AQAM FUTURES PROJECT
CASE STUDY SERIES

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AL QAEDA IN IRAQ
by M. J. Kirdar

Executive Summary

Founded in October 2004, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) emerged from a transnational terrorist group created and led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The original iteration of the group, Bayat al Imam, began in Jordan in the early 1990s. The group first associated with al Qaeda's senior leadership in 1999 and fought alongside al Qaeda core and the Taliban during the U.S. strikes in Afghanistan in late 2001. Shortly after, the group transferred to Iraq in anticipation of the U.S.-led invasion. From 2003 through 2007, the group galvanized the Iraqi insurgency until its high-profile, divisively brutal tactics and failure to deliver meaningful gains to its nominal constituents led to a reversal in its popularity. The death of Zarqawi in 2006 has been followed with a series of successful counterterror strikes against his successors. Nonetheless, the group has proven resilient and though its activities are greatly diminished since its operational peak in 2007, it has proven still capable of carrying out high-profile attacks, particularly against soft targets.

The Al Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM) Futures Project is a joint study undertaken by the CSIS Transnational Threats Project and the CSIS Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Program. The initiative will produce a series of alternative futures regarding the state of AQAM in the year 2025 and generate recommendations to defeat the threat over the long term. Drawing on historical analysis, social science research, expert interviews, and targeted fieldwork, this project will provide to policymakers and strategists a vision beyond the next few years and will consider the trends and shocks that may shape AQAM over the next decade and a half.

This case study is one of several examining the historic evolution and future prospects of al Qaeda and its range of affiliated groups. The purpose of the case studies is to determine the key drivers that have influenced a terrorist group's trajectory over time. Ultimately, these drivers, in conjunction with additional supporting analysis, will be used to inform projections about the future of al Qaeda and its affiliates.

Key Judgments

Emergence of the Zarqawi Network: 1993–December 2001

- *Leadership.* Zarqawi created, directed, and propelled the creation and rise of the group that would eventually become AQI. The loyalty his charismatic persona engendered among recruits and his instinctive organizational, operational, and strategic skills were instrumental to the group's emergence.

- *Terrorist patron.* The initial provision of funds and organizational/training space provided by al Qaeda core leadership, in addition to its early recognition of the group's potential, facilitated AQI's growth from a small terror cell into a transnational terrorist force.

Transformation into AQI: Early 2002–Summer 2006

- *Foreign intervention.* The U.S.-led invasion and subsequent occupation provided the raison d'être for AQI, fueled the influx of foreign fighters, enabled a lawless environment for profitable criminal activities, and facilitated the execution of its strategic goals.

- *Information and communication technology.* Two media campaigns raised Zarqawi's profile, allowing his group to attract more recruits, gather more resources, and play a more central role within the insurgency. First, the alleged U.S. military psychological operations during the occupation raised Zarqawi's profile to a level of prominence he was unlikely to have achieved on his own. Second, AQI's strategy of disseminating videos of murders and attacks through the Internet further raised Zarqawi's—and by extension, the group's—profile.

Decline and Transformation into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI): Summer 2006–Present

- *Local support.* The group's high-profile, brutal tactics and desire to dominate the insurgency coalesced with the political isolation of insurgent tribes, leading to a reversal in public support for the group and its loss of strategic alliances with other elements of the Iraqi insurgency.

- *Leadership.* In response to the local and global backlash, al Qaeda core's senior leaders sought greater influence over AQI's organizational structure, shifting it from leadership-centric to bureaucratic. This shift, enabled in part by the loss of Zarqawi as the group's charismatic leader, reduced the group's profile and is linked to the eventual decline in its operational activity. However, this shift also made the group less vulnerable to targeted strikes against its leadership.

Full Narrative

Emergence of the Zarqawi Network

The emergence of al Qaeda in Iraq can be traced back to the radicalization of its founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.[1] After his father's death, Zarqawi, 17 at the time, dropped out of high school and embraced a life of drugs, alcohol, and violence.[2] He landed in prison in the early to mid-1980s for drug possession and sexual assault, and remained there until he was released under a general amnesty in 1988.[3]

Introduced to radical Islam while imprisoned, Zarqawi left Jordan within a year of his release to participate in the Soviet-Afghan conflict. He arrived after the Soviet forces had already begun to withdraw and participated in little if any fighting. However, this first venture outside of Jordan provided a "young and impressionable" Zarqawi his "first exposure to al-Qaeda."[4] In Peshawar, his interaction with Salafi doctrinaires, including Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi—Zarqawi's mentor and partner in founding the first iteration of his group, Bayat al-Imam—deepened his radicalization and broadened his terrorist contacts.

In 1992, following the fall of Kabul, Zarqawi returned to Jordan with Maqdisi, where they began plotting against the Hashemite monarchy and formed Bayat al-Imam.[5] After directing a failed suicide bombing attack against a local movie theater in 1993, Zarqawi caught the attention of Jordanian authorities with his recklessly vocal campaign criticizing King Hussein's regime and its treaty with Israel. He was arrested following a General Intelligence Department raid on his home and, after a misguided attempt to use his hearing in court to indict King Hussein and the presiding judge, he was sentenced to 15 years in al Sawaqa prison, where he was joined by Maqdisi.[6]

With Maqdisi playing the part of spiritual leader and a body-building Zarqawi playing the part of enforcer, the

two rapidly built a following inside the prison. Enjoying special treatment from prison guards due to Zarqawi's tribal affiliations,[7] they were able to expand Bayat al-Imam rapidly beyond the prison walls. Maqdisi's religious tracts, smuggled out by visiting relatives and sympathetic guards, were disseminated on Salafi websites to target audiences in Europe, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf.

Zarqawi eventually began to publish his own, more virulent tracts despite his mentor's efforts to temper his increasingly radical and religious views and readiness to declare anyone who disagreed with them an infidel. By May 1998, a few of Zarqawi's tracts had caught the attention of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Zarqawi's natural leadership and charisma quickly overshadowed Maqdisi's spiritual role. Fostering a reputation for fearless confrontation with prison guards and ruthless control over and protection of his followers, many of whom were Iraqi, Zarqawi developed "hypnotic" control over his recruits.[8]

In the spring of 1999, Zarqawi was once again released from prison in general amnesty. Perhaps fearful that his role in the 2000 Millennium Plots[9] would be uncovered, he departed Jordan for a second time to go to Afghanistan where he met with bin Laden himself.[10]

Bin Laden, wary that Jordanian intelligence had infiltrated the released prisoners, was suspicious of Zarqawi. Moreover, the al Qaeda leader was taken aback by Zarqawi's unabashed criticism of al Qaeda's support for the Taliban's "un-Islamic" fight against the Northern Alliance and disapproved of Zarqawi's "swagger," his tattooed hand, and his intense hatred of Shiites.[11] However, Seif al-Adel, al Qaeda's security chief and a proponent of "near enemy" centric terrorism,[12] empathized with Zarqawi's efforts against the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan. Adel convinced bin Laden to grant Zarqawi around $5,000 in seed money and space to set up his own training camp, which—to assuage bin Laden's fear of a Jordanian sting operation—was set in Herat, far away from bin Laden's camp in Kandahar.[13]

