



Electronic Propaganda of the Iraqi Insurgency

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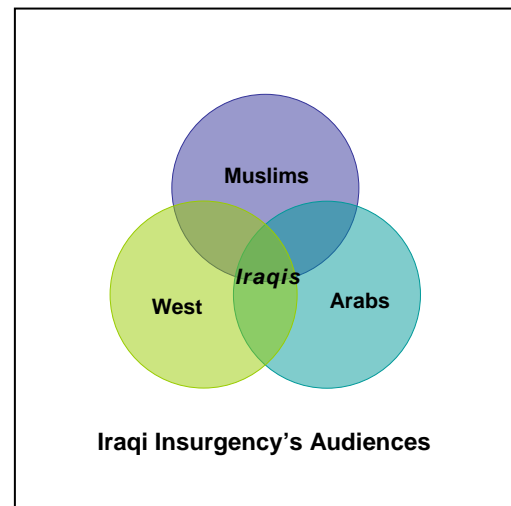
Context: Electronic Propaganda in Iraq

The use of the Internet by insurgent groups did not begin with Operation Freedom in 2003, nor shall it end with the conclusion of Coalition military operations in Iraq. Rebel groups, particularly in the last decade, have typically employed electronic media as a means of communication for operational and propaganda reasons. Over the last decade, the number of websites affiliated with terrorist activity has shot up from a mere dozen or so circa 1997 to well over 4,000 as of February 2005¹. However, as far into the Iraq conflict as December of 2003, analysts puzzled over the lack of the insurgency's use of the Internet as an essential communication tool. According to Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert at the RAND Corporation at the time, "virtually every insurgent or terrorist group has a Web site that puts across its propaganda. But this is not a movement that is seeking to communicate to the outside world to get their political platform across."² One need only peruse the newspapers of the past week to learn that this is no longer the case and that, in fact, the Iraqi insurgency has developed a relatively sophisticated approach to the use of the Internet to manage its local, regional, and global image and operations.

It would be a mistake to think of the Iraqi insurgency as a monolith and its tactics as stagnant. It would also be a tremendous disservice to the organizations, agencies, and individuals whose livelihoods are affected by the insurgency's actions on a daily basis. The reconstructive work of the varied NGOs and agencies in Iraq occurs in tandem with the destructive operations of the insurgency. Both constantly adapt to changes in their shared environment and must do so before a multi-tiered audience that includes Iraqis, peer groups, and the international arena. Yet the very nature of the Internet forbids a conclusive analysis of the way electronic communication tools are utilized by the insurgency to reach its audiences -- just as the Internet is an organic, evolving entity, so must the electronic propaganda techniques of Iraq's insurgency be considered similarly.

Audiences

Rather than being born into a vacuum, these groups' discourse, goals, and audiences have continued to evolve and adapt to their changing contexts both within Iraq's borders and beyond. The launch of Coalition military operations in Iraq in 2003 marked the beginning of the latest 'migration of causes,' so to speak, witnessed by loosely linked, combative groups worldwide. Whether coming from an ideology fueled by radical secular beliefs or one in which religion serves as the prime motivating factor, Iraq has become a new focal point around which these groups rally their followers and advance their individual or shared causes.



¹ Jon Swartz, "[Terrorists' use of Internet spreads](#)," *USA Today*, February 20, 2005.

² Edward Wong, "Iraq's faceless enemy: Rebels without a cause or a website," *New York Times*, December 7, 2003.

“Mrs. Hassan's killers imagine the audience for their carefully constructed drama in two parts: the Muslim world in the stalls, the West in the cheap seats. The aim is to challenge both parts, provoking a different response in each.”³

Although the above statement is in reference to the implacable actions of a specific Islamist group, the gist of it may be applied to all insurgent-minded factions in Iraq, including those with secular ideologies. The primary audiences of Iraq’s insurgency groups include three intersecting sets that can be loosely categorized as **Muslim**, **Arab**, and **Western**. Each of these categories is comprised of approving and disapproving ears: the insurgency speaks to both its detractors and its sympathizers in its propaganda. Per terrorism expert Gabriel Weimann, “The fact that terrorists themselves have direct control over the content of their websites offers further opportunities to shape how they are perceived by different target audiences and to manipulate their image and the images of their enemies.”⁴

On the most proximate level is the **Iraqi** audience, which crosses into all three categories. The publication of Al Qaida’s latest Internet magazine,⁵ *Zarwat Sanam Al Islam*,⁶ may be the group’s propaganda response to a long war that trudges on and may complicate recruitment efforts. Says Rita Katz of the SITE Institute, “the new propaganda effort may also be motivated by a belief that as the war grinds on, it may get harder to recruit foreign fighters. For that reason, the insurgent groups appear to be focusing more on winning and retaining the sympathies of Iraqis.”⁷ Iraqi sympathies are necessary in order to maintain Iraq as a milieu in which Al Qaida and other non-Iraqi militant groups may continue their operations.

The greater **Muslim** population is addressed by Islamist and secular insurgency groups in order to garner operational and financial support. The content disseminated by Iraq’s insurgents has also betrayed its effort to move beyond recruiting like-minded individuals to appeal also to the sympathies of those individuals with more moderate Islamic views. “The killers are of course aware that what they are doing is deeply controversial - as the overwhelmingly negative reaction from most Muslims has shown - and so include a series of visual signs, such as the orange jumpsuit and references to Islamic religious history and tradition. The very act of throat-cutting will, they hope, legitimise their actions.”⁸ Their actions must be seen and recognized as legitimate by competitors as well, particularly the leadership of peer insurgent groups. “There is a game of terrorist one-upmanship going on.”⁹



Image taken from Al Qaida Yahoo! Group homepage. Arabic text reads, “Do not forget our prisoners at Guantanamo. May God set them free.”

³ Jason Burke, “[Theatre of terror](#),” *The Observer*, November 21, 2004.

⁴ Gabriel Weimann, “[Terrorism and the Internet](#),” *Daily Times*, April 30, 2004.

⁵ Rawya Rageh, “[Al-Qaida purportedly launches Internet magazine](#),” *Associated Press*, March 4, 2005.

⁶ Literally, “the top of the camel’s hump” but also a well-known Arabic metaphor for the pinnacle of Islamic practice.

⁷ Robert F. Worth, “[Jihadists take stand on Web, some say it’s defensive](#),” *New York Times*, March 13, 2005.

⁸ Jason Burke, “[Theatre of terror](#),” *The Observer*, November 21, 2004.

⁹ *Ibid.*

In a similar manner, insurgents are competing with the leadership and opinion makers of the **Arab** world at large. “As participants vie for influence and allegiances come and go, every message is careful to take into account the positions of [...] *ulemas* and other respected thinkers.”¹⁰ This is particularly true for the Baathist, Nationalist, and Pan-Arabist varieties of the insurgency. Relying less on religious ideology (though without shying away from invoking Islam where suitable), these secular groups have a rich history to draw upon in gaining national and regional support.

Finally, elements in the **West** are given heavy consideration in the insurgency’s propaganda war. *The Observer*’s Jason Burke notes, “The message for the West is different. The execution videos invade our consciousness. They are shocking and distressing. Even if we don’t watch them, their very existence is upsetting. This is crucial. We watch human beings begging for their lives and we feel complicit.”¹¹ Such visual messages, which, unlike spoken and written statements, need little translation, speak to a Western audience -- in this case one that by and large has supported US military operations in Iraq -- on a visceral level that cannot but be deeply affective. Leaders’ popular support may wane, the moral of troops may diminish, and the view of the war as a success or failure may shift. On yet another level, much of the electronic propaganda disseminated by Iraq’s insurgency is framed as truth in the face of lies circulated by the US government which purportedly seeks to silence dissenting voices. Such framing appeals to the Western value of freedom of expression, and may create sympathy for an “alternative” version of Iraq’s war story.

Research methodology

AMENA Consulting honed its research and analysis of the Iraqi insurgency’s electronic propaganda by employing the following methods:

- Performance of various searches in English, Arabic, and French using traditional search engines in order to identify the primary websites and forums used by the insurgency.
- Research of secondary sources of information and analysis on use of electronic media for insurgency worldwide, in the post-9/11 context, and in Iraq, including analyses by think tanks organizations, news pieces, and independent private sector investigations.
- Incorporation of long-term observation and analysis of Arabic language news sources’ reporting on Iraq events.
- Live consultation with US-based counterterrorism and cyberplanning experts.
- Utilization of *New York Times* as case study to track dissemination of insurgency propaganda to legitimate media outlets.

For the purposes of this analysis piece, the term “Islamist” is used to denote a practitioner of extremist, militant Islamic beliefs in the same ilk as Al Qaida. “Iraqi insurgency” denotes the cross-section of groups actively working to disrupt the operations of the Coalition, the new Iraqi government, and the various agencies and organizations working toward reconstruction in Iraq. “Iraqi resistance” is used in cases where the insurgency has referred to itself as such.

¹⁰ David Baran & Mathieu Guidere, “[How to decode resistance propaganda; Iraq: A message from the insurgents](#),” *Le Monde*, May 11, 2005.

¹¹ Jason Burke, “[Theatre of terror](#),” *The Observer*, November 21, 2004.

