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**Zarqawi's Death:  
Temporary "Victory"  
or Lasting Impact**

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**Working Draft, Revised: June 8, 2006**

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There is no doubt that the Iraqi government and US forces in Iraq have scored a major political and propaganda victory by killing Abu Musab al Zarqawi. What is less clear that this victory will have a major impact over time. Its lasting importance depends on two things. The overall resilience of the insurgency in Iraq and how well the new Iraqi government can follow up with actions that build a national consensus and defeat and undermine all the elements of the insurgency.

### ***Much Depends on Iraqi Government Follow-Up***

Much of whether Zarqawi's death has lasting impact, or has the same temporary impact as Saddam's capture and the death of his sons, depends on the Iraqi government. Zarqawi's death does coincide with a new government taking office, and it may well be able to exploit his death with a range of important actions:

- ***Appointing Ministers of Defense and Interior:*** The appointment of Ministers who have ended half a year of non-leadership, convince Sunnis that the Ministry of Interior and its forces would no longer support attack on Sunnis, and still reassure Shi'ites and Kurds, would have great impact. The new Ministers cannot be successful overnight, but simply appointing them is an important first step and following up with real action would have a lasting value.
- ***Freeing Detainees and Bringing Sunnis and Ba'athists Back into Government and the Iraqi Forces:*** Maliki has already taken a vital step by freeing some detainees and the eventual total could be much higher. He has talked about bringing more Sunnis into office and the Iraqi forces as well as more Ba'athists. This latter step is critical because so many leading secular Iraqis joined the Ba'ath simply to survive, and are innocent of any of Saddam's abuses.
- ***Investigating American "Abuses:"*** An Iraqi investigation may seem critical of the US, but it is absolutely essential that both the Iraqi government and the US make it clear who is really guilty of what, punish the guilty, and identify the innocent. Only such Iraqi action can show the government is truly sovereign and provide a basis for showing there is no cover up or concealment. It is vital to establishing the fact that many of the charges being piled on the US military are almost certainly exaggerated or false, and rebuilding Iraqi-US trust and confidence.
- ***Reaching out to Sunnis:*** Maliki has already shown he is actively seeking to include Sunnis in the political process, and Sunnis who supported the insurgency for political reasons, and not out of loyalty to Saddam or religious extremism. Many of these Sunnis have every reason to fear or hate the more extreme

insurgents, and Zarqawi's death may convince them to move back towards the center.

- ***Cleaning Up the Ministry of Interior, Security Forces, Police Forces, and Guards:*** Maliki has talked about a sweeping clean up and reorganization, with new uniforms and badges, tighter controls and discipline, and backed by a MNSTC-I advisory effort that gives the "year of the police" real meaning. There already has been considerable progress in the MOI, prison system, and several key MOI security units associated with "death squads." If a broader effort can even be seen to begin to take hold, this could have a major impact.
- ***Dealing with the Militias and Irregulars:*** Maliki already delivered key messages calling for an end to militia operations, and gave one in Basra – showing he will deal with Shi'ite militias in even the most trouble areas. Making good on his words will be difficult, dangerous, and time consuming. Once again, however, even a real start would have a major impact.
- ***Cleaning Up Baghdad:*** Plans have been underway for months for joint Iraqi-US action to try to take back the parts of Baghdad that have come back under Shi'ite militia (Sadr) and insurgent control. A major sweep, led by Iraqi forces with a real Iraqi government, can't win back the whole city, but could be a critical start. If other actions take place in Mosul, Kirkuk, and Basra, the move toward reestablishing security in the most important areas in the country could offset much of the problems created by more than half a year of political turmoil.
- ***Appointing the Group to Review the Constitution:*** Finally, Sunnis, Shi'ites, Kurds, and others will be far more willing to believe in the new government if they see a body appointed to deal with the 55 areas in the constitution that must be reviewed to finish a draft that is national and representative.

There is no way the new government can implement all of these actions overnight, and many will play out over a year or more. The deterioration of Iraq since the political turmoil over the constitutional referendum, and December 15<sup>th</sup> election, does not, however, have to continue. There important options to correct the situations and some are underway. The questions that count are how soon, how real, and how lasting government action will be.

### ***The Impact on the Insurgency***

Regardless of how decisively the government acts, Zarqawi's death will have a positive impact. There is no other figure in the insurgency that has captured Iraq and the world's attention. Most other leaders are nearly faceless and many are unknown. At the same time, Zarqawi's extremism has sometimes been a liability. His cruelty and calls for Jihad against Shi'ites, his willingness to attack civilians and fellow Muslims, has helped push at least some Sunnis away from the insurgency, divided even some elements of Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia, and been a partial liability. There is at least some risk that his death will allow the surviving insurgency to broaden its base.

But, the past tendency to demonize both Zarqawi and Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia has been dangerously misleading. The insurgency is far more complex and robust.

### *Damage to Al Qa'ida*

The level of damage Zarqawi's death will do to Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia is almost impossible to predict. Reports of deep divisions in Al Qa'ida sometimes seem to owe as much to wishful thinking and disinformation as fact.

