IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

READING THE IRAQI INSURGENCY

Middle East Report N°50 – 15 February 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: READING THE IRAQI INSURGENCY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Iraq, the U.S. fights an enemy it hardly knows. Its descriptions have relied on gross approximations and crude categories (Saddamists, Islamo-fascists and the like) that bear only passing resemblance to reality. This report, based on close analysis of the insurgents' own discourse, reveals relatively few groups, less divided between nationalists and foreign jihadis than assumed, whose strategy and tactics have evolved (in response to U.S. actions and to maximise acceptance by Sunni Arabs), and whose confidence in defeating the occupation is rising. An anti-insurgency approach primarily focused on reducing the insurgents' perceived legitimacy – rather than achieving their military destruction, decapitation and dislocation – is far more likely to succeed.

Failure to sufficiently take into account what the insurgents are saying is puzzling and, from Washington's perspective, counter-productive. Abundant material – both undervalued and underutilised – is available from insurgent websites, internet chat, videos, tapes and leaflets. Over the past two years such communication has assumed more importance, both among insurgent groups and between groups and their networks of supporters or sympathisers. This report, the first exhaustive analysis of the organised armed opposition's discourse, seeks to fill the gap, and the lessons are sobering.

Textual analysis has its limitations. The information by definition sheds light only on those who choose to speak, and only about that which they discuss in public. Wartime communication is part information, part propaganda; insurgents highlight their nobleness, tactical exploits and ingenuity while downplaying brutality and setbacks. Without knowing more of the groups' inner workings, it is hazardous to speculate on the reasons behind specific communications.

Still, the discourse offers a window into the insurgency. It tells us about themes insurgents consider best to mobilise activists or legitimise actions, and gives us information on internal debates and levels of coordination, and about shifts in tactics and strategy. This war, U.S. officials concede, will be won as much in the court of public opinion as on any battlefield. The U.S administration faces an increasingly sceptical domestic audience; Iraq's authorities

suffer from a serious credibility deficit at home; and insurgents must contend with accusations of sectarianism and barbaric violence. For the U.S. to ignore, or fail to fully take into account, the insurgents' discourse – at a time when they are paying close attention to what Washington is saying – is to wage the struggle with one hand tied behind its back.

Several important conclusions emerge:

❑ *The insurgency increasingly is dominated by a few large groups with sophisticated communications.* It no longer is a scattered, erratic, chaotic phenomenon. Groups are well organised, produce regular publications, react rapidly to political developments and appear surprisingly centralised.

❑ *There has been gradual convergence around more unified practices and discourse, and predominantly Sunni Arab identity.* A year ago groups appeared divided over practices and ideology but most debates have been settled through convergence around Sunni Islamic jurisprudence and Sunni Arab grievances. For now virtually all adhere publicly to a blend of Salafism and patriotism, diluting distinctions between foreign jihadis and Iraqi combatants – though that unity is unlikely to outlast the occupation.

❑ *Despite recurring contrary reports, there is little sign of willingness by any significant insurgent element to join the political process or negotiate with the U.S.* While covert talks cannot be excluded, the publicly accessible discourse remains uniformly and relentlessly hostile to the occupation and its "collaborators".

❑ *The groups appear acutely aware of public opinion and increasingly mindful of their image.* Fearful of a backlash, they systematically and promptly respond to accusations of moral corruption or blind violence, reject accusations of a sectarian campaign and publicise efforts to protect civilians or compensate their losses. Some gruesome and locally controversial practices – beheading hostages, attacking people going to the polls – have been

abandoned. The groups underscore the enemy's brutality and paint the U.S. and its Iraqi allies in the worst possible light: waging dirty war in coordination with sectarian militias, engaging in torture, fostering the country's division and being impervious to civilian losses.

❑ ***The insurgents have yet to put forward a clear political program or long-term vision for Iraq.*** Focused on operations, they acknowledge this would be premature and potentially divisive. That said, developments have compelled the largest groups to articulate a more coherent position on elections, and the prospect of an earlier U.S. withdrawal than anticipated is gradually leading them to address other political issues.

❑ ***The insurgency is increasingly optimistic about victory.*** Such self-confidence was not there when the war was conceived as an open-ended jihad against an occupier they believed was determined to stay. Optimism stems from a conviction the legitimacy of jihad is now beyond doubt, institutions established under the occupation are fragile and irreparably illegitimate, and the war of attrition against U.S. forces is succeeding.

The emergence of a more confident, better organised, coordinated, information-savvy insurgency, increasingly susceptible to Sunni Arab opinion, carries profound implications for policy-makers. That it has survived, even thrived, despite being vastly outnumbered and outgunned, suggests the limitations of the current counter-insurgency campaign. Its discourse may be dismissed as rhetoric, but, notwithstanding credible reports of internal tensions, it appears to have been effective at maintaining agreement on core operational matters, generating new recruits, and mobilising a measure of popular sympathy among its target audience.

Countering the insurgency requires taking its discourse seriously, reducing its legitimacy and increasing that of the Iraqi government. The harm from excessive use of force, torture, tactics that inflict widespread civilian injury and reliance on sectarian militias outweighs any military gain. It is essential for the U.S. to hold the new government accountable and make clear that long-term relations, economic aid and military cooperation depend on disbanding militias, halting political killings and respecting human rights. U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad has recently struck a candid tone, which should be followed with proactive measures. The U.S. and its allies are unable to establish a monopoly over the use of force but they can and should do so over the *legitimate* use of force, which means establishing the legitimacy both of the means being deployed and of the state on whose behalf force is being exercised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the United States and its Coalition and Iraqi Allies:

1. Closely monitor, control and, if necessary, punish the behaviour of security forces.

2. Halt recourse to the most questionable types of practices, including torture and extraordinary methods of interrogation and confinement, collective punishment and extrajudicial killings.

3. End the use of sectarian militias as a complement to, or substitute for, regular armed forces and begin a serious process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of militia fighters.

To the United States:

4. Hold the new government accountable and make clear that longer-term relations, economic assistance and future military cooperation will depend on the steps it takes to rein in and ultimately disband militias, halt politically motivated killings, and respect human rights and the rule of law.

5. Make clear its willingness, while it remains in Iraq, to negotiate openly the terms of its presence and its rules of engagement.

6. Make clear repeatedly and at the highest level that it accepts that the oil resources of the country belong to the Iraqi people and no one else, and will withdraw from Iraq as soon as the newly elected government so requests.

Amman/Brussels, 15 February 2006

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: READING THE IRAQI INSURGENCY

I. INTRODUCTION

More than two and a half years after it first emerged in mid-2003, the armed opposition remains somewhat of a mystery. Both its identity (said to be a mix of rejectionists, Baathists, dead-enders and die-hards, Saddamists, Islamo-fascists, and foreign jihadi terrorists) and its objectives (a return to the status quo ante or the establishment of a Taliban-style theocracy) typically have been assumed rather than carefully investigated and scrutinised. Such crude analysis necessarily impedes attempts to contain the insurgency, let alone end it.