Electronic Propaganda Methods: Secular vs. Islamist

The goals behind the insurgency's electronic media campaign are fairly well-defined and, as described by Weimann, fall into eight categories that overlap heavily: publicity and propaganda, psychological warfare, data mining, fundraising, recruitment, networking, planning and coordination, and sharing information.¹² However, when it comes to the specific Internet tools used in this propaganda campaign, a clear delineation appears between Iraq's secular vs. Islamist groups.

Secular Groups

Inclusive of Iraq's Baathist regime loyalists as well as Nationalists and Pan-Arabists, this group has followed a relatively stable pattern of Internet use since the Iraq war began. This faction's preexisting ideologies dictate the content and consistency of its electronic presence. The construction of websites with permanent locations and regular updates is the chosen method by the group, with some sites that predated the war (e.g. AlMoharer.net) seizing the latest conflict in Iraq to further their agendas. To all of these sites, the insurgency is one built upon secular, patriotic ideals (Baathist or not), and all "resistance" operations are framed so as to minimize the Islamist shade of most attacks. Interestingly, however, even as they tout their secular ideology, these websites do not hesitate to utilize reports and videos of insurgency operations in order to present the picture of an active, legitimate Iraqi resistance. In many cases, these sites become a central collection place for daily insurgency reports and videos that are originally posted on Islamist-leaning websites and are quickly disseminated over the Internet.



Photo typical of "patriotic resistance," this one taken from image repository at AlBasrah.net.

Islamist Groups

Islamist websites related to Iraq's insurgency, presumably because of their affiliation with extremist terrorist groups whose scope reach far beyond Iraq's borders, are highly vulnerable to being hacked and shut down.¹³ For this reason, permanent Islamist websites are rare and tend to instead take the form of temporary sites that migrate from IP to IP and URL to URL. As an outsider, locating these websites is made more difficult by the fact that journalists have ceased citing their sources when reporting on insurgency Internet statements. According to counterterrorism expert Evan Kohlmann, news articles did at first include these URLs in their reports, but, after many of them were shut down as a result, reporters began omitting their sources from the articles.¹⁴ All of this begs the question of how group members and

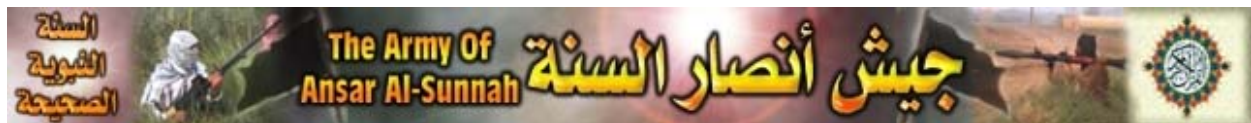
¹² Lea Mae Rice, "[Analysis: terror on the Web](#)," *United Press International*, July 22, 2004.

¹³ See "[Extremist Web Sites Disappear from Dallas Internet Servers After CBS-11 Report](#)" by Todd Bensman and Robert Riggs, *CBS-11 News*, November 16, 2004.

¹⁴ Per conversation between AMENA Consulting's Rima Mulla and New York-based terrorism expert Evan Kohlmann on May 13, 2005.

sympathizers are able to follow these migrating sources of information if they are constantly eluding the fate of so many past sites.¹⁵

Temporary websites are used in conjunction with prolific posting to message boards and forums -- a multipart method preferred by Iraq's Ansar Al Sunnah which proves to be a decidedly effective means of communication and dissemination.¹⁶ Typically, links to the temporary sites, which contain an archive of statements as well as up-to-date reports of activities, are posted to message boards at favorite forum websites. Lasting only 7-8 hours before being shut down, the temporary sites nonetheless succeed in distributing its propaganda *en masse* and to a wide audience within that period of time.



An Ansar Al Sunnah banner denotes an official communiqué. In contrast to *AlBasrah.net* photo, this omits Baath colors, has “*Quran*” written in Arabic calligraphy at right, and proclaims, “*The correct Prophetic Sunnah (tradition)*” at left.

According to Kohlmann, as of mid-May 2005, Islamist groups' distribution mechanism is not as effective as it has been in the past due to the deactivation of several favorite message boards. At this time, Kohlmann asserts, there is no one, exclusive forum for the dissemination of statements, propaganda, and videos.

Message boards are not the only tools Islamist insurgents use to communicate with one another and their wider audiences. Chat rooms and instant messaging are two relatively well-known devices, but as more websites and forums are shut down, insurgents are resorting to newer technologies to spread their messages. Toward the end of 2004, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi's spokesman Abu Maysara Al Iraqi began utilizing the file transfer technology at YouSendIt.com. YouSendIt.com “allows senders to create multiple links to a large file so it can be viewed by an unlimited number of people. Users type in their e-mail addresses, upload the file and YouSendIt creates a free, anonymous Web page for them.”¹⁷ Links to the page are then posted prolifically to various message boards and the large video files are disseminated quickly, unencumbered by the limits of upload and e-mail attachment restrictions.

Website Profiles

Following is a list of websites consistently used to advocate on behalf of the insurgency in Iraq and to disseminate the resistance's print, audio, and video messages.

¹⁵ Sites that include, for example, *AlNeda.com*, which was recognized as an Al Qaida website several years back and, more recently, *inn4news.net*, which until it was shut down several weeks ago was an original source for Ansar Al Sunnah statements.

¹⁶ Per conversation between AMENA Consulting's Rima Mulla and New York-based terrorism expert Evan Kohlmann on May 13, 2005. Kohlmann contrasts this method with that of Al Qaida in Iraq which appears to prefer only posting to message boards.

¹⁷ Ariana Eunjung Cha, “[From a virtual shadow, messages of terror](#),” *Washington Post*, October 2, 2004.

[AlBaathAlArbi.org](http://www.albaathalarbi.org)

(www.albaathalarbi.org) *Arabic*

Apparently a main online media source for the National Leadership for the Arab Baath Party statements, this site has sections for not only Iraq but other countries in the Arab world with a strong Baathist presence such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Although the breadth of the site's content is certainly pan-Arab, its recent focus has been on the locus of its most observable struggle, Iraq. *AlBaathAlArbi.org* appeals to Arab and Iraqi nationalist sentiments by demonizing the "enemy" forces and describing the "valiant resistance" in terms that present it as a unified, popular Iraqi movement. While the site itself does not bring attention to the Islamist-minded side of the Iraqi insurgency, it does link to several other websites that do. These include [AlBasrah.net](http://www.albasrah.net) and [IraqPatrol.com](http://www.iraqpatrol.com). The opinion pieces and statements heap praise upon resistance operations, but they stop short of advocating specific activities. The term "operative" is given to any and all agents seen to be cooperating with the Occupation, including state actors such as Iran and Israel, Iraqi government actors such as Iyad Allawi, and Iraqi civilians supporting security operations. The "operative" label would likely extend to non-governmental actors working toward reconstruction as well. It is difficult to ascertain a chronological evolution of the site, as many of the site's features are undated. It appears, though, that the site was created on 21 October 2004 and is registered in Herndon, Virginia, USA.¹⁸

[AlBasrah.net](http://www.albasrah.net)

(www.albasrah.net) *English, Arabic, provides translation links for several other languages*

AlBasrah.net claims the goal behind its creation in the spring of 2003 was to showcase the "culture, the traditions and the arts of Al-Basrah City" -- a mission whose nature changed with the invasion of Iraq by the "imperialist terror." Since then, the site asserts itself as a source for truthful reporting on Occupation and anti-Occupation operations in Iraq. A very visual website, *AlBasrah.net* culls images and portraits from various sources that are typical of anti-American and anti-Occupation media. Early content of the website appears to have been collected from radical conspiracy and leftist sites. More recent additions, however, have been gathered from sites such as [AlChahed.net](http://www.alchahed.net), which carries actual footage of Iraqi insurgency operations and [AlBaathAlArbi.org](http://www.albaathalarbi.org) where Baath party statements are released. This chronology and the breadth of belief behind the information presented on *AlBasrah.net* suggests that the site does not have a direct connection to Iraqi insurgents but rather serves as a clearing house for all anti-Occupation information, regardless of the source's convictions. Of note is a recent statement on *AlBasrah.net*'s homepage indicating that US news source *MSNBC* had implicated it as advocating for "the terrorism of az-Zarqawi and preaching anti-Semitism and hate towards the West." The statement goes on to disclaim such an accusation by subscribing to the idea that Zarqawi is in fact a "mythological figure" created and used by Occupation forces as a scapegoat for all insurgency operations in Iraq. This further compounds the conclusion that *AlBasrah.net* does not share ideological or operational ties with the Islamist elements of the insurgency. *AlBasrah.net*'s content targets mainly the US Occupation forces and government, but occasionally also singles out non-US actors. In one example, the International Committee of the Red Cross was dubbed an "enabler" of the prison abuse scandal. In another, Jordan was considered to be a "servant" of the Occupation for having hosted a reconstruction-focused summit. The website hosts a [Site Meter](http://www.sitemeter.com) whose statistics paint an interesting picture of

¹⁸ According to information provided by WHOIS Search at [AllDomains.com](http://www.alldomains.com).