Beginning in early 2000, Zarqawi turned his small group into a mobile army, ready to take action anywhere in the world. Drawing on the terrorist contacts he had developed in Peshawar, Zarqaa, and Sawaqa, Zarqawi attracted recruits mainly from the exiled Jordanian, Palestinian, and Syrian Islamist populations living in Europe.[14] In his monthly visits to the camp, Adel was consistently impressed with the growth and progress Zarqawi achieved with his recruits, who arrived first by the dozens, then the hundreds. By the October 2001 U.S. air strikes against Afghanistan, the population of the Herat camp had reached 2,000–3,000 and included the only Levantine recruits in Afghanistan. In Herat, Zarqawi became a full-fledged terrorist commander.[15]

Transformation into AQI

Following the 2001 U.S. airstrikes in Afghanistan, Zarqawi led his men—now under the banner of al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (TwJ)—out of Afghanistan to set up camp in Iran.[16] Arrests of Europe-based TwJ operatives in early 2002 alerted Western authorities to Zarqawi's presence in Iran, forcing him to leave and establish new smuggling routes through Syria. His rising profile among Western intelligence agencies forced Zarqawi to spend the next 14 months moving between Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and the Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Iraq. Despite being on the move, Zarqawi was able to continue expanding his network and growing his cadre of fighters.[17]

Adel continued to meet with Zarqawi during this period and both encouraged as well as facilitated the transfer of Zarqawi's group into Iraq.[18] Adel further funneled an inflow of Arab Islamists through Syria into Iraq where Zarqawi had joined a number of Arab Islamists already based in the territory controlled by the Kurdish Islamist group Ansar al-Islam.[19] While in Iraq, Zarqawi traveled frequently to the "Sunni Triangle"—a 100–square-mile area between Baghdad, Ramadi, and Tikrit—deepening his network, recruiting fighters, and establishing bases.[20] Zarqawi's expansion of his weapons and fighter smuggling networks made him the default conduit for most, if not all, foreign fighters—including members of TwJ and other Islamist terrorist groups—flowing into Iraq in anticipation of the U.S.-led invasion. He became the default "emir' of Islamist terrorists in Iraq.[21]

In coordination with al Qaeda core, which had been urging Muslims across the globe to travel to Iraq to fight against the pending invasion, Zarqawi mobilized his network of safe houses, weapons caches, and intelligence networks, preparing a trap for the coalition forces.[22] Once the invasion began, Zarqawi put into action a carefully prepared, four-pronged strategy to defeat the American-led coalition.

First, he intended to isolate American forces by targeting their international and coalition partners—for example, the August 2003 truck bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad.[23] Second, he aimed to deter Iraqi cooperation with the transition process by targeting police stations, recruitment centers, and Iraqi politicians. Third, he targeted the rebuilding processes through high-profile attacks against civilian contractors and humanitarian aid workers—a gruesome example of which was the May 2004 beheading of Nicholas Berg, believed to have been carried out by Zarqawi himself.[24] Finally, he sought to ensnare the U.S. troops in a Sunni-Shiite civil war by attacking Shiite targets and provoking retaliatory responses against Sunni communities.[25] Among the more consequential examples of this final element in Zarqawi's strategy was the attack against Shiite leader Sayyid Muhammad al-Hakim in the holy city of Najaf.[26]

Early into the occupation, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) issued CPA Orders No. 1 and No. 2, barring members of the Baath Party from almost all government posts and disbanding the Iraqi army, on May 15 and 16, 2003, respectively.[27] Many of the 250,000 members of the disbanded Iraqi security services formed the core of what would become the Iraqi insurgency. This base was augmented by a stream of foreign fighters who were spurred by calls from Muslim leaders around the world to travel to Iraq to engage in "defensive jihad."[28] Former regime elements—previously a repressive bulwark against religious extremists—encouraged and facilitated this flow.[29]

The insurgency—a complex hybrid of Islamist, nationalist, and Baathist elements—undermined security and disrupted Coalition reconstruction efforts by attacking high-profile foreign targets and critical economic infrastructure.[30] The announcement in early 2004 that the CPA would be dissolved in June bolstered the insurgency; that year saw a spike in terrorist attacks, targeted killing of Iraqi collaborators (especially volunteers for the new Iraqi security forces), for-profit kidnappings, and other criminal activities as well as the temporary seizure of Fallujah.

Emboldened by the willingness of the Multi National Force (MNF) to negotiate a cease-fire to end the first Fallujah battle in June 2004, the Islamist elements of the insurgency began enforcing a "theocratic reign of terror," distributing leaflets that demanded full compliance with their edicts and listed names of collaborators marked for execution. That month, a ceremony was held in Fallujah in which the local "mujahideen" pledged their loyalty to Zarqawi, the emir of the "Islamic caliphate in Al-Fallujah."[31] As Zarqawi's prominence within the Iraqi insurgency reached its peak, an agreement was struck between him and bin Laden and in October 2004, Zarqawi declared his allegiance to bin Laden and changed his group's name to al Qaeda in Iraq.

This period also saw a spike in attacks on Shiite targets by Sunni terrorists so that by the second Fallujah battle in November 2004, Shiites both participated in and cheered the crushing defeat served the Sunni insurgency, fueling the sectarian dimension of the insurgency. Following the battle, Zarqawi said, "The battle of Fallujah removed the ugly mask of the damned Rafidha [a derogatory term for Shi'a among Sunni extremists], whose hatred [for Sunnis] was manifested in this battle."[32] Insurgent violence, and in particular AQI's high-profile, predominantly suicide attacks, steadily rose throughout 2005. [33] These attacks, which targeted Shiites and MNF "collaborators," followed the Sunni boycott of the January 30 elections—a boycott many Sunnis later admitted was a "failure of historic proportions."[34]

Following the 2005 national elections and the subsequent redrafting of the Iraqi constitution, tensions among the competing factions of the insurgency emerged, resulting in widespread dissatisfaction with Zarqawi's high-profile, brutal, and increasingly unpopular tactics. Nationalist elements of the insurgency, which had previously facilitated the inflow of foreign fighters, now sought to distance themselves from "foreigners" engaging in divisive sectarian tactics, especially Zarqawi. As early as July 2005, al Qaeda core's leadership sought to convey to Zarqawi the importance of maintaining popular support, both in Iraq as well as globally, through avoidance of divisive attacks (targeting Shiites), minimizing collateral damage (killing of innocent Muslims), and promoting an Iraqi image (elevating the profile of the group's Iraqi membership). [35]

On November 9, 2005, the global backlash against Zarqawi and his group reached its peak following AQI's coordinated bombings of three Amman hotels that killed 60 people, most of them Muslims attending a wedding party. Following the bombings, more than 100,000 Jordanians took to the streets chanting, "Zarqawi, you coward, what brought you here?"[36] In January 2006, in an effort to

lower its profile in response to the backlash, AQI and five other affiliated terrorist groups were subsumed under the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), an umbrella organization led by a council of member group leaders from which Zarqawi was excluded.[37] Despite an isolated attempt to reassert his leadership, Zarqawi maintained a diminished profile until his death by U.S. airstrike on June 7, 2006. [38]