The US has, however, scored increasing success against the overall structure of organization over the last year, and its intelligence and targeting capabilities to have improved significantly. How much of this comes from new intelligence methods and how much comes from Iraqi informers inside and outside Al Qa'ida is hard to determine. The US emphasizes Iraqi sources but this may be to protect intelligence sources and methods and partly political warfare.

Much also depends on just how much information the US captured that reveals Al Qa'ida's overall organization and cell structure. ABC reporting indicates that US and Iraqi forces conducted 17 simultaneous raids around Baghdad after they confirmed that Zarqawi was death and seized a "treasure trove" of information about Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia. These had been a massive surveillance and targeting effort underway to find Zarqawi, and they could immediately deploy the resource devoted to go after secondary targets.

It still, however, is far from clear that they can attack the entire organization. If much does survive, it can take on a less extreme and more Iraqi character, and Zarqawi's death may allow him to be treated as a martyr and even be spun into a kind of "victory."

The bulk of Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia is now Iraqi, not foreign, and it has developed a highly compartmented organization, with regional emirs and cells with a high degree of isolation and security and a high degree of independence. The end result might be the most of Al Qa'ida survives, and even "moderates" in ways that expand its reach in ways Zarqawi's extremism prevented.

It is also important to note that Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia has already shown that it can resurface under a variety of other names and covers. These include: Al-Qa'ida Group of Jihad in Iraq; Al-Qa'ida Group of Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers; Al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia; Al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers; Al-Qa'ida of Jihad in Iraq; Al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of The Two Rivers; Al-Qa'ida of the Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers; Al-Tawhid; Al-Zarqawi Network; Jam'at al-Tawhid Wa'al-Jihad; Tanzeem Qaidat al Jihad/Bilad al Raafidaini; Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn; The Monotheism and Jihad Group; The Organization Base of Jihad/Country of the Two Rivers; The Organization Base of Jihad/Mesopotamia; The Organization of al-Jihad's Base in Iraq; The Organization of al-Jihad's Base in the Land of the Two Rivers; The Organization of al-Jihad's Base of Operations in Iraq; The Organization of al-Jihad's Base of Operations in the Land of the Two Rivers; and the Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers

### *The Other Elements of the Insurgency*

One thing is clear, most of the insurgency will not be affecting because Al Qa'ida is a highly visible and extraordinarily brutal cadre within a much larger group of different insurgent movements. Experts differ on how much insurgent groups compete or coordinate, and how different their goals are. The groups that make the most use of public statements and the Internet do tend to advance common themes. They at least

claim to be Sunni Islamist in character, and insurgent web sites do reflect a shift towards the use of more religious rhetoric and themes over time. Like many oppositionist and radical movements, however, it is not always clear what such Islamist claims really mean.

Leaders may be true believers and strongly support Neo-Salafi beliefs, but such Puritanism does not really set clear goals for the future. It seems likely that most leaders and the vast majority of Sunni insurgents know far more about what they are against than what they are for.

This does give them a common set of targets and to some extent means they pursue a common strategy. At the same time, a number of intelligence, Coalition, and Iraqi government experts feel the insurgents do divide into two major groups.

- *The first are largely native Iraqi Sunni insurgents.* They still seem to be primarily nationalist in character. They are not seeking regional or global Jihad, but rather the ability to influence or control events in Iraq. In general, native Iraqi Sunni “nationalists” want to return to a government closer to the Ba’athist regime. They may be religious, but a secular regime under Sunni control is acceptable. Their primary goal is to regain the power they once had, or at the minimum obtain their “fair share” of power and not be subject to Shi’ite rule... Anger, revenge, economic need, opposition to the US invasion and any government that grows out of it or sheer lack of hope in the current system are all motives as well.
- *The second consists of Sunni “neo-Salafi” insurgents* – particularly those led by harder-line neo-Salafi figures like Zarqawi. These groups have different goals. They believe they are fighting a region-wide war in Iraq for a form of Sunni extremism that not only will eliminate any presence by Christians and Jews, but also create a Sunni puritan state in which other sects of Islam are forced to convert to their interpretation or are destroyed.

Most of these groups avoid attacking other sects of Islam, at least publicly and have made a growing effort to identify themselves as Iraqi rather than as groups dominated by foreign leaders or influence. Others, like the group led by Zarqawi, are more extreme. These neo-Salafis have little of mainstream Islam’s tolerance for “peoples of the book,” but they have no tolerance of other interpretations of Islam. Such insurgents are known in the Muslim world as *Takferies*—a term that refers to groups that base their ideology on determining who is a believer in their view. They see those who do not fit their definition of piety as apostates. To some, particularly the group led by Zarqawi, all other Islamic sects like Shi’ites and even other Sunnis, are effectively nonbelievers or *Kafirs*.

Such generalizations do have severe limits and uncertainties. There is no way to know how many Iraqis support the neo-Salafi and other Sunni extremist elements of the insurgency, any more than there are any precise counts of the foreign volunteers who support them. It is unclear how many members of Sunni extremist groups actually support the group’s ideological goals rather than act out of anger, misinformation, and/or a naïve search for martyrdom.

