SWP Research Paper

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The Iraqi Insurgency

Actors, Strategies, and Structures

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**The Iraqi Insurgency:
Actors, Strategies, and Structures**

Four years after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Sunni groups continue to fight an insurgency against the occupation forces, and the violence that erupted in summer 2003 has yet to let up. Some insurgents specifically target members of the Shiite majority in an effort to provoke a civil war in Iraq. *al-Qaida in Iraq*, which was headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi until his death in June 2006, is especially guilty of this. Since summer 2005, there have been increasing signs that they might succeed in this strategy. Sectarian violence is claiming more and more civilian victims. Meanwhile, the number of foreign and Iraqi soldiers and security forces killed is declining.

The example of Afghanistan before 2001 shows just how dangerous these sorts of conflicts can be for the international community if they are not brought under control. Under the protection of the Taliban, *al-Qaida* succeeded in establishing a trans-national terrorist organization with an international agenda. In Afghanistan, they could plan and organize the September 11th attacks. Similarly, *al-Qaida in Iraq* also has international ambitions, in addition to their fight against the occupation forces and the new Iraqi state.

Since the end of the Cold War, the number of intra-state conflicts has risen markedly compared to inter-state conflicts. Usually these involve conflicts between the state and one or more nonstate actors, and it is more important than ever that we study these actors in order to better understand them. The insurgency in Iraq presents such a case, and up to now our knowledge about the players involved has remained superficial. In order to understand the insurgency's role in the development of Iraq and the region, we need to know about its structure, organization, ideology, goals, strategies and tactics. How should Germany and Europe respond to the insurgents' activities?

There are four characteristics of the insurgency in Iraq that are especially relevant to German and European policy:

▸ Iraq is a failed state. For years to come it will remain unstable and the insurgents will bear considerable responsibility for the instability. Through their attacks against the Iraqi military, police, and members of the emerging civil service, they have

thus far made it difficult, if not impossible, to establish functioning state institutions. Since the insurgents cannot defeat their enemy militarily, they focus their efforts on simply not losing the fight. The stakes for the military, on the other hand, are much higher. In the eyes of world public opinion, they must at least appear to contain insurgent activity. Anything less would spell defeat.

▸ The insurgency in Iraq is likely the best example of an increasingly decentralized form of warfare, in which insurgent groups with flat hierarchies confront their enemies with new threat scenarios. The insurgency in Iraq differs from most conventional insurgencies in that it lacks a center of gravity and a hierarchical command structure.

▸ The insurgency is increasingly taking on an Islamist character. This is consistent with the trend toward the Islamization of Iraqi society which began in the nineties. As a result, national Islamists, which represent groups whose military and political agenda is focused on Iraq, are also gaining ground within the insurgency. Due to their more limited political objectives, they hold open prospects of reaching a negotiated settlement.

▸ The Jihadists, defined as members of militant Islamist groups who are ideologically aligned with Usama bin Laden's *al-Qaida*, are not the dominant force in the insurgency, and they are losing ground vis-à-vis the national Islamist groups. Nevertheless, they continue to play an important role. In particular, it appears that they are succeeding in provoking a civil war between Shiites and Sunnis. Regardless of whether a civil war erupts or not, they will attempt to shift their activities to neighboring countries and possibly even further afar.

Germany should be prepared for Iraq to be unstable for the foreseeable future. Given that German and European influence on events in Iraq is negligible, they ought to pay special attention to what is going on in neighboring states. Representatives of neighboring states and Egypt have met on several occasions to discuss the impact of the Iraq War. The European Union and Germany should try to promote such initiatives, with the long-term objective of establishing a new regional security architecture.

In the future, German and European policy needs to be prepared to meet the challenges of threat scenarios emerging from decentralized forms of warfare. Current counterterrorism measures already address this to some extent, but it also affects the German military. The Bundeswehr increasingly faces decen-

tralized and diffuse insurgency scenarios in its current and future missions.

European policy in Iraq should differentiate between those insurgents and groups who are not engaged in a "holy war" *(Jihad)* against the West and anti-Western Jihadists. Neither the national Islamists in Iraq nor their supporters abroad have posed a direct threat to Europe so far. Efforts to involve them in the political process should definitely be supported. The Jihadists, on the other hand, are another case altogether. Although their role in Iraq is less prominent than the national Islamists', they pose a threat to neighboring states, and they will most likely become active in these states, particularly in Syria and Lebanon.

Phases of the Insurgency in Iraq

The insurgency in Iraq can be divided into four phases. While events in each phase were primarily influenced by different insurgent groups, there was activity across the spectrum of the insurgency during all four phases. In the "Baathist phase" from early summer 2003 until the winter of 2003/2004, the dominant group was the so-called *Army of Muhammad (Jaish Muhammad)*. They allegedly maintained close ties to Saddam Hussein, who was still a fugitive at the time, and consisted primarily of former members of the Baath Party.[1] The organization fought a more or less classic guerrilla war, in which they would attack military targets with mortars and hand grenades, explode roadside bombs and try to shoot down coalition forces' aircraft. Spectacular suicide attacks were conducted as early as August 2003, but they were rare in comparison to the years that followed. By the end of 2003, the influence of the *Army of Muhammad* and the Baathists was on the decline.[2] This was followed by the "Zarqawi" or "Jihadist" phase, which, from the beginning of 2004 until the summer of 2005, was dominated by the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In early 2004, he released his first audio message announcing the goals of his organization *Jama'at al-Tauhid wa-l-Jihad* (Monotheism and Holy War).[3] Zarqawi was able to catapult his organization to the forefront of the insurgency through spectacular acts of terrorism, kidnappings and an effective public relations. This was a particularly heated phase of the insurgency, as Shiite Islamists under the leadership of the populist cleric Muqtada al-Sadr had also started to actively resist the occupation forces. It was not until the third, "national Islamist phase," beginning in spring 2005, that groups more narrowly focused on Iraq, such as the *Islamic Army in Iraq (al-Jaish al-Islami fi l-Iraq)* and the *1920 Revolution Brigades (Kata'ib Thaurat al-'Ashrin)*, were able to gain more public attention and emerge as competitors to Zarqawi's organization. During this period, the conflict between national Islamists and Jihadists intensified. By February 2006,

the fourth phase had begun. In this phase, which coincides with the national Islamist phase, the conflict has increasingly taken on characteristics of a civil war. The sectarian violence reached an initial high-water mark in spring 2006 following the bombing of one of the most important holy places for Shiites in Iraq, the Askariya shrine in Samarra, which houses the tombs of the Shiite Imams Ali al-Hadi and al-Hasan al-Askari, and it has persisted unabated ever since.

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1 *al-Hayat*, February 25, 2006.

2 *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 2004.

3 The message was entitled "Join the Caravan" *(Ilhaq bi-l-qafila).* The text and audio clip are available at www.tawhed.ws/a?i=249.

The Insurgent Organizations

Since the loss of influence of the Baathists in 2004, two camps have dominated the insurgency: national Islamists and Jihadists. The essential difference between them lies in their strategies and tactics. The national Islamist groups largely limit their activities to guerrilla warfare. One of the key goals of the Jihadists, on the other hand, is to provoke a sectarian civil war by committing frequent acts of terrorism. The main national Islamist groups are the *Islamic Army in Iraq* and the *1920 Revolution Brigades*. Frequent mention is also made of an organization called the *Mujahidin Army (Jaish al-Mujahidin)* which works closely with the Islamic Army, but little is actually known about this group. The Jihadists share the national Islamists' goals of driving the occupation forces out of Iraq and combating the new Iraqi state. But their agenda extends beyond the insurgency. They are particularly intent on broadening their struggle, though the exact goals are often not clearly defined. The main Jihadist groups are *al-Qaida in Iraq*[4] and *Ansar al-Sunna (Followers of the Sunna)*, a Kurdish-Iraqi organization.

Although divisions between the two camps became apparent in 2005, it is still difficult to clearly delineate between them. In part, this is due to the fact that all the organizations are largely made up of Iraqis, many of whom were members of the former army and security forces. Moreover, the overall structure of the insurgency makes even a purely analytical division difficult. Although the outlines of both camps have become more defined since 2005, the highly decentralized nature of the insurgency means that locally active groups often work together closely, making it hard to distinguish between them. For example, the *Islamic Army*, *Ansar al-Sunna* and the *Mujahidin Army* have repeatedly claimed joint responsibility for attacks.[5] Thus, the division into two camps presented here is preliminary and for analytic purposes. Only

further developments in Iraq will tell whether it is an enduring division.

To date, there are some 35 organizations involved in the insurgency that are known by name. Most of them became known in connection with claims of responsibility for attacks or demands related to kidnappings. The majority of these groups likely consist of no more than a few cells or a local group that has little influence on the insurgency as a whole.[6] Of the groups that are still relevant today, information is only available about the four largest and most publicly active of them.[7]

National Islamists

The Islamic Army in Iraq

Since 2004, the *Islamic Army in Iraq* has been one of the most influential and largest organizations of the insurgency. Indeed some observers claim it is the largest such grouping.[8] It is primarily comprised of Iraqis who were members of the former security forces, particularly the army. The group's political ideology is a mixture of nationalist and Islamist elements.

The organization emerged in early 2004 out of the shadows of the *Army of Muhammad*.[9] In the following months, a number of local cells and groups joined the Islamic Army, although detailed information about its

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4 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi renamed his organization several times since 2003, most recently to *al-Qaida in the Land of the Two Rivers*. To avoid confusion, this paper will consistently refer to the organization as al-Qaida in Iraq.

5 National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), Terrorism Knowledge Base, Oklahoma City, www.tkb.org/Incident.jsp?incID=23588.

6 Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iraqi Insurgency and the Risk of Civil War: Who Are the Players?* (Working Draft, Revised: March 1, 2006), Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), March 2006, 14, www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/060301_iraginsurgplayers.pdf.

7 On the whole, the quality of sources is poor because most information comes from the insurgents themselves or their opponents. As such, they tend to be for propaganda purposes. Thus, many details are unconfirmed, and our knowledge about the insurgency in Iraq is sketchy.

8 *al-Hayat*, May 2, 2006; Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 175.

9 The *Islamic Army* was reportedly founded in summer 2003. See *al-Hayat*, February 25, 2006.

structure is not available.[10] The main goal of the Islamic Army is to fight against the occupation forces and their local allies. The group's principal area of operation is central Iraq. Its strongest presence is in Baghdad and its surroundings, including strongholds in the south of the city and in the areas of Ramadi and Falluja.[11]

The organization has only committed a few major bomb attacks. It is mostly involved in classic guerrilla activities against military targets.[12] However, it has also been known to conduct targeted killings of representatives of the new Iraqi state. The effectiveness and professionalism with which the individual cells carry out the majority of their actions suggests that many members of the Islamic Army have received military training.