Transformation into ISI

Though Zarqawi's death served an emotional blow to the group, it seemed to have little effect on the tempo and brutality of their operations. He was replaced immediately by senior AQI leader Abu Hamza al Muhajir—an Egyptian with longstanding ties to al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al Zawahiri—as the group's emir.[39] Violent incidents remained steadily high throughout 2006 and the first half of 2007. Terrorism incidents declined by only 6 percent between 2006 and 2007, falling from 6,631 to 6,210, compared to 3,438 and 3,256 in 2005 and 2008, respectively.[40]

Beginning in the summer of 2006, however, the Sunni tribal backlash against the group culminated in the *Sahwa*, or Awakening Movement. Anbar tribesman, exasperated with AQI's attempts to control their territory, began a covert campaign of killing the terrorist group's members. Leaving signs on their victims that read, "This is what you get when you work with al-Qaeda," the campaign mirrored the intimidation tactics used by AQI against Iraqis cooperating with the central government or the MNF.[41] On September 9, 2006, this covert campaign became public and by the spring of 2009, 100,000 Sunni tribesmen—and former insurgents—were on the U.S. payroll and fighting against AQI.[42]

In conjunction with this alliance, in January 2007 the deployment of 20,000 additional U.S. troops was announced and completed in mid-June 2007. By early 2008, 2,400 AQI members had been killed and 8,800 captured—greatly diminishing its active membership, previously estimated at 15,000. Meanwhile the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq had withered from 120 per month to 45 per month and by 2009 only five or six entered Iraq each month.[43]

On October 15, 2006, an AQI spokesman announced the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)—a second AQI rebranding attempt after the MSC failed to regain lo-

cal support—with Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as its emir. Abu Hamza was renamed the group's minister of war, though intelligence analysts believed this leadership shuffle was only nominal. On July 4, 2007, this seemed to be corroborated when detained AQI media chief Khalid al-Mashadani revealed to U.S. forces that Abu Omar was "played" by an actor at the direction of Abu Hamza in order to hide the foreign-led AQI's control over ISI.[44] These efforts failed to restore local support, however, and by February 2008, the bounty placed on al-Masri's head by the American coalition had been reduced from $5 million to only $100,000.[45]

Confusion over the leadership structure in the post-Zarqawi AQI worsened after an Iraqi counterterror operation killed both Abu Hamza and Abu Omar on April 18, 2010. Intelligence officials changed their analysis and now claimed that Abu Omar had "successfully grown into the role of ISI leader… and was asserting his own authority."[46] Once again, the group was quick to name successors: al Nasir Lidin Allah Abu Sulayman replaced Abu Muhajir as war minister and head of AQI and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi replaced Abu Omar as the nominal emir of ISI.[47]

AQI remained steadfast in its operational aims throughout the leadership transition. Shortly after the announcement of the new leaders, a detained AQI militant revealed that the group was planning attacks against the Dutch and Danish teams in the World Cup that would take place in South Africa.[48] More recently, on October 31, 2010, AQI launched a "suicide siege" attack against a Roman Catholic Church in Baghdad, managing to kill more than 40 hostages before Iraqi security forces broke the siege.[49] Two days later AQI launched a coordinated bombing attack in Baghdad that included more than 15 car bombs and killed more than 90 people. That attack came on the heels of a 380 percent spike in security incidents over the previous quarter, still down 73 percent from the peak in violence in second quarter of 2007.[50]

AQI's propaganda production house, Al-Furqan Media, continues to produce terrorist videos, though most attacks are announced through text releases from its ministry of information. Although public support for the group remains low, recent reports indicate that some members of the Awakening Movement, frustrated with the lack of full integration with the Iraqi security services and delays in salary payment, have re-joined AQI.[51]

Analysis

Period I: The Emergence of Zarqawi's Network

- *Leadership.* Zarqawi's leadership was a chief factor in shaping the group's emergence as well as directing its course throughout its evolution. His leadership style was tied to the time he had spent in prison, where he "found" Islam and became a fully hardened criminal and gang leader.[52] His embrace of Salafi Islam likely stemmed from his pre-prison exposure to radical Salafi preachers in Zarqaa's lawless Palestinian refugee camp where his foray into criminal life began.[53] In prison, his captivating personality and nascent brutality earned him the loyalty of a criminal gang, foreshadowing the cult-like following he would eventually engender as a terrorist leader.[54]

During the group's emergence period, Zarqawi's charisma enabled him to recruit and indoctrinate a loyal following as well as a network of funders and supporters. Throughout the region, he developed a support network that fueled his control over the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and provided funding and recruits for his operations. In addition to resilience against efforts to shut down the inflow of weapons and fighters, Zarqawi's networking directly endowed the group with significant amounts of its operational funds.[55]

Zarqawi's time in Peshawar in the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan conflict deepened his exposure to Salafi doctrinaires. In addition to Maqdisi, Zarqawi forged a relationship with Abu Kutaiba al Urdani, whose letter of introduction would be instrumental in Zarqawi's association with bin Laden in the late 1990s. Moreover, Zarqawi's natural networking skills allowed him to cultivate important relationships with fellow militants, especially those whose wealth would form the base for his international support network in the years to come.[56]

- *Terrorist patron.* Al Qaeda core as a terrorist patron was instrumental in turning Zarqawi's cell into a global terrorist network. With a base in Herat, Zarqawi had a venue to train and organize a network of cells throughout the Middle East and Europe. This base, and the command experience that came from running it, honed Zarqawi's leadership skills, giving him the confidence to develop and operationalize his strategy for post-invasion Iraq. Though

specifics about Adel's advice and assistance to Zarqawi are limited, it is highly likely that the seasoned military strategist served as a useful mentor to guide the nascent terrorist commander toward success.

Moreover, it was Adel who directed Zarqawi into Iraq and who was, in part, responsible for funneling foreign fighters into Iraq. Later, after Zarqawi made a formal pledge of allegiance to bin Laden, al Qaeda core's media efforts further helped attract recruits and foreign financial support to AQI. Furthermore, the al Qaeda affiliation enabled Zarqawi to have a more a prominent role in the insurgency, which is likely the reason he reversed his position of not pledging allegiance when he was initially invited to do so.[57]

Period II: Transformation into AQI

- *Foreign intervention.* The foreign intervention of the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003 and the subsequent occupation was the chief factor that led to Zarqawi's formal allegiance to al Qaeda core and the creation of AQI. It served as a driving factor in three ways: it fed the al Qaeda narrative of the West's war against Islam; it attracted and provided sanctuary for terrorist organizational and operational activities; and it served as a common enemy framework that encouraged marriages of convenience between groups that had previously formed distinct, more manageable threats. Each of these effects of the invasion coalesced to perfectly fit Zarqawi's pre-planned strategy for Iraq.