It is also important to point out that Sunni Puritanism does not, in itself, mean advocating violence against other Islamic sects or those outside Islam. Some Sunni puritan movements call Shi’ites and other sects heretics (*bid’a*), attacker of God’s unity (*tawhid*), and even as advocates of polytheism (*shirk*). Some extremist puritan Salafis preachers have called Shi’ites apostates, and advocate shunning them, hating them, and scorning them as *rawafidh* (which means rejectionists; a reference to the Shi’ites’ rejection of electing Abu Bakr as the first Caliph after the death of the Prophet over Ali, Islam fourth Caliph and Shi’ites first Imam). Yet, such religious rhetoric has rarely taken the form of violence. Like Christian and Jewish extremists, words do not necessarily mean a commitment to action.<sup>1</sup>

Some traditional Salafist groups and traditional Shi'ite groups have coexisted and worked closely together. Notable examples include Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Palestine. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood cooperated with Iran after the revolution in 1979, despite some of the country's actions against Iranian Sunnis.

### *The Nature and Role Neo-Salafi and Islamist Extremist Groups*

The ideological belief structure of the various Neo-Salafi and other Islamist extremist groups is hard to characterize. They are far more political and military activists than theologians. As such, they are not puritans in the sense of Wahhabi, nor are they Salafis in the traditional sense of the word. While they are "Islamist," they are not so much religious as committed to a violent struggle for their beliefs. Their foreign leaders and cadres have been created in past wars, and their Iraqi members have been created since the Coalition invasion of Iraq.

Religion has proven to be an important factor in the composition of these groups and extending their reach into the Iraqi population. There have been reports that some "nationalists" have joined ranks with these neo-Salafi groups in Iraq. Mowaffak Rubaie, Iraq's National Security Advisor, was quoted as saying, "Religion is a strong motive. You are not going to find someone who is going to die for Ba'athists. But Salafists have a very strong message. If you use the Koran selectively, it could be a weapon of mass destruction."<sup>ii</sup>

The violent Sunni neo-Salafi and other Sunni Islamist extremist groups do, however, clearly differ from other Sunni insurgents in their willingness to use violence against non-combatants and the innocent and in their willingness to use violence against other Muslims. They are far more willing to use extreme methods of violence, like suicide bombs, against Shi'ite and Kurdish targets. They are equally willing to use these methods of attack against Iraqi officials and Iraqis in the military, security, and police services, and Iraqis of all religious and ethnic background that do not support them in their interpretation of jihad.

Moreover, some have been willing to act on the principle that ordinary Iraqi citizens can be sacrificed in a war fought in God's cause. These Sunni Islamic extremists are fighting a war that extends throughout the world, not simply in Iraq, and their goals affect all Arab states and all of Islam.

It also seems clear that many such insurgents do not believe they have to "win" in Iraq, at least in any conventional sense of the term. They do not need to restore Sunni power or control, at least in the near term. Simply driving the US and its Coalition allies out of Iraq in a war of attrition is seen as a key goal and would be seen as a major strategic victory.

An outcome that left Iraq in a state of prolonged civil war, and forces a spreading conflict in Islam between Sunnis and other sects, and neo-Salafists and other Sunnis, is seen a prelude to a broader eschatological conflict they believe is inevitable and that God will ensure they win. They are not fighting a limited war -- at least in terms of their ultimate ends and means. Compromise is at best a temporary action forced upon them for the purposes of expediency.

True Neo-Salafis also seen the insurgency are part of a general war for the control and soul of Islam, rather than Iraq. If anything, they ultimately gain the most if the Sunni and Shi'ite worlds divide, if Iraq becomes the continuing scene of violence between the US

and Arabs, if US forces remain tied down, and if their actions create as much regional instability as possible.

This means there are no clear limits to the willingness of some of the more extreme Sunni Arab insurgent elements to escalate, even if this means trying to drive the nation into a civil war they cannot win. They are also likely to escalate even further as their situation becomes more threatened.

Neo-Salafi extremist groups, such as that of Zarqawi are the main causes of suicide bombings and mass attacks on civilians, especially the ones directed against the Shi'ites. Zarqawi has been ambiguous in his permissibility of attacking other Muslims and has issued various statements, some of which sanction attacks on Iraqi Shi'ites, and others emphasizing that such casualties should be avoided. Such neo-Salafi extremists have used religious rhetoric effectively in Iraq, and have tried to link the conflict in Iraq to other Muslim struggles in Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. Their statements and recruitment tapes start with references to these conflicts and tie their "struggle" in Iraq as part of this worldwide Islam vs. the West conflict.

Such groups extend their commitment to violence to other Sunnis and Iraqis, although they differ over how willing they are to state this publicly. Until September of 2005, most Sunni Islamist extremist groups were generally careful to avoid any open claims of a split with Iraqis Shi'ites, and some cooperated with Sadr and his militia. Since, they have carried out mass attacks and bombings on Shi'ites, and they have repeatedly shown that they place few -- if any -- limits on the means of violence against those they regard as enemies of Islam.