AlBasrah.net's visitors: The site appears to have more visitors from North America (US and Canada) than from four of the Arab world's most Internet-wired countries. Additionally, Germany, the UK, France, and the Netherlands are among the website's top ten highest country visitors, indicating that a majority of *AlBasrah.net*'s audience resides outside of Iraq's immediate region.¹⁹ Notably, France, Germany, and the Netherlands are three Western European countries that have relatively large Muslim immigrant populations, which may also account for the site's popularity there. All of these statistics shed skepticism on *AlBasrah.net*'s claim to be run from the city of Basrah, particularly since the volume of visitors from Iraq itself is negligible.

[AlChahed.net](http://www.alchahed.net)

(www.alchahed.net) *English, Arabic*

Originally created on 1 November 2004, *AlChahed.net*'s registration information shows an administrative contact in Baghdad and a billing contact in France.²⁰ *AlChahed.net* claims to reveal the truth of Iraq's ongoing war and showcase the bravery of the "Iraqi resistance in its confrontations with the US Occupation." Its video section encourages visitors to disseminate links at other sites pointing back to *AlChahed.net* as a source for insurgency coverage. The Arabic-French website is heavy on the visual and light on textual content, and what little there is appears to have been culled from other websites mentioned above or hereafter such as [AlBasrah.net](http://www.albasrah.net) and [Al-Moharer.net](http://www.al-moharer.net). Notably, *AlChahed.net* is indeed often pointed to on these other websites as a reliable source for videos of Iraqi insurgency attacks. Though its video library is certainly not extensive nor does it contain original footage (most are clips aired by *Al Jazeera*), it appears to be durable and resistant to being shut down. The most recent video and photo additions to *AlChahed.net* are dated February 2005.

[Al-Moharer.net](http://www.al-moharer.net)

(www.al-moharer.net) *English, Arabic, French*

Al-Moharer.net is the electronic incarnation of a weekly magazine that has been publishing since 1992, directly following the Gulf War. Touting itself as an independent, political, cultural weekly magazine, *Al-Moharer.net* is heavily supportive of the Baath party ideology and encourages the Iraqi insurgency in its actions under the Baath flag. Contributors to the online magazine are loyal to Saddam Hussein and extremely critical of US policies and actions in Iraq. *Al-Moharer.net* encourages Iraqis to demonstrate, with "the leader remaining in their hearts" solidarity with the Baath party while supporting *Jihad* against the US/UK Occupation. Throughout its publication years, *Al-Moharer* has done little to waver from its pro-Baath theme, except to incorporate whatever events may be affecting the party at the particular time of publication. There seems a notable repeating pattern of linking in which many of the Nationalist/Baathist websites take part in -- *Al-Moharer.net* links to several other sites mentioned here: [Kifah.org](http://www.kifah.org), [IraqPatrol.com](http://www.IraqPatrol.com), [UrukNet.info](http://www.UrukNet.info), and [AlChahed.net](http://www.alchahed.net) among others. The *Al-Moharer.net* websites is registered with contact information in Cairo, Egypt.²¹

¹⁹ According to statistics posted on [Nedstat](http://www.Nedstat.com) site meter for *AlBasrah.net* on 20 May 2005.

²⁰ According to information provided by WHOIS Search at [AllDomains.com](http://www.AllDomains.com).

²¹ Ibid.

[Anbaar.net](http://www.anbaar.net)

(www.anbaar.net) Arabic

After a hiatus during which the site was closed down, the return of *Anbaar.net* on 20 May 2005 was excitedly announced several times on the Islamist-leaning message boards of Hkmah.net. Created in January of 2003 and with posts as early as February of the same year, *Anbaar.net* has a decidedly Islamist tone and considers Iraqi insurgents to be “*Mujahideen*” fighting an Occupation whose goals extend beyond Iraq’s borders. The site is formatted as something of an open news blog, with posting privileges given to all members who sign up. Because a “comments” feature is missing from the site, visitors do not have the option to post responses to news stories and opinion pieces. *Anbaar.net* therefore lacks the feel of a “dialogue” that so many other membership-based websites have. Posts are anti-Coalition and hostile toward the Shia population in Iraq as well and much of the content encourages Iraqis and non-Iraqis to join the “*Jihad*” in Iraq. The Islamic views expressed on the site are Sunni in nature, and the visual media posted at the site (including now-dead links to videos) display the “heroic” actions of the Iraqi insurgency. One particularly interesting aspect of *Anbaar.net* is its Surveys section. The two survey questions that elicited the most responses from visitors were:

“Do you think the Occupation forces managed to defeat the resistance in Fallujah?” with 5,004 responders, 80% of whom said no, and

“Who won the battle of Fallujah?” with 4,164 respondents, 74% claiming victory for the “heroic resistance” and another 15% saying the battle there has yet to end.

Site statistics indicate that this year has been a particularly active one for *Anbaar.net* in terms of number of page views -- in just the first five months of 2005, there have been exponentially more page views than there were in all of 2004. This indicates a growing interest in *Anbaar.net*, perhaps spurred by the recognition it might have received after returning from its hiatus. *Anbaar.net* links to several familiar websites such as AlBasrah.net and IraqPatrol.com, but also to several known Islamist message boards including AlM2sda.net and AlQal3ah.net.

[IraqiFlame.com](http://www.iraqiflame.com)

(www.iraqiflame.com)

A comprehensive analysis of *IraqiFlame.com* has become difficult due to the site’s unavailability whilst compiling this report. It does not appear the site has been taken down but rather that its bandwidth has been exceeded recently. The site was created in August of 2004 with its registrant contact info an address in Baghdad and its administrative contact in Jordan.²² Prior to its recent bandwidth troubles, the site seems to have played host to numerous videos and visual materials that were anti-Occupation and pro-insurgency in nature, encouraging *Jihad* operations and expressing hostility toward “Occupation agents” within the NGO community.

[IraqPatrol.com](http://www.iraqpatrol.com)

(www.iraqpatrol.com) Arabic

The website -- registered with contact information in Cairo, Egypt in September of 2003,²³ and with archives dating back to November of that year -- presents itself as a means by which to “discredit the Occupation and reveal the truth behind the lies of US policies,” purportedly by presenting eyewitness accounts of actions on the ground in Iraq. The site strongly encourages

²² According to information provided by WHOIS Search at AllDomains.com.

²³ Ibid.

members and guests to participate in the struggle in its “Resist With Us” section where visitors are asked to contribute opinion pieces, articles, photos, cartoons, and videos that match *IraqPatrol.com*’s mission. The target of the site is clearly the US and its “operative” Iraqi government, and any insurgency operations are considered to be resistance actions aimed at restoring Iraq to the “model of freedom and democracy” it was prior to the invasion. The nationalist theme runs strong in posts on the message boards, with much sympathy expressed for Saddam Hussein. The “resistance” is viewed as heroic and nationalistic in its actions. Links to video files of insurgency operations date back to as early as May 2004 and as recently as the writing of this report, though the links have ceased to function. Some members and guests who post comments in the Video section request that video files be sent to their e-mail addresses, indicating that e-mail may be a popular mode of disseminating such material. The various message board sections have a high volume of visitors; the video section has a few posts relative to the other sections but has the highest number of views, numbering in the thousands for each new post. Judging from the site’s archives, there has been a great deal of consistency in the themes expressed by its reports beginning in November 2003 and until now: any and every opportunity to vilify the Occupation is seized, whether it be legitimate and verified news or a conspiracy theory. The addition of insurgency videos several months into the site’s content appears to have evolved naturally as the insurgency began utilizing the Internet more regularly to disseminate its materials.

[IslamMemo.cc](http://www.islammemo.cc)

(www.islammemo.cc) *Arabic*

Created in March of 2003, *IslamMemo.cc* reports on all news that, in its consideration, affects the Muslim world. With regular updates from its correspondent in Iraq, Khalid Abduljabbar, *IslamMemo.cc* has become a widely cited source for Iraqi insurgency news on other anti-Coalition websites despite no clear connection between it and the insurgency. The Iraq reporting and opinion pieces are highly critical of the US Occupation, and the content of the site overall has maintained this tone since its inception. *IslamMemo.cc* appears to have no affiliation with any political party, though its mission is to monitor events that may affect the Muslim community and to proselytize in the name of Islam to the rest of the world. Site administrators even purport to be working toward the creation of an IslamMemo satellite television channel to grow its audience into the millions. In Arabic, *IslamMemo.cc* is referred to as *Mufakkarat Al Islam*.

[Kifah.org](http://www.kifah.org)

(www.kifah.org) *Arabic*

Dubbing itself “The People’s Struggle Movement” in English, *Kifah.org* is the website for the group purporting to have been founded by free Iraqi nationals whose goal it is to liberate the country from occupation. Its stated mission is to work towards rebuilding Iraq with Iraqi hands “unsoiled” by having colluded with the “Occupation enemies.” *Kifah* goes so far as to restrict its membership to Iraqis who have no record of having cooperated with the “foreign Occupation or any post-Occupation agents that have entered Iraq more recently.” This stance indicates *Kifah* is likely to be hostile toward foreign reconstruction workers perceived as agents of the US Occupation. The *Kifah.org* website considers the foreign presence in Iraq to be an “Anglo-American Zionist” enterprise. A decidedly Arab-Iraqi nationalist organization, the spokesman for *Kifah* asserts on the website that to free Iraq, “armed resistance is the only choice.” He also

praises those “Arab fighters” who, according to him, have joined the resistance to defend the Iraqi, Arab country. Any alternative ideology espoused by these fighters is unmentioned. For the most part, the content on the site revolves around alleged US Occupation crimes, Israeli interference in post-Occupation Iraq, and only the occasional Iraqi insurgency attack report. Created in October 2004, *Kifah.org* links to like-minded, secular websites mentioned above, IraqPatrol.com, AlChahed.net, IraqiFlame.com, and AlMoharer.net.