In the first instance, the controversial invasion was easily framed by Islamist imams as unprovoked Western aggression against a Muslim population. Imams in several Muslim-majority countries issued *fatwas*, or religious edicts, calling on members of the Muslim community to travel to and defend Iraq against the invasion. This was the central impetus for the flood of foreign fighters into Iraq, many of whom were absorbed by Zarqawi's group, given his control over the fighter smuggling networks into the country. The series of fatwas denouncing the "Crusader-Safavid" invasion culminated in a conference in Istanbul where clerics from around the Muslim world, though predominantly from Saudi Arabia, publicly expressed their support for the resistance.[58] This exogenous ideological support for the insurgency was augmented by a parallel indigenous movement that had its roots in mid-1990s Iraq.[59]

The invasion deepened and unleashed Islamist radicalism within the Iraqi Sunni community, many members of which came to see the invasion as such a clear case of justified self-defense that fatwas officially declaring jihad were unnecessary.[60] The removal of Saddam was seen as part of the same continuum of injustice that stemmed from the country having strayed from the path of "pious Islam."[61] Moreover, perceptions that the MNF, and especially American troops, were insensitive to Iraqi culture were widespread. The sense of humiliation—exacerbated by such events as the Abu Ghraib scandal[62]—was frequently cited as enough to radicalize and mobilize moderate Iraqis.[63]

These sentiments reflect a poor strategic communication effort on the part of the U.S.-led coalition; failing to convince the Iraqis that the occupation was in their interest, the MNF lost the support even of those who were initially ambivalent toward, or even optimistic about, the occupation. Members of the insurgency that did not fit neatly into the nationalist or Salafi Islamist rubric found the perceived favoritism to certain sects of the Iraqi population to be clear evidence of nefarious American intentions.[64]

Second, the overthrow of Saddam's regime and the dismissal of Iraq's security forces created safe havens for AQI and other elements of the Iraqi insurgency. CPA Orders No. 1 and No. 2 fit into Zarqawi's strategy in two ways. First, those who had the most experience in running Iraq—from providing services to maintaining security—were barred from doing so. Second, and in the immediate term far more importantly, 250,000 young Iraqi men—trained in following orders and killing—were suddenly unemployed, and Iraq lost its armed security force.

The invasion and the removal of all of Iraq's security forces further expanded the political space afforded Iraq's Salafi movement in the post-Gulf War sanction period. Compounding the problem, the CPA attempted at once to restrict illegal activity that had become permissible during the post-1991 regime, while simultaneously removing the entity that could have enforced such restrictions. The complex impact of this action is most vividly demonstrated in the pre-invasion smuggling hub of Fallujah.[65]

To the extent that the CPA was able to put an end to illicit economic activities, it proved unable to provide alternate sources of gainful employment, driving more of Iraq's alienated population to embrace the insurgency. Estimates of vast unemployment—some as high as 60 percent—were in part attributed to the CPA's focus on capital-intensive reconstruction projects that employed few Iraqis and mostly enriched U.S. contractors.[66] The 30,000 jobs created by U.S. assistance by July 2004—equivalent to less than half a percent of the Iraqi workforce—were insufficient to prevent Iraqis from joining the insurgency, where they could get paid up to $100 for planting a roadside bomb or shooting an American soldier.[67] In November 2005, 34 percent of polled Iraqis who identified a "single biggest problem" facing their lives cited economic concerns as their chief grievance.[68]

Third, the various elements that would form the diverse Iraqi insurgency developed complex, symbiotic—though at times conflicting—relationships among one another. Insurgent elements from the former regime eagerly facilitated, armed, and housed foreign fighters. The fact that they were driven to participate in the insurgency based on religious grounds—the very same ideology that likely drove their hatred of Saddam's regime—seems to have had little effect on the regime elements' willingness to assist them. Likewise, these foreign fighters were eager to accept the explosives, heavy weapons, and logistical support, which included intelligence on coalition force movements and positioning, from those who in another context would be considered "godless infidels."[69]

Moreover, individual insurgents were often driven by somewhat irreconcilable, often muddled combinations of religious and nationalist motivations. For example, 25-year-old insurgent Abu Abdul Rahman described his motivation for jihad in mixed religious and political terms: "The idea of jihad came step by step as I watched what the Americans were doing to our country.… Our goal is to get the invaders out of our country, and from all the *Arab* countries."[70]

Another unexpected alliance occurred between Zarqawi's group and Iran. According to a Jordanian intelligence officer, Iran equipped AQI with weapons, uniforms, and other military equipment: "The Iranians see Iraq as a fight against the Americans… they'll get rid of Zarqawi and all of his people once the Americans are out."[71] The complex, at times cooperative, relationship between al Qaeda and Iran—ostensibly mortal enemies—demonstrates the importance of not viewing alliances through one-dimensional assessments of group interests.

▪ *Information and communication technology.*
Information and communication technology amplified
the role of media campaigns as a second key driver that
inflated the prominence of Zarqawi's group and drove al
Qaeda core's desire to incorporate AQI into its global net-
work of affiliates. There were two major sides of the media
campaigns: on the one hand was Zarqawi's own innovative
use of the Internet to magnify the impact of his shocking
acts of violence, and, on the other hand, an external media
campaign, led by the U.S. military, raised his profile both
in Iraq and throughout the global terrorist movement.

To deliver his ideological message, Zarqawi and AQI
pioneered the use of the Internet to disseminate propagan-
da across not just Iraq, but the world over. Unlike al Qaeda
core's as-Sahab Media, which generally released long-
winded and verbose sermons by bin Laden and Zawahiri,
AQI flooded Internet chat rooms and jihadi forums with
video clips of violent martyrdom missions, glossy comput-
er-generated imagery, and gruesome execution videos—
the most famous being of American contractor Nicholas
Berg. Through this medium, Zarqawi was able to reach his
audience, deliver his ideological message, and garner mas-
sive support.

At the height of its strategic and tactical success, AQI
could claim the lives of 185 people in a single day of
coordinated attacks,[72] maintain a complex and reliable
web of regional smuggling and recruiting networks, and
command thousands of conventional guerilla fighters and
suicide bombers across the entire country, though it is un-
likely the group made up more than 15 percent of the total
Iraqi insurgency at any given time.[73] It was these high-pro-
file acts, and their dissemination across the Internet, that
gave the disproportional force to Zarqawi's psychological
war that still grips the country today. These acts were clear
attempts by Zarqawi to dissuade any non-military person-
nel in Iraq from staying to support the military or political
coalition. The extent of their achievement is largely tied to
the successful use of "new media."[74]

In April 2006 the *Washington Post* reported that begin-
ning in 2004, the U.S. military was engaged in psychologi-
cal operations (PSYOP) to magnify Zarqawi's importance
as part of an effort "to turn Iraqis against [him]…by
playing on their perceived dislike of foreigners."[75] Because
the long-term threat to U.S. interests stemmed not from
Zarqawi or other religious extremists but from the nation-

alist insurgents, the campaign "enlarged his caricature…
made him more important than he really is." Although
there has not been an official acknowledgment of the use
of PSYOP to raise Zarqawi's profile, the alleged campaign
fits into some assessments of Zarqawi's actual prominence
and strength.[76]

