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# *The Impact of the War in Iraq On the Global Jihad*

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**T**HE UNEXPECTEDLY QUICK FALL OF SADDAM HUSSEIN and the collapse of his government created a vacuum in Iraq that has attracted a steady flow of terrorist volunteers to the country. Furthermore, the dismantling of Iraq's military forces and the subsequent deterioration of the security situation there has triggered the emergence of fundamental conflicts and disputes along ethnic, tribal, and religious lines. Various jihadist groups—some old, some new, and comprised predominantly of Sunni Arabs—have since rapidly turned post-Saddam Iraq into a new battleground.

For Islamist and terrorist ideologues in the Middle East and elsewhere, the insurgency in Iraq has presented a golden opportunity. They have sought to consolidate, direct, and reinforce the insurgency and to reinvigorate militant and radical Islam around the Muslim world by elaborating a new set of ideas about the meaning and purpose of jihad. This new ideology potently combines several elements, including:

- Anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism. These sentiments are shared across a broad range of Arab publics and have been inflamed by the War in Iraq. The new ideologists of jihad have sought to exploit this outrage to rally popular support for both the insurgency and for militant activities elsewhere.
- Radical interpretations of the Islamic doctrine of apostasy and religious excommunication or *takfir*. In this ideology, Muslims that are perceived to collaborate with America and other “infidel” powers—for example, by enlisting in Iraqi security services, or by participating in elections—are declared to be the same as enemy combatants, and are to be treated as such. Recently, this ideology has focused Islamist and terrorist animosity on a “core triangle” of “apostate” Arab regimes deemed to have forsaken Islam—Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

- Viewing the struggle in Iraq as a “return home” to the heart of the Arab world for Muslim fighters after years of struggle in “exile” in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Central Asia. In this view, Iraq is seen as a staging point in which Muslim holy warriors could consolidate their power, and ultimately mount a larger offensive in the hopes of one day purifying all Islamic lands of “infidel” and “satanic” influence (*jahilyya*).
- Promoting the idea of the “ummah” not simply as the worldwide community of faithful Muslims, but as a political and strategic unit. This idea is promoted by Islamist ideologues to enforce ideological and organizational solidarity and uniformity among large Muslim publics that are otherwise disconnected linguistically, culturally, and nationally. This has been facilitated in particular by the Islamist’s increased use of the Internet, which they have employed quite effectively to recruit sympathy and new fighters for the insurgency throughout the Arab and Muslim world, including from Muslim communities in Europe.

Taken together, this new ideological matrix has enabled Islamist leaders to amass a significant level of support and sympathy for the Iraqi insurgency—and especially among Muslim youth, who have increasingly voiced their approval not only for the insurgency, but also for the Islamist’s overall political aspirations in the region and throughout the Muslim world. In turn, this new ideology of jihad has had a significant impact on the organization, activities, and mindset of Islamist terrorist groups in the Middle East and on the political culture of the Global Jihad in general.

### The Ideological Development of Global Jihad

Since the outset of the War in Iraq, Islamist scholars, clerics, and intellectuals have led a massive campaign to reinterpret the meaning and purpose of jihad. This ideological movement represents a shift toward what we might call the “second” and even “third generation” of Al-Qaeda and Islamist terrorism. It also marks a shift away from the Egyptians and toward the Saudis as the leading ideologues of the Global Jihad. If we were to map these ideological developments, we would point to four influential figures, each representing four successive stages:

- Dr. Abdallah Azzam—a Palestinian who introduced the doctrine of jihad to the Afghan Mujahideen and their Arab supporters, and who created, along with Osama bin Laden, the original strategy for Al-Qaeda.

