



Center for Strategic and International Studies

Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy

1800 K Street, N.W. • Suite 400 • Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 1 (202) 775-3270 • Fax: 1 (202) 457-8746

Email: BurkeChair@csis.org

The Iraqi Insurgency and the Risk of Civil War:

Who Are the Players?

Anthony H. Cordesman

Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy

acordesman@aol.com

Working Draft, Revised: March 1, 2006

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I. Characterizing the Insurgency

Coalition and Iraqi forces must deal with a complex mix of threats – only some of which have as yet come into play. The Bush Administration summarized the nature of the insurgency, and its successes and failures, as follows in its October 2005 report to Congress:¹

The insurgency is primarily a Sunni Arab phenomenon and is not a national movement; it has a very narrow base in the country. It continues to be comprised of semi-autonomous and fully autonomous groups with a variety of motivations. Measuring the strength of the insurgency in terms of numbers alone does not provide an adequate assessment of insurgent capabilities.

Insurgent numbers are a very small fraction of Iraq's population. The vast majority of these groups are connected in some way through members belonging to social networks (e.g., familial, tribal, and former professional) that stretch across Iraq and beyond. Insurgents can also be grouped into several strands: terrorists and foreign fighters, "rejectionists" (mostly Sunni), Saddam loyalists, and criminals.

The main threat to achieving Iraqi control of and responsibility for security in provinces is, in the near and medium term, terrorists and foreign fighters because of the psychological impact on the population of their terror campaign, which appears to target Iraqi civilians indiscriminately.

... One noteworthy strategic indicator of progress in the security environment is the continued inability of insurgents to derail the political process and timelines. This is a key objective they are failing to achieve. As expected, there has been an increase in the average number of insurgent attacks during the period leading to the constitutional referendum. Insurgent attacks remain concentrated in four of Iraq's eighteen provinces; half of the Iraqi population lives in areas that experience only six percent of all attacks. Six provinces reported a statistically insignificant number of attacks based on population size. Although about 80% of all attacks are directed against Coalition Forces, about 80% of all casualties are suffered by the Iraqi population.

...Iraqi rejectionists maintain a steady level of violence that complicates efforts to stabilize Iraq. Criminal elements and corruption often enable the insurgency. As noted, these several strands of the insurgency have failed to derail the political process, and their efforts to foment ethno-sectarian conflict have not been successful due in large part to key Iraqi figures calling for restraint among their communities.

Successful elections will not likely change the foreign fighters' strategy. The Iraqi rejectionists – particularly those who are Sunni – may, nonetheless, lose some of their support base as the political process advances. Saddam loyalists may present a longer-term threat to building a democratic, prosperous Iraq because they remain focused on creating conditions in which they can disrupt and subvert the government.

Multi-National Force-Iraq operations in several of the areas most affected by the insurgency have combined with local commanders' engagement of local officials, tribes, and clerics. These operations have disrupted a number of key insurgent cells, limited their freedom of action, and maintained cooperation with influential local leaders in order to keep reconstruction and democracy building moving forward. A significant factor enabling progress against the insurgency is the dramatic increase in intelligence tips received from the population in the past several months, indicative of increasing popular rejection of the insurgents.

... Insurgent groups continue...to demonstrate an ability to adapt, relocate, regenerate, and sustain a campaign of intimidation against Iraqi officials, professionals, "collaborators with the coalition," and religious figures.

The insurgency remains concentrated in Baghdad, Nineveh, al-Anbar, and Salah ad Din

provinces. In these areas, the insurgency sustains a level of violence and casualties that can produce effects that include: maintaining a non-permissive environment that undermines local governance, emerging institutions, reconstruction efforts, and economic growth; inhibiting foreign investment and diplomatic representation; limiting the roles of non-governmental organizations and contractors; and increasing the costs of reconstruction.

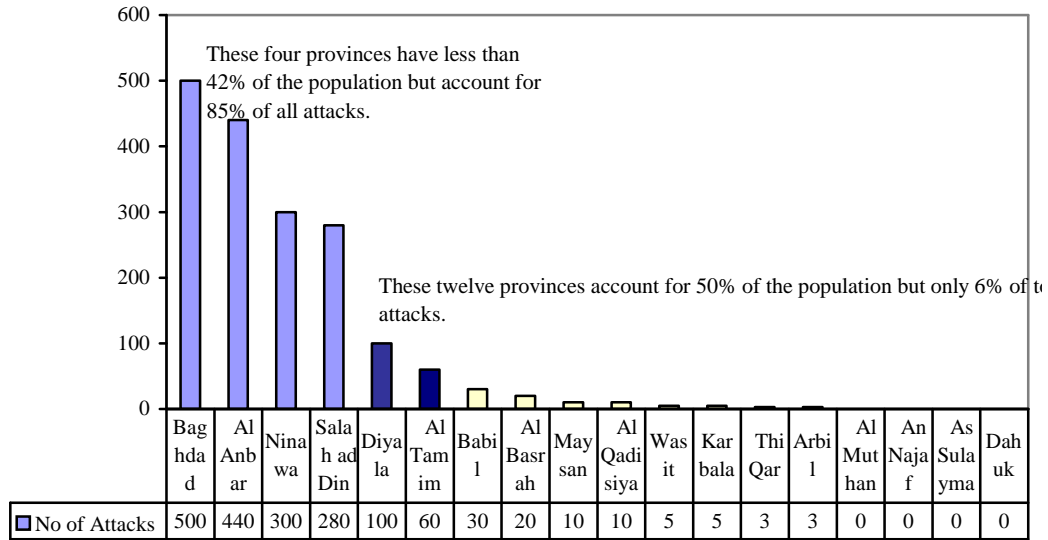
The Regional, Sectarian, and Ethnic Nature of the Insurgency

The insurgency in Iraq has not been a national insurgency. Iraqi Kurds have never supported it, and only small numbers of Shi'ites have taken an active role. It has been driven by a relatively small part of Iraq's population concentrated in part of the country, and its most violent actions have been led by a group of foreign volunteers and extremists which did not seem likely to exceed 3,000 full time insurgents as of September 2005.

Although there are no accurate census data, the Arab Sunni population may only to be around 15-20% of Iraq's total population. Such estimates are, however, uncertain. The CIA placed Iraq's population at 26,074,906 as of July 2005. It CIA estimated in January 2006, that Iraq's population was 75-80% Arab, 15%-20% Kurdish, and 5% Turkoman, Assyrian or other 5%. It estimated that the sectarian split in the entire population was 97% Muslim (Shi'a 60%-65%, Sunni 32%-37%), and 3% Christian. This estimate by Muslim sect, however included the 20%-25% of the population that was not Arab, and not just Arab Sunnis.² It is unclear any accurate figure exists for the number and percentage of Sunni Arabs, although election registrations to date would put in close to the 20% figure.

Regardless of the exact ethnic and sectarian split, only about 6-8% of Iraq's total population is located in the areas most hostile to the Coalition and the Iraqi government. Moreover, if one looks at the total population of all the scattered cities and areas where insurgents and terrorists largely dominate, it does not exceed 6-9% of Iraq's total population.

Figure I.1: The Regional and Sectarian Nature of the Fighting, Total Attacks by Province: August 29-September 16, 2005



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Report to Congress, October 13, 2005, p.21-22.

Estimates of Total Insurgent Forces

Estimates of the size of the insurgency have varied widely ever since the struggle first became serious in August 2003. Much depends on the definition of insurgent and the level of activity and dedication involved, and virtually everyone who issues such estimates admits they are little more than sophisticated "guesstimates."

US officials kept repeating estimates of total insurgent strengths of 5,000 from roughly the fall of 2003 through the summer of 2004. In October, they raised their estimates to a range of 12,000 to 16,000 but have never defined how many are hard-core and full time, and how many are part time. As has been discussed earlier, estimates as divergent as 3,500 and 400,000 were being cited in the spring and early summer of 2005.³

US and Iraqi officials were the first, however, to indicate that any such numbers were little more than guesstimates. They have since been consistently careful to note that they are uncertain as to whether the numbers are increasing or decreasing with time as a result of US and Iraqi operations versus increases in political and other tensions that lead Iraqi Arab Sunnis to join the insurgents. There is no evidence that the number of insurgents is declining as a result of Coalition and Iraqi attacks to date. US experts stated in the spring of 2005 that they had no evidence of a decline in insurgent numbers in spite of large numbers of kills and captures since the summer of 2004.

Much depends on how insurgents are defined and counted: core, full time, part time, sympathizers, etc. This explains why a few outlying estimates were still as low as 3,500 full-time actives making up the "core" forces in 2005. Most US military estimates range between 8,000 and 18,000, perhaps reaching over 20,000 when the ranks swell for major operations. Iraqi intelligence officials, on the other hand, have sometimes issued figures for the total number of Iraqi sympathizers and insurgents as high as 200,000, with a core of anywhere between 15,000 and 40,000 fighters and another 160,000 supporters.

Newsweek quoted US sources as putting the total of insurgents at 12,000-20,000 in late June 2005. Another US expert was quoted as saying it had some 1,000 foreign jihadists, 500 Iraqi jihadists, 15,000-30,000 former regime elements, and some 400,000 auxiliaries and support personnel.⁴ Throughout 2005, the numbers put forth publicly fluctuated between 15,000-20,000 for the total number of insurgents. Near the fall of 2005, estimates of foreign insurgents were between 700 and 2,000. That estimate stayed consistent into 2006.⁵

The true figure may well fall somewhere in this range of different figures, but the exact number is also largely irrelevant. There is no single meaningful definition of the term. There are many different kinds of "insurgents": cadres, full time, part time, sympathizers, collaborators and passive tolerators.

Once again, the numerical strength of the insurgents is only part of the issue. Insurgent cadres have also steadily become more experienced, adapting tactics and methods of attack as fast as Coalition can counter them. Coalition troops

reported that insurgents in Fallujah utilized an improved RPG in efforts to counter armored vehicles. The fighting in September-November of 2004 has shown they are developing networks with some form of central command, planning, and financing.

Furthermore, the ability of insurgents to find replacements is as critical as their current numbers at any given time. US officers have repeatedly commented on the resiliency of the insurgency. Col. Ed Cardon spoke on behalf of himself and others saying, "One thing that has really surprised us is the enemy's ability to regenerate, we take a lot of people off the streets, but they can regenerate very rapidly. The insurgent networks are complex, [and] diffuse. We can take out the leadership, but it doesn't take long for them to grow new legs."⁶

This means much depends on whether the insurgency continues to enjoy enough popular sympathy among Sunnis and others to continue to fight, and whether the violence of Sunni Islamist extremist groups can paralyze efforts at inclusiveness and national unity, or even trigger civil war. In practice, suicide bombings by small groups of such extremists may be far more dangerous than the lower levels of violence by larger mainstream Ba'athist or Sunni groups.

The Iraqi Insurgency vs. Other Insurgencies

It is interesting to speculate on how the Iraqi insurgency compares with that of other modern insurgencies. In August 2005, U.S. Gen. John Abizaid, head of Central Command, estimated that the insurgency was only 20,000 strong, and that it could be even less than that. This number amounted to less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the Iraqi population.

Figure I.2 displays data on seven twentieth century insurgencies analyzed in a 1963 government-sponsored report by Andrew Molnar. The figure shows the percentage of the total population represented by each respective insurgency. The average number is about 2.4 percent, well above the 0.1 percent that Gen. Abizaid cited for Iraq's insurgency.

Figure I.2: Ratios of Insurgents to Population and Guerillas to Underground Members

(For Seven Irregular Conflicts)

Country	Insurgents as % of Population	Ratio of Armed Guerillas to Unarmed Members of the Underground
France (1940-45)	0.97 %	1:3
Yugoslavia (1941-45)	1.65 %	1:3
Algeria (1954-62)	0.29 - 0.58 %	1:3
Malaya (1948-60)	1.9 %	1:18
Greece (1945-49)	8.86 %	1:27
Philippines (1946-54)	0.58 %	1:8
Palestine (1945-48)	2.25 %	1:2

Source: Adapted from Andrew R. Molnar, *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare* (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, 1963), Page 13-16.

Comparisons of Insurgent and Iraqi Forces

There is no way to quantify how the development of Iraqi military, security, and police forces has kept pace with the development of effective Iraqi government forces. There are also no meaningful comparative casualty estimates, although MNSCT-I has issued reports of over 1,000 dead in the various elements of Iraqi forces, and one US commander has talked about 15,000 insurgent and terrorist casualties.⁷

In any case, numerical comparisons of insurgents to Iraqi forces are largely pointless. The ratio of security forces to insurgents sometimes has to reach levels of 12:1 through 30:1 in order to provide security in a given area, if there is no political solution to the problems that create the insurgency or active presence by the government. In other cases, a small number of security forces can decapitate a movement or cell and end it. Intangibles like the battle for political perceptions and “hearts and minds” are often far more critical than the numbers of insurgents and defenders.

As Chapters II and III have shown, threat forces have evolved steadily through the course of the conflict in response to attacks by Coalition and Iraqi forces, their own inventiveness, and lessons learned from other conflicts. The insurgents and terrorists have grown in capability and size, although serious fighting in Fallujah, Mosul, and Samarra may have reduced their capabilities towards the end of the year. The insurgents have also learned a great deal about how to use their weapons, build more sophisticated IEDs, plan attacks and ambushes, improve their security, and locate and attack targets that are both soft and that produce political and media impact. Insurgents deployed six suicide bombers with explosive belts in February 2005 alone, indicating that insurgents are learning ways to get around security restrictions that make car bombings more difficult.⁸

The Intelligence and Security Problem

There are several additional aspects of the insurgency that are important background to any discussion of its individual elements. One is the ability of various insurgent groups to obtain intelligence.

Insurgent Intelligence Capabilities

“Ba’athists” and “Sunni nationalists,” and Sunni Islamist extremists, all pose acute security and counterintelligence problems for MNF-I and Iraqi forces. As has been touched upon in previous chapters, the insurgents have good sources within the Iraqi Interim Government and forces, Iraqi society and sometimes in local US and Coalition commands. This is inevitable, and little can be done to stop it. Iraq simply lacks the resources and data to properly vet all of the people it recruits. US officials believe the insurgent leadership is often so well informed by its intelligence network that it can stay ahead of US and Iraqi forces, fleeing towns before Coalition forces arrive and slipping in and out of the country.⁹

There are good reasons for these intelligence and security problems. Many Iraqis only work for the government or in the Iraqi forces because they cannot find other

employment. They may, in fact, quietly sympathize with the insurgents. Workers in US and government facilities, and in various aid and construction projects, are even harder to vet. Men who do support the government are vulnerable to threats against the families, kidnappings, and actual murders of friends and relatives.

The end result is that the insurgents often have excellent intelligence from sources within the Iraqi government, Iraqi forces, the Iraqis supporting Coalition forces and government activities, and Iraqi industry. This enables them to locate soft targets, hit at key points in terms of Iraq's economy and aid projects, and time their attacks to points of exceptional vulnerability. In practice, it also allows them to pick weak and vulnerable elements of the Iraqi military, security, and police forces and often produce significant casualties. At the same time, in many areas they can use intimidation, threats, kidnappings, and selective murders and assassinations to paralyze or undercut Iraqi units. This means a comparatively small number of core insurgents can bypass or attack the developing Iraqi forces with considerable success.

The insurgents also can take advantage of new reporting on the internet, the steady growth of Iraqi media and near-real time new reporting, and other media coverage of the fighting, particularly by Arab satellite television. This coverage has often provided a near-real time picture of what tactics and weapons work, what strikes have most media and political impact, and often what targets are vulnerable. This "Al Jazeera Effect" substitutes for many elements of a CI system. At the same time, confronting this confusing array of threats is made more difficult without general Iraqi loyalty and stand-alone Iraqi forces.

Counterintelligence and Iraqi Government Efforts

Some US officials have expressed frustration with the Iraqi government for failing to move quickly enough in developing its own intelligence agency. US and Iraqi authorities worked together in a joint intelligence effort to capture former Ba'ath Party members, including Saddam Hussein, and Washington would like to see the same happen with Zarqawi. But according to US officials, Baghdad has been unable to establish a network of local informants.¹⁰

US, allied, and Iraqi human intelligence is improving but Coalition efforts are badly hurt by high turnover and rotations. Most Iraqi networks serving the US in hostile areas have serious quality and loyalty problems, while others either use their positions to settle scores or misinform Coalition troops. Iraqi intelligence is just beginning to take shape, and has only limited coverage of Sunni areas. Training and equipment have improved significantly in the last six months, however, and an October 2005 report to Congress showed the number of tips from Iraqi citizens had increased by more than six fold from 483 March to 3,341 in August 2005 and 4,7000 in september.¹¹

The organization of effective Iraqi government intelligence and counter intelligence efforts will take at least until the end of 2005 and probably well into 2006. Moreover, Coalition and Iraqi government vulnerability is unavoidable to some extent. Aid projects are easy to infiltrate and to target when nearing completion. NGO or contractor headquarters are easily observable targets.

Infrastructure and energy facilities are typical targets that have long lines of pipes or wires and many vulnerable links. The media has to be careful and defensive, as do emergency workers and medical teams. Any nation is inevitably filled with soft or vulnerable targets that insurgents can choose at will, and experienced insurgents and terrorists will always target these vulnerabilities.

Financing the Insurgency

The sources of insurgent finances are another such issue. These sources are not entirely clear, but the broad trends are known. Analysts believe that elements of Saddam Hussein's regime sought refuge in the UAE, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Syria at various points before, during, and after major combat operations in Iraq. Those elements were then able to establish a financial base from which to send funds to the insurgents on the ground.

In July 2005 a senior intelligence officer in the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Caleb Temple, testified before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities and the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. Temple stated that the insurgents' financiers had the connections and enough money to fund their activities, perhaps even increase the violence, for some time. He stated:¹²

We believe terrorist and insurgent expenses are moderate and pose little significant restraints to armed groups in Iraq. In particular, arms and munitions costs are minimal—leaving us to judge that the bulk of the money likely goes towards international and local travel, food and lodging of fighters and families of dead fighters; bribery and payoffs of government officials, families and clans; and possibly into the personal coffers of critical middlemen and prominent terrorist leaders.

Temple and Acting Assistant Treasury Secretary Daniel Glaser asserted that various criminal activities as well as certain Islamic charities also contributed to the flow of funds to insurgents in Iraq. Vital to strangling the insurgency, Temple stated, was the ability to staunch the flow of money. He asserted, "Drying up money and stopping its movement degrades terrorist and insurgent operations. It hinders recruitment and impedes couriers, disrupts procurement of bomb components, and creates uncertainty in the minds of suicide bombers regarding whether their families will receive promised compensation."¹³

In July 28, 2005 testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Glaser listed some of the most common methods of funding the insurgency:¹⁴

- Funds provided by charities, Iraqi expatriates, and other deep pocket donors, primarily in the Gulf, but also in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, and Europe;
- Criminal activities, such as kidnapping for ransom, possible narcotics trafficking, robbery, theft, extortion, smuggling, and counterfeiting (goods and currency).

Glaser also reviewed some of the efforts underway to help staunch these cash flows:

- Since March 2003, the U.S. Government has focused on the need to locate, freeze, and repatriate Iraqi assets from around the world, as well as to find cash and other assets within Iraq that were stolen and hidden by Former Regime Elements.

- In May 2003 the United Nations Security Council adopted UNSCR 1483, which calls on U.N. Member States to identify, freeze and transfer to the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) assets of senior officials of the former Iraqi regime and their immediate family members, including entities owned or controlled by them or by persons acting on their behalf. The President subsequently issued Executive Order (E.O.) 13315, which authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to freeze the assets of former regime elements. To date, under E.O. 13315, the Department of the Treasury has designated scores of Iraq-related entities and individuals (including 55 senior Iraqi officials who were named by the President in issuing E.O. 13315, and 47 administrative or "derivative" designations.) The U.S. Government, in turn, submits these names to the United Nations for listing by the UN 1518 Committee under UNSCR 1483.
- Only a week ago, the Department of the Treasury designated six of Saddam Hussein's nephews (sons of Saddam's half brother and former presidential advisor, Sabawi Ibrahim Hasan Al-Tikriti), and we understand that their names have now been accepted at the UN. Four of the designated individuals provided financial support (and in some cases, weapons and explosives) to Iraqi insurgents. Similarly, on June 17, 2005, we designated, Muhammad Yunis Ahmad for providing funding, leadership and support from his base in Syria to several insurgent groups that are conducting attacks in Iraq.
- On June 9, 2005, we also designated two associated Syrian individuals, General Zuhayr Shalish and Asif Shalish and a related asset, the Syria-based SES International Corporation for their support to senior officials of the former Iraqi regime. SES also acted as false end-user for the former Iraqi regime and facilitated Iraq's procurement of illicit military goods in contravention of UN sanctions.
- Just as there is a U.N. Security Council Resolution requiring countries to freeze the assets of former Iraqi regime elements, so too are there U.N. Security Council Resolutions requiring countries to freeze the assets of individuals and entities related to al Qa'ida, Usama bin Laden, and the Taliban (UNSCR 1267) and other global terrorist groups (UNSCR 1373). The U.S. implements its obligations under these resolutions through E.O. 13224. To date, the Treasury Department has designated over 400 individuals and entities under E.O. 13224. These actions include individuals and entities tied to jihadist insurgency groups: -- Sulayman Khalid Darwish (January 25, 2005) (Syria-based Zarqawi supporter/financier), also designated by the UN, pursuant to UNSCR 1267; Syria joined the U.S. in co-designating Darwish at the UN.
- U.S. outreach efforts to countries in the Gulf region are manifold, both bilaterally and multilaterally. For example, just this calendar year I have personally traveled to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and have led the U.S. delegation to the Middle East/North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENA FATF) - a new multilateral body that works to ensure the implementation of comprehensive anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing systems throughout the region. Launched in November 2004, this 14-member body held its first plenary session in Bahrain in April 2005 and is preparing for its second plenary session in September of this year, currently scheduled to take place in Beirut. This body has the potential to be effective in persuading its members to implement systems to freeze assets in a timely and effective manner.
- We also have extensive outreach efforts to Europe - most prominently the US-EU Counter-Terrorist Financing Working Group, chaired by Assistant Secretary of State Anthony Wayne. Through this and other mechanisms, we are working to ensure the effective and aggressive implementation of targeted financial sanctions throughout Europe.
- The full range of U.S. efforts against terrorist financing are coordinated by the Terrorist Financing Policy Coordination Committee (PCC), which is chaired by Deputy National Security Advisor Juan Zarate, and includes representatives from the Departments of the

Treasury, State, Justice, and Defense, as well as representatives from the law enforcement and intelligence communities.

The Role of Crime and Criminals

Another key issue is the inability to distinguish insurgency from crime. The vast majority of Iraqi criminals probably have limited or no ties to the insurgents, although some are clearly “for hire” in terms of what they target or in being willing to take pay for sabotage or acts of violence that help create a climate of violence in given areas.

At least some elements in the Sunni insurgency do, however, work with criminal elements looting and sabotage campaigns. These clearly involve some native and foreign Sunni Islamist extremists – particularly in areas like kidnappings – but the alliances “Ba’athists” and “Sunni nationalists” have with criminal groups seem to be much stronger. They also seem to dominate the cases where tribal groups mix insurgents and criminals.

Many US and Iraqi intelligence officers believe that some criminal networks are heavily under the influence of various former regime elements or are dominated by them, and that some elements of organized crime do help the insurgency. The US Defense Intelligence Agency stated in July 2005 that some aspect of insurgent financing was derived from kidnapping for ransom, drug trafficking, robbery, theft, extortion, smuggling and the counterfeiting of goods and currency.¹⁵ Furthermore, at least some Shi'ite criminal groups and vendettas use the insurgency or Sunnis as a cover for their activities.

The Impact of Crime on the Insurgency

Crime affects intelligence as well as security. Independent criminals, insurgents and their criminal allies understand the limits of Coalition ability to cover the given areas and the Coalition's vulnerabilities. Many patterns of Coalition, Iraqi government, and Iraqi forces activity are easily observed and have become predictable. Bases can often be observed and are vulnerable at their entrances to rocket and mortar attacks, and along their supply lines. There are many soft and relatively small isolated facilities.

The crime problem also affects Iraqi popular confidence in the government and its popular legitimacy. Far more Iraqis face day-to-day threats from criminals than from terrorists and insurgents, although there is no area totally free from the risk of attack. If Iraqis are to trust their new government, if insurgents are to be deprived of recruits and proxies, and if Iraq is to move towards economic development and recovery, the crime problem must be solved at the same time the insurgents and terrorists are being defeated. This is a key priority in terms of Iraqi force development because it means effective regular policy is critical, and must have the same emphasis as developing military and security forces.

The Bush Administration summarized the impact of crime in Iraq as follows in its October 13, 2005 report to the Congress on “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” and made it clear that corruption was in many ways as important a criminal activity as the threat outside government, and that the development of an effective

judicial and police structure for dealing with crime was still in the initial stages of progress:

The most obvious indicator of success in establishing rule of law in Iraq is probably the crime rate. Unfortunately, data on criminal activity in Iraq are unreliable. If such statistics become available, they will be included in future reports.

All 869 judges in Iraq have been reviewed and 135 removed because of substantial evidence of corruption or Ba'ath Party affiliation. All Iraqi provincial criminal courts are also now operational, although the number of trials proceeding in these courts varies. In some areas, relatively few cases are tried. In general, the primary impediment to prosecuting more cases is the ability of police and prosecutors to collect evidence and prepare cases for trial. The Coalition has therefore trained 99 judicial investigators, who in Iraq assume some of the investigative duties performed by detectives in American police departments.

Training of Iraqi judges is ongoing, with 351 Iraqi judges having received at least some training. The Coalition has also established a witness protection program and a judicial security program to protect judges and courthouses. In addition, the Coalition is engaged in ongoing efforts to build Iraqi prisons and train corrections officers and to encourage the Iraqi government to assume full responsibility for security internees.

The Central Criminal Court of Iraq is the court that tries defendants accused of terrorism and crimes against the Coalition, among other crimes. Since its inception, it has conducted 544 trials and handed down 522 convictions. (Some of the trials involved multiple defendants.)

The Iraqi Special Tribunal (IST) has begun the process of prosecuting Saddam Hussein and other top officials of his regime. Under the Iraqi system, a defendant is given a separate trial for each event that constitutes a crime. Saddam is therefore likely to face multiple, different trials. The first of these trials is currently scheduled to begin on October 19. The U.S. Department of Justice-supported Regime Crimes Liaison Office continues to assist with preparing the IST, providing training and other support for IST attorneys and judges.

The Strength of Criminal Activity

Like most aspects of the insurgency, it is difficult to know the strength of criminal elements and the extent to which they are and are not tied to insurgent groups. The collapse of Saddam's regime, massive unemployment, the disbanding of a wide range of military and security elements, the destruction of Iraq's military industries, de-Ba'athification, and sheer opportunism have all combined to make organized and violent crime an endemic part of Iraqi society even in many areas where the insurgents have little real strength. They also are a powerful force behind local vigilante and militia efforts that at least indirectly challenge the legitimacy of the central government.

Crime also has virtually the same the impact as sabotage even when there is no deliberate intent to support the insurgency. It adds to the image of ineffective governance by acts like wire and equipment thefts that limit the government's ability to distribute electric power. It deprives the government of oil revenues through oil thefts, and adds to Iraq's fuel problems by the endemic theft of gasoline.

While most kidnappings are almost certainly decoupled from any political motive, some may have been done for hire at the bidding of various insurgent groups. At

best, the end result is a climate of cumulative violence, with some elements of Sunni versus Shi'ite tension. At worst, crime vastly compounds the government and Coalitions security problems, offers insurgent groups yet another kind of informal network, helps block investment and development, compounds the problem of hiring security forces, and undermines legitimacy.

The fact that the Ministry of Interior stopped reporting meaningful crime statistics in mid-2004 makes trend analysis almost impossible. The same is true of the casualties involved. The Ministry of Health reported in the spring of 2005 that some 5,158 Iraqis had died from all forms of criminal and insurgent activities during the last six months of 2004, but most experts felt such reporting might only include about half the real total. The Baghdad Central Morgue counted 8,035 deaths from unnatural causes in Baghdad alone in 2004, a major increase from 6,012 in 2003 and a figure that compared with 1,800 in 2002 -- the last year of Saddam Hussein. The morgue reported that 60% of those killed were killed by gunshot wounds and were unrelated to the insurgency, and were largely a combination of crime, tribal vendettas, vengeance killings, and mercenary kidnappings.¹⁶

It is also all too clear that the focus on defeating active insurgents has not been matched by similar efforts to develop effective police forces and prison system, eliminate corruption, create a working and efficient judicial system, or create an effective system for prosecution. The end result is that day-to-day security even in areas without active insurgent activity is often poor to non-existent, dependent on local forces or militias, and/or dependent on bribes and protection money. This makes it easier for insurgents to infiltrate, allows them to become the de facto security force or intimidate the population in some Sunni areas, alienates some of the government's potential supporters, and leads to widespread distrust of the police and criminal justice system. The situation has not been helped by the relatively limited staffing of the Ministry of the Interior, the Sunni perception that it is Shi'ite dominated, and the fact that the Coalition advisory effort remained limited and understaffed through October 1, 2005 -- when it was reorganized and put under the MNSTC-I.

II. The Dominant Role of Iraqi Sunni Arab Insurgents

There are no reliable estimates of the numbers of the various types of Sunni insurgents, or breakdowns of their strength by motivation and group. Some 35 Sunni Arab "groups" have made some kind of public announcement of their existence, or claimed responsibility for terrorist or insurgent attacks – although many may be little more than cells and some may be efforts to shift the blame for attacks or make the insurgent movement seem larger than it is.¹⁷ Some may be little more than tribal or clan groupings, since many elements of the Sunni insurgency have strong tribal affiliations or cells. An overwhelming majority of those captured or killed have been Iraqi Sunnis, as well as something like 90-95% of those detained.

The various Sunni insurgent groups are divided into a complex mix of Sunni nationalists, pro-Ba'ath/ex-regime, Sunni Iraqi Islamists, outside Islamic extremists, foreign volunteers with no clear alignment, and paid or politically motivated criminals. Some are organized so that their cadres are in relatively small cells, some as small as 2 or 3 men. These cells can recruit or call in larger teams, but the loss of even a significant number of such cells may not cripple a given group, and several Sunni groups operate in most areas. Others seem to operate as much larger, but normally dispersed groups, capable of coming together for operations of as many as 30-50 men.

The Sunni elements of the insurgency involve a wide range of disparate Iraqi and foreign groups, and mixes of secular and Islamic extremist factions. There are elements tied to former Ba'athist officials, and to Iraqi and Sunni nationalists. There are elements composed of native Iraqi Sunni Islamists, groups with outside leadership and links to Al Qa'ida, and foreign volunteers with little real structure - - some of which seem to be seeking Islamic martyrdom rather than clearly defined political goals.

Tribal and clan elements play a role at the local level, creating additional patterns of loyalty that cut across ideology or political goals. In one documented incident, a Sunni tribe in Samarra tried and publicly executed al-Qa'ida members for the murder of a local sheik after an interrogation.¹⁸ The stated objectives of various groups range from a return of some form of Ba'athist like regime to the creation of an extremist Sunni Islamic state, with many Iraqi Sunnis acting as much out of anger and fear as any clearly articulated goals.

The various insurgent and terrorist groups often cooperate, although there are indications of divisions between the more-Ba'ath oriented Iraqi Sunni groups and some of the Sunni Islamic extremist groups with outside ties or direction. At least some Sunni groups are willing to consider negotiating with the new government, while Islamist extremist groups are not. This had led to threats and some violence between various Sunni factions.¹⁹

At the same time, the threat continues that Sunni Arab extremists will provoke something approaching a full-scale civil war. They have stepped up suicide and

other attacks on Shi'ites and Kurds, and many of these attacks have clearly been designed to block efforts at including Sunnis in the government and to try to provoke Shi'ites and Kurds into reprisals that will make a stable national government impossible to achieve.