From the viewpoint of negotiation and deterrence, this belief structure means that many cadres and leaders of such groups and cells cannot be persuaded, only defeated. Furthermore, they not only will remain alienated and violent --almost regardless of what the government and other Sunnis and Sunni insurgents do -- they will remain active diehards until they are rooted out, move on to new countries or areas if forced to disperse, and join other extreme Sunni Islamist movements if the ones they currently support are defeated.

### *Guessing at Their Strength*

No one can reliably estimate how many such neo-Salafi extremists there are in the field. No one fully understands how many movements and cells are involved. It seems fairly clear, however, that such neo-Salafi groups are a driving force in the insurgency. It is also fairly clear that they are tactical and lethal in their violence in Iraq.

The most visible groups or names for a mix of affiliates including Sunni Islamist groups like Al Qaeda and Ansar al Sunna, and more nationalist or "Ba'athist groups like the Victorious Army Group. More than 35 groups have claimed to exist at various times. Their numbers include groups like the Supporters of the Sunni People. Some sources put the number at over 100, but these totals seem to include mere fronts and Sunni groups that are more secular or affiliated with the Ba'ath. The names include groups like the Men's Faith Brigade; the Islamic Anger, Al Baraa bin Malik Suicide Brigade; and the Tawid Lions of Abdullah ibn al Zobeir.

A study of Internet websites and postings by SITE found more than 100 groups claimed to exist in various proclamations and Sunni Islamist websites. Of these, SITE found that

59 were claimed by Al Qa'ida and 36 by Ansar al Sunna. Another eight groups claimed to be operating under the direction of the Victorious Army Group, and another five groups claimed to be operating under the 20th of July Revolution Brigade.<sup>iii</sup>

Work by the Crisis Group found at least 14 largely neo-Salafi groups had web pages, and that large numbers of brigades and formations existed that had some degree of autonomy or independence.<sup>iv</sup> It also found that the major groups were loosely linked in an informal "Majlis," although it is unclear how real such a body is, how often it meets, or what it does.

The major groups do seem to have cadres of leaders, planners, financiers, and "armorers." These may or may not control a given operation; have jurisdiction over a given group of cells, or simply supply affiliates. It is clear that Al Qa'ida sometimes claims attacks are coordinated by different elements. For example, an October 24, 2005 attack on the Palestine and Sheraton Hotels in central Baghdad was claimed by the "Attack Brigade," the "Rockets Brigade," and "Al Baraa bin Malik Suicide Brigade" It was far from clear who was really involved. As these names indicate, some groups also seem to specialize in given type of attacks, and other on given types of targets. Some, for example, only seem to attack Coalition targets while others (the "Omar Brigade"?) attacks Iraqi elements such as the Badr Organization on the grounds they attack Sunnis.

Insurgent groups often act alone, or claim affiliation with other organizations. Some, such as the Ansar, or "Suicide" Brigade, create confusion because their name implies they are members of one group but claim affiliation with another. The Ansar Brigade claims claim an affiliation with Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia. Al Qa'ida, however, openly associates itself with only some of the groups that claim affiliation with it.

The high degree of compartmentalization, isolation, and independence of such movements not only helps protect them and enables them to operate as informal distributed networks; it makes their strength fluid and extremely hard to estimate. As Bruce Hoffman of the Rand Corporation pointed out, "There is no center of gravity, no leadership, no hierarchy; they are more a constellation than an organization. They have adopted a structure that assures their longevity." Abdul Kareem al-Eniezi, the minister for national security, has said that, "The leaders usually don't have anything to do with details...Sometimes they will give the smaller groups a target, or a type of target. The groups aren't connected to each other. They are not that organized."<sup>v</sup>

When it comes to estimating the number of Neo-Salafi and other Sunni Islamist extremist groups relative to other insurgents, some experts guesstimate the number of Islamist extremist insurgents at as little 5-10 percent of the total insurgents without being able to say what base number they are a percent of, or distinguishing core insurgents from part timers or sympathizers.

As has been noted earlier, US experts and officers sometimes make reference to a total of 20,000 insurgents of all kinds, but such experts are among the first to state that these numbers are more nominal mid-points in a range of guesses than real estimates. Other experts estimate the total number of Sunni insurgents and active sympathizers insurgents of all kinds at totals from 15,000 to 60,000, with far larger numbers of additional passive sympathizers. These guesstimates would put the Sunni Islamist extremists at anywhere from 1,500 to 6,000.

Some estimates do put the total number of neo-Salafi Sunni extremists much higher.<sup>vi</sup> Anthony Lloyd of the *London Times* has stated that, "An intelligence summary, citing the conglomeration of insurgent groups under the al-Qa'ida banner to be the result of rebel turf wars, money, weaponry and fear, concluded that of the estimated 16,000 Sunni Muslim insurgents, 6,700 were hardcore Islamic fundamentalists who were now supplemented by a possible further 4,000 members after an amalgamation with Jaysh Muhammad, previously an insurgent group loyal to the former Ba'athist regime."