- Dr. Ayman Zawahiri—an Egyptian who contributed to the development of Al Qaeda's ideology in Afghanistan by introducing the principles of the jihadi experience in Egypt. Zawahiri was a key ideologue behind the consolidation of the doctrines of the Taliban and the attempt to create the only true and purified or Salafi Islamic state in modern times in Afghanistan.
- Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi—a Palestinian who combined the doctrines of the *Jihadi Salafiyyah* with the most severe principles of Saudi Wahhabism, thus creating the *Tawhid wal-Jihad* that operates in Jordan and nowadays in Iraq, and has inspired several Islamist movements elsewhere. One of al-Maqdesi's most loyal disciples, Abu Anas al-Shami, a Jordanian of Palestinian origin, was the leading inspiration of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, until his death in Fallujah in October 2004. Another Palestinian partner of al-Maqdesi, Omar Abu Omar (alias Abu Qutadah), who is presently imprisoned in the United Kingdom, was the leading ideological figure of Al-Qaeda in Europe.
- Sheikh Yousef al-Ayiri—the Saudi scholar and commander of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, who was killed in June 2003 by the Saudi police. Al-Ayiri's ascendance as the major theorist of jihad in Iraq represents a distinct shift in the global jihadi ideology to Saudi hands. Two of his Saudi associates are trying to fill his place—Sheikh Fares Bin Ahmad al-Zahrani (alias Abu Jandal al-Azdi) in Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Abu Omar Seyf in Chechnya. The latter is the leading Islamist ideologue of the Arab battalion of volunteers in Chechnya. Another figure that should be noted is Sheikh Hamed al-Ali, a Saudi who lives in Kuwait.

Even though he was killed over a year ago, Sheikh Yousef al-Ayiri should be regarded as the leading architect of the jihad in Iraq and in other regions as well. Between 2000 and 2003, al-Ayiri authored about 40 books and many long articles in Arabic on the strategy and purpose of jihad. These publications appeared only on the Internet and were not signed. Al-Ayiri himself remained anonymous to most of the world until his death, and only in the past year have the holy warriors and other participants in Global Jihad come to recognize his writings. Unfortunately, the significance of his work for the insurgency in Iraq and elsewhere remains largely underappreciated in the West and by Western intelligence communities.

In August 2003, al-Ayiri published a book titled *The Future of Iraq and the Peninsula After the Fall of Baghdad*. In that book, al-Ayiri explains that the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Iraq is a "blessing for Islam and Muslims." Had the

Ba'ath been able to resist the Infidel invasion, al-Ayiri argues, then the secular Ba'ath ideology would have been strengthened in the hearts and minds of Muslims overall, with devastating consequences for Islam and the future of Islamist ideology in the region. But since the American victory over the Ba'ath, al-Ayiri explains that the most dangerous enemy of Islam in the region is the heretical and corrupting ideology of democracy. "One of the most wicked aspects of secularism is democracy," he writes, "which cancels the authority of the Shariah on the society and which is in total conflict with it in form and substance. God Almighty has stated that there is no governing but by God. Democracy, however, says that governing is done by the majority of the people."

In al-Ayiri's view, the ideology of democracy is on the ascendant in Muslim lands because the majority of Muslims have forsaken the Islamic duty of holy war. He therefore enjoins all true Muslims to heed the Islamic obligation of jihad, and to wage a total and violent holy war against the forces of democracy. In a later publication, "The Crusader War Against Iraq," al-Ayiri elaborated his view of the struggle in Iraq and its significance for Islam's larger global conflict with democracy. He says "the importance of the war in Iraq is not because a brother Arab country is attacked by the United States, but because Iraq is just one link in the chain of attacks to follow." Therefore, he says, "if the Mujahideen do not resist in Iraq, they are going to fail in the future aggressions" and, ultimately, in the overall ideological conflict between democracy and Islam.