In fact, extensive information is available in the form of insurgent web sites, internet chat rooms, magazines, leaflets, videos and tapes.[1] Given the conditions under which the insurgents must operate, these most likely represent a significant part of their communication, whether directed at one another or at Iraqi and Muslim populations, and thus constitute an important window into their thinking. Although some insurgent leaders reportedly meet from time to time or communicate by telephone and couriers, such methods are highly susceptible to interception and disruption and are far riskier than, say, internet exchanges. The quantity and quality of information transmitted via the internet suggests that it is, indeed, a preferred and regular means of communication.

This background report is based on a comprehensive review of all such forms of communication between mid-2003 and January 2006 and is focused exclusively on groups that have claimed responsibility for armed attacks in 2005. There is every indication that these groups represent, if not the sum total of the effective insurgency, at least a substantial part: almost every significant attack is instantaneously claimed by one of these groups, and few are claimed by more than one.

A. THE INSURGENT LANDSCAPE

The Four Main Groups. Based on the data Crisis Group collected, four groups stand out. Over time, they have developed recognised, proficient, and uninterrupted channels of communication through which, among other things, they regularly take responsibility for armed operations.

❑ ***Tandhim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*** (al-Qaeda's Organisation in Mesopotamia). Formerly *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad), the group has been shaped by the personality of its purported founder, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. It claims to have fifteen brigades[2] or battalions (*Katiba*, plural *Kata'ib*) operating under its banner, including two "martyrs" brigades, of which one allegedly comprises exclusively Iraqi volunteers. *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* releases daily communiqués, runs two official websites (both of which were shut down as of December 2005),[3] and publishes a short monthly magazine, *Siyar A'lam Al-Shuhada'* (Biographies of Great Martyrs), as well as one that

---

[1] Material available on the internet is also available in Iraq in other forms. DVDs in particular are readily available. There is no indication that the material circulated in Iraq is of a different nature than that posted on the internet. On the contrary, leaflets and videos acquired by Crisis Group during recent fieldwork had also been posted on the internet, with the exception of some video footage too substantial to be downloaded.

[2] As of mid-December 2005, Crisis Group had noted some 50 different brigades claiming military deeds under the banner of one major group or the other. In traditional Arab military parlance, a brigade comprises from 100 to 300 men, which would add up to a total roughly between 5,000 and 15,000 insurgents. Reports have varied widely as to the number of foreign fighters. Such fighters must be smuggled in, given cover, provided with weapons and other supplies, possibly trained, and finally used in operations that rely heavily on local logistics and intelligence. All of which suggests that the ratio between foreign and local fighters probably does not exceed one to ten. In this respect, initial reports concerning the presence of large numbers of foreign fighters in Falluja were almost certainly exaggerated. In particular, the notion that most foreign jihadis redeployed prior to the U.S.-Iraqi onslaught defies logic. If anything, they would be the least likely to leave the city since they presumably had come to Iraq to fight and die in the first place and would have found it far more difficult than local Iraqis to find refuge elsewhere.

[3] Due to systematic attacks on its websites, most likely from the U.S., *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* currently uses restricted distribution lists.

appears more erratically, *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad).[4]

Known for its uncompromising and generally extreme positions, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* sought throughout 2005 to remodel and "Iraqify" its image. How central it is to the overall insurgency is unclear; according to some observers, its importance has been vastly exaggerated, a result both of Washington's propensity to attribute most attacks to it and of other opposition groups' readiness to have Zarqawi shoulder the blame for their most controversial actions.[5] Others argue that *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* is more a loose network of factions involving a common "trademark" than a fully integrated organisation (an observation that may well apply to all similarly sized insurgent groups). As far as Crisis Group can conclude, based on a study of its communiqués, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* appears to be surprisingly well-structured; it should neither be blown up into a Leviathan nor ignored as a mirage, but rather considered as one among a handful of particularly powerful groups.

❑ *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* (Partisans of the Sunna Army).[6] The group reportedly is an offshoot of *Jaysh Ansar al-Islam* (the Partisans of Islam Army), a jihadi organisation previously based in Iraqi Kurdistan and which by most accounts has ceased to operate in the country.[7] (Tellingly, a group claiming affiliation with *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* publishes a magazine in Kurdish.) *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* claims to have some sixteen brigades, and it too releases daily communiqués, ran a website until it was shut down in November 2005,[8] and publishes

a monthly compilation of its military wing's communiqués, *Hasad al-Mujahidin* (the Mujahidin's Harvest), as well as *al-Ansar*, its political branch's magazine. It is a profoundly salafi group,[9] despite a simultaneous emphasis on patriotic themes, and is said to be at least as radical as *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*.[10]

❑ *Al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* (the Islamic Army in Iraq). Thirteen brigades have claimed allegiance to this group, which also issues daily statements, runs a website (shut down in November 2005 and subsequently reactivated), and publishes *al-Fursan*, a monthly magazine of up to 50 pages. Again, a highly salafi discourse blends with a vigorously patriotic tone.[11] It is widely seen in both Iraq and the West as one of the more nationalistic of the armed groups.[12]

❑ *Al-Jabha al-Islamiya lil-Muqawama al-'Iraqiya* (the Islamic Front of the Iraqi Resistance), known by its initials as *Jami'* (mosque or gathering). According to a credible source, it could be more

---

[4] Its former publication, *Dhurwat Sanam al-Islam*, no longer is published.

[5] Crisis Group interviews, Arab and Iraqi intellectuals claiming ties to the insurgency, December 2005 and January 2006. Most interviewees will remain unspecified given the sensitive nature of the subject.

[6] *Sunna* in this context does not refer to Sunnis. *Al-Sunna* (literally law, norm or custom) designates the record of the Prophet's sayings and deeds as recalled by his companions. Because parts of these accounts are disputed by Shiites, the expression *Ansar al-Sunna* nonetheless bears a confessional connotation.

[7] For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°4, *Radical Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Mouse That Roared?*, 7 February 2003.

[8] Several attempts to reactivate its website immediately were thwarted by hacker (probably U.S.) attacks, compelling *Ansar* to turn to email distribution lists. While the U.S. has become increasingly successful over time in tracing and destroying websites, the policy has several downsides, not least the loss of a valuable source of information. Rather than interrupt the communications flow, it has led insurgents to resort to

channels that are far more difficult to detect and access, including restricted distribution lists and confidential chat rooms. The U.S. also deprived itself of an opportunity to engage the insurgents' audience through these very websites, for example by creating "mirror sites" (sites using the same address but disseminating a different message), redirecting users to other sites, or even taking part in chat sessions.