The Areas of Major Sunni Insurgent Influence

It is not certain that Sunni Arabs will continue to dominate the insurgency. A violent split between the Arab Shi'ites and Kurds remains possible, as do such splits within the major Shi'ite factions inside and outside the government. Barring such divisions, however, the insurgency will remain largely Iraqi and Sunni dominated. CENTCOM estimated in the summer of 2005 that 90 percent of the insurgency was Iraqi and Sunni, with a maximum of 10 percent foreign contribution to insurgent manpower.²⁰ While relatively small, this foreign element is recognized as almost exclusively Sunni, a particularly violent segment of the insurgency, and ideologically driven by Neo-Salafi extremism. Likewise, the foreign element is seen as an important source of money and materiel support to the insurgency.

The main Sunni insurgent groups are concentrated in cities ranging from areas like Mosul and Baghdad; in Sunni-populated areas like the "Sunni Triangle," the Al Anbar Province to the west of Baghdad, and the so-called "Triangle of Death" to the southeast of Baghdad; and in Sunni areas near the Iraqi and Turkish borders. As a result, four of Iraq's provinces have both a major insurgency threat and a major insurgent presence. At the same time, they have continued to lack the ideological cohesion and operational coordination necessary to mobilize Iraqi Sunni Arabs with optimal effect.

Sunni insurgents have exerted considerable sway--at various points--in Fallujah, Rawa, Anna, Haditha, Ramadi, Rutbah, Qaim, Ubaydi, Karabilah, Haqliniyah, Barwanah, Tal Afar, and others. They have not, however, established long-term control over "safe havens" from which to operate, and Coalition assaults have disrupted continuous insurgent control in such areas and the creation of insurgent sanctuaries.

General John Abizaid, commander of the US Central Command, has said that the four provinces with particularly difficult security situations are western Baghdad, Al Anbar, Nineveh and Salahuddin.²¹ Yet, even in these areas -- where insurgents have significant local influence -- much of the population is divided and only limited areas have normally been under active insurgent control.

In October of 2005, a Congressional report noted that the insurgency remained concentrated in four of Iraq's eighteen provinces: Baghdad, Al Anbar, Ninewah, and Salah ad Din. As has already been shown in Figure V.1, these four provinces have less than 42% of the country's population but account for 85% of the violence.²²

Al Anbar is both Iraq's largest province (roughly the size of Belgium), and one of its least populated -- roughly one million people out of Iraq's 27 million. It is at least 90% Sunni Arab, and offers a route to a potential sanctuary in Syria, and has

borders with Jordan and Saudi Arabia as well. Aside from Fallujah, the area immediately surrounding the Euphrates, and its agricultural areas have become a key operating area for insurgents. So have the towns along its border with Syria and the road to Syria, and insurgents take advantage of the largely desert and rough terrain for smuggling and dispersal. While it has some major cities, it has long been a tribal area where the government has exercised limited control.

It is scarcely surprising that it has been a center of the Sunni insurgency, and some estimates indicate that 500 of the 1,630 US servicemen killed in Iraq during the war up to June 2, 2005, died in Al Anbar. It is one of the few areas where insurgents have openly occupied towns and set up check points, and large numbers of Jordanian truck drivers have been killed on the road from Amman in an effort to break up lines of supply.²³

Sunni Islamist Extremist and Neo-Salafi vs. "Nationalist" Insurgents

Experts differ on just how much insurgent groups compete or coordinate, and just how different their goals are. The groups that make the most use of public statements and the internet do tend to advance common themes. Few seem to be secular in character, and there does seem to have been a shift towards the use of more religious rhetoric and themes over time. Like many oppositionist and radical movements, many 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, as much as to rather 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 they either want a more secular regime that allows Sunnis dominate, one where they have a "fair share" of power without domination or leadership by Shi'ite religious politicians,, or an Iraq in which Iraqi Sunnis -- not Shi'ites -- regain power and the religious lead. 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. Others, like 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 have severe limits. 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. There are no clear dividing lines as to belief, the willingness to use given kinds of violence, or the willingness to use Shi'ites and Kurds as targets.

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. Other 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; this is 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 Shiites 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.²⁴

Some traditional Salafist groups and traditional Shi'ite groups have also coexisted and worked closely together. Notable examples include Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Palestine. Another example was the Muslim brotherhood dealing with Iran after the revolution, despite some of Iran's actions against Iranian Sunnis.

The Nature and Role Neo-Salafi and Islamist Extremist Groups

The violent Sunni neo-Salafi and other Islamic extremist groups do differ from other Sunni insurgents, however, in both 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 and use them against Shi'ite and Kurdish targets.

They are equally willing to use them 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, they act on the principle ordinary Iraqi citizens can be sacrificed as expendable 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.

An Addiction to Violence and Extremism

This ideological rationale has an important implication -- particularly for the insurgent movements with large numbers of foreign Islamists. Such insurgents do not have to "win" in Iraq, at least in any conventional sense of the term. An outcome that leaves 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, would be 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.

Until September of 2005, such groups were generally careful to avoid any open claims of a split with Iraqis Shi'ites, and some cooperated with Sadr and his militia. They have, however, 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. 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.

From the viewpoint of negotiation and deterrence, it seems almost certain 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 do -- they will remain active diehards until they are rooted out, move on to new countries or areas if force to disperse, and join other extreme Sunni Islamist movements if the ones they currently support are defeated.

The ideological background of these 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.

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 small part of the insurgency. It is also fairly clear that they are tactical and lethal in their violence in Iraq.

It is equally true that the neo-Salafi extremist groups, such as that of Abu Musab Zarqawi are the main suspects of suicide bombing, especially the ones directed against the Shi'ites. At times Zarqawi has made his views clear on the

permissibility of attacking other Muslims, but he has also been ambiguous at times arguing that Shi'ites that oppose the occupation are not a target.

These 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.

This has also 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. Mowaffag 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."²⁵

Guessing at Their Strength

There is no better count of the number of Islamist extremist movements, or claimed movements, much less their strength, than of the other aspects of the insurgency. The most visible groups or names for a mix of affiliates include Sunni Islamist groups like Al Qa'ida and Ansar al Sunna, and "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 names like the Men's Faith Brigade; the Islamic Anger, Al Baraa bin Malik Suicide Brigade; and, the Tawid Lions of Abdullah ibn al Zobeir.

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 an affiliation with Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia. Al Qa'ida openly claims only some of the groups that claim affiliation with Al Qa'ida. This means their exact affiliation with Al Qa'ida and Zarqawi is often unclear, and a number of such groups state that they act alone or under the guidance of some other group.²⁶

A study of internet websites and posting by SITE found more than 100 groups that 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.²⁷

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 which had some degree of autonomy or independence.²⁸

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 Qaeda sometimes claims attacks are coordinated by different elements, for example an October 24, 2005 attack on the Palestine and Sheraton Hotels in central Baghdad by the "Attack Brigade," the "Rockets Brigade," and "Al Baraa bin Malik Suicide Brigade" -- but it is far from clear what is really involved. As these names indicate, some groups also seem to specialize in given types of attacks, and other on given types of targets. Some, for example, only seem to attack Coalition targets while others (the "Omar Brigade"?) are so specialized that they attack elements of the Badr Organization on the grounds they attack Sunnis.

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 had 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."²⁹

Most experts guesstimate the number of Islamist extremist insurgents at some 5-10 percent of the total insurgents without being able to say what base number they are a percent of. 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 such numbers are more nominal mid-points in a range of guesses than real estimates. Other experts guesstimate 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.³⁰ Anthony Lloyd of the *London Times* has stated that, "An intelligence summary, citing the conglomeration of insurgent groups under the al-Qaeda 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.

Key Islamist Extremist Groups

The key Iraqi Islamist extremist groups 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-Qaeda of Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers.³¹

The other 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 allegedly several settled in Mosul. Other groups, and their area of operation, include:³²

- *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.

In June 2005, U.S. Lt-Gen John Vines, commanding general of coalition forces in Iraq, identified the foreign fighters as the most violent group in Iraq's ongoing insurgency. According to Vines, insurgent activity among Iraqis was being driven by money, not ideology, and foreign jihadists were using their financial resources to get Iraqis to attack other Iraqis.³³

While the various Sunni Islamist extremist groups are in a constant state of flux, the unclassified assessments in the US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism, provides the following description of the key Islamist groups as of early 2005:³⁴

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.

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.

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.

The State Department report also 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):³⁵

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.

The Crisis Group developed list in early 2006, which it summarized as follows:³⁶

- *Tandhim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (al-Qaeda'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).³⁷ 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, a highly salafi discourse blends with a vigorously patriotic tone.(This group is widely seen both in Iraq and in the West as one of the more nationalistic of the armed groups and one 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, local networks 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)...could be more akin to a "public relations organ" shared between different armed groups, rather than an armed group in itself.¹ 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 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)...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*.

It is important to note that the Crisis Group created this list largely on the basis of their public statements, and that the groups differed significantly in history and credibility. The first five groups were seen as having significant operational status. These 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 also 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."

By the time the Crisis Group reported in February 2006, none of these groups made formal attacks on Shi'ite sectarianism, but virtually all of the active groups did repeatedly attack Shi'ite targets. All 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, that they generally accused of using death squads, committing crimes, and fighting "dirty wars."

In practical terms, however, there seemed to be no clear limits to the willingness of the more extreme Sunni Arab insurgent elements to escalate, even if this meant trying to drive 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. It seems almost certain that many cadres and leaders of such groups and cells cannot be persuaded, 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.

Al Qa'ida in the Two Rivers and the "Zarqawi Factor"

Zarqawi's *Tandhim Qa'idat al-Jihan fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* or as the al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers is only one Sunni Islamist extremist insurgent group, but there is no question that Zarqawi has become the figure that dominates much of the reporting on the Islamist extremist aspects of the insurgency

Views differ sharply, however, over the size of al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers over time, how much control Zarqawi has exercised over time, the depth of its ties to Bin Laden and Al Qa'ida, how many of its current "fighters" are Iraqi versus non-Iraqi, and how many other Islamist extremist groups exist and how independent they are of Zarqawi and Al Qa'ida. This debate heightened in 2006, when it seemed that Zarqawi had either given up formal leadership for political and propaganda reasons, or had been pushed into a sideline position.

A number of groups have claimed affiliation with Zarqawi and Al Qaida in the Two Rivers since early 2004, but it is unknown how closely tied many of these groups are to Zarqawi. It is likely that some of them either only claim him as an inspiration, or operate as almost totally independent groups and cells. This seems to include a number of elements organized along tribal lines.

At the same time, forces with ties to Zarqawi have been capable of large offensive operations like the spring 2005 attack on Abu Ghraib prison, and many of the insurgent forces the US Marine Corps fought in its offensive along the Euphrates and near the Syrian border in May 2005 either had ties to Zarqawi or were part of mixes of Zarqawi loyalists and other Iraqi Sunni insurgents.

The Zarqawi Organization Structure and Its Strength

On November 10, the military released a diagram (**Figure II.1**) showing the makeup of the Zarqawi network. At a news conference describing the US military's progress in capturing Zarqawi operatives, Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch told reporters:³⁸

The insurgency is broken into three groups: terrorists and foreign fighters, Iraqi rejectionists and Saddamists. We believe that the terrorists and foreign fighters are the most lethal group of the insurgency. And it is indeed an organized group, and the face of that group is Zarqawi -- al Qa'ida in Iraq...

Over the last several months, we've been able to kill or capture over 100 members of al Qa'ida in Iraq. Since I've talked to you about this graphic last, we have indeed taken out one additional tier-one member.

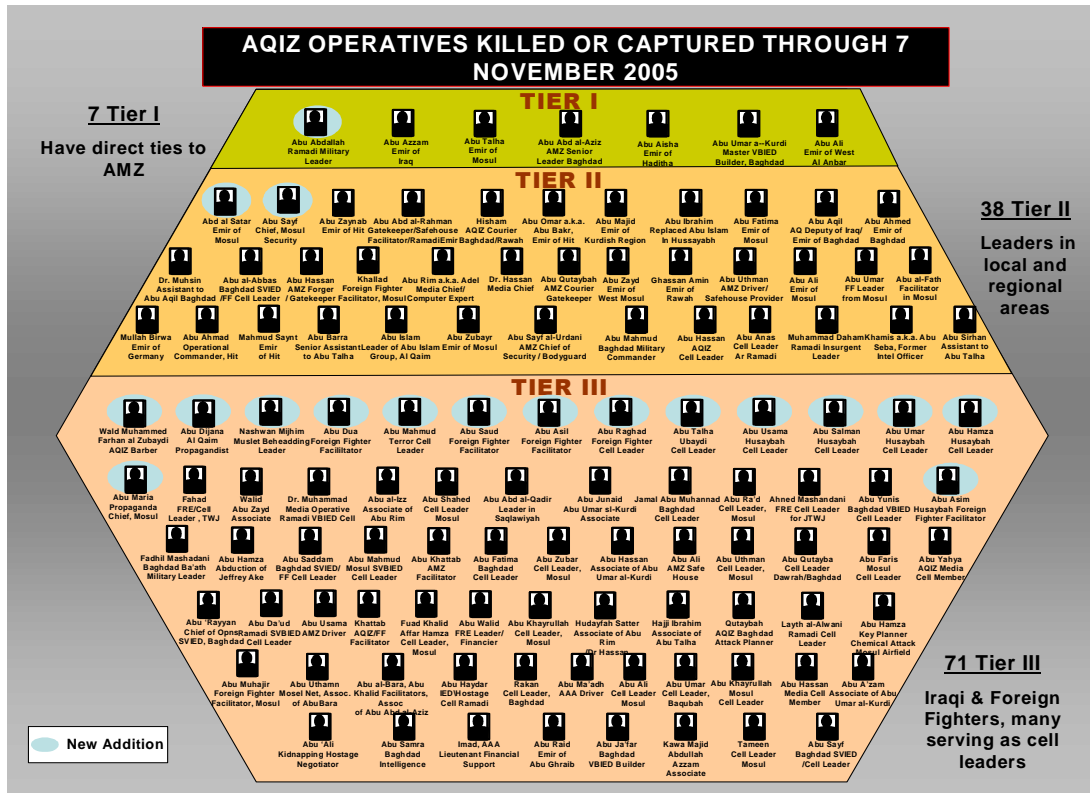
Reminder: tier one are those people who have direct access to Zarqawi. They are Zarqawi's lieutenants. They are his trusted advisers. They have visibility in al Qa'ida operations not just in Iraq but across the entire Middle East. And when Zarqawi loses a

tier-one member, he's losing one of his most trusted advisers. The Ramadi military leader was killed in an operation in Ramadi a week ago, Abu Abdullah, along with 12 additional terrorists. So one more tier-one individual killed.

Tier two: tier-two leadership plan and facilitate operations in a region of Iraq. They are responsible for flow of money, for flow of information, for flow of munitions, and flow of foreign fighters. Since we talked last, two additional tier- two members have been killed or captured, both in Mosul -- the emir of Mosul and the chief of Mosul security. Since we talked last, 15 additional tier-three members have been killed or captured. These are the individuals who control cells, local cells -- both Iraqis and foreign fighters - - serving as cell leaders.

Figure II.1 lists 38 “Tier 2” and 71 “Tier 3” operatives killed or captured. According to the US military, the influence of foreign fighters was most predominant in the tier-three. Speaking about the new developments, Lynch said: “we have great success at killing or capturing his leaders, his cell leaders, his coordinators and his lieutenants, and this chart just continues to expand, and eventually, he’s going to be on this chart.”³⁹

Figure II.1
Zarqawi's Network in 2005



Source: MNF-I Briefing with Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, November 10, 2005. Available at <http://www.mnf-iraq.com/Transcripts/051110b.htm>

In the spring of 2004, US officials estimated that there might be a core strength of fewer than 1,000 foreign fighters in Iraq or as many as 2,000. However, some MNSTC-I and Iraqi experts felt that so many volunteers were coming in across the Syrian and other borders that the total was rapidly increasing.⁴⁰ A few press estimates went as high as 10,000 before the fighting in Fallujah, but seemed to be sharply exaggerated. It seems more likely that Zarqawi's movement now consists of a series of cells, with a limited central organization. They probably total less than 2,000 full and part time men -- including both Iraqis and foreigners -- and probably with a core strength of no more than several hundred.

Zarqawi does seem to have been able to recruit more volunteers after the fighting in Fallujah, and substantially more volunteers for suicide bombings after the January 30, 2005 elections brought a Shi'ite and Kurdish dominated government to power. It is not clear whether this strengthened his movement, or simply helped to cope with the constant attrition caused by MNF-I and Iraqi attacks. The problem of infiltration, however, was serious enough to make improving border security a top Coalition and Iraqi government priority in January and February 2005, and a factor in a major Marine offensive in the Syrian border area in May 2005.⁴¹

The Zarqawi Hunt

While US claims about the importance of the killings and captures of Zarqawi's senior lieutenants have sometimes seemed exaggerated -- as do claims to have nearly killed or captured Zarqawi -- there were real successes. On January 10, 2005, then Prime Minister Allawi announced that Izz al-Din Al- Majid, a chief Zarqawi financier, was arrested in Fallujah in early December 2004. Al Majid had more than \$35 million in his bank accounts and controlled \$2 to \$7 billion of former regime assets stolen from Iraqi government accounts. His objective, according to interrogators, was to unite the insurgent groups Ansar al-Sunna, Jaysh Muhammad, and the Islamic Resistance Army. Since that time, the appendix to this report shows that MNF forces have killed or captured many other such senior cadres.

In July 2005, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers announced that the Coalition had captured a long sought after battlefield commander, Abu 'Abd-al-Aziz. According to the US military, al-Aziz had led a foreign fighter cell in Fallujah up until the US took control of the city. Fleeing the city, al-Aziz apparently came to Baghdad and earned the moniker 'the Amir of Baghdad' among fellow insurgents.⁴²

Later that month, the US military announced the capture of what was described as an Al Qa'ida commander and close confidant to Zarqawi. Khamis Farhan Khalaf Abd al-Fahdawi, or Abu Seba, was captured with approximately 30 other terrorist suspects. It is believed that Seba played a role in the murder of Egypt's ambassador and in the attacks on the Pakistani and Bahraini envoys. An Internet posting purportedly written by Zarqawi's group claimed that Seba was a low-level leader of a cell in Baghdad and that the US forces were inventing ranks to portray an image of success in taking down the terrorist networks.⁴³

Not long after, an Egyptian insurgent named Hamdi Tantawi was captured by Iraqi police in the town of Yusufiya, along with weaponry, computers, and money. It is believed that Tantawi financed insurgent operations and allegedly was a lieutenant to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second most recognized international Al Qaeda figure behind Osama bin Laden.

Further details were unavailable, and it is unclear whether Tantawi was operating independently or coordinating with Zawahiri and/or Zarqawi. If he was as close to Zawahiri as suggested by the press reports, it would suggest that the coordination between the old guard Al Qaeda leadership and the Al Qaeda in Iraq group is far closer than previously thought. It would also suggest that Bin Laden and Zawahiri are perhaps not as hard pressed and on the run along the Afghan border with Pakistan as has largely been assumed.

US military spokesman General Kevin Bergner told reporters on September 16 that joint operations between Iraqi and US forces in northern Iraq had captured or killed 80 senior leaders since January 2005.⁴⁴

In late September 2005, the US military announced it had killed two senior members of Zarqawi's group. Abu Nasir, believed to be Al Qaeda in Iraq's leader in Karabilah, was killed near the border with Syria on September 27. Two days earlier, US forces in Baghdad shot and killed Abdullah Najim Abdullah Mohamed al-Jawari, also known as Abu Azzam. Thought to be Al Qaeda in Iraq's No. 2 man, Abu Azzam was the leader of the insurgency in Iraq's Anbar Province. Recent improvements in US human intelligence, improved technical intelligence, targeting of insurgents, and more developed informants, are believed to have contributed to the success of the two operations.⁴⁵

Around the same time, soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry from the 172nd Stryker Brigade, known as "2-1", captured more than 180 suspected terrorists. In late October, the 2-1 killed a terrorist cell leader and his assistant, crippling an Al Qaeda terrorist cell in Mosul. The terrorists, identified as Nashwan Mijhim Muslet and Nahi Achmed Obeid Sultan, were killed during a raid on their safe house on October 22. Muslet and Sultan were behind at least three videotaped beheadings and had terrorized Mosul residents through roadblocks, extortion and kidnappings.⁴⁶

In early November, the US military announced it had killed two regional terrorists in an operation in the town of Husaybah, on the Syrian border. According to a US military press release, the two men, identified as Asadallah and Abu Zahra, were "key Al Qaeda in Iraq terrorist leaders." The statement described the two men in the following way:⁴⁷

Asadallah, a senior Al Qaeda in Iraq terrorist leader and foreign fighter facilitator in the Husaybah area. Asadallah commanded several terrorist and foreign fighter cells in the Husaybah, and al Waim region. Asadallah also coordinated the funneling and distribution of foreign fighters from Syria into the Husaybah area as well as their employment as suicide bombers. His foreign fighters were responsible for numerous suicide bombings in the region. He also directed, planned and executed many of the terrorist attacks on Iraqi security and coalition forces.

Abu Zahra, a close associated of the current al Qa'ida in Iraq Emir of Husaybah. As a close personal friend and confidant to the Emir of Husaybah he acted as an assistant, helping run the day to day activities of the terrorist organization. Zahra took an active role in planning and coordinating attacks against Iraqi security and Coalition forces. He additionally was reported to provide logistical support for various terrorist cells in the area. This support included providing weapons and ammunition, arranging housing, and money for foreign fighters and terrorists operating in the area.

Also in November, US officials reported that they had come close to capturing Zarqawi on at least three occasions. The military said it was using eavesdropping satellites, unmanned drones and U-2 spy planes to gather intelligence on the insurgency and to track Zarqawi's movements. US forces were also helping Iraqis in the intelligence process.⁴⁸

US officials believe they were close to catching Zarqawi before. In the past, US forces have stormed restaurants and hospitals after receiving reports about Zarqawi sightings. The US military believes it came closest to capturing Zarqawi in February 2005, when the insurgent leader jumped out of a truck as it approached a US checkpoint outside Ramadi. Zarqawi's driver and bodyguard were captured, and a large amount of cash along with Zarqawi's laptop computer was seized.

There may have been other near misses. According to a senior US intelligence official: "Several times we have showed up at places where we know he was hours or days earlier. But the intelligence we get is never fresh enough." US officials believe Zarqawi has slipped in and out of Iraq during the past few years, traveling to Jordan, Syria and Iran to raise funds and recruits for the insurgency.⁴⁹

US assertions that they were getting closer to Zarqawi intensified in the fall of 2005. In late November, US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad told CNN, "His days are numbered-he is going to be ultimately found...Either he will be brought to justice or he will die in the battle to capture him, but we are getting closer to that goal every day. A lot of coalition forces and experts are working hard on this...It's not a question of whether but when."⁵⁰

On November 19, US and Iraqi forces surrounded a two-storey house in the mostly Kurdish area of eastern Mosul, after receiving intelligence that Zarqawi might be hiding there. Coalition troops encountered fierce resistance by the insurgents, heightening suspicion that a high-value target like Zarqawi was inside the house. Three of the eight insurgents killed during the three-hour raid blew themselves up rather than be captured alive. Immediately following the raid, US forces sealed the house.

Speculation that Zarqawi might have been killed in the raid grew after Iraqi Foreign Minister Hohshyar Zebari told the Jordanian Petra news agency that DNA tests were being carried out on the bodies. But the governor of Nineveh province, Duraid Kashmoula, told the Washington Post on November 21 that there was only a 30 percent chance that one of the bodies was that of Zarqawi, adding: "We've had dry holes before."⁵¹

US officials, however, remained cautious. On November 22, a top US commander in Iraq said there was "absolutely no reason" to believe Zarqawi had died in the

raid and Ambassador Khalilzad echoed that assessment, saying, "I do not believe that we got him. But his days are numbered...We're closer to the goal, but unfortunately we didn't get him in Mosul."⁵² The following day, Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia issued a statement on an Islamic web site denying their leader had been killed. The statement said the group had waited to respond to the rumors of Zarqawi's death "until this lie took its full length to let Muslims know the extent of [the media's] stupidity and shallow thinking."⁵³

As of late November 2005, US officials believed the best intelligence showed Zarqawi was operating in western Baghdad. But Iraq's Interior Minister Bayan Jabr told ABC News in mid-November that the Iraqi government had evidence that Zarqawi had been injured in Ramadi sometime in October or early November, suggesting Zarqawi remained as elusive as ever in the fall of 2005.⁵⁴ US officials also claimed that more and more Iraqis were coming forward with tips about his whereabouts following the November 9 bombings in Amman.⁵⁵ But while the military's elite Task Force 145 continued to hunt the elusive leader of the insurgency, the public disowning of Zarqawi by his own tribe after the November 9 bombings may ultimately do more to hasten his capture than the almost two years of US searching.

Zarqawi Ties to Bin Laden and Outside Sunni Islamist Groups

The Zarqawi group has strengthened its ties to outside terrorist groups. In October 2004, Zarqawi publicly pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and changed the name of his organization from Al Tawhid wal Jihad (Unity and Holy War) to Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers.⁵⁶ While there is no evidence that the two men have ever met or even directly communicated, Bin Laden issued a statement in December 2004 confirming Zarqawi as the "Emir" of Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Movements like the Army of Ansar al-Sunna, which claimed responsibility for the attack on the US mess tent in Mosul in December 2004 and for many other suicide attacks, seem to have a mix of links to Zarqawi and possibly Al Qaeda. They seem to be largely Iraqi, but their mix of Sunnis and Kurds is uncertain, as is the extent to which the group and its cells are at least partly a legacy of Ansar al-Islam – an active Islamist group that reportedly provided sanctuary for Zarqawi before the war. In November 2004, Ansar al-Sunna claimed that it had twice collaborated with Zarqawi's group and another group known as the Islamic Army in Iraq.

In February 2005, a leaked US intelligence memo indicated that an intercepted communication, reportedly from bin Laden to Zarqawi, encouraged Iraqi insurgents to attack the American homeland.⁵⁷ Even so, US intelligence analysts view bin Laden and Zarqawi as separate operators, and it remains unclear as to what – if any – organizational or financial support Bin Laden provides Zarqawi's organization.⁵⁸

According to US intelligence officials, Zarqawi has surpassed Bin Laden in raising funds: "Right now, Zarqawi is fighting the war, and [Bin Laden] is not...Who would you give money to?" But a Justice Department official downplayed the money issue, saying:⁵⁹

It's not like John Gotti running around Manhattan in fancy suits and limousines... We are talking about a man who is operating in an area that is extremely primitive, in a very clandestine manner and with a huge network of people that do his communications for him and surround him and protect him.

That Zarqawi is financially independent from Bin Laden was seemingly confirmed in a 2005 letter to Zarqawi purported to be from Al Qaeda's No. 2, Ayman Al Zawahiri. In the letter, discussed in detail below, Zawahiri asks Zarqawi to send funds to the Al Qaeda leadership.

Another "Zarqawi letter," written on April 27, 2005 by one of his associates (Abu Asim al Qusayami al Yemeni), seemed to reflect Zarqawi's complaints about the failure of some of his volunteers to martyr themselves, typical of the kind of complaints and calls for more support that he has used both to try to lever more support from Bin Laden and gain more support from Arabs outside Iraq.⁶⁰

Some analysts believe that Bin Laden made a strategic error by declaring Zarqawi the "emir" for operations in Iraq. Iraqis are deeply distrusting of outsiders and, in particular, neighbors in the region. Bin Laden's declaration could be seen by Iraqis in highly nationalistic terms as a Saudi ordering a Jordanian to kill Iraqis. These analysts believe that this will motivate those Iraqis who were previously unsure of whether to offer their support to the elected government.

Zarqawi appears to have made some efforts to remake his organization's reputation to reduce tensions with Iraqi Sunnis, and possibly Iraqi Shi'ites as well. The website pronouncements claimed that the group had tried to avoid Muslim casualties with the notable exception being the Iraq military and security forces. They quickly denounced attacks on civilians like the massive suicide car bombing in Hilla in March 2005.⁶¹ Zarqawi has, however, advocated attacks on Shi'ites and said he views them as apostates. It was clear that many bloody suicide bombings and other attacks had support from elements loyal to Zarqawi, and that many were sectarian attacks on Shi'ites or ethnic attacks on Kurds. It is now unclear that any Shi'ite element, including many of Sadr's supporters, are willing to cooperate with such Sunni extremist groups.

A tape attributed to Zarqawi in May 2005, was anything but reticent.⁶² In the one hour and 14 minute tape, he explained why Muslim civilians were being killed in his attacks and justified the killing on the basis of research by "Abu Abdullah al Muhajer". He claimed that many operations were cancelled because they were going to kill large numbers of Muslims, but mistakes were made and "we have no choice...It's impossible to fight the infidels without killing some Muslims." He stated that Muslims were killed in 9/11, Riyadh, Nairobi, Tanzania, and if these were considered illegitimate then it would mean stopping jihad in every place.

He said that Iraq's geography made through direct combat with the enemy difficult, and the only way was to intensify combat was suicide operations. He compared Iraq to Afghanistan with its mountains, and to Chechnya where there were woods, and said it was easier for the "mujaheddeen" to have a safe place to hide and plan after fighting with the enemy. He stated that it was difficult for the "mujaheddeen" to move in Iraq because of the checkpoints and the US bases, therefore suicide operations are easy to carry out and to effectively force the

enemy to leave the cities for places where it would be easier to shoot them. "These operations are our weapon...If we stop them jihad will be weaker...If the enemy gets full control of Baghdad it will implement its plan and control the whole nation. The whole world saw what they did in Abu Ghraib, Camp Bucca and prisons in Qut, Najaf and Karbala...that's when they did not have full control, so what would happen if they do?"

He heavily attacked Iraq's Shiites and Shiites in general. He claimed his group never attacked other sects in Iraq who are not considered Muslims, but fought the Shiites because they assist the enemy and are traitors. According to Zarqawi, the Shiites pretend they care about civilian casualties...he mentioned operations carried out by Failaq Badr (with dates, locations, numbers of people killed) during the 1980s and 1990s. He also claimed there was a plan to eliminate the Sunnis in Iraq, and that Sunni mosques were being handed over to Shiites and that Sunni clerics, teachers, doctors and experts were being killed. He claimed that Sunni women were being kidnapped and that Shiite police participated in raping women at Abu Ghraib.

He claimed there were problems at Iraqi government-run prisons in Iraq, including one in Qut which he said was being run by Iranian intelligence and a prison in Hilla run by a Shiite major general called Qays, who "cuts Muslims' bodies and rapes women." He mentions a specific story where Qays threatened to rape the wife of one of the fighters (evidently Major General Qays Hamza, chief of al Hillah police). He says his fighters tried to kill Qays but he survived (There was a web statement dated March 30th about a suicide bombing in Hilla that targeted Major General Qays).⁶³

Another tape -- attributed to Zarqawi -- aired on July 6, 2005. In the tape, Zarqawi reaffirms that targeting Iraqis is legitimate and he dubs the Iraqi security forces apostates. He calls on Iraqi clerics who disapprove of targeting Iraqis to reconsider their views.

The Jordanian asserts in the message that the US went to war with Iraq in order to advance Israel's interests and refers to the conflict in Iraq as a 'quagmire.' He declares that the US will soon invade the lands of Sham (Greater Syria) on the pretext of stopping insurgent infiltration, and that this had not yet happen due to the ferocity of the militant attacks. He also announced the creation of a new brigade charged with killing the members of the Failaq Brigade, a Shi'ite militia.

On September 14, 2005, Al Qa'ida in Iraq released another audiotape by Zarqawi. Its release marked the first time the leader of the insurgency in Iraq had been heard from since May 2005 when a message from a man purporting to be Zarqawi said he had been wounded. On the tape, which surfaced on a day when insurgent attacks killed more than 150 people and wounded more than 500, Zarqawi declared "all out war" against Shiite Muslims in Iraq.

