>Suicide Bombers</b>	<b>Fighters</b>
Through a “brother”	59.6% (31/52)	19.2% (10/52)
Through a friend	57.8% (26/45)	33.3 % (15/45)
Through a relative	18.2% (2/11)	63.6% (7/11)
Through a neighbor	77.8% (7/9)	22.2% (2/9)
By way of the internet	100% (6/6)	0% (0/6)
Through work	50% (3/6)	50% (3/6)
A new acquaintance	100% (5/5)	0% (0/5)
Through school	75% (3/4)	25% (1/4)
Mecca	0% (0/3)	100% (3/3)
Through a mosque	66.7% (2/3)	33.3% (1/3)

### Financial Contribution

Fighters that claimed to have made a donation to AQI when they arrived in Iraq were listed as suicide bombers at a much higher rate than fighters that did not contribute to AQI. In the Sinjar Records, 70.5 percent of the individuals that donated to AQI were listed as suicide bombers, as opposed to 50.9 percent that did not list a contribution.

<sup>103</sup> Numbers do not sum to 100 percent because some fighters did not list their “work” in Iraq.

Figure 26: Financial Contribution by “Work” Assignment

	Suicide Bomber	Fighter
No Record of Contribution	50.9% (138)	46.9% (127)
Record of Contribution > 0	70.5% (74)	29.5% (31)
All Records	56% (212)	42% (158)

## FOREIGN VS. INDIGENOUS IRAQI FIGHTERS

### Suicide Bombings

The Sinjar Records provide an opportunity to assess the impact of foreign fighters on al-Qa`ida’s suicide campaign in Iraq over the time-period covered by the Sinjar sample.<sup>104</sup> There are several ways to calculate this impact. In the Sinjar Records, 56.4 percent (212) of the 376 foreign fighters that listed their “occupation” once in Iraq were to be “suicide bombers” rather than “fighters.” The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) recorded 394 suicide attacks in Iraq from August 2006 to August 2007 that produced over 16,000 casualties.<sup>105</sup> If all of the 212 fighters listed in the Sinjar Records as future suicide bombers acted on their stated purpose they would account for (212/394) 54% of all suicide attacks during that period. If the 56.4% rate holds for all 590 non-duplicated individuals listed in the Sinjar Records, then approximately 333 fighters listed in the Sinjar Records were likely candidates for suicide bombing missions. Using that number as a baseline, we can estimate that (333/394) 84% of suicide bombings were conducted by fighters listed in the Sinjar Records. This number is likely too high. Since some suicide attacks in Iraq utilized multiple bombers, more than 394 bombers were required for the 394 attacks. We estimate that the 394 attacks required approximately (394 x 1.1) 433 suicide bombers. According to this methodology, approximately (333/433) 77 percent of the suicide bombers in Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007 were listed in the Sinjar Records.

Although the numbers themselves are inexact, they clearly demonstrate the major impact that Sinjar Record fighters—and foreigners in general—have had

<sup>104</sup> These calculations are challenged by the limited information in the records as to whether the individuals were assigned the role of “fighters” or “suicide bombers” by al-Qa`ida cadre or by personal choice. The authors would like to thank Alan Krueger for introducing the methodology for making these calculations.

<sup>105</sup> <http://wits.nctc.gov> Search ran from August 1, 2006 through August 31, 2007, and was bounded in “Iraq” and to “Suicide” attacks. July 21, 2008

on the suicide campaign in Iraq. Using these figures as guidelines, we estimate that approximately 75% of suicide bombers in Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007 were listed in the Sinjar Records.

It is important to recognize the assumptions inherent in the calculations that led to this conclusion. The Sinjar Records may not accurately report the ultimate “vocation” of foreign Jihadis in Iraq. Many Jihadis who listed “suicide bomber” on their personnel form likely opted out later. Likewise, some incoming Jihadis listed as traditional fighters may have later been convinced to commit a suicide attack. AQI did attempt to ensure that Jihadis committed to a suicide attack completed their mission, forcing numerous would-be bombers to sign contracts that they would not renege on their mission, which suggests that many bombers were initially reluctant.<sup>106</sup> Some of the contracts indicate that fighters sign them in Syria as a condition for their transfer to Iraq. By requiring incoming Jihadis to commit to a suicide mission before they arrive in Iraq, AQI is able to force the fighters to choose between a suicide mission and not participating in the fight at all.<sup>107</sup> Further, the contracts stipulate that AQI will completely disavow fighters that do not fulfill their suicide mission. Some contracts include provisions that if a fighter does not finish their mission they immediately divorce their wife and renounce Islam, a severe punishment.<sup>108</sup>

Besides the problem of fighters renegeing, some committed bombers were likely prevented from completing their mission by coalition or Iraqi forces. Our estimate, therefore, is not precise; rather it provides a general idea of Sinjar’s importance—roughly 75% of suicide bombers passed through this region.

There is anecdotal evidence suggesting that AQIs foreign suicide bombers were more enthusiastic about their task than native Iraqis. The former Commander of the Coalition’s detainee facility at Camp Bucca explained: “there are 2 kinds of suicide bombers—those handcuffed to the steering wheel and those [who are] not... foreigners are never found handcuffed.”<sup>109</sup> The same officer recounted an experience where a native Iraqi bomber survived his bombing attempt—albeit badly burned—to explain that he had been duped into carrying out a suicide bombing mission. The native Iraqi claimed he was instructed to drive his explosive-laden truck next to a US compound gate, park it there, initiate a delayed detonation fuse, and run away. Unknown to the hapless bomber,

---

<sup>106</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657961, et al

<sup>107</sup> Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-658063

<sup>108</sup> Harmony Document: NMEC-2007-657979

<sup>109</sup> April 8, 2008 author interview with Colonel James Brown at West Point, New York.

however, the truck had been wired for remote detonation and was blown up as soon as the truck neared the compound.<sup>110</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Foreign fighters, unlike many of the indigenous fighters in al-Qa`ida in Iraq, are not insurgents or criminals. They are not struggling to gain control of the government, advance the interests of a particular group within Iraq, or to profit materially. These extremists are ideologically motivated “terrorists” and they are very likely driven by different factors than the typical Iraqi member of AQI. Foreigners are more likely motivated by religious ideology—the goal of reestablishing a Caliphate and achieving personal salvation—than Iraqi AQI members. In general terms, Iraqi AQI members are likely more anti-occupation and criminal in nature.

This distinction is important because the differing motivations imply different strategies that can be used against AQI. While counterinsurgency and stability operations must be employed against AQI to ameliorate the concerns of Sunnis and round-up criminals, such behavior will not deter or eliminate the threat from foreign ideologues. AQI has been backed into a corner in northern Iraq, its local infrastructure largely destroyed, and is largely discredited in many Iraqi communities. Yet such setbacks will not deter AQI’s foreign diehards, whose primary goal is to continue the fight, not necessarily to win it.

Our analysis of the Sinjar Records suggests a number of principles for combating the specific problem of foreign fighters in Iraq:

### **Interdict Cells and Recruiting Networks Early**

Because foreign fighters are unlikely to be deterred by local political considerations, or by the prospect of military defeat, stopping them before they enter Iraq is critical. Early interdiction is best achieved by creating incentives for states to stop would-be fighters and suicide bombers before they leave for Iraq. The Sinjar Records identify recruiting hot spots within countries and many of the key individuals and mechanisms involved in the recruitment process. Such information can reduce the costs of interdiction by helping states focus their intelligence and outreach efforts. Because states may see value in allowing their

---

<sup>110</sup> Colonel Brown described the bomber as disillusioned by the experience and bitter about being lied to and “sold out” by his handlers.

most aggrieved citizens to leave to fight elsewhere, positive inducements may be required to motivate early interdiction efforts.

Releasing additional data similar to the Sinjar Records can enhance early interdiction efforts by helping local law enforcement officials in key recruiting areas identify and investigate suspicious activity. While such data can be shared through official channels, making it public more effectively ensures it will be available to low-level officials who can use it most effectively.

### **Target Criminal Activities in Border States**

Most foreign fighters arriving in Iraq seem to be motivated ideologues. Conversely, many of the Coordinators, smugglers and other middlemen that facilitate their movement to Iraq are little more than criminals. AQI's reliance on criminal and smuggling networks exposes the group to the greed and uncertain commitment of mercenaries.

In many cases, directly targeting and destroying these criminal networks is impractical because they operate in sovereign states surrounding Iraq. The US and host-nation operatives may be able to use financial incentives and creative security guarantees to gain cooperation from these criminal networks. Offering a large bounty for foreign fighters may be more attractive than the payments Syrian coordinators/smugglers can expect to receive from AQI, or the cash they can take from the fighters traveling to Iraq. Efforts to "buy out" known smugglers must be carefully constructed. Providing a direct bounty for foreign fighters creates incentives for smugglers to brand innocent travelers or refugees as "Jihadis."<sup>111</sup> A better option may be to co-opt specific smugglers for information on particular terrorists.

### **Increase Coordination Problems Between AQI and their Syrian Coordinators<sup>112</sup>**

There is a clear and obvious difference between the risks faced by AQI leaders in Iraq and those faced by smugglers providing logistical support to the group. It is likely that individuals who provide logistical support are less committed to the

---

<sup>111</sup> Such incentives appear to have played a role in the capture of a number of individuals released from US custody after being labeled "No Longer Enemy Combatants" through the Combatant Status Review Tribunal (CSRT) process. For transcripts of these individuals' CSRT hearings, see "Guantanamo Bay Detainees Classified as 'No Longer Enemy Combatants,'" [washingtonpost.com](http://projects.washingtonpost.com/guantanamo/nlec/), available at <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/guantanamo/nlec/> (last visited May 12, 2008).

<sup>112</sup> *Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qa`ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2006).

cause than the group's permanent staff in Iraq. This difference in commitment can be exploited. One way to do so is to encourage Syrian authorities to offer amnesty or reduced punishment for known Syrian coordinators in exchange for cooperation and "ratting out" their competition. Absent such cooperation from the Syrian government, the US and Iraqi governments may be able to use the fact that these Coordinators have a long-run interest in doing business in Iraq to engage them from Iraqi territory.

### **Exploit Common Ground with Syria**

The Syrian government has willingly ignored, and possibly abetted, foreign fighters headed to Iraq. Concerned about possible military action against the Syrian regime, it opted to support insurgents and terrorists wreaking havoc in Iraq. Nonetheless, al-Qa`ida is a major threat to Syria. Now that AQI is largely defeated in Iraq and its fighters are trickling out of the country, Syria may be more willing to cooperate on efforts to interdict them. Even if Syria is hesitant to work with the United States, it may be willing to help other Arab states concerned about AQI fighters heading out of Iraq.

### **Address the Terrorist "Hot Spots"**

The Sinjar Records strongly support the notion that certain localities produce disproportionately large numbers of terrorists. Public diplomacy, security-linked development aid, and other counterterrorism tools should focus on these areas. Research that combines qualitative and quantitative methods to predict the local conditions responsible for terrorist "hot spots" will help identify which benign strategies will be most useful in different places. A necessary step in developing such strategies is enhanced collection and analyses of sub-national data to identify why some towns spawn so many more fighters *per capita* than others.

### **Address Strategic Concerns Hindering Cooperation from States Bordering Iraq**

Saudi Arabia perceives a national interest in combating an emerging threat from Iran. As long as the Saudi government views foreign Sunni militants in Iraq as a bulwark against the dominance of Iranian-influenced Iraqi leaders, it is unlikely to invest heavily in stemming the flow of Saudis traveling to fight in Iraq. Limiting the real and perceived influence of Iran in Iraq's domestic political and security situation may therefore be a necessary first step to gaining greater cooperation from Saudi authorities. A similar logic applies to gaining Syrian cooperation for interdicting or co-opting smuggling networks.

### **Support Programs Aimed at Increasing Civil Liberties and Political Rights**

Krueger (2007) finds that low levels of civil liberties are a powerful predictor of the national origin of foreign fighters in Iraq.<sup>113</sup> The statistical model Krueger developed to estimate the nationality of foreign fighters caught in Iraq from factors such as civil liberties and GDP per capita predicts the data in the Sinjar Records quite well.<sup>114</sup> Increasing civil liberties and political rights at the national level in countries producing the largest number of militants may be impractical except as a long-term goal. However, because individual recruitment in these countries is concentrated in a few localities, national-level change may not be necessary. Instead, efforts to improve local governance and the professionalism of security services in these 'hot-spot' communities may be both feasible and effective.

## **APPENDIX A: PREVIOUS STUDIES OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN IRAQ**

---

<sup>113</sup> Alan Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>114</sup> The predicted contribution from most countries is off by no more than one individual. Saudi Arabia was predicted to be the country of origin of 44 percent of foreign fighters in Iraq because of its close proximity, high GDP, and low civil liberties. In the Sinjar records, Saudis account for 41 percent of foreign fighters entering Iraq. According to military data the country was responsible for just 10 percent of the foreign captives. If the Sinjar records are representative, then the statistical model would appear to do a better job predicting the participation of Saudis from fundamental factors, such as proximity and political repression, than the military's data on captured insurgents. This result points to the problems inherent in inferring participation rates from patterns observed in data collected on those in captivity.



A number of previous studies provide insights into the backgrounds of foreign fighters in Iraq. In March 2005, Reuven Paz drew on a sample of 154 fighters identified as “martyrs” on Jihadi web forums to glean information about their backgrounds.<sup>115</sup> Figure 27 illustrates Paz’s findings on the fighters’ national origin.

*Figure 27: Reuven Paz Findings on Foreign Fighters*

Saudi Arabia	61% (94)
Syria	10.4% (16)
Iraq	8.4% (13)
Kuwait	7.1% (11)
Jordan	(4) 2.6%
Lebanon <sup>116</sup>	(3) 1.9%
Libya	(2) 1.3%
Algeria	(2) 1.3%
Morocco <sup>117</sup>	(2) 1.3%
Yemen	(2) 1.3%
Tunisia	(2) 1.3%
Palestine	(1) 0.65%
Dubai	(1) 0.65%
Sudan <sup>118</sup>	(1) 0.65%

Several months after the Paz report was released, Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid of the Center for Strategic and International Studies argued that Paz overstated the Saudi presence in Iraq. Cordesman and Obaid, working with data provided by Saudi intelligence sources, claimed that there were some 3000 foreign fighters operating in Iraq, but that only 12 percent were Saudi. The Cordesman/Obaid estimates suggested Algeria was the largest contributor to foreign fighters in Iraq, followed closely by Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.<sup>119</sup> Figure 28 illustrates the Cordesman/Obaid conclusions.

<sup>115</sup> Reuven Paz, *Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: an Analysis*, PRISM Series on Global Jihad, No. 1/3, Mar. 2005, available at [http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM\\_no\\_1\\_vol\\_3\\_-\\_Arabs\\_killed\\_in\\_Iraq.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_1_vol_3_-_Arabs_killed_in_Iraq.pdf).

<sup>116</sup> One was living in Denmark.

<sup>117</sup> One was living in Spain.

<sup>118</sup> Living in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>119</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, “Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom’s Response,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Sept. 19, 2005, [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/050919\\_saudimilitantsiraq.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/050919_saudimilitantsiraq.pdf)

Figure 28: Cordesman/Obaid Estimates

Algeria	20% (600)
Syria	18% (550)
Yemen	17% (500)
Sudan	15% (450)
Egypt	13% (400)
Saudi Arabia	12% (350)
Other Countries	5% (150)

An *NBC News* report released in June 2005 cited information provided by a US Army official who listed the top ten countries of origin for foreign fighters in Iraq: Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.<sup>120</sup> The official would not provide the number of fighters from each country or greater details on the source of this information.

Later in 2005, Murad Shishani cited a list of 429 slain Salafi-Jihadis posted on a Jihadi-linked web forum to conclude that 53 percent were Saudi, 13 percent Syrian, eight percent Iraqi, 5.8 percent Jordanian, four percent Kuwaiti and 3.8 percent Libyan.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, in July 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* cited “official US military figures” stating that 45 percent of all foreign fighters in Iraq come from Saudi Arabia. According to the article, 15 percent arrived from Lebanon and Syria and another 10 percent were from North Africa. The *Los Angeles Times* article also cited statistics indicating that 50 percent of all Saudis arrived in Iraq to become suicide bombers.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> See Meyers, “Who are the Foreign Fighters?”

<sup>121</sup> Murad al-Shishani, “The Salafi-Jihadi Movement in Iraq: Recruitment Methods and Arab Volunteers,” *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 3:23, Dec. 2, 2005, available at <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369842>.

<sup>122</sup> Ned Parker, “Saudis Role in Iraq Insurgency Outlined,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2007, available at <http://fairuse.100webcustomers.com/fairenough/latimesA98.html>.

## Chapter 3

# Bureaucratic Terrorists: Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's Management and Finances

By Jacob Shapiro

The Sinjar documents provide a striking insider's view of the management challenges facing al-Qa`ida in Iraq's Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). The documents reveal leaders struggling to balance the control required to achieve their political goals against the security required to survive. The ISI, like any terrorist organization, faces a difficult task in a hostile operational setting. First, it must control the use of violence as a means to achieve their specified political ends. As the organization itself has acknowledged many times, too much violence or inappropriate fundraising efforts can damage the cause as much as doing too little.<sup>123</sup> Second, the ISI must sustain itself with limited funds, placing a premium on financial efficiency and oversight. Third, the ISI must maintain this calibrated use of force in an environment where becoming known to Iraqi or American government forces leads to operational failure.<sup>124</sup>

These three tasks place conflicting demands on the ISI. The more the organization exercises control over its operatives—by using organizational tools such as tracking spreadsheets, expense reports, and standardized policy memoranda—the less secure it becomes.<sup>125</sup> Exercising control in this manner requires additional communications that can be intercepted and creates direct links between senior leaders and operators who are more likely to be identified and captured by government forces. Moreover, because these documents often include names and provide evidence about operational practices, they make ideal raw material for intelligence organizations seeking to target the ISI. The ISI thus faces the same tradeoffs between security and control that have troubled

---

<sup>123</sup> Harmony Documents IZ-060316-02; NMEC-2007-637813.