The trend towards the Islamization of the insurgency is especially apparent in the Islamic Army. Although it is considered a nationalist organization, the group's public rhetoric barely differs from that of the Jihadists, not least in the way they refer to their fight against the occupation forces as a *Jihad*, rather than as "resistance." They often make announcements that combine nationalist arguments with Islamist and Jihadist ones.[13]

The similarity to the Jihadists is also evident in the Islamic Army's tactics. For example, since the summer of 2004 the group has claimed responsibility for a number of high-profile kidnappings, some of which ended in beheadings. On several occasions, foreigners were taken hostage in order to pressure their governments to withdraw troops from Iraq. In July 2004, for example, the Philippine government pulled its soldiers out of Iraq after the Islamic Army had kidnapped a Philippine truck driver. Fearing that this would set a precedent, the Bush administration

strongly opposed the move, but the government in Manila withstood their pressure.[14] In fact, shortly thereafter, in August 2004, the organization took the Italian journalist Enzo Baldoni captive. He was subsequently killed after the Italian government refused to withdraw its troops. In a number of other cases, however, the Islamic Army has released its hostages.[15]

The Islamic Army purportedly subjects its captives to intensive interrogation with the intention of establishing their "guilt" or "innocence."[16] Thus, they claim to only execute people who have been "convicted" of supporting the occupation forces. This is clearly an attempt by the Islamic Army to differentiate themselves from the indiscriminate violence of the Jihadists. The tendency of the Islamic Army to vacillate between nationalist and Islamist positions is highlighted by another hostage taking incident. After seizing French journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot in August 2004, the Islamic Army demanded that France repeal its ban on headscarves. It was an unusual demand for the organization to make and one that provoked protests among Muslims living in France. In all likelihood, however, the kidnappers were probably more interested in the ransom money than having their political demands met. The two journalists were eventually released and they subsequently reported on the inner workings of the group. They confirmed that there are Jihadists active in the organization who are closely oriented to the ideology of Usama bin Laden's *al-Qaida*. At the same time, these elements work side by side with former regime elements.[17]

Although effective public relations is important to the Islamic Army, for a long time its website was less professionally designed than those of the Jihadists, in particular *al-Qaida in Iraq* and *Ansar al-Sunna*.[18] The followers of the latter two organizations have much more experience with information technology and also make use of the expertise of supporters abroad. In addition, Arab authors maintain that Zarqawi's organization was able to capitalize on the initial financial and organizational weaknesses of the Islamic

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10 A November 2004 newspaper article refers to Ismail al-Juburi as the organization's leader. See *Washington Post*, November 28, 2004. There is no additional information about him. In all likelihood, al-Juburi is probably just a regional commander.
11 *Washington Post*, November 28,2004; *New York Times*, October 23, 2005.
12 Letters claiming responsibility for attacks that are posted in various militant web forums support this interpretation.
13 One example is a statement on the elections held on January 30, 2005. See "The Islamic Army's Position on the Elections," www.tawhed.ws/r?i=3172&a=p. Similar arguments were made by *Ansar al-Sunna* and *al-Qaida in Iraq*. See, for example, "Statement on the Elections by Qaidat al-Jihad in Mesopotamia," www.qal3ati.net/vb/showthread.php?t=121268.

14 *New York Times*, July 21, 2004.
15 *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 2004.
16 Mahan Abedin, "Post-Election Terrorist Trends in Iraq," in: *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, 3 (March 10, 2005) 5: 1−4 (2), www.jamestown.org/images/pdf/ter_003_005.pdf.
17 Malbrunot published a journal of his captivity in the French daily *Le Figaro*. See *Le Figaro*, December 24, 2004.
18 At the end of August 2006, the website was accessible under www. iaisite.org.

Army (and the national Islamists in general) to claim responsibility for attacks that were actually carried out by these other groups.[19] Since 2005, the Islamic Army has been able to rectify the situation, and they are now among the most visible organizations in Iraq.

The 1920 Revolution Brigades

The *1920 Revolution Brigades* is probably somewhat weaker than the *Islamic Army in Iraq* in terms of personnel and operational capabilities. But, like the *Islamic Army*, it is primarily made up of members of the former security forces and it embraces both Iraqi nationalist and Islamist ideology.

The *1920 Revolution Brigades* is the only large organization that has a nationalist rather than an Islamist name. The 1920 revolution was a failed Iraqi revolt against the British occupation forces which still looms large in the collective memory of Sunni and Shiite Arabs alike. The organization emerged around the beginning of 2004.[20] It is frequently referred to as the armed wing of the *Islamic Resistance Movement (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya)*, but there is no evidence to prove this.[21] It seems the *1920 Revolution Brigades* is trying to appear part of a larger political organization in order to present itself as a potential negotiating partner. This, in any case, would be consistent with the group's overall alignment as the Brigades seems to be the most political of all the insurgent groups. The group reportedly has close ties to non-militant Sunni groups such as the *Association of Muslim Scholars (Hay'at 'Ulama al-Muslimin)*, which itself has strong links to the insurgents.[22]

There is not much information about the militant activities of the *1920 Revolution Brigades*. This is probably due to the fact that they are focused on low-profile guerrilla actions. They carry out their actions in a manner very similar to that of the *Islamic Army*, indicating that their members have had good military training.[23] The group was not involved in any of the numerous kidnappings that took place in 2004.

19 *al-Hayat*, February 25, 2006.
20 Ibid.
21 International Crisis Group (ICG), *In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*, Brussels/Amman, February 15, 2006 (Middle East Report No. 50), 3.
22 Another organization is the *Supreme Association for Propagation and Guidance (Hay'at al-Da'wa wa-l-Irshad)* headed by Sheikh Mahdi al-Sumaidi'i. See *al-Hayat*, February 25, 2006.
23 See, for example, *Financial Times*, February 1, 2005.

Jihadists

Ansar al-Sunna (Ansar al-Islam)

Some analysts consider *Ansar al-Sunna* the strongest of the insurgent groups.[24] It is the successor to *Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam)*, a Kurdish group that operated in the Kurdish autonomous region until 2003. Since July 2003, however, they have spread their activities to central Iraq and brought many Arab Iraqis into their ranks.

The forerunner to *Ansar al-Sunna* was founded in Iraqi Kurdistan in September 2001, originally under the name *Jund al-Islam (Soldiers of Islam)*. Initially they fought against secular Kurdish parties, such as the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP). *Ansar al-Islam* was a Jihadist organization with links to *al-Qaida* in Afghanistan. They managed to gain control of the region around the city of Biyara near Halabja in the southeast of the Kurdish autonomous zone in the mountains bordering Iran. Following the American and allied intervention in 2001, Arab combatants from Afghanistan also fled to this area. The region's nominally ruling Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by Jalal Talabani did not succeed in driving out the Islamists until March 2003 when they received American assistance. Some of the fighters fled to Iran. Iran's tolerance of these fugitives using its territory as a safe haven probably reflects Tehran's interest in maintaining influence in Iraqi Kurdistan.[25] By at least passively supporting Iraqi-Kurdish militants, Iran keeps an ace up its sleeve, a card they could play should the KDP and the PUK try to establish an independent state.

Ansar al-Islam fighters reappeared in Iraq beginning in July 2003. This was followed by the founding of *Ansar al-Sunna*, which was announced in September that year. Reliable information about the organization is scarce, so the relationship between *Ansar al-Islam* and *Ansar al-Sunna* is a matter of debate. Speculation that the two are actually one and the same organization is supported by the fact that since *Ansar al-Sunna* was founded, *Ansar al-Islam* has completely disappeared from the scene. All public announcements are now made exclusively in the name of *Ansar al-Sunna*. The group has a website in Arabic and Kurdish that is intermittently accessible and it publishes an online

24 Abedin, 2.
25 ICG, *Radical Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Mouse That Roared?*, February 7, 2003 (Middle East Briefing No. 4), 8.

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newspaper. Also, the current leader of *Ansar al-Sunna*, Abu Abdallah al-Hasan bin Mahmud, is presumably the same person as the former Kurdish leader of *Ansar al-Islam*, Abu Abdallah al-Shafi'i.[26]

Over time the organization has been able to recruit many Sunni Arabs, as its expanded radius of activity seems to indicate. *Ansar al-Sunna* focuses its activities in northern Iraq, particularly in Mosul, the country's second largest city. It also has a strong presence in central Iraq. For example, in 2003 and 2004, there were a number of *Ansar al-Sunna* cells active in Falluja and Baghdad.[27] Another area where many of the group's fighters are active is the so-called "Triangle of Death" south of Baghdad around the cities of Latifiya, Mahmudiya and Yusufiya. If Kurds had remained in the majority, this sort of expansion into the Arab heartland would have been impossible.

However, *Ansar al-Sunna* has failed to form an umbrella organization, which the group had announced it would do when it was founded. Over the course of the past few years, only small groups have joined the organization. In fact, the organization stands in the shadows of *al-Qaida in Iraq*, with whom it frequently cooperates closely and shares personnel. As a result, it is often hard to tell whether one of the cells or larger groups belongs to *Ansar al-Sunna* or *al-Qaida in Iraq*. There are cases in which leaders of certain groups or cells are attributed to both organizations. This is most likely due to the close operational contacts between locally active cells that have more or less identical goals.

There is no reliable information about the structure of *Ansar al-Sunna*, nor of the number and composition of its followers. Their operations encompass the entire spectrum of militant activities in Iraq, but they primarily engage in guerrilla attacks. In Jihadist web forums they regularly claim responsibility for a large number of such attacks against occupation troops and Iraqi security forces. Although it is usually impossible to determine whether they are really responsible for a particular incident, the list of targets, including military convoys and police stations, conveys an image of an efficiently operating organization with at least some members who have undergone military training. In addition to guerrilla actions, *Ansar al-Sunna* has also claimed responsibility for numerous suicide bomb-

ings, which are usually carried out by foreign nationals.[28] Their most devastating act to date was the twin bombings of the offices of the two leading Iraqi Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK, in Irbil in February 2004, which left several leading Kurdish politicians dead.[29] *Ansar al-Sunna* has also attracted considerable media attention for its role in several kidnappings that have ended in beheadings. Since 2005, however, the organization seems increasingly to have limited itself to guerrilla tactics and a few isolated bomb attacks.

al-Qaida in Iraq

Although it is the most well-known insurgent group, *al-Qaida in Iraq* is just one of the three largest insurgent organizations, along with the *Islamic Army* and *Ansar al-Sunna*. In marked contrast to the national Islamists, the organization frequently relies on foreign volunteers to carry out suicide attacks with car bombs and bomb belts. They are responsible for the majority of major bomb attacks, and they are trying to incite a civil war by specifically targeting Shiites.