### The New Strategy of the Global Jihad

On July 1, 2004, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service translated a document titled "The Mujahideen's Roadmap." Signed by the Abu-Hafs al-Masri Brigades, an Islamist group affiliated with Al-Qaeda, the roadmap asserted that:

the Americans, Jews, and the Crusader West are our enemies and are combatants. They must be killed wherever they are caught.... Combat is today the individual duty of every Muslim man and woman, as the ancestor *ulema* agreed. If the enemy enters a single inch of the Muslims' land, then it becomes the Muslims' duty to fight until they get the enemy out. Let a million or more die in the battlefield and let those remaining live in dignity and freedom, as this is better than having them die in the dialogue and humiliation field and the remaining ones live in humiliation and be the slaves of the Christians and Jews.

The declaration "let a million [Muslims] or more die in the battlefield"

should remind us of the Algerian uprising in the 1950s against the French. The expressions of outrage in the Arab world following the invasion of Iraq seems to feed off of these “old demons” and deep-rooted feelings of dishonor and humiliation. Islamist ideologues will continue to appeal to these sentiments, and it is reasonable to assume that they will continue to work to unify the Arab world’s diverse Islamist and terrorist groups at both the doctrinal and organizational levels.

Uniting these disparate groups is clearly one of the principal strategic objectives for the new ideologists of Global Jihad. The roadmap calls on all mujahideen “to enlarge the circle of the (Islamic) struggle by distributing the operations all over the world.” This entails ramping up Islamist indoctrination and recruitment efforts not only in support of the Iraqi insurgency but also to incite militant Islamist activity in other countries. The roadmap calls on the mujahideen to employ new tactics to achieve their goal of expanding the global jihad—in particular, to “form small organizations under different names” so as to “make it difficult for the enemy to discover and hunt them down” and to “scatter the security organs’ efforts.” It also calls on holy warriors to learn how to use computers and the Internet, and to employ such technologies to “ignite a psychological war against the enemy.” This is intended not merely to repel foreign forces from Iraq, but to “drag the United States into a third quagmire after Iraq and Afghanistan.” (The document singles out Yemen as a possible arena for future conflict.) All of these efforts are undertaken in hopeful anticipation of a larger strike against the United States homeland, possibly with weapons of mass destruction—a strike that will “make the United States yield or break its will and leave its agents so that we can settle accounts with them.”

Central to this strategy of proliferating new Islamist fronts is the promotion of radical doctrines of *takfir*—or religious excommunication of Muslims deemed to have departed from Islamic belief. In the new jihadi ideology, this applies to all those who have adopted beliefs deemed antithetical to the Islamist cause. As the roadmap states, “Arabs and Muslims who support [the Crusader West] are considered to be like them and must be killed because they are apostates.” This view was recently expressed by Abu Musab Zarqawi, who called for “an all-out war on this evil principle of democracy and all those who follow this wrong ideology.”

This new ideology of Global Jihad has significantly altered the so-called “red lines” of what constitutes legitimate forms of jihad. For one, it has led to widespread violence against all Muslims who willingly accept or collaborate with pro-democratic forces (e.g., the Shi’a) in Iraq. The beheadings of both

Muslim and non-Muslim civilians, for example, have also become a widespread phenomenon in Iraq. These barbaric acts were carried out by various Islamist groups, all of which operated under different names. Each execution was videotaped and, within hours, circulated around the Internet by Islamist websites and other forums. In September 2004, for example, propagandists for Al-Qaeda and Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in Iraq posted a "movie" containing footage of several executions on various websites that sympathize with the jihad. Thousands of Muslim youngsters, mainly in the Arab world, have publicly stated their support for the beheadings of innocent Turks, Egyptians, and Nepalese, not to mention hundreds of Iraqis, whose only "sin" was looking for employment.

Such tactics as beheadings and suicide-bombings in Iraq have gained increasing support from a growing number of Islamist clerics in the region. Prior to the war in Iraq, Islamic clerics debated the legitimacy of suicide or "martyrdom" operations, but the battleground in Iraq has escalated this debate and given it a new pitch. Today, many Islamist clerics sanction suicide operations, and if there is debate over what constitutes legitimate tactics, it is largely over the legality of beheading, kidnapping, the killing of Muslims, or of committing such terrorist acts outside of Iraq.