<sup>124</sup> This is especially true for organizations like the ISI whose enemy, the Coalition forces, can strike anywhere without the constraints security forces face in traditional counter-terrorism operations. The British, for example, could not use indirect fire weapons against Provisional Irish Republican Army (P-IRA) meetings in Belfast in the 1990s.

<sup>125</sup> Harmony Documents NMEC-2007-657921, NMEC-2007-657945, NMEC-2007-658021, continued in NMEC-2007-657988.

terrorist organizations from the 1890s to the present.<sup>126</sup> The Sinjar documents provide further insight into how al-Qa`ida's ISI is challenged by these tradeoffs.

For at least a one-year period, the portion of the ISI that I refer to as the Sinjar Organization repeatedly sacrificed operational security for managerial control.<sup>127</sup> The four "Fighter Registry Report[s]" in the Sinjar Records, for example, provided a clearly useful leadership tool.<sup>128</sup> Each report details the group's personnel in three categories: "incoming fighters," "permanent Emirate fighters," and "exiting brothers." For incoming fighters the reports detail names, dates of arrival, the work they will do (suicide bomber or fighter), and the assets they brought with them. For permanent fighters, the reports list individuals' names and gives information on "salary" and "work" for a number of individuals. For 'exiting brothers' the reports give the individual's "reason for leaving," identify who gave them permission to leave, and state the date of departure. Any human resources manager would want to capture such information, but for an organization whose members depend on anonymity for survival, such record-keeping is a disaster waiting to happen.

The remainder of this chapter outlines how and why the Sinjar Organization took such security risks. Section one summarizes the Sinjar documents. Section two focuses on the group's finances, examining both its sources of funding and how it spent its money during the relevant period of time. Section three studies the Sinjar Organization's management and offers an explanation for the progressive bureaucratization evident in these documents. Section four identifies a number of implications for both counter-insurgency operations in Iraq and for counter-terrorism operations more generally.

---

<sup>126</sup> For a discussion of the security-control tradeoff in the context of Al-Qa`ida, see *Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qa`ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2006). For a more theoretical analysis of terrorists' organizational challenges with evidence from a wide variety of groups, see Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Challenge: Security, Efficiency, Control* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2007).

<sup>127</sup> Fourteen of the documents refer to the "Border Emirate" (Imarat al-Hudud) of the ISI. It is not clear, however, when this organizational distinction became official within the group, nor whether what would become the Border Emirate was recognized as a distinct geographical command within AQI. What is clear is that these documents were produced by a cohesive organization with shared personnel across "official" names, institutional memory, and embedded management practices. I therefore refer to it as the "Sinjar Organization."

<sup>128</sup> Chronologically, these are Harmony Documents NMEC-2007-657921, NMEC-2007-657680, NMEC-2007-657775, NMEC-2007-657927.

## SECTION I: THE SINJAR DOCUMENTS

The 109 documents analyzed in this study were captured by Coalition forces in October 2007 in a raid near Sinjar, along Iraq's Syrian border. Most of the documents (70) were typed or were found on computer files and just over half of the documents (61) are either standardized forms or are handwritten according to a common format. A number of the documents are actually blank standardized forms for everything from tracking weapons, to receiving group funds, to swearing allegiance to the ISI.<sup>129</sup>

Combined with previously released documents from AQI, these documents provide a valuable window on the foreign terrorist organizations in Iraq. First, the combined documents cover a wide variety of institutional minutiae including:

- 44 signed contracts by fighters agreeing to conditions for different activities;
- 43 managerial reports covering personnel, equipment, and finances;
- 10 internal receipts for funds disbursed to group members;
- 9 internal policy memos;
- 4 press releases.<sup>130</sup>

Second, the original documents were produced over a long time period. Some of the documents are undated, and the exact dates on others remain obscure, but the production dates for 37 are relatively certain. These documents were produced during the 11-month period from September 2006 through August 2007 and contain information about the Sinjar Organization's finances going back to March 2006.<sup>131</sup> This time-series allows us to assess the ISI's organizational

---

<sup>129</sup> Harmony Documents NMEC-2007-657916, NMEC-2007-657782, and NMEC-2007-637854.

<sup>130</sup> The 109 newly-released Sinjar documents include 4 duplicate documents and one original document continued over two Harmony reference numbers. We used seven previously-released documents detailing conflicts between AQI and other Sunni elements of the Iraqi insurgency to augment this sample. One additional Sinjar memo included instructions for opening encrypted messages.

<sup>131</sup> The vast majority of the documents are from the "Border Emirate" of the Islamic State of Iraq, though the earliest documents were completed shortly before AQI and its allies publicly declared the independent ISI across a swath of western Iraq on October 15, 2006.

response through 2007 as many local Sunni political leaders in Anbar province turned against al-Qa`ida and its foreign fighters.<sup>132</sup>

Despite this opportunity, there are two serious reasons why analysts should be careful when interpreting these documents. First, they do not represent a random sample of all ISI documents captured in Western Iraq from September 2006 forward, much less a random sample of all ISI correspondence produced during this time period. Thus, we cannot be certain they are representative of the overall group's internal correspondence. It may be that those ISI operatives whose documents were captured have a particular taste for bureaucracy. Second, some of the staid managerial tone in the translated documents may be due more to the translators' experiences in highly-bureaucratic government organizations than to the original authors' affinities for Western business jargon. Despite these problems, the Sinjar documents provide the best public evidence on the financing and management of the ISI.

## **SECTION II: SINJAR FINANCES**

There are two basic financial tasks for any terrorist organization. The first task is raising money without offering security forces actionable intelligence on the group's activities.<sup>133</sup> The second task is ensuring that expenditures support the group's cause rather than enrich its financial intermediaries. This section reviews the organizational implications of these tasks and examines how the ISI managed its finances to carry them out. It concludes by analyzing how the ISI spent the money it raised.

### **The First Task: Covert Fundraising**

Coercive fundraising is deeply problematic for foreign organizations in Iraq because no insurgent group can exclude Coalition forces from a defined geographic area. Locals unhappy with the "revolutionary taxes" imposed on them always have the option to share information that can get the insurgents killed.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, in a relatively homogenous area like Anbar province—undivided by salient sectarian or ethnic cleavages—there is no convenient group

---

<sup>132</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez, "Al-Qa`ida Losing Ground in Iraq," *CTC Sentinel* 1:1 (2007): 6-8.

<sup>133</sup> Officials are sometimes aware of the mafia-like protection rackets run by terrorist groups such as AQI or the P-IRA, but lack sufficiently specific information to target the racketeers. The problem for terrorist groups arises when such activities create exploitable vulnerabilities.

<sup>134</sup> Of course, this option may also get the local "informer" killed. The key point is that it is relatively more costly for the ISI to use coercive fundraising than it is for an insurgent organization, which can actually exclude government forces from territory.

of “others” that the ISI can tax without alienating its supporters. Indeed, coercive fundraising backfired on the Sinjar Organization. As the local population in Anbar province became increasingly disenchanted with foreign fighters over the period covered by these documents, they became more willing to share specific information with Coalition forces. The population’s willingness to offer intelligence to Coalition forces forced the Sinjar Organization to prevent its operatives from raising money for the group through kidnapping, theft, or other problematic methods. Relatively strict accounting procedures offer one way to identify operatives who cross over into problematic fundraising methods, albeit at the cost of reducing the group’s security.

### **The Second Task: Spending Money Appropriately**

The second task is problematic for all terrorist organizations. Unless operatives below the senior leaders are perfectly committed to the cause and want to spend money exactly as leaders would like, they must be directed or compelled to use funds as their leadership desires. The covert nature of the enterprise means that senior leaders have difficulty providing such direction. Operatives charged with generating, storing, and disbursing funds can take advantage of their leaders’ security concerns to spend money independently, either by supporting unauthorized activities or by taking a cut for themselves. When resources are constrained so that leaders cannot simply accept the resulting inefficiencies, they need to take steps to ensure funds are spent as desired. Strict accounting procedures offer leaders oversight if they are willing to accept the security cost.

### **ISI Financial Management**

Unsurprisingly given the above discussion, the ISI relied heavily on voluntary donations and spent a good deal of energy tracking how money was raised and spent, despite the security costs implicit in doing so. The financial reports and receipts in the Sinjar documents show that the ISI relied on three sources of funding: transfers from other leaders in AQI, money foreign suicide bombers brought with them, and fundraising from local Iraqis.<sup>135</sup> As we should expect from the discussion above, money from foreign suicide bombers was by far the largest source of funds in these records.<sup>136</sup> All three sources are neatly summarized in what appears to be a report prepared in September 2006 when the leadership of “Border Sector number 1” turned over.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> It is unclear from these documents whether the funds raised from locals were given voluntarily.

<sup>136</sup> See, e.g., Harmony Documents NMEC-2007-657680, NMEC-2007-657731, and NMEC-2007-657927.

<sup>137</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-658021.

The report signed by “Shahin the administrator” summarizes the group’s finances from 15 March through 16 September 2006. Shahin reports that there “was a shortage of funds from 15 MAR 2006 to 20 JUL 2006 in Sector 1, [because] the money didn’t arrive with the suicide brothers, and the coordinating brothers in Syria kept the money.”<sup>138</sup> During this period, the Sinjar organization did receive approximately \$22,000 in transfers from “brother Hamzah, the Emir of Mosel.”<sup>139</sup> After 20 July, Shahin reports that his organization “enjoyed financial improvements... [and] had \$52,790 in their budget... [which] came from the suicide brothers.”<sup>140</sup> Shahin closes his report by noting that the “money that [the incoming leader] brother Abu-’Abdallah spent beyond the total amount [TC: amount above the amount of the suicide operations money] came from contributions of Muslim people in Iraq; he apologized for not giving exact numbers.”<sup>141</sup>

Shahin’s concern that he is unable to specifically account for every last dollar strongly suggests that more senior leaders in AQI were expected to review his report, an interpretation buttressed by a slightly later accounting report in which Shahin reports the assets of “border sector number (1)” and notes that the “receipts were reviewed as well as the incoming money and brothers.”<sup>142</sup> Accounting concerns arose in later ISI reports. One such report sought to excuse its authors from responsibility for accounting discrepancies by noting that “expenditures report for the amount of 4,225 USD has not been submitted.”<sup>143</sup> Another is even more explicit, stating “[w]e have a \$2,700 discrepancy; we do not know where it went although the al-Hudud Emirate did not receive this sum. You should check with brother Abu-al-Silah or the accountant.”<sup>144</sup> The frequent repetition of such comments throughout the ISI accounting documents suggests several layers of management and oversight over finances.

Of course, each of the ISI’s three funding sources came with problems. Relying on internal transfers merely pushes the fundraising burden on to a different part of the organization and creates connections that can be exploited by counter-

---

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* This memo likely refers to Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (Abu Ayyub al-Masri.)

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657988. The turnover report is two-pages long, each of which enters the Harmony Database as a separate document.

<sup>142</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657998.

<sup>143</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657695.

<sup>144</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657733.



terrorist forces. Relying on incoming suicide bombers for funds places AQI at the mercy of mendacious smuggling organizations who can extract large fees from would-be-martyrs. The Sinjar Organization dealt with this problem in spring 2006 when “the money didn’t arrive with the suicide brothers, and the coordinating brothers in Syria kept the money.”<sup>145</sup>

Raising funds from the locals reduced such direct monetary losses, but created severe political problems that are even more important for an organization like the ISI. Shahin’s report makes it sound as though contributions from local Iraqis were voluntary. They often were not, a fact that caused many political problems for AQI both before and after the ISI was founded.<sup>146</sup> For example, a December 2004 “Threat Announcement” from AQI lists the names of people who took part in “mugging and looting” and disavows them in the following harsh terms:

Due to the increase of illegal activities from theft and looting from those who claim to be part of Jihadi organizations and have committed such act in the name of their organization, let it be known [that] we at Al-Qa`ida organization in the land of two river are free from all their wrong doing and their acts we have sworn to expel those whom allow themselves to exploit the blood or the money of the Muslims.<sup>147</sup>

The author of this letter is concerned that improper fundraising efforts will hurt AQI politically. That concern was echoed in a series of later ISI memos that established administrative rules to give leaders the ability to monitor how their operatives spend money.<sup>148</sup> One requirement is that “[f]or every amount paid out of the Muslim people funds, the recipient is required to provide two signatures, in his own handwriting, one for receiving the money and another one to show how the money was spent.”<sup>149</sup> This is a sensible requirement for most organizations, but not one that is ostensibly covert. For a covert organization,

---

<sup>145</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-658021.

<sup>146</sup> Examples of press reporting on coercive fund raising by foreign fighters include: David Loyn, “Iraq’s migrants from violence,” *BBC News*, Jan. 10, 2008; Michael R. Gordon, “G.I.’s Forge Sunni Tie in Bid to Squeeze Militants,” *New York Times*, July 6, 2007; Vanessa Arrington, “Most likely kidnap victims in Iraq are Iraqis,” *Associated Press*, Mar. 30, 2006; and Hamza Hendawi, “Kidnappings fund insurgent attacks,” *Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 8, 2006.

<sup>147</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-637813.

<sup>148</sup> The list of rules appears in a series of three slightly amended memos, two of which have standardized expense forms tacked on at the end, presumably to ensure that ISI operatives do their paperwork correctly. See Harmony Documents NMEC-2007-657945, NMEC-2007-657926, and NMEC-2007-657877.

<sup>149</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657945.

such record keeping creates security risks that only make sense if the group’s leaders were: (1) concerned with being cheated by their operatives; or (2) willing to give up a measure of security in order to be able to demonstrate financial propriety to a skeptical public. Both appear to have been the case for the ISI, which imposed the following strict requirement on its agents:

All properties, small and large, will be inventoried, a report will be kept. We will keep a copy of the report, and all changes will be annotated from the previous report.<sup>150</sup>

### ISI Fundraising and Spending Patterns

While the Sinjar documents do not represent a proper random sample of ISI correspondence, the expense reports provide some information on how ISI funds were allocated. Seven of the expense reports in the Sinjar documents were sufficiently detailed to provide good evidence of spending patterns. Because the reports were produced over a long time period by different administrators using widely-varying levels of detail, they provide what is at-best a rough snapshot of ISI spending patterns. Figure 1 summarizes the evidence from the five documents that contained a breakdown of incoming funds. Figure 2 summarizes the evidence from the seven documents that contain a comprehensive breakdown of ISI spending for a set period.<sup>151</sup>

*Figure 1: ISI Fundraising<sup>152</sup>*

Document Number	Incoming Funds	Fighter	Internal Transfers	ISI	Local Donations / Loot	Total Income
658021	-					
657988	52,790		22,000		735	75,525
657676	26,341				14,113	40,454
657680	3,468		2,000			5,468
657731	16,104		657			16,761
657695	2,220				1,100	3,320
<b>Total</b>						
Incoming	100,923		24,657		15,948	141,529
Percent of						
<b>Total</b>	<b>71.3</b>		<b>17.4</b>		<b>11.3</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> The periods covered by the documents vary from as little as 15 days to as much as six months. Raw amounts should not be compared across documents. The proportion of funds in each category averaged across documents is informative.

<sup>152</sup> All amounts are given in U.S. Dollars. Currency conversions completed using interbank exchange rates from Oanda on date of document or, for undated documents, on last date noted within document.

These data highlight several important patterns. Figure 32 demonstrates that the primary source of income for the ISI in this sector is money that incoming fighters bring with them. Indeed, incoming fighters contributed more than 70 percent of the ISI's funds. This underlines the central importance of information operations in limiting the foreign insurgency. As long as non-Iraqis with funds to spare view the Coalition presence in Iraq as one worth fighting, then foreign elements of the Iraqi insurgency will have a large resource base that can be used to purchase weapons, pay off local authority figures, and continue undermining the Iraqi state.

*Figure 2: ISI Spending*

Document Number	Weapons / Equipment	Personnel	Logistics	Outgoing Transfers	Other	Total Expenses
658021 - 657988	11,200	2,700	14,125	5,400	27,000	60,425
657971	62,736	10,252	1,746	0	0	74,734
657676	7,273	16,337	5,170	16,099	12	44,890
657680	11,256	470	4,712	9,050	100	25,588
657731	2,398	2,395	7,245	1,474	15	13,527
657777	14,300	21,100	19,700	7,100	1,500	63,700
657695	903	2,898	276	0	212	4,289
Total Spending	110,066	56,152	52,974	39,123	28,839	287,154
Percent of Total	<b>38.3</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>1.000</b>

Figure 2 shows that the ISI's single largest cost was purchasing weapons and other equipment such as binoculars, cell phones, and vehicles. Of the 38 percent of ISI spending devoted to weapons and equipment, roughly 60 percent went to purchase weapons and ammunition. Thus, actions such as buy-back programs that increase the cost of small arms in Iraq have great potential for increasing the costs of running the insurgency.<sup>153</sup>

Interestingly, the combined costs of bringing fighters into Iraq and sustaining them there—personnel plus logistics—amount to 38 percent of ISI spending, as much as the ISI spends on weapons.<sup>154</sup> Because the ISI relies on pay-for-service smugglers to bring personnel across the border, diplomatic efforts that convince

<sup>153</sup> While the evidence on their effects is mixed, buy-back programs appear to increase the price of small arms, but create incentives for low-level trading and import of small arms. See *Small Arms Survey 2006* (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 141-5, 258-9.