Given the difficulty in distinguishing core activists from part time or fringe activists, no one can discount such estimates. The fact is, however, that such estimates again highlight the level of uncertainty surrounding a number of key aspects of the insurgency

### ***Key Islamist Extremist Groups***

There is a broad consensus over which Islamist extremist groups are most important, but little consensus over their relative strength and power, and the nature of the smaller groups.

While the various Sunni Islamist extremist groups are in a constant state of flux, the declassified intelligence assessments in the US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism, provided the following description of the key Islamist groups as of April 2005:<sup>vii</sup>

Iraq remains the central battleground in the global war on terrorism. Former regime elements as well as foreign fighters and Islamic extremists continued to conduct terrorist attacks against civilians and non-combatants. These elements also conducted numerous insurgent attacks against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces, which often had devastating effects on Iraqi civilians and significantly damaged the country's economic infrastructure.

...Jordanian-born Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and his organization emerged in 2004 to play a leading role in terrorist activities in Iraq. In October, the US Government designated Zarqawi's group, Jama'at al Tawhid wa'al-Jihad, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In December, the designation was amended to include the group's new name Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (or "The al-Qa'ida Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers") and other aliases following the "merger" between Zarqawi and Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida organization. Zarqawi announced the merger in October, and in December, bin Laden endorsed Zarqawi as his official emissary in Iraq. Zarqawi's group claimed credit for a number of attacks targeting Coalition and Iraqi forces, as well as civilians, including the October massacre of 49 unarmed, out-of-uniform Iraqi National Guard recruits. Attacks that killed civilians include the March 2004 bombing of the Mount Lebanon Hotel, killing seven and injuring over 30, and a December 24 suicide bombing using a fuel tanker that killed nine and wounded 19 in the al-Mansur district of Baghdad.

In February 2004, Zarqawi called for a "sectarian war" in Iraq. He and his organization sought to create a rift between Shi'a and Sunnis through several large terror attacks against Iraqi Shi'a. In March 2004, Zarqawi claimed credit for simultaneous bomb attacks in Baghdad and Karbala that killed over 180 pilgrims as they celebrated the Shi'a festival of Ashura. In December, Zarqawi also claimed credit for a suicide attack at the offices of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), one of Iraq's largest Shi'a parties, which killed 15 and wounded over 50.

This assessment was updated as follows in the April 2006 edition:

In a July 2005 letter to al-Qa'ida deputy Zawahiri, AQI leader Abumusab al-Zarqawi outlined a four-stage plan to expand the Iraq war to include expelling U.S. forces, establishing an Islamic authority, spreading the conflict to Iraq's secular neighbors and engaging in battle with Israel. Consistent with their stated plan, groups affiliated with Zarqawi also were linked to regional acts of terrorism, such as the Sharm al-Sheikh bombings in Egypt in July, the Aqaba rocket attack on the USS Ashland in August, and the multiple hotel bombings in Amman in November.

In addition to Zarqawi's foreign recruiting efforts, the network likely is receiving material support through al-Qa'ida. In addition, local criminal activities also fund many of the Zarqawi Network's actions. There are reports indicating that the network steals cars and uses ransom money from kidnappings to fund its terrorist activities. In Mosul alone, Zarqawi affiliates are reportedly responsible for more than 1,700 attacks on Coalition and Iraqi forces over a threemonth period in 2005. Many of these attacks were suicide and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks using cars and other motor vehicles driven by foreign fighters or locally recruited Iraqis trained by foreign fighters. Like some Zarqawi operations, these attacks often targeted Iraqi Shia in an attempt to incite sectarian violence.

In August 2003, Zarqawi's group carried out a major terrorist attack in Iraq when it bombed the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, followed 12 days later by a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack against the UN Headquarters in Baghdad that killed 23, including the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello. That same month the group also conducted a VBIED attack against Shia worshippers outside the Imam Ali Mosque in al Najaf, killing 85, including the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). The group kept up its attack pace throughout 2003, striking numerous Iraqi, Coalition, and relief agency targets such as the Red Cross. Zarqawi's group conducted VBIED attacks against U.S. military personnel and Iraqi infrastructure throughout 2004, including suicide attacks inside the Green Zone perimeter in Baghdad. The group successfully penetrated the Green Zone in the October 2004 bombing of a popular café and market. It also claimed responsibility for the videotaped execution by beheading of Americans Nicholas Berg (May 8, 2004), Jack Armstrong (September 20, 2004), and Jack Hensley (September 21, 2004).

Zarqawi's network was likely involved in other hostage incidents as well. In 2005 AQI largely focused on conducting multiple high profile, coordinated suicide attacks. AQI claimed numerous attacks primarily aimed against civilians, the Iraqi Government, and security forces, such as the coordinated attacks against polling sites during the January elections and the coordinated VBIED attacks outside the Sheraton and Palestine hotels in Baghdad on October 24. The group also continued assassinations against Shia leaders and the Shia Badr Corps.