In a letter released earlier in the day, the organization said the upsurge in violence was in response to the ongoing US operation against insurgents in Tal Afar. Zarqawi accused the US military and Shiites of using poisonous gas and rapping women in Tal Afar and appealed to Iraqi sects to renounce the Al-Ja'fari

government and its crimes. In addition to Shiites, Zarqawi also threatened violence against Coalition troops and Iraqi government officials, calling on them to “come out of their lairs in the Green Zone.”

Zarqawi's declaration began:⁶⁴

Days go by, and events follow one after the other. The battles are many, and the names used are varied. But the goal is one: a Crusader-Rafidite [a derogatory term for Shia] war against the Sunnis....

The interests of the Crusaders have converged with the desires of their brothers, the hate-filled Rafidites, and the outcome was these crimes and massacres against the Sunnis—from Al-Falluja to al-Madain, Al-Diyala, Al-Samarra, and Al-Mosul, through Al-Ramadi, Hit, Haditha, Al-Rawa, Al-Qaim and other places, and recently-but not last-at Tel'afar.....

This is an organized sectarian war, whose details were carefully planned, against the will of those whose vision has been blinded and whose hearts have been hardened by Allah. Beware, oh Sunni scholars—has your sons' blood become so cheap in your eyes that you have sold it for a low price? Has the honor of your women become so trivial in your eyes? Beware. Have you not heard that many of your chaste and pure sisters from among the Sunnis of Tel'afar had their honor desecrated, their chastity slaughtered, and their wombs filled with the sperm of the Crusaders and of their brothers, the hate-filled Rafidites? Where is your religion? Moreover, where is your sense of honor, your zeal, and your manliness?

According to Zarqawi, the timing of the operation in Tal Afar had been planned to “cover up the scandal of Allah's enemy, Bush, in his dealing with what was left behind by one of Allah's soldiers—the devastating Hurricane Katrina.”⁶⁵ Zarqawi also claimed that US forces numbering 4,000 and Iraqi forces numbering 6,000 converged on Tal Afar in order to do battle with a “small group of believers, which number[ed] no more than a few hundred.”

In the speech, Zarqawi singled out Iraqi government officials and members of the Iraqi security forces, as well as other “collaborators” for denunciation:

Behold the Rafidites' lackey, [Iraqi Defense Minister] Sa'doon Al-Dulaimi, may Allah keep him miserable, bragging about their victories at Tel'afar. If only I knew what victory they are talking about—these cowards, none of whom dares to leave his lair unless he is shielded by the women of the Marines. Does this traitor believe that bombing houses, with women and children inside, constitutes a victory? By Allah, what a miserable victory....

This lackey [Al-Dulaimi], who betrayed his religion and his nation, and agreed to serve as a tool of the Crusaders and Safavids threatens that he and his angels of destruction are advancing towards Al-Anbar, Al-Qaim, Rawatha and Samarra. To him we say that the mujahedeen have prepared for you and for your soldiers, by Allah's virtues, a slashing sword and lethal poison. Allah willing, you will be given to drink from the various goblets of death, and the lands of the Sunnis will contain your rotting corpses. Come, if you want, now or later.

...whoever is proven to belong to the Pagan [National] Guard, to the police, or to the army, or whoever is proven to be a Crusader collaborator or spy—he shall be killed. Furthermore, his house shall either be destroyed or burned down, after the women and children are taken out of it. This is his reward for betraying his religion and his nation, so that he shall serve as a clear lesson and a preventive warning to others.

...any tribe, party, or association that has been proven to collaborate with the Crusaders and their apostate lackeys-by God, we will target them just like we target the Crusaders, we will eradicate them and disperse them to the winds.

The Zarqawi "War" Against Shi'ites

These threats with noit typical of Sunni Islamist extremist groups, who generally avoided any open attacks on Shi'ites and other sects, even as they attacked them and denounced Shi'ites for betraying Iraq and fighting "dirty wars." They may well have alienated as many Iraqis as they intimidated, but Zarqawi went further in ways that definitely produced a backlash even among some of his supporters. His statement ended with a declaration of "total war" against Iraq's Shiites:

This is a call to all the Sunnis in Iraq: Awaken from your slumber, and arise from your apathy. You have slept for a long time. The wheels of the war to annihilate the Sunnis have not and will not halt. It will reach the homes of each and every one of you, unless Allah decides otherwise. If you do not join the mujahedeen to defend your religion and honor, by Allah, sorrow and regret will be your lot, but only after all is lost.

Based on all that I have mentioned, and after the world has come to know the truth about this battle and the identity of its true target, the Al-Qa'ida organization in the Land of the Two Rivers has decided: First, since the government of the descendant of Ibn Al-'Alqami and the servant of the Cross, Ibrahim Al-Ja'fari, has declared a total war against the Sunnis in Tel'afar, Ramadi, Al-Qaim, Samarra, and Al-Rawa, under the pretext of restoring rights and eliminating the terrorists, the organization has decided to declare a total war against the Rafidite Shiites throughout Iraq, wherever they may be....

Immediately following the release of the statement, Shiite leaders and journalists called upon Iraqi Sunnis to condemn Zarqawi's declaration. One of them, Abdulhadi al-Darraji, a representative of Muqtada al-Sadr, insisted that the Sunni Muslim Clerics Association "issue a fatwa (religious edict) forbidding Muslims from joining these groups that deem others infidels."⁶⁶

Sunni responses to Zarqawi's declaration of war against the Shia were mixed. Some leaders did accept Darraji's call for a Sunni rejection of Zarqawi. The Association of Muslim Scholars [AMS] in Iraq called on Zarqawi to renounce violence against Shi'ites and Sunnis in Iraq who were involved in the political process, saying: "Al-Zarqawi must retract his threats because they hurt jihad and would cause the shedding of the blood of more innocent Iraqis."⁶⁷ The Muslim Clerics Association also urged Zarqawi to retract his statement. The most surprising response came from a gathering of members of the Salafi Higher Committee for Da'wah, Guidance, and Fatwa, who rejected Zarqawi's declaration as "unacceptable" and said the spilling of Muslim blood was religiously forbidden.⁶⁸

Zarqawi reacted to these calls by retracting part of his earlier statement. On September 19, 2005, he issued another statement as a follow-up to his declaration of war, saying: "It has become known to our group that some sects, such as the Sadr group...and others, have not taken part in the massacres and not helped the occupier....So we have decided not to hurt these groups in any way, as long as they do not strike us."⁶⁹ But Zarqawi accused six Shiite and Kurdish groups (Al-Dawa Party, The Higher Revolutionary Party, National Conference Party, Al-Wifaq Party, Kurdistan Democratic Party, and Kurdistan United National Party)

of helping the US occupation forces and said attacks against them would continue.⁷⁰

Zarqawi's retraction was seen by some as a sign of a rupture between his group and other insurgents. In the summer of 2005, a statement allegedly written by Zarqawi revealed a strained relationship with the militant Islamist preacher (and former cellmate of Zarqawi's) Islam Mohammed al-Barqawi. Zarqawi had long been identified with Al-Barqawi, also known as Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, and often referred to him as his 'sheik' and spiritual guide.⁷¹

"Overkill" Against Fellow Muslims

In an interview with Al Jazeera television in July, Al-Barqawi admonished Zarqawi, saying suicide bombings in Iraq had resulted in the deaths of too many Iraqis and that the militants should not target Shi'ite Muslims.⁷² Zarqawi's statement was a direct response to al-Barqawi's interview. In it, he questioned al-Barqawi's statements implored the preacher to not 'turn against the Mujahedeen.'⁷³ If authentic, the posting seems likely to confirm what Zarqawi's letter to Bin Laden suggested: that the font of support Zarqawi expected to come forth in Iraq and the Middle East has yet to materialize on the scale he envisioned. Moreover, the posting against Barqawi and the partial retraction of the declaration of war against Shi'ites suggests that Al Qa'ida in Iraq's leadership is sensitive to Muslim public opinion. New York University professor of Islamic Studies Bernard Haykel believes Zarqawi's war on Shiites is deeply unpopular in some quarters of his own movement and is contributing to a schism within the jihadi movement.⁷⁴

Further evidence of this appeared in October 2005 when the US government published a letter purported to be from Ayman Al Zawahiri to Zarqawi. In the letter, dated July 9, 2005, Zawahiri asks for news from Iraq and urges Zarqawi's organization to think about their long-term strategic objectives. Calling the struggle in Iraq "the place for the greatest battle of Islam in this era," Zawahiri writes:⁷⁵

...we must think for a long time about our next steps and how we want to attain it, and it is my humble opinion that the Jihad in Iraq requires several incremental goals:

The first stage: Expel the Americans from Iraq.

The second stage: Establish an Islamic authority or amirate, then develop it and support it until it achieves the level of a caliphate-over as much territory as you can to spread its power in Iraq, i.e. in Sunni areas, is in order to fill the void stemming from the departure of the Americans, immediately upon their exist and before un-Islamic forces attempt to fill this void, whether those whom the Americans will leave behind them, or those among the un-Islamic forces who will try to jump at taking power...

The third stage: Extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq.

The fourth stage: It may coincide with what came before: the clash with Israel, because Israel was established only to challenge any new Islamic entity.

After having outlined the four stages of the conflict, Zawahiri addressed the group's level of popular support. Zawahiri said the organization's goals "will not be accomplished by the mujahed movement while it is cut off from public

support.” Moreover, maintaining and increasing public support was “a decisive factor between victory and defeat,” in the absence of which the Islamic mujahed movement would be “crushed in the shadows” and the struggle between the Jihadist elite and the authorities “confined to prison dungeons far from the public and the light of day.” Zawahiri urged Zarqawi to avoid any action that Iraqis did not understand or approve and to involve them in his planning by “bring[ing] the mujahed movement to the masses and not conduct[ing] the struggle far from them.”⁷⁶

Zawahiri also warned that the scenes of slaughter emerging from Iraq were having a damaging effect on the wider jihadi movement. He warned Zarqawi, “more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media...[W]e are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.”⁷⁷

He also said the following about targeting Shi'ites:

...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.

Indeed, questions will circulate among mujahedeen circles and their opinion makers about the correctness of this conflict with the Shia at this time. Is it something that is unavoidable? Or, is it something can be put off until the force of the mujahed movement in Iraq gets stronger? And if some of the operations were necessary for self-defense, were all of the operations necessary? Or, were there some operations that weren't called for? And is the opening of another front now in addition to the front against Americans and the government a wise decision? Or, does this conflict with the Shia lift the burden from the Americans by diverting the mujahedeen to the Shia, while the Americans continue to control matters from afar? And if the attacks on Shia leaders were necessary to put a stop to their plans, then why were there attacks on ordinary Shia? Won't this lead to reinforcing false ideas in their minds, even as it is incumbent on us to preach the call of Islam to them and explain and communicate to guide them to the truth? And can the mujahedeen kill all of the Shia in Iraq? Has any Islamic state in history ever tried that? And why kill ordinary Shia considering that they are forgiven because of their ignorance?And do the brothers forget that both we and the Iranians need to refrain from harming each other at this time in which the Americans are targeting us?

Zawahiri's final theme in his thirteen-page letter was the issue of political versus military action. Zawahiri stressed the need for Zarqawi to “direct the political action equally with the military action” and suggests that in addition to force, “there be an appeasement of Muslims and a sharing with them in governance.” Once more, Zawahiri cautioned the Al Qa'ida in Iraq leader about the use of excessively violent acts saying they risked alienating the Muslim masses, whose enthusiasm is critical to the overall success of the enterprise.

The letter, which seems to reflect the broader strategic perspective of the Al Qa'ida leadership, was the clearest blueprint of Al Qa'ida's plans for Iraq yet. Less than a week after the US released the letter, however, Al Qa'ida in Iraq issued a statement on an Islamist website rejecting the letter's authenticity. Their statement read: “We in Al Qa'ida Organization announce that there is no truth to these claims, which are only based on the imagination of the politicians of the Black [i.e. White] House and their slaves.”⁷⁸

As with most other Al Qaeda statements though, US experts were divided over the authenticity of the letter. The Congressional Research Service's Kenneth Katzman said the letter contained elements that raised doubts about its authenticity: "The purported letter has Zawahiri admitting to certain things that it's not realistic for him to admit, because he would know there's a potential this letter might be intercepted." Others, like Mike Scheuer, a retired CIA analyst, disagreed and said the letter was most likely authentic.⁷⁹

Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia's media response following the November 9 bombings in Amman (discussed below) was unusual in that the group issued three statements relatively quickly. One frequent commentator to a jihadi website complained Al Qaeda had been too hasty in issuing the statements, including the claim of responsibility, alerting Jordanian officials to the fact that there might have been a fourth bomber, as well as a husband and wife team, involved in the attack.

Criticism of Zarqawi's attack was also apparent on other Internet jihadi websites. Postings on websites showed that the killing of "innocent Muslims" upset Zarqawi's traditional base of supporters and sympathizers. Many criticized the selection of the target, the timing of the attack as well as the means of the attack. Some even urged the Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia leader to abandon any future military operations that might harm Muslims. One such posting by a writer calling himself "Al-Murshid" or "the guide" read:⁸⁰

This is both a (religious) task and a pragmatic tactic...Acts where many innocent Muslims lose their lives make us lose a lot of popular support...The death of the innocent Muslims in this attack...was a fact that lived with each Jordanian. Now people say al-Qaeda kills innocent Muslims.

The backlash against Zarqawi's group in the aftermath of the Amman bombings and the declaration of war against Shiites point to an on-going and not yet resolved internal dispute among the jihadists as to their tactics, specifically whether or not the group should target civilians and/or fellow Muslims.

Zarqawi and Syria

Experts differ in opinion as to how much of Zarqawi's operations have taken place in Syria and with Syrian backing. There are reports that Zarqawi and top lieutenants met in Syria in the spring of 2005, but these have yet to be confirmed by US officials. In fact, US intelligence assessments expressed doubt in June 2005 that Zarqawi had crossed into Syria earlier in the year, stating that such an event was inconsistent with Syria's, and Zarqawi's, pattern of behavior. US, British, and Iraqi experts do believe, however, that a substantial number of recruits pass through Syria, and with Syrian tolerance or deliberate indifference – if not active support.⁸¹

Expanding the Battle: Operations Outside Iraq

It is too early to generalize about Zarqawi's influence outside Iraq, but he has orchestrated a number of attacks in Jordan, and has discussed broadening his operations to include other Arab and Islamic countries.

In some ways, this may be more a matter of personal ambition and a pre-Iraq war agenda than a real effort to broaden the war. Zarqawi is a Jordanian who served a seven-year sentence for efforts to overthrow the Jordanian government, and began to attack targets in Jordan long before he went to Iraq. Attacks against Jordanian targets in recent years have included:⁸²

- January 17, 1998: Masked men raid a dinner party at the hillside mansion of wealthy Iraqi businessmen in Amman, slitting the throats of a top Baghdad diplomat and seven other people.
- March 28, 1998: A crude bomb explodes in an elite English-language school in Amman in what one senior government official calls an apparent attempt to instigate attacks against Americans. The explosion shatters windows but causes no injuries.
- October 28, 2002: An American diplomat, Laurence Foley, is assassinated in front of his house in Amman, gunned down in the first such attack on a US diplomat in decades.
- August 7, 2003: A car bomb explodes outside the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, killing at least 17 people, including two children. More than 50 people are wounded.
- August 19, 2005: Attackers fire at least three rockets from the hills above the Jordanian port city of Aqaba, with one narrowly missing a US Navy ship docked in the port and another hitting a taxis outside an airport in nearby Israel. A Jordanian soldier is killed.

It is not clear exactly when Zarqawi and other insurgents began to consider attacking targets outside Iraq. Zarqawi seems to have played a role in the bombing of the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad on August 7 2003. This attack killed 17 and wounded 50.

There are indications that Zarqawi's group began planning and attempting attacks outside Iraq in late 2003. It is clear that one major attempt did occur in the spring of 2004. Jordan reported that a Zarqawi agent named Azmi al-Jayousi led a cell that attempted to carry out a massive explosive and chemical attack on the US Embassy, the headquarters of the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate, office of the prime minister and other targets in Amman in mid-April 2004. Jordanian officials said they had halted an attack using three trucks loaded with 20 tons of explosives and chemicals. The three trucks were halted in Irbid, and Jordanian sources claimed they could have killed 80,000 people and wounded 160,000 others within a two square kilometer area. The cell was one of two cells in place, and its members had a variety of forged Jordanian, Syrian and other Arab passports

Zarqawi acknowledged the attempt in an audiotape circulated on April 30, 2004, but denied any effort to use chemical weapons. The tape made available on an Islamist website said his goal was to "totally destroy the building of the Jordanian intelligence services" with "raw materials which are sold on the market...The Jordanian security services have lied in claiming to have foiled a plan to kill innocent Muslims."⁸³

He accused Jordan of "creating an outcry and presenting the Jordanian people as a victim targeted at the hands of terrorism ... in order to hide the sordid face of the Jordanian intelligence services..." and of the "evil Jordanian services" of "fabricating (the affair) of the chemical bomb." Zarqawi went on to say "If we had

such a bomb -- and we ask God that we have such a bomb soon -- we would not hesitate for a moment to strike Israeli towns, such as Eilat, Tel Aviv and others...We have scores to settle with this (Jordanian) government which will turn children's hair white."

Some sources say Zarqawi halted further attack attempts after that time. One senior Jordanian source claimed that Jordan had foiled two attacks in 2003, eight in 2004, and 10 in 2005.⁸⁴

Zarqawi was the first major insurgent leader to openly threaten to expand the fighting to foreign countries, however, although his open statements only began to get serious publicity in the summer of 2005. Jordanian intelligence reported that it had intercepted signals that Zarqawi had ordered some of his fighters to leave Iraq to carry out attacks in other Arab and Islamic countries in October 2005.

Jordan has for years been considered a safe place, nestled between the ongoing violence of the *intifida* in the Palestinian territories and, more recently, the insurgency in Iraq. In recent years, however, this has begun to change. According to experts like Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group, "[Jordan] was always a fragile oasis...It was only a matter of time before somebody got through."

On November 9, 2005, Zarqawi's organization struck three US owned hotels in Amman. Neither the attack nor the targets should have come as a surprise to Jordanian officials however. Zarqawi had previously attempted to blow up western hotels in Amman-including the Radisson SAS-as part of millennium celebrations in late 1999. That attack, however, was thwarted by Jordanian intelligence and Zarqawi later fled to Afghanistan.⁸⁵

The November 9 bombings at the Radisson SAS, Grand Hyatt, and Days Inn hotels killed at least 60 people and wounded more than a hundred others. The bombers-all Iraqis-deliberately targeted Jordanians-including a Jordanian-Palestinian wedding party. Four Palestinian officials, including Lt. General Bashir Nafe, the head of West Bank security, as well as other foreigners, were also among the casualties.

The first bombing occurred shortly before 9 p.m. inside the Philadelphia ballroom of the Radisson hotel. Right before detonating his 22-pound explosive packed belt, the bomber and the apparent leader of the cell, Ali Hussein Ali al-Shamari, jumped onto a table. The explosion brought parts of the ceiling down onto the more than 300 wedding guests assembled in the ballroom and sprayed ball bearings contained inside the vest across the room.

Moments after the first bombing, 23 year-old Rawad Jassem Mohammed detonated his bomb in the coffee shop of the Grand Hyatt. Seconds later, the third bomber, Safaa Mohammed Ali, also 23, detonated his explosives outside the Days Inn hotel. Jordanian officials believe that, like Mohammed, Ali planned to detonate the bomb inside the coffee shop. But after a suspicious waiter called security, Ali fled. Once outside the hotel, he knelt on the ground and detonated his explosives, killing three members of a nearby Chinese military delegation.⁸⁶

Immediately following the attack, rumors began circulating that there had been a fourth bomber and that a husband and wife had carried out one of the attacks. On November 13, the alleged fourth bomber and wife of the ringleader-Sajida Mubarak al-Rishawi appeared in a video confession on Jordanian television. Rishawi said her husband had pushed her out of the Radisson ballroom after her own bomb failed to detonate and that she had then fled the scene in a taxi. Her whereabouts for the three days between the attacks and her capture by Jordanian police have not yet been confirmed. Jordanian officials say she went to her sister's husband's family in the nearby city of Salt, but witnesses claim to have seen her in the Tlaa' Ali neighborhood of Amman where one of the cell's safe houses was located.⁸⁷

From Rishawi's televised statement, we know that much of the attack was assembled outside of Jordan. Shamari and his wife, both natives of Anbar province, left Iraq on November 5. The couple were picked up by two men in a white car and driven across the border, apparently using fake passports under the name of Ali Hussein Ali and Sajida Abdel Kader Latef to enter Jordan. The explosive belts used in the bombings appear to have entered the country with them.

Two days later, on November 7, the group rented an apartment in the Tlaa' Ali neighborhood of Amman. The apartment, located in an area with a large Iraqi community, was one of at least two safe houses the cell used before the attack. On the evening of the 9 the bombers took taxis to their targets, which according to Rishawi, had been selected in advance.

There are clear links between Zarqawi's group and the attack in Jordan. At least two of the bombers - Ali Hussein Ali Shamari and his wife - seem to have been part of Zarqawi's operation in Fallujah. Three of Rishawi's brothers were killed by US forces in Iraq.⁸⁸ One, Samir Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi was Zarqawi's top lieutenant in Anbar province and was killed by a US strike on his pickup truck during operations in Fallujah in 2004. According to the US military, another bomber, Safaa Mohammed Ali, may have been in their custody briefly in 2004. The US military said it detained an Iraqi with the same name as Ali in November 2004 but released him after two weeks because they lacked grounds to hold him. As of this writing, US officials are unsure if the Ali they had in their custody was the same one who struck the Days Inn hotel on November 9.

Although all four bombers were Iraqi nationals, it is possible that Zarqawi drew on his own connections in Jordan to carry out the November 9 attacks. There are some 400,000 Iraqis living in Jordan, some of whom have ties to Salafi jihadists in Iraq and might be willing to help carry out operations in Jordan.

Jordanian officials, including King Abdullah II, have refused to rule out the possibility that Jordanians may have been involved in the attacks. In the days following the bombings, Jordanian security officials arrested 12 suspects, mostly Jordanians and Iraqis. Perhaps the strongest evidence of a Jordanian connection comes from the city of Salt, 17 miles northeast of Amman. As already mentioned, many reports say Rishawi fled to the home of her brother-in-law's family there after the bombings.

Sometime in 2002 or 2003, Rishawi's sister Fatima married Nidal Arabiyat, a 30-year-old unemployed Jordanian from Salt who had joined the Salafi jihadi network several years earlier. Arabiyat had joined Raed Khreisat, a religious leader, in the late 1990s and gone to train with the Kurdish Islamic group, Ansar al-Islam in northern Iraq. After American forces invaded Iraq in 2003, Arabiyat joined forces with Zarqawi.

When Arabiyat was killed fighting US forces in Iraq, it was Rishawi's husband, Shamari, who called Arabiyat's family in Salt to tell them he had become a martyr.⁸⁹ The Rishawi-Arabiyyat link, although fascinating is hardly unusual. Strong tribal and family ties exist between Jordanians and Iraqis. Locals say at least 30 men from Salt have died in Iraq fighting the Americans.⁹⁰ Many are connected by more than family ties or loyalty to their clan; they are motivated by a shared belief in Salafi Jihadism.

The Jordanian reaction to the November 9 bombings was notably different from past reactions to Zarqawi attacks. In the days following the triple bombing, tens of thousands of Jordanians marched against Zarqawi and pledged their allegiance to King Abdullah. Jordanians seem to have been shocked by the knowledge that Zarqawi, a fellow Jordanian, deliberately sought out Jordanian targets and Jordanian victims. Even Zarqawi's own Khalayleh clan joined the public backlash, taking out ads in the country's leading newspapers denouncing their infamous relative and pledging to remove any tribal protection he may have been benefiting from.⁹¹ For his part, Zarqawi responded to the public backlash by releasing an audiotape on November 18. Earlier statements from Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia had alerted Jordanian officials to the fact that there might have been a fourth bomber, as well as a husband and wife team, involved in the attack.

Zarqawi's 26-minute November 18 statement began:⁹²

All the world has heard the noise made by the Jordanian Government that the Jordanians are the victims of terrorism and that those terrorists like to shed blood, all this came after three lions have left their lair in Baghdad making their way to the center of Amman to target three hideouts of the crusaders and the Jews.

The Qa'ida has made the blessed step for the coming reasons:

1. The Jordanian government has announced its infidelity and clearly battled against God.
2. The Jordanian army has become the guard of the borders of the Israeli borders, they have banned the Mujahedeen from breaking into the depth of the blessed lands to fight the (brothers of the monkeys and the pigs). How many of the Mujahedeen [have been] killed by a bullet in the back from the Jordanian soldiers securing the borders?
3. The Jordanian government has spread vice and corruption. The state has become like a swamp of pornography-the hotels and the refreshment resorts are widely spread on Aqaba and the Dead Sea-we feel pity [for] the harm caused by this corrupted family of both its men and women.
4. This state has permitted the Zionist enemy to infiltrate in the Jordanian society socially, economically, and politically. The best ever example given is the Hassan industrial city, where all the capitals are in the hands of the Jews.

5. The American's secret prisons in Jordan, working under the supervision of the American intelligence itself, said that there are tens of Mujahedeen in them, going under all different colors of torture done [at] the hands of the Jordanian intelligence members. The Los Angeles Times newspaper has mentioned earlier that the best ally for the CIA in the region now is the Jordanian intelligence, and that part of the CIA budget goes to train the members of the Jordanian intelligence members in Amman.

6. Concerning Iraq, Jordan has become the rear base for the Americans in their war against the Islamic nation, the American airplanes flies from the Jordanian lands to attack the Mujahedeen, and lest we forget the army of translators (the Infidels). The fleet of vehicles that supplies the American army with food supplies all driven by the Jordanians.

A message to the Moslem people in Jordan, we assure you that we are the earnest ones about your safety, we know that you were the prey of the criminal regime, they have lied when they say that you become the victims of the Mujahedeen, it is a lie.

Zarqawi continued:

We have targeted these hotels after two months of surveillance and basing on information collected from inside and outside the hotels from our trusty sources.

The Radisson Hotel was the gathering point of the Israeli tourists and intelligence members, also the Day's Inn hotel. It is also the residence of all the Israeli embassy employees.

The Hayat Amman [sic. Grand Hyatt] is the centre of the American, Israeli and the Iraqi intelligence. The Israeli spy Azzam Azzam was meeting the Mosad members in the Hayat Amman hotel...it is a lie that the martyr has blown up himself in the middle of the wedding crowds...

The government that was able all these years to double cross people that they are enemies of the Zionists can convert the truth easily, we ask God's mercy for all Moslems killed in this operation, as they were not the target, the martyrs have targeted the hall that had the meeting of the intelligence officers, the killing was due to collapsing of the secondary ceiling, it was not done with intention.

...the brother of the groom has said according to the Quds press, it was unlikely that the blast was due to a suicide attack, as there were no signs of something wrong going [on].

He also added that the ceiling has fallen with all components, cement, iron bars and the decoration, on the heads of the wedding attendees, the dust has covered all over the place ... he think[s] the cause was a bomb planted in the ceiling as there was no fire.

The two other hotels were embracing [a] number of American and Jewish figures. The brothers have succeeded in knowing the place and time of their meeting, after frequent surveillance for the place, so the brothers knew for sure their targets.

Zarqawi justified the attack by claiming that Israeli and American secret agents had been meeting at the three hotels. Zarqawi also repeatedly asserted that Jordanians had not been the targets. Near the end of his statement, he threatened King Abdullah, stating: "Your star is fading. You will not escape your fate, you descendant of traitors. We will be able to reach your head and chop it off..."⁹³

Some experts believe the November 9 triple bombings in Amman may have been the first example of Zarqawi coming through on his pledge to spread jihad outside Iraq. In an interview with ABC News in mid-November, Iraq's Interior Minister Bayan Jabr said he believed Zarqawi might be planning more out-of-area operations. Jabr said his ministry had uncovered information that Al Qa'ida in

Mesopotamia was planning at least two other attacks—one in Yemen and the other in Egypt—against foreigners and Americans.

Jabr also claimed that foreigners had been recruited to come to Iraq in order to receive training so that they could return to their home countries to carry out attacks. As proof, he offered several passports the ministry had seized in recent months. Among the nationalities represented were the countries most often associated with foreign fighters in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Algeria. But also seized were passports from France, South Africa, Azerbaijan, India and Pakistan.⁹⁴

It is too early to say whether the Amman bombings signal Zarqawi is widening the jihad and taking the Iraqi insurgency abroad. Rather than see Iraq as spilling over into other countries, or as some kind of magnet for terrorism, it is wise to consider Zarqawi's history, and the fact his attacks on Jordan may be more a logical extension of his personal history and connection to that country.

Zarqawi and "Weapons of Mass Media"

The various Islamist extremist groups have been highly effective at striking at targets in ways that high media and political impact, particularly in the form of suicide bombings and beheadings.⁹⁵ These attacks have been "weapons of mass media" when they have struck against Coalition targets, and this has led some to see such militant groups as successful manipulators of Arab and Western media outlets, able to tailor their attacks for maximum media coverage and psychological effect. As work by the Crisis Group has shown, they have also made effective use of the Internet, showing steadily more sophistication in using it as a method of by communicating and seeking Iraqi and outside support.⁹⁶

At the same time, Zarqawi's extremism has sometimes backfired when directed against fellow Muslims. In the summer of 2005, for example, Zarqawi's group attacked several Muslim diplomats in an effort to stymie relations between the new Iraqi government and foreign governments. Egypt's Ihab Sherif, tapped to become the first Arab ambassador to Iraq, was kidnapped and then killed by the Jordanian terrorist's Al Qa'ida movement.

An Internet statement released by the group suggested that he might have been beheaded and stated that he had been killed for Egypt's recognition of the Iraqi government, for the country's fostering of disbelief in Islam, for 'waging war against Muslims' by cracking down on Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, and by sending an ambassador to Iraq at US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's bidding.⁹⁷

Soon afterwards, Pakistani Ambassador Mohammed Younis Khan and Bahraini charges d'affaires Hassan Malallah Ansari were targeted by Zarqawi's group. In separate attacks, both Khan's and Ansari's convoys were hit with gunfire in what were described as attempted kidnappings. Ansari suffered a minor gunshot wound and Pakistan quickly relocated Khan to Jordan. Not long after, two of Algeria's diplomats to the new Iraqi government was kidnapped in Baghdad and later killed.

The resulting coverage in Iraqi and Arab media was anything but favorable, and may help explain why jihadist websites often list complaints detailing a lack of press coverage for some of their attacks, and about media criticism.⁹⁸

Zarqawi's Al Qa'ida in Iraq group severely criticized the Al Jazeera satellite television station in June 2005 for what it called impartial reporting. It claimed that Al Jazeera, long criticized by US officials, had "sided" with the US over Iraq. Similarly, in January of 2006, Zarqawi posted an audio clip on an Islamist website denouncing those countries that had met at an Arab League summit in November to address Iraqi political reconciliation as "agents" of the U.S. and guilty of "destroying Iraq."⁹⁹

Zarqawi has also had to issue "retractions" or "clarifications" after unpopular attacks or statements. After his declaration of "total war" on Shiites (discussed below) received a very cool response from the larger jihadi community, Zarqawi issued a partial retraction. Many Sunnis rejected Zarqawi's declaration and Al Qa'ida's Zawahiri warned attacks on Shiites would hurt the group's level of popular support. Zarqawi responded in a similar way after the November 9 bombings in Amman (also discussed below).

The backlash to this declaration from the Muslim world, especially within Jordan itself, was enough to prompt Zarqawi to issue several statements denying Jordanians had been the target of the attacks. Instead, Zarqawi claimed Israeli and American intelligence officials meeting in the hotels were the real targets. Such statements and retractions suggest Zarqawi may be on the defensive and that his group is growing increasingly vulnerable to Muslim public opinion.