Finally, media played an important role in amplifying
other factors, in particular the issuance of *fatwas* sanc-
tioning the foreign fighters' violence against the coalition
forces and rallying cries based on incidents such as the
Abu Ghraib scandal.[77] This is perhaps a driving factor in
what led Zarqawi to reverse his position by paying alle-
giance to bin Laden, given the importance of the al Qaeda
brand and media outlets for encouraging recruitment as
well as for fundraising. The success of this campaign at-
tracted high levels of foreign fighters and funding—both
from the fighters themselves and from other, international
donors. Moreover, the high media profile had a destabiliz-
ing effect in Iraq even to the extent that it overplayed the
danger of AQI's operational activity. Internally this had
a chilling effect on would-be collaborators. Externally it
delayed and prevented much-needed foreign investment,
as foreign firms, including oil companies, were reluctant to
enter the violently unstable market.

Period III: Decline and Creation of ISI

▪ *Local support.* AQI's decline stemmed primarily
from its loss of local support. The ideological motivations
that drove Zarqawi's group's participation in the insur-
gency were fundamentally at odds with the interests and
aims of the nationalist insurgency on which the group was
deeply dependent.

From the very early stages of the insurgency, members
from each camp responded to notions of an alliance with
sarcasm: "Us, unite our forces with those of Saddam? A
man who tried to support Milosevic against our Muslim
brothers in the former Yugoslavia!"[78] For the nationalists,
the foreign fighters had little to offer: they had no experi-
ence or skills and their focus on targeting Shiites was detri-
mental to maintaining Iraq's cohesion. More than spoiling
MNF activities, nationalist elements of the insurgency
wanted a sovereign, viable Iraq.[79]

After their failed attempt to spoil the 2005 elections and
constitution process, the disenfranchised Sunni tribes be-
gan questioning what their role in the insurgency had won

them. In this light, AQI's desire to enforce Taliban-like rules in the tribal regions became increasingly intolerable, not to mention costly as AQI took over the tribes' profitable criminal activities. This was coupled with increasing popular disgust throughout Iraq about the level of indiscriminate violence perpetrated by AQI.

As a result, more than 100,000 of those fighting the MNF switched sides, effectively doubling its positive effect on coalition efforts. Beyond the number of fighters, this switch added an invaluable source of local intelligence collection to the MNF and added an entire demographic of Iraqis to cooperative governance. The Anbar tribal leaders sent their members to join the fledging Iraqi security services and reintegrated into the political and social environment.[80]

■ *Leadership.* The loss of popular support and the global backlash against AQI's indiscriminant violence both in Iraq and abroad—as in the Amman hotel bombings that led Zarqawi's own tribe to publicly disown him[81]—added pressure on the group to reform its operational strategy and change its leadership structure.

Despite the lack of information on AQI and Zarqawi's management style prior to his death, recent declassified intelligence gives evidence of the managerial changes that followed it. First, it is likely that AQI maintains much closer ties to al Qaeda core today than it did during the height of Zarqawi's reign. Zarqawi's dangerous autonomy not only was a primary factor in his group's destruction but also heavily damaged al Qaeda's global brand. A managerial reorganization gave al Qaeda core an opportunity to rein in its affiliate and reevaluate its strategy in the country and region. Evidence of this reorganization came in the form of an ISI operative captured a month after Zarqawi's death in 2006. The operative revealed to U.S. forces his role as al Qaeda core's strategic messenger to leaders in ISI.[82] Given that al Qaeda core's repeated and unsuccessful attempts to influence Zarqawi's behavior were sent in letters that risked being (and indeed were) intercepted, it seems unlikely that such a position had existed prior to his death.

Following Zarqawi's death, AQI's organizational structure became more bureaucratic and institutionalized. Discovered AQI documents dated from a month after Zarqawi's death demonstrate that the group placed a premium on managerial control, for which operational security was repeatedly sacrificed. The documents include a standardized recruiting "application" form and detailed records of the group's revenues, spending, and resource allocation methods,[83] despite the risk that such records could be found and used by the MNF.[84]

While it is difficult to assess the internal decisionmaking of a covert terrorist organization, it seems likely that pressure from al Qaeda core—articulated as early as July 2005 in a letter from Zawahiri,[85] and followed more directly with a letter from an al Qaeda core leader identified as Atiyah,[86] to cease the divisive attacks on Shiites and rein in the indiscriminate attacks that were costing so many innocent Muslim lives—had at least some effect. Though Zarqawi appears to have resisted the former request, the latter "suggestion" seems to have been followed in January of the following year, when AQI subsumed itself within the MSC.

Despite significant gaps in public records, it is widely believed that this represented a gradual shift at most and, more likely, a cosmetic one at that. However, the gradual shift from a leadership-centric organizational structure toward that of a highly institutionalized bureaucracy greatly accelerated after the death of Zarqawi in June 2006. Despite the high praise Zarqawi received, his death most likely was a relief to al Qaeda core leaders; his successor, Abu Muhajir, was a member of Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad and enjoyed a relationship with the senior al Qaeda core leader dating back to 1982.[87]

The importance of this shift is demonstrated by the fact that, despite periods of change in leadership marked by successful counterterrorist strikes against successive leaders and, perhaps more damaging, questions about the leaders' authenticity,[88] the group has maintained some degree of operational activity. This includes its alleged involvement in global plots including the World Cup plot and the more recent attacks against Egypt's Coptic Christian population.[89] While the loss of Zarqawi's charismatic leadership—and the resistance or inability to replace it—has led to a reduction in profile, funding, and recruitment rates, it has also made the group less vulnerable to targeted strikes against its leadership. Despite successive strikes against Zarqawi, Abu Omar, Abu Muhajir, and, most recently, Abu Sulayman, in addition to the scores of arrests and killings of other AQI commanders, AQI attacks have continued at a steady,

albeit much reduced, pace.[90] In this sense, the group has become less dangerous but also less likely to expire.

The Future of AQI

Since the U.S. surge and the successful co-optation of the *Sahwa* Movement, violence in Iraq has reduced dramatically. The degradation of al Qaeda core's stake in the Iraq battle-sphere, demonstrated by the major reduction in statements on Iraq from al Qaeda core's leadership—the arena it once claimed constituted the frontline of its global terrorist campaign—and the reduction of its offensive operations reflect a sense of self-admitted defeat. However, given the fluidity of al Qaeda core's strategic and operational organization, ongoing insecurity, and the lack of political progress in Iraq, this is most likely a temporary setback.

Role of the Central Iraqi Government

Moving forward, the capacity of the central Iraqi government will be a major determinant of AQI's future. Specifically, Iraq's government must demonstrate the capacity for and commitment to providing security and other essential services; resolving politically divisive issues, including constitutional and electoral reform; settling the Kirkuk issue; maximizing efficient output from its all-important, and equally contentious, oil production industries; and creating a pervasive sense of national cohesion built upon equal and fair political representation, economic opportunity, and protection under a transparent legal regime.