<sup>154</sup> This total likely underestimates the total costs of bringing personnel into Iraq, as a number of the outgoing transfers in the Sinjar Records are listed as going to individuals in Syria, some of whom may be involved in facilitating the movement of fighters into Iraq.

the Syrian government to crack down on its borders, thereby raising the pay smugglers will demand, can have an outsized impact by greatly increasing the risks.

### SECTION III: AGENCY THEORY AND SINJAR MANAGEMENT

The basic managerial challenge for the leaders of the Sinjar Organization is common to all terrorist organizations. For a variety of reasons, political and ideological leaders—the principals—have to delegate certain duties to middlemen or low-level operatives—their agents.<sup>155</sup> These duties can include planning attacks, soliciting funds, recruiting new operatives, and the like. Such delegation poses no problem if all the agents are perfectly committed to the cause, agree with leaders on how best to serve the cause, and receive the same information as leaders about how different actions will advance the cause. Under those conditions, the principals and their agents will agree on what actions should be taken and the agents will act exactly as the principals would like. However, preferences are not always aligned, meaning that terrorist leaders need to be concerned that their agents will take advantage of delegation to act as they prefer, not as their principals would like.<sup>156</sup>

Such “agency problems” arise when three conditions exist: (1) a principal needs to delegate certain actions or decisions to an agent; (2) the principal can neither perfectly monitor the agent’s actions, nor punish him with certainty when a transgression is identified; and (3) the agent’s preferences about what action to take are not the same as those of the principal.

Agency problems are pervasive in all organizations, from business firms, to government bureaucracies, to military units. Leaders typically exercise control over their agents through a standard set of bureaucratic tools including policy memoranda, reporting requirements, and tracking spreadsheets. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the ISI are organizations made up of human beings—albeit ones whose goals and methods many find reprehensible—and so use many of the same tools. We should not be surprised to see memoranda such as the one sent on May 27, 2007, from the “Islamic State of Iraq Salah al Deen Province Media Office,” giving five directives to all “sections and media personnel.”<sup>157</sup> The translation of one is particularly striking:

---

<sup>155</sup> For a discussion of the problems delegation posed for al-Qa`ida, see *Harmony and Disharmony*.

<sup>156</sup> See Shapiro, *The Terrorist’s Challenge*.

<sup>157</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-637927.

Request an application for every one of your soldiers in your district, if they have not done that before, please send them via postal service, in order for us to have all those who pledge of allegiance. If you do not have enough applications and if you don't have the capabilities for copying please inform our office to secure your needs.<sup>158</sup>

Agents who attack the wrong targets create immense political problems for an organization like the ISI. An AQI press release entitled "Our Chosen Answers for the Latest Bombing Turmoil" highlights the political problems that arise from poorly-targeted violence:

For those who accuse the Army of Islam with latest attacks from thefts and attacks on commercial stores and killing some of the disobedient Muslim, I say we are innocent and we have no relations with any such attacks and we are also warning those who have done it be aware of God's punishment and not to hide the truth.<sup>159</sup>

Thus, terrorist leaders face an organizational dilemma. Unless their political goals are truly millenarian—and those of AQI are not—they would like to exercise some control over their agents.<sup>160</sup> Doing so means: (1) monitoring agents, so that undesirable behavior is detected; and (2) punishing them when they do not behave as principals would like.<sup>161</sup> Both are problematic in terrorist organizations.

Monitoring reduces leaders' security because it entails additional communications and creates links between leaders and those most likely to be identified and captured by government. Certainly, the ISI's "Foreign Fighter Report[s]" create such links. Moreover, the nature of the task means leaders cannot monitor perfectly even if they want to. There is a substantial random component in whether or not a terrorist action succeeds. Leaders watching a cell have difficulty determining if a cell failed because it was not operating

---

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007- 639043.

<sup>160</sup> Even groups such as Aum Shinrikyo use bureaucratic tools to control their operatives. In Aum's case, this control seems to have been driven in large part by the need to coordinate technical activities. For background on Aum, see *Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Case Study on the Aum Shinrikyo*, Staff Statement, Senate Government Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Oct. 31, 1995.

<sup>161</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-637813 provides an example of such punishments by AQI.

faithfully—perhaps because the member in charge of logistics was misappropriating resources—or because government forces got lucky.

Even when leaders can monitor, punishing agents who take unauthorized action is costly. In terrorist groups, agents hold three implicit threats over principals: (1) they can share information with government forces; (2) they can attack the principals; or (3) they can defect to competing groups.<sup>162</sup> These threats may explain why the ISI was reluctant to take more aggressive action against one Abu Yasir, who was suspiciously associated with a series of operational failures.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, the ISI had to be concerned that members who felt mistreated or unfairly punished would leave.<sup>164</sup>

The ISI's circumstance is unique because using standard tools of management oversight entails a security cost most organizations do not face. AQI and ISI leaders were well aware of these problems. One Sinjar Organization memorandum detailing standard reporting procedures admonishes local leaders that:

All information is to be uploaded on a [flash—USB], and sent every week to the administrator of the Emirate of Borders. Due to the security risk involved, do not keep any information.<sup>165</sup>

Despite such concerns, the Sinjar Organization continued to use standardized forms, keeping lists of operatives and equipment, demanding regular reports from lower-level units, and sending intra-organizational memoranda on everything from recommendations for a movie memorializing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to what seems to be a meeting agenda with a proposed organizational chart to be discussed.<sup>166</sup> The Sinjar Organization was consistently willing to sacrifice operational security for managerial control.

---

<sup>162</sup> This may explain the presence of former AQI members in the “Sons of Iraq” groups.

<sup>163</sup> Abu Yasir’s supervisor, Husayn, tells Jasim, the ISI administrator, that “the man [Abu-Yasir] is very suspicious.... [H]e should be placed in non-sensitive locations and put under surveillance.” Harmony Document NMEC-2007-658086.

<sup>164</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657850.

<sup>165</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657926.

<sup>166</sup> Harmony Documents NMEC-2007-657694, NMEC-2007-658008, NMEC-2007-658070, NMEC-2007-657674, NMEC-2007-657911, NMEC-2007-657926, NMEC-2007-657945, NMEC-2007-637123, and NMEC-2007-657738, respectively.

This is not surprising. Historically, the most common source of conflict between terrorist leaders and their operatives is that the operators use violence more wantonly than their leaders intend. People who are good at conducting violent operations, and thus make ideal recruits for a terrorist group, often have an underlying preference for violence that compels them to seek more violence than is politically desirable.<sup>167</sup> The ISI surely faced this dynamic. Many of the ISI's fighters were foreigners who had traveled long distances to kill and die for a cause they deeply believed in; it is likely that many others were susceptible to the ISI's recruitment pitch because they had become disenfranchised from their primary social groups. These fighters came from a wide variety of countries and socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>168</sup> They were exactly the type of diverse, highly-motivated group of operatives that should be expected to seek out violence and combat for its own sake, over and above the contribution to the ISI's political goals within Iraq. Outside of any other considerations, ISI leaders likely had a great need to exercise control simply due to the nature of their operatives.

In practice, events on the ground likely increased the demand for control by ISI leaders throughout the period covered in these documents. According to many accounts, AQI's relationship with the local population in western Iraq began to sour in the summer of 2006.<sup>169</sup> The popular rejection of AQI and its foreign fighters is reflected in the drop in attacks against US forces in Anbar province that began in September 2006. For the ISI, carefully-targeted violence and the appearance of financial efficiency became critical elements in a struggle for legitimacy in the eyes of the locals.<sup>170</sup> The ISI had to both control operations and convince the locals it was doing so. Seemingly obscure bureaucratic actions, such as having the group's financial administrator notarize the outgoing leader's

---

<sup>167</sup> For examples see Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Challenge*, pp. 34-37.

<sup>168</sup> For a summary of the characteristics of the fighters in the Sinjar records, see Felter and Fishman, *Foreign Fighters in Iraq*.

<sup>169</sup> A good summary of how this process played out in Ramadi can be found in Kimberly Kagan, "The Anbar Awakening: Displacing al-Qa`ida from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq," *Iraq Report* (The Weekly Standard, 2007). See also Bill Roggio, "Securing Eastern Anbar Province," *The Long War Journal*, June 15, 2007.

<sup>170</sup> For an analysis of the ISI's "pitch" to Iraqis and the wider Arab world see Brian Fishman, *Fourth Generation Governance: Sheikh Tamimi defends the Islamic State of Iraq* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2007).. For a discussion focused on divisions between Sunni insurgent groups, see Evan F. Kohlmann, "State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq," available at <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/iraqreport0807.pdf> (last visited Feb. 21, 2008).

report on group activities in September 2006, enabled the ISI to present itself as a disciplined, well-run, financially circumspect organization.<sup>171</sup>

## **SECTION IV: IMPLICATIONS FOR COIN AND CT**

The theoretical discussion above combined with evidence about the finances and management of the Sinjar Organization carries a number of implications for both counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. This section outlines these implications.

### **Information Operations Can Drive Intelligence**

Information operations (IO) can generate intelligence in a manner similar to traditional combat operations. The US Army counterinsurgency field manual notes that counterinsurgent “operations produce intelligence that drives subsequent operations.”<sup>172</sup> One implication of the Sinjar Organization’s extensive financial record keeping is that IO, which focuses on financial improprieties by insurgents, can increase their need for record-keeping. This will, on average, increase the intelligence gained from traditional combat operations, driving further operations and providing material to be used in further information campaigns.

### **Terrorist Bureaucracy is a Useful Measure**

All else being equal, groups that are losing public support because of imprecise violence will exercise greater oversight over operatives. Thus, one possible indicator of a decline in popular support for insurgents is an increase in the density of bureaucratic minutiae captured during raids.

### **Finances Can be Constrained through Non-Combat Means**

The Sinjar Organization appears to have relied on the services of outside contractors to move individuals across the border from Syria. Those contractors presumably charge a fee that reflects the level of risk they are taking in moving people for the ISI. By threatening these contractors, perhaps by convincing the Syrian security forces to patrol the border more aggressively, Coalition forces can increase the ISI’s logistical costs without engaging the group directly. Though difficult, such a strategy is easier than preventing extortion by insurgents or stopping would-be suicide bombers from bringing money across the border.

---

<sup>171</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-658016.

<sup>172</sup> FM 3-24, “Counterinsurgency,” Dec. 15, 2006, pp. 1-23.



Likewise, the largest single item in the Sinjar Organization's budget was weapons and equipment. By undertaking programs that artificially inflate the costs of these goods, such as weapons buy-back programs, Coalition forces may greatly increase the costs to insurgent organizations.

### **The Culture of Martyrdom Provides Resources but Creates Political Liabilities**

One striking feature of the Sinjar financial records is the extent to which the Sinjar Organization relied on incoming martyrdom-seekers to finance its operations. This finding has two key implications. First, efforts to make martyrdom fighting in Iraq less desirable to idealistic young men in the Arab world will reduce the supply of both recruits and finances to foreign elements of the Iraqi insurgency. Second, selling themselves in non-Iraqi media markets as an organization that executes successful martyrdom operations is crucial for the ISI and other foreign insurgent organizations because doing so effectively finances the organization by attracting martyrs and their cash. Thus, the use of suicide bombings in Iraq is not simply driven by the tactical utility of the tactic, or by competition with other groups inside Iraq, but by the need to bring in monetary resources. This in turn suggests there will always be pressure on foreign elements of the insurgency to use more suicide bombings than would be ideal given local conditions.

# Chapter 4

## On the Ground from Syria to Iraq

### INTRODUCTION

The Sinjar Records are a partial collection of the logistical, financial and personnel records of Border Sector 1 (the Sinjar Organization) of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the organization created by Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in October 2006 to succeed the Mujahidin Shura Council (MSC). While the MSC was an effort to create a sort of “Popular Front” organization that would make the resistance led by AQI seem a more Iraqi than foreign entity, the ISI was intended as a genuine government that was totally to subsume AQI; it is intended as nothing less than a parallel entity to the government of Iraq.<sup>173</sup>

The Border Emirate of the ISI is that part of the administration charged with organizing the cross-border transit of volunteers and supplies into and out of Iraq, and with maintaining the network of personnel, facilities, and transportation assets needed to support and execute this mission. This chapter describes the geography, demographics, and smuggling networks along the Syrian-Iraqi border. It also explores AQI’s manipulation of these factors, as well as the logistical and financial function of the Sinjar Organization.

### Nineveh Governorate

The Nineveh governorate has been a significant theater in the counterinsurgency campaign that followed the collapse of the Ba’ath government in Iraq. In the first two months of 2008, 142 insurgents had been killed or captured in the city of Mosul alone. Indeed, the city has been described by US military spokesmen as the “strategic center of gravity” for AQI, due to its proximity to the Syrian border and its position at the confluence of a number of transportation routes.<sup>174</sup> The bulk of the Border Emirate records captured with the Sinjar documents refer to the administrative affairs of Border Sector 1, referred to as Syria-Ba’aj, during

---

<sup>173</sup> “Popular Front” refers to the political tactic practiced by European communist parties during the 1920s and 1930s under the direction of the Comintern (Communist International, a Soviet-controlled league of national communist parties); communists would set up coalitions of parties, including non-communists, with a shared goal in opposing a given national government, and then work from inside the Front to take control of the other coalition members.

<sup>174</sup> Patrick Quinn, “US Military Kills Al-Qaida Leader,” *Associated Press*, Mar. 2, 2008. According to US Navy Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, “[o]ne-half to two-thirds of all attacks in Iraq today are in and around Mosul.” *Ibid.*

2006 and 2007. This appears to correspond to the Iraqi district of *al-Ba'aj*, one of the ten districts that compose the Governorate of Nineveh, the capital of which is the city of Mosul.<sup>175</sup>

Figure 1: Map of Nineveh Governorate<sup>176</sup>



### Physical Environment

The border region covered by the districts of Tal Afar, Al-Ba'aj, and Sinjar are characterized by low, rolling prairies somewhat reminiscent of the high plains of North America. The most striking terrain feature is the Jabal Sinjar, a range of hills north of Highway #715 that runs from Mosul to the border and on to the

<sup>175</sup> These are Al-Ba'aj, Hatra, Sinjar, Mosul, Tel Afar, Tel Kaif, Al-Hamdaniya, Al-Shikhan, Shekhan, and Aqra. Of these, Tal Afar, Sinjar, and Al-Ba'aj comprise the Governorate's border with Syria. Aqra and Shekhan, two of the districts which border on Iraqi Kurdistan, are under the control of the government of the Kurdish Autonomous Region (KAR).

<sup>176</sup> Produced by the Humanitarian Information Centre of Iraq, available at [www.uniraq.org/library/maps.asp](http://www.uniraq.org/library/maps.asp).

Syrian city of Hasake. The region is on the ancient migration trail of the nomadic Bedouin tribes who moved from the Nejd, in what is now Saudi Arabia, to Syria. The tribes followed paths through grasslands that provided pasture for their flocks, the foundation of their wealth. The terrain was an important influence on Bedouin tribal culture, which was built around the need of sprawling tribes to have one leader to make critical decisions about when to move to fresh pasturelands. Travel too early, and the grasslands would not have had a chance to come to life after the spring rains; livestock would starve. Travel too late, and the summer heat would have evaporated the pools and streams that provided water for the flocks, and the grass would have withered in the summer heat.<sup>177</sup> As one moves south along the border, towards the Euphrates river valley and the border crossing of Al Qaim (Iraq)/Albu Kamel (Syria), the land remains flat, marked by low rolling hills.

### **Transportation**

As one proceeds from eastern Syria into western Iraq, the road network concentrates until there are only two areas where the border can be crossed on a paved road. One of these is the area around Sinjar, which is remarkable for having two crossings, at Al Yahrubiyah and Al Haw (Syrian names). Moreover, there is a network of unofficial paths and trails, some quite broad and firmly packed, crossing the border in this area. The only other paved crossing is a considerable distance south at Al Qa'im/Abu Kamal.

Once over the border into Iraq, all roads in the north converge steadily on Mosul; if one crosses into Iraq from anywhere in northeastern Syria, it is almost impossible to avoid the city if travelling by road. Mosul's social and political gravity is powerful even if one crosses the border covertly on foot, as a wheeled vehicle must eventually pick up him or her, and thus once again the traveler is channeled towards Mosul.<sup>178</sup> Thus, Nineveh is a chokepoint of sorts, standing

---

<sup>177</sup> The empty, rolling plains are useful for other purposes as well. The first US unit to garrison Nineveh Governorate, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, occupied an abandoned Iraqi military base in Sinjar District near the Syrian border, and this became the site of a sniper training center set up by the U.S. National Guard Marksmanship Training Center; both Iraqi and American personnel continue to receive training there. The site was chosen because of the flat ground and sparse population.

"Sinjar," *GlobalSecurity.org*, available

at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/sinjar.htm> (last visited June 10, 2008).

<sup>178</sup> The one exception to this rule is the road which turns south, from the highway running from the border through Sinjar to Mosul, after passing the city of Tal Afar. This road runs south to Baiji, but again, there are no major roads crossing it prior to Baiji which do not again route the traveler back to Mosul.

between the critical battlefield of Baghdad to the south, and the (relative) sanctuary of Syria to the north and west.