Such developments may have helped lead Zarqawi's Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia group to start an online Internet magazine entitled *Zurwat al Sanam*, in an effort to wage a more effective propaganda and recruiting campaign. Other insurgent groups on the Web have mirrored this effort, and some analysts believe that it is a defensive tactic to counter the perceived inroads made by the January 30th elections and the capture of important terrorist lieutenants in the months that followed.¹⁰⁰

Other Sunni Arab Insurgent Groups: The "Nationalists?"

At the beginning of the insurgency, Coalition forces tended to refer to Iraq's more mainstream insurgents as "former regime loyalists" (FRLs), or "foremer regimne enthiusiats (FREs), Few analysts would do so today. At the same time, Iraq's Arab Sunnis are only beginning to forge new political identities out of the power vacuum left by Saddam Hussein's dictatorship.

While most of Iraq's ruling elite during Saddam Hussein's decades of dictatorship were Sunni, the top elite came from a small portion of Sunnis, many with family backgrounds in what were originally rural military families. The top elite had strong ties not only to Saddam's extended family, but to Tikritis in general, and the al-Bu Nasir tribe and its Bejat clan and Majid family.¹⁰¹ The vast majority of Sunnis got little special benefit from Saddam's rule, and many Sunnis suffered from his oppression in the same way as other Iraqis.

Planing Befoire, During, and Immediately After the War?

It is uncertain that Saddam's regime took effective action to create such groups before, during, or immediately after the war. There has been little unclassified intelligence on what the Coalition and Iraqi government has learned about such groups since the insurgency gathered momentum in 2003, but an analyst with the Crisis Group conducted interviews with Ba'athists and officers of the former security apparatus (including Special security) in Baghdad, Tikrit, Bayji and Mosul and found that,¹⁰²

There is no evidence that Saddam designed a guerrilla strategy in anticipation of military defeat. Indeed, the period immediately following the overthrow of the Baathist regime was remarkably calm; U.S. forces, in effect, suddenly found themselves without an enemy... The fallen regime's power structures collapsed almost instantaneously, laying bare the extent to which Saddam Hussein's authority – including over his own security apparatus – relied on coercion rather than loyalty. Senior Baath party members as well as army and intelligence officers initially were at a loss, facing both an uncertain future and a population that, in its vast majority, appeared willing to give the United States a chance. Far from preparing a collective comeback, these so-called Saddamists above all were preoccupied with personal survival.

...Elements of the former regime, some Shiites included...soon helped set up small cells of fighters. But this was not planned ahead of time and reflected neither a desire to restore the past nor ideological attachment to Baathism; rather, these cells developed gradually, initially drawing individuals angered by dim prospects, resentful of the occupation and its indignities, and building on pre-existing party, professional, tribal, familial or geographic--including neighbourhood—networks.

...Former regime officials were, of course, ideal candidates and soon became the vanguard of the armed opposition, combining as they did idleness, relevant military and intelligence skills as well as knowledge of the whereabouts of vast weapons stockpiles and relatively scarcer cash reserves concealed by the regime in anticipation of the projected defence of Baghdad...Former hierarchical structures in the Baath party or the army helped structure what initially were amorphous cells...But for the most part this had little to do with Baathist loyalty; from the outset, the armed opposition's discourse build on patriotic and religious themes at the expense of a largely discredited ideology.

Even at an early stage, when foreign fighters in all likelihood played a negligible part in day-to-day operations, the upsurge in attacks during the month of Ramadan in 2003 (27 October-25 November) illustrates the extent to which the struggle was framed as a religious duty...A handful of groups claimed to be acting on behalf of the Baath, but they quickly were put on the defensive, having to account for the former regime's perversion of Baathism,...its crimes...and the 2003 debacle...While some fighters probably still looked upon Saddam Hussein as a symbol of anti-imperialist resistance...virtually all armed groups dissociated themselves from the former president...and some openly denounced him.

...Nor is there persuasive backing for the view that the current battle is but the extension of a global *jihadi* war. Most analysts now concur that the Baathist regime did not entertain relations with al-Qaeda and foreign volunteers invited by Saddam to die in his defence had nothing to do with Osama bin Laden's organization.

...The impact of foreign *jihadis* grew over time, but during the early stages of the insurgency it appears to have been negligible and al-Qaeda in particular remained absent, claiming none of the spectacular attacks orchestrated in 2003...Suicide missions only appeared well into the occupation.

...In short, resort to static explanations of the insurgency tends both to misjudge what in fact has been a dynamic, evolving phenomenon and, importantly, to downplay the role played in its emergence and subsequent development by specific U.S. policies and practices.

Such reports may, however, understate the level of organization involved. Some US intelligence experts did say on background before the invasion that Saddam's regime, and intelligence and security services, were organizing for a post invasion resistance. The broad dispersal of weapons and arms in much of Iraq may have been designed to support such activities, and a relatively sophisticated operation did develop by mid-2003, with ties to senior Ba'athists who were operating in Syria as well as Iraq.

The Motives of the More "Nationalist" Insurgents

The insurgent elements with ties to the former regime, and which are more secular or nationalist in character, have not been as active as the more religious and extreme insurgents, and have done much less to seek publicity or use tools like the Internet. Several things are clear from public opinion polls and other sources about Iraqi Sunni attitudes in general, however, and about those Sunnis who say they support attacks on Coalition forces.

Most Sunni Arabs clearly do want rights and privileges for Sunnis, but they also tend to be nationalists in the sense they consistently favor a strong, unified Iraqi state. This has been clear from public opinion polls in Sunni areas since mid-2003, and Arab Sunnis have opposed the idea of splitting Iraq into federations since this became an issue in mid-2005. Like Iraq's Arab Shi'ites, polls also show that Iraqi Sunnis are generally religious and see Islam as a key aspect of their lives, but do not favor a theocratic state.

At the same time, Arab Sunnis show far more general support for violence against the Coalition. Surveys in mid-2003 found that some 37% of Sunnis supported violence against Coalition forces. A poll conducted by the Coalition in summer 2005 indicated that nearly 45 percent of the population supported the insurgent attacks.¹⁰³

The overall motives of Arab Sunnis, however, are complex, and it seems almost certain that this is true of many who participate in the insurgency or support it. While polling efforts in Iraq face many obstacles and their results remain uncertain, a poll conducted in January provides results that tracked closely with other major polls and the country and which do seem to provide useful insights. The poll found that 83% of Arab Sunnis did not feel Saddam should have been ousted, and 93% of Iraqi Arab Sunnis thought that Iraq was moving in the wrong direction.¹⁰⁴ Some 88% of Arab Sunnis approved of attacks on US led forces.¹⁰⁵ A total of 83% wanted the US to leave Iraq in six months.

At the same time, only 7% of Iraqis approved attacks on Iraqi forces and 93% disapproved. Even among Sunnis, only 24% "approved somewhat," and 76% disapproved, of which 24% disapproved strongly. When it came to attacks on Iraqi civilians, only 7% of Iraqis approved attacks on Iraqi forces and 99%

disapproved. So few Sunnis approved that the results were not meaningful, and nearly 100% disapproved, of which 95% disapproved strongly.¹⁰⁶

Ba'athists, Non-Ba'athists, or Semi-Ba'athists?

US analysts acknowledge that Ba'athist and ex-regime loyalists represent only a part of the insurgency – although they have played a key role in leadership, organization, and financing. The largest elements of the insurgency appear to be newly radicalized Iraqi Sunnis.

According to the CIA reports, the Sunni loss of power, prestige, and economic influence is a key factor, as is unemployment and a loss of personal status -- direct and disguised unemployment among young Sunni men has been 40-60% in many areas ever since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Many insurgents are motivated by tribal or family grievances, nationalism and religious duty. Others are motivated by the U.S. occupation – particularly those who have lost a loved one fighting U.S. forces – and the political and economic turmoil that accompanied the occupation.¹⁰⁷

This does not mean that ex-Ba'athists do not play a critical role. The Ba'ath Party did not dissolve when the CPA formally abolished it in May 2003. It reorganized with a new structure, established a new politburo in 2004, and at least some elements operated from a de facto sanctuary in Syria.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, many full-time and part-time Iraqi members groups associated with the Ba'ath are linked more by tribe, family, and locality than any sense of Ba'ath political identity.

In short, it is unclear how much influence various “Ba'athist” groups have. However, both US and Iraqi Interim Government officials – such as the MNF commander General Casey and Iraqi Defense Minister Hazan Shaalan – believe that Ba'ath leaders in Syria coordinate with at least some of the Ba'ath sympathizers. The office of the Iraqi Prime Minister also called for the arrest of six senior members of the former regime in March 2005:¹⁰⁹

- Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri: Believed to be the leader of the New Regional Command and New Ba'ath Party. (He died on November 10, 2005.)
- Muhammed Younis al-Ahmad: financial facilitator and operational leader of the New Regional Command and New Ba'ath Party.
- Rashid Ta'an Kazim: Central Ba'ath Party Regional Chairman in Al Anbar Province.
- Abd Al-Baqi Abd Al-Karim Al-Abdallah Al-Sa'adun: Recruiter and financier of terrorist activity in eastern and central Iraq.
- Aham Hasan Kaka al-Ubaydi: A former intelligence officer, and now associated with Ansar Al Islam.
- Fadhi Ibrahim Mahmud Mashadani (aka Abu Huda): Top member of the New Ba'ath Party and a key financier of insurgent and terrorist activity.

Any remaining Ba'athist elements in the insurgency can benefit from the fact that they still have access to some of the former regime's money and they began to organize – at least a crude level – before the invasion began, and have since

steadily tightened their organization and purged suspect members. According to one report, they held a major meeting at Al Hasaka in April or May of 2004 to tighten their structure.

Field leaders reportedly include Mohammed Younis al-Ahmad, a former aide to Saddam Hussein, and Ibrahim Sabawi, Hussein's half brother and a former security director. They also benefit from the fact that some elements of the leadership of the Iraqi 5th Corps are still in Mosul, and Syria has provided a covert sanctuary for at least some Iraq Ba'athist leaders.¹¹⁰

Other "Nationalist" Sunni Insurgents

It now seems likely that most of the less extreme or "nationalist Iraqi-dominated Sunni insurgent groups now have a significant degree of independence from the former Ba'ath leadership, although it is clear that many cooperate in at least some operations, and that many of the elements with at least some ties to ex-supporters of Saddam's regime have some degree of central leadership and coordination.

US experts talk of informal networks, using tools like the Internet, to coordinate operations and exchange data on tactics, targets, and operations. There is evidence of such exchanges between cells in Iraq and outside groups including those in Syria and Afghanistan. Insurgent groups also use the media to get near-real-time information on what other groups and cells are doing and to find out what tactics produce the maximum political and media impact.

Nevertheless, many of the Sunni insurgent groups or cells that are not Islamist extremist groups, or associated with them, may get money or some degree of leadership from the Ba'athist structures that have emerged since the fall of Saddam Hussein, but have no meaningful ties to or family linkage to former Ba'ath groups or to former members of Saddam and the Ba'ath regime. It is generally misleading to call them "former regime loyalists (FRLs)" or "former regime" elements (FREs). They are rather Sunni nationalists involved in a struggle for current power. This has allowed the insurgency to broaden its base and establish ties to Islamic groups as well.

The Search for Power and the Possibility of Dialogue

The relative impact of the "nationalist" Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups and the smaller Islamic extremist groups is uncertain. In some cases, MNF-I and US officials see evidence that secular Sunni groups, and even Hussein loyalists, were cooperating with extreme Islamists. In Mosul, Ba'athists worked with Salafists to attack American troops and derail the election process.¹¹¹ While the two groups have conflicting visions and aspirations for Iraq's future – and sometimes feud or even kill each other -- their short-term goals are largely the same: instability and insecurity, breaking up the new Iraqi government and depriving it of popular legitimacy, keeping Iraqi forces from becoming effective, and driving the US and MNF-I forces out of Iraq.

In September of 2005, however, Army Maj. Gen. Richard Zahner acknowledged that the Ba'athist insurgency had been surpassed by a terrorist campaign led by Zarqawi's group. Speaking to the Washington Post, Zahner said: "You'll see

some of the old regime elements [out] there, mainly just to maintain pressure and, frankly, accountability...But when you look at those individuals central the inflicting of huge amounts of violence, it really is not those folks. The Saddamists, the former regime guys, they're riding this."¹¹² The view that Al Qaeda in Iraq, not Iraqis loyal to Saddam Hussein (known as "Saddamists"), were becoming the driving element behind the insurgency in the summer and fall of 2005 is however controversial.

The fact the "nationalist" Sunni insurgents have, however, been more willing and able to acquire leverage in the Iraqi political process. For example, some Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents groups saw the December 15th elections as an opportunity to gain power, and called upon their followers to forgo violence on election day while Al Qaeda and its allies called for attacks. This seems to have led to outright clashes between elements of Al Qaeda in Iraq and Sunni nationalists in the months leading up to the election, particularly in cities within the Sunni Triangle such as Qaim, Taji, Ramadi, and Yusefiya.

Tensions and Clashes Between Sunni "Nationalists" versus Sunni "Islamic Extremists?"

Opinions differ as to just how much the different Sunni elements that make up the insurgency are dividing or coalescing. Some analysts suggested in late 2004 and early 2005 that Ba'athists and their former adversaries, such as the Salafists and the Kurds, were finding common cause with foreign fighters.¹¹³ Yet, there were also growing reports of fighting between the more secular and moderate nationalist Sunni insurgents and Sunni Islamic extremists. This fighting has sometimes occurred at the local level where it seemed more a matter of "turf" than ideology. It has also been driven by attacks by fundamentalist groups on individual local Shieks and leaders, where local Sunnis took reprisals without this having broad impact on local support for the insurgency.

As has been discussed earlier, Islamist extremists have increasingly provoked broader resentments. The more moderate and nationalist Sunni groups generally do not approve of mass attacks on civilians and on Iraqi Shi'ites. Many do not approve of attempts to provoke a civil war, or to turn the Iraqi insurgency from a struggle for national power to a broader war for control of Islam. These problems have been compounded by the split over whether Iraqi Sunnis should participate in the government and Iraqi forces, if only to act as a counterweight to the Shi'ites and Kurds and without real support for the new Iraqi political process.

Divisions Over Playing a Role in the Political Process

Sunni Islamist extremist movements made Iraq's political process a primary target before and after the January 30, 2005 elections. Such insurgents feared that a relatively secure and successful election would cement Shi'ite dominance in Iraq and would signal the demise of both the Islamist and Ba'athist visions for the future of Iraq.

On December 29, 2004, Ansar al-Sunna declared, "All polling stations and those in them will be targets for our brave soldiers."¹¹⁴ Similarly, the Islamic Army in

Iraq warned in mid-January 2005, "Do not allow polling stations in your neighborhood because they put your lives in danger. Do not also interfere with the employees who work in these voting centers, as they will be killed. Keep away from these places as they will be attacked." On January 23, 2005, Zarqawi released an audiotape saying, "We have declared an all-out war on this evil principle of democracy and those who follow this wrong ideology."¹¹⁵

The more mainstream Sunni groups, however, seem to have recognized that failing to play a political role effectively deprived the Sunnis of power, provided a "blank" check to other political factions, and meant they had little leverage to block developments they opposed. This experience was reinforced by the debates over the new constitution and the obvious cost to Sunnis of not participating in the political process.

Sunni efforts to create a new political identity included both the minority that has participated in the new government and political process, some who had boycotted it, and political parties like the Muslim Brotherhood and Iraq Islamic Party. They also included clerical bodies like the Association of Islamic Scholars, which is headed by Dr. Muthanna Harith al-Dhari – an Egyptian educated Islamic scholar. The Association of Islamic Scholars claims to represent some 6,000 mosques, or 80% of the total. There is no way to validate such claims.¹¹⁶

Iraq's new president and prime minister encouraged their efforts. The search for a Sunni Minister of Defense examined some 10 candidates before choosing a Sunni Sadoon al-Dulaimi in early May 2003, and this was a key factor delaying the creation of a new government. They also resisted the calls of other Shi'ites and Kurds for the systematic purging of all Sunnis with ties to the Ba'ath, including many in the Iraqi forces.¹¹⁷

While the details are unclear, the new Iraqi government and the US also attempted to hold a dialogue with the more moderate insurgents. At least one such effort became public. In summer 2005, a former Iraqi electricity minister, Iyham al-Samarri, announced that he had established a sort of communication organization through which the various insurgent groups could convey their views and concerns to both the elected Iraqi government and the Coalition.¹¹⁸ Al-Samarri had a questionable past and a controversial tenure as electricity minister. Furthermore, it could not be substantiated that al-Samarri had had any contact with any insurgents as he claimed. Not long after he claimed this ability to speak on behalf of the insurgents, militant groups criticized him via the Web. They asserted that he did not speak for them and that he was 'spreading lies.'

Nevertheless, an Internet statement appeared a week later stating that the Army of the Mujahedeen and the Islamic Army in Iraq had appointed a spokesman, Ibrahim Youssef al-Shammari, to speak on behalf of the two insurgent groups. His identity was confirmed on websites linked to the two militant organizations.¹¹⁹ This suggest some of the militants were moving to form political wings.¹²⁰ It remained unclear whether such wings would seek to formally run in the elections to come or whether they would seek to simply put forward cogent demands and expectations.

This participation of Sunni insurgents in the Iraqi political process marked a profound shift in their thinking and tactics, and led to a growing rift between such insurgents and al-Qa'ida forces in Iraq. This rift became more evident in the fall of 2005, with clashes erupting between al-Qa'ida fighters and Sunni insurgents.¹²¹

There were also growing reports of Iraqi Sunni executions of foreign Sunni Islamic extremists since the first such reports surfaced in November 2004.¹²² One such case clearly took place on August 13, 2005, when Sunni Iraqis in Ramadi took up arms against Abu Musab Zarqawi's forces in defense of their Shiite neighbors.

The fighting came on the heels of a proclamation by Zarqawi that Ramadi's 3,000 Shiites leave the city of some 200,000 residents. The order was given in retaliation for supposed expulsions of Sunni minorities by Shiite militias in the mostly Shiite south of Iraq. Yet in Ramadi, members of the Sunni Dulaimi tribe, formed security cordons around Shiite homes and fought Zarqawi's men with grenade launchers and automatic weapons. All told, five foreign fighters and two local tribal fighters were killed.¹²³

Many Sunnis participated in the debate over the constitution and the referendum that followed. During the summer and fall of 2005, Sunni leaders threatened that a constitution forced through without the consent and consideration of the Sunni population would result in a stepped-up Sunni insurgency. Nevertheless, many Sunni leaders and voters, including Sunnis from a number of insurgent-dominated or influenced areas, participated in the October 15, 2005 constitutional referendum.

In the weeks prior to the referendum, Abu Theeb, the commander of a cell of Sunni insurgents north of Baghdad known as the Anger Brigade, traveled the countryside visiting Sunni villages. The message was the same at each stop: Sunnis should register to vote but vote no in the referendum.

Abu Theeb, who has been fighting coalition troops for more than two years described the boycott of the January election as a mistake. "It is a new jihad...There is a time for fighting, and a time for politics."¹²⁴ Theeb was so determined to ensure a Sunni turnout was Theeb that he supplied a local polling station with his own guards on the day of the vote. Despite an Al-Qa'ida vow to kill anyone, including Sunnis, who participated in the referendum, Theeb ordered his followers to protect the local school to ensure that Sunni voters would be safe. Theeb even reprimanded a young follower for planning an IED attack the night before the election, saying: "I thought we agreed that nothing will happen for the next few days."¹²⁵

Sunnis turned out in far greater numbers than the January 30, 2005 election and this gave momentum to Sunni participation in the December 15, 2005 elections for the national assembly. Although no exact figures have been published, Sunni turnout in the October 15, 2005 referendum was much heavier than expected. Overall turnout in the referendum was 63 per cent, up from 58 per cent in January. Moreover, turnout in many Shi'ite and Kurdish-dominated provinces fell

below January's figures, indicating the increase in overall turnout had come from Sunni Arab voters.¹²⁶

This did not mean Sunnis supported the constitution. In Salahuddin Province, a Sunni stronghold and home to Saddam Hussein's family, however, 81 per cent rejected the constitution. Elsewhere in the country, voting was largely divided along ethnic and sectarian lines. Voting in the mixed province of Diyala, home to both Sunnis and Shiites, was illustrative of this split with 51.76 per cent voting yes and 48.24 per cent voting no.¹²⁷ It did mean that Sunnis had engaged politically, and not through violence.

This engagement was even more active in the run up to the elections for the national assembly. Even in Tikrit, there were more than two-dozen political groups with offices in Tikrit by November 2005, and young men could be found hanging campaign posters. Some posters even reached out to former members of Saddam's party. One such poster read, "Vote for us and we promise we will end de-Ba'athification."¹²⁸

The end result was that numerous Sunni candidates ran, and numerous Sunnis voted. Voter turnout figures released by the Iraqi Electoral Commission put turnout in the December 15 election at 70 percent, the highest in any post-Saddam era election held to date. A total 10.9 of Iraq's 15.6 million registered voters did vote in the election, and Sunnis voted heavily in every area where insurgents who opposed political action could not threaten them.¹²⁹

These tensions over these different approaches to the political process were compounded by the fact that many Iraqi Sunnis strongly opposed attacks on Sunni recruits to the Iraqi forces, and killings of Sunnis in local governments. It is clear that even Sunnis who sympathize with the insurgency do not approve of killings of fellow Sunnis and feel that other Sunnis have to support the government or join Iraqi forces simply to survive.

Iraqi Government Negotiations with "Nationalist" Insurgents

The December 15th election did have a mixed impact. The Sunnis only received about 20% of the seats, and many complained about "fraud" and that they were being allotted fewer seats than their Shi'ite counterparts. Some Sunni insurgents and anti-government leaders also made it clear that there was no reason Sunnis could not both participate in many aspects of the political process *and* support the insurgency.

Nevertheless, a number of reports in early January 2006 indicated that enough progress was taking place so that that US and Iraqi government officials were able to hold much more productive dialogues with groups the insurgency.

These talks involved Sunni Arab nationalists who resented the occupation and were fearful of being marginalized under a Shi'ite dominated government. Both sets of officials stressed that no commitments were made to this group, and that they would not enter into talks with foreign terrorists and pro-Saddam elements. Furthermore, officials were adamant that they would not talk with figures that the

intelligence services identified as having been implicated in lethal attacks on US and Iraqi forces.¹³⁰

Though the identities of the insurgent groups and figures involved in the talks are unknown, the *New York Times* listed Muhammad's Army and the Islamic Army in Iraq as the likely groups because they are allegedly nationalist and are comprised of former Ba'athists.¹³¹ Despite the talks, US officials did not believe that a lasting ceasefire or demobilization of insurgent bands was imminent largely because such groups wanted the US to establish a timeline for withdrawal.

The US part of the effort to reach out to part of Sunni nationalist insurgency appears to have had two levels. On the political level, US officials hope to bring the nationalist insurgents into the political process, which would encourage them to give up violence. On another level, the US appears to want to turn the nationalists against the foreign fighters and Al Qa'ida affiliates by focusing on the differences between the insurgent groups.

As one Western diplomat stated, "According to Islamic doctrine, as well as democratic principles, there cannot be a legitimate resistance against a legitimate government. If we can reach an understanding with each other, meaning the resistance, as they call it, and the coalition, then they in turn will take care of Zarqawi and the terrorists."¹³² In the talks, US representatives have repeatedly asked the location of Al Qa'ida elements and whether the nationalist elements would be willing to help root them out.

Other US efforts had already been made public in December 2005. The US released 20 prominent Sunni detainees along with Satam Quaoood, a former Saddam supporter. Though US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad stressed that the move was not an attempt to mollify Sunni insurgents, they reportedly took the release as a sign of good will and became more open to talks.¹³³ While such prisoner releases may inadvertently soften aspects of the Sunni insurgency, it provoked an outburst of protests by Shi'ites against Ambassador Khalilzad and Iraqi Sunni leaders.

A tape attributed to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was released on an Islamist website in early January that seemed to be an apparent response to such efforts by Iraqi and US officials, as well as Arab states. Zarqawi sharply criticized Iraqi Sunnis and Arab countries for working for the formation of a unifying coalition government in Iraq.

The speaker attacked the Arab League summit in November that brought the various Iraqi factions together in Egypt. Reuters quoted the speaker as saying, "The countries that met in Cairo ... were involved in destroying Iraq and cooperated with America by opening their land, air space and waters and offering intelligence to it."¹³⁴ The speaker explained that they had not attacked polling stations during the election so as not to hurt Sunnis while denouncing the Sunni Iraqi Islamist Party for supporting the Iraqi constitution.

This effort may have backfired to the point that it forced the Zarqawi group to change tactics. An announcement on a website frequently used by al-Qa'ida in early 2006 indicated that Zarqawi had abdicated his position as "emir" on the

Mujahedeen Council, a group composed of six radical organizations in Iraq including al-Qa'ida, in favor of an Iraqi.¹³⁵ In a video broadcast on the Internet, Zarqawi appealed to Muslim clerics in Iraq and asked for their support in his movement.¹³⁶ Although this may be an attempt by Al-Qa'ida in Iraq to put an "Iraqi face" on what is seen by many as a foreign-led Islamist extremist movement, the levels of communication, cooperation and conflict between the various insurgent movements remains unclear.

The Iraqi government attempted to take advantage of this cleavage, reaching an agreement with six Sunni nationalist insurgent groups. In exchange for reconciliation talks, these groups pledged to denounce Zarqawi's al-Qa'ida movement.¹³⁷ Despite the scattered nature of the evidence indicating a split in insurgent movements, Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowaffak Rubaie indicated that he believed such incidents were increasing and reflects an increasing intolerance among Iraqis of foreign-led groups operating in their country.

Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, A U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad echoed these sentiments and emphasized that six "major leaders" had been killed by other indigenous insurgent groups since September 2005, and suggested that the "local insurgents had become part of the solution."

Other reports indicated that members of the Abu Mahal tribe, who had formerly clashed with Coalition forces, began directing U.S. troops to locations of al-Qa'ida hideouts in the Syrian border area. In Ramadi, Abu Khatab, a high-ranking al-Qa'ida member, was run out by insurgents loyal to local tribes.¹³⁸ In Samarra, local leaders launched a campaign to hunt down al-Qa'ida members in a response to the assassination of Hikmat Mumtaz, the leader of the Abu-Baz tribe.¹³⁹

It is important to note, however, that the shifts in Sunni "nationalist positions, and their infighting with Islamist extremists, did not have a discernable effect on the overall level of violence in Iraq. In a ten-day period in January, insurgents attacked U.S. forces 113 times in Ramadi, the supposed primary area of this division among foreign and domestic led groups.¹⁴⁰ Jeffrey White, a former U.S. intelligence officer, suggested that, "even if we can exploit this rift" between insurgent groups, "it doesn't mean they stop fighting us."¹⁴¹

Moreover, any splits between the insurgent groups are highly dependent on the actions of the Shi'ites and Kurds in the new government. Both Sunni insurgents, and Sunnis in general, have expressed growing fears of Shi'ite and Kurdish attacks and abuses since the summer of 2005.

They pointed to well-documented abuses by some of the Shi'ite-dominated units in the special security forces and in prisons controlled by the Ministry of Interior that became public in the fall and winter of 2005. They also charge that Shi'ite organizations like the Badr Organization have run the equivalent of death squads, the Shi'ites are pushing Sunnis out of Basra and Shi'ite neighborhoods in other cities, and Kurdish groups are seeking to push Sunnis out of Kirkuk and other mixed cities and towns in the north.

The Role of Sunni Arab Militias

This pressure on Arab Sunnis from the Arab Shi'ites and Kurds sometimes helped fuel the insurgency, but it also led those Sunnis willing to cooperate with the Coalition and new Iraqi government to develop their own forces. These efforts have also been stimulated by the rising tensions between those Sunnis that do not want to participate in the insurgency and the insurgents, and between the more moderate and nationalist insurgents and the more extreme Islamist movements.

Most of the Sunni forces that emerged by early 2006 were local and informal, operating at the tribal and neighborhood level. In some cases, the end result was a force that was not loyal to either the insurgency or supportive of the Coalition and new Iraqi government. Some forces were part of the insurgency, and others were formed to deal with the threat posed by the more extreme Sunni Arab insurgents, such as the Zarqawi movement.

The Positive Side of the Militia Story

In some cases, the Coalition and new Iraqi government either helped create such militias or supported them. In the border area and part of Western Iraq, for example, MNF-I and the Iraqi government found it was cheaper and more effective to buy the loyalty of local tribal militias than fight the insurgents – particularly in those areas where outside insurgents had alienated the local residents. These developments led US Army Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch to go so far as to say that "The local insurgents have become part of the solution and not part of the problem."¹⁴²

The Iraqi Minister of Defense, Saadoun Dulaymi, encouraged these developments, and MNF-I provided funds, weapons, and some training. US officers and Ambassador Khalilzad met with key leaders. In some Sunni urban areas and towns, police forces were created that came close to being local militias, at least in terms of their recruiting base. In other areas, Sunnis were organized at the tribal or local level in an effort to protect key facilities and projects, like oil pipelines. These efforts were given further incentive when a bombing by Zarqawi forces killed some 70 Arab Sunnis at a recruiting station in Ramadi in January 2006.¹⁴³

Mithal Alusi, a Sunni Arab parliamentarian, was quoted as saying that, "There is a change...After these attacks, and after the elections, we find the people are eager to be rid of the terrorists." Sheikh Osama al-Jadaan, of the Karabila tribe in Anbar province was quoted as saying that, "They claim to be striking at the US occupation, but the reality is they are killing innocent Iraqis in the markets, in mosques, in churches, and in our schools," although he also noted that, "We are caught in the middle between the terrorists coming to destroy us with their suicide belts, their TNT, and their car bombs, and the American Army that destroys our homes, takes our weapons, and doesn't allow us to defend ourselves against the terrorists."¹⁴⁴

These efforts continued in February.¹⁴⁵ Iraqi and US officials and offers discussed deals for prisoner release, added, aid and senior positions in the army and police

for the support of Sunni "nationalist insurgents." These efforts includes a meeting between General George W. Casey, Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari, and high-ranking members of Iraq's security and intelligence agencies with some Iraq's largest Sunni Muslim Arab tribes.

Mowaffak Rubaie, the Iraqi government's national security advisor, said that Jafari promised to recruit more Sunni Arabs into the army and police forces and to send more economic aid to Al Anbar. Rubaie and Sunni tribal leaders at the meeting also said that Jafari also pledged to release at least 140 prisoners in coming weeks, and that more releases would be forthcoming.

The meeting also showed, however, that some tribal leaders wanted to create their own militias to police their cities – something opposed by the central government. For example, Sheik Osama Jadan said his Al Anbar community had already formed an armed group, similar to the Shiite militias, to fight insurgents. "We started our operations three weeks ago, and they have been fruitful," he said. "We caught one of [guerrilla leader Abu Musab] Zarqawi's assistants, and after an investigation of him ... we handed him over to the Iraqi army and joint intelligence."

Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad explained that, "We are engaged with leaders, including tribal leaders and others, to encourage them to suspend their military operations with the aim of ending the insurgency and working together with us against the terrorists...I think it is critical that the security ministries be given to people who are broadly accepted across sectarian and ethnic lines and that they are not people who are sectarian or divisive and that they are not people with ties to militias or armed groups."

The Negative Side

At the same time, other Sunni voices gave a different message. Sheikh Abdel Salaam al-Qubaysi, a leader of the Muslim Scholars Association, a hard-line Sunni group with much of its base in Anbar, stated that, "These are just a few sheikhs who want to get political power by claiming to be fighting the terrorists, and to be speaking for the resistance...They are slaves in the pockets of the occupation. They have no weight in the streets." He also blamed the attacks in Anbar on foreign Shi'ites, "We know that 40,000 militants from Iran have to come to Iraq," he says. "I don't rule out that they did this to prevent Sunni Arabs from joining the Iraqi Army."¹⁴⁶

Some groups became involved in the equivalent of an auction between the Coalition and new Iraqi government and the insurgents. Some took the money and continued to support the insurgency. In a number of areas, however, the results were positive. Success varied by individual case.