### Assessing the Regional and Global Impact

The new ideology of jihad has had a dramatic impact on the security situation in the Middle East and elsewhere. Following the American siege of Fallujah in November 2004 and the occupation of most of the city in early December 2004, it became increasingly difficult for Arab governments to silence the growing anti-Americanism and popular support for the mujahideen in Iraq. Groups and individuals that had previously voiced their opposition to the September 11 attacks, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or various Wahhabi clerics from within the Saudi religious establishment, have recently begun to voice their support for war against the American forces. In November 2004, for example, a group of 26 senior clerics in Saudi Arabia formally declared that the struggle against America in Iraq was a jihad. The Saudi government gave their silent approval to the declaration, which has the binding authority of a fatwa. Moreover, Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradhawi, the leading authority of the international Muslim Brotherhood, gave his sanction to the jihad against the United States and its allies in a press conference in Cairo, without any reaction from the Egyptian government. More recently, in February 2005, Qaradhawi published a poem on his website that calls on all Muslims to recognize that the forces of apostasy and hypocrisy are gathering,

and that the “struggle [against them] has become obligatory” for all members of the Islamic Nation.<sup>1</sup>

These developments signal a doctrinal and organizational rapprochement between the Saudi government and mainstream Wahhabism on the one hand, and the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood on the other. This has created two big blocks of Islamists in the Sunni Arab world—the violent Jihadi Salafiyyah, and the mainstream (*Wasatiyyah*) Ikhwani-Wahhabi. While the latter was composed largely of groups that did not officially practice terrorism, they have made an exception in their ideology for issues concerning Israel and the Jews, where all forms of terrorism, including suicide bombings, have been explicitly sanctioned.

At the same time, the new theory of jihad has also led to considerable friction within Saudi Arabia, and especially among the Saudi religious establishment. Al-Ayiri’s takfiri-influenced ideology splits significantly from the present generation of radical Islamist scholars and their Saudi mentors of the Wahhabi reform movement, led by Dr. Safar al-Hawali and Sheikh Salman al-Awdah. Hawali and al-Awdah, who were once mentors of Osama bin Laden, were recruited in the past year by the Saudi government to defend the Kingdom against the extremists who used the war in Iraq to start a terrorist campaign on Saudi soil. As a result, a tremendous crisis among the Saudi Islamists has emerged. So far, it appears that a significant portion of them have sided with al-Ayiri’s strategy of fomenting jihad in Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

In addition to Saudi Arabia, new ideological conflicts and fronts in the Global Jihad have emerged in Arab and Middle Eastern countries—for example, in Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey. Outside of the Middle East, the War in Iraq has also broadened opportunities for ideological indoctrination and recruitment, especially in Central Asia, the Caucasus, in Southeast Asia, and among Muslim communities living in the West.

Surprisingly or not, the Islamist militants have failed to gain much influence in Egypt, perhaps as a result of the “iron fist” that the Egyptian authorities have employed in handling the Islamist phenomenon during the past 20 years. Another important example where the war and the radical Islamists have had little influence is Algeria. While there is improved cooperation and heightened mutual influence between Algerian and Saudi radical groups, this has not yet seriously affected the struggle within Algeria. According to some reports, there are indications that traditional Islamic scholars in Yemen have had some surprising successes in refuting the new ideology of jihad and dissuading many would-be Islamists from taking up arms in Iraq and elsewhere in the region.<sup>2</sup>

The Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been largely unaffected by the War in Iraq and the new ideology of Global Jihad. This is due in part to the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004, which opened new prospects for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. For many there is renewed hope that this could lead to progress toward a political solution to the conflict. There has also been a constant decrease in Saudi support for Hamas, especially in the financial realm, as a result of American pressure and legislation against terrorist financing. Furthermore, the killing of Hamas leaders Sheikh Yasin and Dr. Rantisi in Gaza decreased the influence of the Jordanian and international Muslim Brotherhood on Hamas. Hamas's new leadership, including Khaled Mish'al and Mousa Abu Marzouq, are influenced more by secular, not Sunni-Islamist, ideologies. Finally, and most importantly, the anarchy in the Palestinian Authority has enabled Hizballah and its backers in Iran to exercise increased influence in the region. Since neither of these Shi'ite elements is part of the Sunni-led Global Jihad, and since they pursue very different Islamist agendas, the radical Sunni ideology of al-Ayiri and others has had up until now minimal impact in Gaza and the West Bank.