Over the years the group has appeared under various banners. In the first months of 2004, they emerged on the scene under the name *al-Tauhid wa-l-Jihad*, and they quickly became the best known group in Iraq. It was thus surprising when Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Usama bin Laden's *al-Qaida* in October 2004, and renamed his organization *al-Qaida in Iraq*, though he maintained its operational independence. His objective in linking the organization to *al-Qaida* was primarily to gain access to the larger organization's financial resources and recruitment network in the Gulf region.[30] In the fall of 2005 he subsequently distanced himself from *al-Qaida* and went on to found an umbrella organization called the *Mujahidin Shura Council (Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin)* together with a few minor Jihadist groups.[31] But, at the end of April 2006, Zarqawi made it clear that this did not mean he had broken with Bin Laden's *al-Qaida*. In a video posted in the name of the *Mujahidin Shura Council*, Zarqawi called

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26 See, for example, *al-Sharq al-Ausat*, June 7, 2005.
27 See interviews with members of the organization conducted by the Spanish daily *El Mundo*. *El Mundo*, October 5, 2003.

28 An early list of suicide attackers can be found in *al-Hayat*, February 27, 2004.
29 *New York Times*, February 2, 2004.
30 For detailed information on this aspect, see *al-Hayat*, February 25, 2006.
31 *al-Hayat,* February 16, 2006. The original announcement of the founding of the organization was published under www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=47781.

himself Usama Bin Laden's "emir" in Iraq. Clearly the various name changes meant little to Zarqawi, who used the different nomenclature to further his short-term interests.

There is only scattered information regarding the size of Zarqawi's group. In the past, it has benefited from the fact that its public relations was more professional than its competitors', and it was able to create a media stir with its sensational attacks. This created the impression that Zarqawi was the dominant figure in the Iraqi insurgency. According to serious estimates, the number of followers of the Zarqawi group in Iraq is likely to be somewhere between just under 1000 and 2000 at most.[32] It is not known how many of these are foreigners, but a realistic guess would be in the low hundreds. On the whole, more than half the members of the organization are Iraqis.[33] This is supported by reports of arrests of leading members of *al-Qaida in Iraq*.[34] Moreover, *al-Qaida* operations indicate it has close ties to the local population, suggesting extensive Iraqi participation. The rapid establishment of the organization in the summer of 2003, the effectiveness and frequency of attacks, precise local knowledge, and the ability to acquire information about potential targets – all of this suggests that there is a large percentage of Iraqis in the ranks of *al-Qaida in Iraq*. Indeed, it is their links to the local community that enables members of *al-Qaida in Iraq* to avoid being captured by coalition troops and Iraqi security forces.

The group focuses its attacks on high-ranking politicians (usually Shiite), on institutions and troops that support US policy in Iraq, and on institutions of the international community. In 2004, Zarqawi gained notoriety for kidnapping Western citizens and video-taping their beheadings. The videos were subsequently posted on the Internet and spread around the world by Jihadists. One of the key characteristics of his organization's attacks is the way in which they are carefully "packaged and marketed" to Arab and Western media. This sort of media manipulation

enabled Zarqawi to increase the psychological impact of his actions.

Since 2005, Zarqawi's organization has tried to present itself as a truly Iraqi group as a way of bolstering its position within the country. The widespread perception that it is a foreign organization is problematic for them, particularly because of the strong nationalism of many Sunni Iraqis. This may be why Zarqawi declared in June 2005 that *al-Qaida in Iraq* had established a unit of suicide bombers made up exclusively of Iraqis. In addition, Zarqawi repeatedly emphasized how important the "liberation" of Iraq is to him, and he had an Iraqi appointed as leader of the Mujahidin Shura Council.[35] Following his death on June 7, 2006, reports that Zarqawi's successor is an Egyptian by the name of Abu Hamza al-Masri would seem to contradict this trend toward indigenization. But information about him is very contradictory. It appears as though he is not Zarqawi's true successor and that *al-Qaida in Iraq* does not want to announce the name of its new leader for security reasons.

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32 Cordesman, 28.

33 According to a Jordanian security agent, speaking with the Lebanese daily *al-Hayat*, published in the April 4, 2006 edition. See also U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, Washington 2005, 131.

34 Since 2005, those arrested have been almost exclusively Iraqis. See *al-Sharq al-Ausat*, February 6, 2006 and June 23, 2005. See also the lists published in *al-Hayat*, on February 10, 2006.

35 *al-Hayat*, April 27, 2006.

Overview of the most spectacular and deadly attacks in Iraq:
August 2003–February 2006

2003	
August 7	Car bombing by *al-Qaida in Iraq* in front of the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad
August 19	Car bombing by *al-Qaida in Iraq* of UN headquarters in Baghdad
August 29	Car bombing by *al-Qaida in Iraq* of leading Shiite politician Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim in Najaf
October 14	Car bombing by *Ansar al-Sunna* of the Turkish embassy in Baghdad
October 27	Suicide bombing by *al-Qaida in Iraq* of the headquarters of the International Red Cross and four police stations in Baghdad
November 12	Car bombing by *al-Qaida in Iraq* of the headquarters of Italian troops in Nasiriya
November 29	Spanish intelligence agents ambushed near Latifiya by *Ansar al-Sunna*
December 31	Car bombing in front of the Nabil restaurant in Baghdad
2004	
January 18	Car bombing in front of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad
February 1	*Ansar al-Sunna* conducts attacks on the offices of two Kurdish parties (KDP and PUK) in Irbil
March 2	*al-Qaida in Iraq* attacks Shiite civilians at the shrine of the Imams Husain and Musa al-Kazim in Kerbala and Baghdad
2005	
February 28	Car bombing by *al-Qaida in Iraq* of a line of people waiting to get into a hospital in Hilla (victims were primarily Shiite)
2006	
January 5	Suicide bomb attack by *al-Qaida in Iraq* against Sunni police recruits in Ramadi
February 22	Attack on the mosque housing the tombs of the Shiite Imams Ali al-Hadi and al-Hasan al-Askari in Samarra

Goals and Strategies

Goals and Visions of Political Order

The insurgents' goal is to drive out foreign powers from Iraq and prevent the establishment of a state dominated by Shiites and secular Kurds. Their alternative vision is one of an "Islamic state." While the national Islamists are focused exclusively on Iraq, the Jihadists' agenda also includes the fight against the governments of neighboring Arab states and beyond.

The insurgents agree on who and what they are fighting against, but they don't always concur on what they are fighting for. They are primarily concerned with securing a greater role for the Sunni population in a new political order for Iraq, notwithstanding the lack of clarity about what that order would look like. None of the larger groups calls for a return to the old Baath regime. On the contrary, the national Islamists have repeatedly distanced themselves from fugitives of the old regime, who claim to speak for the insurgents and insist on a leadership role in the insurgency.[36] The *1920 Revolution Brigades* and the *Islamic Army* are trying to distinguish themselves from Baathists and Jihadists, which should enable them to define their goals more precisely. However, this may lead to the departure of some Baathists or other followers of the old regime who had initially joined the ranks of the national Islamists and who now want to rejoin the Baathists.[37] Still, despite all the differences of opinion that emerged in 2005, all the insurgents remain unified over the goals mentioned above.

But the insurgents do not have a well defined vision of what sort of political order should be established in the event that the occupation is brought to an end and the new Iraqi state collapses. There are no details of what they believe a future Iraqi state should look like, apart from their demand that it be "Islamic,"[38] and they remain unclear on a range of issues, including,

for example, who should be head of state, what role religious scholars should play, and the extent of popular participation in decision-making. It is not even clear whether they are talking about a polity that encompasses all of Iraq or just areas that are predominantly Sunni Arab. One episode that provides a glimpse of what the insurgents' "Islamic state" might look like was when the *Mujahidin Advisory Council (Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin)* controlled the city government of Falluja from April to November 2004. Together with rebel groups present in the city, the council pushed through social codes that were much like those of Afghanistan under the Taliban.[39] However, the local Sunni population objected to these harsh rules and turned against the insurgents, in particular *al-Qaida in Iraq* and the foreign fighters. This marked the beginning of the outbreak of violent conflicts between national Islamist and Jihadist groups.[40]

Unlike the national Islamists, the Jihadists have an agenda that extends beyond Iraq, but their goals are frequently not clearly defined. This pursuit of a broader agenda is only somewhat true in the case of *Ansar al-Sunna*. The group's main goals are the withdrawal of American troops and the establishment of an Islamic state.[41] While the potential for them to engage in activities on a global scale is suggested by the links of their predecessor to *al-Qaida* and other Jihadists as well as their maintenance of a European logistics network,[42] to date there have been few signs of terrorist activities outside of Iraq. *al-Qaida in Iraq*, on the other hand, openly declares that its agenda includes goals beyond Iraq. Initially, Zarqawi had tried

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36 *al-Hayat*, April 3, 2004 and April 10, 2006.

37 There are already first indications of conflicts between national Islamists and Baathists within these groups. See *al-Hayat*, April 12, 2006.

38 On the demands of the *Islamic Army*, see *al-Hayat*, April 12, 2006. For a related statement from Zarqawi, see *al-Hayat*, April 27, 2006.

39 They introduced Koranic punishment for certain offences, women were only allowed to appear in public if properly veiled, and alcohol and music were forbidden. See *al-Hayat*, May 24, 2004; Hashim, 42f.; and *Washington Post*, October 13, 2004.

40 *Washington Post*, October 13, 2004.

41 The organization laid out its goals in its founding declareation, "Declaration of the leadership of the Army of the Helpers of Sunna," September 20, 2004, published under http://ansar-alsunnah.i8.com/Bayan_Sader.htm.

42 On the European logistics network, see Stefano Dambruoso (with Guido Olimpio), *Milano Bagdad. Diario di un magistrato in prima linea nella lotta al terrorismo islamico in Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004); *al-Sharq al-Ausat*, May 13, 2005.

to distinguish himself from bin Laden's *al-Qaida* by creating a transnational group of Jordanians, Palestinians and Syrians whose main objectives were to fight against the governments of their respective home countries and Israel. After he fled Afghanistan for Iraq, he had to refocus, and since 2004 *al-Qaida in Iraq* has called for the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq. The next stage in their plan is to fight a "holy war" in neighboring Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. And their ultimate goal is to "liberate" Jerusalem.[43] The redefined goals reflect the changed composition of the organization, which is now mostly made up of Iraqis, who are primarily focused on fighting the occupation troops and the new Iraqi state. Next in line are the volunteers who come from neighboring states. They are more easily recruited when one of the declared goals is to overthrow the governments of their home countries. Given this makeup, the way the organization has defined its goals makes sense.

Numerous attacks by Zarqawi's organization in Jordan show that he was clearly serious about fighting the regimes of the neighboring states. *al-Qaida in Iraq* also has logistics networks in Arab states and Europe that would enable them to go global with their activities. Whether things will ever reach that stage largely depends on how things develop with the insurgency in Iraq. They would be likely to take their fight abroad if U.S. troops and the Iraqi government succeeded in bringing the insurgency under control. But they might also be forced to shift their operations to a new area as a result of power struggles between the insurgent organizations.