Figure 2: Northern Iraq Transportation Map<sup>179</sup>



## SMUGGLING ON THE SYRIAN FRONTIER

### Tribal Disaffection in Syria

Despite a history of authoritarian governments in Baghdad and Damascus, the Syrian-Iraqi border region is surprisingly independent of centralized control. Many Syrian tribal sheikhs do not support or trust either the Syrian government or the Syrian Ba'ath party, and they have grown increasingly disaffected over the past several years due to the government's inability to cushion the tribes from Syria's deteriorating economy.<sup>180</sup> Corrupt regime agents—appointed officials, governors, and officers in the security services — have exacerbated resentment. Corruption itself is not what offends the sheikhs; rather, the problem is the increased size of bribes demanded and the number of officials claiming an ever-larger share of revenues in both the black-market and legal economy.

<sup>179</sup> Map from NGO Coordination Committee Iraq, available at: [http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf/Iraq\\_north\\_-\\_Transportation.pdf](http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf/Iraq_north_-_Transportation.pdf) (last visited June 27, 2008).

<sup>180</sup> Author's interviews in Euphrates Valley, Syria (between Dayr-al-Zawr and Abu Kamal), September to October 2006.

In the wake of the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2006, the regime appears to be trying to compensate for the loss of illicit revenues — which formed a critically important lubricant in keeping the Damascus regime functioning — by encouraging cabals of officials to seek new sources of funds among the population of eastern Syria. Elements of the security forces once stationed in Lebanon have appeared in and around Hasake, Syria’s easternmost city (and a place widely regarded among Levantine Syrians as somewhat akin to a foreign place populated by barbarians—Turks, Kurds, and the like). Smugglers report that exactions by government officials almost doubled in 2007, from 10-15 percent of capital invested in a given transaction to almost 30 percent, which is widely seen as excessive.<sup>181</sup>

### **The Smuggling Economy on the Frontier**

Like all frontiers, the rules of daily life along the Iraqi-Syrian border work quite differently than in the metropolitan centers. The social reality of the border is dominated by the tribes, whose relationship to the national capitals and elites based in Damascus and Baghdad is historically uneasy and arms-length. The economy is dominated by illicit traffic across the border. Both national governments have depended, economically and politically, on such traffic, which imposes limits on the ability of either country to stop cross-border trafficking, police the frontier, or stop the cross-border flow of militants.

Historically, the Ba’ath regimes in Syria and Iraq emphasized rural education and development, meaning that the nomadic Bedouin became increasingly sedentary, turning to farming and paid labor. These developments, in turn, greatly undercut the role of the sheikhs. It is therefore unsurprising that Bedouin tribesmen on the Syrian side of the border have demonstrated considerable envy and interest in the rising prominence of tribal leaders under the American-directed counterinsurgency program, which has given these men patronage resources—jobs and funds—and at least the appearance of influence with the United States and the government in Baghdad. The interest of the Syrian sheikhs is heightened by their relative disaffection with the regime in Damascus, which is seen as alien in its values; the large, cosmopolitan cities like Damascus and

---

<sup>181</sup> Interviews by the author in Abu Kamal and Euphrates river valley of Syria, October 2005 and November 2007. Contacts in the smuggling community also noted the inflationary effects of the higher pay for Iraqi border guards and customs officials being offered as part of anti-corruption measures by the United States and Iraqi governments. The Iraqi border officials remain heavily involved in smuggling, but smugglers have had to increase the amount paid to the Iraqis in absolute terms in order to remain competitive with the salaries.

Latakiya are a world away from the predominantly rural lives of the eastern Bedouin. The regime is also seen as heretical in its religious affiliations—the Alawi’ite faith of the ruling Assad family is regarded by orthodox Sunni at best as a form of Shi’ism, and at worst as a form of paganism.

### **The Business of Smuggling**

To call the unofficial cross border trade between Syria and Iraq “smuggling” is to do it a considerable disservice. Such “smuggling” is long-standing and has been vital to the welfare and prosperity of the populations of western Iraq and eastern Syria since the two states were formed. Although the commodities have shifted over time, the basic modalities of such commerce continue: syndicates of trader/investors in either Iraq or Syria, usually in cities, purchase locally inexpensive goods that can be sold at a profit across the border if duties are not paid. These syndicates retain the services of Bedouin tribesmen living near the border to carry the cargo across the border by utilizing an intimate knowledge of the terrain and the timing and routine of police and border guard patrols.

The mechanism for crossing the border is usually a function of the bulk and value of the cargo being “smuggled.” By far the most prevalent commodity moved illicitly between Jordan, Iraq, and Syria is livestock, particularly cattle, goats and sheep intended for sale in urban markets. These are moved in large flocks, usually by Bedouin shepherds, who move their charges across borders in very remote areas, where they are picked up and moved to market by trucks owned by or contracted to the importing syndicate. The smugglers will pay border officials for safe passage, and frequently the importing syndicate will include government officials in Damascus.

Less bulky cargoes such as cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, refined fuels (gasoline, diesel and kerosene), alcohol, gold, guns, consumer electronics, and other goods often move through regulated crossings and rely on payments to border officials as well as more generalized purchases of protection. This is proportionately more expensive, but the increased value of the commodity being moved more than covers the increased costs of graft. These smaller goods are often moved in specially-modified vehicles—SUVs and passenger cars transformed in workshops along the border into rolling storage tanks.

Extremely high value, “sensitive” cargoes require techniques that are more stringent. Such cargo includes higher value pharmaceuticals (both medicinal and recreational drugs), specialty weapons (rocket propelled grenades, mortars, and explosives), and certain types of people—*i.e.*, Jihadis, political refugees, and

the like. Persons in this category, if traveling alone, are provided with false documents and moved through controlled crossings. Large groups of people—such as foreign fighters—cross the border in remote locations, often using the same tracks and trails as the livestock smugglers. In fact, the same ring of smuggling guides will often move both livestock and human beings.

As in any industry, the Iraqi-Syrian smuggling industry is segmented. Some elements—often local Bedouin guides—specialize in crossing borders in remote locations, while others may specialize in moving cargoes through controlled crossings. Those moving cargo through controlled crossings may require good intelligence about personnel assignments and rotations, and relatively large amounts of capital to pay two entire guard shifts (Iraqi and Syrian) at a border station. The second group also specializes in providing services to smugglers: water tanker trucks to meet flocks of sheep in remote areas, customized SUVs to smuggle fuel, forged documents, and so on.

### **Smugglers and States**

During the period when United Nations (UN) sanctions were imposed upon Iraq, the smuggling trade boomed. While the regime in Iraq had long winked at some level of illicit cross-border trade, it became a true pillar of the state under the sanctions regime, necessary not only to the establishment and expansion of private fortunes, but to the funding of government operations. During this period, the Iraqi border security forces moved from being a security agency to a regulatory agency. The focus of their operations increasingly became the “taxation” of cross-border trade, with sanctions reserved for those traders who attempted to move cargo across the border without first acquiring the necessary protection from vertically-integrated rings of officials that reached all the way to Saddam’s inner circle—frequently members of his family.<sup>182</sup>

On the Syrian side, trafficking has long-served a similar economic and political function. Like their Iraqi counterparts, the Syrian border-patrol agencies regulated the trade, but were more focused on taxing it than on prevention. The revenues from the trade pacified local tribal populations that would otherwise have been substantially disaffected, and graft was a valuable tool for cementing the loyalty of officials and businessmen to the regime. In Syria, the trafficking system is organized into independent rings of smugglers, generally

---

<sup>182</sup> The Saddam family member who sat at the top of a given smuggling organization was referred to as a “roof.” Some rings specialized in the export or import of particular commodities, such as cement, while others moved a variety of goods.



transportation specialists who operate within a given territory and pay an established tribute to one of several officials with authority in that area. For example, in the border districts of Dayr-al-Zayr province, which includes the city of Abu Kamel, the officials would include the local representative of the provincial governor, the head of the city administration, the local army commander, and the head of military intelligence for the province. There remains considerable room for individual smugglers to try to operate independently, relying on one-time deals with local patrons and low-level border security officers.

The policy of engagement between security forces and smugglers has some advantages. In Syria, it provides a valuable economic safety valve for the local population by generating a ready flow of jobs and capital that functions as a safety cushion in the face of general economic decline. To some extent, it saves the government in Damascus from having to invest scarce resources in a region seen as remote from the regime's heartland. From a security perspective, the close business linkages between the security forces and rings of smugglers and traders operating across the Iraqi border permits the generation of valuable intelligence and yokes self-interest on the part of the state agents with national interest. Since allowing smugglers to operate without taking on silent partners from the state means lost revenue for state officials, these officials are energetic in identifying and suppressing smugglers who do not pay for protection.

The flip side of the arrangement, of course, is that efforts to stop the trade in a given commodity—Jihadis, for example— or to crack down on illicit trading in general, will face resistance from smugglers and local officials alike, which is difficult to overcome given the distance of the region from Damascus. Dayr al-Zawr is 650 kilometers from the capital; Abu Kamel and the border crossing to Sinjar are even farther. Given these distances and the difficulty of monitoring official behavior, leakage should be expected, particularly if the financial benefits offered by a group like AQI are considerable. Moreover, the vertical integration of the trade—with business groups and officials in Damascus invested in cross-border trade—means that any crackdown will generate opposition and resistance from within the elite itself. This dynamic tends to limit both the extent and the effectiveness of any such effort.

Interestingly, a similar dynamic may be at work in Iraq—at least in Anbar province—with American support. It is a fact that there is a strong commercial subtext to the ebb and flow of insurgent and counterinsurgent success in western Iraq. The uprising by tribal elements in Anbar against AQI predates the surge

policies and has in fact been heavily driven by commercial competition between certain tribally-based smuggler networks objecting to the intrusion of AQI-affiliated groups into their trade.<sup>183</sup>

The net result of these social and political dynamics has been a Syrian policy of spasmodic, but effective, cooperation with the Iraqi and Coalition authorities on specific smuggling cases, coupled with high-visibility, but ineffective, efforts to appear as though they are cracking down even harder. For example, the Syrian government has invested in the repair and expansion of a trench along the border, and has constructed concrete guard stations at regular intervals in line of sight along the trench line. These are staffed by 3-man teams of conscripts, who are not equipped with communications or night vision gear. Provisions—bread, eggs, and tea—are dropped off by truck approximately every 7-10 days. In the event of trouble, the guards are to fire shots into the air, and a relief force will be sent from neighboring posts or from the sector headquarters. The guards generally take a very passive approach and rarely venture far from their posts, especially at night. They are not considered a serious impediment by smugglers, especially because the guards themselves are not from the border area and thus are unfamiliar both with the terrain and with the local inhabitants.<sup>184</sup>

## AL-QA`IDA AND SYRIA

### The Border and the Jihadis

Several distinct waves of volunteers have traveled to Iraq to fight American forces. The first wave responded to the call from Saddam Hussein and travelled to Iraq prior to the US invasion. A considerable number of these were tribal fighters from eastern Syria. Saddam had developed considerable support amongst the Bedouin tribes of eastern Syria, who looked in envy at the resources Iraq poured into developing the tribal regions of Anbar Province and the preferred status given men from the area in the Iraqi military and security services. Furthermore, Iraqi propaganda emphasized Saddam's own tribal roots,

---

<sup>183</sup> The most sophisticated analysis of the tribal uprising is A.G. Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival* 50:2 (April-May 2008): 67-94. Note in particular pages 77-79, where the author argues that uprisings against AQI began with local revolts by the Albu Mahal subtribe of the Dulaimi confederation in May 2005 in the city of Qaim, as the tribe sought to defend several ongoing smuggling operations. A number of the leading members of the Anbar Salvation Council, including the founding member, Sheikh Sattar al-Rishawi of the Albu Risha, were well-known smugglers and longtime AQI allies who rose up only after AQI moved in on their business activities.

<sup>184</sup> Reasons given by the guards include both a disinclination to encounter smugglers by accident and a fear of being mistaken for smugglers or insurgents by American patrols.

which made him seem a more congenial figure to the tribesmen than the ruling elite in Syria, whose members are largely drawn from large cities in the west. During this period, mobilization and border crossing from Syria into Iraq was done openly. The mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, Sheikh Ahmed Kaftaro, called on Muslim youth to fight the American invasion, and sermons broadcast from mosques in Abu Kamal and in Dayr al-Zawr repeated the message. In border villages and cities, houses were donated for volunteers to live in while local notables—both religious and tribal figures—organized transportation and accommodations for them in Iraq. According to local sources, hundreds of fighters passed through Abu Kamal and Hasake just before the US invasion, leading to rapid increases in the cost of housing, food and weapons—all of which greatly benefited the locals.<sup>185</sup> The Syrian authorities monitored the flow, but made no move to stop it.

Following the rapid defeat of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, the volunteer movement ebbed. The government in Damascus deployed additional resources to the border areas and, in particular, increased checkpoints along the main roads between Dayr al-Zawr and Abu Kamal, the favored highway for those heading into Iraq. Traffic entering Abu Kamal was channeled through two checkpoints on the outskirts of the city, at al Jazeerah and al Shamiyyeh; persons entering who could not prove residence in the city (shown in government-issued identification) were refused entry into the city itself.

A second wave of volunteers, many of them Saudi, passed through the Syrian border communities in the summer of 2004, during the first battle of Fallujah. Government restrictions on movement remained in place during this period, but there was considerable outrage among the local population about the events in Fallujah. Social discontent, coupled with effective efforts to set up permanent safe houses and transit arrangements for fighters transiting Syria, ensured that the flow of fighters continued.<sup>186</sup> Significantly, this logistical effort included

---

<sup>185</sup> A resident of Abu Kamal interviewed by the author noted that not only did many Bedouin tribesmen go to fight, but that hundreds of Arabs from the Gulf States passed through the border, as well as a sprinkling of “exotics,” which included Pakistanis, Indonesians, Afghans, and Yemenis. One correspondent stated that the price of a Kalashnikov rifle – the preferred weapon of Bedouin tribesmen in the area, who have a gun loving culture akin to that of Texas - doubled from \$400 to \$800. There was also a significant inflation in rental costs for housing.

<sup>186</sup> Smugglers working with Jihadi groups purchased safe houses and vehicles in several border communities on the Syrian side, as well as stockpiling weapons, medical equipment, and other items. In a number of cases, these moves represented an institutionalizing of arrangements which had existed since 2003 – houses that had been rented were now purchased outright, along with vehicles, *etc.*

massive bribes to a number of Syrian mukhabarat officials and appeared to have some success in neutralizing government efforts to secure the border.

The third wave of foreign fighters transiting Syria began with the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and continues today. The numbers of fighters have decreased over this period, but the logistical network to move them has grown more organized. Meanwhile, local support for human smuggling has declined, in part because of social disaffection with al-Qa`ida's tactics in Iraq. Specifically, the cruelty and violence of AQI has had an impact on the Syrian side of the border, where much of the population had family and clan links with victims of AQI violence in Anbar province. This hostility increased when local Syrian leaders who criticized the conduct of the resistance received written death threats stating they would be beheaded if they continued to do so in public. Nevertheless, local opposition to the presence of American forces in Iraq remains very strong, as does antipathy to the Shi'ite dominated Iraqi government.

### **Al-Qa`ida's Syrian Problem**

Syria offers AQI extraordinary opportunities, but deeply threatens it at the same time. The Syrian regime would be unlikely to tolerate the actual use of Syrian territory as a base from which to launch attacks into Iraq; but it is willing—and to a certain extent, unable to resist—Syrian territory being used as a rear base for AQI. If sufficiently motivated, the regime could crack down on AQI activities in eastern Syria, and has in fact done so when the risk of an American military response seemed real. However, such a crackdown could not be sustained indefinitely given the economic realities on the border. The regime needs the revenue derived from “taxing” illicit cross-border trading and the sympathies of the local population, who are linked by blood and religion to the tribes of Anbar and who are ill-disposed toward the government in Damascus and the current government in Baghdad.

At the same time, AQI's reliance on personnel and facilities in Syria requires a certain degree of discretion to avoid provoking the regime in Damascus and the local authorities in the border provinces. This fine balance makes AQI vulnerable, as the group's smuggling elements retain considerable autonomy within the structure of the insurgency. The organization relies heavily upon their efficient operation both for funds and for specialist manpower, but they are not subject to strict disciplinary measures and they have abundant opportunities to skim funds and other resources.

## DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

This report is being released with a trove of logistical and financial documents that provide insight into the Islamic State of Iraq's Border District 1—the Sinjar Organization. The financial documents, analyzed in Chapter 3 by Jacob Shapiro, offer a fascinating glimpse into the financing and spending patterns of the Sinjar Organization. They also offer clues to leadership dynamics of the organization. The logistical documents—especially documents related to the cross-border transits by ISI personnel apparently intended for duty as suicide bombers—offer similar insights. This chapter offers some additional comments on the financial documents, but focuses primarily on AQI's logistical maneuvering.

### Financial Documents

Many of the Sinjar Documents are financial records for Border Sector 1, also referred to on some occasions as “Syria-Ba’aj” or, in this document, as the Sinjar Organization. This appears to be the border area of Ba’aj district, immediately west of the Sinjar district on the Syrian-Iraqi frontier.<sup>187</sup> Interestingly, AQI seems to have adopted the administrative boundaries of the state of Iraq. This is a somewhat unusual practice for an insurgent organization; guerrillas often make an effort to create confusion by setting up alternative administrative networks to complicate jurisdictional problems for state security forces.

The Sinjar Organization's financial health evolved dramatically over the period covered in the Sinjar Documents. At least some of these changes may be related to the region's commander. Someone identified as Abu Abdallah al-Ansari was the border administrator from 15 March 2006 to 16 September 2006, a period of some financial turbulence. As mentioned in Chapter 3, document NMEC-2007-658021 refers to a shortage of funds from 15 March 2006 to 20 July 2006 because the “coordinating brothers” in Syria apparently kept the funds carried by fighters and suicide bombers in transit. This problem was resolved after 20 July and the financial health of the command was restored.