[UrukNet.info](http://www.uruknet.info)

(www.uruknet.info) *English, Italian*

With little evidence indicating any direct operational or communication link with the Iraqi insurgency, *UrukNet.info*, a site run from Italy,²⁴ republishes news and opinion pieces from various international sources, many of them legitimate,²⁵ in an effort to provide “timely and unbiased coverage from occupied Iraq and acting resistance.”²⁶ The information provided does suffer from a bias, however, despite its claim to the contrary, as all of the articles culled together at *UrukNet.info* are clearly only those very critical of the US. On the other hand, the site does not advocate on behalf of the Iraqi insurgency, although it does seem to endorse, by providing links to their URLs, other websites,²⁷ which do. Many of the domains listed in the Links section, however, are left-leaning, Western sites that also serve as sources for the occasional pro-Saddam article. With no clear way to access archives, it is difficult to track any evolution in the content reported at *UrukNet.info* since it began operation in May of 2003.

Message Boards

The messages of Islamist insurgents in Iraq proliferate over the web due to the widespread use of message boards and forums to duplicate the groups’ official statements and latest videos. New material tends to originate on Islamist-leaning message boards often serving as forums for Salafist, Wahhabi, and Jihadist voices. Several of these message boards restrict access to members who have been vetted, but material posted at these members-only boards is often re-posted on other sites open to all. For example, Al Qaida and Ansar Al Sunnah statements posted at the restricted AlHesbah.net are often replicated elsewhere.



Hkmah.net logo

Islamist/Jihadist message boards are just as vulnerable to being shut down as Islamist websites. In the span of this research project, a relatively new Al Qaida forum was discovered only to have it closed, purportedly temporarily, several days later.²⁸ Others which have managed to remain operational for extended periods include:

²⁴ According to information provided by WHOIS Search at AllDomains.com.

²⁵ Sources including the *New York Times*, *Al Jazeera*, the *Washington Post*, and *The Observer* among others.

²⁶ Per the Uruknet.info statement located at <http://www.uruknet.info/?l=x&p=-3&hd=0&size=1>.

²⁷ Links to AlMoharer.net, AlBasrah.net, AlChahed.net, and IraqPatrol.com.

²⁸ AlQa3edaaah at <http://alqa3edaaah.netfreehost.com/alqa3edaaah.html>.

- [AlHkmah.net](http://www.alhkmah.net) (www.alhkmah.net), a Jihadist forum²⁹ where statements by Abu Musab Al Zarqawi are often posted, and where tensions between Baathist and Islamist participants sometimes surface.
- [AlMourabitoune](http://ribaah2.forumactif.com) (ribaah2.forumactif.com), a French-language site that, in August of 2004, became a popular choice for individuals usually seen on Arabic forums to post videos of hostages and attacks.³⁰
- [AlM2sda.net](http://www.alm2sda.net) (www.alm2sda.net), a Jihadist forum³¹ which, until it was temporarily suspended a few weeks ago, was being used as an alternate forum for original Ansar Al Sunnah material to be posted.

Because the Internet is teeming with message boards whose agendas range from the very broad to the very specific, the proliferation possibilities for insurgency propaganda are almost endless. In addition to Islamist message boards, mainstream Arab and Muslim forums are used by certain posters to spread extremist messages, often eliciting varied responses. Forums such as those at AlSaha.com, AlKhayma.com, and AlSakifah.com have a diverse membership such that when pro-Zarqawi posts are made, responses are bound to include several that are highly critical of the figure. It is important to note, though, that even though the reception of these posts may be lukewarm, they tend to be the posts that receive the highest number of hits, thereby achieving their goal of information dissemination.

The Insurgency's Discourse

Differences between the secular and Islamist sectors of the insurgency are not limited to their choice of online venues and tools. A comparison of the discourse these two distinct factions engage in reveals parallels and stark contrasts.

Similarities

In their communiqués to each other and their wider audiences, both groups allude to a range of well-known Arab and Islamic traditions. References to a shared history and rich culture build common ground with individuals of similar backgrounds and provide historical legitimacy to what may be a fledgling movement. “The insurgents have undeniably achieved a degree of sophistication in their discourse, in many ways because of their skilful manipulation of the wealth of resources in Islamic and Arab culture. Leaning heavily on just a few verses from the Koran, they invoke a succession of episodes from religious and Arab nationalist history, with a venerable tradition of poetry and tribal folklore.”³²



AlBasrah.net image of Iraqi children stoning US tanks recalls similar image seen for decades in Palestinian

Arab and Islamic culture are inextricably linked, and allusions to them serve both secular and Islamist agendas. The Palestinian struggle is one example that appeals to a very wide audience in

²⁹ According to *Internet Haganah* database [profile for AlHkmah.net](#).

³⁰ According to *Internet Haganah* database [profile for AlMourabitoune](#).

³¹ According to *Internet Haganah* database [profile for AlM2sda.net](#).

³² David Baran & Mathieu Guidere, “[How to decode resistance propaganda; Iraq: A message from the insurgents](#),” *Le Monde*, May 11, 2005.

the region and beyond. The conflation of rhetoric and images from Palestine and Iraq is a tactic often employed by the insurgency.

Another point of similarity across insurgent discourse is the use of a heroic leader figure. In a country and region deeply familiar with this tactic, we find that regime loyalists continue to tote Saddam Hussein signs and wear Saddam Hussein t-shirts, even as he has become, for some, a modern day Omar Al Mukhtar³³ figure. The defunct Mehdi Army once rallied around signs emblazoned with the image of the firebrand cleric Muqtada Al Sadr. Seen perhaps less often in public is the “warrior sheikh” of the Islamist brigades, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, but his image certainly graces the pages of Islamist message forums.



Image without caption from *AlBasrah.net* photo section.

Certainly the insurgency factions share much of the same language to describe their common foe, and while *Jihad* may be invoked by the Islamist groups more often, the insurgency is across the boards considered to be a *muqawama* (resistance) battling a brutal *ihtilal* (occupation). “Put together, this forms a coherent and unified body of propaganda, considering the diversity and divisions of the armed groups that produce it. A vocabulary and set of references are now widely shared: the combatants are mujahideen; the enemy is a miscreant occupation force - like crusaders or even barbarians. It is bent on perpetuating ‘American-Zionist’ imperialism through a puppet government serving only the US and its allies within Iraq: former exiles, pro-Iranian Shias and secessionist Kurds.”³⁴

In terms of the visual discourse -- just as powerful as the verbal -- the proliferation of videos and images suggests that these tools of propaganda traverse ideological boundaries, particularly when the footage illustrates the operational successes of the “resistance.”

Differences

The differences between the two groups’ discourse lie in the details and can be either obvious or subtle. Official statements by an organization loyal to the former regime will be comprised of mostly secular language and peppered with an appropriate amount of Islamic allusion. Statements disseminated by a group such as Al Qaida in Iraq lean heavily on religious language and Quranic verses, recalling past moments in Islamic history when the *Ummah* faced tribulations that speak to modern day events.

Another contrast can be seen in each group’s treatment of the sectarian factions in Iraq. Secular websites focus on projecting the image of a cohesive Iraqi society whose foremost allegiance is to the nation. Sunni Islamist discourse, on the other hand, is hostile to Iraqi Shiism and tends to amplify the sectarian division in the country. Examples of this can be seen in the recent

³³ Libyan national hero who led the anti-colonial resistance in the 1920s. Al Mukhtar was captured, imprisoned, and sentenced to death.

³⁴ David Baran & Mathieu Guidere, “[How to decode resistance propaganda; Iraq: A message from the insurgents](#),” *Le Monde*, May 11, 2005.

publication of Al Qaida in Iraq's new online magazine *Zarwat Sanam Al Islam*, wherein a letter purporting to be from Usama bin Laden praised Zarqawi and his followers and asserted that "enlightening Muslims and calling upon the people to follow the faith and way of Sunnis" was the magazine's main goal.³⁵ Hostility toward the Shia is also illustrated by a photo that was spread on several Islamist message boards depicting a Mehdi Army soldier handing over his gun to a US soldier in exchange for a "sex magazine." Whether or not the photograph was doctored is not clear, but the message is: the Shia are colluding with the Occupation in shamefully un-Islamic ways.

This is in sharp contrast to Nationalist and Baathist propaganda which either avoids any discussion of factionalism altogether or is carefully inclusive of all divisions in its content, as illustrated from these AlBasrah.net photos below. Notably missing from *AlBasrah.net* were images depicting Iraqi Kurds, whose desires for self-rule are antagonistic to the Nationalist agenda.



Three photos sampled from *AlBasrah.net*'s "AlMuqawama" section. Insurgents likely represent. from left: Nationalist. Shia. Islamist.