Strategies and Their Implementation

While the national Islamists are essentially fighting a classic guerrilla war with only a few isolated acts of terror to their name, the Jihadists use terrorist attacks to specifically try to provoke a sectarian civil war. Guerrilla warfare is typically carried out by lightly or moderately armed groups that are highly mobile. They wear down their enemy – which is usually a conventional military force – over a long period of time through pin-prick attacks. Guerrilla forces tend to be larger than terrorist groups. Terrorism, on the other

hand, can be defined as violence against primarily civilian (but often also military) targets in order to create fear and be able to push through political objectives.[44] In practice, the difference between the national Islamists and the Jihadists is largely in their willingness to use violence against Iraqis in general and Shiites in particular.

The primary goal of the national Islamists is to liberate Iraq from the occupation forces and those now in power. To this end, they follow a dual strategy. First, they fight directly against the occupation forces and representatives of the new Iraqi state. Second, they maintain ties to Sunni politicians as a way of potentially reaching their goals through negotiations.

On the whole, the national Islamists are more restrained in their use of violence than the Jihadists. They repeatedly stress that they only kill Iraqis who collaborate with the occupation forces. By exercising restraint and issuing such claims, they hope to win the support of the Sunni population. Judging from their actions, it also seems likely that they would be willing to resolve the conflict through negotiations. The *1920 Revolution Brigades* have made public statements to this effect, but as a precondition for negotiations they demand recognition of the "resistance" and its leading figures as the only legitimate representatives of the Iraqi people.[45]

Another sign of the national Islamists' willingness, at least in principle, to negotiate is reflected in their close, if murky, ties to Sunni Arab political organizations. The organization thought to be closest to the national Islamists is the *Association of Muslim Scholars*, which was founded in 2003 shortly after the end of the war. They claim to be non-partisan representatives of the Sunnis and above day-to-day politics. While the exact nature of the relationship between the *Association* and the insurgents is unclear, it appears they maintain close contact with one another. This can be seen, for example, in the key role played by the *Association* in securing the release of numerous Western hostages since 2004. Furthermore, national Islamist groups followed the *Association's* call for a ceasefire during the referendum on the constitution held on October 15, 2005. The scholars had called on Sunnis to participate in the referendum in order to reject the constitution. They sternly oppose recognizing any political institutions in Iraq until the occu-

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43 This is according to a Zarqawi follower quoted in *al-Hayat* on September 10, 2004. Zarqawi confirmed this plan of action in a letter to Zawahari, a deputy of Usama Bin Laden, in summer 2005. See U.S. State Department, 132.

44 Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism. From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005), 33–36.
45 *al-Hayat*, April 3, 2004.

pation is over, and they have also maintained that Iraqis have the right to engage in armed "resistance" to U.S. occupation of their country. In doing so, the scholars have given a political voice to the insurgents' uncompromising demand for the withdrawal of American forces.[46] If national Islamist groups are integrated into the political process in the future, the *Association of Muslim Scholars* will surely insist on having a place at the table.

At the same time that the national Islamists have sought to not jeopardize their close ties to the Sunni population and their religious-political representatives, they have stepped up their anti-Shiite activities. Since the overwhelming majority of recruits to the army and security forces are Shiites, the increased attacks on these institutions by national Islamists fuel sectarian tension in the country. Moreover, in their all-out battle against the country's Shiite militias, they also end up attacking civilians. To this extent, there is not a great deal of difference between their strategy and that of the Jihadists.

The Jihadists aim to bring about the complete collapse of the Iraqi state. They are attempting to unleash a civil war by ratcheting up the tension between Sunnis and Shiites. Thus, for example, *al-Qaida in Iraq* attacks Shiite targets in an effort to provoke Iraqi Shiites into responding with assaults on Sunnis. This strategy was revealed in a letter from Zarqawi that American troops intercepted in January 2004. He argued that the insurgents need to create as chaotic an environment as possible in order to prolong the battle in Iraq. Zarqawi also expressed concern that the transfer of sovereignty planned for June 2004 could lead to the establishment of an indigenous security architecture whose forces would fight the insurgents with increasing effectiveness.[47]

The attacks carried out by *al-Qaida* militants since then, including murdering numerous Shiite politicians, show just how serious Zarqawi was in his comments. The assault that has caused the greatest stir was on Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, the leader of the *Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq* (SCIRI), in

August 2003. A car bomb exploded as Hakim was leaving the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, one of the holiest sites in Shiite Islam.[48] Zarqawi's followers have repeatedly attacked Shiite shrines and Shiite pilgrims gathered for important religious holidays. Other favorite Jihadist targets include the Shiite-dominated security forces and the lines in front of their recruiting centers. Zarqawi's organization has also attacked large gatherings of innocent civilians on a number of occasions.[49] He was rebuked for these assaults by the *Association of Muslim Scholars* and even from some Jihadist circles.

This did not dissuade *al-Qaida in Iraq* from continuing its strategy of inciting a civil war. In an audio clip released in September 2005, Zarqawi declared "all-out war" on Iraqi Shiites in response to a U.S.–Iraqi offensive near the Syrian border. He argued that the Shiite-dominated government under Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari had declared "all-out war" on Iraqi Sunnis.[50] But, in fact, the announcement was only a public declaration of a strategy that had begun to be implemented two years earlier. His announcement was particularly noteworthy inasmuch as the situation in Iraq in 2005 had changed. Up until then, the Jihadists had been unsuccessful at provoking representatives of the Shiites to fight back on a broader scale. Shiite religious and political leaders, especially the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, had called on the Shiite population to exercise restraint.[51] However, it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to control the Shiite militias.

The transitional government that came to power in April 2005 under Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari was dominated by Shiite Islamists. The post of Interior Minister went to Bayan Jabr al-Saulagh, a member of SCIRI and a former high-ranking leader of the Badr Brigade, the militia wing of SCIRI. Under Jabr the interior ministry's police force was increasingly infiltrated by Shiite militia forces. Paramilitary units of the interior ministry are particularly suspected of carrying out attacks on Sunnis.[52] In November 2005, US troops discovered an underground prison in Baghdad run by the interior ministry, where the detainees had been tortured.[53] This appeared to be a widespread

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46 Roel Meijer, "The Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq," in: *Middle East Report*, 237 (Winter 2005): 12–19.

47 The letter contained an announcement of plans to attack Shiite targets during commemorations of *Ashura*. The fact that the attacks did indeed take place is evidence of the letter's authenticity. Nevertheless, some commentators have expressed their doubt. The letter was published on the website of the Coalition Provisional Authority at http://cpa-iraq.org/transcripts/20040212_zarqawi_full.html.

48 *al-Hayat*, September 14, 2004.

49 *New York Times*, August 18, 2005.

50 ICG, *The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict*, February 27, 2006 (Middle East Report No. 52).

51 *New York Times*, February 1, 2005.

52 ICG, *The Next Iraqi War?*, 17–21.

53 *New York Times*, May 22, 2006.

practice, not just an isolated incident. In addition, the Badr Brigade and police units are thought to be responsible for murdering many Sunnis, particularly since spring 2005. The bodies of Sunni civilians killed by gunshots to the head have been found with increasing frequency in Baghdad and the "Triangle of Death." At the same time, the insurgents stepped up their attacks on Shiite militias and civilians.

The Jihadists' prospects for success are limited. While they might be able to unleash a civil war, they themselves would not gain support in the process. In fact, their national Islamist competitors have been gaining in popularity since 2005 because many Iraqis reject the Jihadists' wanton violence. The national Islamists have no real hope of seizing power from the Shiites and Kurds. But because of their relative restraint, they may well have an opportunity to play an important role within the Sunni population in the future. This would likely be the case, for example, if a Sunni region were created within an federal Iraq.

Conflicts between National Islamists and Jihadists

There are two observable trends since the transition from the Jihadist to the national Islamist phase of the insurgency in spring 2005. First, there has been a consolidation within both the national Islamist and the Jihadist camps. Each is trying to shore up its position within the insurgency, with the Jihadists, and *al-Qaida in Iraq* in particular, increasingly on the defensive. Second, the conflicts between the two camps have intensified. These latent conflicts, which are rooted in the camps' different strategies, had not erupted previously because of the overall similarity in their objectives. Recognizing these developments, the Iraqi and American governments have been trying since spring 2005 to drive a deeper wedge between the insurgents by holding talks with some national Islamist groups.[54] The angry reaction of the Jihadists, especially from Zarqawi, suggests that this could be a successful strategy.

In winter 2005/2006, the Jihadists attempted to create larger organizations through a process of consolidation. In some cases, the mergers were genuine, while others were simply media stunts. What lies behind these efforts is not entirely clear, but it is

probably related to the emergence of the two competing camps. Within the Sunni camp, opposition to the Jihadists' rampant use of violence has been growing since the elections in January 2005. Starting in summer 2005, the *Islamic Army*, the *1920 Revolution Brigades* and the *Mujahidin Army* began presenting themselves as alternatives to *al-Qaida in Iraq* and *Ansar al-Sunna*. For the many insurgents who are critical of Zarqawi's strategy and tactics, these organizations became a place that they could turn to.[55] *al-Qaida in Iraq* responded in January 2006 by forming the Mujahidin Shura Council, but its members appear to primarily come from *al-Qaida in Iraq*.[56] Moreover, *Ansar al-Sunna*, the other important Jihadist grouping, is not part of the new organization. All of this suggests that *al-Qaida in Iraq* is trying to claim a leadership role for itself, which, however, is not recognized by the other major insurgent groups.

The national Islamist camp is also experiencing a trend toward consolidation. This includes the long-standing *Islamic Front of the Iraqi Resistance (al-Jabha al-Islamiya li-l-Muqawama al-Iraqiya)*, which is primarily concerned with the media presence of the national Islamist groups. On its website, the *Islamic Front* publishes claims of responsibility for attacks as well as a monthly magazine called *Jami'*, an acronym of the organization's name.[57] The *Front* does not appear to be an independent group, but rather serves as a shared public relations organ of the *Islamic Army*, the *1920 Revolution Brigades* and the *Mujahidin Army*.[58] Though there has been no official merger of these groups, they are trying to create the impression that they represent a unified block. One way they achieve this is by addressing the public jointly. For example, the *Islamic Army* and the *Mujahidin Army* have had a joint spokesperson since July 2005, and they have announced their intention to merge.[59]

The conflicts between the Jihadists and the national Islamists erupted, on the one hand, because of their different positions on the political process, and, on the other hand, because of their choice of targets for attack. In October 2005, the national Islamists called for a ceasefire to enable the Sunni electorate to vote to reject the new constitution in a referendum. They also announced that they would refrain from attacks

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54 There is debate over which groups they have contact with. See *al-Hayat*, July 6, 2006.