The turnaround may in part be attributed to a change of command. Abu Muthanna al-Ansari took command of Border Sector 1 in the fall of 2006, a period of increased financial health and steady improvement in terms of standardization and detail of financial reporting.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> See, *e.g.*, Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657998.

<sup>188</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-658021.

Importantly, the records suggest that spending on cross-border transit of foreign fighters was relatively stable, insofar as it took place against a backdrop of increasing efforts to improve security controls on the Iraqi-Syrian frontier. The US efforts do not seem to have greatly increased the financial cost of cross border transportation, at least during the period under examination.

A secondary inference may be drawn from the heavy spending on salaries and support, which appears to equal spending on the Border Emirate's primary mission. While the bulk of foreign fighters entering Iraq *via* the Emirate may be young single males, the majority of the permanent manpower appears to have families requiring support. Indeed, as will be outlined in the following section, Border Emirate personnel rosters and pay records routinely record the marital status of individual fighters and whether or not they have dependents and property. Of 46 men listed in one such roster, only 11 are single, but three have dependents nonetheless.<sup>189</sup> The permanent staff of the Border Emirate, thus, is mature, settled, and responsible, with heavy family responsibilities to match their undercover duties.

A third observation arises from the connection between the Border Emirate's revenues and the traffic in foreign fighters and suicide bombers: the funds that the foreign fighters bring with them form a very considerable part of the operating revenue for the Emirate. The source of these funds is less than clear; the fighters and bombers themselves are unlikely in most cases to be wealthy, and on balance it seems more likely that the recruiting network that funnels men to Iraq also serves as a fundraising network, and the traveling fighters are a convenient vector by which to send funds to support the struggle.

### **Logistical Documents**

The Sinjar logistical documents are a series of reports—each of which covers a period ranging from one to six weeks—reporting the numbers of foreign fighters and suicide bombers entering through the Border Emirate, and salary rosters showing pay to the permanent establishment of the Emirate—that is, the fighters and other personnel permanently assigned. The numbers in this section do not correspond directly to Felter and Fishman's analysis of AQI's personnel records for incoming fighters in Chapter Two. However, because many of those records do not include the date of a fighter's arrival in Iraq, this information helps us fill out our understanding of the scope and pace of AQI's border operation.

---

<sup>189</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-658070.

The documents analyzed here demonstrate that AQI's border transit operation was extremely impressive, bespeaking a well-organized institution functioning at a high operational tempo in a high-risk environment.

Figure 3: ISI Logistical Records

Doc. Number	Dates Covered	Days in Range	Number of Fighters
NMEC-2007-657973	9/16/06-10/25/06	39	104 <sup>190</sup>
NMEC-2007-657752 <sup>191</sup>	12/31/06-1/25/07	25	33
NMEC-2007-657850	02/01/06-02/09/06	8	33
NMEC-2007-657775	02/13/06-03/02/06	17	37
NMEC-2007-657927	03/05/07-04/03/07	29	42
NMEC-2007-657820 <sup>192</sup>	04/01/07-05/24/07	54	32
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>281</b>

### The Pipeline: Frequency of Delivery

Over the roughly six-month span between September 16, 2006 and May 24, 2007, the Border Emirate oversaw the transit of 281 fighters into Iraq from Syria.<sup>193</sup> The personnel records analyzed in Chapter 2 suggest that the bulk of these incoming Jihadis were suicide bombers, but a significant fraction were regular fighters, some of whom may have possessed specialized skills. A crude average of the period covered by these records shows a delivery rate of 1.6 foreign fighters per day, or 48 fighters in a 30-day period.

<sup>190</sup> This number is low – one group of incoming fighters was of unknown size.

<sup>191</sup> This document gives dates in the Islamic calendar – Duh-al Hijja 1428 H and Muharram 1428. The year appears to be incorrectly translated; it should be Duh-al Hijja 1427. Duh-al Hijja corresponds to December, and 1428 to 2007. December 2007 would be after the date the Sinjar documents were seized.

The same document appears twice in the records, the second time as Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657683. In the latter version, the dates have been translated, but the year for Duh-al Hijja/December is still 2007.

<sup>192</sup> This document does not conform to the standard format used in the other reports, but is a roster of names and dates of entry for suicide bombers. It is worthy of note that where dates overlap – April 1 and 3 – with Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657927, the two documents do not agree. For example, on 3 April, NMEC-2007-657927 lists 4 foreign fighters entering, two fighters and two suicide bombers. NMEC-2007-657820 lists eight suicide bombers entering on that day.

<sup>193</sup> This figure may not jive completely with Felter and Fishman's conclusions in Chapter 2. Felter and Fishman's figures are derived directly from the collection of personnel records known as the Sinjar Records. The 281 figure comes from reporting documents passed among AQI personnel in northwestern Iraq.

In any logistics operation, providing a regular flow of goods is more important than the overall volume. An organization that spasmodically delivers large quantities, but which operates unpredictably and is frequently crippled by disorganization or inefficiency renders forward planning impossible. This can be almost as bad as having no logistics operation at all.

The achievements of the AQI network can be better judged by examining the variations in the sizes of the groups brought into the country, and in the elapsed time between deliveries. The mean variation in delivery times—the organization’s ability to deliver regularly—is a particularly powerful measure; it serves as a shorthand indicator of the reliability and robustness of the trafficking network as it operates in the face of an unpredictable and hostile environment.

Mean variations are calculated by averaging the elapsed time between the arrival of groups of fighters in Sinjar, as described in each of the documents listed above. For example, in NMEC-2007-657973, the intervals (in days) between the arrivals of groups of fighters are 3, 11, 3, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 7. The average interval then is:  $38/8 = 4.75$ .

*Figure 4: Mean Variation in Foreign Fighter Arrival Dates*

<b>Doc. Number</b>	<b>Calculation</b>	<b>Mean Interval</b>	<b>Mean Variation</b>
NMEC-2007-657973	$3+11+3+5+4+3+2+7=38/8$	4.75	.15
NMEC-2007-657752	$1+12+1+3=17/4$	4.5	-.1
NMEC-2007-657850	$2+4+2=8/3=$	2.7	-1.9
NMEC-2007-657775	$2+3+5+7=17/4=$	4.5	-.1
NMEC-2007-657927 <sup>194</sup>	$6+2+3+7+8+2=28/6=$	4.6	0
NMEC-2007-657820	$2+6+25+4+3+9+3=48/7$	6.8	2.8
	<b>Mean of Mean Intervals</b>	<b>4.6</b>	

If we discard the two outlier documents, NMEC-2007-657850—a very small batch of 3 deliveries—and NMEC-2007-657820—a much larger period than the others, the Emirate smuggling operation approaches clockwork status. The network delivered a new group of fighters and suicide bombers roughly every 4.5 days, with near perfect reliability, over a span of six months. This regularity was achieved in the face of presumably determined efforts to detect and disrupt the

<sup>194</sup> The translation of this document appears to contain an error, noting the arrival of a group of two fighters and two suicide bombers on March 1; this date should be March 11.



operation and losses to Iraqi government and Coalition action, as well as the accidents that tend to plague any organization during wartime.<sup>195</sup>

### The Pipeline III: Group Size Variations

Mean group sizes may be calculated in the same manner as the variations in delivery timing. Beginning again with NMEC-2007-657973, the calculation is  $15+14+15+10+10+15+15+10/8 = 13$ .

*Figure 5: Size of Fighter Groups Crossing Syrian Border*

Doc. Number	Mean Group Size
NMEC-2007-657752	13
NMEC-2007-65752	5
NMEC-2207-657850	8.25
NMEC-2007-657775	7.4
NMEC-2007-657927	6
NMEC-2007-657820	4

The average group size was 7.25 people. While a lack of variation in delivery timing demonstrates organizational strength, this form of stability is less admirable where delivery sizes are concerned. For a military organization, built-in slack capacity—that is, an ability to handle suddenly larger amounts without undue dislocation—is a useful asset that provides an ability to react quickly to unexpected demands. The spikes in demonstrated carrying capacity described in NMEC-2007-657973 and NMEC-2007-657850 imply that AQI's Syrian infrastructure was capable of surging housing and transport for larger numbers of incoming fighters in order to maintain scheduled deliveries with minimal disruption.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Self-Financing

The Border Emirate is at least partially self-financing. It collects funds and other valuable items held by incoming fighters. Disrupting the transportation and warehousing networks in Syria may cause short-term financial disruptions, but

---

<sup>195</sup> NMEC-2007-657927 describes two distinct periods, with a 25 day gap between them. If this is treated as two separate operating periods, one stretching from April 1-9, and the second from May 5-21, we generate two new means of  $2+6/2=4$ , and  $4+3+9+3/4=4.75$  – both fitting perfectly with the tight average mean.

the value of such efforts should not be overstated; the Emirate can, and frequently has, applied to a higher command level for supplemental funds.

### **The Trafficking Organization Is Well-Organized**

The trafficking network is well-organized and proficient. It possesses the ability to maintain a regular schedule of border transits and can absorb considerable variations in the numbers of travelers being moved. The Syrian component of the network is probably not as disciplined as are AQI members inside Iraq, and likely relies on paid intermediaries to perform some of the specialist tasks involved with crossing the border, but this does not seem to have degraded performance. In fact, it may have improved performance because such smugglers are the most expert border-crossers.

### **Exploit Financial Disputes**

The network's previous functionality notwithstanding, disputes between the Iraqi and Syrian halves of the Emirate's operation are a substantial vulnerability that might be exploitable. For example, fostering personal disputes between ranking members of the Border Emirate and their Syrian counterparts could lead to a rapid decline in the efficiency of the operation.

### **Corruption within AQI is Endemic**

Further, stringent measures to control expenditures suggest a strong organizational commitment to financial responsibility and corruption control. This in turn almost certainly suggests a fear of the effects on the organization's abilities and image should corruption become an issue. This should be exploited by Coalition and Iraqi information operations.

### **Syrian Cooperation is Limited by Corruption**

Syria can almost certainly do more to disrupt the traffic across the border. However, it is unrealistic to expect the regime to expend more energy, given the economic and internal political importance of the underground cross border trade to Syrian social and political leaders, and the inherent limits of the regime's ability to enforce a crackdown indefinitely.

### **AQI's Permanent Establishment is Vulnerable to Coercion**

The Border Sector's permanent establishment is dominated by family men with property. Such individuals are highly vulnerable to pressure, if they can be identified, and may be susceptible to being turned and run as agents within the Emirate.

## Chapter 5

# After the War in Iraq: What Will the Foreign Fighters Do?

By Peter Bergen

Over the past 12 months, al-Qa`ida in Iraq has suffered a series of stunning defeats, many of them at the hands of local Sunni tribal leaders once affiliated with the group. Despite such setbacks, AQI is unlikely to be completely destroyed. In order to understand the future of the organization after the war, it is necessary to address several related questions.

1. What are the similarities and differences between the “Afghan Arabs” and the foreign fighters in Iraq today?
2. What was the legacy of the Afghan Arabs?
3. What has the impact of the Iraq War been on Jihadis around the world? Is there any evidence, for instance, to support the “flypaper” theory—that by fighting Jihadis in Baghdad, you can keep them out of Boston?
4. How closely tied is al-Qa`ida in Iraq to al-Qa`ida Central?
5. What have the foreign fighters in Iraq learned that is applicable elsewhere?
6. What are the key weaknesses of the foreign fighters in Iraq?
7. What is the status of al-Qa`ida in Iraq today? And what is its likely future strategy, especially given the inevitable American drawdown from Iraq?
8. What is the evidence of “blowback” from the Iraq war thus far, particularly the bleedout of foreign fighters?
9. How might that blowback change in the future?
10. How prepared are the United States and its allies today for the blowback problem from the Iraq war, compared to that from the Afghan war?

I will also consider what policy recommendations might flow from the answers to some of these questions.

### **1. WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE “AFGHAN ARABS” AND THE FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN IRAQ TODAY?**

There are a number of similarities between the experience of the “Afghan Arabs” and the foreign fighters in Iraq, including that they hail from similar locations and have very similar ideologies. But there are important differences as well that speak to the sophistication of today’s insurgents in Iraq and their prospects for the future.

## **Similarities**

### *Origins: Similar Countries*

One of the first Arab recruits to the Afghan Jihad was Boudejema Bounoua, an Algerian also known as Abdullah Anas. He arrived in Pakistan in 1984, five years after the Soviet invasion. Together with Abdullah Azzam and Usama bin Ladin, Abdullah Anas set up the Services Bureau that facilitated the travel and accommodation of foreign volunteers who wanted to participate in some manner in the Jihad.<sup>196</sup>

As Anas was one of the three men who founded the Services Bureau and spent nine years in Afghanistan during the Jihad, he is uniquely positioned to give an authoritative estimate of the numbers of Arabs fighting against the communists. Anas says that even at the height of the fighting against the communists there were, at most, 500 Arabs inside Afghanistan on the battlefield. Well-informed estimates of the numbers of Afghans on the battlefield at any given moment during the war against the Soviets put the number at around 200,000.<sup>197</sup> The foreign fighters therefore accounted for no more than 0.5% of the forces fighting the Soviets.

Anas says that the largest single groups of foreign mujahidin during the Afghan Jihad were Saudi.<sup>198</sup> Hasan Abd-Rabbuh al-Surayhi, an early Saudi recruit to the Jihad, recalled, “When I went to buy my ticket to Islamabad, I realized that many had preceded me to the reservations office. There were about twenty young Saudis from various cities on the same flight.”<sup>199</sup>

The Iraq Jihad has also attracted Saudis and Arabs from around the Middle East, and a sprinkling of other Muslims from around the world. Mohammed Hafez, the author of the 2007 study *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, found that of the 102 “known” suicide bombers in Iraq, 44 were from Saudi Arabia and only seven

---

<sup>196</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, pp. 28-31.

<sup>197</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, p. 49.

<sup>198</sup> Abdullah Anas, email to author, Apr. 14, 2008.

<sup>199</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, p. 52.

were Iraqi, while the rest came from other Arab countries and even Europe.<sup>200</sup> Those findings were broadly confirmed by the Sinjar Records. According to Felter and Fishman in Chapter 2 of this report, 41 percent of the fighters were Saudi, 19 percent were Libyan and smaller percentages from other Middle Eastern countries made up the rest of the total.

The Saudi role should not be surprising. Saudis played a leading role among the Afghan Arabs. Similarly, according to the 9/11 Commission, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Al-Qa`ida's military commander before he was captured in 2003, estimated that 70 percent of the fighters in al-Qa`ida's Afghan camps before 9/11 were Saudi.<sup>201</sup> In short, Saudis have always been disproportionately drawn to volunteer for Jihads around the world, and Iraq is no exception.

### *Religious Ideology*

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's ideology celebrates the *umma* (the global community of Muslim believers), a supranational concept that does not recognize national boundaries. Religious ideology also motivated those who fought in Afghanistan against the communists. Abdullah Anas was asked at a conference in London in January 2008 what prompted him to travel from his native Algeria to fight in Afghanistan. He gave a one word answer: "Paradise!"<sup>202</sup> Similar sentiments can be found throughout the thousands of pages of *Jihad* magazine, the in-house organ of the Arabs who participated in the Afghan Jihad.<sup>203</sup>

Both the Iraq war and the Afghan war were ruled to be "defensive" Jihads by leading Muslim clerics. This is not an arcane matter of Islamic theology, but a key reason that Americans are dying in significant numbers in Iraq today. The Koran has two sets of justifications for holy war: one concerns a "defensive" Jihad, when a Muslim land is under attack by non-Muslims, while another set of justifications concerns grounds for an "offensive" Jihad, which countenances unprovoked attacks on infidels. Generally, Muslims consider the defensive justifications for Jihad to be the most legitimate grounds for war.<sup>204</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Mohammed Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2007).

<sup>201</sup> The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, p. 232.

<sup>202</sup> Abdullah Anas, "First International Conference on Radicalization and Political Violence," *Institute for Strategic Threat Analysis and Response*, Jan. 17-28, 2008.

<sup>203</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, p. 33.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* p. 350.

To the extent that Sunni Muslims have a Vatican, it is the ancient al-Azhar University in Cairo, the preeminent center of Muslim thought. Before the Iraq war, al-Azhar released a fatwa, a ruling on Islamic law, to the effect that if “Crusader” forces attacked Iraq, it was an obligation for every Muslim to fight occupation forces. The clerics of al-Azhar were not alone in this view. The prominent Lebanese cleric and Hizballah leader, Sheikh Fadlallah, also called on Muslims to fight American forces in Iraq. This is in sharp contrast to what these clerics ruled following the 9/11 attacks. Sheikh Fadlallah issued a fatwa condemning the attackers, as did the chief cleric of al-Azhar University. Thus, while leading Muslim clerics condemned the 9/11 attacks, they also have condoned fighting in Iraq.<sup>205</sup>

### *Financing*

The Afghan Arabs were well-financed from both private contributions and largesse from the Saudi government. In the Iraq Jihad, foreign fighters have also been well-financed, although their sources of income have differed from those used during the Afghan conflict. The US military estimates that insurgent groups in Iraq generate as much as \$200 million a year from criminal activities such as oil smuggling, kidnapping, and the like.<sup>206</sup>

In his 2005 letter to Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, Ayman al Zawahiri requested a \$100,000 transfer from al-Qa`ida’s Iraqi affiliate to al-Qa`ida Central, which suggests Zawahiri was confident in AQI’s finances.<sup>207</sup> Similarly, the Sinjar documents show substantial cash flows through al-Qa`ida’s “Border Emirate,” on Iraq’s Syrian border. In the period between April 1, 2007 and August 1, 2007 al-Qa`ida’s local “Emirate” on the Syrian border recorded an income of \$386,060 and spending of \$173,200 (\$88,600 of which was spent on weapons). As explained in Chapter 3, much of that funding (71 percent in the Sinjar documents) was delivered by fighters from outside of Iraq. Such spending is not entirely novel. According to Essam Deraz, an Egyptian documentary cameraman who

---

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 350-51.