Because the Islamist ideology at work in Iraq is built on precisely that -- Islam -- and the location of this struggle is the most recent in a line of venues, the Islamist discourse is unfettered by national and geographical boundaries. In the same way that this group does not plant permanent electronic roots with enduring websites, its rhetoric remains universal enough to apply to past, ongoing, and any potential future locales. Rather than diluting the message, this adaptive quality makes for a strong and universal discourse -- "Iraq" can quickly be exchanged for "Afghanistan" or "Chechnya" without fear of diffusing the pan-Islamist agenda.

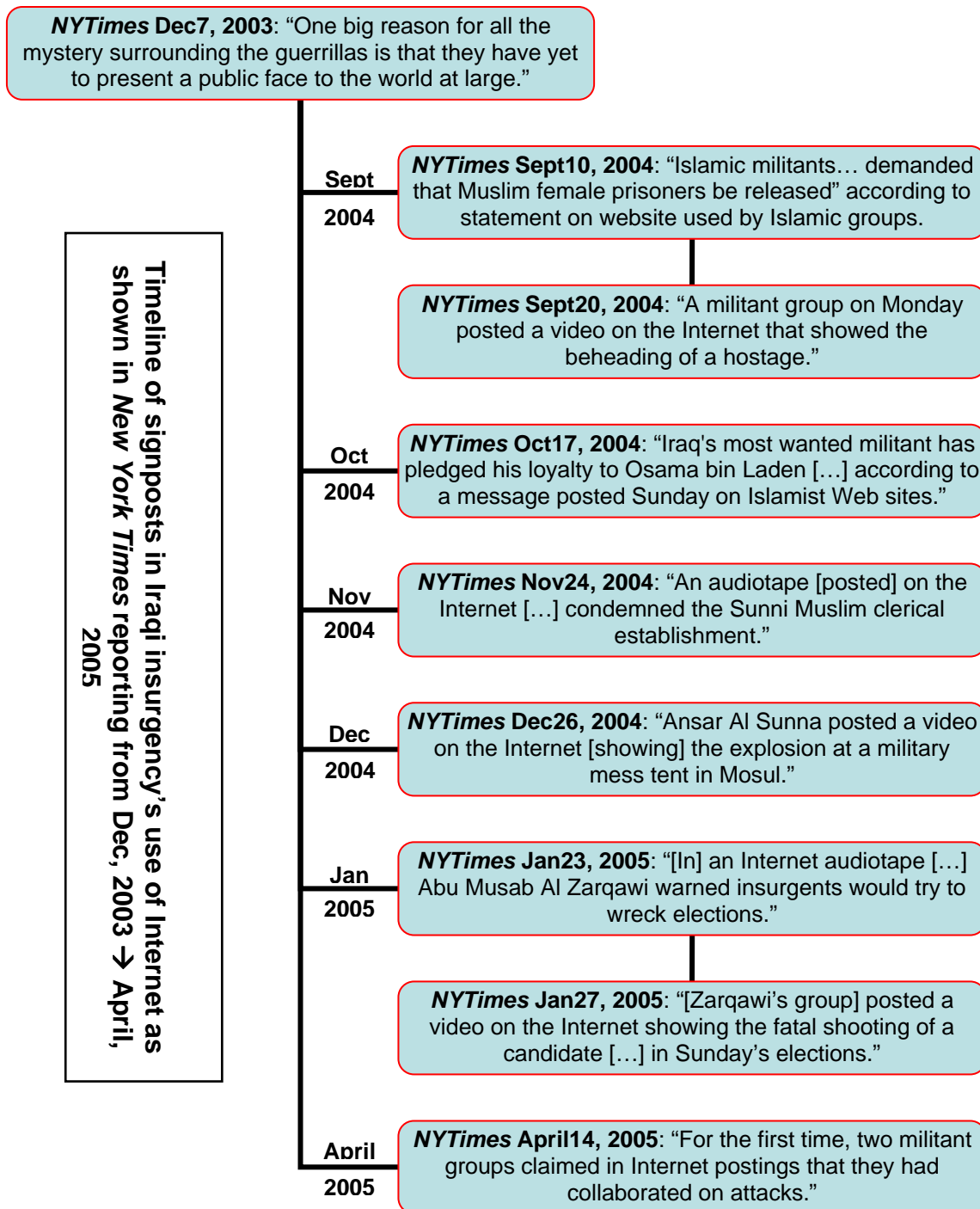
Whether a conscious move or not, the venue of choice used to display the Islamist discourse -- message boards -- also strengthens this group's communications. The forum format allows for a reader to become involved in dialogue, sometimes in agreement and others in dispute. Either way, this involvement invokes in him or her a sense of agency that forces the participants and observers to choose which side of the discussion they are on.

The adaptability and transitory nature of the Islamist discourse is far from being a detractor from this group's mission and in some cases bolsters it.

³⁵ Rawya Rageh, "[Al-Qaida purportedly launches Internet magazine](#)," *Associated Press*, March 4, 2005.

Case Study: Internet Insurgency in the *New York Times*

An examination of *New York Times* coverage of the Iraqi insurgency's use of the Internet yields a telling story of an increasingly self-aware and sophisticated communication strategy. In less than one year, the *Times* went from having no coverage of such savvy to reporting on the insurgency's use of the Internet to make political demands, carry through on threats, and intimidate voters on Election Day, as illustrated in the following timeline (for details, Index 1):



Prospective Analysis & Conclusion

In light of the information gathered for the purposes of this report, AMENA Consulting offers the following three conclusions as to the future of electronic media use by the Iraqi insurgency:

As communication technology advances, so will the insurgency's electronic propaganda methods.

Throughout the first year of the war, the Iraqi insurgency was without an effective propaganda mechanism; by the fall of 2004, however, the Internet had become its primary tool for both garnering support and engaging its adversaries. This usage grew beyond a simple website presence to include the widespread dissemination of multimedia messages as well as draw global news attention. The insurgency, building upon the online strategies of other militant groups, proved itself to be adaptable, mobile, and quick to learn how to leverage the Internet. Continually rebounding from hacking attempts and site shutdowns, this group has gone on to employ even newer messaging and file-sharing systems for their purposes in recent months. The likelihood of their incorporating the latest communication methods is high and imminent. A more recent addition to the insurgency's repertoire of tools is the multimedia instant messaging system, [Paltalk](#) which offers its users free video and audio chat. While Internet connectivity in Iraq is still very low, even just a handful of individuals there have still managed to wage a successful, far-reaching propaganda campaign online. The insurgency's communication success is likely to grow alongside Iraq's developing technology infrastructure.

Insurgency's goals, and thereby its propaganda, interact with the Iraqi and global political landscapes.

Clearly, Iraq's insurgents do not operate in a vacuum; just as its operational tactics have and will continue to evolve with the political situation in Iraq, so will its communication strategies. A US withdrawal from Iraq, for example, would remove the various groups' common enemy, resulting either in the choosing of a new shared target or a breakdown in the insurgency's apparent unity. If the new Iraqi government garners popular legitimacy, insurgency groups may lose the sympathies of Iraqis and be forced to consider entering mainstream politics, abandoning their combative actions and rhetoric. Alternatively, they may refuse to give up their fight, choosing to become a long-term insurgency movement or else adapting their tactics to a new setting with a new foe.

NGOs are not primary propaganda targets, but their role as "Occupation agents" could escalate them into sharper focus.

Other than occasionally being characterized as having "colluded with the enemy," NGOs working on the reconstruction of Iraq have not been a favorite propaganda target of the insurgency thus far. However, in the event of primary targets being removed or reprioritized, the role of the foreign NGOs may take on greater symbolic significance and, thus, an increased prominence in the propaganda. Such targeting could in fact put these organizations in greater danger than they may already face; Internet misinformation may be a virtual machine, but it is one nonetheless capable of causing real-world harm.

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Addendum to Electronic Propaganda of the Iraqi Insurgency:

Reality vs. Fiction

Prepared on 03 June 2005 for NCCI

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Insurgency Propaganda: Reality vs. Fiction

In the years since the current Iraq conflict began, much focus has been placed on the coverage of the war by international media, and on whether reporting has been extensive and journalists objective enough. Indeed, at the start of the war, the former Iraqi regime's spokesman, Muhammad Al Sahhaf, continued to exploit the presence of international media in his country by giving journalists on-the-ground reports that conflicted with those issued by US military spokespeople. Similarly, US media coverage of the war has been notoriously picked apart by documentary filmmakers examining the truthfulness with which the situation in Iraq has been reported.

Public Information as a Tool of War

The narrative generated by the Iraqi insurgency can be looked at in a similar manner. Nefarious intentions aside, the Iraqi insurgency has developed a public discourse that accentuates its strengths and attenuates its weaknesses. The insurgency is one of many players on the ground in Iraq seeking to portray the situation in a manner beneficial to their cause, the other players including the Coalition forces, local and international news media, and various agencies at work on securing and reconstructing the country. The aim of framing the Iraq situation from any one of these perspectives is threefold: to maintain the image of sustainability and strength; to counter and degrade the adversary; and to garner widespread operational and financial support for the agenda. Any information campaign, regardless of its perpetrator's ideology, seeks to shape public discourse, and an information campaign becomes a campaign of disinformation when the line is crossed between hype and propaganda. The Iraqi insurgency's media campaign is no different in this aspect. Discrepancies between the truth of the situation on the ground in Iraq and the way the insurgency portrays its operations is part and parcel to the very definition of propaganda: information, ideas, opinions or images, often only giving one part of an argument, which are broadcast, published or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions.¹

Why the discrepancies?