55 *al-Hayat*, February 26, 2006.

56 *al-Hayat*, January 16, 2006.

57 See www.jaami.info/jm/.

58 *al-Hayat*, February 3, 2006.

59 *AlJazeera.net*, July 4, 2005 ("Iraq fighters name joint spokesperson").

against voters and polling places in the elections held on December 15. In response, the Jihadist groups, under the leadership of *al-Qaida in Iraq*, threatened to kill all Sunnis who enter into negotiations with the government or who participate in the elections.[60] As a result, the national Islamists organizations felt compelled to take up arms to prevent local branches of *al-Qaida in Iraq* from attacking voters. The first clashes between the groups erupted in the Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces.

Further conflicts ensued when local tribal leaders protested against the killing of innocent civilians by Jihadists. The conflicts escalated after many Sunnis participated in the elections and more and more young Sunnis registered to serve in the army and the security forces. In early January 2006, over 50 people were killed when two suicide bombers from *al-Qaida in Iraq* attacked a line outside of a police recruiting center in Ramadi.[61] Local tribal leaders had organized the registration drive, and some of them were allegedly among those killed.[62] In the weeks that followed, the number of armed clashes in the province rose, especially involving skirmishes between local branches of *al-Qaida in Iraq* and units of the *Islamic Army*.[63]

The fighting in Samarra was particularly intense. The brutal attacks on Shiites in the area especially caused an uproar because many of the local tribes are mixed tribes with both Sunni and Shiite members. The tribe members' first loyalty is, however, to their tribe, not their religious sect. The murder of the leader of the al-Bu Baz tribe, who had called for an end to the violence, was followed by months of violent skirmishes between the tribe and the local branch of *al-Qaida in Iraq*.[64] Another contributing factor to this and similar conflicts in the Sunni-dominated areas was that the tribal leaders increasingly felt their authority was being threatened by the insurgents. In many cases the tribes responded by forming militias in conjunction with the security forces. Within their tribal areas, these militias attacked the insurgents, receiving money and weapons from the government in exchange.[65] It is not yet clear how successful this strategy has been, and in particular whether the militias

also take action against national Islamist groups, which include many tribe members in their ranks. In any case, *al-Qaida* has lost influence in Anbar, and many members have relocated, heading first to the eastern provinces of Salah al-Din and Diyala and later to Baghdad.

Following the events in Ramadi in January 2006, the *Islamic Army*, the *1920 Revolution Brigades* and the *Mujahidin Army* released several statements in which they defined more precisely which groups of people they considered to be legitimate targets. For example, they prohibited the killing of Iraqis whose cooperation with the occupation forces was insignificant. Enlistment in the Iraqi police force was also declared insufficient grounds for execution. Instead, there must be evidence that the potential target was actively involved in a "conspiracy against holy warriors," and an execution order to carry out the attack must be issued according to religious laws.[66] In addition, the three groups also declared their opposition to Zarqawi's efforts to incite a civil war. In a joint statement issued in early February 2006, they distanced themselves from the attack on the Askariya shrine in Samarra. They declared furthermore that their struggle was against the occupation forces, not Shiite Muslims, and they warned against the outbreak of a "sectarian civil war" *(fitna ta'ifiya)*.[67]

But it is questionable whether the conflicts described above were only about differences over goals, strategies, and tactical methods. What is really at stake in these conflicts between various wings of the insurgency is power, with the most powerful insurgent groups fighting for the leadership of the entire movement.

60 "Joint Declaration of the Salafist Jihadist Groups in Iraq," posted at: www.islam-syria.com/vb/showthread.php?t=1979.
61 *Washington Post*, January 6, 2006.
62 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 26, 2006; *al-Hayat*, February 25, 2006.
63 *New York Times*, January 12, 2006.
64 *al-Hayat*, February 18, 2006.
65 *al-Hayat*, February 1, 2006.

66 *al-Hayat*, March 22, 2006.
67 *al-Hayat*, February 3, 2006.

Characteristics and Structures

Decentralization

The most important structural characteristic of the Iraqi insurgency is its high degree of decentralization. This is particularly apparent in the lack of identifiable leaders. The individual groups typically operate on a local, and only occasionally on a regional basis. While there are organizations that have formed since 2003 that have leaders, such as *al-Qaida in Iraq*, the *Islamic Army*, *Ansar al-Sunna*, and the *1920 Revolution Brigades*, the impression that these are unified organizations is in reality just a product of their public relations. The extent to which they actually control the local branches that act in their names is unclear. Often it appears as though the local branches maintain their operational independence, even after they have publicly joined larger organizations and act according to their strategic guidelines.[68]

The decentralized structure is in large part a reaction to the combat methods of U.S. troops and the Iraqi security forces. As long as the organizations are primarily organized in local and regional cells (comprising just a few persons) and groups (comprising a few dozen members) that only communicate with their leadership when they absolutely need to, it is exceedingly difficult to wipe them out. If an individual unit becomes inoperable, this generally has little impact on the other cells or the leadership. This makes it possible for the organizations to continue to act despite being heavily pursued by U.S and Iraqi forces. Indeed, they probably realize that a decentralized structure makes it easier for them to evade enemy attacks.[69]

This lack of an identifiable leadership is one of the key differences between the insurgency in Iraq and most other insurgencies. Generally, insurgent movements have had command headquarters and corresponding hierarchies, though sometimes not until after a "preinsurgency phase" of a few months.[70] This has led American terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman to label the Iraqi insurgency an example of a "netwar." The concept, introduced in a study published by the Rand Corporation in 1999, is a "speculative" model of the future of terrorism and insurgent movements. It describes an ideal-type of warfare between states and terrorist networks, which link together groups with flat hierarchies and present new types of threats.[71] According to the authors, this development is the result of a global trend towards networking, which finds its most visible manifestation in the spread of new means of communication. They regarded Usama bin Laden's *al-Qaida* as the most important example of this new type of threat.

This trend towards networking seems to have accelerated after 2001. In terrorism research this is often described as the transition of *al-Qaida* from an organization to an ideology or to an "ideological clearinghouse." In many of the attacks that have been carried out since 2003, *al-Qaida* does not appear to have been calling the shots. Nowadays the core organization limits its activity to spreading its ideology and objectives, while the local cells plan, organize and carry out attacks largely on their own initiative. This, for example, was the case with the attacks in London in 2005. It is often impossible to find direct links between local cells and the central organization. *al-Qaida* opted for this strategy from a position of weakness after its organization had largely been destroyed.

Given that the decentralization of the insurgency in Iraq is also a reaction to the strength of the enemy, the extent to which the concept of netwar truly represents a model for insurgencies of the future remains an open question. What is new, in any case, is the extent

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68 The best known example of this is a group in Falluja led by the Iraqi Umar Hadid, which joined Zarqawi in 2004. See Amatzia Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents? Sunni Arab Rebels in Iraq*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, April 2005 (Special Report 134), 12f, www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr134.pdf.

69 For evidence of this see, Hashim, 98f.

70 Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq,* Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, June 2004 (Occasional Paper), 16f.

71 "These protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed small groups who communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner, without a precise central command." John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, "Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism," in: Ian O. Lesser et al., *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1999) 39–84 [47].

of decentralization and the minor importance of hierarchical elements. The success that the insurgents have had with their decentralized structure in holding their own against the occupation troops will undoubtedly lead others to copy this approach in the future. Looking to the conflict in Iraq, *al-Qaida's* most influential strategic thinker, a Syrian by the name of Mustafa al-Sitt Mariam (a.k.a. Abu Musab al-Suri), developed a doctrine calling for the decentralization of Islamist terrorist activities.[72]

The Iraqi insurgency not only lacks any type of central leadership, it also has no recognizable core that one could expect to take on a leadership role in the future on a national scale. Both Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and leading members of the Baath Party have been considered potential candidates for such a role, but the position still remains vacant. Up until his death in June 2006, Zarqawi was perceived by the Western public as the leading figure of the insurgency, and the U.S. government and many commentators consider Zarqawi's *al-Qaida in Iraq* the insurgency's most dangerous outfit.

Washington reportedly tried to discredit the insurgents by playing up the role of Zarqawi, a Jordanian, and the other foreign fighters. Highlighting foreign involvement in the insurgency was a way of playing on the strong sense of nationalism among many Iraqis.[73] And, indeed, given the nationalist character of the insurgency, it is unlikely that an organization led by a non-Iraqi could succeed in assuming the leadership of the movement. However, there are also no indications that any of the national Islamist organizations are prepared to take the helm.

Meanwhile, some members of the old regime have staked a claim to a leadership position. Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, the former Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council and a confidant of Saddam Hussein, made statements to this effect which were posted on the Internet and distributed in flyers.[74] This lends credence to the repeated reports of fugitive Baath Party leaders guiding and financing the activities of insurgents, sometimes from within Syria. But their role appears to be limited since the end of the Baathist phase of the insurgency.

Since early 2004, none of the larger groups associates itself with the former ruling party, the old

regime, or even Saddam Hussein, who has been completely discredited. All groups, including even those with a large number of members who were involved in the old regime and the Baath Party, have been subsumed into the broader insurgency. In the process, they have augmented their original nationalist ideology with Islamist elements.[75]

Areas of Operation

The insurgency is not operating throughout the entire country; rather it is largely limited to Baghdad and the west and northwest of the country. The Kurdish and Shiite regions in the north and south are rarely affected. Since 2005, the conflict has taken on elements of a sectarian-based civil war. This has been accompanied by an intensification in insurgent activity in provinces in central Iraq with a mixed Sunni and Shiite population. Over the course of 2006, this has led to an escalation of sectarian tension and the violence in the country has been stepped up.

The insurgents primarily operate in predominantly Sunni areas in central and northern Iraq. The area between the cities of Baghdad in the east, Ramadi in the west and Tikrit in the north has since become known as the "Sunni Triangle." Beyond this area, the insurgents are also active as far north as Mosul (Iraq's second largest city), as far west as the Syrian border, and as far as Baquba, east of the Tigris. Some groups also operate in the area south of Baghdad, a mixed Sunni-Shiite region which has been called the "Triangle of Death" by the media since 2003. In sum, the insurgents are primarily active in four provinces: Anbar (capital: Ramadi), Salah al-Din (capital: Samarra), Niniwa (capital: Mosul) and Baghdad. The majority of attacks take place in the capital, where around six million of the somewhat more than 27 million Iraqis live. Since 2005, the number of violent acts has especially increased in areas with mixed Shiite-Sunni populations in the Diyala and Babil provinces, and above all in Baghdad. In spring 2006 the capital increasingly became the focal point of the insurgency.[76]

The insurgents have failed to establish a notable presence in the areas of Iraq where Shiites and Kurds make up the majority. The safest region is the Kurdish

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72 Abu Musab al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (Arabic), publication location unknown, 2004, 54.
73 *Washington Post*, April 10, 2006.
74 *al-Hayat*, April 12, 2006.