What was more threatening was that some Sunni Arabs sought to form their own militia at the national level to counter Shi'ite and Kurdish forces. In early February, a force called the "Anbar Revolutionaries" emerged which opposed the more extreme elements of the insurgency like Al Qa'ida, but also was created to help secure Arab Sunnis against Arab Shi'ite and Kurdish pressure and attacks. According to press reports, this force was composed largely of former Ba'ath

loyalists, Saddam, moderate Iraqi Sunni Islamists and other Arab Sunni nationalists. It was organized partly to resist pressure from Arab Sunni Islamist extremists, but its main purpose was to deal with the threat from the Shi'ite Badr Brigades,

One Sunni Arab official involved was quoted as saying that, "The Anbar Revolutionaries are here to stay, we need them to protect the people...Sunnis do not have the Shi'ite Badr (Brigades) or the Kurdish Peshmerga. In these times when sectarian tension is high, such a force is needed." Another was quoted as saying, "It is our right to defend ourselves."

Hazem Naimi, a political science professor, was quoted as saying that, "Tribal leaders and political figures found that al Qaida's program is harming the political efforts and progress the Sunni political leaders are making, because al Qa'ida rejects all politics...Sunnis feel that the Shi'ites have taken over the government and now it is their state...The Badr Brigades are in the interior ministry and under the interior ministry's name they go to towns, kill and arrest."

It is clear that Sunni participation in the government, Iraqi forces, and the role of the Sunni militia(s) is dependent on the ability of the new Iraqi government to reassure Sunnis about their day-to-day security and its ability to compromise with issues like the control of oil and other revenues, the nature of central versus local power, the nature of any federation, allowing Ba'ath leaders to return to the government, the role of religion in law and governance, and the other key aspects that will shape Iraq's character as a state.

It is also clear that further purges of Sunnis from the government, military, and security services can only make things worse. Such mistakes are exemplified by the implementation without warning of a six-month-old order from the Iraqi Debaathification Commission that led to the dismissal of 18 Iraqi generals, colonels, and majors -- most Sunni Arabs from Anbar.¹⁴⁷

Assessing the Future Potential of the Sunni Insurgency

The future of the Sunni insurgency may well be dependent on whether the Iraqi political process succeeds in becoming truly inclusive or whether it heightens the sectarian and ethnic tensions and conflicts that divide Iraq and creates a more intense state of civil war.

Given their present strength, there are good reasons why the more nationalistic Sunni insurgents will seek some compromise. At best, they seem capable of paralyzing progress, and fighting a long war of attrition, rather than defeating an Iraqi government which is dominated by a cohesive Shi'ite majority, and which maintains good relations with the Kurds.

Regardless of who is doing the counting, the total for active and passive native Iraqi Sunni insurgents still leaves them a small minority of Iraq's population. Unless the Iraqi government divides or collapses, they cannot bring back Arab Sunni minority rule or the Ba'ath; they cannot regain the level of power, wealth, and influence they once had. They cannot reestablish the form of largely secular

rule that existed under Saddam, or reestablish Iraq as a country that most Arabs see as “Sunni.”

An understanding of these same political and military realities may eventually drive most Sunni insurgents to join into the non-violent political process in Iraq *if* the Shi'ite and Kurds elements that now dominate the government and political process act to include them and provide suitable incentives.

Such shifts, however, are likely to be slow and uncertain. Historically, most insurgent groups have a much better vision of what they oppose than what they are for, and they have limited interest in pragmatic *realpolitik*. Most Sunni groups are still committed to doing everything -- and sometimes anything -- they can to drive the Coalition out and break up the peaceful political process almost regardless of the damage done to Iraq and to Sunni areas.

Richard Armitage, the former US Deputy Secretary of State, commented on the insurgency and its lack of realistic political goals as follows: “In Algeria, the so-called insurgents, or in Vietnam, the so-called insurgents, they had ... a program and a positive view...In Iraq that's lacking ... they only have fear to offer. They only have terror to offer. This is why they're so brutal in their intimidation.”¹⁴⁸

The risk also exists that as the Sunni Islamist extremists become becoming better trained and organized, they may still be able to establish themselves as *the* dominant political and military force within the Sunni community—particularly if Iraq's Arab Shi'ites and Kurds mishandle the situation or react to the growing provocation of bloody suicide attacks and other killings by Neo-Salafi extremists.¹⁴⁹ The Sunni Islamist extremists can then try to present themselves as the only legitimate alternative to the occupation, even if they fail to provide a popular agenda. This means they can survive and endure as long as the government is too weak to occupy the insurgency dominated areas, and as long as the large majority of Sunnis in given areas does not see a clear incentive to joint the government and Iraq's political process.

Much will depend on just how willing Iraqi Shi'ites and Kurds are to forget the past, not overreact to Sunni Islamist and other attacks designed to divide and splinter the country, and continue to offer Iraqi Sunnis a fair share of wealth and power. The US position is clear. The US consistently supported a unified nation and inclusive government. U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, stated in an interview that the Ministries of Defense and Interior must be headed by those who have broad based support: “The security ministries have to be run by people who are not associated with militias and who are not regarded as sectarian.”¹⁵⁰

III. The Issue of Foreign Volunteers¹⁵¹

It is unlikely that foreign volunteers make up even 10% of the insurgent force, and may make up less than 5%. While the number of foreign volunteers has increased through the spring of 2005, US experts feel they have since declined, largely as a result of US and Iraqi government military operations in Western Iraq and improvements in security in the Syrian-Iraqi border area. While some estimates of the total number of such volunteers have gone as high as 3,000, others go from the high hundreds to over 1,000.¹⁵² The fact is that there is no basis for even a credible guesstimate, and the numbers keep fluctuating over time.

The Uncertain Number, Source, and Role of Foreign Volunteers

Foreigners made up less than 600 out of some 14,000 detainees as of June 2005. Coalition experts estimated that they had made up less than 5% of insurgent casualties and detainees to date.¹⁵³ US experts and top level Iraqi officials estimated in November 2005 that at least 90% of the Sunni fighters were Iraqi and the total might be closer to 94% to 96%. Coalition sources reported that only 3.8% of some 13,300 detainees held in November 2005 were foreign. These percentages of foreigners were lower than estimates made in the early winter of 2005, and marked a sharp contrast to claims that the insurgency was being driven by large numbers of foreign volunteers.

The reliance given insurgent organizations place on foreign volunteers is also uncertain. While Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia has become virtually synonymous with foreign volunteers, its membership may well be largely Iraqi. US authorities believed Zarqawi commanded as many as 1,000 fighters and a much larger group of sympathizers, as of November 2005, but did not believe they came close to being a majority.¹⁵⁴ The US-Iraqi operations in Tal Afar focused on attacking Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia in September 2005. It led to the capture of 1,000 suspected insurgents, but none proved to be foreigners.¹⁵⁵

There also are foreign volunteers in other Sunni Islamist extremist groups like Ansar al-Islam (also known as Ansar al-Sunnah), and the Islamic Army of Iraq. At least six other smaller terrorist groups are operating in Iraq that may rely on foreign volunteers, and many of the groups supporting the "Ba'ath" seem to have foreign volunteers as well.

Intelligence analysis – corroborated by information from Internet chat rooms and web sites run by Islamists – indicates that such groups have established terrorist training camps for both foreign volunteers and Iraqi volunteer in the mountains of northern Iraq and in the country's western desert along its 450-mile border with Syria. There are also reports of staging facilities and indoctrination centers inside of Syria.

In any case, foreign volunteers have had a special impact on the insurgency because they have used such extreme methods to try to provoke a civil war between Iraq's Arab Sunnis and its Arab Shi'ites, Kurds, and other minorities.

Foreign Sunni Islamist extremist volunteers do seem to have carried out most of the suicide car and pedestrian bombings since 2003. These are among some of the bloodiest and most-publicized insurgent attacks.

One US defense official estimated that as of July 2005, Iraqis had directly carried out less than 10% of more than 500 suicide bombings.¹⁵⁶ These attacks also accelerated sharply in the spring and summer of 2005; the Associated Press counted at least 213 suicide attacks as of July. US Air Force General, and MNF-I spokesperson, Don Alston stated, "The foreign fighters are the ones most often behind the wheel of suicide car bombs, or most often behind any suicide situation," and Gen. Abizaid stated that the Coalition had seen a rise in suicide bombers coming from North Africa, particularly Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.¹⁵⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Peter Pace, agreed adding that foreign fighters present a "larger challenge" to the security of the country than Iraqi insurgent groups.¹⁵⁸

The fact that young men are being recruited from countries in North Africa, the Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and other countries does not, however, mean that foreign fighters dominate Iraqi Islamist extremist organizations. Recruiting smaller numbers of outsiders as cannon fodder, sacrifice pawns, or "martyrs" has become all too easy in a region where religious extremists have learned how to exploit religious feelings. This does not, however, mean that those directing the efforts of such groups, carrying an out the support activity, or doing much of the day-to-day fighting.

There is limited evidence that Iraq is a unique magnet for foreign volunteers. Iraq is scarcely only center of such activity, and foreign volunteers also operate in the West, in North Africa and the Levant, in the Gulf, and Central, South, and Southeast Asia. Nations as diverse as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Indonesia, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, and the Sudan also have training centers, staging and support facilities, or internal conflicts involving neo-Salafi extremists. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict does as much to fuel Arab and Islamic anger as the Iraq conflict, and such extremists capitalize on political, economic, and social problems and tensions throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Nevertheless, Iraq has become a critical center for Sunni Islamist extremist activity, and currently presents the greatest threat that such extremists could destabilize a major state, and drive it towards a major civil war. They have at least partially displaced the struggle between Iraqis, and they certainly drive it towards violence and away from political competition and accommodation. They are fighting a war to create a civil war in Iraq; one that would make an effective secular or moderate government impossible and trigger a conflict between Sunni and Shiite that could spread to divide Islam and the Arab world. More broadly, they seek to make Islam a captive to a kind of violent, intolerant, and ruthlessly exclusive ideological movement that would deprive it of a future by driving it back towards an imaginary and perverted vision of the past.

Number and National Origin of Foreign Volunteers

No one knows where most of the foreign volunteers present in Iraq at any given time have come from. The mix seems to vary constantly, and estimates differ from source to source. For example, the US military reported that 375 foreigners so far had been detained in Iraq in 2005 as of late October. Among those detained were: 78 Egyptians; 66 Syrians; 41 Sudanese; 32 Saudis; 17 Jordanians; 13 Iranians; 2 Britons; and one each from France, Israel, Ireland and the United States.¹⁵⁹

Reuvan Paz, a respected Israeli analyst attempted to calculate the composition of foreign volunteers in Jihadi-Salafi insurgent groups by examining the national origin of 154 insurgents killed in the fighting after the battle of Fallujah and through March 2005. He estimated that 94 (61%) were Saudi, 16 (10.4%) were Syrian, 13% (8.4%) were Iraqi, 11 (7.1% were Kuwaiti, 4 came from Jordan, 3 from Lebanon, 2 from Libya, 2 from Algeria, 2 from Morocco, 2 from Yemen, 2 from Tunisia, 1 from Palestine, 1 from Dubai, and one from the Sudan. He estimated that 33 of the 154 were killed in suicide attacks: 23 Saudis, 5 Syrian, 2 Kuwaiti, 1 Libyan, 1 Iraqi, and 1 Moroccan. These figures are drawn from a very small sample, and are highly uncertain, but they do illustrate the diversity of backgrounds.¹⁶⁰

The Saudi National Security Assessment Project estimated that there were approximately 3,000 foreign fighters in Iraq in the spring of 2005 (See Figure III1). These figures, and a breakdown by nationality, were rounded "best estimates," based on reports of Saudi and other intelligence services. They drew upon the interrogations of hundreds of captured militants and a comprehensive analysis of militant activities. This included interviews and analysis of activities by both Saudi and non-Saudi militants. Also consulted were intelligence reports prepared by other regional governments, which provided not only names of militants, but also valuable information on the networks that they relied upon to enter Iraq and conduct their activities.

The conclusion of the Saudi investigation was that the number of Saudi volunteers in August 2005 was around 12% of the foreign contingent (approximately 350), or 1.2% of the total insurgency of approximately 30,000. Algerians constitute the largest contingent at 20%, followed closely by Syrians (18%), Yemenis (17%), Sudanese (15%), Egyptians (13%) and those from other states (5%). Discussions with US and Iraqi experts indicated that they felt that Saudi estimates were roughly correct, although they cautioned that they did not have reliable numbers for either the total number of volunteers or their origin by country. A Brookings Institution's analysis of the numbers of foreign fighters in Iraq and their countries of origin concurred with the Saudi assessment.¹⁶¹

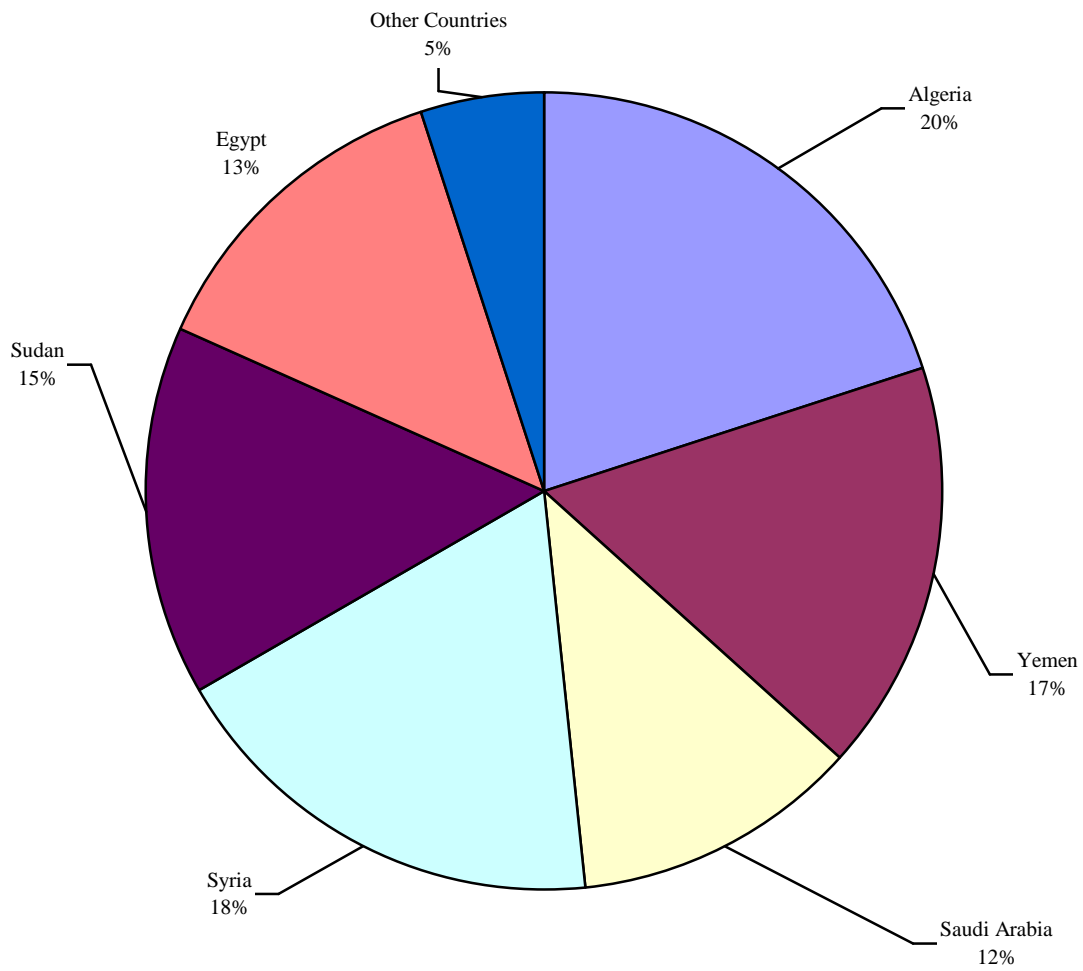
Anything like 3,000 foreign fighters in Iraq would pose a serious threat, and the numbers may be largely irrelevant. All it may take is enough volunteers to continue to support suicide attacks and violent bombings, and seek to drive Iraqi Sunnis towards a major and intense civil war. They also pose a threat because their actions gave Bin Laden and other neo-Salafi extremist movements publicity and credibility among the angry and alienated in the Islamic world, and because

many were likely to survive and be the source of violence and extremism in other countries.

Nevertheless, even the highest estimate of foreign volunteers pales beside the estimates of Iraqi insurgents. US experts still put the total number of full time insurgents at around 20,000-30,000 in December 2005. Virtually all reports, the insurgency remained largely homegrown. Moreover, if the number of foreign detainees is any measure of how important foreign militants are, it indicates that it is their fanaticism and willingness to use extreme violence that is the key issue. The percentage of foreign detainees was only a little over 4% in early 2005, and had actually dropped by the end of 2005.

Figure III.1: Foreign Militants in Iraq

(3,000 Total)



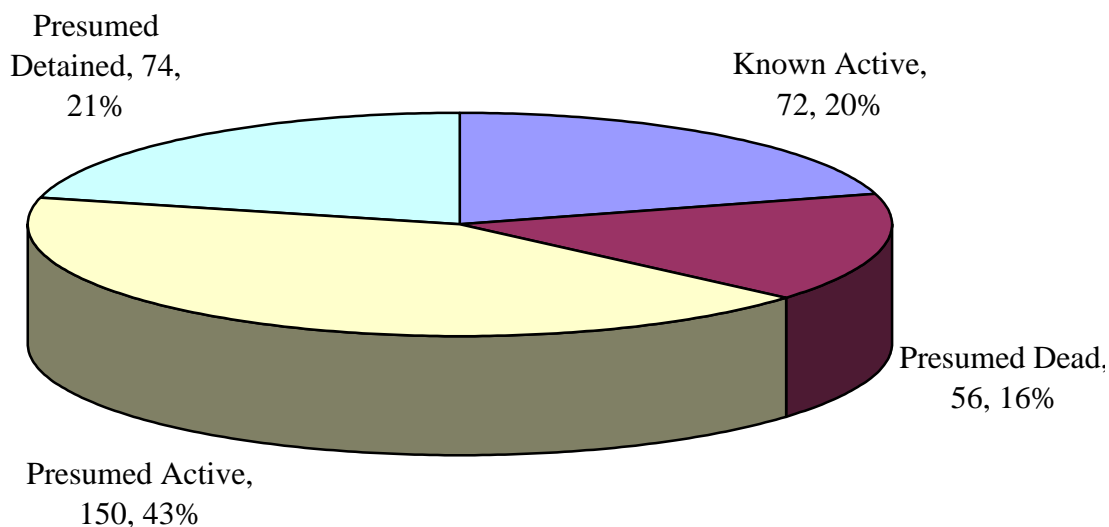
Saudi Militants in Iraq: A Case Study

The Coalition and Iraqi government have not released any significant details on their estimates of the number of foreign volunteers, their origin, or their motives. The Saudi intelligence services have, however, made a major effort to estimate the number of Saudi infiltrators that move across the Saudi border – or far more often transit through third states like Syria.

As of August 2005, approximately 352 Saudis were thought to have successfully entered Iraq (and an additional 63 had been stopped at the border by Saudi security services). Of these, 150 were thought to be active, 72 were known from al-Qa'ida compiled lists to be active in Iraq,¹⁶² 74 were presumed in detention (a maximum of 20 in US custody and 3 in Kurdish), and 56 were presumed dead (See Figure III2).

Interrogations and other Saudi intelligence gathering operations revealed that these individuals did not come exclusively from a single geographical region in Saudi Arabia, but from various areas in the Kingdom, especially from the South, Hijaz, and Najd. They were usually affiliated with the most prominent conservative tribes and were generally middle class. Most are employed, many are educated, and all were Sunni.¹⁶³

Figure III2: Saudi Militants in Iraq as of September 2005



As part of a massive crackdown on Saudi militants attempting to enter Iraq, the Saudi government has interrogated dozens of nationals either returning from Iraq or caught at the border. The average age of these fighters was 17-25, but a few were older. Some had families and young children. In contrast, other fighters from across the Middle East and North Africa tended to be in their late 20s or 30s.

The Saudi infiltrators were also questioned by the intelligence services about their motives for joining the insurgency. One important point was the number who insisted that they were not militants before the Iraq war. Of those who were

interrogated, a full 85% were not on any government watch list (which comprised most of the recognized extremists and militants), nor were they known members of al-Qa'ida.

The names of those who died fighting in Iraq generally appear on militant websites as martyrs, and Saudi investigators also approached the families of these individuals for information regarding the background and motivation of the ones who died. According to these interviews as well, the bulk of the Saudi fighters in Iraq were driven to extremism by the war itself.

Most of the Saudi militants in Iraq were motivated by revulsion at the idea of an Arab land being occupied by a non-Arab country. These feelings were intensified by the images of the occupation they see on television and the Internet – many of which come from sources intensely hostile to the US and war in Iraq, and which repeat or manipulate “worst case” images.

The catalyst most often cited was Abu Ghraib, though images from Guantanamo Bay were mentioned. Some recognized the name of a relative or friend posted on a website and feel compelled to join the cause. These factors, combined with the agitation regularly provided by militant clerics in Friday prayers, helped lead them to volunteer.

In one case, a 24-year-old student from a prominent Saudi tribe -- who had no previous affiliation with militants -- explained that he was motivated after the US invasion, to join the militants by stories he saw in the press, and through the forceful rhetoric of a mid-level cleric sympathetic to al-Qa'ida. The cleric introduced him and three others to a Yemeni, who unbeknownst to them was an al-Qa'ida member.

After undergoing several weeks of indoctrination, the group made its way to Syria, and then was escorted across the border to Iraq where they met their Iraqi handlers. There they assigned to a battalion, comprised mostly of Saudis (though those planning the attacks were exclusively Iraqi). After being appointed to carry out a suicide attack, the young man had second thoughts and instead, returned home to Saudi Arabia where he was arrested in January 2004. The cleric who had instigated the whole affair was also brought up on terrorism charges and is expected to face a long jail term. The Yemeni al-Qa'ida member was killed in December 2004 following a failed attack on the Ministry of Interior.

There are other similar stories regarding young men who were enticed by rogue clerics into taking up arms in Iraq. Many were instructed to engage in suicide attacks and as a result, never return home. Interrogations of nearly 150 Saudis suspected of planning to join the Iraqi insurgency indicate that they were heeding the calls of clerics and activists to “drive the infidels out of Arab land.”

Like Jordan and most Arab countries, the Saudi government has sought to limit such calls for action, which inevitably feed neo-Salafi extremist as the expense of legitimate interpretations of Islam. King Abdullah has issued a strong new directive that holds those who conceal knowledge of terrorist activities as guilty as the terrorists themselves. However, many religious leaders and figures in Arab nations have issued fatwas stating that waging jihad in Iraq is justified by the

Koran due to its “defensive” nature. To illustrate, in October 2004, several clerics in Saudi Arabia said that, “it was the duty of every Muslim to go and fight in Iraq.”¹⁶⁴

On June 20, 2005, the Saudi government released a new list of 36 known al-Qa’ida operatives in the Kingdom (all but one of those released on previous lists had been killed by Saudi security forces, so these individuals represented the foot soldiers of al-Qa’ida, and they were considered far less dangerous). After a major crackdown in the Kingdom, as many as 21 of these low-level al-Qa’ida members fled to Iraq.

Interior Minister Prince Nayef commented that when they return, they could be even “tougher” than those who fought in Afghanistan. “We expect the worse from those who went to Iraq,” he said. “They will be worse and we will be ready for them.” According to Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi Intelligence Chief and the new Ambassador to the US, approximately 150 Saudis are currently operating in Iraq.¹⁶⁵

In mid-November 2005, Iraq’s national security adviser, Mowaffaq al-Rubaie told reporters that most of the suicide bombers in Iraq were Saudi citizens:

We do not have the least doubt that nine out of 10 of the suicide bombers who carry out suicide bombing operations among Iraqi citizens...are Arabs who have crossed the border with Syria.

Most of those that blow themselves up in Iraq are Saudi nationals.

But al-Rubaie’s comments appeared to conflict with findings released the previous month by Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch who said some 312 foreign nationals, including 32 Saudis, had been captured while taking part in the insurgency since April. With 78 and 66 respectively, two countries-Egypt and Syria-made up the largest foreign contingents, accounting for almost half of all captured foreign insurgents.¹⁶⁶

Unlike the foreign fighters from poor countries such as Yemen and Egypt, Saudis entering Iraq often brought in money to support the cause, arriving with personal funds between \$10,000-\$15,000. Saudis are the most sought after militants; not only because of their cash contributions, but also because of the media attention their deaths as “martyrs” bring to the cause. This is a powerful recruiting tool. Because of the wealth of Saudi Arabia, and its well-developed press, there also tends to be much more coverage of Saudi deaths in Iraq than of those from poorer countries.

In contrast, if an Algerian or Egyptian militant dies in Iraq, it is unlikely that anyone in his home country will ever know. For instance, interrogations revealed that when an Algerian conducts a suicide bombing, the insurgency rarely has a means of contacting their next of kin. Saudis, however, always provide a contact number and a well-developed system is in place for recording and disseminating any “martyrdom operations” by Saudis.

Syria and Foreign Volunteers

No country on Iraq's borders prevents all forms of infiltration. Anyone with a convincing set of papers can cross at legal border crossings, and minor bribes are often enough to gain permission to enter. Smuggling and "fees" simply to jump the inspection line are common, and inspection is often minimal.

Jordan does offer some security along its border, although it is scarcely "sealed." The same is true of Turkey. The Saudi government had some success in its efforts to seal the border between the Kingdom and Iraq. However, it admits that traffic still cross the border in both directions, with Iraqi smugglers going into Saudi Arabia and some infiltrators moving in the opposite direction. Iran now has a flood of pilgrims entered Iraq, border checks are often inadequate, and neither Iran nor Iraq could totally halt smuggling and infiltration even during the worst days of the Iran-Iraq War.

The key problem, however, has been Syria. It has allowed Iraqi insurgent groups to operate and stage in Syria, with the clear tolerance of Syrian intelligence and security officials. Some insurgent safe house, small training and indoctrination facilities, and funding raising activities have existed long enough to make it clear that Syria is at best deliberately turning a blind eye, and border controls have been loose and erratic.

Such tolerance can be important even when it does little more than allow volunteers to be "trained" in Syria for a few weeks. Many insurgents require only the most minimal training. Wearing a suicide vest or driving a suicide VBIED does not take skill, it takes motivation. Be able to indoctrinate young men or women intensively in a closed facility is often the key to providing that motivation, and debriefs of infiltrators indicate it works best if they are secure and do not mix with actual insurgents while they are being indoctrinated.

US, Iraqi, Jordanian, and Saudi officials have all repeatedly identified Syria as a serious problem. An April 2003 report by Italian investigators described Syria as a "hub" for the relocation of Zarqawi's group to Iraq. According to the report, "transcripts of wiretapped conversations among the arrested suspects and others paint a detailed picture of overseers in Syria coordinating the movement of recruits and money between Europe and Iraq."¹⁶⁷ Large numbers of former Ba'athists and supporters of more nationalist insurgent groups also operate in the country.

Syria has shown in the past that it can crackdown on such insurgent activities and infiltration when it wants to -- usually when it has come under intensive pressure from the US or its neighbors. Preventing militants from crossing its 380-mile border with Iraq does, however, present problems even for a regime as notoriously security conscious and repressive as Syria. Even if Syria had the political will to completely and forcefully seal its border, it may lack sufficient resources to fund such an effort (Saudi Arabia has spent over \$1.2 billion in the past two years alone to Secure its border).

Syria has, however, had considerable success simply by heavily screening those who enter the country. This method does present problems in establishing proof of residency in Syria as well as the difficulties with verifying hotel reservations. According to the Minister of Tourism, roughly 3.1 million tourists visited the country in 2004; the number of Saudis alone that arrived in the first seven months of 2005 increased to 270,000 from 230,000 in the same period in 2004.¹⁶⁸

Yet, Syria does seem to be able to act when it wants to. There are even those who claim the Syrian authorities are being *too* forceful in their crackdown on foreigners in the country. There have been recent reports that Syria has engaged in the systematic abuse, beating and robbery of Saudi tourists, a charge that Syria denies. According to semi-official reports published in *al-Watan*, released prisoners alleged that Syrian authorities arbitrarily arrested Saudis on the grounds that they were attempting to infiltrate Iraq to carry out terrorist attacks.

The former detainees maintained that they were “targeted for arrest in Syria without any charges.” They went on to say that, “if they had intended to sneak into Iraq, Saudi authorities would have kept them in custody when they were handed over to that country.” According to the Syrian Minister of Tourism, Saadallah Agha Kalaa, “no Saudi tourists have been harassed in Syria or subjected to unusual spate of robberies. Those who are spreading these rumors are seeking to harm Syria, which is a safe tourist destination.” In the murky world of the Syrian security services, it is difficult to discern the truth. Suffice it to say that the problem of successfully halting the traffic of Saudis through Syria into Iraq is overwhelmingly difficult, politically charged, and operationally challenging.

There is no visa requirement for Arabs from some countries to enter the country. Syria does, however, maintain a database of suspected militants, and several dozen Saudis have been arrested at the border. However, pressuring the Syrians additionally to tighten security could be both unrealistic and politically sensitive.

As for exfiltration out of Syria, Most militants leaving Syria to enter Iraq have done so at a point just south of the mountainous Kurdish areas of the north, which is sparsely inhabited by nomadic Sunni Arab tribes, or due east from Dair al-Zawr into Iraq's Anbar province. Crossing near the southern portion of the border, which is mainly desert and is heavily occupied by Syrian and U.S. forces, is seldom done.

The crossing from Dair Al-Zawr province was the preferred route through the summer of 2005, because the majority of the inhabitants on both sides of the border were sympathetic to the insurgency, the scattering of villages along the border provides ample opportunity for covert movement, and constant insurgent attacks in the area are thought to keep the U.S. forces otherwise occupied. According to intelligence estimates, the key transit point here – for both Saudis and other Arabs – is the Bab al-Waleed crossing.

Iran and Foreign Volunteers

Iraq also shares a long and relatively unguarded border with Iran, however, as a non-Sunni non-Arab country. Few Saudi and other Sunni extremists seem to use

it as a point of entry. Saudi authorities have, however, captured a handful of militants who have gone through Iran and four were apprehended after passing from Iran to the United Arab Emirates.

Iran is also a major source of funding and logistics for militant Shiite groups in Iraq (mainly SCIRI). According to regional intelligence reports, Iran is suspected of arming and training some 40,000 Iraqi fighters with a view towards fomenting an Islamic revolution in Iraq. While most of these Iraqi Shiites are former prisoners of war captured during the Iran-Iraq war, there were also reports of young Iraqi's being recruited by Shiite clerics to go into Iran for religious and political indoctrination and militia training.¹⁶⁹

Britain has also reported that Iran has allowed (or supplied) insurgents with more modern triggering devices and help in make better IEDs. This aid seems to be going to both some Sunni insurgent groups and Shi'ute anti-British hardliners in the Basra area.

IV. The Uncertain Status of the Shi'ites

While domestic and foreign Sunni Islamists now dominate the insurgency, there is a risk of civil war, and that the conflict could escalate to include other ethnic and sectarian groups. This risk is most serious between Iraqi Arab Sunni and Iraqi Arab Shi'ite, although ethnic divisions play a major role as well. The tensions between religious Iraqi Arab Shi'ites and Sunni Islamist extremist groups are particularly dangerous and there are growing indicators that Shi'ites are taking revenge for Sunni insurgent attacks.