[9] For a discussion of Salafism, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005.

[10] Some insurgents reportedly accused *Ansar al-Sunna* of being more violent than *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*. Crisis Group interview, Iraqi journalist, December 2005.

[11] The brigades affiliated with *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* are named after both illustrious generals from the early Islamic era (for example, Khalid Ibn Al-Walid, al-Muthanna Ibn Haritha) and Arab nationalist figures (Salahuddin, 'Umar al-Mukhtar). Other groups, including *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* and *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, generally name their brigades after caliphs and religious figures.

[12] The perception that *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* comprises chiefly former regime officers while *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* is a gathering of foreign militants is misleading. Undoubtedly, *Tandhim* has tapped into foreign volunteers who are ready to die, but the logistics of suicide attacks (smuggling, hosting, training, and equipping volunteers, gathering intelligence on targets, etc.) require solid rooting in Iraqi society and capabilities Iraqis alone can provide. *Al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* may well involve a core of experienced Iraqi officers and other members of the former regime, but unseasoned and devout combatants, as well as Iraqi salafi preachers with connections throughout the Muslim world, ought not be excluded. Indeed, such mixed composition, as well as cross-dependencies (jihadis rely on local networks, local networks on international sources of finance and legitimacy), help explain in part the relative homogeneity in discourse.

akin to a "public relations organ" shared between different armed groups, rather than an armed group in itself.[13] It issues weekly updates of claimed attacks**,** has a comprehensive website and publishes a lengthy, monthly magazine, *Jami'*. Deeply nationalistic, but with a salafi taint, its discourse counts among the more sophisticated of the groups.

The Other Groups. This report also is based on communications of several other groups that take credit for military actions but which tend to use far less elaborate and stable channels of communication. Their discourse reveals political leanings akin to those of *al-Jaysh al-Islami* and *Jami'*.

❑   *Jaysh al-Rashidin* (the First Four Caliphs Army[14]). As many as six brigades reportedly operate under its banner. The group issues regular updates on its activities and recently set up a website.

❑   *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansoura* (the Victorious Group's Army[15]). At least three brigades are known to have pledged alliance to this group, which also issues weekly updates.

❑   *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* (the Mujahidin's Army). This group, too, puts out weekly updates and operates a website, which was briefly shut down in December 2005.[16]

❑   *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya fil-'Iraq* (the Islamic Resistance's Movement in Iraq), which at some stage has been joined by *Kata'ib Thawrat 'Ashrin* (the 1920 Revolution Brigades), now its military wing.

❑   *Jaysh Muhammad* (Muhammad's Army), which issues periodic communiqués and videos focusing on IED[17] attacks in the Anbar governorate.

A third cluster of groups scrutinised in this report includes those that lack regular means of communication and rely on periodic claims of responsibility through statements or videos.

❑   *'Asa'ib Ahl al-'Iraq* (the Clans of the People of Iraq).

❑   *Saraya Al-Ghadhab Al-Islami* (the Islamic Anger Brigades).

❑   *Saraya Usud Al-Tawhid* (the Lions of Unification Brigades).

❑   *Saraya Suyuf al-Haqq* (the Swords of Justice Brigades). Previously unknown, this group took responsibility for the November 2005 kidnapping of four peace activists from the Christian Peacemaking Team. Its origins and affiliation remain murky, although it claims to operate under the banner of *Jaysh al-Sunna wal-Jama'a*, a recent offshoot of *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*.[18]

B.   LISTENING TO WHAT THEY SAY

The insurgents' discourse tells us only so much and often only what they would like their diverse audiences to hear. There is an unsurprising emphasis on military exploits, on the insurgents' nobility and ingenuity, and on their faith in ultimate victory; controversial practices and setbacks are underplayed. The U.S. and its Iraqi allies are depicted as brutal, insensitive to civilian casualties, and motivated by evil designs, such as the attempt to fragment the country. Little can be taken at face value: information and propaganda often merge, and the insurgents may wish to keep certain things from public view.

Nonetheless, there is considerable value in analysing these communications. Through what is said and, just as importantly, not said, they indicate what image the groups are seeking to project. Most often written or spoken in Arabic and targeting a sympathetic audience, the material also offers information on the arguments the insurgents believe to be most effective in terms of bringing in fresh recruits and mobilising a wider sympathetic constituency. The evolution in their discourse is equally instructive: as discussed below, coordination among organisations and within groups has developed, and political tactics have progressed as has, noticeably, the insurgents' self-confidence. Significantly, the groups seem to be learning from their mistakes and from their enemy's tactics, and changes appear to reflect both – a nimbleness that, given its size and bureaucratic character, the U.S. military at times has appeared to lack.

---

[13] Crisis Group interview, Arab intellectual with close ties to elements of the insurgency, December 2005.

[14] *Rashidin* designates the first four Caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib), the first three of whom are rejected as usurpers by Shiites. The name is thus indicative of a confessional slant.

[15] *Ta'ifa* here means group, and refers to the Prophet's companions in the famous battle of Badr. *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura* is often translated inappropriately as the "Army of the Victorious Sect".

[16] Intensified disruption of insurgent websites in November and December 2005 appears to be related to the then approaching Iraqi elections.

[17] Improvised explosive device.

---

[18] Other previously unknown groups or subgroups recently have taken responsibility for kidnapping foreigners, such as Bernard Planche, a Frenchman seized in December 2005. It is too early to assess whether they are offshoots of existing organisations, new formations, or fronts for well established groups.

The role played by such forms of communication appears to have been systematically undervalued, even as quantifiable "metrics" typically used to assess the state of the insurgency – body counts and territorial conquests in particular – time and again have proved unreliable.[19] Aware of their adversary's military superiority, insurgent groups the world over try to avoid static-defence tactics and direct, face-to-face confrontations, seeking instead to shift the battle to arenas where they believe they enjoy relative superiority. Iraq's armed groups, territorially and organisationally dispersed, constantly hunted by coalition forces and without clear hierarchical structures or central leadership, have relied heavily on communication strategies to blunt their enemy's military advantage, as well as to preserve and even boost their strength and assets (funds, weapons, recruits).[20]

They appear to have been remarkably effective: despite considerable setbacks – the loss of numerous leaders and territorial sanctuaries, such as Falluja – there has been little let-up or disarray but rather increased coherence and organisation. The self-conscious and intensive use of communication networks to unify the groups' official positions, standardise their tactics, recruit new members and generate sympathy among their target audience largely accounts for this success.[21] Internet sites are of particular importance, for they have become the principal daily means of exchange among groups, shedding light on their internal debates regarding acceptable methods of combat, tactical priorities and strategic objectives.