Where the Iraqi insurgency's image diverges from its reality is where its weaknesses can be found. What may in fact be a deeply divided revolt is portrayed in the propaganda as a relatively unified movement with common goals. As long as a common enemy exists, factions within the insurgency will continue to have an indisputable target around which to frame their information campaign; and though the reality may not be such, the appearance of a unified insurgency gives the impression of strength in numbers that does not necessarily exist in reality.

Another purely logistical reason for why the content on insurgency-linked websites does not appear to mirror reality on the ground is the fact that many of these sites may not actually operate out of Iraq. While some claim to carry first-hand, eyewitness accounts of events on the ground, the site operators themselves are elsewhere and remain reliant upon the discretion of their sources for accurate information. Without a system of verification, there is no way to differentiate between valid reporting and fabrication.

¹ As defined in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*.

Notably, debates do sometimes erupt on message forums over the legitimacy of the insurgency's actions. The heatedness of the debate depends upon where the message forum lies along the Extremist→Mainstream continuum; on forums used almost exclusively by Islamists, for example, to boast of the latest attack on an Iraqi police station, there is little to no voice of dissent. However, the more conventional the forum website is, the more mainstream its audience is, and the more likely participants are to dispute the legitimacy of attacks carried out against Iraqis and civilians as part of valid resistance.



Appendix: Electronic Propaganda of the Iraqi Insurgency

Prepared on 26 May 2005 for NCCI

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Index 1

Selection of Websites and Forums used for Iraqi Insurgency Purposes

| NAME | URL | TYPE | STATUS |
|-------------------|--|--|----------|
| Al Chahed | www.alchahed.net | General resistance news, photos, videos | Active |
| Al Farooq | www.farooq.net/news.htm , www.farooq.org/news | Website for Al Qaida in Iraq | Inactive |
| Al Moharer | www.al-moharer.net | Website of weekly Baathist magazine | Active |
| Al Basrah | www.albasrah.net | General resistance content | Active |
| Ansar Al Sunnah | ansar-alsunnah.8k.com | Ansar Al Sunnah website | Inactive |
| Cihad | www.cihad.net | Website associated with Ansar | Inactive |
| Iraq Patrol | www.iraqpatrol.com | Resistance website & message boards | Active |
| Islam Memo | www.islammemo.cc | Islamic website; reports on resistance | Active |
| Shuhadaa | www.shuhadaa.org | Raises funds for Iraqi 'martyrs' families | Inactive |
| Sawt Al Mazlumeen | www.stcom.com | General and Islamist resistance material | Active |
| Uruknet | www.uruknet.info | Anti-Occupation Iraq news | Active |
| Kifah | www.kifah.org | Nationalist website; calls for armed resistance; anti-Occupation | Active |
| Anbaar | www.anbaar.net | Islamist website; open blog hostile to Shia; calls for <i>Jihad</i> against Occupation | Active |
| Dahr Jamail | dahrjamail.com/weblog | Iraq weblog of independent journalist | Active |
| Al Khayma | www.khayma.com | Mainstream forum used for insurgency statements | Active |
| Al M2sda | www.alm2sda.net | Jihadist forum used by Ansar | Inactive |
| Al Mourabitoune | ribaat2.forumactif.com | Forum sometimes used by Jihadists | Active |

| | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|-----------------------|
| Al Saha | www.alsaha.com | Mainstream forum used for insurgency statements | Active |
| Al Hesbah | www.alhesbah.org/v | Forum used by Al Qaida, Ansar | Active (members only) |
| Al Hkmah | www.alhkmah.net | General forum used to post insurgency statements | Active |
| AlQa3edaaah | alqa3edaaah.netfreehost.com | Al Qaida forum with posts from Iraq | Inactive |
| Islam Minbar | www.islam-minbar.net | Forum used by Al Qaida in Iraq | Inactive |
| Muntada Al Sakifah | www.alsakifah.org | General forum used by Al Qaida supporters | Active |
| Tevhidweb | www.forum.tevhidweb.com | Forum associated with Ansar | Inactive |
| Al Baath Al Arabi | www.albaathalarbi.org | Website of Arab Baath press office | Active |

Index 2
Iraqi Insurgency Groups

Al Faruq Brigades

Affiliated Groups:

Al Faruq Brigades are linked to the *General Command of the Armed Forces* and the *Resistance and Liberation in Iraq*, which are Saddam loyalists.

Philosophy:

Al Faruq Brigades are a militant arm of the *Iraqi Islamic Movement*. The group was formed in June 2003, and is made up of primarily Arab Sunni Muslims. However, it may include some secular and former regime fighters in its ranks. There is contradictory information on whether the group's fighters include foreign *Mujahideen*. The group itself is anti-Saddam but may include Saddam loyalists in its ranks. It has been known to cooperate with Saddam loyalists in operations.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Al Faruq Brigades* have claimed responsibility for a number of US casualties, issuing reports to *The Free Arab Voice*, an Arab nationalist leftist website, where they provide information on their operations. They have set up small units or squadrons, with each group being tasked according to expertise, such as reconnaissance and combat squadrons.

Al Mehdi Army or Al Sadr Army or Active Religious Seminary

Philosophy:

Formed in the summer of 2003 by radical Iraqi leader Muqtada Al Sadr, the *Al Mehdi* was set out to be a new force on the Iraqi scene. Since the handover to the Iraqi interim government, Sadr's movement continues to take new members, feeding on dissatisfaction among Shia who initially welcomed the ousting of Saddam Hussein and the end to curbs on their faith. It appeals mostly to young and desperate Shia in Iraq's urban slums who have not seen any benefit to their lives from liberation. Taking its name from the *mehdi* - a messianic figure in the Shia tradition - the militia is fiercely loyal to its religious founder.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Mehdi Army's* potential as an armed force was first really felt when violence erupted with coalition forces, although many of the gunmen on the streets of Baghdad or Najaf may not necessarily have been militia members but ordinary Iraqis defending their neighborhoods. The *Mehdi Army* was the first Shia militia to organize on the ground and now benefits from a degree of military discipline, making it the natural choice for leading unrest in Shia areas.

Ansar Al Islam or Supporters of Islam

Affiliated Groups:

Ansar Al Islam is a faction of *Ansar Al Sunnah*. It is allied with *Al Qaida* and *Tawhid and Jihad*. The original leadership is no longer in place and the group has disintegrated, but some of the remaining fighters within the group have reconstituted in small units. They have joined forces with other foreign and domestic *Mujahideen*, or have created new resistance cells, but other former members have fled to Iran. There are alternate claims that the group has reorganized but this has not been validated. This group was attacked by US forces in April 2003 during the major combat phase and suffered heavy casualties.

Armed Vanguard of Mohammad's Second Army

Affiliated Groups:

The *Armed Vanguard of Mohammad's Second Army* has possible links to *Jaysh Muhammad*, and may maintain at least communication links with *Mohammed's Army*. It was formed on August 22, 2003.

Philosophy:

The *Armed Vanguard of Mohammad's Second Army* is comprised of Saddam loyalists who also claim to be Arab Sunni Muslims committed to *Jihad*.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

According to their statement issued after the UN Bombing, for which they claimed responsibility, the group swore to "continue to fight every foreigner until [...] victory or martyrdom," and to "make the Americans regret their occupation of Mohammed's land". The group also vowed to "carry out similar attacks against the agent Governing Council and all coalition forces." They also intended to export the conflict outside Iraq: "God willing, we will reach America and Britain themselves."

Black Banner Organization or Holders of the Black Banners

Philosophy:

The *Black Banner Organization* is an Arab Sunni Muslim *Mujahideen* group that has issued calls for the destruction of the Iraqi oil infrastructure. Their aim is to prevent the US from profiting from oil revenues.

Iraqi National Islamic Resistance

Affiliated Groups:

The *Iraqi National Islamic Resistance* claims operational affiliation with other groups.

Philosophy:

The *Iraqi National Islamic Resistance* is a group of local Arab Sunni Muslims who are anti-Saddam, anti-colonialist, and have some nationalistic tendencies.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Iraqi National Islamic Resistance* appeared publicly on June 16, 2003. It referred to the US as "American dogs" and warned foreign countries not to send troops to Iraq.

Iraqi Resistance Brigades or Iraqi National Resistance Brigades

Philosophy:

In a communiqué broadcast by *Al Jazeera* on June 16, 2003, the *Iraqi Resistance Brigades* qualified Saddam and his followers as "enemies who have contributed to the loss of the motherland." They describe themselves as "a group of young Iraqis and Arabs who believe in the unity, freedom and Arab culture of Iraq."

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

On the tape aired by *Al Jazeera*, the group claimed responsibility for "all" attacks against US-led Occupation forces in Iraq up to that point. The group stated, "These operations are planned and executed by the units of the *Iraqi Resistance Brigades* and, contrary to what some news agencies claim, they are not the work of the head of the former regime and his supporters or individual acts by Muslim extremists."