AQI also increased its external operations in 2005 by claiming credit for three attacks: suicide bomber attacks against hotels in Amman on November 9; a rocket attack against U.S. Navy ships in the port of Aqaba in August, which resulted in limited damage in Jordan and in Eilat, Israel; and the firing of several rockets into Israel from Lebanon in December. In addition, an AQI operative was arrested in Turkey in August while planning an operation targeting Israeli cruise ships. Prior to 2005, AQI planned and conducted limited attacks in Jordan, including the assassination of USAID official Laurence Foley in 2002. Also in 2005 AQI increased its rhetoric against governments in the region that it sees as collaborating with the West....More than 1,000 members, but the exact number is unknown.

The State Department reports have also notes that other insurgent groups are active and have provided a more detailed description of the role of Ansar al-Islam (AI) (a.k.a. Ansar al-Sunnah Partisans of Islam, Helpers of Islam, Kurdish Taliban,; Ansar Al-Sunna Army; Devotees of Islam; Followers of Islam in Kurdistan; Helpers of Islam; Jaish Ansar Al-Sunna; Jund Al-Islam; Kurdish Taliban; Kurdistan Supporters of Islam: Partisans of Islam; Soldiers of God; Soldiers of Islam; Supporters of Islam in Kurdistan:<sup>viii</sup>

Other terrorist groups were active in Iraq. Ansar al-Sunna, believed to be an offshoot of the Ansar al-Islam group founded in Iraq in September 2001, first came to be known in April 2003 after issuing a statement on the Internet. In February 2004, Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on the offices of two Kurdish political parties in Irbil, which killed 109 Iraqi civilians. The Islamic Army in Iraq has also claimed responsibility for terrorist actions. Approximately 3,800 disarmed persons remained resident at the former Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MeK) military base at Camp Ashraf; the MeK is a designated US Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). More than 400 members renounced membership in the organization in 2004. Forty-one additional defectors elected to return to Iran, and another two hundred were awaiting ICRC assistance for voluntary repatriation to Iran at the end of the year. PKK/ KADEK/Kongra Gel, a designated foreign terrorist group, maintains an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 armed militants in northern Iraq, according to Turkish

Government sources and NGOs. In the summer of 2004, PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel renounced its self-proclaimed cease-fire and threatened to renew its separatist struggle in both Turkey's Southeast and urban centers.

Turkish press subsequently reported multiple incidents in the Southeast of PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel terrorist actions or clashes between Turkish security forces and PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel militants. Zarqawi has denied responsibility for another significant attack that same month in Karbala and Najaf, two of Shi'a Islam's most holy cities, which killed Iraqi civilians and wounded more than 120. Terrorists operating in Iraq used kidnapping and targeted assassinations to intimidate Iraqis and third-country nationals working in Iraq as civilian contractors. Nearly 60 noncombatant Americans died in terrorist incidents in Iraq in 2004. Other American noncombatants were killed in attacks on coalition military facilities or convoys. In June, Zarqawi claimed credit for the car bomb that killed the chairman of the Coalition-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. In April, an American civilian was kidnapped and later beheaded. One month later, a video of his beheading was posted on an al-Qa'ida-associated website. Analysts believe that Zarqawi himself killed the American as well as a Korean hostage, kidnapped in June. Zarqawi took direct credit for the September kidnapping and murder of two American civilians and later their British engineer co-worker, and the October murder of a Japanese citizen.

„In August, the Kurdish terrorist group Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and killing of 12 Nepalese construction workers, followed by the murder of two Turkish citizens in September. Many other foreign civilians have been kidnapped. Some have been killed, others released, some remain in their kidnappers' hands, and the fate of others, such as the director of CARE, is unknown.

...Ansar al-Islam (AI) is a radical Islamist group of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs who have vowed to establish an independent Islamic state in Iraq. The group was formed in December 2001. In the fall of 2003, a statement was issued calling all jihadists in Iraq to unite under the name Ansar al-Sunnah (AS). Since that time, it is likely that AI has posted all claims of attack under the name AS. AI is closely allied with al-Qa'ida and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's group, Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (QJBR) in Iraq. Some members of AI trained in al-Qa'ida camps in Afghanistan, and the group provided safe haven to al-Qa'ida fighters before Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Since OIF, AI has become one of the leading groups engaged in anti-Coalition attacks in Iraq and has developed a robust propaganda campaign.

AI continues to conduct attacks against Coalition forces, Iraqi Government officials and security forces, and ethnic Iraqi groups and political parties. AI members have been implicated in assassinations and assassination attempts against Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) officials and Coalition forces, and also work closely with both al-Qa'ida operatives and associates in QJBR. AI has also claimed responsibility for many high profile attacks, including the simultaneous suicide bombings of the PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) party offices in Ibril on February 1, 2004, and the bombing of the US military dining facility in Mosul on December 21, 2004.