75 On the incorporation of the Baathists into the insurgency, see U.S. State Department, 130.
76 *al-Hayat*, April 21, 2006 and May 12, 2006.

autonomous zone in the northeast, which is ruled by the PUK and the KDP. Since 2003, only a few attacks have occurred in this region. Things are relatively peaceful and the security situation is also stable. The insurgents have also only had sporadic success in carrying out attacks in southern Iraq. This makes it clear just how reliant the insurgents are on support from sympathizers, who are overwhelmingly found among Sunni Arabs.

So far, the insurgents have not attempted to control large areas due to the superior force of the U.S. army. However, they have on occasion tried to hold their ground in smaller areas, for example in the city of Falluja between April and November 2004. After the Americans aborted their attack on the city in April, the insurgents established their own city government together with the *Mujahidin Advisory Council*. The majority of fighters fled the city when the Americans launched a second assault on Falluja in November. But more than a thousand of the likely 3000 insurgents stayed to fight in street battles and were ultimately wiped out.[77] Their attempt to stand up to a superior enemy was subsequently regarded by the insurgents as a major tactical mistake. As a result, since then the insurgents always withdraw quickly when the Americans attack. As soon as the military presence in the city is drawn down, which is unavoidable due to the small overall number of American troops, they trickle back into town. This tactic has meant that, since 2004, U.S. troops have repeatedly regained control over cities in central Iraq, only to be confronted again by insurgents shortly thereafter. This is precisely what happened in Samarra, where American troops took the city in September 2004 and once again in March 2005. During the assault on Falluja in November 2004, the insurgents were able to flee to the neighboring cities of Ramadi, Samarra and, somewhat further afar, Baquba. At the same time, some groups set up in parts of Mosul and stepped up their activities in and to the south of Baghdad. The upshot is that the siege of Falluja only served to displace militant activities to other areas.

One area of retreat that is particularly important is the region bordering Syria in the northwest of Anbar province and in the west of Niniwa province. Many insurgents relocated to this region in the fall of 2004,

where densely-populated areas along the Euphrates proved particularly suitable as a safe haven. U.S. troops responded in the fall of 2005 with two offensives around the cities of Tallafar in the north and Qaim in the south. Their attempts to gain control over these towns and regions made sense, though they came late. Tallafar and Qaim are both at the end of the line for routes from Syria. These routes, used by travelers and smugglers alike, is how the vast majority of foreign fighters enter the country. The American assaults, however, resulted in the insurgents once again retreating to new areas of operation, this time closer to Baghdad.

Syria has, at least intermittently allowed foreign fighters to cross its borders into Iraq, making it the main entry point for them since 2003. Fighters from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Syria and even North Africa and Europe head to Iraq via Damascus and Aleppo, where they find contacts to the insurgents who can provide hideouts for them and organize the trip on towards Iraq.[78] The journey through Syria is a logical choice because there are already established smuggling networks operating in the border regions. The smugglers are often members of tribes that live on both sides of the border. Moreover, it is very easy to go hide out in the villages along the Euphrates. There are two reasons for this. First, there are inhabited swathes of land all along the banks of the river as it flows from Syria into Iraq. Second, the insurgents enjoy considerable support on both sides of the border. The route across the Jordanian and Saudi Arabian borders is riskier, as there are large uninhabited areas that need to be crossed, making it easier to be discovered.

It is impossible for Syrian border agents to completely control the border. The government in Damascus also does not act very consistently in this regard. On the one hand, they tolerate the movement of people along the border. On the other hand, they take action against those supporting the insurgents whenever the U.S. government turns up the pressure on them.[79] On the whole, however, Syrian agents are still less likely to pursue insurgents than their Turkish, Jordanian and Saudi counterparts. Even if the number of fighters infiltrating Iraq via Syria has declined as a result of American actions in the border

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[77] Paul Rogers, *Iraq and the War on Terror. Twelve Months of Insurgency 2004/2005* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 79. However, the numbers vary considerably depending on the source and only serve as rough estimates.

[78] *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2003; Hashim, 137, 141, 149.
[79] In response to pressure from the U.S., Syria extradited several high-ranking former Baath party leaders to Iraq in February 2005. See *al-Sharq al-Ausat*, February 28, 2005.

Map of Iraq: Provinces and the Region
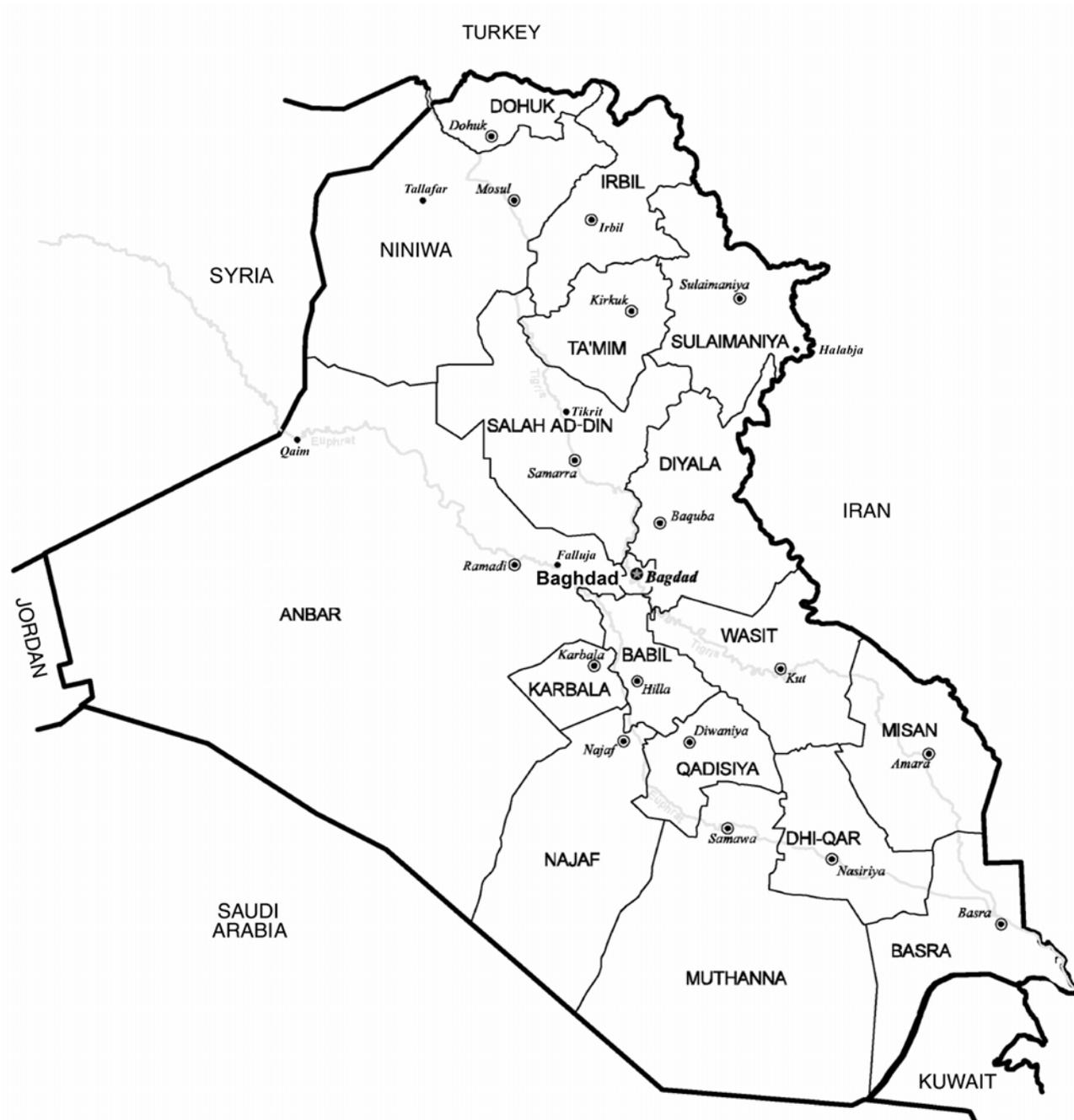
regions of Anbar province, it is unlikely that this development will hold for long.[80]

Financial Sources

There is only a smattering of reliable information about how the insurgents are financed. The decentralized structure of the insurgency is also reflected in the modalities of how it is financed and the channels of finance. All the large groups receive donations from neighboring countries (Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) and from sympathizers within Iraq. In

80 *Financial Times*, February 8, 2006; *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 2005.

addition, the insurgents often finance themselves by engaging in criminal activity, such as robbing supply convoys and cars and kidnapping people for ransom.[81] Even though some organizations have financial difficulties now and then, it appears that on the whole the insurgents have enough funds to finance their activities for years to come.[82]

One important advantage for the insurgents is that weapons, munitions and explosives are cheap and readily available in mass quantities in Iraq. The Baath regime had set up numerous decentralized arms depots in the nineties, most of them located in the Sunni west. Although U.S. troops have uncovered many of these depots since 2003, the majority of them had already been looted by Iraqis or they are still in existence. In addition, the former members of the army and security forces kept their handguns when they were discharged in spring 2003.[83]

In addition to the arsenals mentioned, the Baath regime also left behind a large amount of cash in the hands of former regime elements. Although many of these people have been captured and hiding places for the money have been discovered, the insurgents still have access to funds from these sources. According to American and official Iraqi sources, former members of the Baath regime living in neighboring countries, particularly Syria, provide funding to insurgent groups.[84] This is probably true, but it is hard to prove. What is clear is that the network of Baathists in Syria has been considerably weakened since Damascus handed over leading members of the network to Iraq in spring 2005. Thus, it is questionable how important this source of money still is for the insurgents.

The Jihadists also receive money from abroad. Both *al-Qaida in Iraq* and *Ansar al-Sunna* receive donations via a logistics network in the Arab world and Europe. The money is typically transported in a suitcase by a courier via Syria. It also appears that foreign fighters often travel to Iraq with donations from their home countries. In particular, volunteers from the rich Gulf states are reported to bring large sums of money with

them.[85] It is unclear whether there is also money coming from the Gulf states in a more systematic manner. The widespread approval in the Gulf region of the insurgents' actions suggests that large sums of money are being sent from there to Iraq.[86] In the past, money from the Gulf region flowed to Afghanistan. Now Iraq has become a key recipient of their largess.