As U.S. officials repeatedly have acknowledged, this war will not be won on the battlefield, at least not on the battlefield alone.[22] All three principal actors have been hobbled by non-military factors: the U.S. by the collapse of its legitimacy in Iraqi eyes and by growing scepticism at home; its Iraqi allies by a credibility deficit; and the insurgency by accusations of sectarianism and resort to ghastly methods.[23] Perceptions, in others words, will play a critical part in the conflict's outcome. Prevailing in this arena requires, at a minimum, taking seriously what the armed opposition says, understanding how it resonates and why, and addressing the legitimate grievances it expresses. The insurgents' objectives have, instead, generally been assumed (including, *inter alia*, the restoration of Sunni hegemony, Baathist rule, or an Islamic caliphate), without sufficient reference to their actual language. This makes it difficult to comprehend the ease with which the insurgents have replenished their ranks and brought together individuals of diverse background.

---

[19] On more than one occasion, U.S. and Iraqi officials have claimed major victories over the insurgency – Saddam's capture and the Falluja takeover, for instance – only to see attacks redouble. In November 2004, then Prime Minister Iyad Allawi claimed Iraqi forces had defeated *Jaysh Muhammad* and detained most of its leadership. "Iraqi PM says Islamist insurgent network smashed in Fallujah", Agence France-Presse, 15 November 2004. It has remained one of the more visible and active of the armed opposition groups.

[20] This is nothing new. As Thomas Hammes pointed out, groups compensate for the lack of identifiable structures by emphasising operational and ideological cohesion. "In Iraq, the United States has found no evidence of central direction at this early stage in the insurgency, yet the pattern of the attacks has represented a coherent approach to driving the coalition out of the country. The question is: with no coordination, how could insurgents reinforce each others' actions? The insurgents could track each attack and, to a degree, measure its effectiveness by monitoring the Iraqi, U.S. and international media. Those attacks that succeeded were quickly emulated….The insurgents showed many of the characteristics of a self-organising network". Thomas X. Hammes. "Insurgency: Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation", *Strategic Forum*, N°214, January 2005. As shown by this report, intense communications between insurgent groups has provided them with a high degree of operational and ideological cohesion, despite the lack of a centralized and hierarchical leadership. That said, the notion of a "self-organising network" arguably is exaggerated, given the level of coordination that has been observed.

[21] Al-Qaeda is another apt illustration of this phenomenon. "Gilles Kepel puts it very well when he says that al-Qaeda is not actually a base, as its name suggests, but a database. It is a source of recruits, certainly, and of information, technology, contacts and links". *Middle East Policy*, vol.12, no.1, 2005.

[22] The U.S. is "not going to win the war on terrorism on the battlefield alone. Good alliance relations, trade policy, energy policy, intelligence cooperation, public diplomacy, nation-building – all of these are part of our formula for victory. Most important, however, are ideas and ideals", Secretary of State Colin Powell, Princeton University, 20 February 2004.

[23] During Allawi's tenure, Iraqi television began broadcasting daily confessions of alleged members of the armed opposition in which they admitted to some of the worst crimes. The insurgents' anxiety about a possible backlash is evidenced not only by their swift and angry claims of fabrication, but also by the subsequent evolution in their practices, notably an end to the frenzy of videotaped beheadings. See Section III A below.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF THE ARMED OPPOSITION'S DISCOURSE

Key U.S. officials have routinely depicted the armed opposition as either the outcome of a strategy planned before his fall by Saddam Hussein or the extension to Iraq of al-Qaeda's indiscriminate and violent hostility toward the U.S. and Western values. In the words of a senior official charged with managing post-Saddam Iraq, "the insurrection can be reduced to a combination of Saddamists and al-Qaeda followers".[24] Both explanations are seriously flawed.

There is no evidence that Saddam designed a guerrilla strategy in anticipation of military defeat.[25] Indeed, the period immediately following the overthrow of the Baathist regime was remarkably calm. U.S. forces, in effect, suddenly found themselves without an enemy.[26] The fallen regime's power structures collapsed almost instantaneously, laying bare the extent to which Saddam Hussein's authority – including over his own security apparatus – relied on coercion rather than loyalty. Senior Baath party members as well as army and intelligence officers initially were at a loss, facing both an uncertain future and a population that, in its vast majority, appeared willing to give the U.S. a chance. Far from preparing a collective comeback, these so-called Saddamists above all were preoccupied with personal survival.[27]

Elements of the former regime, some Shiites included,[28] soon helped set up small cells of fighters. But this was not planned ahead of time and reflected neither a desire to restore the past nor ideological attachment to Baathism; rather, these cells developed gradually, initially drawing individuals angered by dim prospects and resentful of the occupation and its indignities, and building on pre-existing party, professional, tribal, familial or geographic – including neighbourhood – networks.[29] Former regime officials were, of course, ideal candidates and soon became the vanguard of the armed opposition, combining as they did idleness, relevant military and intelligence skills, and knowledge of the whereabouts of vast weapons stockpiles and relatively scarcer cash reserves concealed by the regime in anticipation of the projected defence of Baghdad.[30] Former Baathist or army hierarchies helped structure what initially were amorphous cells.[31] But for the most part this had little to do with party loyalty. From the outset, the armed opposition's discourse built on patriotic and religious themes at the expense of a largely discredited ideology.

Even at an early stage, when foreign fighters in all likelihood played a negligible part in day-to-day operations, the upsurge in attacks during the month of Ramadan in 2003 (27 October-25 November) illustrates the extent to which the struggle was framed as a religious duty.[32] A

---

[24] Crisis Group interview, July 2005.

[25] Serious U.S. analysts have argued against the idea that the insurrection was planned before the war. See Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White. "Assessing Iraq's Sunni Arab Insurgency", The Washington Institute, *Policy Focus* #50, December 2005. Although some documents suggesting otherwise have been produced, their authenticity has not been established. Importantly, the impressive investigative work undertaken after the war by the Iraq Survey Group (a fact-finding mission sent to assess the former regime's possession of weapons of mass destruction) and based on archives from the Baathist regime as well as interviews with its principal leaders has not confirmed this thesis. "Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD", 30 September 2004.

[26] Between 13 April and 23 May 2003, U.S. forces suffered only three losses due to combat. Anthony Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons* (Washington, 2003).

[27] Interviews with Baath members and officers of the former security apparatus (including special security) by a Crisis Group analyst visiting Iraq in a different capacity, Baghdad, Tikrit, Bayji and Mosul, April and May 2003.

[28] The insurgency has become increasingly Sunni Arab but has never been exclusively so. As late as 2005, several of the coalition's "most wanted" insurgent leaders were Shiites. Its 10

February 2005 list of 29 most wanted, for example, included Rashid Ta'n Kadhim (a former senior Baath party member) and Mahmud al-Hasani (a former member of Najaf's religious circles).