<sup>206</sup> John F. Burns and Kirk Semple, “US finds Iraq insurgency has funds to sustain itself,” *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2006, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/26/world/middleeast/26insurgency.html?ex=1322197200&en=1bd1f805c30e2ae2&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>.

<sup>207</sup> Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, “Al-Qa`ida in Iraq: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *Mother Jones*, Oct. 18, 2007, available at <http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2007/11/iraq-war-al-Qa`ida.html>.

filmed bin Ladin for months in the late 1980s, he was spending \$25,000 a month to support a number of the Arabs then based in Peshawar.<sup>208</sup>

The biggest fundraising difference between foreign fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan is that Afghan Arabs raised funds overtly. Indeed, the effort was either tolerated or encouraged by governments around the world. The Services Bureau, for instance, located its main office in the United States in Brooklyn on Atlantic Avenue. The charismatic Abdullah Azzam traveled the globe, including to the United States, to recruit for the Afghan Jihad.<sup>209</sup>

There were substantial sums available for the Jihad. In addition to the billions of dollars that flowed through Pakistan's military intelligence service to the Afghan mujahedeen parties, Ayman al-Zawahiri estimated in his autobiography, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, that 200 million dollars of non-governmental support flowed into the Afghan Jihad effort.<sup>210</sup>

### *Media*

In both the Afghan and Iraqi Jihads, foreign fighters embraced the cutting-edge media of the time. A vital project of the Services Office was *Jihad* magazine, which started publishing in the fall of 1984.<sup>211</sup> The magazine appeared twice a month, and included news of the war in Afghanistan focused on Arab efforts to help the Afghan Jihad. Over time, *Jihad* became increasingly professional. In its first six months, the magazine was an amateurish production in black and white; subsequent issues were well laid out and featured a wealth of color photographs. The magazine would prove to be vital for fundraising and recruiting Muslim volunteers from around the world for the holy war against the Soviets.

Similarly, Al-Qa`ida in Iraq has fully exploited the Internet as a multimedia platform for propaganda. Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's group took advantage of broadband Internet access to get its message out, using not only text and images, but also by distributing high resolution videos that can be streamed online. Posting propaganda clips has revolutionized how al-Qa`ida fights the media war. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq now not only films attacks but also films them from multiple angles.

---

<sup>208</sup> Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 56.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 45-46.

<sup>210</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner* (2001)..

<sup>211</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, p. 32.

Using the Internet, Abu Musab al Zarqawi turned himself from a second-tier commander in Iraq into the most feared leader of the insurgency. One of Zarqawi's first postings from Iraq was the video of the beheading of American Nicholas Berg posted on May 11, 2004; it was downloaded millions of times.<sup>212</sup>

### *Highly Structured Organizations*

During the Afghan Jihad, the Services Bureau coordinated the travel and living arrangements of thousands of Arabs to the Afghan-Pakistani border. It also organized some 20 charities in Peshawar and published *Jihad* magazine.<sup>213</sup> Later, al-Qa`ida displayed a significant degree of corporate structure with various committees for media, military, and business affairs; its top-down CEOs; the salaries it paid many of its members; the comprehensive training it provided to its recruits; and the detailed application forms required to attend its training camps or to join al-Qa`ida itself. Al-Qa`ida even had a vacation policy that compares quite favorably to most American companies, with a week off for its married recruits for every three weeks served. Requests for vacation had to be submitted two and half months in advance.<sup>214</sup>

The Sinjar Documents reveal that al-Qa`ida in Iraq is very similar. Recruits are required to fill out forms asking for their countries and cities of origin, real names, aliases, date of birth, and information on how they traveled to Iraq. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's Border Emirate also kept detailed accounts of expenditures. For instance, during a two-month period, it recorded outgoings of \$727 on food, \$3,800 on salaries, and \$2,400 for document forgery. The Border Emirate also recorded a two-week period in January 2007 when it spent \$5,320 on weapons and \$1,000 to pay off smugglers, presumably of fighters entering Iraq from Syria.

### **Differences**

#### *Iraqi Fighters Arrived Earlier in the War*

Foreign fighters came late to the Afghan battlefield. Bin Ladin, for instance, fought his first engagement with the Soviets seven years after they invaded in December 1979.<sup>215</sup> By contrast, foreign fighters such as Zarqawi started to arrive in the Kurdish-dominated north of Iraq in 2002, even before the US-led invasion, and started preparations for attacking Americans before the war began.<sup>216</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup>"Zarqawi beheaded US man in Iraq," *BBC News*, May 13, 2004, available at

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3712421.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3712421.stm)

<sup>213</sup> Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 240.

<sup>214</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, p. 408.

<sup>215</sup> Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>216</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, pp. 350-68.



### *Number of Fighters*

Relatively few Arabs actually did any fighting during the Afghan war, no more than several hundred at the height of their involvement. In contrast, CIA director General Michael Hayden in congressional testimony in November 2006 estimated that 1,300 foreign fighters were on the battlefield in Iraq.<sup>217</sup> The Sinjar documents tend to support that estimate, as they show 590 foreign fighters arriving in a one-year time frame between August 2006 and August 2007. It is unlikely that the Syrian-Iraqi “Border Emirate” admitted all of AQI’s foreign fighters, as the group had a presence in other parts of the country. Syria is not the only gateway into Iraq.<sup>218</sup>

### *Attitudes Toward the Shi’a*

In early 2004, Zarqawi suggested in a letter to Usama bin Ladin that he hoped to unleash a civil war between Sunnis and Shi’a.<sup>219</sup> Bin Ladin has historically rejected such tactics; he aims to restore a unified Caliphate, but also must be concerned about the fact that senior al-Qa`ida leaders are living under some form of arrest in largely Shi’a Iran.<sup>220</sup> In the letter, Zarqawi argued: “The Shi’a: These in our opinion are the key to change. I mean that targeting and hitting them in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger.”<sup>221</sup> That strategy worked all too well helping to embroil Iraq in chaos.

### *Strategic Impact on the Fight*

Unlike the Afghan Arabs, the foreign fighters in Iraq have had considerable strategic influence on the war. In August 2003, Zarqawi’s group bombed the United Nations’ headquarters in Baghdad, prompting the UN to withdraw. Zarqawi also helped provoke the civil war. On August 30, 2003, his group

---

<sup>217</sup> Michael Gordon and Mark Mazzetti, “General Warns of Risks in Iraq if G.I.’s are Cut,” *New York Times*, Nov. 16, 2006, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/16/world/middleeast/16policy.html?\\_r=2&ref=todayspaper&oref=slogin&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/16/world/middleeast/16policy.html?_r=2&ref=todayspaper&oref=slogin&oref=slogin).

<sup>218</sup> Senior U.S. national security official, Mar. 2008.

<sup>219</sup> Zarqawi to bin Ladin, Coalition Provisional Authority, February 12, 2004.

<sup>220</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, pp. 362-63.

<sup>221</sup> Zarqawi to bin Ladin, Coalition Provisional Authority, February 12, 2004.

exploded a massive car bomb outside a Shiite mosque in Najaf that killed 125.<sup>222</sup> Zarqawi's strategy to attack the Shiites has, unfortunately, proven wildly successful. The tipping point in the slide toward full-blown civil war was al-Qa`ida in Iraq's February 2006 attack on the Golden Mosque in Samarra.<sup>223</sup>

According to figures tracked by Mohammed Hafez, as of October 15, 2007 there have been 864 suicide bombings in Iraq that killed more than 10,000 Iraqis.<sup>224</sup> The US military estimates that Al-Qa`ida's foreign recruits have been responsible for up to 90 percent of such attacks.

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq is relatively small compared to the largest insurgent groups in Iraq, but AQI has punched above its weight in terms of strategic impact on the war and the trail of body bags it has left in its wake. This finding contradicts Andrew Tilghman's conclusion in the October 2007 *Washington Monthly* that there is an "erroneous belief that al-Qa`ida's franchise in Iraq is a driving force behind the chaos in the country."<sup>225</sup> No doubt, Shi'a death squads and other Sunni insurgent groups have played critical roles in Iraq's violence; but so too has AQI.

By contrast, the foreign fighters in Afghanistan had minimal strategic impact on the war. The Soviet Union was beaten with the blood of Afghans, billions of dollars of support from the United States and Saudi Arabia, and the introduction of American Stinger anti-aircraft missiles in 1986 that ended the Soviets total air superiority. Despite their negligible strategic contribution to the war, the Afghan experience was important for the foreign "holy warriors" for several reasons. First, they gained experience on the battlefield and bragging rights. Second, they swapped business cards with like-minded militants from around the Muslim world, creating a truly global network. Third, as the Soviet war wound down, they established a plethora of new Jihadi organizations—from Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria. In short, the foreign volunteers saw the Soviet defeat as a model for victory that they could export to other battlefields.

---

<sup>222</sup> CNN, "Najaf bombing kills Shiite leader, followers say." August 30, 2003.

<http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/08/29/sprj.irq.najaf/index.html>

<sup>223</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer and K.I. Ibrahim, "Bombing shatters mosque in Iraq," *Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2006, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/22/AR2006022200454.html>.

<sup>224</sup> Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*.

<sup>225</sup> Andrew Tilghman, "The myth of AQI," *Washington Monthly*, Oct. 2007, available at <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2007/0710.tilghman.html>.

## 2. WHAT WAS THE LEGACY OF THE AFGHAN ARABS?

### The Formation of al-Qa`ida

Al-Qa`ida was founded in 1988 to take the Jihad in Afghanistan to other countries, but al-Qa`ida's first meetings were not about the United States. From 1988 through 1990, al-Qa`ida did not see itself as an anti-American organization. Nor, perhaps surprisingly, did al-Qa`ida plan to attack Russian targets following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. Rather, the organization's goals were couched in the broadest of terms: "To lift the word of God; to make His religion victorious."<sup>226</sup> Beyond defeating the Afghan communist government that replaced the Soviets in 1989, bin Ladin's most pressing concern was to topple the socialist government of South Yemen.<sup>227</sup>

Al-Qa`ida also remained a fundamentally Arab organization, purposefully not attracting local Afghans into its ranks. While there were some Pakistani recruits into al-Qa`ida, they were insignificant in number.

Al-Qa`ida's first overseas operation seems to have occurred three years after the organization was founded. Paulo Jose de Almeria Santos, a Portuguese recruit to al-Qa`ida, attempted to assassinate Zahir Shah, the deposed king of Afghanistan in November 1991. The king was seen as a secularist by al-Qa`ida whose possible return to Afghanistan would put a crimp in their plans to turn the country into a Taliban-style state.<sup>228</sup>

Around the same time as the Zahir Shah assassination attempt, al-Qa`ida moved its most important leadership figures to Sudan.<sup>229</sup> It was in Sudan that one of the early goals of al-Qa`ida, fighting for Muslim causes around the world, began to take shape. While al-Qa`ida was based in Sudan, the group forged or strengthened alliances with a range of other militant organizations, such as - Egypt's Islamic Group and Jihad Group, Algeria's Armed Islamic Group, and the Libyan Fighting Group. Al-Qa`ida members traveled to Lebanon, where the group maintained a guesthouse, and, with Hizballah, learned how to bomb large buildings. The group opened a satellite office in Baku, Azerbaijan; sent fighters to Chechnya; dispatched holy warriors to Tajikistan; trained members of the

---

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81

<sup>227</sup> Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>228</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.* p. 120.

Filipino Moro Front; delivered \$100,000 to affiliates in Jordan and Eritrea; and smuggled weapons into Yemen and Egypt.<sup>230</sup> Bin Ladin met with Imad Mughniyeh, the secretive, Iran-based head of Hizballah's security service. It was Mughniyeh who masterminded the 1983 suicide truck bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut that killed 241 American servicemen and precipitated a US pullout from Lebanon a few months later.<sup>231</sup>

#### *Other Afghan Jihad Veterans Seeded Conflicts Around the World*

The Afghan Jihad not only spawned al-Qa`ida, but a slew of other Jihadi groups. For example, returning Afghan veterans to Algeria founded the Armed Islamic Group (known by its French initials, GIA), which ultimately murdered tens of thousands of civilians during the 1990s.<sup>232</sup> In the hothouse atmosphere of Peshawar in the late 1980s, militants in Egypt's Jihad Group and Islamic Group sharpened doctrines about overthrowing "apostate" regimes in the Middle East and takfiri doctrines about excommunicating Muslims who did not share their views to the letter. Those militants came back from the war against the Soviets to lead a terror campaign in Egypt that killed more than a thousand people between 1990 and 1997.<sup>233</sup>

### **3. HOW HAS THE IRAQ WAR IMPACTED THE GLOBAL JIHADI MOVEMENT?**

The Iraq War has increased Jihadi radicalization in the Muslim world. All else being equal, the invasion and occupation of Iraq has increased the number of al-Qa`ida recruits. President Bush has described the so-called "flypaper" theory for fighting Al-Qa`ida in Iraq, saying in 2007: "If we were not fighting these Al-Qa`ida terrorists in Iraq most would be trying to kill Americans and other civilians elsewhere—in Afghanistan, or other foreign capitals, or on the streets of our own cities."<sup>234</sup> It is true that many of al-Qa`ida's recent recruits have found their way to Iraq, but the evidence suggests that the level of terrorist violence around the world has increased while US troops have remained in Iraq. The reason is that the pool of potential terrorists has expanded quite dramatically in the past five years. As the 2006 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on terrorism

---

<sup>230</sup> Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 89.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 87-88.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>233</sup> Peter Bergen and Alec Reynolds, "Blowback Revisited," *Foreign Affairs*, 84:6 (Nov/Dec 2006).

<sup>234</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "George W. President Bush Discusses War on Terror in South Carolina," July 24, 2007, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/07/20070724-3.html>.

explains, “the Iraq conflict has become the ‘cause célèbre’ for Jihadis... and is shaping a new generation of terrorist leaders and operatives.”<sup>235</sup>

To test the NIE’s assertion, Paul Cruickshank of New York University and I compared terrorist attacks during the period between September 11, 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 to the period from the invasion through September 2006. Using numbers from the authoritative RAND terrorism database and a conservative methodology, we found that the rate of deadly attacks by Jihadis had increased sevenfold since the invasion. Many of these attacks occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan, but even excluding events in these countries, the number of fatal attacks by Jihadis in the rest of the world increased by more than one-third in the period after March 2003. Iraq, of course, did not cause all of this terrorism, but it certainly increased the tempo of Jihadi attacks from London to Kabul to Amman.<sup>236</sup>

Al-Qa`ida has continued to plot spectacular attacks since the invasion of Iraq. For instance, had the “planes plot” of the summer of 2006 succeeded, it would have brought down seven American and Canadian airliners departing the United Kingdom, costing hundreds or thousands of lives. The head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. General Michael Maples, testified before a congressional committee in 2007 that the planes plot was directed by al-Qa`ida from Pakistan.<sup>237</sup>

#### **4. HOW CLOSELY TIED IS AL-QA`IDA IN IRAQ WITH AL-QA`IDA CENTRAL?**

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq was established in October 2004, when Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Usama bin Ladin.<sup>238</sup> Zarqawi’s initial Iraq operation, begun in 2002, was limited to Kurdistan’s mountains, in the no-fly zone outside

---

<sup>235</sup> Director of National Intelligence. Declassified key judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate, “Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States,” Apr. 2006, [http://www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/Declassified\\_NIE\\_Key\\_Judgments.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/Declassified_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf).

<sup>236</sup> Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, “The Iraq Effect,” *Mother Jones*, Mar. 1, 2007, available at [http://www.motherjones.com/news/featurex/2007/03/iraq\\_effect\\_1.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/featurex/2007/03/iraq_effect_1.html).

<sup>237</sup> Peter Bergen, “Where You Bin?,” *The New Republic*, Jan. 29, 2007, available at <http://www.peterbergen.com/bergen/articles/details.aspx?id=288>.

<sup>238</sup> Dexter Filkins, “Wanted rebel vows loyalty to bin Laden, web sites say,” *New York Times* Oct. 18, 2004, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/18/international/middleeast/18zarqawi.html?partner=rssnyt&mc=rss>.

of Saddam Hussein's control.<sup>239</sup> Before October 2004, Zarqawi had an on-again-off-again relationship with al-Qa`ida, going back to the early 1990s when he first fought in Afghanistan. In 1999, Zarqawi set up a training camp in western Afghanistan for his Tawhid (Unity of God) group, an organization that was initially somewhat competitive with al-Qa`ida for recruits and resources. Shadi Abdalla, a member of Tawhid arrested by German police, claimed that Zarqawi, at least up until early 2002, was focused on Jordanian, Israeli, and Jewish targets, not the United States. This was the essential ideological difference between al Tawhid and al-Qa`ida.<sup>240</sup>

Despite the historical differences, on October 17, 2004, Zarqawi issued an online statement in the name of his Tawhid group pledging allegiance to bin Ladin.<sup>241</sup> Despite the oath of allegiance, Zarqawi did not do al-Qa`ida Central's bidding. The letter from Ayman al Zawahiri to an associate of Zarqawi's in July 2005, which was intercepted by US forces, urged Zarqawi to behave more judiciously in his campaign against the Shi'a and end the nasty habit of beheading his victims:

We don't want to repeat the mistake of the Taliban, who restricted participation in governance to the students and the people of Kandahar alone. They did not have any representation for the Afghan people in their ruling regime, so the result was that the Afghan people disengaged themselves from them... Therefore, I stress again to you and to all your brothers the need to direct the political action equally with the military action, by the alliance, cooperation and gathering of all leaders of opinion and influence in the Iraqi arena... I repeat the warning against separating from the masses.