Failure to achieve these lofty but critical goals perpetuates the crisis of legitimacy of the government. A relatively minor but illustrative demonstration of the factors behind this crisis is found in reports of Iraq's police and military forces engaging in minor skirmishes. While violent incidents in Iraq have dropped significantly since their peak in 2007, the lack of cohesion between national and municipal actors over so basic a service as security plays directly to AQI's and similar groups' interests and rhetoric. At the very least, Iraqis must question what makes the state's security services any different than the insurgent militias that drove the country into civil war.

Role of Foreign Interests

The precarious cooperation from *Sahwa* councils and other community-based security partners has been a particular

target for AQI's attacks.[91] Attacks against central and local Iraqi security targets will be sustained as AQI continues its attempts to undermine the government's legitimacy and perceived capacity. Much of this is related to a second factor that will heavily influence AQI's future: the role of foreign interests.

The role of the United States going forward will have lasting implications for al Qaeda's activities in Iraq. Some U.S. military leaders have raised concerns about premature deadlines.[92] Nonetheless, American economic and political realities make it unlikely that the necessary commitment can be made by Iraq's most important partner. As a result, the most influential external actor will increasingly be Iran, to date the chief benefactor of events in Iraq since March 2003.

Iran's uncertain relationship with AQI, and with al Qaeda in general, is worrisome. At times, Iran has supported al Qaeda terrorists, offering them sanctuary, weapons, and training to further its interests in the region. At the same time, Iran and the al Qaeda organization are ostensibly enemies; AQI's rhetoric in the early stages of the insurgency, in fact, focused on the invasion being the result of an Iranian-Western-Israeli conspiracy to undermine the state. While it remains uncertain how this relationship will evolve—likely in a variety of seemingly contradictory manifestations—it is important to note that Iran has been willing to arm and assist groups that may pose a long-term threat to its own interests if and when its short-term interests are secured through such an alliance.

AQI and the Broader al Qaeda Movement

Finally, AQI's relationship with the broader al Qaeda movement will both hinge upon and influence the above factors and its future. Zarqawi's network of global terrorists and the unique tactics and strategy he employed have shaped a new generation of global terrorists.[93] The targeting of Christian communities within Iraq and Egypt, as well as al Qaeda's ongoing interest in spreading the terrorist movement into the core of the Levant, are worrisome trajectories that could change the level of the threat from the movement.

In projecting AQI toward 2025, it is important to recognize that throughout all of the changes that have occurred since its first appearance before the 2003 invasion, the group has been able to adapt and survive. Unlike

AQI, neither the Iraqi government nor any of its Western allies have proved as capable of quickly changing name, leadership, and operational strategy to adapt to evolving circumstances.

Therefore, AQI will likely persist in one form or another. The form it takes and the nature of the threat posed by that form will be determined by the relative effectiveness and legitimacy enjoyed by the range of actors invested in Iraq and the region. These groups include the Iraqi central government, Iran, the United States, and the global terrorist movement of Al Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM).

Without reading too much into still-nascent developments in the region, one might add the youth-driven, popular movements to this cast of players. Given the dearth of competition, this democratic movement, which has demonstrated some resonance in Iraq, may resonate with the broadest swath of the Iraqi population. Moreover, the removal of authoritarian regimes with records of repressing domestic terrorist movements—most notably Egypt's Mubarak—may shift the focus of al Qaeda affiliates away from Iraq, especially given their lack of popular support in Iraq and the historic importance of Egypt to the movement.

Notes

1. Born Ahmed Fadil Nazal al-Khalaylah, his alias "al-Zarqawi" is taken from his hometown Zarqaa, Jordan.

2. Gary Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: A Biographical Sketch," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor* 2, issue 24, December 15, 2004, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=27304.

3. Bruce Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2008), 89–90.

4. Unnamed former Jordanian counterterrorism official. See Mary Anne Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," *Atlantic* (July/August 2006), http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/4983/.

5. Hazem Al-Amin, "The City of Al-Zarqaa in Jordan—Breeding Ground of Jordan's Salafi Jihad Movement," *Al-Hayat*, parts one and two of three-part inquiry published December 14–15, 2004, translated and excerpted by the *Middle East Media Research Institute*, Special Dispatch No. 848, January 17, 2005. See also Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*; Gambill, "Abu Musab

al-Zarqawi"; and Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

6. Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*, 92; see also Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

7. Zarqawi belonged to the Bani Hassan, a prominent Bedouin tribe that is, ironically, fiercely loyal to the Hashemite monarchy.

8. Jordanian journalist Abdullah Abu Rumman, who was imprisoned in Sawaqa prison with Zarqawi. See Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

9. The 2000 Millennium Plots were a series of thwarted and abandoned plots that were planned to occur around January 1, 2000. Targets included four sites in Jordan, the Los Angeles International Airport, and the USS *The Sullivans* destroyer. See Vernon Loeb, "Planned Jan. 2000 Attacks Failed or Were Thwarted; Plot Targeted U.S., Jordan, American Warship, Official Says," *Washington Post*, December 24, 2000.

10. Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi." See also Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," and Peter Bergen, *The Longest War* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 161.

11. Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

12. "Near enemy" centric terrorism principally targets local "apostate" rulers of Muslim-majority countries, as opposed to "far enemy" centric terrorism, which targets foreign, "imperial" regimes that facilitate the "apostate" rule. The debate stems from the early rise of Global Islamist ideology. "Near enemy" advocates include Sayyid Qutb—"the forefather of Islamist terrorism"—and his disciple Muhammad Adbel Salam Faraj, who argued that "the overthrow of the 'near enemy' (the local ruler) was more important than fighting the 'far enemy' (the Israeli state) because if an infidel ruler [i.e., a corrupt ruler who did not govern according to Islamic law] captured Jerusalem, it would still be infidel and nothing would have changed." See Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 37–38.

13. Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

14. Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

15. Jordanian intelligence official. See Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

16. Bergen, *The Longest War*, 162.

17. Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

18. Ibid.

19. Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

20. Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

21. Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

22. Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*, 98.

23. Dexter Filkins and Richard A. Oppel Jr., "After the War: Truck Bombing; Huge Suicide Blast Demolishes U.N. Headquarters in Baghdad; Top Aid Officials Among 17 Dead," *New York Times*, August 20, 2003, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/20/world/after-war-truck-bombing-huge-suicide-blast-demolishes-un-headquarters-baghdad.html. See also Pam Benson, "CIA: Zarqawi Tape 'Probably Authentic,'" *CNN.com,* April 7, 2004, http://articles.cnn.com/2004-04-07/world/zarqawi.

tape_1_al-zarqawi-zarqawi-organization-abu-musab-zarqawi?_s=PM:WORLD.

24. "'Zarqawi' Beheaded US Man in Iraq," *BBC News*, May 13, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3712421.stm.

25. Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

26. Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2006), 212.