[29] Interviews with three members of this "proto-insurgency" by a Crisis Group analyst visiting Iraq in a different capacity, Baghdad, November 2003. Even to these former regime elements, the notion of a jihad was more appealing than an implausible "return to power", for it provided them with an immediate, legitimate sense of purpose. Still, those interviewed appeared thoroughly confused about what to do, agreeing solely on the need to do something, and all gave the impression they would gladly turn away from the armed struggle if they could return to a relatively stable financial situation. The notion that the former elite formed a cohesive group that was lavishly rewarded by Saddam Hussein's regime and was in a position to coalesce quickly after the tyrant's fall in an effort to stage a comeback is a myth. For a depiction of life under Saddam, including officials' salaries, privileges and perks, see David Baran, *Vivre la tyrannie et lui survivre. L'Irak en transition* (Paris, 2004).

[30] Describing the regime's strategy, two former intelligence officers claimed that its sole purpose was to prevent the fall of Baghdad, not fuel a subsequent insurgency. They called the strategy an unintended "blessing" for the armed opposition. Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, November 2003.

[31] For example, after a respected army officer in Diyala joined the insurgency, former subordinates followed him. A hierarchical relationship remained between them in deference to earlier ranks, even though the army officially had been disbanded. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, November 2003.

[32] Two Iraqi insurgents originally from Tikrit – neither of whom displayed significant signs of piety (and who, although Sunni, were married to Shiites), explained that they wanted to redouble their efforts during the holy month of Ramadan. Crisis Group

handful of groups claimed to be acting on behalf of the Baath but they quickly were put on the defensive, having to account for the former regime's perversion of Baathism,[33] its crimes,[34] and the military debacle.[35] While some fighters probably still looked upon Saddam Hussein as a symbol of anti-imperialist resistance, virtually all armed groups dissociated themselves from the former president,[36] and some openly denounced him.[37]

---

interviews, Baghdad, November 2003. In 2003, some of the first leaflets released in the Baath party's name bore Koranic verses alongside the party's more traditional mottos, "A United Arab Nation" with "An Eternal Mission" (*Umma 'Arabiya Wahida – Dhat Risala Khalida*).

[33] Saddam's power was built not through but at the expense of the party's internal cohesion and ideological consistency. As a consequence, after the regime's collapse, competing "Baath Parties" emerged, holding often diametrically opposed discourses. Some groups turned to a more Islamic discourse; others rekindled the quasi-Marxist ideology of old, which rapidly receded.

[34] In late 2003, the so-called Leadership of the Party distributed leaflets claiming that mass graves uncovered after the regime's fall contained victims of U.S. forces during the Gulf War and of the "mobs" which took part in the 1991 uprising – all of which for sanitary reasons allegedly had to be hurriedly buried. A 2004 leaflet issued by *Jaysh Muhammad* called on all former members of the Baath party and of the regime's security agencies to atone for past crimes through exemplary behaviour. "Contact each other because you know each other well. Organise your ranks and be a model and a support to the Mujahidin in order for the people to forgive what some of you did to them".

[35] Former army officers blamed Saddam Hussein's mediocre performance during the war, accusing him of betraying the Baath. Blame also falls on party bureaucrats: "Baathists did nothing during the war, nor will they act now. No one is fighting for the sake of Saddam. Saddam should be tried by the Iraqi Army for what he did and for destroying our great army". Crisis Group interview, a captain from the former army who joined the armed opposition, Baghdad, May 2004.

[36] The rare exceptions involve direct descendants of the Baath party, whose capacity for effective action appears quite limited. Unlike other groups, their communications are rudimentary and amateurish, and their claims of responsibility appear to be vastly exaggerated. While the Baath pledged to plunge Iraq into chaos if Saddam were judged, the opening of his trial coincided neither with a spectacular operation nor an upsurge in attacks. Several armed opposition internet sites display Saddam's picture, but this is misleading. Internet data makes clear that both those who set them up and those who consult them typically reside outside Iraq. The case of www.albasrah.net is typical: highly visible abroad, its audience in Iraq – as indicated by the Internet Protocol address of internet visitors – is negligible. See AMENA Consulting (an Arlington, Virginia based consulting outfit aiming at "bridging the gap between the U.S. and the Arab World"), "Electronic Propaganda of the Iraqi Insurgency", 26 May 2005. There is no reference at all to Saddam Hussein in most of the armed opposition's communiqués and videos.

[37] Some nationalistic/salafi groups, such as *Jaysh Muhammad*, bitterly accuse him of having persecuted Sunni *Ulama* (in this instance, salafis). See "Islamists Pledge Continued War on

Nor is there persuasive backing for the view that the current battle is but the extension of a global jihadi war. Most analysts now concur that the Baathist regime did not entertain relations with al-Qaeda, and foreign volunteers invited by Saddam to fight for him had nothing to do with Osama bin Laden's organisation.[38] The impact of foreign jihadis grew over time, but during the early stages of the insurgency it appears to have been negligible, and al-Qaeda in particular was absent, claiming none of the spectacular attacks orchestrated in 2003.[39] Suicide missions only appeared well into the occupation.[40]

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

For clarity, Crisis Group has distinguished three phases in the evolution of the insurgents' discourse. In reality, rather than being clearly separate and sequential, they are overlapping and intertwined: competition between groups for greater visibility generated increasingly bloody and controversial deeds, which in turn initiated vigourous internal debate from mid-2004 to mid-2005 and ushered in the current phase of apparent consensus on critical issues.

A. PHASE 1 (PEAKING IN 2004): COMPETITION

Although armed attacks rapidly grew in number and intensity from late May 2003 onwards,[41] initially these

---

Coalition", Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) Iraqi Crisis Report, no. 63, 14 May 2004. Mohammad al-Obaidi, a sympathiser of the insurgency, explained: "As for the resistance's view of Saddam's regime, I think that all resistance factions condemn the regime for what happened in Iraq, but in the meantime we must keep in mind that the regime is gone now and forever and the Americans cannot hold Iraq hostage with the memory of the past". Laith al-Saud, "Voices of Resistance: An interview with Dr. Mohammad al-Obaidi of Iraq's Struggle Movement", *CounterPunch*, 16 July 2005.

[38] Interestingly, very few suicide attacks were reported during the 2003 war, despite Saddam Hussein's efforts to recruit and equip candidates for martyrdom.

[39] Some spectacular attacks were ascribed to *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, then in conflict with al-Qaeda.

[40] Following the regime's collapse, no suicide attack was reported until the August 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters, which according to some sources had all the hallmarks of such an operation.