A major civil war in Iraq still seems avoidable, but the risk is all too real and can scarcely be dismissed. Iraqi Arab Shi'ites resent the US presence, but most seem to realize that the fact they are 60% of the population will give them political dominance *if* Iraq is secure enough so that its new political system divides up power according to the size of given factions. Not all recognize the need to forgive their past treatment, to include Sunnis in the government and military, or to resist the continuing provocation of Sunni extremist attacks.

The good news is that past public opinion polls have shown that Arab Shi'ites, like Arab Sunnis, favor a unified Iraq and a strong central government. Such polls also showed, however, that Iraqi Shi'ites tended to be more religious in terms of support for recognition that Iraq should be an "Islamic state" than Sunnis. In addition, leading Iraqi clerics have not supported anything approaching Iran's concept of a supreme leader, and key figures like the Grand Ayatollah Sistani have strong oppose direct clerical participation in the government or politics.

Key Shi'ite political parties like Al Dawa and SCIRI do have a strong religious character, but have so far been largely secular in their goals and actions. Although Al Dawa and SCIRI operated in Iran from 1980 onwards, they remain Iraqi nationalists, and their "gratitude" to Iran is often limited – particularly because of Iran's history of treating them on an opportunistic basis before the fall of Saddam Hussein. Members of Al Dawa can privately be sharply critical of Iran, and members of both parties resent past pressure to recognize the authority of Iran's supreme leader.

The bad news is that many Shi'ites seem to have reacted to the debate over federalism during the drafting of the constitution by coming to support a Shi'ite federation in the south. Shi'ite support for nationalism in no way means that Shi'ites do not feel it is "their turn" to have control over Iraqi politics, power, and wealth. Many Shi'ites feel that former Ba'athists should be punished for their actions in the previous regime. Most important, an increasing number seem to support revenge or "payback" for attacks by the Sunni insurgents.

Shi'ite Factions and the Various Militias

The years following Saddam's fall have led to growing tensions between Shi'ite and Sunni. The seriousness of these tensions has grown since late 2003 because of repeated Sunni insurgent attacks on Shi'ite targets. They have also been a reaction to Sunni politics. For example, both Iraq's Sunni interim president, Ghazi al-Yahwar, and King Abdullah of Jordan, sounded warnings about the risks of

Shi'ite dominance and possible Iranian influence before the January 30, 2005 elections.¹⁷⁰

Arab Shi'ites, in contrast, have been increasingly polarized by the Sunni suicide attacks on Shi'ite targets, kidnappings, over killings and disappearances described in previous chapters, and which have intensified since the January 2005 elections. They are all too aware that figures like Zarqawi have threatened jihad against Shi'ites and have said they are not legitimate followers of Islam.

The main Shi'ite leaders in the government have continued to seek an inclusive political solution and read out to the Sunnis, but many of their followers have increasingly reacted to Sunni attacks by taking revenge or seeking to exclude Sunnis from their neighborhoods, government jobs, contracts, and the security services.

Although the CPA tried to establish legal barriers to maintaining militias by issuing Order 91 in April 2004, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the faction of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim still have large militia elements. These are forces that Sunni groups have increasingly accused of committing atrocities against them since the spring of 2005. Al Dawa, the Badr Organization, and the Iraqi Hezbollah remain potential security problems, and Sunnis feel particularly threatened by the Badr Organization.

The Bush Administration summarized the risks posed by Shi'ite militias as follows in its October 13, 2005 report to the Congress on "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq:"

More than a dozen militias have been documented in Iraq, varying in size from less than a hundred to tens of thousands of members. Some were organized in loose cellular structures, while others had a more conventional military organization. Some were concentrated around a single locale, while others had a more regional footprint. Some of them were wholly indigenous, while others received support such as training, equipment, and money from outside Iraq.

Typically, the militias were armed with light weapons and operated as cells or small units. Even if they do not take up arms against the government, militias can pose a long-term challenge to the authority and sovereignty of the central government. This was the driving force behind the creation of Coalition Provisional Authority Order 91 and the Transition and Re-Integration Committee. For the same reason, Article 27 of the Transitional Administrative Law and Article 9 of the draft Iraqi Constitution prohibit armed forces or militias that are not part of the Iraqi Armed Forces.

The realities of Iraq's political and security landscape work against completing the transition and re-integration of all Iraqi militias in the short-term. Provided the constitution is ratified in October, the government elected in December will have a four-year term of office, and it will have the task of executing the militia-control provisions of the constitution. Although it is often referred to as an Iraqi militia, the Jaysh al Mahdi (or "Mahdi Army") of radical Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr fought Coalition Forces and Iraqi forces in April and August of 2004. The Peshmerga and the Badr Organization are viewed as militias by the Iraqi government and Coalition Forces, while the Mahdi Army is viewed as a potentially insurgent organization.

- Badr Organization. Officially known as the Badr Organization for the Reconstruction and Development, it is the militia of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the largest Shi'ite party in Iraq. It is reported to have links with both

Iranian and Iraqi intelligence services and provides protective security for many Shi'ite religious sites as well as religious and secular leaders. Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is protected by the Badr militia. The Badr Organization has been implicated in the revenge killings of Ba'athists and has also been involved in combat and street fighting with Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army.

- Jaysh al Mahdi. The Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr engaged in open combat with Coalition and Iraqi forces in April and August of last year, most notably in the battles in and around Najaf. The Mahdi Army has continued to exist after an October 2004 ceasefire agreement, although the Iraqi government has made repeated calls for its disbandment. The exact size of the organization is unknown. There is evidence that they are supplied from sources outside of Iraq, most notably Iran.

These militias were supposed to have been abolished under the guidelines set out by the CPA in the interim government. Iraqi officials state that they now are nominally under the control of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior. However, Iraq's leaders have been ambiguous about the role the militias actually play. In early June 2005, Prime Minister Jafari held a press conference in which he lauded the Kurdish Pesh Merga and the Badr Organization, formerly the Badr Brigade. Iraqi President, and Kurd, Jalal Talibani joined the prime minister as well as the founder of the Badr Organization and SCIRI head, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, at Hakim's headquarters to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the Badr group.¹⁷¹

The president applauded what he, and presumably Jafari, viewed as the militias' positive contributions to Iraq. Talibani stated, "[The Badr Organization] and the Pesh Merga are wanted and are important to fulfilling this sacred task, to establishing a democratic, federal and independent Iraq."¹⁷² Addressing a variety of allegations against the two militias, Talibani remarked, "It [Badr Organization] is a patriotic group that works for Iraq's interest and it will not be dragged into sectarian or any other kind of struggle."¹⁷³ Jaafari went on to dub the Badr Organization a "shield" protecting Iraq.

Shi'ites and Kurds see the militias an important aid in fighting the insurgency. In contrast, Sunnis accuse the militias – particularly the Badr Organization, the Mahdi Army, and police and elements of the special security forces dominated by these militias -- of killings, intimidation and a host of other crimes. In contrast, this has led to steadily rising tension, and divisions between Sunni and Shi'ite, over the roles the Shi'ite militias and government forces with large numbers of former militia are playing in any revenge killings.

Many Sunnis have vehemently condemned the Badr Organization. The Badr Organization, and its precursor the Badr Brigade, was created by SCIRI and trained by the Iranian military. What influence the Iranians may have over the Badr is unclear. Once more, Sunnis assert that the Badr are the ones responsible for the targeting and assassination of a number of senior Sunni clerics, many from the Muslim Scholars' Board. The Coalition has yet to find evidence of such activity on part of the Badr Organization, but such charges are virtually impossible to disprove.

While it is far from clear how much the Badr Corps or other Shi'ites are to blame, some Sunnis feel that the Badr Corps has been responsible for targeting Sunni

leaders and figures, killing them and dumping their bodies. Baghdad's central morgue began to detect such killings shortly after the new government was formed on April 28, 2005, and claimed that at least 30 cases had been found by late June.

The killers were said to have worn police uniforms while seizing some victims. Police uniforms can be bought cheaply in much of Iraq, but they also had Toyotas and Glock pistols, which are more difficult to obtain. There have also been mass abductions and killings of ordinary Sunnis, like 14 Sunni farmers who were taken from a Baghdad vegetable market on May 5, 2005. It is possible that insurgents have done this to try to foment sectarian tension, but the frequency and location of many revenge killings and acts of intimidation raises questions about whether this is a credible explanation for many incidents.¹⁷⁴

Many Sunnis opposed the appointment of Bayan Jabr as Minister of the Interior in April 2005, claiming that, as a member of SCIRI, he was a pawn of the Iranians and that the ministry's Wolf Brigade, led by Abdul Waleed, was responsible for some of the assassinations of Sunni figures.¹⁷⁵ By the fall of 2005, many Iraqis saw Iraq's Interior Ministry and the police as being classified as predominantly Shiite in orientation and the ranks of the Badr Brigade as being incorporated into MOI police forces. The Army, meanwhile, was seen as being predominantly Sunni in makeup.¹⁷⁶

There were more and more reports of revenge killing and anti-Sunni strikes by both the Shi'ite militias and Shi'ite elements in the security forces and police during 2005.¹⁷⁷ There are credible reports that hundred of Sunni bodies have been found in locations like rivers, desert roads, open desert, sewage disposal facilities, and garbage dumps since the new government was formed that April.

The Baghdad morgue reported growing numbers of corpses with their hands bound by police handcuffs, and that it processed 7,553 corpses between January and September 2005, versus only 5,239 for the same period in 2004. Sunni groups like the Moslem Scholars Association have published pictures of such corps and lists of the dead, and have claimed there are Shi'ite death squadrons. The Inspector General of the Ministry of the Interior, General Nori Nori said that, "There are such groups operating -- yes this is correct." In November, a raid on a secret MOI detention facility in southeastern Baghdad, that was operated by former members of the Badr Brigade, was linked to the death of 18 detainees reported to have died under torture. Some 220 men were held in filthy conditions and subject to torture.¹⁷⁸

Minister of Interior Jabr denied any government involvement, and claimed that if MOI security forces and police uniforms and cars have been seen, they were stolen. Other sources, however, confirmed that some of the killings of an estimated 700 Sunnis between August and November 2005 involved men who identified themselves as Ministry of Interior forces.¹⁷⁹ This increased the risk that Iraqi forces could be divided by factions, decreasing their effectiveness and leading to the disintegration of Iraqi forces if Iraq were to descend into full-scale civil war.

The killing of at least 14 Sunnis could be clearly traced to MOI arrest records several weeks earlier.¹⁸⁰ US sources also noted that large number of members of the Bader Organization had joined the MOI forces, including the police and commando units, since the new government was formed in April 2003, and the lines between some MOI units and the Badr Organization had become increasingly blurred.

The police expanded from some 31,000 men in July 2004 to nearly 95,000 in July 2005, sometimes with only limited background checks. In the process, substantial numbers of men from both the Bader Organization and the Moqtada Al Sadr's Mehdi Army joined the force. In the case of the roughly 65,000 strong mix of MOI and police forces in the greater Baghdad area, the men from the Bader Organization tended to go into the MOI special security units and those from the Mehdi Army tended to join the police, but there were no rigid divisions. While both the Iraqi government and Coalition claimed things were improving, a September 2005 report by the ICG suggested that the process of drafting a constitution had helped exacerbate the existing ethnic and sectarian divisions between Iraqis.¹⁸¹

By late 2005, US officials and military sources were complaining that the MOI and Minister Jabr were not informing them of some MOI and police operations and have privately acknowledged that they have observed prisoner abuse. Commenting on the futility of filing reports against the incidents, one U.S. official equated it with "trying to put out a forest fire with a bucket of water."¹⁸² They expressed particular concern about the actions of the MOI's Maghawir or Fearless Warrior special commando units, and that they were carrying out illegal raids and killings. This 12,000-man force had a number of Sunni officers and had originally been formed under the authority of former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. It had recruited larger numbers of new Shi'ite members after the new government was formed in April 2005, however, and its commander, General Rashid Flaih Mohammed was reported to have acknowledged that the unit had had some problems. Sunni police commanders like Brigadier General Mohammed Ezzawi Hussein Alwani, commander of the Farook Brigade, were also purged from the MOI forces, along with junior officers.¹⁸³

The discovery of some 169 Sunnis held in horrible conditions in a bunker in Baghdad in November 2005 raised further issues. Many were tortured, and the Special Investigative Unit carrying out the detentions was an MOI unit run by an MOI brigadier general and colonel. The colonel was an intelligence officer said to be reporting directly to Jabr.

This and previous incidents drove the issue into the open with comments by both U.S. and Iraqi officials. U.S. military procedure and policy was set forth in a back-and-forth between Secretary Rumsfeld and Joint Chief of Staff Peter Pace when Pace declared, "it's absolutely the responsibility of every U.S. service member if they see inhumane treatment being conducted to intervene to stop it." Secretary Rumsfeld countered, "I don't think you mean they have an obligation to physically stop it; it's to report it." Pace respectfully reiterated, "If they are physically present when inhumane treatment is taking place, sir, they have an

obligation to stop it.” Putting prisoner abuse in perspective, former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi commented to a British newspaper that “people are doing the same as Saddam’s time and worse.”¹⁸⁴

At the same time, Sunni Islamic insurgents and some Sunni political figures had every reason to try to implicate the security services. Some of the killings in late November involved key Sunni politicians like Ayad Alizi and Al Hussein, leading members of the Iraqi Islamic Party which was a member of the Sunni coalition competing in the December 15th elections. Shi’ites seemed to have little reason to strike at such targets.¹⁸⁵

What was clear at the beginning of 2006 was that such accusations of “retaliation killings,” and the implication of Shiite-dominated MOI and security forces in acts of violence perpetrated largely against Sunni Arabs, increased sectarian tensions and moved the country closer toward civil war. This had become a prime concern for the U.S. Maj. Gen. William G. Webster Jr. stated during a press briefing that one of the most important focuses of the U.S. military in Iraq in the coming months would be to train Iraqi forces to operate within the rule of law and with respect for human rights. In addition, he called for efforts to promote “a greater ethnic and sectarian balance within those forces” and a “spirit of national service.”¹⁸⁶

Shi’ite and Sunni tensions had an impact inside the forces as well. In December 2006 the US Army’s 3rd Infantry Division, deployed to Baghdad, had to threaten to demote the readiness rating of an Iraqi Army division scheduled to take over part of the Green Zone and to suspend the transfer of authority indefinitely when Iraq’s Defense Ministry refused to confirm the appointment of Col. Muhammed Wasif Taha, a Sunni. U.S. Col. Ed Cardon, commander of the 3rd infantry’s fourth brigade, defended the decision saying, “The hand-over was contingent upon their leadership remaining where it was.” Although the Defense Ministry eventually capitulated and confirmed Taha as the commander of the brigade, a spokesman for the ministry indicated that it still had the right to replace Taha at a later date.¹⁸⁷

The rise of Shi’ite power also presented new problems in the south. In the predominately Shiite city of Basra, British troops arrested 14 Iraqi law enforcement officials, including two senior police intelligence officers, in late January 2006. While several were released, the British claimed those that remained in custody, including the deputy chief of intelligence for Basra, had been involved in political corruption, assassinations and bomb-making.

Local Iraqi officials denounced what they viewed as excessively “random arrests” and threatened to suspend relations with British forces until the men were released. Maj. Peter Cripps, a British military spokesman in Basra, defended the arrests saying that those arrested “were all part of the former internal affairs department that was disbanded by the Ministry of Interior and are now in the criminal intelligence unit and the serious crimes unit. They are alleged to be following their own agenda including, corruption, assassinations and persecutions of citizens.”¹⁸⁸

The Role of Moqtada al-Sadr

Unlike most Iraqi religious leaders, who are "quietists," and do not believe the clergy should play a direct role in politics, the Moqtada al-Sadr is an activist related to two of Iraq's greatest activist clerics: Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Al-Sad and Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr -- both of whom were killed by Saddam Hussein.

Sadr has played a divisive role in Iraq since the first days after the fall of Saddam Hussein. He has been accused of playing a role in the murder of rival Shi'ite clerics like the Grand Ayatollah Abd al-Majid al-Khoi on April 10, 2003. He attacked the US presence in Iraq almost immediately after the fall of Saddam Hussein and denounced the members of the Iraqi interim government as puppets in a sermon in Najaf as early as July 18, 2003.

Sadr's militia began playing a role in the intra-sect Shiite power struggle as early as October 13, 2003, when al-Sadr's men attacked supporters of moderate Shi'ite Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani near the Imam Hussein shrine.¹⁸⁹ His Mahdi (Mahdi) Army presented a serious threat to Coalition and government forces in Najaf, in Sadr City in Baghdad, and in other Shi'ite areas in the south during much of the summer and early fall of 2004. Moqtada al-Sadr called on his followers in Iraq to rise up and attack US forces on August 5th, and broke out in three cities between his supporters and US and Iraqi security forces, especially in Najaf and Sadr City in Baghdad. US officials indicated that US forces faced up to 160 attacks per week in Sadr City between August and September 2004 of varying severity.

The defeat of Sadr's forces, and a series of political compromises, led Sadr to turn away from armed struggle in the late fall and early winter of 2004. US officials indicated that the number of attacks dropped significantly to between zero and five a week in early 2005, and they remained at or below this level through November 2005. More important, Sadr joined the Shi'ite coalition in the election campaign and his supporters play a role in the new National Assembly and government.

General John Abizaid remarked in March 2005, however, "we have not seen the end of Muqtada Sadr's challenge."¹⁹⁰ Although Iraqi government forces have been able to move in to the area, Sadr's movement still plays a major political role in Sadr City in Baghdad, and remains active in poorer Shi'ite areas throughout the country.

Sadr's supporters sponsored demonstrations calling for US forces to leave Iraq in April 2005, and top Sadr aides in his Independent National Bloc issued warnings to Ibrahim Jafari, then the prime minister designate, that he must pay more attention to these demands or that the Sadr faction might leave the United Iraqi Alliance and become an active part of the opposition. The group also demanded the release of some 200 Sadr activists arrested during earlier fighting and that all criminal charges against Sadr be dropped.¹⁹¹

Sadr was able to exploit the political weakness and divisions of other Shi'ite movements in the ¹⁹²south and their lack of ability to govern, as well as the fact other hard-line Islamist movements won significant numbers of seats in local governments in key areas like Basra. ¹⁹³ In summer 2005, Sadr attempted to collect one million signatures on a petition that asked the Coalition to leave Iraq in what appeared to be his burgeoning attempts to recast himself as a major political force within Iraq. Sadr's Council for Vic and Virtue launched at least one attack on secular students in Basra for having a mixed picnic. ¹⁹⁴

Sadr revived the Mahdi Army, which was again beginning to be openly active in parts of Southern Iraq such as Basra, Amarah, and Nasiriyah, and still had cells in Najaf and Qut as well. While some US official sources stated the army was relatively weak, it began to hold parades again, and while only limited numbers of arms were displayed, it was clear that such weapons were still available in the places where they had been hidden during the fighting the previous year. ¹⁹⁵

By the late spring of 2005, the Mahdi (Mahdi) Army seemed to be the largest independent force in Basra, played a major role in policing Amarah, and had effectively struck a bargain with the government police in Nasiriyah that allowed it to play a major role. By the late fall of 2005, some sources estimated that some 90% of the 35,000 police in Northeast Baghdad had ties to Sadr and the Mahdi forces. They were reported to be playing a major role in pushing Sunnis out of Shi'ite neighborhoods. ¹⁹⁶

Unlike most militias, the Mahdi Army had the active participation of Shi'ite clergy, mostly "activists" who strongly supported Sadr. One reason for their rebirth was the lack of effective action by the government. For example, the government police in Nasiriyah had 5,500 men, but was 2,500 men short of its goal. ¹⁹⁷ In August 2005, Basra police Chief Hassam Sawadi said that he had lost control over three-quarters of his police force, and that men in his ranks were using their power to assassinate opponents. ¹⁹⁸

Sadr has remained publicly supportive of the political process in Iraq, and has urged Shiites to avoid sectarian fighting with the Sunni population. Yet, while Sadr urged his followers not to be drawn into sectarian fighting, his organization was accused of a rash of political assassinations and kidnappings in the Shiite south in the summer of 2005. On August 24, 2005, seven people died in an attack on Sadr's office in Najaf, which led to unrest among Shiite populations there and in other cities. Sadr's movement also began to publicly reassert in the late in late summer of 2005, capitalizing on the release of Hazem Araji and other Sadr leaders from prison.

Sadr did, however, continue to call for calm and continued his public support of non-reprisal. He sided with anti-federalist Sunni leaders during the drafting and review of the Iraqi constitution ¹⁹⁹ He supported continued Shiite political involvement in the new government, although many fear that he eventually wants to see a fundamentalist government appear.

The strength of his militia remains a concern. Since the fall of 2005, his organization and other Shi'ite groups with similar beliefs have been accused of

political assassinations and kidnappings, as have Kurdish forces in the North. Sadr's Mahdi Army maintains control over certain areas in cities like Basra and Sadr City, and creates an environment of fear according to local accounts.²⁰⁰

His organization staged several large demonstrations as a show of strength. In mid-September, militiamen from the Mahdi Army in Basra directly engaged in battles against US and British troops. Shootouts between supporters of Sadr and Coalition forces also erupted in Sadr City during the last week in September. On October 27, members of the Mahdi army clashed with Sunni gunmen outside of Baghdad. The fighting, which occurred in the village of Bismaya in the Nahrawan area south of Baghdad, claimed more than thirty lives.²⁰¹ The militia battles in October proved to be the deadliest in months.

In a new twist and as a sign of his enduring power, Sadr entered into a new political alliance with the two largest Shiite parties in the country on the very same day his forces battled militias in Bismaya. The alliance brought together Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari's Dawa Party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and Sadr's supporters. The move made Moqtada Sadr an even larger player in Iraqi politics. Because of the deal, Sadr-backed candidates would appear on the same ticket alongside members of the Shiite-led government in the December elections. Sadr had earlier pledged to support the elections but said he would not be supporting any particular list of candidates.

Although US officials were encouraged by Sadr's pledge to support the December 15 elections, they remained cautiously optimistic in the fall of 2005. Sadr has continuously refused to disband his militia, which continued to grow in power and influence in the fall of 2005. There were also reports that many Mahdi members have joined the police and other government security forces, contributing to the already fragmented nature of the Iraqi security forces.

After the December 15 elections, in which Sadr's group won 29 seats in the parliament, the cleric visited several neighboring countries meeting with government officials. In Saudi Arabia, Sadr asked King Abdullah to press the U.S. to commit for a date of withdrawal from Iraq. In late January, amidst international tensions over Iran's nuclear program, Sadr made a statement of solidarity with Tehran during a visit, pledging to come to the defense of the country from an attack by an outside aggressor.²⁰²

Although he did not elaborate, this statement, it was made amid ongoing negotiations to form a coalition government, and exacerbated Sunni fears of a "Shiite crescent" based on a Shiite dominated Iraqi government aligned with Iran. This situation was made more tense when Sadr visited President Assad of Syria in February 2006.

Internal Shiite Divisions

Shi'ite splits are possible, as are sectarian and ethnic splits. Moreover, few Shi'ites can forget that Sadr is believed to have been responsible for the assassination of Al Khoi right after the fall of Saddam Hussein and for the killing of Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's brother, in August 2003.

Basra was effectively taken over by a local government after the January 30, 2005 election that was much more of a Shi'ite fundamentalist government than the mainstream of al Dawa or SCIRI. The local police was intimidated or pushed aside by such elements in May, and Shi'ite militia joined the police and took over. While some of those accused of being involved – such as police Chief Lt. Colonel Salam Badran --were affiliated with SCIRI in the past, most such “Islamists” seem more fundamentalist than SCIRI’s leadership. There have been reports of threats, beatings, and killings affecting liquor stores, male doctors who treat women, and even barbers cutting hair in “non-Islamic” ways. Individuals in plain clothes have also made threats and put pressure on local businesses. Even if such cases do not divide Iraq’s Arab Shi’ites – and serious issues do exist about how “Islamic” the future government should be in Shi’ite terms and who should rule – they may well cause even greater fear among Sunnis and increase the risk of civil conflict.²⁰³

Divisions among Shi'ite groups could put new burdens on Iraq’s forces, and/or potentially paralyze or divide key elements of the government. It is not clear that Sadr and other Shi'ite elements will hold together, or that other splits will not occur during 2005. Iraq must deal with forging and approving a constitution and with moving towards general elections at the end of the year without any clear picture of what political leaders, political parties, and power sharing arrangements will emerge in the process.

The risk also exists that the Kurds and Shi'ites might split in ways that could lead to civil conflict or that Shi'ite politics may begin to react far more violently to Sunni insurgent bombings and attacks, and striking back at the Sunnis rather than seeking to include them. Shi'ite political leaders have generally been careful to avoid this so far, but the preaching in mosques has become more polarized, and popular tension is growing. Attacks like the bombings in Karbala and Najaf on December 20, 2004 have been followed up by many similar anti-Shi'ite attacks since the elections. At least some Sunni Arab and Islamist extremist insurgents are certain to continue to try to provoke sectarian Sunni versus Shi'ite rift using any means possible, no matter how bloody and violent.

Insurgent Pressure on the Shi'ites to Move Toward Civil War

Even since the January 30, 2005 election, much of the Sunni insurgent activity has been directly targeted at Shi'ite clergy and political leaders, Shi'ite civilians, and Shi'ite institutions. Attacks have also been targeted for key Shi'ite holidays like the February 19th Ashura holiday and the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. While most Shi'ite leaders strongly resisted any calls for reprisals against Sunnis, other Shi'ites called for such action, and there do seem to have been Shi'ite killings of Sunni clergy and civilians.²⁰⁴ Some top leaders also called for bringing key militias like the Shi'ite Badr Corps and Kurdish Pesh Merga actively into the struggle.

Shi'ite leaders resisted this pressure, however, and one US military observer -- Brig. Gen. John Custer – went so far as to state that, “The incredible violence that

the Shi'a community has endured over last year leads me to believe that they are smart enough and understanding of the big picture enough to back away from civil war at all costs. The specter of the dark cloud of civil war has moved away. It is much less evident than it was last year."²⁰⁵

Such statements were premature. The single deadliest day for Iraqi Shi'ites was August 31 when almost 1,000 Shiite pilgrims were killed in a stampede in Baghdad. The pilgrims were crossing the al-Aima bridge en route to the shrine of Moussa al-Kadhim when rumors began to spread that there were Sunni suicide bombers in their midst. The resulting panic ended in 953 Shiites dead, according to the Iraqi interior ministry. Moqtada al-Sadr vowed vengeance against Sunnis, who he believed organized the pandemonium. Later in a sermon, Sadr spoke out against the Coalition's presence in Iraq, as it hampered a sectarian war, which he asserted had already begun.²⁰⁶ Prior to the stampede, Moqtada al-Sadr had publicly opposed Shiite participation in sectarian warfare.

As already mentioned, on September 14, Iraq's Al-Qa'ida leader and Sunni insurgent Abu Musab al-Zarqawi declared war on Shiite Muslims in Iraq. The declaration was made by through an audio file on the Internet. According to the recording, the declaration came in response to the recent joint U.S.-Iraqi offensive in the town of Tal Afar, a Sunni insurgent stronghold. Zarqawi referred to the assault as an "organized sectarian war." Earlier that day, the Sunni-Muslim al-Qa'ida said in an Internet posting it was waging a nationwide suicide bombing campaign to avenge the military offensive against Sunni rebels in Tal Afar. Following Zarqawi's declaration, Baghdad erupted in violence:

- September 14, 2005:
 - At least 167 people die and more than 570 injured as more than a dozen bombs explode throughout Baghdad. Marks the single worst day of killing to hit the capital since the US-led invasion of March 2003.
 - A suicide bomber in a car blew himself up in Baghdad, killing 11 people who lined up to refill gas canisters, police said. The blast in northern Baghdad, which also wounded 14, came hours after what appeared to be a series of coordinated blasts, including one that killed at least 114 people.
 - Gunmen wearing military uniforms surrounded the village of Taaji north of Baghdad and executed 17 men, police said. The dead were members of the Tameem tribe, al-Hayali said. The gunmen looted the village before leaving.
 - Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device exploded in the Uruba Square in the Zahra district of northwest Baghdad. The terrorist attack killed at least 75 Iraqi civilians and wounded more than 130. The wounded were evacuated to the Al-Shulla Hospital in central Baghdad where another suicide VBIED detonated, causing more civilian casualties.
 - Suicide Car bomb attack in Kadimiya in market area. At least 80 killed, 150+ injured. North of Centre of Baghdad.
 - Task Force Baghdad unit reported striking a VBIED in west Baghdad. The Soldiers established a cordon and began searching the area for triggermen. Several Iraqi civilians were wounded in the attack. There were no U.S. casualties.
 - VBIED detonated on a U.S. convoy in east Baghdad. The suicide bomber was reportedly driving against traffic before detonating on the convoy. Two U.S.

- Soldiers received non-life-threatening wounds in the attack. Ten minutes later, a suicide VBIED detonated near a U.S. convoy in southeast Baghdad with no injuries to U.S. personnel or damage to equipment.
- VBIED attack against U.S. forces in central Baghdad failed when the terrorist struck an M1 Abrams tank but did not detonate his explosives. The tank crew reported the driver was still alive and trapped inside the vehicle with a 155-millimeter round. The Task Force Baghdad unit secured the site and called for assistance from an explosive ordnance disposal team.
 - September 15, 2005:
 - Suicide bombers continued to strike Baghdad, killing at least 31 people, 23 of them Iraqi police and Interior Ministry commandos.
 - A suicide bomber killed 15 police commandoes in the Dora district of Baghdad, police said. Five civilians were also killed. The blast wounded 21 people. Hours later, two more bombs detonated in the same area. Ten more policemen died in the explosion and ensuing gun battle with insurgents.
 - Two police officers were killed and two wounded in Kirkuk.
 - Three civilians were killed in an attack on a Ministry of Defense bus east of Baghdad.
 - Three bodies of people who had been shot dead were found in the Shula district of Baghdad, police said.
 - Three bodies were found in the New Baghdad district. Police said they had been shot dead.
 - Gunmen in northern Baghdad killed three Shi'ite pilgrims on route to Karbala for a religious festival.
 - Three workers were killed and a dozen wounded in east Baghdad in a drive-by shooting by unidentified gunmen. The attack occurred in an area where laborers gather each day for work.

Violence continued to escalate throughout September, with insurgents killing more than 100 Iraqi civilians on the last two days of the month alone in the predominantly Shiite town of Balad, in the Sunni region of Salah ad Din, north of Baghdad.²⁰⁷ September 2005 was the bloodiest month yet in terms of multiple-fatality insurgent bombings, with 481 Iraqis killed and 1,074 wounded.²⁰⁸ The wave of deadly attacks launched by Zarqawi continued into October, suggesting there would be no immediate end in sight to the violence. Citing the terrorists' history of increasing attacks before major Iraqi political milestones, President Bush warned that the violence would further intensify in the run-up to the October 15 referendum and December elections.²⁰⁹ Not surprisingly, as violence in Iraq increased in the fall of 2005 so too did the number of sectarian incidents. In one six-week period, more than 30 Iraqis died as part of sectarian attacks in the Ghazaliya neighborhood of Baghdad. Sectarian violence in Baghdad's mixed neighborhoods began accelerating sharply in the summer of 2005 and continued to do so throughout the fall of 2005. According to Iraqi government statistics, the number of sectarian targeted killings almost doubled in 2005, in spite of the increased presence of Iraqi security forces on the streets.²¹⁰

In many cases, such as the Ghazaliya murders, the victims were randomly selected based on their religion and had little if any involvement in politics. The

ongoing violence also caused many Iraqis to relocate to areas where they constitute the majority. According to Edward Joseph of the Woodrow Wilson Center, "Once displacement starts, it is a never-ending cycle." Joseph believes the key question will be how the minority community reacts after the murder of one of its own: "If they don't flee, if they just hang around and then order up some reprisal killing a little later...it's probably less likely to be civil war." But, Joseph also notes that the current pattern of displacement in Iraq today loosely resembles the departure of Bosnian Muslims in the mid-1990s following attacks by Serbian militias, a development that ended up increasing, not decreasing, the level of violence in that region.