For that reason, many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia. The sharpness of this questioning increases when the attacks are on one of their mosques. My opinion is that this matter won't be acceptable to the Muslim populace however much you have tried to explain it, and aversion to this will continue.

Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and

---

<sup>239</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, pp. 361-62.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 261-6.

<sup>241</sup> Jeffrey Pool (translator), "Zarqawi's pledge of allegiance to al-Qa`ida," *Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor*, Dec. 16, 2004, available at <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369020>.

their description of you as the sheik of the slaughterers, etc. I say to you that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media.<sup>242</sup>

Zarqawi's Egyptian successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, appears to have strengthened ties with al-Qa`ida Central. In July 2007, US forces captured an Iraqi al-Qa`ida operative, Khalid al Mashadani, who told his interrogators that he had acted as a conduit between the top leaders of al-Qa`ida in Iraq and bin Ladin and Zawahiri.<sup>243</sup> According to the US military, Mashadani revealed that there was "a flow of strategic direction, of prioritization of messaging and other guidance that comes from the Al-Qa`ida senior leadership to the Al-Qa`ida in Iraq leadership."<sup>244</sup> Also, al-Masri, a member of Egypt's Jihad group, is likely to have longstanding ties with Ayman al Zawahiri.

Today, AQI is probably more of a wholly-owned subsidiary of al-Qa`ida Central than the nominally affiliated but independent operation it was under Zarqawi. However, since AQI is increasingly marginalized in Iraq, al-Qa`ida Central will have difficulty leveraging the group for funding or help with a terrorist attack outside of Iraq, at least in the short term.

## 5. WHAT HAVE THE FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN IRAQ LEARNED?

### **Tactical Innovation**

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq is fighting the best army in history, acquiring skills that will be far more useful for future terrorist operations than those learned by their counterparts during the 1980s, who fought a conventional guerrilla war against the demoralized conscripts of the Soviet army.

### *Massive Use of Suicide Tactics*

The massive suicide campaign in Iraq has been the most intense, widespread, and effective such campaign in history. In a single month, June 2007, there were 35 suicide attacks in Iraq.<sup>245</sup> Contrast that with the 76 suicide attacks Robert Pape counted by the Tamil Tigers in the 14 years between 1987 and 2001. Pape described the Tigers as "the world's leading suicide terrorist organization."<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, pp. 365-7.

<sup>243</sup> Paul Cruickshank, "Total recall," *New Republic Online*, July 20, 2006, available at [http://www.lawandsecurity.org/get\\_article/?id=75](http://www.lawandsecurity.org/get_article/?id=75).

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> Mohamed Hafez, email to author, Apr. 14 2008.

<sup>246</sup> Robert Pape, *Dying to Win* (New York: Random House, 2005) p. 139.

Hardly. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq, which is responsible for at least 80 percent of the 900 or so suicide attacks in Iraq in the past five years, has conducted ten times more suicide attacks than the Tamil Tigers in a third of the time span.<sup>247</sup>

#### *Innovative Suicide Tactics*

In addition to the overall number of attacks, Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's suicide tactics are innovative. The group has mastered using multiple suicide attackers simultaneously and experiments with bomber of different demographics.<sup>248</sup> Women have conducted suicide bombings in Iraq, a tactic salafi Jihadi groups have generally eschewed. Husband-and-wife suicide teams have also been used, as was the case in November 2005 when Muriel Degauque, a female Belgian baker's assistant, and her husband were recruited as suicide bombers by al-Qa`ida in Iraq. The operation was noteworthy as it was the first time that a female European Jihadi had launched a suicide operation.<sup>249</sup>

#### *Chlorine Attacks*

Although not directly attributed to AQI, the use of chlorine in bomb attacks in 2007 illustrates a brutal tactical escalation in Iraq. Insurgents seem to have stopped using the tactic, perhaps because it has not been especially effective, and/or because the use of chemical weapons is seen as beyond the pale.<sup>250</sup>

#### *Propaganda*

As detailed above, Iraq was the first war waged as much on the Internet as on the battlefield. A great percentage of attacks are filmed and then posted to Jihadi websites. Beheading videos, first seen in the kidnapping of American journalist Daniel Pearl in Pakistan, became commonplace in Iraqi Jihadi propaganda.

#### *IED Innovation*

The manufacture of IEDs went through warp-speed innovations in Iraq beginning with simple "passive" trip devices, and progressing to cell phone-triggered devices, IED "daisy chains," and infrared-triggered devices that shoot

---

<sup>247</sup> Kevin Bergner, quoted in Raghavan, Sudarsan, "US military calls al-Qa`ida in Iraq 'principal threat,'" *Washington Post*, July 12, 2007, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/11/AR2007071102212.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Anderson Cooper 360, CNN, Nov. 18, 2005, available at <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/051118/acd.02.html>.

<sup>249</sup> "Journey of a Belgian female 'bomber,'" *BBC News*, Dec. 2, 2005, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4491334.stm>.

<sup>250</sup> "'Chlorine bomb' hits Iraq village," *BBC News*, May 16, 2007, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6660585.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6660585.stm).



slugs of molten metal through almost any armored vehicle. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's ability to produce advanced IEDs from available materials raises the possibility that such weapons can be developed, built, and employed almost anywhere.

### **Ability to Export Tactical Innovation**

Unlike the Afghan Arabs, who did not export their tactics until after the anti-communist Jihad had ended, Iraqi suicide and IED tactics are exported from Iraq into the Afghan theater against US, NATO, and Afghan government forces. These tactics were learned both by copycatting the Iraqi insurgency and by sending Jihadis to Iraq for on-the-job training.

The Taliban has increasingly adopted suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices, and the beheadings of hostages—all techniques that al-Qa`ida perfected in Iraq. Mullah Dadullah, a key Taliban commander gave an interview to Al Jazeera in 2006 in which he noted, "we have 'give and take' relations with the mujahidin in Iraq."<sup>251</sup> Suicide operations, which were almost unknown in Afghanistan, became prevalent in 2005 after the Taliban saw their success in Iraq. Members of al-Qa`ida Central such as Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, Omar al-Farouq and Hassan Ghul have been captured or killed either in Iraq or travelling there.

### **AQI Attacks Outside of Iraq**

During the Afghan Jihad, the Arabs did not launch attacks outside of Afghanistan. By contrast, AQI is the only Iraqi insurgent group that has attacked American targets outside of the country, and has repeatedly said it plans to attack the United States itself.

In November 2005, AQI launched simultaneous suicide bombings against three American-owned hotels in Amman, Jordan. The attacks killed 60 people, mostly Jordanians.<sup>252</sup> In August 2005, the group rocketed two US warships in the Port of Aqaba, killing one Jordanian citizen.<sup>253</sup> In a November 2006 audiotape, AQI's

---

<sup>251</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute, "Taliban Military Commander Mullah Dadallah: 'We are in Contact With Iraqi Mujahideen, Osama bin Laden & Al-Zawahiri; Non-Islamic Countries Have Offered Help in Defeating the Americans,'" No. 1180, June 2, 2006, available at <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP118006>.

<sup>252</sup> Hassan Fattah and Michael Slackman, "3 Hotels Bombed in Jordan; At Least 57 Die," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 2005, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/10/international/middleeast/10jordan.html>.

<sup>253</sup> "Al-Qa`ida claims responsibility for rocket attack," *CNN.com*, Aug. 23, 2005, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/08/23/jordan.attack.alqaeda/index.html>.

leader al-Masri said that his organization “would not rest from Jihad until... we have blown up... the White House.”<sup>254</sup>

Despite AQI’s intentions, al-Qa`ida today is more likely to be able to organize a terrorist attack against the United States from Pakistan than from Iraq. Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell testified in February 2007 that the next terrorist attack in the United States was most likely to emanate from Pakistan.<sup>255</sup>

### **Al-Qa`ida in Iraq is More “Iraqified”**

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq has been more successful recruiting Iraqis than al-Qa`ida was recruiting Afghans during the anti-Soviet Jihad. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq was composed largely of foreigners at its inception in late 2004, but today the group is almost 90 percent Iraqi fighters.<sup>256</sup> Despite continued tensions between AQI’s foreign recruits and native Iraqis, Iraq is much more fertile ground for recruits than Afghanistan was. Afghans, who are culturally quite different from the Arabs who form the core of Al-Qa`ida, generally did not want to join al-Qa`ida.

## **6. AL-QA`IDA IN IRAQ’S WEAKNESSES**

### **AQI Leadership**

Abu Musab al Zarqawi’s death in 2006 left AQI, unlike the Arabs during the Afghan Jihad, without a charismatic leader. There is even some question whether the nominal leader of the group, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, is a fictional character.<sup>257</sup> Regardless, neither al-Baghdadi nor the Egyptian leader of the group, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, have emerged as charismatic leaders in the mould of Zarqawi or bin Ladin.

### **The problem of Being an Outsider**

Al-Qa`ida recognized belatedly that it needed to put a more Iraqi face on its actions. Its leader Zarqawi was, of course, a Jordanian and so in October 2006,

---

<sup>254</sup> “Al-Qa`ida Claims 12,000 Iraq Fighters.” *CBSnews.com*, Nov. 12, 2006, available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/11/10/iraq/main2170851.shtml>.

<sup>255</sup> Paul Cruickshank, “Front Line,” *TNRonline*, Aug. 2, 2007, available at [http://www.lawandsecurity.org/get\\_article/?id=76](http://www.lawandsecurity.org/get_article/?id=76).

<sup>256</sup> Edward Gistaro, “Statement for the Record House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence And House Armed Services Committee,” Director of National Intelligence, July 25, 2007, available at [http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20070725\\_testimony.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20070725_testimony.pdf) (Congressional testimony accessed via Lexis Nexis Congressional).

<sup>257</sup> Michael Gordon, “Leader of Al-Qa`ida in Iraq group was fictional, U.S. military says,” *International Herald Tribune*, July 18, 2007, available at <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/07/18/africa/iraq.php>.

AQI created the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and appointed al-Baghdadi to be its nominal leader.<sup>258</sup> Although the group is now largely Iraqi, its leadership is still foreign—a problem in its dealings with other nationalist groups in Iraq.<sup>259</sup>

### **The Ideology Problem**

Encoded in the ideological DNA of Al-Qa`ida in Iraq and like-minded Jihadi terrorist groups are the seeds of their own destruction. Jihadi ideology that embraces the concept of *takfir*—the self-appointed ability to decide who is Muslim and who is not—tends to degenerate into mass killing and social alienation. When a group starts labeling self-declared Muslims to be apostates, the following step tends to be killing them. And then violence against other Muslims becomes an end in itself.

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's hard line attitudes, married to seemingly unlimited violence, severely damaged its standing with other Sunnis in Iraq. For example, the Sinjar AQI passed Diyala Province's tribal leaders an oath of allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq in which the Sheikhs would swear to reject tribal rules. Al-Qa`ida's tone-deaf approach to local politics had them demanding concessions no self-respecting Sunni tribal leader could possibly agree to.<sup>260</sup>

### **Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's Enemies**

The "Anbar Awakening" model has now been extended to many other parts of Iraq, as tribal leaders across the country reject AQI style violence. There are now some 90,000 members of Sunni militias around Iraq who are aligned with the US military against al-Qa`ida.<sup>261</sup> Even Sunni insurgent groups previously allied to al-Qa`ida have now turned against it. For instance, in April 2007, the Islamic Army of Iraq issued an online communiqué condemning the actions of al-Qa`ida in Iraq.<sup>262</sup> Around the same time, the 1920 Revolution Brigades, following the

---

<sup>258</sup> Stephen Negus, "Call for Sunni State in Iraq," *Financial Times*, Oct. 15, 2006, available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e239159e-5c6a-11db-9e7e-0000779e2340.html>.

<sup>259</sup> Karen DeYoung and Walter Pincus, "Al-Qa`ida in Iraq may not be threat here," *Washington Post*, Mar. 18, 2007, available at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/17/AR2007031701373\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/17/AR2007031701373_pf.html).

<sup>260</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-637854.

<sup>261</sup> Lawrence Korb, "The Iraq legacy: the awakening," *Guardian*, Mar. 21, 2008, available at [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/lawrence\\_korb/2008/03/the\\_iraq\\_legacy\\_the\\_awakening.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/lawrence_korb/2008/03/the_iraq_legacy_the_awakening.html).

<sup>262</sup> "Islamic army seeks bin Laden crackdown on Iraq rival," *Agence France Presse*, Apr. 6, 2007, available at <http://www.mywire.com/pubs/AFP/2007/04/06/3214046?extID=10051>.

killing of its leader Dhahir Khamis al-Dari by AQI, also turned against the group.<sup>263</sup>

In some regions, al-Qa`ida in Iraq's collapse has been dramatic. The diary of an al-Qa`ida leader near Samarra lamented that his force, which had once been 600 strong, was down to 20 men. Abu Tariq blames local Sunni tribes for "changing course" and bringing about his group's present travails.<sup>264</sup>

### **Iraq's Foreign Fighters Wind Up Dead**

Of the foreign fighters in the Sinjar documents who listed their desired "work" in Iraq, more than half gave their preference to be suicide bombers.<sup>265</sup> Presumably, many other foreign fighters who directly fight the US military do not survive. This high rate of casualties has important implications for the future because it limits the pool of AQI-trained fighters that can continue the fight in Iraq, or leave to fight somewhere else.

## **7. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF AL-QA`IDA IN IRAQ TODAY? AND WHAT IS ITS LIKELY FUTURE STRATEGY, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE INEVITABLE AMERICAN DRAWDOWN FROM IRAQ?**

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq is a wounded organization. The number of foreign fighters entering Iraq has declined from 120 per month in 2007 to between 40 and 50 today, and foreign fighters are now trying to leave the country.<sup>266</sup> In February 2008, US military officials said that they had killed 2,400 suspected members of AQI and captured 8,800, whittling the group's strength down to 3,500 as of early 2008.<sup>267</sup> Fred Kagan, writing in the *Weekly Standard* in September 2007, concluded that al-Qa`ida has "suffered a stunning defeat in Iraq over the past six months."<sup>268</sup> That certainly seems to be the case for now. The situation is so grave

---

<sup>263</sup> Lydia Khalil, "Leader of 1920 Revolution Brigades Killed by al-Qa`ida," *Terrorism Focus* 4:9 (Apr. 10, 2007) available at <http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373310>.

<sup>264</sup> Harmony Document MNFT-2007-005648.

<sup>265</sup> Felter and Fishman, *Foreign Fighters in Iraq*.

<sup>266</sup> Jim Michaels, "Military: foreign fighters getting out of Iraq." *USA Today/MilitaryTimes.com*, Mar. 21, 2008, available at [http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2008/03/gns\\_foreignfighters\\_032008/](http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2008/03/gns_foreignfighters_032008/).

<sup>267</sup> Amit R. Paley, "Shift in Tactics Aims to Revive Struggling Insurgency," *Washington Post*, Feb. 8, 2008, A13.

<sup>268</sup> Fred Kagan, "Al-Qa`ida in Iraq: how to understand it, how to defeat it," *The Weekly Standard*, Sept. 10, 2007, available at [http://www.weeklystandard.com/Utilities/printer\\_preview.asp?idArticle=14043&R=114FE5FD](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Utilities/printer_preview.asp?idArticle=14043&R=114FE5FD).

that in October 2007, no lesser figure than Usama bin Ladin accused AQI of fanaticism and told the Sunni insurgent groups to unite.<sup>269</sup>

Future withdrawals of US troops from Iraq will obviously help Al-Qa`ida's ability to operate in the country. Al-Qa`ida has a "paper tiger" narrative about the United States based on American pullouts from Vietnam during the '70s, Lebanon in the '80s, and Somalia in the '90s. Al-Qa`ida propaganda will play on this narrative if there is an American drawdown from Iraq.

More important is al-Qa`ida's desire to occupy territory. In Ayman al-Zawahiri's 2001 book, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, he explained:

[V]ictory by the armies cannot be achieved unless the infantry occupies territory. Likewise, victory for Islamic movements against the world alliance cannot be attained unless these movements possess an Islamic base in the heart of the Arab region.<sup>270</sup>

Al-Qa`ida will continue to try to turn Iraq into a safe haven whatever the scale and timing of an American withdrawal. Iraq is in the heart of the Middle East, has a storied Islamic past, and is far more unstable than any of its neighbors.

Indeed, a US withdrawal may not completely stem the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq. Large numbers of foreign volunteers continued to arrive on the Afghan-Pakistan border after the Soviet withdrawal in order to fight the "puppet" Afghan communist government.<sup>271</sup> Similarly, the Shiite-dominated government in Iraq will continue to be seen as puppet of the US and "apostate" by AQI, whatever the disposition of American troops in the country.

## **8. WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE SO FAR FOR "BLOWBACK" FROM THE IRAQ WAR, PARTICULARLY THE BLEEDOUT OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS?**

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq's attacks in Jordan suggest that Jordan should worry about fighters trickling out of Iraq. Saudi Arabia also faces a real security threat from returnees from Iraq. In April 2007, Saudi authorities arrested 172 militants

---

<sup>269</sup> Dan Murphy, "Bin Laden lambastes Iraqi insurgents," *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 24, 2007, available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/1023/p99s01-duts.html>.