[41] The most spectacular operations in 2003 included the attack on the Jordanian embassy (7 August), the devastating bombing of UN headquarters (19 August), the murder of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim and scores of his followers (29 August) the launching of missiles on the al-Rashid hotel during U.S. Deputy

mostly went unclaimed. The first claims of responsibility and named armed groups appear as of June 2003, though even then confusion prevailed. In some cases, there was no claim of responsibility, in others, several.[42] Groups disappeared as suddenly as they emerged.[43] All in all, the armed opposition displayed rudimentary communications skills, was unable to articulate a clear message and had virtually no internet presence.[44]

During this phase, multiple groups, generally small and highly localised, vied for exposure and recognition to attract recruits and financial backing. Their initiatives were uncoordinated, their claims often wildly exaggerated, and their logic that of one-upmanship. To heighten their profile, they distributed crude leaflets by pre-existing social networks (family, tribe, etc.) and in mosques. They also filmed short, low-quality videos depicting armed operations; these typically were dropped off for the foreign press corps at the reception desk of major hotels.[45] With time, these methods improved to include more sophisticated compact discs, replete with elaborate soundtracks as well as scenes borrowed from Arab television. Available at local video stores, they were popular with the Iraqi public, whose reactions ran the gamut from pride to curiosity to scepticism, and, in some instances, disgust. By early 2004, videos had become highly professional, used by insurgent groups to make their case and highlight their deeds. [46]

Among these, the most notable and highly valued because of their high media return were the meticulously staged executions of foreigners.[47]

At the same time, the internet became a principal means of communication both within the armed opposition and for its relations to the outside world. While various sites (such as www.basrah.net, www.alchahed.net, www.uruknet.info, www.iraqiresistance.info and www.iraqpatrol.com) depicted the resistance as patriotic and nationalistic, the rhetoric from the groups most visibly active on the ground was of an increasingly religious and, more precisely, salafist bent. Unlike sites affiliated with the Baath party (www.albaathalarabi.org, www.al-moharer.net),[48] those run by Islamic armed groups contained specific and constantly updated information. Islamic internet chat rooms gradually emerged as important forums for discussion and vigourous debate. These developments were symptoms of the Islamists' gradual domination of the armed opposition as a whole.[49]

Secretary of Defence Wolfowitz's surprise visit (26 October), and the bombing of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) headquarters (27 October).

[42] For example, multiple groups claimed responsibility for the UN headquarters attack.

[43] Significantly, the few groups that professed attachment to the former regime quickly vanished. Despite widespread visibility in the international media, *Hizb al-'Awda* (the Party of the Return) was among them. Another, *Mujahidu Saddam* (the name of a commando set up in the 1990s by the former regime), issued a communiqué vowing to avenge the death of Saddam's two sons, killed by U.S. forces in Mosul on 22 July 2003. Nothing has been heard from it since.

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

[45] One such recording showed the launching of the missile that struck a DHL airplane on 22 November 2003, forcing it to make an emergency landing. The footage was immediately dropped off at a hotel and then circulated among journalists.

[46] One example among many: in February 2004, *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* released "Rayat al-Haqq" (Banners of Truth), a video it claimed as its first, disavowing any link to earlier footage attributed to it. The 30-minute recording begins with pictures of "Muslim suffering in Iraq" to the sound of Islamic sermons. Excerpts from the Koran follow, intertwined with an opening statement delivered by the organisation's emir. Next comes the list of all attacks perpetrated by the group between May 2003 and January 2004; pictures of armed fighters; a video montage of its armed operations; detailed justification of the assassination of U.S., Spanish, Canadian and British citizens, purportedly

members of their respective intelligence services; display of a mass grave allegedly containing U.S. soldiers buried by their own countrymen in order to lower official casualty numbers; and, finally, recorded statements by five martyrs, explaining their forthcoming sacrifice. Another example is the "al-Dhurwa" (The Peak) video produced by *Saraya al-Ghadhab al-Islami.* Lasting approximately 40 minutes, it has a very similar structure.

[47] The publicity surrounding Nicolas Berg's decapitation, the footage of which was released on the internet on 11 May 2004, triggered a wave of hostage-taking and foreigner executions (Iraqis had been victims for some time already). The decapitations were captured on tapes, which were distributed to the media. One of the most appalling cases involved the execution of Nepalese labourers. Their killing, shown by *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* on a video of extraordinary brutality, was condemned by the Muslim Scholars Association (*Hay'at al-'Ulama al-Muslimin*), a religious and political organisation that typically has refrained from denouncing insurgent violence. See www.aljazeera.net, 31 August 2004.

[48] All these sites were most recently accessed on 31 January 2006, except www.albaathalarabi.com, which has been suspended or shut down.

[49] Islamist groups were the most effective at using internet resources. For example, groups most closely affiliated with transnational, jihadi salafist networks – namely *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* and *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* – were first to implement a genuine internet-based communications strategy. Indeed, as a general matter salafists, whether jihadists or not, have turned to the internet for sharing important information (for example, doctrinal texts or sermons) and helping communication among members of this relatively small yet highly dispersed strand of Islam. Even prior to the Baathist regime's fall, contacts had been established via the internet between Iraqi salafi *Ulama* (in particular from Falluja) and foreign counterparts, arguably facilitating later contacts with jihadi groups. Interviews by a Crisis Group analyst visiting Iraq in a different capacity, Falluja, May 2003.

Progressively, as a result of fierce competition, smaller, less effective groups disappeared or merged with more successful, well-established and prestigious ones, such as *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* and *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq*. By 2005, what had begun as an assortment of isolated cells thus became a set of far wider and sophisticated networks.[50]

The insurgency's heightened centralisation and sophistication were manifested in several ways. The most significant groups each established a subdivision (such as *Maktab I'lami*, *Qism I'lami*, *Katiba I'lamiya* i.e., information bureau, section or squad) dedicated to controlling the information flow, synthesising data produced by their military branches,[51] and acting as official spokesmen.[52] There was greater military specialisation as well: within *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, the 'Umar brigade formally was tasked with detecting, surveilling and eliminating the "most dangerous members" of the Shiite Badr Corps,[53] while a unit from *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura* was charged with seizing non-Western hostages.[54] A loose territorial allocation also began to emerge, both within groups (where specific "brigades" or "battalions" took exclusive responsibility for operations in their allotted regions) and between groups, some of which exercised de facto control over given areas.[55]

Other changes occurred in parallel. As credibility became a more central preoccupation, the organisations stopped issuing some of their more extravagant statements. Groups began to nurture specific identities, using distinctive logos and separate presentation styles. By 2005, newspapers in PDF format were circulating on a regular basis.[56] Finally, the insurgent groups started to glorify their respective leaders, relating in detail their every deed and prominently displaying their pictures on posters.

Over time, in short, the most visible actors among the armed opposition became larger entities that knew and communicated with each other. An informal division of labour also took shape, presumably reflecting differences in priorities and resources,[57] with *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* focusing on anti-U.S. suicide operations and *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* as well as *Jaysh al-Rashidin* chiefly targeting members of the Iraqi security forces and other so-called collaborators.[58] With greater coordination and harmonisation also came the first joint declarations and operations.[59] Of course, this process was far from smooth; groups engaged in heated discussions and, on some occasions, armed confrontation, as tactical convergence masked deeper tensions.