27. Fred Kaplan, "Who Disbanded the Iraqi Army?" *Slate*, September 7, 2007, http://www.slate.com/id/2173554/.

28. "Defensive jihad" refers to armed struggle that is carried out in defense against external aggression. It is also referred to as "moral jihad" and "*watinyah* jihad," or nationalist jihad. It enjoys wider religious legitimacy than the "*takfiri* jihad," or excommunicate jihad, advocated by al Qaeda and its associated movements. See Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*(New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 36, 383–384.

29. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 148–149.

30. Ibid., 34.

31. Ibid., 42–43.

32. Ibid., 47.

33. By July 2005, there had been 400 suicide bombings in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion, 90 of which occurred in May 2005 alone. Ibid., 180.

34. Ibid., 51.

35. "Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, October 11, 2005, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTC-Zawahiri-Letter-10-05.pdf; "Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa'ida High Command," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, September 25, 2006, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/CTC-AtiyahLetter.pdf.

36. "Zarqawi 'Defends Jordan Attacks,'" *BBC News*, November 18, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4450590.stm.

37. Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "Al-Qaeda's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, Harmony Project, January 2008, 5, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/aqs-foreign-fighters-in-iraq.pdf.

38. "Zarqawi: The Resurgence of an Al Qaeda Leader," Terrorism, *Anti-Defamation League*, May 8, 2006, http://www.adl.org/main_Terrorism/zarqawi_video.htm.

39. "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," Group Profile, *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, April 13, 2011.

40. Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq: Patterns of Violence, Casualty Trends and Emerging Security Threats* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, February 9, 2011), 9, http://csis.org/publication/iraq-patterns-violence-casualty-trends-and-emerging-security-threats.

41. Bergen, *The Longest War*, 267.

42. Ibid., 272.

43. Ibid., 270–271.

44. "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*.

45. Mike Mount, "Reward for Wanted Terrorist Drops," *CNN.com*, May 13, 2008, http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/05/13/pentagon.masri.value/index.html.

46. "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*.

47. Lauren Gelfand, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Regroups and Names New Leadership," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, May 19, 2010.

48. Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Detained Militant in Iraq Details World Cup Plot," Associated Press (Baghdad), May 18, 2010.

49. "Suicidal Siege Warfare," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, January 19, 2011.

50. "Bomb Wave Kills More Than 90 in Baghdad," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, November 5, 2010.

51. Timothy Williams and Duraid Adnan, "Sunnis in Iraq Allied with U.S. Rejoin Rebels," *New York Times*, October 16, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/17/world/middleeast/17awakening.html.

52. Gambill, "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

53. Ibid.

54. Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*, 90.

55. Benjamin Bahney, Howard J. Shatz, Carroll Granier, Renny McPherson, and Barbara Sude, *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq*, RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, 2010, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1026.html. See also note 56, below.

56. According to Huthaifa Azzam, a fellow militant and son of the influential Abdullah Azzam, "[Zarqawi's] primary friendships were with the Saudi fighters and others from the Gulf.… Some of them were millionaires. There were even a couple of billionaires." See Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi." At its peak, AQI's primary revenue stream came from foreign recruits. Despite the financial and organizational strength of the al Qaeda-led resistance, foreigners eager to wage jihad in Iraq not only were responsible for getting themselves to the battlefield, but were also required to bring as much cash with them as possible. Throughout the period covered by the "Sinjar Records," cash from foreign recruits comprised more than 70 percent of AQI's total income. See Brian Fishman et al., "Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa'ida's Road in and Out of Iraq," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, Harmony Project, July 2008, 76, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/Sinjar_2_July_23.pdf.

57. As Zarqawi's importance grew readily apparent to al Qaeda's core leadership, bin Laden unsuccessfully called on him to pledge *bayat*, or formal allegiance, at least five times during 2000–2001. See Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

58. Thomas Hegghammer, "Saudis in Iraq: Patterns of Radicalization and Recruitment," *Cultures & Conflicts*, June 12, 2008, 112.

59. Following the first Gulf War, Iraq's population featured a growing Salafi strand. Sunni Islamic activism had long been a feature of Iraqi sociopolitics. Though largely muted when the secularist Baath party reached the height of its power in the

1970s, this strand reemerged following the total defeat Iraq experienced in 1991. In an effort to control the rising religiosity, and in recognizing that the post-war sanctions regime had crippled Iraq's once ruthlessly repressive surveillance capacity, Saddam launched *al hamla al-imaniya* (Enhancement of Islamic Faith) campaign in 1999. The campaign was in effect a deal struck between Saddam's regime and Sunni clerics; insofar as they did not overtly challenge the regime, clerics were appeased with increased restrictions on unsavory activities (e.g., gambling and drinking), promotion of religious education, and the removal of a ban on delivering politicized sermons. See Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 25–26, 109–112.

60. Sheikh Fakhri al-Qaisi, a Salafi cleric from Baghdad, put this argument simply: "Infidels are occupying a Muslim country, the jihad is therefore automatic as a right of legitimate defense. We have no need to launch a general appeal for a holy war." See Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 114.

61. An Islamist imam from Mosul outlined this view: "In invading a Muslim territory, the objective of the infidels has always been to destroy the cultural values of Islam.… Today Iraqis suffer… precisely because [they have] forgotten the divine teachings and [have] not followed the principles of Islam. We have been delivered of the injustices of one man [i.e., Saddam], but this does not mean we must accept the American-British domination." See Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 116.

62. The first Iraqi opinion polls conducted after the Abu Ghraib scandal found that the majority of Iraqis polled (71 percent) were surprised by the abuse of prisoners. Of them, almost half were surprised by the extent to which it humiliated Iraqis. Among Iraqis not surprised by the abuse, 64 percent explained their lack of shock by saying that they "expect the worst from Americans." Furthermore, the poll found that the percentage of Iraqis that cited coalition operations as the most threatening violence in Iraq had increased threefold from January to May 2004; that an overwhelming 92 percent of Iraqis polled viewed the coalition forces as "occupiers"; and that more than 80 percent wanted the coalition forces to leave Iraq (of whom 7 percent cited abuse and lack of respect toward Iraqi religions and cultures, and the vast majority of whom cited the coalition forces' role of occupiers). See "Public Opinion in Iraq: First Poll Following Abu Ghraib," *Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies*, June 2004, 43–45, http://psychoanalyst-sopposewar.org/resources_files/PublicOpinionInIraq_FirstPollAfterAbuGhraib-CPAPol_14-23May.pdf.

63. "I train my son to kill Americans. They kicked my Koran. They speak to me so poorly in front of my children. It's not that I encourage my son to hate Americans. It's not that I make him want to join the resistance. Americans do that for me." Quote from Abdul Razak al-Muaimi, a poor Iraqi laborer in his thirties. See Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 101.

64. "When Saddam fell we avoided fighting against the Americans in order not to destroy Mosul. But gradually we saw the Kurds becoming bosses in our home, and the American infidels stealing our oil, building ever larger bases, and bringing in an increasing number of vehicles. So we realized that they would never leave voluntarily, and that we would have to hound them out. We got organized. Friends telephoned each other… and they counted the weapons available to them." See Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 102.