As in 2004, Shiite-Sunni violence continued during the holy month of Ramadan in 2005. On the first day of the month long holiday, a suicide car bomber targeting an Interior Ministry official blew himself up outside Baghdad's Green Zone, wounding several civilians.²¹¹ That same day, an Internet message posted by Al Qaeda in Iraq called for additional attacks during the holy month as well as a boycott of the October 15 referendum. The following day, October 5, a suicide car bomb exploded outside the Husseiniyat Ibn al-Nama Mosque in Hillah as Shiite worshippers gathered to pray, killing at least 24 and wounding several dozen.²¹²

In early January 2006, violence spiked again, killing nearly 200 people in two days. One suicide attack occurred at a Shiite shrine in Karbala killing 63 and wounding 120. As political groups attempted to construct a governing coalition, protests broke out in Sadr City where over 5,000 Shiites condemned the violence and chastised Sunni leaders. SCIRI issued a warning to the Sunni insurgents that its patience was wearing thin and that it may use the Badr Brigade to conduct retaliation attacks. Izzat al-Shahbandar, an official with the Iraqi Accordance Front, the main Sunni coalition party involved in the negotiation process, remarked that the current Shiite-dominated government was acting as an "accomplice" in the ongoing violence by pursuing sectarian policies and strengthening militias.²¹³

According to Aya Abu Jihad, the owner of a store in Baghdad, "People are being killed because they are Shiites, and others are killed because they are Sunnis." Some senior Iraqi government officials believe that the recent wave of sectarian violence poses a greater threat to stability than does the possible rejection of the draft constitution by a majority of Iraqis: "The government now is so inefficient at controlling the situation that the security situation has deteriorated, and so the political situation has deteriorated...They have to get security under control, otherwise [the constitution] is not going to matter." A former general in the Iraqi army known as Abu Arab echoed that sentiment, saying, "People don't want a constitution-they want security."²¹⁴

At the same time, senior Shi'ite and Kurdish politicians still pressed for a peaceful political solution and for an inclusive unity government. Even relative hardline Shi'ite politicians like Abdelaziz Hakim pressed for more care on the part of Shi'ite forces in dealing with Sunnis. On February 8, 2006, he called for Iraq's security forces "to continue strongly confronting terrorists but with more consideration to human rights."

V. The Kurds and Other Minorities

The Kurds represent a faction that the January 2005 elections made far more powerful relative to other Iraqi factions in military and security terms than their 15% of the population might indicate. Iraqi security and stability depends on finding a power-sharing arrangement that gives the Kurds incentives to be part of the political process just as much as it does on developing such arrangements for the Arab Sunnis.

There is no basic political or economic reason such a compromise cannot be found. Unfortunately, however, Iraq has a long history of not finding such compromises on a lasting basis and Saddam Hussein's legacy left many areas where Kurds were forcibly expelled and Sunni Arabs and minorities were given their homes and property.

Kurdish politics also include large numbers of Kurds who favor independence over political inclusiveness. This helps explain why the Kurdish turnout in the October referendum on the constitution varied widely. In predominantly Kurdish provinces, participation was much lower than in the January election. Some analysts have suggested the lower turnout was a result of increased voter apathy among a Kurdish population who felt assured the Constitution would pass.

Others note the increase in dissatisfaction with the central government and remaining in Iraq among Kurdish populations. Riots and demonstrations protesting the shortages of gas, fuel and power have become more common in Kurdish cities in recent months.²¹⁵ Some Kurds may also have felt let down by a Constitution that did not specifically address the status of Kirkuk or lay out a clear path to secession.²¹⁶

Kurdish Parties and the Kurdish Militias

The two major Kurdish parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) headed by Masoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, headed by Jalal Talibani, retain powerful militias, known collectively as the Pesh Merga. Their current strength is difficult to estimate, and some elements are either operating in Iraqi forces or have been trained by US advisors. The Iraqi Kurds could probably assemble a force in excess of 10,000 fighters – albeit of very different levels of training and equipment.

The Kurdish Pesh Merga trace their origins to the Iraqi civil wars of the 1920s. They fought against the Saddam Hussein regime during the Iran-Iraq war and supported U.S. and Coalition military action in 2003. The Peshmerga groups of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) serve as the primary security force for the Kurdish regional government. The PUK and KDP claim that there are 100,000 Peshmerga troops, and they have insisted on keeping the Peshmerga intact as guarantors of Kurdish security and political self-determination.

Tensions Between the Kurds and Other Iraqis

There are serious tensions between the Kurds, the Turcomans, and Assyrian Christians, as well as between Kurds and Arabs. At a local level, there are many small tribal elements as well as numerous “bodyguards,” and long histories of tensions and feuds. Even if Iraq never divides along national fracture lines, some form of regional or local violence is all too possible.

Insurgent activity in the Kurdish areas was particularly intense in the city of Irbil, which has been the site of several suicide bombings. In summer 2005, Kurdish security officials and the KDP intelligence service announced the arrest of approximately six insurgent suspects who, the authorities believe, came from six separate and previously unheard of militant organizations. The head of the Irbil security police, Abdulla Ali, stated that there was evidence that the groups had links to international terror groups, established jihadi groups in Iraq like Ansar al-Sunna, and even links to intelligence services from nearby countries.²¹⁷ This evidence was not made public, but the Kurdish authorities stated that it appeared as though various groups were working together and that, to the anger and disappointment of the Kurdish authorities, that local Kurds were assisting them.

Tension between the Kurds and Iraqi Arabs and other minorities has also been critical in areas like Kirkuk and Mosul. The Kurds claim territory claimed by other Iraqi ethnic groups, and demand the return of property they assert was seized by Saddam Hussein, during his various efforts at ethnic cleansing from 1975 to 2003.

The future of Kirkuk and the northern oil fields around it is the subject of considerable local and national political controversy between the Kurds and other Iraqis. The Kurds claim that over 220,000 Kurds were driven out of their homes by Saddam in the 1970s and fighting in the Gulf War, and that over 120,000 Arabs were imported into “Kurdish territory.” The Kurds see control of Kirkuk as their one chance to have territorial control over a major portion of Iraq’s oil reserves, but Kirkuk is now roughly 35% Kurd, 35% Arab, 26% Turcoman, and 4% other. This makes any such solution almost impossible unless it is violent.

There has been armed violence between Kurds, Arabs, and Turcomans, as well as struggles over “soft” ethnic cleansing in the North, and there may well be more violence in the future. Many experts feel that the only reason Kirkuk has been relatively peaceful, and still has something approaching a representative government, is that the Kurds have not been strong enough relative to the other factions in the city to impose their will by intimidation or force.

The issue of Kirkuk took on a new importance after the December 2005 elections. In the months prior, thousands of Kurds erected settlements in the city, often with financing from the two main Kurdish parties. In addition, violence began to rise, with 30 assassination-style killings from October through December. Kurdish political groups were increasingly open about their intent to incorporate Kirkuk into Iraqi Kurdistan and continue to repatriate Kurds into the city in an effort to tip the ethnic balance in their favor. They stated they sought to accomplish this by the time of the popular referendum in 2007, which is to determine whether the

Tamim province will be governed by the Kurdish regional government, or from Baghdad.²¹⁸ The future of Kirkuk will be a central factor for Kurdish political groups as they work to form a governing coalition.

According to US government documents and interviews with Turcoman families, Kurdish security forces abducted hundred of Turcoman from Kirkuk in the spring and summer months of 2005 and put them in prisons deep within acknowledged Kurdish territory.²¹⁹ This was an apparent bid to create an overwhelming Kurdish majority in order to lend greater legitimacy to the Kurds claim on Kirkuk.

Reports in August 2005 indicated that government police and military forces in the Kurdish north were using their power to intimidate Arabs through abductions and assassinations. Such activity poses the threat of deepening regional fissures. Likewise, the misuse of power by Coalition-sponsored forces could deepen resentment toward Coalition forces, particularly among the Sunni population.²²⁰

Other Kurdish actions have exacerbated ethnic tension in a struggle for the control of Kirkuk. There are reports that the KDP and PUK systematically kidnapped hundreds of Arabs and Turcomans from the city and transported them to prisons in established Kurdish territory.²²¹ This activity allegedly spread to Mosul as well. While some of the abductions had occurred in 2004, reports indicated that there was a renewed effort following the January 30th elections that solidified the two parties' primacy in the Kurdish areas. According to a leaked State Department cable in mid-June 2005, the abducted were taken to KDP and PUK intelligence-run prisons in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah without the knowledge of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of the Interior, but sometimes with US knowledge. In fact, the Emergency Services Unit, a special Kirkuk force within the police, was both closely tied to the US military and implicated in many of the abductions, along with the Asayesh Kurdish intelligence service.²²² It should be noted that the head of the Emergency Services Unit is a former PUK fighter.

Kirkuk province's Kurdish governor, Abdul Rahman Mustafa, stated that the allegations were false. However, the State Department cable indicated that the US 116th Brigade Combat Team had known about the activity and had asked the Kurdish parties to stop.²²³ According to Kirkuk's chief of police, Gen. Turhan Yusuf Abdel-Rahman, 40% of his 6,120 officers probably assisted in the abductions despite his orders and that they followed the directives of the KDP and PUK instead. Abdel-Rahman stated, "The main problem is that the loyalty to the police is to the parties and not the police force. They'll obey the parties' orders and disobey us."²²⁴ According to Abdel-Rahman, the provincial police director, Sherko Shakir Hakim, refused to retire as ordered by the government in Baghdad once he was assured that the KDP and PUK would continue to pay him if he stayed on. The various factions in Kirkuk do seem to have agreed on a compromise local government in June 2005, but the city continues to present a serious risk of future conflict.

Uncertain Kurdish Unity

Kurdish unity is always problematic. The Kurds have a saying that, "the Kurds have no friends." History shows that this saying should be, "the Kurds have no

friends including the Kurds.” The Barzani and Talibani factions have fought on several occasions, and there was a state of civil war between them during 1993-1995. PUK forces were able to take control of Irbil in 1994, and put an end to the first attempt to create a unified and elected government that began in 1992. Barzani’s KDP collaborated with Saddam Hussein in 1995, when Hussein sent a full corps of troops into Irbil and other parts of the area occupied by Talibani. Tens of thousands of Kurds and anti-Saddam activists fled the area, and the US did not succeed in brokering a settlement between the two factions until 1998.²²⁵

Despite past, and potential future tensions and divisions between the PUK and KDP, leaders from both parties signed an agreement in January 2006, which allotted eleven ministerial posts to each group. Minority parties were skeptical of KDP-PUK promises to give remaining posts to political factions who did not win a majority and worried that this further isolated them from any future role in the political process.²²⁶

The present marriage of convenience between the KDP and PUK has not unified the Kurdish controlled provinces in the north. There were minor clashes between their supporters in 1995, and these political divisions could create future problems for both Kurdish political unity and any agreement on some form of autonomy.

The Problem of Resources and Oil

The Kurds also face the problem that at present they have no control over Iraq’s oil resources or revenues, and no access to any port or lines of communication that are not subject to Iraqi, Turkish, or Iranian interdiction. They also have a very uncertain economic future since they have lost the guaranteed stream of revenue provided by the UN Oil-For-Food program, Iraq can now export oil through the Gulf and reopen pipelines to Syria as a substitute for pipelines through Turkey, and there is far less incentive to smuggle through Kurdish areas now that trade is open on Iraq’s borders. The Kurds also face the problem that Iran, Syria, and Turkey all have Kurdish minorities that have sought independence in the past, and any form of Iraqi Kurdish autonomy or independence is seen as a threat.

The Turkish Question

All these problems are still further compounded by the rebirth of Kurdish insurgency in Turkey, and acute Turkish pressure on the Iraqi government, Iraqi Kurds, and MNSTC-I to both deny Turkish Kurdish insurgents a sanctuary, and set any example that would encourage Kurdish separatism in Turkey. The Turkish Kurdish Worker Party (PKK) is a movement that has often used northern Iraq as a sanctuary, and which led to several major division-sized Turkish military movements into the area under Saddam Hussein. While estimates are uncertain, some 6,000 PKK forces seemed to be in Iraq in the spring of 2005, with another 2,000 across the border.²²⁷ These same factors help explain why Turkey has actively supported Iraq’s small Turcoman minority in its power struggles with Iraq’s Kurds.

VI. The Role of Outsiders in the Insurgency

The pressure for civil war can also expand to involve outside states. Syria very clearly tolerates and supports Sunni neo-Salafi extremist operations on its territory in spite of its Alawite controlled government. A broader and more intense civil conflict could lead other Arab states to take sides on behalf of the Sunnis -- although Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen are just a few of the states that have deep sectarian divisions of their own. Any major divisions within Iraq could reopen the Kurdish issue as it affects Turkey, and possibly Iran and Syria as well.

Creating a "Shi'ite Crescent"?

The most serious wild card in Iraq's immediate neighborhood is Iran. Iran already plays at least some role in the political instability in Iraq and may take a more aggressive role in trying to shape Iraq's political future and security position in the Gulf. Some believe that the Iranians have abandoned their efforts to export their "Shi'ite revolution" to the Gulf. This view has changed since the invasion of Iraq. Officials across the Arab world, especially in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, have expressed reservation over the right of Iraqi Sunnis, Kurdish and Shi'ite dominance over the Iraqi government, and a new "strategic" Shi'ite alliance between Iran and Iraq.

Jordan's King Abdullah has claimed that that more than 1 million Iranians have moved into Iraq to influence the Iraqi election. The Iranians, King Abdullah argued, have been trying to build pro-Iranian attitudes in Iraq by providing salaries to the unemployed. The King has also said that Iran's Revolutionary Guards are helping the militant groups fighting the US in Iraq, and warned in an interview with the *Washington Post* of a "Shi'ite Crescent" forming between Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. He was quoted as saying:²²⁸

It is in Iran's vested interest to have an Islamic republic of Iraq.

If Iraq goes Islamic republic, then, yes, we've opened ourselves to a whole set of new problems that will not be limited to the borders of Iraq. I'm looking at the glass half-full, and let's hope that's not the case. But strategic planners around the world have got to be aware that is a possibility.

Even Saudi Arabia is not immune from this. It would be a major problem. And then that would propel the possibility of a Shi'ite-Sunni conflict even more, as you're taking it out of the borders of Iraq.

The same sentiment has been echoed by the former interim Iraqi President, Ghazi Al-Yawar, a Sunni and a pro-Saudi tribal leader. "Unfortunately, time is proving, and the situation is proving, beyond any doubt that Iran has very obvious interference in our business -- a lot of money, a lot of intelligence activities and almost interfering daily in business and many [provincial] governorates, especially in the southeast side of Iraq." Mr. Al-Yawar, however, asserted that Iraq should not go in the direction of Iran in creating a religious oriented government. He was quoted in a *Washington Post* interview as saying "We cannot

have a sectarian or religious government... We really will not accept a religious state in Iraq. We haven't seen a model that succeeded."²²⁹

Both Iran and Iraqi Shi'ites rejected these comments. Iran called King Abdullah's comment "an insult" to Iraq. Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, also called on Ghazi Al-Yawar to retract his statement and accusing King Abdullah II and Al-Yawar of wanting to influence the election against Iraqi Shi'ites. Asefi said "Unfortunately, some political currents in Iraq seek to tarnish the trend of election there and cause concern in the public opinion...We expect that Mr. al-Yawar takes the existing sensitive situation into consideration and avoids repeating such comments."²³⁰

Iraqi Shi'ites also reacted to King Abdullah's comment about the fear of a "Shi'ite Crescent." Jordan's King Abdullah was asked to apologize by Shi'ites. The Najaf Theological Center issued a statement, in which they accused the King of meddling in Iraq's internal affairs:²³¹

Distorting the truth and blatantly interfering in Iraqi affairs, provoking tribal sentiments in the region against Iraqi Shi'ites, provoking great powers against Iraqi Shi'ites, intimidating regional countries and accusing them of having links with Iran, displaying a great tendency for ensuring Israel's security and expressing worries about the victory of Shi'ites in the upcoming elections tantamount to insulting millions of people in Iran, who have been insulted just because they follow a religion that the Jordan's king is opposed...

Najaf Theological Center is hopeful that the Jordanian monarch will apologize to the Shi'ites of the region and Iraq, and their religious authorities, because of the inaccurate remarks made against them.

The Views of the Arab Gulf States

The Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, have also made their views known regarding the unity of Iraq and their fear of Shi'ite dominance of an Arab country that allies itself with Iran. Saudi Arabia has pushed for more Sunni inclusiveness in the constitution writing process, especially after their lack of participation in the January 2005 elections.

When a draft constitution did not acknowledge Iraq's Arab and Muslim identity, the General Secretary of the GCC called the Iraqi constitution "a catastrophe." The Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, also warned that if the constitution does not accommodate the Iraqi Sunni community, it would result in sectarian disputes that may threaten the unity of Iraq.²³²

Prince Saud al-Faisal later urged the US to pressure Iraqi Shi'ites and Kurdish government leaders to work to bring the Iraqi people together. He said, "[Americans] talk now about Sunnis as if they were separate entity from the Shi'ite." al-Faisal reiterated his fear of an Iraqi civil war and the danger of it. He said, "If you allow civil war, Iraq is finished forever."²³³

According to al-Faisal, a civil war in Iraq could have dire consequences in the region. He reiterated the Kingdom's fear of an Iran-Iraq alliance. The Saudi Foreign Minister asserted "We (US and Saudi Arabia) fought a war together to keep Iran out of Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait." He added that the US

policy in Iraq is "handing the whole country over to Iran without reason." Iranians have established their influence within Iraq, al-Faisal said, because they "pay money ... install their own people (and) even establish police forces and arm the militias that are there."²³⁴

A Clash within a Civilization?

One should not exaggerate Iraq's role in any clash within a civilization, and the more dire predictions of a clash between Sunni and Shi'ite that polarizes the Gulf and Middle East may well be exaggerated. The fact remains, however, that this is what Bin Laden, Zarqawi, and other neo-Salafi extremists are seeking. The battle in Iraq is only part of the much broader struggle by neo-Salafi extremists to capture the Arab and Islamic world. The outcome in Iraq will be critical but only part of a much broader struggle.

The Problem of Syria

Both senior US and Iraqi officials feel that Syria may overtly agree to try to halt any support of the insurgency, but allow Islamic extremist groups to recruit young men, have them come to Syria, and then cross the border into Iraq – where substantial numbers have become suicide bombers. They also feel Syria has allowed senior ex-Ba'athist cadres to operate from Syria, helping to direct the Sunni insurgency. As has been touched upon earlier, these include top level officials under Saddam Hussein such as Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, one of Saddam's Vice Presidents.

General George Casey, the commander of the MNF, has been careful not to exaggerate the threat of foreign interference. Nevertheless, Casey has warned that Syria has allowed Iraqi supporters of Saddam Hussein to provide money, supplies, and direction to Sunni insurgents, and continues to be a serious source of infiltration by foreign volunteers.²³⁵ General Casey highlighted Syria's complicity in this regard when testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 8, 2005. He stated:

There are former regime leaders who come and go from Syria, who operate out of Syria, and they do planning, and they provide resources to the insurgency in Iraq. I have no hard evidence that the Syrian government is actually complicit with those people, but we certainly have evidence that people at low levels with the Syrian government know that they're there and what they're up to.²³⁶

The US State Department spokesman described Syria's role as follows in the late spring of 2005:²³⁷

I think that what we've seen, again, are some efforts, but it certainly isn't enough. We do believe the Syrians can do more. We do believe there's more they can do along the border to tighten controls.

We do believe that there's more that they can do to deal with the regime elements that are operating out of Syria itself and are supporting or encouraging the insurgents there.

And so, again, it's not simply a matter of them not being able to take the actions, at least from our perspective. Part of it is an unwillingness to take the actions that we know are necessary and they know are necessary.

In late February 2005, the Baghdad television station al-Iraqiya aired taped confessions of insurgents captured in Iraq. Many of the men, from Sudan, Egypt and Iraq, claimed that they were trained in Syria – at least three said they had been trained, controlled and paid by Syrian intelligence officials. They were instructed to kidnap, behead and assassinate Iraqi security forces. The majority of the men expressed remorse for their actions and said they were driven almost exclusively by monetary rewards; there was almost no mention of religious or nationalistic motivation.

Syria has repeatedly and emphatically denied that it supports or harbors any persons involved in the insurgency in Iraq. After months of American pressure and accusations, however, Syrian authorities delivered a group suspected of supporting the insurgency from Syria to Iraqi officials in February 2005. Among the captives handed over was Sabawi Ibrahim Hassan, Saddam Hussein's half-brother and a leading financier for the insurgency. Syria's Foreign Minister, Farouk al-Sharaa stated that Syria was doing all that it could, but that it needed equipment tailored to policing the borders, such as night vision goggles.²³⁸

There have also been reports that Zarqawi obtains most of his new young volunteers through Syria, and that they are recruited and transited in ways that have to be known to Syrian intelligence. There have also been media reports that Zarqawi's top lieutenants, and perhaps Zarqawi himself, have met in Syria for planning sessions.²³⁹ These reports were called into question by US intelligence assessments in June 2005.

US officials and commanders, as well as Iraqi officials, acknowledge that Syria has made some efforts to improve its border security and reduce infiltration. In summer 2005, Syrian security forces fought suspected militants, possibly former bodyguards of Saddam Hussein, for two days near Qassioun Mountain, and a sweep of the border area with Lebanon led to the arrest of some 34 suspected militants. In a high profile case, Syria arrested a man and his brother's wife who they accused of facilitating militants' passage into Iraq. The woman admitted on Al Arabiya satellite television that the brothers had crossed into Iraq to join Saddam's Fedayeen prior to the Coalition invasion.²⁴⁰

US Central Command director of intelligence, Brigadier General John Custer acknowledged in July 2005 the moves that Syria had made as well as the problems in patrolling the border. Custer stated that Syria had bolstered the forces along the eastern border with units relocated from Lebanon. In comments that seemed to contradict what other intelligence officials had said, Custer stated:²⁴¹

I think Syria is intent on assisting the US in Iraq. . . [I have] no information, intelligence or anything credible [that Syria] is involved or facilitating in any way [the flow of insurgents into Iraq]. . . Could they do more? Yes. Are they doing more? Yes. They are working very hard. As troops have been pulled out of Lebanon, we've seen some of those troops go to the border. I am convinced that they are not only doing it along the border but are arresting people as they transit.

The British military attaché in Damascus, Colonel Julian Lyne-Pirkis, inspected the Syrian efforts at the border and agreed with Custer's assessment. Custer

suggested that the border interacted with a tradition of lawlessness and lack of Syrian ability to create a greater impression of Syrian complicity than there actually was. He stated, "It's not a question of intent—it's simply capacity and capability. You've got a 600-kilometer border there, some of the toughest desert, and you have a thousand-year-old culture of smuggling. Smuggling men now is no different than smuggling men a 1,000 years ago. It's all a smuggling economy."²⁴² Syria faces problems because its border forces are relatively weak, they lack training and equipment, and much of the border is only demarcated by an earthen beam. At the same time, they feel Syria deliberately turns a blind eye towards many operations, and the large number of Islamist extremist volunteers crossing the border.

Cash couriers bring unknown sums of cash across the border. Because Iraq's formal financial system is still maturing, and because porous borders allow for the easy transfer of money carried across by human mules, this is an effective and preferred method for financing the insurgency from abroad. Syria is a particular concern in this regard, as identified by Daniel L. Glaser. Through various sanctions programs, the Treasury Department has targeted Syrian individuals, entities, and officials for a range of issues, including harboring assets of the former Iraqi regime, interfering in Lebanon, inadequately policing the flow of cash across its borders, and failing to implement money laundering and terrorist financing controls.²⁴³

Some analysts have suggested that the regime in Damascus may view the insurgency in Iraq as a means to 'export' their own Islamist extremists who might otherwise take aim at Assad's secular regime (led by an Alawite minority). However, such a view, analysts say, is extremely near-sighted as it is quite possible that extremists in Iraq could return the very way that they came and cross back into Syria, bringing practical guerilla warfare experience with them much like the Mujahedeen who fought in the Afghan war brought back to their countries of origin. Such hardened and trained militants could then pose a very serious threat to the ruling regime. As one commentator stated, "They [militants and Syria] may have slept in the same bed to fight the Americans, but what's important for al Qaeda is that it has entered the bedroom [Syria] and secured a foothold there."²⁴⁴

Indeed, such views were supported by classified CIA and US State Department studies in summer 2005. Analysts referred to the return of experienced and trained militants to their country of origin or third party country as "bleed out" or "terrorist dispersal."²⁴⁵ The studies sought to compare the returning Mujahedeen from Afghanistan to those who fought in Iraq. Like Syria, those countries could be threatened by the fighters who return with advanced warfare skills.²⁴⁶ A Marine Corps spokesman pointed out that if nothing else, certain techniques such as the use of IEDs had already been transferred from Iraq to combat zones like Afghanistan. Experts, however, point to the fact that while the Afghan war attracted thousands of foreign fighters, Iraq has yet to do so, meaning that the potential number of returning veterans would be much less.²⁴⁷

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef echoed the conclusions of the CIA and State Department studies, pointing out that many of the terrorists that operated in Saudi from May 2003 on were either veterans of the Soviet conflict in Afghanistan, or had trained in the camps that operated until Operation Enduring Freedom eliminated them. Nayef and other Saudi officials believe that the Saudis that return from the conflict in Iraq will have skills that are even more lethal than those exhibited by the Afghan war veterans. Nayef stated, "We expect the worst from those who went to Iraq. They will be worse, and we will be ready for them."²⁴⁸

In a speech before the UN Security Council in May 2005, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari asked that Iraq's neighboring states do more to prevent terrorists from crossing into Iraq. Syria figured prominently in his speech, in which he acknowledged the efforts by the government but implored the regime to make greater efforts. Zebari stated, "We have learned recently that Syria has stopped more than a thousand foreign fighters from entering Iraq from Syria. We welcome this action but note that it confirms our long-held view that Syria has been one of the main transit routes for foreign terrorists as well as for remnants of the previous regime."²⁴⁹ Reportedly, another Iraqi official handed a list over to the Syrians that contained the names, addresses, and specific roles in planning attacks in Iraq of individuals living in Damascus. According to the Iraqi official, the Syrians ignored the list.²⁵⁰

One senior US intelligence official echoed the foreign minister, stating, "There's no question that Syrian territory plays a significant role with regard to how outside figures [move] into the insurgency in Iraq. The problems with the regime are a mixture of willingness and capability."²⁵¹

In January of 2006, an AH-64 Apache was downed by a surface-to-air missile shot by an insurgent group led by Abu Ayman. The group reportedly had ties to Syrian intelligence and its ranks were composed at least partly by Syrian fighters.²⁵² Although it is unknown if the SAM originated in Syria or Iraq, in the years before Operation Iraqi Freedom U.S. intelligence indicated that Syria had become an entry point for eastern European military equipment, such as anti-aircraft weapons and surface-to-air-missiles, on its way to Iraq.²⁵³

A Washington Post article that ran in early summer 2005 featured an interview with a proclaimed insurgent sympathizer/organizer within Syria. The man, Abu Ibrahim, made several claims about the insurgency and its relation to Syria. He dubbed Syria a "hub" for organizing insurgents, and claimed that when the US pressured the Syrian government in late 2004, men like him were taken into custody by Syrian agents only to be released several days later.²⁵⁴

He openly admitted to ferrying men, weapons, and money into Iraq, as well as possibly fighting on one occasion, and stated that he was routinely tailed by Syrian agents but that they did not interfere with his activities. Ibrahim stated that in the early days of the war, Syrian border guards waved busloads of would-be insurgents through checkpoints and into Iraq.²⁵⁵ He claimed that he had seen a rise in the number of Saudis coming to Syria to be transported to Iraq to join the insurgency. Purportedly, Ibrahim and others were inspired by a radical Syrian

preacher named Abu Qaqa. When he asked a sheik why the Syrian government had not arrested them for their activities, “He would tell us it was because we weren’t saying anything against the government, that we were focusing on the common enemy, America and Israel, that beards and epaulets were in one trench together.”²⁵⁶ Though it may be impossible to verify Abu Ibrahim’s claims, they do not appear to differ greatly from the public statements and assessments of the US military and intelligence community.

Iraq’s Interior Minister, Bayan Jabr, repeated the prime minister’s call to neighboring countries in July 2005. Jabr met with the interior ministers from Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in Istanbul, and reiterated that the Iraqi government wanted the neighboring countries to do more to staunch the flow of weapons and insurgents into Iraq.²⁵⁷ The ministers released a communiqué that condemned the murder of Egypt’s ambassador, pledged to prevent terrorists from using their territories as bases and recruitment centers for terrorists, and called for the rapid exchange of information on terror suspects and their movements. Jabr, commenting before meeting with the ministers, stated, “I will say clearly in my speech about the countries – maybe without names but they know themselves – the countries who support directly or indirectly the insurgents. I will talk to these countries to stop these activities and to cut short these terrorists.”²⁵⁸

In July 2005, the US Treasury Department announced that information obtained from Saddam Hussein’s half brother and former advisor, Sabawi Ibrahim al-Hasan al-Tikriti, (who had been captured in a raid in Tikrit four months earlier) indicated that the Tikriti family was responsible for supplying money, arms, explosives and other support to the insurgents in Iraq from bases in Syria. Shortly thereafter, the US Treasury Department announced it was blocking the assets of six of Saddam Hussein’s nephews, all sons of al-Tikriti.²⁵⁹ Stuart Levey, the US Treasury’s Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence stated, “This action targets the money flows of former regime elements actively supporting attacks against Coalition forces and the Iraqi people.”²⁶⁰ Acting Assistant Treasury Secretary Danier Glaser asserted that cash couriers from the region, Syria in particular, were the primary method for funnelling money to insurgents. He stated that large sums belonging to former Iraqi officials who are now in Syria, or who are now controlled by Syria, are responsible for much of the financing.²⁶¹

There have been conflicting reports over the extent of the financial ties between Syria and the insurgency in Iraq and the degree of Syrian government complicity. An Iraqi official claimed that Syria had agreed to turn over 3 billion dollars of money that originated with Hussein or his supporters. President Assad however reduced this number significantly to 200 million. In 2004, The U.S. asserted that the state controlled Commercial Bank of Syria was laundering money on behalf of insurgent groups in Iraq. Another report suggests that efforts to stop the flow of money from Syria to Iraq have only accumulated one billion, and that much more is slipping by undetected.²⁶²

A number of al-Tikriti’s sons have been particularly active in financing the Iraqi insurgency. One son, Ayman Sabawi was captured in Tikrit in May. In late

September Iraqi authorities announced he had been sentenced to life in prison for his role in funding the Iraqi insurgency and for bomb making. Iraqi authorities had not announced the trial had begun and the verdict, the first against a family member of Saddam Hussein, took many by surprise.²⁶³ Tareq Khalaf Mizal, an Iraqi militant arrested alongside Sabawi was sentenced to six years in prison for his role. Having allegedly confessed to other crimes while in detention, Sabawi is due to stand trial again in November.

A second son, Yasir Sabawi Ibrahim was arrested by Iraqi security officials in Baghdad on October 19, 2005. In a surprise twist, Damascus had “pushed” Sabawi out of Syria only a few days before. Although Syrian authorities did not hand Sabawi over to Iraqi authorities, they promptly informed US authorities about his presence in Baghdad. US officials passed the information onto the Iraqi Defense Ministry whose security forces then carried out the raid on Sabawi’s apartment. Believed to be second-in-command of the Iraqi-led insurgency (behind Younis al-Ahmad), Yasir is accused of using money from the Ba’ath Party in Syria, Jordan and Yemen to fund the insurgency in Iraq.²⁶⁴ A third son, Omar, is suspected of being behind several attacks against US forces in Mosul.²⁶⁵

Despite Damascus’ role in the capture of Yasir (largely seen as a goodwill gesture towards Washington at a time of increased tensions between the two countries), a number of former Ba'ath Party leaders, including al-Ahmad, are believed to still be in Syria. But the capture of yet another nephew of the former Iraqi dictator confirmed the strong ties between members of the former President’s family and the Iraqi insurgency.