B. PHASE 2 (MID-2004 TO MID-2005): CONSOLIDATION

Practically from the outset, insurgent groups emphasised the need to legitimise their actions.[60] A series of early

---

[50] *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* in particular incorporated numerous smaller ones, for example, 'Umar and Qa'qa' – based in Baghdad and Baquba, respectively – which in late 2004 swore allegiance to Zarqawi. In September 2005, *Thawrat 'Ashrin Tammuz*, a significant group that itself incorporated several smaller ones, merged with *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya fil-'Iraq*.

[51] For example, groups started to issue, at periodic intervals, compilations of their military operations, often covering wide areas of the country.

[52] All *Tandhim al-Qa'ida's* communiqués are signed by Abu Maysara al-'Iraqi, who is in charge of the information department (*Mas'ul al-Qism al-I'lami*).

[53] The Badr Corps, officially renamed Badr Organisation, is a militia operated by the Shiite Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which is a central player in the political process. Specialisation is most pronounced in the case of *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*. According to its communiqué claiming responsibility for simultaneous attacks against the Palestine and Sheraton hotels in Baghdad on 24 October 2005, the operation was jointly conducted by an attack brigade, an RPG brigade and al-Barra' Ibn Malik, a "suicide commando". See "Hotels in Baghdad rocked by rockets, car bombs", American Forces Press Service, 24 October 2005.

[54] Although each principal group claims it has a brigade specialising in hostage-taking and that the decision to act is made in an orderly fashion by their political bureau, see *Jami'*, November 2005, there is strong reason to suspect that at least some kidnappings are haphazard and opportunistic.

[55] Crisis Group interview, an Iraqi stringer who organized encounters between journalists and insurgents throughout 2004 and early 2005, August 2005.

[56] In early 2005, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* launched *Dhurwat Sanam al-Islam;* the first issue of *Jami'*, published by the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance (*al-Jabha al-Islamiya lil-Muqawama al-'Iraqiya)* was dated 1 July 2005 and entitled "Iraq and Palestine, one and the same Jihad". See also *al-Fursan* (published by *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq*), *al-Ansar* and *Hasad al-Mujahidin* (edited by *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*).

[57] See also Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, op. cit.

[58] For its part, *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* appears to specialise in attacks against military convoys.

[59] Such joint statements have by now become frequent. For example, the 21 April 2005 attack against a U.S. helicopter was jointly announced and claimed by *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* and *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq*. According to *Jami'*, the 10 October attack against a U.S. armoured vehicle in Mosul was jointly conducted with *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq*. On 27 November 2005, five insurgent groups (*Harakat al-Muqawima al-Islamiya fil-'Iraq*, *Jami'*, *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq*, *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*, *Jaysh Muhammad*) issued a communiqué concerning the U.S. offensive on Ramadi. On 5 January 2006, *al-Jaysh al-Islami*, *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* and *Jaysh Muhammad* jointly urged an intensification of attacks as a religious duty before the celebration of *'Id al-Adhha*.

[60] *Al-Jabha al-Sha'biya li-Tahrir al-'Iraq* (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Iraq), a short lived and hardly known group, published in the 10 August 2003 issue of *al-Aswar* a declaration

missteps by coalition forces greatly facilitated this task. As anger and frustration grew, increasing numbers of Iraqis appeared willing to give the armed opposition the benefit of the doubt.[61] During this initial period, coalition forces, UN headquarters and the Jordanian embassy were considered by large segments of the population as legitimate targets.[62] Violence resulting in Iraqi civilian casualties tended to be blamed on foreign terrorism (*Irhab*) as distinguished from the national resistance (*Muqawama*). While the insurgency failed to become mass-based, these early days were a high point in terms of its popular support. Two events in particular explain this success.

First, Saddam's capture in December 2003 helped rid the insurgency of the image of a rear-guard struggle waged on behalf of a despised regime. Paradoxically, his incarceration gave the insurgency renewed momentum, dissociating it from the Baathist regime and shoring up its patriotic, nationalist and religious/jihadist credentials. By the same token, it facilitated a rapprochement between the insurgency and transnational jihadi networks, which had been hostile to a partnership with remnants of a secular, heretical regime and whose resources (monetary and human) could now be fully marshalled.[63]

Secondly, the April 2004 siege of Falluja coupled with the onslaught against Muqtada al-Sadr's armed militia (*Jaysh al-Mahdi*) significantly boosted popular sympathy for the armed opposition at a time when disillusionment with the political process was intensifying.[64] For the insurgency, the simultaneous fighting in Falluja,[65] coalition

difficulties in facing down Sadr's militia, and close cooperation between Sunni fighters and Shiite militiamen,[66] were a godsend. Many Iraqis saw it as the embodiment of a heroic, nationalistic and cross-sectarian resistance that would restore the nation's lost dignity.[67]

The insurgency's golden era lasted only a brief moment. Within weeks, cooperation between Sadr's militias and the armed opposition ended.[68] In the south, Iraqis quickly grew tired of continued skirmishes, which they perceived as feckless or, worse, counter-productive. Within the armed opposition, the one-upmanship noted above led to increasingly brutal practices, prompting widespread popular revulsion, including among former sympathisers.[69] A rash of hostage-taking, beheadings (whether filmed or not),[70] summary executions of government employees,[71]

---

by which it "fully takes the legal responsibility for its military operations against the Anglo-American occupation forces", basing itself on the illegitimacy of the invasion. By November 2003, insurgent groups were distributing leaflets in mosques justifying on religious grounds the execution of "collaborators", typically branded as apostates (*Murtaddun*)