Islamic Armed Group of Al Qaida, Fallujah Branch

Affiliated Groups:

The *Islamic Armed Group of Al Qaida* denies any affiliation with Saddam Hussein and was the first Iraqi group purporting links to Usama bin Laden's *Al Qaida*.

Philosophy:

The *Islamic Armed Group of Al Qaida* includes many foreign fighters in its ranks. It was first heard of in July, 2003, and may be led by Afghan war veteran Abu Iyad.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Islamic Armed Group of Al Qaida* has claimed responsibility for "all" the armed resistance against US forces in Iraq in a four-minute videotape aired on the Dubai-based *Al Arabiya* satellite television station on July 13, 2003. In the taped address, the group encouraged the United States to "leave Iraq's territories and to live up to their promises." The taped address warned of more attacks that would aim to "break America's back."

Islamic Army in Iraq or Al Jaysh Al Islami fi Al Iraq

Affiliated Groups:

Ansar Al Sunnah and Tawhid and Jihad

Jaysh Muhammad or Muhammad's Army

Affiliated Groups:

Jaysh Muhammad is said to have training camps around Baaquba. Their regional cells are known to cooperate with each other. Not much is known about the leadership and funding of the group. There are claims that *Jaysh Muhammad* receives money from Syria. The group includes foreign fighters as well as Arab nationalists, with some former Saddam Fedayeen, Iraqi military and ex-Baath Party members. *Muhammad's Army* said they were not responsible for the UN bombing but stated the rationale for the attack.

Philosophy:

Jaysh Muhammad is an Arab Sunni Muslim *Mujahideen* group based in Fallujah. It is pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionist, anti-colonialist and anti-Saddam with some nationalistic tendencies. The group boasts 5,000 members throughout the Sunni Triangle. There are also claims that the group has an all-female brigade in Diyala Province.

The *New York Times* reported that the *Army of Muhammad* is responsible for the beheadings of several Iraqi and foreign hostages and is the armed wing of a group created by Saddam Hussein to fight for the return of his Baath Party.

Note: The fact that information on Muhammad's Army is not consistent indicates that the group has not effectively communicated its identity and position.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

Jaysh Muhammad has publicly stated that it wants a new government, "without Saddam Hussein but in the same style" and has criticized the US agenda. In *Jaysh Muhammad's* view, the invaders want to "bring the Jews to our holy land in order to control Iraq". The group accuses the former regime of handing over Iraq to the enemies. The movement took root when local Arab Sunni Muslims, Arab nationalists and military veterans angry about the Occupation began meeting in rural areas of the Sunni Triangle. The group claims to have a few members of the former regime in their ranks.

Jihad Brigades

Philosophy:

The *Jihad Brigades* appeared on July 22, 2003. It is made up of Arab Sunni Muslims, and is anti-Saddam, with some nationalist tendencies.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Jihad Brigades* have publicly stated that attacking former regime members is a waste of time but have threatened to kill all those who collaborate with the US. The group, possibly based in Baghdad, has referred to the Governing Council as “traitors” and urged Iraqis to boycott the Governing Council.

Liberating Iraq’s Army**Philosophy:**

The *Liberating Iraq’s Army*’s ideology is not known, though it shows nationalistic tendencies. The group is active in Anbar, around Haditha. Media reports claim they are pro-Saddam. Considering the area where they operate, they may be anti-Saddam Arab Sunni Muslims.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Liberating Iraq’s Army* targets those who collaborate with the US. It has warned foreign nations against sending troops to the country. The group has claimed responsibility for the assassination of Hadassa’s pro-US mayor.

Mujahideen Battalions of the Salafi Group of Iraq**Affiliated Groups:**

The *Mujahideen Battalions of the Salafi Group of Iraq* claims the Palestinian Abdallah Azzam as its spiritual leader. Azzam was Usama bin Laden’s mentor in the 1980s.

Philosophy:

The *Mujahideen Battalions of the Salafi Group of Iraq* is a Sunni Muslim *Mujahideen* group. This group may include foreign fighters. Abdallah Azzam encouraged many to join the Afghan *Jihad* in the 1980s against the Soviet Occupation. He was killed by a car bomb in Peshawar in November 1989 by unknown attackers and left behind dozens of books on religious doctrines, religious *fatawa* (rulings) and a comprehensive ideology of *Jihad*.

Muslim Fighters of the Victorious Sect or Mujahideen of the Victorious Sect or Martyr Khattab Brigade**Affiliated Groups:**

The *Muslim Fighters of the Victorious Sect* may have a relationship with the *Mujahideen* in Chechnya.

Philosophy:

The *Muslim Fighters of the Victorious Sect* was named after Ibn Khattab, a Saudi who commanded the Chechen *Mujahideen* until he was poisoned by the Russians in 2002. The group appears to include foreign fighters in their ranks. They are strongly anti-Saddam,

referring to members of the former regime as "soldiers of tyranny and the devils of darkness who have handed over this Muslim country to their American masters."

Muslim Youth

Affiliated Groups:

The *Muslim Youth* group is allied with *White Flags* and *Muhammad's Army*.

Philosophy:

The *Muslim Youth* are Arab Sunni Muslim young men, and are anti-Saddam.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Muslim Youth* have publicly criticized the Jordanian Embassy bombing.

Nasserites

Philosophy:

The *Nasserites* are a small group of non-Baathist pan-Arab nationalists.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Nasserites* have warned all foreigners to leave Iraq. They have described the Governing Council as "traitors," and have lashed out at Shia and Kurdish secessionism and those cooperating with the US. This group was an existing underground political party surviving from their heyday in 1960's. The party has since formed a military wing.

National Front for the Liberation of Iraq

Affiliated Groups:

The *National Front for the Liberation of Iraq* is an alliance of ten Iraqi resistance groups united under one front. The *National Front for the Liberation of Iraq* was formed the day after the fall of Baghdad.

Philosophy:

At the time of its founding, the *National Front for the Liberation of Iraq* said they were composed of nationalists and Muslims. The group's leaders are secular and religious members of the Republican Guard. The *NFLI* says it is particularly active in Irbil and Kirkuk, in Fallujah and Tikrit, as well as Basra and Babil Provinces. The group includes many Arab volunteers and has allowed Saddam Fedayeen and ex-Baath party members to join its ranks. However, they are not loyal to Saddam. The *NFLI* is anti-Zionist and appears to claim solidarity with both the Southern Sudanese and the Palestinian resistance. However, their public statements are heavily bent on Arab nationalism. Pragmatic and very well organized, the group has a representative in London and may be associated with Iraqi exiles.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *NFLI* claims to be willing to negotiate peacefully but only on terms that result in the US leaving Iraq. They also accuse Iraqis working for the Iraqi government of being associated with the CIA and Mossad. They have made an assassination attempt on the life of Ahmed Chalabi.

National Iraqi Commandos Front

Philosophy:

The *National Iraqi Commandos Front* is an anti-Saddam group.

New Return

Philosophy:

The *New Return* is a group of Saddam Hussein loyalists.

Patriotic Front

Philosophy:

The *Patriotic Front* is comprised of Saddam Hussein loyalists.

The Political Media Organ of the Baath Party or Jihaz Al Ilam Al Siyasi li Hizb Al Baath

Philosophy:

The *Political Media Organ of the Baath Party* is composed of Saddam loyalists and Baath Party members.

Popular Resistance for the Liberation of Iraq

Affiliated Groups:

The *Popular Resistance for the Liberation of Iraq* is linked to some Sunni groups and tribes. The group is pro-Saddam.

Philosophy:

The *Popular Resistance for the Liberation of Iraq* supports former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Popular Resistance for the Liberation of Iraq* stands against any US presence or US-backed organizations in Iraq.

The Return or Al Awda

Affiliated Groups:

The *Return* group first appeared on May 14, 2003. Its headquarters are in Mosul, and the group is headed by Mohammed Al Samidai, a leader of the Baath party in Mosul under Saddam Hussein. Al Samidai is said to have coordinated with other Baath party leaders from north and central Iraq, including some from Kirkuk, Mosul, Tikrit and Baghdad and renamed the party *Al Awda*, or *Return*.

Philosophy:

The *Return* is comprised of Saddam loyalists based in northern Iraq. Former security service members, Iraqi military and midlevel Baathists are among its members. They have been organized into cells spread throughout Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, Tikrit, Fallujah, Ramadi, and possibly other areas. This group is said to be the Baath Party under a new name.

Saddam's Fedayeen or Saddam's 'Men of Sacrifice'

Affiliated Groups:

The paramilitary *Fedayeen Saddam* was founded by Saddam's son Uday in 1995. In September 1996, Uday was removed from command of the *Fedayeen*. Uday's removal may have stemmed from an incident in March 1996 when Uday transferred sophisticated weapons from the Republican Guard to the *Saddam Fedayeen* without his father's knowledge. Control of the group passed to Qusay, further consolidating his responsibility for the Iraqi security apparatus. The deputy commander was Staff Lieutenant General Mezahem Saab Al Hassan Al Tikriti. The *Fedayeen* are allegedly 18,000 to 40,000 strong.