Its strength is approximately 500 to 1,000 members, its location and area of operation is primarily central and northern Iraq... The group receives funding, training, equipment, and combat support from al-Qa'ida, QJBR, and other international jihadist backers throughout the world. AI also has operational and logistic support cells in Europe.

### ***Other Estimates***

Virtually all sources agree that at least two, and probably three key Iraqi Islamist extremist groups exist. They include the one led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, first known as *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, or Unity and Holy War, and now known as *Tandhim Qa'idat al-Jihan fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* or as the al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers.

The second, and only easily identifiable group with significant numbers of foreign volunteers, is the offshoot of Ansar al-Islam, or Protectors of Islam, an Islamist group created in the Kurdish regions in September 2001, called Ansar al-Sunna, or Protectors of

the Sunna Faith. Ansar suffered a joint attack from Kurdish and US forces in March 2003, forcing many of its fighters to scatter, possibly to Iran, before several allegedly settled in Mosul.

Two other groups, and their area of operation, include:<sup>ix</sup>

- *Al-Muqawama al-'Iraqiya al-Wataniya al-Islamiya—Fayaliq Thawrat 1920* or the Iraqi National Islamic Resistance—the 1920 Brigades: West Baghdad, Ninewah, Diyala, and Anbar.

*Al-Jibha al-Wataniya litahrial-'Iraq* or the National Front for the Liberation of Iraq and which seems to be an umbrella for groups of Islamists and nationalist, namely the Islamic Army of Iraq, the Army of Mohammad, the Iraqi Resistance Front, the Iraqi Liberation Army, and the Awakening and Holy War: Fallujah, Samarra, and Basra

### ***NGO Estimates of the Full Range of Movements***

NGO's like the Crisis Group believes that Sunni Islamist groups have come to almost totally dominate the insurgency. The Crisis Group developed a list of such groups in early 2006, and it is clear that there are many other groups than Al Qa'ida and many leaders (albeit far less visible) than Zarqawi:<sup>x</sup>

- *Tandhim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (al-Qa'ida's Organisation in Mesopotamia). Formerly *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad), the group has been shaped by the personality of its purported founder, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. The group claims to have 15 brigades or battalions (*Katiba*, plural *Kata'ib*) operating under its banner, including two "martyrs" brigades, of which one allegedly comprises exclusively Iraqi volunteers.
- *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* (Partisans of the Sunna Army).<sup>xi</sup> The group reportedly is an offshoot of *Jaysh Ansar al-Islam* (the Partisans of Islam Army); a *jihadi* organisation previously based in Kurdistan and which by most accounts has ceased to operate in Iraq. (Tellingly, a group claiming affiliation with *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*, *Jaysh al-Sunna wal-Jama'a* publishes a magazine in Kurdish). The group claims to have some 16 brigades. It has committed some particularly violent attacks.
- *Al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* (the Islamic Army in Iraq). Thirteen brigades have claimed allegiance to this group. Again, the group's highly Salafi discourse blends with a vigorously patriotic tone. It is widely seen both in Iraq and in the West as one of the armed groups that is more "nationalist" in character and more likely to turn away from armed struggle if a suitably inclusive political compromise is possible. The authors of the Crisis Group study disagree and argue that, "The perception that *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* comprises chiefly former regime officers while *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* is a gathering of foreign militants is misleading. Undoubtedly, *Tandhim* has tapped into foreign volunteers who are ready to die, but the logistics of suicide attacks (smuggling, hosting, training, and equipping volunteers, gathering intelligence on targets, etc.) require solid rooting in Iraqi society and capabilities Iraqis alone can provide. The make-up of *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* may well involve a core of experienced Iraqi officers and other members of the former regime, but unseasoned and devout combatants, as well as Iraqi salafi preachers with connections throughout the Muslim world ought not be excluded. Indeed, such mixed composition, as well as cross dependencies (*jihadis* rely on local networks, and on international sources of finance and legitimacy), help explain in part the relative homogeneity in discourse.
- *Al-Jabha al-Islamiya lil-Muqawama al-'Iraqiya* (the Islamic Front of the Iraqi Resistance), known by its initials as *Jami'* (mosque or gathering). This group could be more akin to a "public relations organ" shared between different armed groups, rather than an armed group in itself. Issuing regular, weekly updates of claimed attacks, it also has a comprehensive website and publishes a lengthy, monthly magazine also called *Jami'*. Deeply nationalistic, but with a slight Salafi taint, its discourse counts among the more sophisticated of the groups.