65. The familial network of Fallujan tribes extended across Iraq's borders with Syria and Jordan, making the city a central hub in the illegal Iraqi smuggling trade that flourished during the sanctions regime from 1991 to 2003. Given the diminished law enforcement and surveillance capacity of Iraqi security forces during this period, and the fact that most local security service personnel belonged to the smuggling tribes, Fallujah enjoyed virtual autonomy and the enrichment of tribal leaders and nouveau riche entrepreneurs. Reduced salaries of government employees enabled the tribes to buy off any security personnel that were unaffiliated with the tribes. Eager to accept this offer, the security services either actively participated in the smuggling or happily looked the other way. Further complicating the situation was the rise in Islamist tendencies described above. Known Islamists were also privy to the same tribal or familial exceptionalism as the smugglers: "My oldest brother is a member of these [Salafist] groups, and he was discharged from the army for his affiliation to these people and he became unemployed, and he started to spend most of his time in the mosque. The Baathists were closely following him, and whenever they could they would arrest some of the members of this group.… My oldest brother was never imprisoned because my youngest brother was a member of the Baathist party, and he always protected him." See Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 25–26.

66. Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, *Progress or Peril: Measuring Iraq's Reconstruction*, Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, September 2004), 49–50, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0409_progressperil.pdf.

67. Ibid., 50.

68. Question 12 asked "What is the single biggest problem you are facing in your life these days?" Out of the 1,031 respondents who identified singular, greatest threats, 186 reported "no job," 76 reported "poor living standards," 49 reported "economic problems," and 23 reported "high prices." Other cited problems closely tied with economic conditions included "poor public services" (86 respondents), "housing problems" (82 respondents), and "poor electricity supply" (35 respondents). See "National Survey of Iraq November 2005," Oxford Research International (December 12, 2005), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/12_12_05_iraq_data.pdf, 6.

69. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 148–149.

70. Emphasis on "Arab" is added to note that the insurgent links himself to Arabs vice Muslims. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 118.

71. Account of an anonymous Jordanian intelligence office. See Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

72. Emily Hunt, "Zarqawi's 'Total War' on Iraqi Shiites Exposes a Divide among Sunni Jihadists," PolicyWatch No. 1049, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 15, 2005, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2400.

73. Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*, 100–101.

74. Notorious cyberterrorist Younis Tsouli (aka *Irhabi* 007, or Terrorist 007) was one of the chief culprits behind the widespread dissemination of Zarqawi's Internet videos. Zarqawi specifically congratulated and thanked Tsouli for his indispensable role in AQI's terrorist campaign. See Akil N. Awan, "The Virtual Jihad: An Increasingly Legitimate Form of Welfare," *CTC Sentinel* 3, issue 5 (May 2010), http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol3Iss5.pdf.

75. Thomas E. Ricks, "Military Plays up Role of Zarqawi: Jordanian Painted as Foreign Threat to Stability," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/09/AR2006040900890.html.

76. Prominent leaders of the insurgency, including Sheikh Majid al Qa'ud, denied that they had even heard of Zarqawi, suggesting that he was an American invention: "Listen, I am from al-Ramadi and my family is from al-Ramadi, yet neither I nor my relatives have ever seen this al-Zarqawi fellow. Does it not occur to you that he might be a convenient invention? The embodiment of Evil, one of those things of which the Americans are so fond?" See Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 87. A former Jordanian official also alluded to this campaign when including "the creativity of the Americans" in a list of the major turning points that shaped Zarqawi's life. When asked to identify the most curious aspect of the relationship between the United States and Zarqawi, another Jordanian official responded, "The six times you could have killed Zarqawi, and you didn't." Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi." See also Daniel Benjamin, "Holy Zarqawi: Why Bush Let Iraq's Top Terrorist Walk," *Slate*, October 29, 2004, http://www.slate.com/id/2108880/.

77. One captured foreign fighter, Tunisian Muhammad Hadi al-Masmudi, explained the importance of media in his decision to fight in Iraq: "We also watched [Muslim] clerics on television and on Al-Jazirah declaring jihad in Iraq… there was a statement, fatwa, by a list of 40 scholars from the Arab and Islamic world on Al-Jazirah.… They used to show events in Abu Ghurayb, the oppression, abuse of women, and fornication, so I acted in the heat of the moment and decided… to seek my martyrdom in Iraq." Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 144.

78. Sheikh Ahmed Abbas al-Issawi, Salafi imam from Fallujah, quoted in Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 42.

79. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 182, 184.

80. Bergen, *The Longest War*, 172.

81. Associated Press, "Al-Khalayleh Tribe Disowns al-Zarqawi," *Jerusalem Post*, November 20, 2005, http://fr.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1132475586094&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull.

82. Paul Cruickshank, "Total Recall," *New Republic Online*, July 16, 2007, http://www.tnr.com/article/total-recall.

83. Felter and Fishman, "Al-Qaeda's Foreign Fighters in Iraq."

84. Fishman et al., "Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout," 67.

85. "Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*.

86. "Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa'ida High Command," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*.

87. "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*.

88. Austin Long, "Assessing the Success of Leadership Targeting," *CTC Sentinel* 3, issues 11–12 (November 2010): 19–21.

89. Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Is the Islamic State of Iraq Going Global?" *Terrorism Monitor* 9, issue 4 (January 28, 2011), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37422&cHash=ca0517bd28.

90. "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*.

91. Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Persuading the Uncertain and Punishing the Recalcitrant," *Terrorism Monitor* 6, issue 21 (November 7, 2008), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34109&tx_ttnews[backPid]=167&no_cache=1. See also Brian Katulis, Peter Juul, and Ian Moss, *Awakening to New Dangers in Iraq: Sunni "Allies" Pose an Emerging Threat*, Center for American Progress, February 2008, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/02/pdf/new_dangers.pdf.

92. In a meeting with then senator Obama in July 2008, General Petraeus voiced strong opposition to plans for withdrawing all combat troops by mid-2010: "We are coming down, but I need the flexibility of not having a timetable." Based on extensive interviews with U.S. military leadership, including General Odierno, Thomas Ricks argued in 2009 that "Obama is likely to find Odierno and other generals arguing passionately that to come close to meeting Obama's conditions of keeping the troops safe, keeping Iraq edging towards stability, and keeping up the pressure on al Qaeda and other extremists, he will need a relatively large force for many years.… they will argue that adhering to any timetable will risk giving up the security gains already made. 'Now is not the time to take your foot off the gas,' said Gen. Swan [then General Odierno's director of strategic operations]. 'If you assume the war is won, that would be a faulty assumption. We've got the bad guys down. Don't let them get back up.'" Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 299, 309.

93. Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan," *Terrorism Monitor* 7, issue 34 (November 13, 2009), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35727&tx_ttnews[backPid]=412&no_cache=1. See also Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Al-Zarqawi's Legacy Seen in Trial of Jordanian al-Qaeda Cell," *Terrorism Focus* 6, issue 4 (February 6, 2009), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34507.