The Number of Fighters

The number of insurgents is generally estimated to be between 20,000 and 30,000, including foreign volunteers.[87] While a few sources place the number at a maximum of 50,000, the lower estimates are more realistic. Estimates of over 20,000 also include "part-time" fighters, who have civilian jobs and participate in insurgent activities after they get off work. The higher estimates include members of criminal groups that carry out contracts for the insurgents. Those quoting numbers over 50,000 are also including sympathizers of the insurgency. Even though no reliable information on the matter is available, it is safe to assume that many Sunni Arabs are sympathetic to the insurgents.[88]

The number of insurgents is one of the most controversial issues in the context of research on the insurgency. This is because, among other things, the American military does not have any reliable estimates itself and the numbers are a politically explosive issue. Low estimates begs the question why the quantitatively superior U.S. troops are incapable of bringing the insurgency under control. High estimates, on the other hand, could lead to the accusation that the U.S. army is exaggerating the problem in order to mask their own battlefield shortcomings. Since 2003 the U.S. government has repeatedly increased its estimates. At the end of 2003,

81 *al-Hayat*, April 4, 2006; Cordesman, 11.

82 Cordesman, 9f.

83 *al-Hayat,* April 10, 2006. On the importance of the weapons depots*, see Rogers,* 137f.

84 Daniel N. Glaser, Congressional Testimony before the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, July 28, 2005, http://financialservices.house.gov/media/pdf/072805dg.pdf; *New York Times*, October 22, 2004.

85 Cordesman reports of sums ranging from $10,000 to $15,000. Cordesman, 67.

86 Privately, some Kuwaitis report that there are large sums of money flowing from their country to the Iraqi insurgents. Interviews with the author in Kuwait, December 2005.

87 Cordesman, 63.

88 Michael Eisenstadt quotes opinion surveys that were conducted in Sunni areas in 2004 and 2005. Between 45% and 85% of those surveyed reported that they support attacks on U.S. troops. See Michael Eisenstadt, "The Sunni Arab Insurgency: A Spent or Rising Force?," in: *PolicyWatch/Peace Watch* #1028 (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy), (August 26, 2005), www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2362.

the numbers presented by the U.S. military were between 2000 to 7000. By the end of 2004, they were already talking about a hard core of 8000 to 12000, which, it was said, could swell to upwards of 20,000.[89] Many estimates in the literature are basically just the average between the American and Iraqi numbers quoted here.

Washington security expert Anthony Cordesman noted in a study on the insurgents that their absolute numbers are of only secondary importance. What is more important for measuring their strength is whether and to what extent they are capable of withstanding loses.[90] But here too there are only rough estimates available.[91] Although the insurgents have suffered great losses on a sustained basis in their fight against the occupation forces, this does not appear to have had a serious negative impact on their capabilities. All counter-insurgency measures seem to only have a temporary effect on the activities of the insurgents and on the security situation.

The insurgents appear to not have any problems recruiting new fighters. This can be seen, for example, by the number of suicide bombers that have blown themselves up in car bombings. In 2004, there were 133 such attacks. This rose to 411 by 2005.[92] On top of that come the attacks carried out using explosive belts. Apart from suicide attacks, *al-Qaida in Iraq* is known to have lost over 100 fighters in 2004-2005.[93] Despite these setbacks, the organization's followers continue to be able to conduct attacks and keep the organization from being destroyed. In all likelihood this is only possible because of the considerable decentralization of the organization and a continuous flow of volunteers.

89 International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Strategic Survey 2004/2005* (London: Routledge, 2005), 177; U.S. State Department, 131.
90 Cordesman, 4f.
91 *Iraq Index. Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, Washington: Brookings Institution, September 21, 2006, 16, www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf.
92 On these numbers, see Ibid., 18.
93 A list can be found in: Briefing with Major General Rick Lynch, Spokesman, Multinational Force Iraq, Combined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, November 10, 2005, www.mnf-iraq.com/Transcripts/051110b.htm.

Motives and Origins of the Insurgents

Who Are the Indigenous Fighters?

90 to 95% of the insurgents are Iraqis. The majority of them, though by no means all, served in the army or the security forces under the old regime. This is particularly evident in the military professionalism of many attacks.[94] There are four main motives driving the insurgents, and these are becoming increasingly intertwined: first, former members of the army and security forces feel marginalized in post-war Iraq; second, nationalism; third Islamism; and fourth criminal motives.

After 1991, the old regime was fearful of revolts by Shiites and Kurds. They were also concerned that the Republican Guard or the army might attempt to overthrow the regime in a coup. As a result, Saddam Hussein increasingly relied on Sunnis for his protection and that of his regime. Key positions within the security apparatus were increasingly assigned to people from the region of Tikrit, Saddam's hometown. Many of them were members of his tribe (al-Bu Nasir) or members of his family. Newly established special forces, such as the Special Republican Guard, the special services of several secret service agencies and "Saddam's Fedayeen," a militia-like force, also preferred to recruit personnel from the Sunni-dominated provinces. These forces were considered especially loyal, and in all, there were tens of thousands of them.[95] During the U.S. invasion in spring 2003 these units rapidly disbanded. They suffered few losses since they did not play an important military role. But the closer the followers of the old regime stood to Saddam Hussein, the less likely they were to get off to a new start in the new Iraq after 2003. Their situation was further complicated by the decision of the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, L. Paul Bremer, to disband the army and all security agencies and carry out radical "De-Baathification." The result was that several hundred thousand men lost their source of income as of May 2003. Many Sunnis lost all hope of finding a way to make a living in the new state, which they viewed as being dominated by Shiites. It is therefore no surprise that many of them joined the insurgency. On the other hand, demobilized Shiites, who had actually made up the

94 Rogers, 10f. (and 124).
95 Sean Boyne, "Inside Iraq's Intelligence Network, Part One," in: *Jane's Intelligence Review*, (July 1997): 312–314 (312f).

majority of the military, only rarely went over to the insurgents' camp.

However, it is by no means just members of the old regime who are participating in the insurgency. Many Iraqis were also motivated by nationalist sentiments to join it.[96] These insurgents main motive is to resist the American presence in Iraq. They were opposed to the coalition forces from the outset, and subsequently decided to take part in the insurgency. Their individual motivations vary. One key factor is the failed plans for the reconstruction of Iraq and the poor security situation. Many Iraqis did not turn to the insurgency until it was clear that the U.S. government was incapable of delivering on its promise of a prosperous Iraq. This was especially true for the Sunni population, which already regarded itself as the losers in the post-war order. In many cases there were also personal motives. American troops arrested tens of thousands of Iraqis on suspicion of participating in the insurgency, and they often conducted themselves poorly in carrying out their sweeping arrests and in the interrogations that followed. The Abu Ghraib scandal is but one particularly blatant example of how the U.S. military has treated Iraqis. In addition, American troops frequently used their superior firepower in battles against the insurgents, leading to high civilian casualty rates. This has made revenge an important motive for many supporters of the insurgents.[97]

Many of the insurgents have an Islamist outlook, and today Islamist ideologies dominate the discourse of all the large groups.[98] Since the early nineties, there has been a tradition of militant Islamism among Iraqi Sunnis, which the insurgents have been able to tap into. Shortly after the end of the war in 2003, a few Islamist cells were already active in the Sunni triangle,[99] where they apparently worked closely with former regime elements. In fact, the latter began to appropriate Islamist rhetoric. This was initially evident in how they named their groups. For example, the most influential organization during the Baathist phase called itself the *Army of Muhammad*. At first glance, it is surprising that former regime elements would adopt Islamist ideologies, given that the Islamists were among the most vehement opponents of the secular Baath party, for which they were often

brutally suppressed. But party ideology had already begun to fade in importance in the eighties, as Saddam attempted to emphasize the religious legitimacy of his rule. Many young Sunnis were influenced by the increasingly Islamic discourse in the nineties. They now see no contradiction in the insurgents' odd mix of nationalism and Islamism.[100] The Islamization of the intra-Iraqi conflict has been accompanied by an increasing split along sectarian lines.

The criminal element is also a key contributing factor to the insurgency. Crime in Iraq has risen dramatically since spring 2003, and in the eyes of many Iraqis it is a more urgent problem than the threat from the insurgents. According to American estimates, some 80% of all violent attacks in the country have crime as their underlying motive, with the rest being politically motivated.[101] While this is likely too high an estimate, it highlights the fact that parties involved in a civil war or conflicts resembling civil wars often resort to criminal activity as a source of money. For example, there has been a wave of kidnappings for ransom throughout the country, and it has shattered the confidence of many Iraqis in the ability of the occupation powers and the government to protect them. The high crime rate is probably also being fueled by the country's catastrophic economic situation. The unemployment rate is officially 28%,[102] but it is probably considerably higher. Resentment is running particularly high in Sunni areas, where unemployment rates of over 50% are not unusual.[103] Added to that is the widespread collapse of governmental institutions that occurred during the invasion that have yet to be rebuilt. The insurgents take advantage of this situation by offering to pay individuals to sabotage infrastructure or carry out attacks, especially involving roadside Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).[104]

Who Are the Foreign Fighters?

The percentage of foreign combatants among the insurgents is somewhere between 5% and 10%. Their

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96 Toby Dodge, *Iraq's Future. The Aftermath of Regime Change*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005 (Adelphi Paper 372), 47 and 55.

97 For an example, see *al-Hayat*, Februray 25, 2006.

98 ICG, *In Their Own Words*, 5 and 15f.

99 *al-Hayat*, February 26, 2006.

100 Baram, 9f.

101 *New York Times*, October 22, 2004.

102 According to an official estimate from July 2004. U.S. Defense Department, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, Report to Congress, October 2005, www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2005/d20050721secstab.pdf

103 *New York Times*, June 20, 2004.

104 *New York Times*, October 28, 2003 and October 22, 2004.

importance is above all related to their willingness to volunteer for suicide missions. Suicide attacks get the most public attention, and most of them are committed by foreign nationals. They are also an especially important tactic of *al-Qaida in Iraq*. It appears that Saudis and Syrians form the largest contingents of suicide bombers, though in the course of 2005, there was increasing evidence of the involvement of more and more Egyptians and other North Africans.

The influence of foreign fighters on events has been disputed since the beginning of the insurgency. When it became apparent in late summer 2003 that a large number of foreigners were participating in the conflict, U.S. government authorities stressed their importance. It was not clear until sometime in 2004 that they probably made up less than 10% of all the insurgents. The first hints came during the second battle of Falluja in November 2004. At the time, the American military reported that only a small portion of those captured were foreign nationals,[105] though these numbers are hardly conclusive given that many insurgents had already fled the city prior to the attack. Nevertheless, there are further indications that the number of foreign fighters is low. For example, the figures of foreign prisoners that are published from time to time also suggest a proportion of less than 5%.[106] Current U.S. military estimates put the numbers at somewhere between 500 and 2000 foreign fighters.[107]

But, as in the case of the total number of insurgents, the actual number is not what really matters. What matters is whether the insurgents succeed in recruiting large numbers of fighters from abroad in order to support the indigenous militants and compensate for losses. Press reports on the recruitment of Arab youth throughout the region and in Europe suggest that the flow has not been stemmed, even if the overall numbers remain limited. It is questionable what impact the growing threat of persecution in Arab states is having on the situation. Since 2003, logistic networks that smuggled fighters into Iraq have been uprooted in several Middle Eastern and North African countries, with many volunteers having

been arrested in their home countries or en route to Iraq. Nevertheless, it appears that security agencies in many Arab states are not taking decisive action against the recruitment of combatants. They would rather see militant Islamists leave their countries to go fight in Iraq, where it is thought that sooner or later most of them will be killed or taken prisoner. Thus, it seems it was the American offensives in fall 2005 in the Syrian border region that were primarily responsible for reducing the number of fighters infiltrating Iraq, rather than the willingness of the Syrian government to cooperate. However, in such cases, the insurgents are probably able to find alternative routes into the country.