Throughout the Sunni world, it seems that the Iraq insurgency has inherited the role of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the primary concern of Islamist militants and as the major factor contributing to Muslim anti-Westernism. In a way, Iraq has become the most important criterion for carrying out terrorist operations even outside Iraq. Examples include the attacks in Madrid in March 2004 and in Jakarta in early September 2004. In a declaration published on Islamist websites in Arabic on September 10, Indonesia's Jama'ah Islamiyyah stated clearly that the bombing nearby the Australian embassy in Jakarta was meant as a lesson for the Australian government, which participates in the "war against our brothers in Iraq." Other terrorist strikes that were thwarted in Europe, as well as threats made against such countries as Italy, Denmark, and Honduras, were all made against the background of the War in Iraq.

Possible future developments that we should keep in mind are the emergence of other Islamist fronts in Turkey, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Thus far, there has been limited support for the Global Jihad among Turks, but Turkey is not invulnerable to ideological penetration. The gruesome terrorist attacks in Beslan and against two airplanes in Southern Russia by Chechen terrorists and their Arab supporters were not explicitly linked to the War in Iraq and the new ideology of Global Jihad. Yet, it should be noted that the leading Islamist authority of the Arab volunteers in Chechnya has published several articles in support of the jihad in Iraq, and has attempted to link both

the Chechen and Iraqi struggles together within an overarching, global Islamist framework. Moreover, the increased influence of Wahhabi radical groups in Central Asia should be a paramount concern, and may well add further fuel to the fire.

### **Madrid: The New Ideology of Global Jihad in Action**

The most significant terrorist attack that took place on the background of the War in Iraq was the horrifying bombings in Madrid on March 11, 2004, which resulted in 190 persons killed and over 1400 wounded. For the ideologues and strategists of the Global Jihad, Europe has become one of the most important fronts.

On December 8, 2003, following a deadly attack against the Spanish troops in Iraq in which seven intelligence officers were killed, the jihadi “news agency” Global Islamic Media (GIM) published a more explicit threat, which hinted at the possibility of an attack within Spain. Titled “A Message to the Spanish People,” the message attempted to play on the humanitarian sympathies of the Spanish people, arguing that while the Iraqi people suffered greatly under Saddam’s rule, they continue to suffer under American “liberation” and occupation. Therefore, any country that assists the United States in occupying Iraq was guilty, and should be fought. The message severely attacked the then Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar as a “war criminal.”

The most detailed and explicit statement against Spain’s involvement in Iraq was authored by elements of Qa`idat al-Jihad, and appeared in December 2003. The analysis is found in a 50-page booklet, titled *The Iraqi Jihad, Hopes and Risks: An Analysis of the Reality and Visions for the Future, and Actual Steps in the Path of the Blessed Jihad*. The book was published on Islamist websites under the name, “The information institution in support for the Iraqi people—the center of services for the Mujahideen.” The booklet’s introduction presents its argument as a follow-up to a book written in the beginning of 2003 by the above-mentioned Sheikh Yousef al-Ayiri.

About eight pages of *The Iraqi Jihad* are dedicated to Spain. They include a detailed analysis of Spanish politics, including the personal ambitions of then Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, and of the political struggle between the right and left wing parties in the upcoming parliamentary elections on March 14, 2004. The book attempted to show how the Spanish government could be forced to withdraw its forces from Iraq; how the Spanish government’s support for the United States could be decreased through popular pressures; how to ignite opposition in Italy and Poland to the presence of their troops in Iraq; and how to create pressures within the United

Kingdom against the alliance of their government with the Americans. The book advanced the theory that each of these European governments would withdraw its support of the War in Iraq in a kind of domino effect after an attack on Spain.