- *Jaysh al-Rashidin* (the First Four Caliphates Army). As many as six brigades reportedly operate under its banner. The group issues regular updates on its activities and of late has recently set up a website.
- *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansoura* (the Victorious Group's Army). At least three brigades are known to have pledged alliance to this group, which also issues weekly updates.
- *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* (the Mujahidin's Army). This group too puts out weekly updates and operates a website, which was briefly shut down and suspended in December 2005.
- *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya fil-'Iraq* (the Islamic Resistance's Movement in Iraq), which at some stage *Kata'ib Thawrat 'Ashrin* (the 1920 Revolution Brigades) appears to have joined.
- *Jaysh Muhammad* (Muhammad's Army), which issues periodic communiqués and videos focusing on IED attacks in the Anbar governorate.
- *'Asa'ib Ahl al-'Iraq* (the Clans of the People of Iraq).
- *Saraya Al-Ghadhab Al-Islami* (the Islamic Anger Brigades)
- *Saraya Usud Al-Tawhid* (the Lions of Unification Brigades)
- *Saraya Suyuf al-Haqq* (the Swords of Justice Brigades). This group took responsibility for the November 2005 kidnapping of four peace activists from the Christian Peacemaking Team. Its origins and affiliation remain murky, although it claims to operate under the banner of *Jaysh al-Sunna wal-Jama'a*, a recent offshoot of *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*.

Such lists present major uncertainty because they have to be developed largely on the basis of the public statements by various insurgent groups, and that the groups differed significantly in history and credibility. The first five groups were seen as having significant operational status. The second four consisted of groups that took credit for military actions but which tended to use far less elaborate and stable channels of communication than the above four, although their public statements showed beliefs similar to those of *al-Jaysh al-Islami* and *Jami'*. The last four groups "lack regular means of communication and rely instead on periodic claims of responsibility through statements or videos."

The Crisis Group had counted some 50 different brigades by December 2005, that had claimed to carry out military action or terrorist attacks under the name of one major group or the other. It reported that, "In traditional Arab military parlance, a brigade comprises from 100 to 300 men, which would add up to a total of roughly 5,000 to 15,000 insurgents."

What is striking about the groups other than Al Qaeda is almost none of the other groups make formal attacks on Shi'ite sectarianism, although virtually all of the active groups repeatedly attack Shi'ite targets. All have made repeated efforts to establish their credibility by providing detailed on military and terrorist operations. They claimed to act out of Islamic honor and tended to downplay or ignore their worst actions, they attacked US and Iraqi government actions for crimes and atrocities, and accused the Shi'ites and Kurds of sectarian and ethnic separatism – ignoring their own focus on Shi'ite and Kurdish targets. It was the Shi'ites and not the Kurds, however, which they generally accused of using death squads, committing crimes, and fighting "dirty wars."

In practical terms, this means that the insurgency is now dominated by extreme Sunni Arab insurgent elements which seek to provoke a more intense civil conflict, and are willing to escalate to steadily higher levels of violence, even if this means driving the

nation into a civil war they could not win. As a result, some are likely to escalate even further as their situation becomes more threatened, and may seek to lash out with a new surge of violence because of Zarqawi's death. It seems almost certain that many cadres and leaders of such groups and cells cannot be persuaded to join the Iraqi government and political process, only defeated. Some non-Islamist extremist groups will remain alienated almost regardless of what the government and other Sunnis do, and will move on to join the most extreme Islamist movements.

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<sup>i</sup> For an excellent analysis of Wahhabi extremist views, see International Crisis Group, "The Shi'ite Question in Saudi Arabia," Middle East Report No. 45, September 19, 2005, pp 9-11, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3678&l=1>. Also, see "understanding Islamism," Report No. 38, March 2, 2005, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3301&CFID=7586926&CFTOKEN=14481701>.

<sup>ii</sup> Greg Miller and Tyler Marshall, "Qa'ida Operative Said to Draw Iraqi Recruits: US Officials Say Zarqawi Faction Extending its Reach," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 2005, available at: [http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2005/09/17/Qa'ida\\_operative\\_said\\_to\\_draw\\_iraqi\\_recruits/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2005/09/17/Qa'ida_operative_said_to_draw_iraqi_recruits/)

<sup>iii</sup> Dexter Filkins, "Profusion of Iraqi Groups Helps Them Service in Iraq," *New York Times*, December 2, 2005.

<sup>iv</sup> Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words," February 2006.

<sup>v</sup> Dexter Filkins, "Profusion of Iraqi Groups Helps Them Service in Iraq," *New York Times*, December 2, 2005.

<sup>vi</sup> Anthony Loyd, "Terrorists Unite to Plot Iraqi Civil War," *London Times*, September 15, 2005.

<sup>vii</sup> US Department of State, *Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2004*, Department of State Publication 11248, April 2005, pp. 61-62, and *Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2005*, Department of State Publication, April 2006, pp. 219-221.

<sup>viii</sup> US Department of State, *Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2004*, Department of State Publication 11248, April 2005, pp. 94-95, and *Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2005*, Department of State Publication, April 2006, pp. 186-187.

<sup>ix</sup> See Amnesty International's "Iraq in Cold Blood: Abuses by Armed Groups," July 2005, pg. 14.

<sup>x</sup> Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words," Middle East Report No. 50, February 15, 2006, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=3953>.

<sup>xi</sup> The Crisis Group analysis notes that "Sunna in this context does not refer to Sunnis. *Al-Sunna* (literally law, norm or custom) designates the record of the Prophet's sayings and deeds as recalled by his companions. Because parts of these accounts are disputed by Shi'ites, the expression *Ansar al-Sunna* nonetheless bears a confessional connotation."