US officials commented that as of summer 2005, some intelligence showed that Syrians were providing weapons, training, money, and perhaps even “barracks-like housing” for volunteers who had made their way from Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. Furthermore, the intelligence indicated that the makeshift staging areas for militants preparing to cross the border into Iraq had become more complex.²⁶⁶ A series of *Financial Times* interviews with would-be militants and their families in summer 2005 revealed the extent to which Syria might be aiding the insurgency. A mother of one fighter stated, “...you go to a mosque to make initial contact. Then you are sent to a private home and from there for a week’s intensive training inside Syria.”²⁶⁷ The militants who were interviewed claimed that they were trained in remote Syrian territory, close to the Iraqi border, with a focus on how to use Kalashnikovs, RPGs, and remote detonators. The fighters claimed that some attacks were even planned from Syrian territory.²⁶⁸

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice both made it clear in mid-2005 that they felt that Syria continued to allow both Iraqi Ba’athist and Islamist extremist elements to operate inside Syria and across the Syrian-Iraqi border.²⁶⁹ US Lt. Gen. John Vines estimated in summer 2005 that about 150 fighters crossed into Iraq from Syria each month.²⁷⁰ This presented problems for both Iraqi and Coalition forces because Iraq had comparatively few border posts and many isolated posts had been attacked and some had been destroyed or abandoned.²⁷¹ A major effort was underway to rebuild them and

strengthen the Iraqi border forces, but it so far has made limited progress, and the morale and effectiveness of these border forces is often still low.

Washington's warnings to Damascus over border security intensified during the fall of 2005. On October 7, Syrian President Bashar Assad told the pan-Arab newspaper *Al Hayat*: "They (Americans) have no patrols at the border, not a single American or Iraqi on their side of the border...We cannot control the border from one side."²⁷² Assad's comments came a day after President Bush and Prime Minister Blair both issued renewed warnings against continued Syrian and Iranian involvement in Iraqi affairs. Both countries accused Syria and Iran of giving shelter to Islamic extremists.

A senior US official also suggested that the war may have spread beyond Iraq's borders, telling the *Financial Times* "We are concerned that Syria is allowing its territory to be part of the Iraqi battlefield. That's a choice the Syrians made. We think that is an unwise choice."²⁷³ In his interview with *Al Hayat*, Assad said the absence of security along the border was hurting Syria and maintained "controlling it will help Syria because the chaos in Iraq affects us." Assad said his country had arrested more than 1,300 infiltrators from that country since the war began.²⁷⁴ The following day, Assistant Secretary of State David Welch responded by saying the US was "ask[ing] the Syrian government not to interfere in such matters." Welch went on to say, "It appears that they are not listening and it seems this behavior is not changing."²⁷⁵ The rhetorical exchanges, however, did not prevent the Syrian Airlines Company from flying its inaugural post-Saddam era flight between Damascus-Baghdad on October 11. It was the first regular flight to operate between the two capitals in a quarter of a century.²⁷⁶

On September 12, 2005, in a State Department briefing, US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad said that Syria was the "number one offender" in the Middle East working to impede the success of Iraq. Khalilzad said Syria was knowingly allowing terrorists to use its territory for training exercises and permitting them to transit across Syria into Iraq and kill Iraqis.²⁷⁷ This followed the September 10, 2005 announcement by Iraqi Interior Minister Bayan Jabr that Iraq would close its border with Syria at the Rabiah crossing point near the city of Mosul, beginning the following day.

The border area around Huasaybah (Qusaybah) in Iraq has long been a center for smuggling and criminal activity. Two Muslim tribes in the area – the Mahalawis and Salmanis – have long controlled illegal trade across the border and seem to permit insurgent activity with at least Syrian tolerance. The Iraqi government also proved unable to secure the area. A 400 man Iraqi unit sent in to try to secure Huasaybah in March 2000 virtually collapsed and was forced to hide out in a local phosphate plant.²⁷⁸

The route along the Euphrates from Hit and Haditha to Ubaydi, Qaim, KIRbilah, Qusaybah, and Abu Kamal in Syria has been a center and partial sanctuary for insurgent forces and a conduit for volunteers and supplies coming in from Syria. By the spring of 2005 it became so serious a center for some of the insurgents who fled from the fighting in Ramadi and Fallujah that the US Marine Corps launched its largest offensive since Fallujah against insurgent forces in the area,

sometimes meeting stiff resistance from both Iraqi Sunni insurgents and Sunni Islamic extremist groups.²⁷⁹

At the same time, the insurgents do not need major shipments of arms, virtually anyone can go in and out moving money and small critical supplies, and volunteers can simply enter as ordinary visitors without equipment. US Customs and Border Protection officers are working to train their Iraqi counterparts and have had moderate success in detaining potential insurgents and arms suppliers, and in breaking up smuggling rings. Another US CBP team of officers and border agents was deployed in Iraq on February 1, 2005, to assist further in the training of Iraqis.

This may help, but Iraq's border security forces have so far been some of its most ineffective units. Many of its new forts are abandoned, and other units that have remained exhibit minimal activity. Yet, even if Iraq's border forces were ready and its neighbors actively helped, border security would still be a problem.

This illustrates a general problem for both Iraq and its neighbors. Iraq's borders total 3,650 kilometers in length. Its border with Iran is 1,458 kilometers, with Jordan 181 kilometers, with Kuwait 240 kilometers, with Saudi Arabia 814 kilometers, with Syria 605 kilometers, and with Turkey 352 kilometers. Most of these borders are desert, desolate territory, easily navigable water barriers, or mountains. Even Iraq's small 58-kilometer coastline is in an area with considerable small craft and shipping traffic, which presents security problems.

It is also important to note that Syria plays a role in dealing with some of Iraq's Shi'ites as well as its Sunnis. While it may tolerate and encourage former Iraqi Ba'athist operations in Syria, and transit by Islamist extremists, Syria also maintains ties to elements of formerly Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'ite groups like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Al-Da'wa and Al-Da'wa - Tanzim al-Iraq that it first developed during the Iran-Iraq War. Syria has an Alawite-led regime that is more Shi'ite than Sunni, and while it sees its support of Sunni insurgents as a way of weakening the potential threat from a US presence in Syria, it also maintains ties to Shi'ite factions as well.

The Problem of Iran

The role Iran plays in the Iraqi insurgency is highly controversial. Citing Iranian sources, a Time Magazine article stated that the Supreme National Security Council of Iran concluded in September 2002, before the U.S. invasion, that "It is necessary to adopt an active policy in order to prevent long-term and short-term dangers to Iran."²⁸⁰

Iran certainly has active ties to several key Shi'ite political parties. These include key elements in the Shi'ite-based United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) that emerged as Iraq's most important political coalition in the January and December 2005 elections: the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Al-Da'wa and Al-Da'wa - Tanzim al-Iraq. The Revolutionary Guard and Iranian intelligence have been active in southern Iraq since the early 1980s, as well as other areas. They almost certainly

have a network of active agents in Iraq at present. There are also some indications that the Lebanese Hezbollah has established a presence in Iraq.²⁸¹

Prime Minister Allawi repeatedly expressed his concern over Iran's actions during 2004 and early 2005, as did other senior officials in the Interim Iraqi Government who see Iran as a direct and immediate threat.

Iraqi interim Defense Minister Hazem Sha'alan claimed in July 2004 that Iran remained his country's "first enemy," supporting "terrorism and bringing enemies into Iraq...I've seen clear interference in Iraqi issues by Iran...Iran interferes in order to kill democracy." A few months later Sha'alan -- a secular Shiite who is one of Iran's most outspoken critics in Iraq -- added that the Iranians "are fighting us because we want to build freedom and democracy, and they want to build an Islamic dictatorship and have turbaned clerics to rule in Iraq."²⁸² Sha'alan made the following points in a briefing on September 22, 2004:

- Iranian intervention and support of Sadr pose major threats; and some infiltration has taken place across the Syria border.
- Iran is behind Sadr. It uses Iranian pilgrims and sends arms, money, and drugs across the border.
- Iraq must have strong border defence forces. "If doors and windows are empty, no amount of cleaning will ever get rid of the dust."

In a study of Iran's role in Iraq, the International Crisis Group noted that an Iranian cleric and close associate of Ayatollah Sistani warned in November 2004 that: "Iran's policy in Iraq is 100 per cent wrong. In trying to keep the Americans busy they have furthered the suffering of ordinary Iraqis...We are not asking them to help the Americans, but what they are doing is not in the interests of the Iraqi people; it is making things worse. We [Iranians] have lost the trust of the Iraqi people [*Mardom-e Aragh az dast dadeem*]."²⁸³

In contrast, King Abdullah of Jordan has made a wide range of charges about Iranian interference in Iraq and went so far as to charge during the period before the Iraqi election that Iran was attempting to rig Iraq's election with up to 1,000,000 false registrations. He has since talked about the risk of an Iraqi-Syrian-Lebanese Shiite "axis" or "crescent."

In an extraordinary interview aired on Iraqi TV on January 14, 2005, Muayed Al-Nasseri, commander of Saddam Hussein's "Army of Muhammad," claimed that his group regularly received arms and money from both Syria and Iran. "Many factions of the resistance are receiving aid from the neighboring countries," he said. "We got aid primarily from Iran."²⁸⁴

In early October 2005, the British government publicly blamed Iran for the deaths of eight British soldiers in southern Iraq. Although British officials had complained to Tehran about ongoing arms smuggling across the porous Iran-Iraq border earlier in the year, this marked the first time London officially implicated Tehran in the deaths of Coalition troops. British officials accused Iran's Revolutionary Guard of supplying advanced technology--"shaped charges" capable of penetrating even the toughest armor--to insurgents in Iraq, and of trying

to further destabilize the country.²⁸⁵ Echoing British accusations, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld stated that some weapons found in Iraq have “clearly [and] unambiguously” originated from Iran.²⁸⁶

One week later, on October 13, the Iraqi Interior Ministry announced that Iraqi security forces had arrested 10 Iranian “infiltrators” trying to enter the country illegally. A total of 88 suspected insurgents were arrested in the raid, including one Somali citizen. Iraqi security forces also seized a number of weapons and ammunition caches.²⁸⁷ In a similar incident in July 2005, Iraqi border guards exchanged fire with gunmen crossing into Iraq from Iran. The Iraqi security forces also uncovered a cache of explosives, timers and detonators.²⁸⁸ Such incidents, in addition to growing allegations of Iranian involvement by Baghdad and Washington, suggest that Iran may have moved from having the ability to create unrest and violence in Iraq to actively supporting insurgents.

According to what several newspapers claim are classified intelligence reports, British intelligence officials suspect insurgents led by Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani are responsible for the deaths of at least 11 British soldiers in southern Iraq.²⁸⁹ An investigation of Iranian involvement in Iraq in August of 2005 by *Time Magazine* identified al-Sheibani as the leader of the insurgency in the south. According to the magazine, the IRGC had been instrumental in creating the al-Sheibani group and providing it with weapons and training. US intelligence officials also believe the group, estimated to number almost 300 militants, is responsible for at least 37 bombs against US troops in 2005 alone.²⁹⁰ British officials accused a second Tehran-backed militia group, the Mujahideen for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (MIRI), of having killed six British Royal Military Police in Majar el-Kabir in 2003.²⁹¹

The London Times in September 2005 identified at least a dozen active Islamic groups with ties to Tehran. Eight were singled out as having considerable cross-border influence:²⁹²

- **Badr Brigades:** A Shia militia force of 12,000 trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guards and blamed for a number of recent killings of Sunni Muslims. Thought to control several cities in southern Iraq.
- **Islamic Dawaa Party:** Shia party that has strong links to Iran. Its leader, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the present Prime Minister, has vowed to improve ties between the two neighbours.
- **Mehdi Army:** Received arms and volunteers from Iran during its battle against US and British troops last year. The group's commander in Basra-Ahmed al-Fartusi- was arrested by British forces in mid-September 2005.
- **Mujahideen for Islamic Revolution in Iraq:** Tehran-backed militia blamed for the murder of six British Royal Military Police soldiers in Majar el-Kabir in 2003.
- **Thar Allah (Vengeance of God):** Iranian-backed terror group blamed for killing former members of the ruling Ba'ath party and enforcing strict Islamic law.
- **Jamaat al-Fudalah (Group of the Virtuous):** Paramilitary group that imposes Islamic rules on Shi areas; attacks shops selling alcohol and music.

- Al-Fadilah (Morality): Secret political movement financed by Iran. Thought to have many members among provincial officials.
- Al-Quawaid al-Islamiya (Islamic Bases): Iranian-backed Islamic movement that uses force to impose Islamic law.

A number of experts believe that Tehran-backed militias have infiltrated Iraqi security forces. In September 2005, Iraq's National Security Adviser, Mouwafak al-Rubaie, admitted that insurgents had penetrated Iraqi police forces in many parts of the country, but refused to speculate about the extent of the infiltration.²⁹³

Some reports suggest that between 70 and 90 percent of Basra's police force has been infiltrated by religious and political factions. The Mehdi Army in particular, is believed to have almost de facto control over the police. Not surprisingly, corruption and violence is on the rise within the force. More than 1,300 murders were documented in Basra during the first nine months of 2005, many of them allegedly by men in police uniform.²⁹⁴ A second Tehran-backed group, the Badr Brigades, controlled the city's bureau of internal affairs up until Spring 2005.²⁹⁵ All in a city not considered a Sadr stronghold.

There are also reports of Iranian backed-groups exerting influence over the lives of everyday Iraqis. Achieving a government job in Basra today is almost impossible without the sponsorship of one of these groups. Teaching posts in local schools and universities are increasingly filled only by those deemed ideologically loyal to Iran.²⁹⁶ Iranian goods flood local markets and Farsi is becoming the area's second language.²⁹⁷

The increasing frequency of such reports in the summer and fall of 2005 led some US and British officials to conclude that Iran was backing the insurgency in southern Iraq. The exact level of Iranian influence over the Iraqi insurgency is still unknown however. Whether the Tehran regime, or elements of it, is encouraging or merely allowing attacks against Coalition troops stationed in southern Iraq is unclear.

It should be noted, however, that Iran has repeatedly denied these charges and that some American experts are more concerned with the potential role Iran could play in any Iraqi civil conflict, or once a Shi'ite political majority takes office, than with direct Iranian support of a Shi'ite insurgency.

As General George Casey put it, "I don't see substantial Iranian influence on this particular government that will be elected in January. I see Iran as more of a longer-term threat to Iraqi security...a long-term threat to stability in Iraq. If you look on the other side, I think Syria is a short-term threat, because of the support they provide to Ba'athist leaders operating inside and outside of Iraq."²⁹⁸

The nature of Iranian involvement in Iraqi politics is multifaceted. Many of the Iraqi exile groups and militia members that lived in Iran before the fall of Saddam Hussein were never particularly grateful to Iran during the time they had to remain in exile and are not pro-Iranian now. The Ayatollah Sistani, Iraq's pre-eminent Shi'ite religious leader -- as well as virtually all of the influential Iraqi clergy except Sadr -- is a quietest who opposes the idea that religious figures should play a direct role in politics.

Moreover, the Grand Ayatollah Sistani has rejected the religious legitimacy of a *velayat-e faqih* or supreme religious leader like Iran's Khameni. The major Iraqi Shi'ite parties that did operate in Iran before Saddam's fall did endorse the idea of a *velayat-e faqih* while they were dependent on Iran, but have since taken the position that Iraq should not be a theocratic state, much less under the control of a *velayat-e faqih*. But Iran's aims in Iraq may not be to secure a religious theocracy akin to its own, but merely to assure a Shiite backed Baghdad government friendly to Tehran.

The analysis of the International Crisis Group, and of many US experts in and outside Iraq interviewed for this report do not support the existence of any major Iranian effort to destabilize or control Iraq through June 2005.²⁹⁹ However, the present and future uncertainties surrounding Iran's role, however, can scarcely be ignored. Iran does seem to have tolerated an Al Qa'ida presence in Iran, or at least transit through the country, as a means of putting pressure on the US, in spite of the organization's hostility toward Shiites. Iran may have been active in supporting groups like Al Ansar in the past, or at least turning a blind eye, and may allow cross border infiltration in Iraq's Kurdish region now.

In July 2005, Kurdish intelligence officials asserted that Ansar was based primarily in Iran and that attacks in the Kurdish areas could only have occurred with Iranian support. According to an Iraqi Kurdish reporter, the Iranian cities of Mahabad and Saqqiz are centers where Ansar recruited among the Iranian Kurds. Such claims cannot be independently verified.

Iran has not been, and never will be, passive in dealing with Iraq. For example, it sent a top-level official, Kamal Kharrazi, to Iraq on May 17, 2005 -- only 48 hours after Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had left the country. Kharrazi met with Prime Minister al-Jaafari and Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari. He also met with other top officials and key members of the Shi'ite parties, and his visit was at a minimum a demonstration of Iran's influence in an Iraq governed by a Shi'ite majority, even though some key Iraqi Shi'a parties like Al Dawa have scarcely been strong supporters of Iran. Kharrazi also gave an important message at his press conference, "...the party that will leave Iraq is the United States because it will eventually withdraw...But the party that will live with the Iraqis is Iran because it is a neighbor to Iraq."³⁰⁰

In summer 2005, the Iraqi and Iranian ministers of defense, Sadoun Dulaimi and Adm. Ali Shamkhani, met and concluded a five point military agreement. The meeting, however, produced conflicting statements as to what had been agreed upon. The Iranian minister, Shamkhani, asserted that as part of the deal Iran would train a number of Iraqi troops. His counterpart, Dulaimi, however, stated that the Iraqi government was satisfied with the Coalition efforts and that Iran would not be training Iraqi troops. Iran would, however, be providing \$1 billion in aide that would go towards reconstruction. Dulaimi conceded that some would go to the Ministry of Defense.³⁰¹

Several high level meetings between Iraqi and Iranian officials took place in the fall of 2005. Iraq's deputy minister, Ahmed Chalabi met with Iranian officials in

Tehran only days before traveling to the United States to meet with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The timing was seen by many as odd given accusations in May 2004 by US officials that Chalabi gave Iran classified information.³⁰²

In mid-November, Iraq's National Security Adviser Mowaffaq al-Rubaie traveled to Tehran. While there, he signed a memorandum of understanding with the Iranian government committing the two governments to cooperate on sensitive intelligence-sharing matters, counter-terrorism and cross-border infiltration of Qa'ida figures. The agreement took Washington by surprise: US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad told reporters he found out about the agreement only afterward.³⁰³

Iraqi President Jala Talabani traveled to Iran in late November, becoming the first Iraqi head of state to do so in almost four decades. Talabani spent three days in Iran and met with both Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Rubaie, who accompanied Talabani on the trip, told reporters he asked the Iranians to use their influence with Damascus to secure Syrian cooperation in sealing off the Iraqi border to insurgents.³⁰⁴ In their meeting, Khamenei told Talabani that foreign troops were to blame for the ongoing violence and urged the Iraqi president to tell the occupiers to go: "The presence of foreign troops is damaging for the Iraqis, and the Iraqi government should ask for their departure by proposing a timetable...the US and Britain will eventually have to leave Iraq with a bitter experience."³⁰⁵

According to Talabani, Khamenei promised to support the Iraqi president's efforts to end the insurgency. With regard to Iraq, Khamenei told the official IRNA news agency: "Your security is our own security and Iran honors Iraq's independence and power...We will extend assistance to you in those fields." But Khamenei made a point of denying any responsibility for the violence next door, saying: "Iran considers the United States to be responsible for all crimes and terrorist acts in Iraq and the suffering and misery of the Iraqi people."³⁰⁶

The final high-profile Iraqi visit to Tehran took place on November 27 by Vice-President Adel Abdul-Mahdi. Abdul-Mahdi met with his Iranian counterpart, Vice President for Executive Affairs Ali Saeedlou to discuss the implementation of accords reached earlier in the month. Together these visits marked a sign of improving relations between the two countries in late 2005.

Iran faces a dilemma. It benefits from US support for Iraq to help it deal with the insurgency and provide economic aid. Yet, it fears the US presence in Iraq, and the risk of being "encircled" by the US presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Gulf. Iranian officials have threatened to destabilize Iraq if the US brings military pressure against Iran because of its activities in nuclear proliferation. A split in Iraq's government could lead some Shi'ite factions to actively turn to Iran for support, and the divisions in Iran's government create the ongoing risk that hard-line elements might intervene in Iraq even if its government did not fully support

such action. At this point in time, however, these seem to be risks rather than present realities.

The Problem of Turkey

The Kurdish issue in Northern Iraq has two major implications for Turkey. First, Ankara is concerned about activities of Kurdish separatist groups in Northern Iraq, whose chief objective is an independent Kurdistan in and around Turkey. Turkey is engaging in heavy diplomacy with both the US and Iraqi administrations to crack down on these organizations and eliminate the Kurdish rebels which are launching attacks into Turkish territory. This long-standing concern is the primary reason for the presence of Turkish intelligence and military units in Northern Iraq since the Gulf Operation.

In summer 2005, Kurdish PKK rebels launched a series of attacks on Turkish forces allegedly from bases in northern Iraq. In two months, more than 50 Turkish security forces were killed in attacks, mostly in the form of planted IEDs, a weapon utilized widely by Iraqi insurgents.

In July 2005, the Turkish Prime Minister threatened cross-border action against the rebels if the attacks did not stop, though such action is generally regarded as extremely provocative and even illegal. Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated, however, that "There are certain things that international law allows. When necessary, one can carry out cross border operations. I hope that such a need will not emerge."³⁰⁷

Perhaps exacerbating the debate about cross border operations were the conflicting reports that the US, who considers the PKK a terrorist organization, had ordered the military to capture the organization's leaders. A member of the Turkish military claimed that the US had agreed to seize the leaders while US military spokesmen were unaware of such an agreement.

The official US position seemed to be that the US opposed any cross-border action as an infringement on sovereignty and likely to incite further violence between the Kurds and the various sects opposed to their independence or autonomy. Furthermore, the US made it clear that any discussion over the PKK should center on the Iraqi government. US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard Myers stated, "I think the difference now is that they [Turkey] are dealing with a sovereign Iraqi government, and a lot of these discussions will have to occur between Turkey and Iraq, not between Turkey and the United States."³⁰⁸

Second, Turkey has consistently opposed strong autonomy for a Kurdish zone within Iraq, out of the fear that it would create unrest and aspirations for independence among Turkey's own Kurdish population. Given the rich water supplies in the Kurdish populated regions of Turkey and the colossal irrigation project (the Southeast Anatolian Project) that Turkey invested in for over four decades, an autonomous Turkish Kurdistan is out of the question for Turkish policy-makers.

Despite the present tension in U.S. and Turkish ties, and Turkey's relations with Iraq, Turkey is significantly involved in post war reconstruction in Iraq. Turkey

also offered to assist with the training of Iraqi police forces. The most recent example of Turkish effort to help the creation of a stable and unified Iraq was the meeting held in April 2005 in Istanbul where all Iraq's neighbors, Egypt and Bahrain convened to address issues related with cross border insurgency and terrorist infiltration.

The Problem of Jordan

Jordan shares a border with Iraq and some analysts believe that a limited number of insurgents may cross into Iraq from that border. Most Arab Jordanians are very much opposed to the rise of a Shi'ite dominated Iraq.

While commentators focus on the fact that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is a Jordanian, it should be noted, however, that the Jordanian government has sentenced Zarqawi to death in absentia. Though there may be some Jordanians involved in the insurgency, Jordan has been very cooperative in its efforts to train Iraqi police and to monitor its borders.

The Jordanian government has trained a good number of the Iraqi security forces and is very much concerned with extreme Islamist elements within its own territory. King Abdullah has pledged to train over 30,000 Iraqi military and police within Jordan and on January 13, 2005, the 12th class graduated its training class bringing the total to almost 10,000 Iraqi security forces trained in Jordan since efforts began.³⁰⁹ There have, however, been incidents. In spring 2004, a plot to create a massive chemical-laced explosion over Amman by radical Islamists was uncovered and disrupted by the Jordanian security forces.

On August 19, 2005, Katyusha rockets were fired at two U.S. warships in Jordan's Red Sea Aqaba port. None of the rockets struck the ship. One hit a warehouse, killing a Jordanian soldier; another exploded near a Jordanian hospital, resulting in no casualties; and the third landed outside of Eilat airport in neighboring Israel, but failed to explode. The Iraqi branch of Al Qaeda, linked to Jordanian Abu Masab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility for the attack. Four days later, Jordanian officials arrested a Syrian man, Mohammed Hassan Abdullah al-Sihly, who they accused of carrying out the attack. Police said three accomplices slipped across the border into Iraq.³¹⁰ Jordanian Interior Minister Awni Yirfas confirmed his government was working with Iraqi authorities in order to capture the militants.³¹¹

In summer 2005, Jordanian forces broke up an alleged recruitment ring in Amman. According to the main defendant, Zaid Horani, he and several other Jordanians crossed into Syria and boarded buses in Damascus, Syria that were bound for Iraq as the Coalition forces invaded. Horani apparently returned home and helped to organize a recruitment pipeline for Jordanians interested in joining the insurgency in Iraq. Figuring prominently in the case was a Syrian, Abu al-Janna, who was allegedly the point of contact in Iraq for the Jordanians. Al-Janna is reportedly a central figure in the regional terror network.³¹²

A Jordanian, Raad Mansour al-Banna, is the main suspect in the suicide bombing of a police recruitment site in Hilla in February 2005, considered the single

deadliest attack to date with more than 125 killed.³¹³ On August 21, 2005, Laith Kubba, spokesman for Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari, accused Jordan of allowing the family of Saddam Hussein to finance the insurgent campaign in Iraq in an effort to reestablish the Ba'ath Party in that country.³¹⁴

As already discussed, none of the bombers involved in the November 9 hotel bombings in Amman were Jordanian. But although all four bombers were Iraqi nationals, it is possible that Zarqawi drew on his own connections in Jordan to carry out the attacks. There are some 400,000 Iraqis living in Jordan, some of whom have ties to Salafi jihadists in Iraq and might be willing to help carry out operations in Jordan. Jordanian officials, including King Abdullah II, have refused to rule out the possibility that Jordanians may have been involved in the attacks. In the days following the bombings, Jordanian security officials arrested 12 suspects, mostly Jordanians and Iraqis.

¹ "Report to Congress, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," October 13, 2005.

² <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>, February 9, 2006.

³ Jeffrey White, "Assessing the Iraqi Insurgency," Part I, Problems and Approaches, Policywatch 978, March 24, 2005. Also see Jeffrey White, "The Elections and Insurgency," <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2247>.

⁴ Scott Johnson and Melinda Liu, "The Enemy Spies," Newsweek, June 27, 2005.

⁵ Michael E. O'Hanlon, and Nina Kamp, Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq, February 2, 2006, <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf>.

⁶ Greg Grant, "U.S. Army Fights Hot Zone in Baghdad Suburb; Intelligence Officials: Area South of Capital Home to Car Bomb Factories," Defense News, January 9, 2006, p. 16.

⁷ For another discussion of this issues see, Jeffrey White, "Assessing the Iraqi Insurgency - Part I, Problems and Approaches," PolicyWatch, March 24, 2005, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2282>; and Michael Eisenstadt, "Assessing the Iraqi Insurgency - Part II, Devising Appropriate Analytic Measures," PolicyWatch, March 25, 2005, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2284>.

⁸ Ijet Travel Risk Management, "Iraq – A Look Ahead," March 3, 2005, pg. 2.

⁹ Bradley Graham, "Top Iraq Rebels Elude Intensified U.S. Raids," Washington Post, February 15, 2005, p. A1 and Dan Murphy, "After Temporary Gains, Marines Leave Iraqi Cities," Christian Science Monitor, March 3, 2005.

¹⁰ Josh Meyer and Mark Mazzetti, "In A Battle Of Wits, Iraq's Insurgency Mastermind Stays A Step Ahead Of US," The Los Angeles Times, November 16, 2005, p.1.

¹¹ "Report to Congress, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," October 13, 2005, p.19.

¹² Caleb Temple testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities and the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, July 28, 2005.

¹³ Caleb Temple testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities and the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, July 28, 2005.

¹⁴ Acting Assistant Treasury Secretary Daniel Glaser testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities and the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, July 28, 2005.

¹⁵ Acting Assistant Treasury Secretary Daniel Glaser testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities and the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, July 28, 2005.

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Born Ahmed al-Khalayleh on Oct. 20, 1966. His father was a traditional healer, and he and his nine siblings grew up poor. He took the name "Zarqawi" as homage to his hometown of Zarqa, Jordan.

In 1983 he dropped out of high school. People there remember him as a petty criminal, simple, quick-tempered, and barely-literate gangster

In 1989 he went to Afghanistan to fight. He and Bin Laden rose to prominence as "Afghan Arabs" - leading foreign fighters in the "jihad" against Soviet forces. After the Soviets pulled out, he worked as a reporter for a jihadist magazine.

Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi returned to Jordan around 1992, and was convicted of hiding weapons and of conspiring to overthrow the monarchy and establish an Islamic caliphate. Imprisoned until 1999, fellow inmates say he devoted hours of study to the Koran. He also is said to be a specialist in poisons. Not long after his release, he fled the country.

His movements have been difficult to track. Western intelligence has indicated that Zarqawi had then sought refuge in Europe. German security forces later uncovered a militant cell that claimed Zarqawi as its leader. The cell-members also told their German interrogators their group was "especially for Jordanians who did not want to join al-Qa'ida".

After Europe he is believed to have moved to Afghanistan and to have set up a training camp in the western city of Herat, near the border with Iran. Students at his camp supposedly became experts in the manufacture and use of poison gases. It is during this period that Zarqawi is thought to have renewed his acquaintance with al-Qa'ida.

He is believed to have fled to Iraq in 2001 after a US missile strike on his Afghan base. US officials argue that it was at al-Qa'ida's behest that he moved to Iraq and established links with Ansar al-Islam - a group of Kurdish Islamists from the north of the country.

He was first identified as a suspect at large in a plot to attack U.S. and Israeli targets in Jordan, culminating in the 2002 slaying of U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley. Jordan tried him in absentia and sentenced him to death for allegedly plotting attacks on American and Israeli tourists.

He is believed to have traveled extensively since 9/11, reportedly spending time in Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey.

In the run-up to the Iraq war in February 2003, US Secretary of State Colin Powell told the United Nations Zarqawi was an associate of Osama Bin Laden who had sought refuge in Iraq.

On 29 August 2003 Ayatollah Sayed Mohamad Baqir Al-Hakim, the head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), was killed in a car-bomb blast in the holy city of Al-Najaf in southern Iraq. It was one of the bloodiest attacks. US authorities pinned the blame on Zarqawi.

In February 2004, the US military released a letter it claimed to have intercepted in which Zarqawi apparently asks al-Qa'ida to help ignite a sectarian conflict in Iraq.

In October 2004 his group, Tawhid and Jihad, declared allegiance to AQ.

He is suspected of direct involvement in the kidnapping and beheading of several foreigners in Iraq - even of wielding the knife himself. In May 2004 the American contractor Nick Berg, taken hostage in Baghdad, was among the first to be beheaded. The CIA believes with a "high degree of confidence" that it was Zarqawi who read out a statement and then carried out Berg's murder. Those killed in this fashion include another American, a South Korean and a Bulgarian, and a string of others. A Turkish hostage was shot three times in the head.

In the days leading up to the Jan. 30 Iraqi election, the terror leader declared a "fierce war" on democracy and was believed to be the voice in audiotapes urging people not to vote.

In April 2005 U.S. forces said they had recently come close to capturing him in Iraq.

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