The suicide attacks by foreign fighters have drawn the attention of the international community to the Iraqi insurgency. But reports have been circulating since 2005 of an increase in the number of Iraqi suicide bombers. For example, Zarqawi announced that *al-Qaida* had established an Iraqi unit of suicide bombers.[108] In reality, they are probably responsible for fewer than 10% of the attacks,[109] and proof Iraqi involvement is very rare.

There is a lot of scattered information about the background of the foreign fighters. One of the sources is lists of "martyrs" that are posted on Jihadist websites. Israeli terrorism expert Reuven Paz analyzed one of these lists in March 2005 and came to the conclusion that of the 154 Jihadists killed in the previous six months, 61% were from Saudi Arabia and 10.4% came from Syria. Apart from a few Iraqis (8.4%) and Kuwaitis (7.1%), casualties from all other nationalities ranged from only one to four.[110] In an updated list from September 2005, the figures were similar, although the total sum of fighters killed had risen to over 200.[111] But, these are likely to be distorted figures since these lists were compiled by Saudi Jihadists, who are especially knowledgeable about the biographies of Saudi and Kuwaiti fighters. Still, the trend is clear and numerous other reports support the observation that Saudis and Syrians are playing an important role in

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105 Hashim, 139.

106 Of the more than 10,000 suspected insurgents taken into custody in October, only 312 were foreign nationals. *New York Times*, October 21, 2005. See also Rogers, 89.

107 IISS, 182; *Iraq Index*, 18. The U.S. State Department estimates in its terrorism report that 4% to 10% of the roughly 20,000 insurgents are foreign nationals. See U.S. State Department, 131.

108 Associated Press, June 21, 2005.

109 Cordesman, 61; *Time Magazine*, October 17, 2005; *New York Times*, October 21, 2005.

110 Reuven Paz, *Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: An Analysis*, Herzliya, Israel: The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), March 2005 (PRISM Series of Global Jihad, No. 1/3), www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_1_vol_3_ _Arabs_killed_in_Iraq.pdf.

111 "The Names of the Arabic Martyrs in Iraq," (Arabic), www.minbar-islam.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=236.

the insurgency. While Saudis made up a large part of *al-Qaida's* foot soldiers in Afghanistan, the high number of Syrians indicates the existence of a strong Islamist underground in Syria.

Since 2005, evidence has been mounting of a more balanced distribution of nationalities among the foreign fighters. It is increasingly clear that the insurgency in Iraq is contributing to the radicalization of young Muslims throughout the Arab world and is attracting volunteers from across the region.[112] In addition to Egyptians, Sudanese are well represented among the insurgents, despite only rarely showing up on the lists posted on the Internet. This is corroborated by statements made by the U.S. military regarding the nationalities of foreign fighters captured in Iraq. The number of Egyptians is often the highest cited, and there are also many Sudanese.[113] Yemenis are also strongly represented, which is consistent with the scattered information about militants who have left Yemen.[114] Over the course of 2005, the percentage of Algerians, Tunisians and Moroccans rose rapidly, with Algerians representing the lion's share from this region.[115] While earlier numbers suggested that the volunteers came primarily from directly neighboring states, it appears that the area of recruitment has expanded since then.

The foreign volunteers join different groups. Although they are generally associated with *al-Qaida in Iraq*, some also fight for *Ansar al-Sunna* and for national Islamist groups. The fact that even national Islamists groups are now attracting Islamists from abroad is further evidence of the increasing Islamization of the insurgency. Moreover, there are likely to be at least some foreign fighters who are critical of *al-Qaida in Iraq* because of the organization's attacks on Muslims and civilians. The group's reputation was especially damaged by attacks it carried out on hotels in Amman in November 2005. It seems that even some Jihadists found the killing of some 60 Arab Muslims unacceptable.[116]

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112 *Iraq Index,* 19.

113 According to official figures, of the 312 or so foreign nationals taken into custody between spring and fall 2005, 78 came from Egypt, 66 from Syria, 41 from Sudan, and 32 from Saudi Arabia. See *New York Times*, October 21, 2005.

114 *Washington Post*, November 11, 2004; Hashim, 42.

115 *al-Hayat*, April 4, 2006. According to (unreliable) statistics from the Brookings Institution, Algerians make up as much as 20% of the foreign fighters; *Iraq Index*, 19.

116 On the reaction to the attacks, see Guido Steinberg, *The Amman Suicide Bombings: On the Strategy of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,* Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, November 2005 (SWP Comments C 51/05), 3, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?asset_id=2624.

Dividing the Insurgency?

Thus far, the U.S. government's counterinsurgency efforts have favored a strategy of repression over cooperation. They have attempted to completely destroy the insurgent groups without alienating the Sunni population too much in the process. At the same time they are trying to build up the Iraqi security forces, but success in this venture has been equally poor. A cooperative strategy, on the other hand, would aim at identifying legitimate demands of the insurgents and attempt to include rebel supporters into the political process.[117] Since the end of 2004, the U.S. has tried to combine both of these counterinsurgency strategies. They have made overtures to the national Islamists in an effort to integrate them into the political process through the use of negotiations. But the primary objective of this approach is to widen the rift between the national Islamists, the Jihadists, and the remaining Baathists over the goals and strategies of the insurgency. The ultimate goal is to divide the insurgency.

In spring 2005, the U.S. government tried to get Sunni politicians, who had by and large boycotted the elections of January 2005, to participate more actively in drafting a new constitution. During this time, as the national-Islamist phase was getting underway, the differences between the insurgents were becoming more apparent. According to the Arab press, the ceasefire called by the national Islamists for the duration of the referendum in October and the elections in December 2005 was the first fruits of negotiations between insurgent groups and the Iraqi government and the Americans.[118] Clashes at the time between *al-Qaida in Iraq* and the national Islamist organizations were probably related to the latter's willingness to negotiate. In any case, the ceasefire showed that the national Islamists were ready to refrain from armed conflict in order to achieve political goals. It makes sense, then, that U.S. representatives on the ground and the Iraqi government sought a dialogue with them.

Talks with the insurgents became more formalized in the months that followed. At the "National Reconciliation Conference" organized by the Arab League in November 2005 in Cairo, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani presented an offer to negotiate with the insurgents. He declared in very general terms his willingness to begin talks. At the end of April 2006, Talabani's office officially confirmed for the first time that negotiations with representatives of insurgent organizations were under way.[119] In June 2006, the new Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki presented a plan for national reconciliation which offered amnesty to the national Islamists. The offer appears to be first and foremost an effort to divide the insurgents.

No reliable information is available on the details of the talks that have taken place thus far. It seems probable that they are being conducted at least in part with representatives of tribes whose members are active in the insurgency. Other participants include Baathist organizations and, according to statements of Sunni politicians, the *Army of Muhammad*.[120] There is considerable debate about whether the large national Islamist groups are also participating. The *Islamic Army* has repeatedly denied being involved and declared that they are only willing to negotiate after the occupation has ended.[121] Representatives of the *Association of Muslim Scholars* have also denied reports of participation in the talks by the *Islamic Army*, the *1920 Revolution Brigades* and the *Mujahidin Army*.[122] But sources close to the government report that it is precisely these groups that are in contact with Talabani.[123] Given these contradictory pronouncements, it is too early to draw any conclusions about the negotiations.

The *Islamic Army's* frequently angry reaction to reports about the talks show that the public debate about this issue is enough to spark conflict among the insurgents. Reports about Baathists having split from the national-Islamist organizations in winter 2005/2006 could be the first signs of the disintegration of this camp. From today's vantage point, it is not clear whether the attempt to drive a deeper wedge between national Islamists and Jihadists by offering to negotiate will actually lead to a division of the insurgency.

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117 Hashim, 322f.

118 *al-Hayat*, February 25, 2006.

119 *Washington Post*, May 3, 2006.

120 *al-Hayat*, May 2, 2006.

121 *al-Hayat*, April 12, 2006.

122 *al-Hayat*, May 2, 2006.

123 *al-Hayat*, May 1, 2006.

Conclusion: From Insurgency to Civil War?

Over the course of 2005 and even more so since spring 2006, the insurgents have been increasingly confronted by Shiite militias and have responded to their encroachments with great brutality. More and more, it is innocent civilians who are the victims of these sectarian skirmishes. Whether or not this constitutes a civil war depends on how the term is defined. One definition of civil war that is consistent with the situation in Iraq comes from Peter Rudolf: "the organized use of violence on a large scale between different groups within one state. Such conflicts may be between a government and armed forces directed against it, or between groups fighting in a state of anarchy."[124] Still, the Shiites continue to act relatively cautiously. But as Shiite perpetrators of violence abandon their restraint in reaction to attacks by insurgents, the violence is intensifying. The trend towards conflict along sectarian and ethnic lines has become increasingly apparent since spring 2005, and the more the insurgent groups carry out operations in mixed Shiite-Sunni areas, the stronger the trend becomes. Negotiations with these groups are an important step in efforts to quell the violence, but it is questionable whether this will succeed, not least because of the decentralized structure of the insurgency. This results in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence that the individual organizations cannot control.

U.S. efforts since spring 2005 to integrate Sunni groups into the political process are unlikely to change this situation. Despite the fact that the new government under the leadership of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is a "government of national unity" in which Sunni parties are also represented, the lines of conflict are still present. The lack of willingness to compromise among the majority of the actors has thus far militated against finding a solution that is acceptable to the Sunnis. If this is true of both the Sunni parties in parliament, the Iraqi Consensus Front and the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue, it is even more true of the insurgents. It seems therefore certain that the "organized use of violence" will continue to shape events in Iraq in the coming years. So far the insurgents have been adept at responding flexibly to changes in Iraq's political system and new combat tactics. This is likely to remain the case in the future, leaving no end in sight to the insurgency.

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124 Peter Rudolf, "Bürgerkrieg," in: Dieter Nohlen and Rainer-Olaf Schultze (eds.), *Lexikon der Politikwissenschaft*, Vol. 1, 3rd ed., (Munich: Beck, 2005), 92.