Philosophy:

"Saddam's Men of Sacrifice" were considered a notoriously violent paramilitary group specializing in counter-insurgency operations for the regime in Baghdad. Many are now rumored to have renounced their loyalty to Saddam and have switched to advocating *Jihad*. However, this has not been validated and appears unlikely given the history of the group.

Salafist Jihad Group

Affiliated Groups:

The *Salafist Jihad Group* is an Arab Sunni Muslim *Mujahideen* group. It first appeared on July 28, 2003 and may be a faction of the group by the same name operating in Morocco.

Philosophy:

The *Salafist Jihad Group* vowed, in a videotape aired by *Al Arabiya*, to fight a "holy war" against US President George Bush and his administration. They added that "Bush, Rumsfeld

and decision makers in the 'black house' and in the Pentagon... we will shake the ground under your feet and we will send a fire upon you which only God can prevent."

Snake Party or Snake's Head Movement or Harakat Ras Al Afa

Philosophy:

The *Snake Party* is a group of Saddam loyalists. It stems from the Baath Party in Hawija, amongst the Arab Sunni tribes.

Unity and Jihad Group or Jamaat Al Tawhid wal Jihad or Monotheism and Holy Struggle or Tanzim Qaidat Al Jihad fi Bilad Al Rafidayn or Unification and Jihad or Al Tawhid, Al Zarqawi network

Affiliated Groups:

The *Tawhid and Jihad Group* has ties to *Al Qaida*, *Asbat Al Ansar* and *Hizbullah*. The group is believed to be comprised of foreign terrorists, elements of the Kurdish Islamist group *Ansar Al Islam*, and indigenous Sunni Iraqis. On October 17, 2004, it announced allegiance to Usama bin Laden's *Al Qaida*.

Philosophy:

The *Tawhid and Jihad Group* seeks to establish an Islamic state in Iraq. It is motivated by radical religious beliefs.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *Tawhid and Jihad Group* aims to force the US-led coalition out of Iraq and overthrow the Iraqi government. It is dedicated to committing terrorist attacks against the US-led coalition forces in Iraq, as well as Iraqi government officials and security forces. The group has also carried out attacks on the United Nations, humanitarian organizations, and Kurdish politicians and religious figures.

Wakefulness and Holy War

Philosophy:

Wakefulness and Holy War is an Arab Sunni Muslim *Mujahideen* group operating in Fallujah. The group videotaped an attack and sent it to an Iranian TV station on July 7, 2003, in which it said that "Saddam and America are two faces of the same coin," and stated that they were carrying out operations against the American Occupation in Fallujah and other Iraqi cities.

White Flags

Affiliated Groups:

The *White Flags* are allied with the *Muslim Youth* and *Muhammad's Army*.

Philosophy:

The *White Flags* are a local Arab Sunni Muslim *Mujahideen* group mainly operating in the Sunni Triangle, and possibly outside it in other areas.

Stance toward the Iraqi Government, allied forces and NGOs:

The *White Flags* have criticized the Jordanian Embassy bombing.

Index 3

New York Times coverage of Iraqi insurgency use of Internet through April, 2005 (detail)

HEADLINE: The World: Iraq's 'Faceless Enemy'; Rebels Without a Cause or a Web Site

BYLINE: By EDWARD WONG

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Dec. 7 2003

➔ *In the early stages of the insurgency, groups in Iraq did not seek to establish contact with the outside world, instead communicating with Iraqis through graffiti and with Arabs through pan-Arab networks to garner support. At the time, these groups did not appear to have websites.*

HEADLINE: US Aircraft Strike Insurgents in Falluja; Kidnappers Want Iraqi Women Out of Jail

BYLINE: By SABRINA TAVERNISE

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Sept. 10 2004

➔ *Islamic groups start using websites as a means to communicate publicly with the outside world, including Coalition forces, as they start taking hostages and making demands. Demands are of a political nature.*

HEADLINE: Iraqi Video Shows Beheading of Man Said to Be American

BYLINE: By EDWARD WONG

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Sept. 20 2004

➔ *Tawhid and Jihad and Ansar Al Sunnah post videos online. The videos show beheadings of hostages and a means to deliver threats. In one message, President Bush is addressed directly.*

HEADLINE: Insurgents Who Beheaded 2 Show Briton in Plea for Life

BYLINE: By EDWARD WONG; Khalid W. Hassan contributed reporting for this article.

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Thursday, Sept. 23 2004

➔ *Tawhid and Jihad continue to communicate with allied forces through online videos to make political demands. They also use the Internet to make false claims about their treatment of hostages. In this case, the two Italian aid workers are later released.*

HEADLINE: Wanted Rebel Vows Loyalty To bin Laden, Web Sites Say

BYLINE: By DEXTER FILKINS

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Oct. 17, 2004

➔ *Militants use the Internet to announce their alliances. In this case, Tawhid and Jihad announce that it took eight months of exchanges before reaching an understanding with Al Qaida.*

HEADLINE: Rebel Attacks Kill 18 Iraqis; G.I.'s Injured

BYLINE: By RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr., James Glanz, Edward Wong and Khalid al-Ansary

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Oct. 23 2004

➔ *Messages (here, Ansar Al Sunnah) posted by "Islamist" insurgent groups clearly have religious connotations to describe the enemy ("infidel", "disbeliever", "crusader", etc.).*

HEADLINE: What the Terrorists Have in Mind

BYLINE: By DANIEL BENJAMIN and GABRIEL WEIMANN, Oct. 24 2004

→ *Both Sunni and Shia militants spread their ideology over the Internet, use it to talk about the weaknesses of their enemies, and to spread their visuals (photos and videos) to a widespread audience across the world.*

HEADLINE: Militants Report Killing 11 Captive Iraq Officers and Seizing Woman

BYLINE: By EDWARD WONG and RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Oct. 28 2004

→ *Hostages include: foreign and Iraqi aid workers, foreign and Iraqi contractors, foreign civilians, Iraqi security officers.*

HEADLINE: Assault Slows, but G.I.'s Take Half of Falluja

BYLINE: By ROBERT F. WORTH and EDWARD WONG

DATELINE: FALLUJA, Iraq, Thursday, Nov. 11 2004

→ *Political demands have included the departure of coalition forces, the end of the Fallujah siege, the release of female prisoners, and the release of all prisoners.*

HEADLINE: Tape Condemns Sunni Muslim Clerics for Abandoning Iraqi Resistance

BYLINE: By JOHN F. BURNS; Richard A. Opiel Jr. contributed reporting from Mosul.

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Nov. 24 2004

→ *Zarqawi's group condemns the Council of Ulama for their lack of support to the insurgency during the Fallujah offensive.*

HEADLINE: 9 Iraqis Die in Car Bombing At the Official Compound

BYLINE: By ROBERT F. WORTH

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Dec. 13 2004

→ *Zarqawi's group uses the Internet to claim responsibility for attacks.*

HEADLINE: Militants Say They Taped Mosul Blast

BYLINE: By RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Dec. 26 2004

→ *Detailed online video shows Ansar Al Sunnah insurgents carrying out attack on US military mess hall, purposefully revealing part of their strategy and tactics.*

HEADLINE: 5 in Iraq Force Are Shot Dead In Rebel Video

BYLINE: By CHRISTINE HAUSER; Iraqi employee of The New York Times.

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Jan. 1 2005

→ *Zarqawi's group executes Iraqi security forces as a message to deter Iraqis from joining the police or National Guard.*

HEADLINE: Sunni Group Says It Killed Cleric's Aide In Bombing

BYLINE: By ERIK ECKHOLM

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Jan. 14 2005

→ *Ansar Al Islam targets Shia religious figures for "cooperating" with the Interim government and allied forces.*

HEADLINE: Tape in Name of Leading Insurgent Declares ‘All-Out War’ on Iraq Elections and Democracy

BYLINE: By JOHN F. BURNS

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Jan. 23 2005

→ *Zarqawi’s group threatens to disrupt elections and condemns democracy as a “wrong ideology.” Elections are portrayed as a plot to bring the Shia to power.*

HEADLINE: Militant Imams Under Scrutiny Across Europe; Calls to Back ‘Global Jihad’ Are Cited

BYLINE: By DON VAN NATTA Jr. and LOWELL BERGMAN; Souad Mekhennet.

DATELINE: LONDON, Jan. 24 2005

→ *The Internet is used to spread ideology beyond borders. It is a global phenomenon.*

HEADLINE: Iraqi Candidate Killed on Videotape; Other Attacks Leave a Marine and Several Iraqis Dead

BYLINE: By EDWARD WONG; Khalid al-Ansary.

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Jan. 27 2005

→ *Zarqawi’s group kills a candidate for elections to spread fear among Iraqis gearing up to vote.*

HEADLINE: U.S. Shouldn’t Cut Force Soon, Iraqi Leaders Say

BYLINE: By JOHN F. BURNS

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Feb. 1 2005

→ *Zarqawi’s group vows to continue attacks even after elections.*

HEADLINE: 19 Iraqis Killed and 60 Hurt By Car Bombs and Gunfire

BYLINE: By ROBERT F. WORTH; Layla Isitfan and Mona Mahmoud.

DATELINE: BAGHDAD, Iraq, April 14 2005

→ *For the first time, Al Qaida in Iraq and Ansar Al Sunnah cooperate in carrying out attacks. Collaboration is announced in Internet postings.*