<sup>270</sup> Zarqawi and Zawahiri, quoted in Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*. See also Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, Feb. 6, 2006, p. 10, available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf>.

<sup>271</sup> Abdullah Anas, email to author, Apr. 14, 2008.

allegedly plotting to attack oil installations and recovered \$5 million that the group had hidden to fund their operations. Several of those arrested had returned to Saudi Arabia after gaining military experience in Iraq.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, in November 2007 Saudi officials announced the arrest of more than two hundred militants, 112 of whom were “linked in with elements stationed abroad who facilitate the exit and travel to conflict zones [such as Iraq].”<sup>273</sup>

Iraq war veterans have also returned to Lebanon. Fatah al-Islam militants who fought pitched battles with the Lebanese Army inside Palestinian refugee camps last year had earlier fought in Iraq, according to Fawaz Gerges, an expert on militant Islam.<sup>274</sup> Nir Rosen, another expert on Jihadi groups in the Middle East, came to similar conclusions when he investigated Fatah al Islam in 2007.<sup>275</sup>

Finally, a number of Europeans, such as Hamid Bach, a French-Moroccan Jihadi, have traveled to fight in Iraq and then returned to Europe.<sup>276</sup> Al Qa`ida in Iraq may have had a role in the botched terror attacks in London and Glasgow in the summer of 2007. According to a report in the *New York Times*, the plotters’ cell phones included the phone numbers of AQI members. The plotters, a British born doctor of Iraqi descent and an Indian aeronautical engineer, attempted to blow up two cars filled with gas canisters and explosives outside a nightclub in central London. Despite the attacks’ failure, the *modus operandi* of the attacks seemed to owe something to the multiple Vehicle Born Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attacks of the Iraqi insurgency. Britain’s Joint Terrorism Analysis Center had concluded earlier in 2007 that “we are aware that AQI networks are active in the U.K.”<sup>277</sup>

The Director of National Intelligence, Mike McConnell, in his annual threat assessment to Congress in February 2008, testified that “fewer than 100 AQI

---

<sup>272</sup> “The bad guys keep on coming,” *Economist.com*, May 3, 2007, available at [http://www.economist.com/world/africa/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=9122645](http://www.economist.com/world/africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9122645).

<sup>273</sup> Peter Bergen “Saudi: 200 held over ‘terror plots,’” *CNN.com*, Nov. 28, 2007, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/11/28/saudi.arrests/index.html>.

<sup>274</sup> Gerges, quoted in Bergen and Cruickshank, “Al-Qa`ida in Iraq: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.”

<sup>275</sup> Nir Rosen, “Scapegoats in an unwelcoming land,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 16, 2007, available at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/14/AR2007121401329\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/14/AR2007121401329_pf.html).

<sup>276</sup> Bergen and Reynolds, “Blowback Revisited.”

<sup>277</sup> Raymond Bonner, Jane Perlez, and Eric Schmitt, “British inquiry of failed plots points to Iraq’s Qaeda group,” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 2007, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/14/world/europe/14london.html?pagewanted=print>.

terrorists have moved from Iraq to establish cells in other countries.”<sup>278</sup> If the numbers above are accurate, this estimate is almost certainly low.

## 9. HOW MIGHT THE BLOWBACK CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

The number of “Iraq returnees” from the West does seem to be quite small, at least in terms of the overall numbers of fighters. French officials, for instance, say that 24 French citizens and residents have travelled to Iraq, and few of those have returned to France. Most of those are in jail.<sup>279</sup>

The Sinjar Records suggest that Iraqi foreign fighters are overwhelmingly Arab, with only single fighters from Bosnia, Ireland, Sweden, Mauritania, France and two from Turkey appearing in the documents.<sup>280</sup> This suggests that the returnee problem may not affect the West as much as the Afghan Arabs did.

As with the Afghan-Arabs, Iraqi foreign fighters are likely to seek safe havens away from governments capable of cracking down on them. “Arab-Iraqis” are likely to seek out safe havens in weak or failing states such as in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas along Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan, Somalia, Lebanon, and, in particular, Yemen, where Sunni Arabs do not stand out.

Interestingly, some foreign fighters in Iraq signed exit contracts pledging not to join other Jihadi groups. Ahmad Khalifah Ahmad al Hajji, for instance, who was leaving Iraq for medical treatment, signed a statement found in the Sinjar documents stating, “I pledge not to join any organization affiliated with al-Qa`ida anywhere in the world.”<sup>281</sup> Similarly, Mahmud al Jum`ah signed what appears to be a permanent exit contract from al-Qa`ida in Iraq in which he pledged “not to enter any organization belonging to al-Qa`ida in any place in the world.”<sup>282</sup>

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq prevents its recruits from waging other Jihads because, like any other turf-conscious organization, it wants its own recruits to work on its own projects, not those of other groups. They may also be concerned that individuals

---

<sup>278</sup> Michael McConnell, Annual threat assessment of the intelligence community for the Senate Armed Services Committee, Feb. 27, 2008, available at [www.dni.gov/testimonies/20080227\\_testimony.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20080227_testimony.pdf).

<sup>279</sup> French official, March 2008.

<sup>280</sup> Felter and Fishman, *Foreign Fighters in Iraq*.

<sup>281</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-657976.

<sup>282</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-20007-657960.

leaving Iraq are easily targeted by security services. It is unclear whether such bans are successful, but the fact that Saudi Arabia continues to arrest Iraqi returnees engaged in militant activities suggests that they may be hard to enforce.

There are several issues that will greatly affect the impact foreign fighters from Iraq will have outside of Iraq's borders. The first is the future status of Iraqi refugees. The Iraq war has created the largest refugee population in the history of the modern Middle East. There are two million Iraqi refugees outside the country, most of them Sunnis. Two million more Iraqis are displaced internally.<sup>283</sup> Those numbers are likely to increase as the United States draws down in Iraq. We know from the experiences of the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan that refugee populations can be breeding grounds for militants, such as the Taliban. If Iraqi refugee communities cannot return to Iraq and remain unassimilated into host societies, they will likely become recruiting grounds for al-Qa`ida.

The second issue is the duration and outcome of the war in Iraq. In an authoritative study of 91 insurgencies in the past century, Seth Jones of the RAND Corporation found that it takes approximately 14 years for a government to win against an insurgency, and 11 years for insurgents to defeat a government.<sup>284</sup> Either way, the war in Iraq is unlikely to end soon. The longer the war goes on, the more foreign fighters will gain experience there. Even if the number of foreign fighters who come into Iraq drops, every foreign fighter who survives the war and moves elsewhere is a force multiplier for any Jihadi-inclined "bunch of guys" he comes into contact with.

The inevitable drawdown of US combat brigades from Iraq will likely strengthen al-Qa`ida. Even after US forces depart Iraq, Sunni militants and foreign fighters will likely have a high interest in fighting a Shiite regime that will still be perceived as a US puppet, even after most American troops depart. Indeed, the "defeat" of another world superpower may encourage more foreign militants to make the trip to join the Iraq Jihad bandwagon.

---

<sup>283</sup> Sudarsan Raghavan, "War in Iraq is propelling a massive migration," *Washington Post*, Feb. 4, 2007, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/03/AR2007020301604.html>.

<sup>284</sup> Seth Jones, "The State of the Afghan Insurgency," Testimony before the Canadian Senate National Security and Defence Committee, Dec. 10, 2007, available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT296/>.



A United States withdrawal would also be a boon to al-Qa`ida because of the intensification in the civil war that would probably result. If a US pullout leads to increased sectarian violence in Iraq, which is likely, Iraqi Sunnis will be more disposed to support al-Qa`ida in exchange for aid and protection.

Fortunately, al-Qa`ida's ability to control territory or achieve even a mini-state in Iraq is limited by the nihilistic tendencies of its recruits. The barbaric violence and extreme Puritanism of al-Qa`ida's recruits alienate many Iraqi Sunnis. Al-Qa`ida's prospects in Iraq depend greatly on the degree to which Sunni Iraqis view it as a protector or an oppressor.

## **10. HOW PREPARED ARE THE US AND ITS ALLIES TODAY FOR THE BLOWBACK PROBLEM FROM THE IRAQ WAR?**

As opposed to the post-Afghan Jihad period, when the United States and its allies were caught unaware by the Arab-Afghan problem, the US and its allies are quite conscious of the blowback problem emerging out of the Iraq war. Countries such as France, Spain, Italy, and even the United States have prosecuted cases against anyone traveling to Iraq to fight with the insurgency or facilitating that travel. At the same time, US officials have visited Middle Eastern countries whose citizens have traveled to fight in Iraq to provide them intelligence about the identities of those fighters and their support networks.<sup>285</sup>

Of all the Middle Eastern countries affected by blowback from the Iraq war, Saudi Arabia, in particular, is taking significant steps to mitigate the problem. For example, the Saudi government is soliciting bids for a fence along its border with Iraq.<sup>286</sup> The grand mufti and other important clerics such as Salman al Awdah have publicly said it is not religiously legitimate for Saudis to travel to Iraq to fight. And the Saudi government has instituted a massive crackdown on militants inside the kingdom since 2003, some of whom have trained in Iraq.<sup>287</sup>

The Saudis have also implemented a de-radicalization program, staffed with clerics and psychiatrists, that has returned hundreds of militants back into Saudi society in the past few years. Some are returning Guantanamo detainees, others are members of al-Qa`ida inside the Kingdom, and others are returnees from

---

<sup>285</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Bush sends envoys to Arab leaders to shore up support for Iraq," *International Herald Tribune*, Apr. 11, 2008, available at <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/04/11/america/11terror.php>.

<sup>286</sup> Jim Krane, "Saudis plan long fence for Iraq border," *Washington Post*, Sept. 27, 2006.

<sup>287</sup> Bergen, "Saudi: 200 held over 'terror plots.'"

Iraq. In an efficient police state like Saudi Arabia—where former militants have to pledge to abstain from militancy, and do so while enmeshed in a web of strong family and tribal networks—the recidivism rate of “de-radicalized” militants is very low.<sup>288</sup> The former militants receive a number of incentives to reintegrate into Saudi society, such as help with jobs and marriages.

Similarly, the US military has instituted its own de-radicalization program for the more than 20,000 prisoners in its custody in Iraq, some 2,000 of who are members of AQI. Known extremists are separated from the general population. This is an important program; we know that there is not better place to recruit Jihadis than prisons. One only has to recall Zarqawi’s radicalization in a Jordanian prison in the late 1990s to recognize the significance of this problem.<sup>289</sup>

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Universal Database to Track Foreign Fighters, Insurgents, and Terrorists**

More than six years after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the US government still does not maintain an integrated database of Jihadis (foreign fighters, insurgents, and terrorists). The database needs, above all, to map the “facilitative nodes” that bring young men into the Jihad, such as websites, operational planners, financiers, and Jihadi underground networks. A building block of such a database should be identifying the suicide attackers in Iraq, a process that can be accomplished using DNA samples, accounts on Jihadi websites, good intelligence work, and media reports. We know from former CIA officer Marc Sageman’s investigations of the histories of hundreds of Jihadi terrorists that friends and family are the backbone of terrorist recruitment networks, so this investigatory work should include an effort to identify friends and/or family members who brought the suicide attackers into the Jihad.<sup>290</sup>

### **Track Detainees who are released from US custody in Iraq.**

The US has increasingly sophisticated methods for identifying and containing Jihadi influence in Iraqi prisons. Former Jihadis released from these prisons should continue to be tracked in case of relapse.

---

<sup>288</sup> Chris Boucek says that 2,000 militants have been “processed” since 2003, 700 have been released, and only 10 have been picked up again, see Christopher Boucek, “Extremist Reeducation and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia,” *Terrorism Monitor*, 5:16 (Aug. 16, 2007).

<sup>289</sup> Bergen, *The Osama bin Ladin I Know*, ch. 12.

<sup>290</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

**Identify Ideological Influence**

In addition to traditional social mapping, investigators should identify the clerical mentors of travelers to Iraq. Armed with that intelligence, the United States can urge the fighters' home governments to rein in particularly egregious clerics. Such cooperation should be possible, as these governments will feel the brunt of the blowback after the Iraq war winds down.

**Monitor Potential Safe Havens**

Al-Qa`ida and its affiliates have targeted areas in Lebanon, Somalia, Pakistan, and Yemen to establish safe havens.

**Encourage cooperation on de-radicalization programs.**

Other Middle Eastern countries can learn from the Saudi de-radicalization model.

## Addendum A: Author Biographies

### **Peter Bergen**

Peter Bergen is a Schwartz senior fellow at the New America Foundation in Washington D.C; an Adjunct Lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; a research fellow at New York University's Center on Law and Security; CNN's national security analyst, and author of *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Bin Laden*. (Free Press, 2001). *Holy War, Inc.* was a *New York Times* bestseller and has been translated into eighteen languages. A documentary based on *Holy War, Inc.*, which aired on National Geographic Television, was nominated for an Emmy in 2002.

Bergen has traveled repeatedly to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to report on bin Laden and al Qaeda. His most recent book is "The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader" (Free Press, 2006). It was named one of the best non-fiction books of 2006 by *The Washington Post*. "The Osama bin Laden I Know" was translated into French, Spanish and Polish, and CNN produced a two hour documentary "In the Footsteps of bin Laden" based on the book that aired around the fifth anniversary of 9/11. Bergen was one of the producers of the CNN documentary, which was named the best documentary of 2006 by the Society of Professional Journalists and was nominated for an Emmy.

Bergen has written for a variety of publications including the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *Rolling Stone*, *TIME*, *The Nation*, *The National Interest*, *Washington Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *Prospect*. He has also worked as a correspondent for National Geographic Television and Discovery Television and is a contributing writer for *Mother Jones*. He is on the editorial board of *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, a leading scholarly journal in the field, and has testified before congressional committees. From 2002-2006 he taught at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

Bergen has a M.A. in Modern History from New College, Oxford University. He won an Open Scholarship when he went up to New College. Before that he attended Ampleforth. He was born in Minneapolis in 1962 and was raised in London.

## **Vahid Brown**

Vahid Brown is a Harmony Fellow and FBI instructor at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC). He holds a degree in Islamic studies from Reed College and his seven research languages include Arabic and Persian. He has spent three years living and teaching in East Asia and speaks Mandarin Chinese. Prior to coming to work for the CTC, he published extensively on medieval Spanish Islamic and Jewish thought; nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iranian religious movements; and contemporary Western approaches to the study of Islam. As a research fellow at the CTC, he was one of the lead researchers for the *Militant Ideology Atlas*; was a contributing author and chief editor of the CTC's second Harmony report, *Al-Qa'ida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa*; and was the sole author of the third Harmony report, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa'ida from 1989-2006*. As an instructor for the CTC's FBI counter-terrorism training program, he designs curricula on Islamist terrorism and teaches regular courses both at the FBI Academy and for Joint Terrorism Task Force training events at FBI Field Offices throughout the United States. His work has been featured on NPR's "Morning Edition," the front pages of the Los Angeles Times and Kuwait's al-Jarida, and other national and international media outlets. He lives in the Pacific Northwest.

## **Joseph Felter**

Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Felter, a career Special Forces and Foreign Area Officer, is the Director of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and an Assistant Professor in the international relations and terrorism studies program at the US Military Academy. His military experience includes service as a platoon leader with the 75th Ranger Regiment and as a Special Forces A-Team Leader and Company Commander in the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). As a military attaché in Manila, he planned and coordinated combined efforts to develop the counter terrorist capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Lieutenant Colonel Felter is a graduate of the US Army Command and General Staff College, the Singapore Command and Staff College, and numerous special operations qualification schools. He received a B.S. from the United States Military Academy, earned a Masters degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, a Graduate Certificate in Management from the University of West Australia, and received his PhD in political science from Stanford University. His dissertation assesses the impact that variation in quality and structures of state internal security forces has on efforts to combat insurgency and terrorism

## **Brian Fishman**

Brian Fishman is a Senior Associate in the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and an Instructor in the Department of Social Sciences. Fishman's primary research interest is the impact of the war in Iraq on terrorism worldwide. He has published in the *Washington Quarterly*, the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, and numerous edited volumes. Fishman sits on the editorial board of the CTC Sentinel.

At West Point, Fishman has taught American Politics, the CTC's introductory terrorism class, and a semester-long seminar on al-Qa'ida in Iraq. Before joining the CTC in 2005, Fishman was the Foreign Affairs/Defense Legislative Assistant for Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey (CA-6). He worked extensively on the Middle East peace process, proliferation, Chinese human rights, and landmine and UXO cleanup. Fishman has appeared in numerous national and international media outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *PBS' Bill Moyers Journal*, *National Public Radio*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Fox News*.

Fishman holds a Masters in International Affairs (MIA) from Columbia University and a B.A. from the University of California Los Angeles.

## **Jacob Shapiro**

Jacob N. Shapiro is an Assistant Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University. His primary research interests are the organizational aspects of terrorism, insurgency, and security policy. Shapiro's ongoing projects study the balance between secrecy and openness in counterterrorism, the causes of militant recruitment in Islamic countries, and the relationship between public goods provision and insurgent violence in Iraq and Afghanistan. His research has been published in *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Foreign Policy*, and a number of edited volumes. Shapiro is a Harmony Fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy.

Mr. Shapiro has served tours as a Naval Reserve officer with the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Naval Warfare Development Command. On active duty he served at Special Boat Team 20 and onboard the USS Arthur W. Radford (DD-968). Ph.D. Political Science, M.A. Economics, Stanford University. B.A. Political Science, University of Michigan.