The subsequent bombings in Madrid should teach us the lesson that we are dealing with people and groups that mean everything they write or say. Even though they are capable of using deception and disinformation, knowing how each new audiocassette affects Western intelligence services, the West should listen more carefully to their hinted threats and not neglect any piece of writing. The Madrid bombings proved the sophistication of European Islamist groups, the amount of weapons they can obtain, and their access to chemical materials. It is increasingly likely that these groups will attempt to obtain and use weapons of mass destruction.

The Madrid bombings were unique in the framework of jihadi terrorism, and not only because of the written threats that preceded them. The Moroccans that carried out the Madrid attacks were linked to The Moroccan Group for Da`wah and Combat—a sister group of an Algerian faction by a similar name. In the past year, it appears that a common takfiri doctrinal approach has emerged between these radical North African groups and the Iraqi and Saudi Jihad groups. In Iraq and Saudi Arabia, the adoption of these takfiri doctrines has led to a violent and non-compromising Islamist fight against government and elements of civil society. The ability of the new jihad ideologists to recruit among takfiri Moroccan networks in Europe, using the Iraqi issue, should be of central concern for Western policymakers dealing not only with Iraq, but also with homeland security.

### **Muslim Resistance to the Global Jihad**

**T**he answer to the new ideology of Global Jihad that has emerged from the War in Iraq lies primarily within the Muslim world itself. The process of radicalization creates a larger distinction between, on the one hand, the radical Islamists, and on the other, those Islamic doctrines and trends that do not advocate the violent radical jihadi line. Though this larger process has now only begun, it might as it unfolds produce a moderate Islamic answer to the problem of radicalism.

The United States and its Western allies should pay more attention to these moderate Islamic elements and seek to promote them, either in their own countries, or through their policy vis-à-vis the Muslim world. The role that ideology plays in radical and terrorist groups is immense, and must not be neglected by the West. Ultimately, however, curtailing this phenomenon

must come from within the Arab and Muslim world. The final answer to Islamist radicalism will come not through democracy simply, for this could probably, as it has in the past, lead to Islamist states, as occurred in 1989 in Algeria. Rather, the answer will come from moderate Muslim elements who challenge these radical phenomena from within the Muslim world.

Dr. Sa'd Bin Tefla, a journalist and the former Minister of Information in Kuwait, recently wrote an excellent article in which he posed the question: "Where are the Fatwas Against bin Laden?" In his article he compared the lack of a fatwa against bin Laden to the fatwa that called for the killing of Salman Rushdie. He concluded his article by saying:

But let us put aside the [subject of the] fatwa. Have any protests been held condemning bin Laden's actions in any of the Islamic capital cities? Perhaps there were some that demonstrated in his favor. The [Muslim] satellite stations competed amongst themselves in broadcasting his sermons and fatwas, instead of preventing their dissemination as they did in the case of Rushdie's book. Have we earmarked a reward for anyone who kills bin Laden as we did for anyone who kills Rushdie on account of his book? With our equivocal stance on bin Laden we from the very start left the world with the impression that we are all bin Laden.

Only when such self-critical voices are heard more often in the Arab world will the problem of radical Islamism and terrorism be seriously confronted. Until then, the insurgency in Iraq will continue to serve the Islamists, who unfortunately benefit from increasing support from Arab Muslim youngsters who are attracted to the apocalyptic nature of the radical Islamist discourse that preaches Global Jihad.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.qaradawi.net>, translated by MEMRI, special dispatch series No. 858, February 4, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, "Koranic duels ease terror" by James Brandon, *Christian Science Monitor*, February 4, 2005.