[61] Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, October and November 2003.
[62] Ibid. The UN and Jordan were widely resented for the role they played during the embargo in the 1990s, the former having enforced it and the latter having profited from it at Iraq's expense.
[63] See Molly Bingham, "Ordinary Warriors: The Iraqi Resistance", *Vanity Fair*, June 2004. The combination of their respective skills and networks of relationships, together with the wedding of national liberation and jihadi outlooks, significantly boosted the insurgents' capacity and effectiveness. Suicide attacks are a case in point: they combine resources available to the jihadis (the suicide bombers themselves) with the tactical expertise, logistical backup and materials in the hands of Iraqi insurgents.
[64] For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°27, *Iraq's Transition: On A Knife Edge*, 27 April 2004.
[65] On 31 April 2004, four Americans were killed and their bodies desecrated in Falluja. The incident triggered "Operation Vigilant Resolve", which started as a simple cordon-and-search process but rapidly turned into a violent confrontation between insurgents

and Marines as resistance inside the city proved fiercer than expected, and local Iraqi police and military units melted away. The operation mobilised many Iraqis in opposition.
[66] See Zainab Naji, "Combat Training, Courtesy of Fallujah. Volunteers from the Sunni Resistance Stronghold are Teaching Shia Militants how to Fight", IWPR Iraqi Crisis Report, no. 80, 24 August 2004.
[67] Public manifestations of Shiite support for the insurgency contributed to this image, which was assiduously cultivated by the insurgency. See, for example, the manifesto issued by the Iraqi National Founding Congress (*al-Mu'tamar al-Ta'sisi al-Watani al-'Iraqi*) and signed by Ayatollah Ahmad Hasan al-Baghdadi and Jawad al-Khalisi, A*l-Quds al-'Arabi*, 14 May 2004. Moreover, during the brief period when events in Falluja and the Shiite south converged, armed operations focused on coalition forces as opposed to other, more controversial targets. This too helped legitimise the insurgency. As an interior ministry employee put it, "I support any attack against the Americans and reject any attack that kills Iraqis. The U.S. is trying to defame the Iraqi resistance by saying it is Saddam loyalists or Baathists or terrorists. I tell them: They are brave Iraqis". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, May 2004.
[68] According to a photographer who covered these events and was "embedded" with *Jaysh al-Mahdi*, instructors dispatched from Falluja desperately sought to teach Sadr's militiamen basic military skills – for example, that mortar settings differ when shells are launched from rooftops rather than the ground. In their eyes, they were wasting their time trying to educate militiamen whom they considered grossly incompetent amateurs. Crisis Group interview, May 2005. The June 2004 execution of six Shiite truck drivers carrying supplies to Falluja dampened any prospect for an enduring Shiite-Sunni military alliance.
[69] The execution of a British/Iraqi senior aid worker, Margaret Hassan, in particular elicited widespread public outrage. See Associated Press, 24 October 2004.
[70] Beheadings proliferated to an extraordinary degree by late 2004 and early 2005. This can be seen in the number of videos released, but even they do not tell the entire story. See Michael Georgy, "Beheadings now routine for Iraqi pathologist", Reuters, 10 October 2004.
[71] This phenomenon also grew in spectacular fashion, in particular in Mosul. See Tom Lasseter, "Killings in Mosul have

public killings,[72] and suicide attacks against Iraqis lining up for security sector jobs fundamentally altered public perceptions. With the growing conviction that Sunni militants were deliberately targeting Shiites,[73] polarisation increased dramatically, virtually halting any possibility of cross-sectarian alliances.[74]

Controversial practices also exacerbated tensions within insurgent ranks as well as between them and their supporters. Although they generally are reluctant to acknowledge the backlash triggered by their actions and their inability to rally public opinion, the impact of both is apparent from their documents. All groups expressed concern about their legitimacy at a time when accusations of barbarism, depravity and sectarianism were encountering a large and widening echo,[75] though from mid-2004 to mid-2005, they engaged in sharp disputes over how to respond and pursued differing, often contradictory tactics.[76] The January 2005 parliamentary elections in particular exposed deep rifts,[77] galvanised popular opposition to continued violence,[78] and prompted some former allies to distance themselves. While all insurgents called for a

boycott, only some deliberately targeted anyone involved in the process. Breaking with the armed opposition's line, in March and April 2005 a number of prominent Sunni religious leaders voiced concern about the predominant strategy.[79] Around this time, credible reports surfaced of pitched battles between relatively more conciliatory and more radical groups,[80] with U.S. forces as passive eyewitnesses.[81]

Such tensions have tended to be viewed as precursors of growing and irreversible fragmentation. Yet, for all their undeniable differences, what is remarkable is that the at times violent friction between groups, far from precipitating the insurgency's implosion, has increased its coherence, at least in rhetoric. Signs of dispute or disagreement swiftly disappeared from view. Eager for legitimacy and fearful of debilitating internal conflict, the insurgency converged around an Islamic discourse, turning principally to salafi *Ulama* (i.e. religious scholars) for moral and juridical validation of its jihad in general and of specific forms of conduct in particular. In this, the groups did not seek out little-known figures on whom they knew they could rely to bless their cause but rather solicited the views of prestigious religious jurists who openly sanctioned their struggle.[82]

The more active groups now appeal to the same Koranic passages,[83] tend to interpret current events through the prism of the Crusades (of which U.S. imperialism is seen as the latest manifestation), and invoke mythical/religious events and people (the battle of Hittin in the early age of Islam; the heroic figures of Saladin, liberator of Jerusalem, and al-Qa'qa'; the early Muslim fighters, and so forth). Insurgents also tie the war in Iraq to a broader struggle on behalf of Muslims, with a special emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

---

taken a huge toll", *Knight Ridder Newspapers*, 23 January 2005. During this period, insurgent groups established their own checkpoints, most notably in the "Triangle of Death", south of Baghdad, and executed anyone identified as a government employee. Crisis Group interview, a civil servant who evaded execution by concealing evidence of his professional status, February 2005.

[72] A January 2005 *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* video pictures the killing of an officer on a busy street. The shot appears to have been deliberately taken with an eye to emphasising that many cars were travelling in the background and that the killing had occurred in public view.

[73] An unauthenticated letter ascribed to Zarqawi, in which he blamed Iraqi Shiites for having chosen sides against the Mujahidin, was leaked by U.S. officials to *The New York Times* on 8 February 2004. It was closely followed by spectacular attacks against Shiite civilians in Baghdad and Karbala during the 'Ashura commemorations, on 2 March 2004. Later in the year, there were increasing reports of attacks targeting Shiites. See, for example, *The Washington Post*, 23 November 2004.

[74] Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, October 2003 and September 2004.

[75] Carefully staged televised confessions of captured insurgents reportedly had a considerable impact. See Maggie Michael, "Confessions show terror's spread in Iraq", Associated Press, 7 November 2004.

[76] A key point of contention concerned whether the "Crusaders" or their "collaborators" ought to be the primary targets.

[77] While *Jami'* announced its refusal to spill Iraqi blood despite its view that the elections were illegitimate, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* continued to behead both candidates and election workers. See Samir Haddad. "Iraqi Resistance Group Says Not to Target Elections", *Islam Online*, 27 January 2005.

[78] See, for example, Doug Struck. "Iraqis cite shift in attitudes since vote, mood seen moving against insurgency", *The Washington Post*, 7 February 2005.

[79] On 1 April 2005, one of the most prominent Sunni clerics in Iraq, Ahmad al-Samarra'i, reportedly signed, along with 64 other prominent clerics, a *fatwa* urging Sunni Arabs to join the National Guard. The information was only partly denied by the Muslim Scholars Association, a reflection of its ambivalence on this issue. United Press International, 2 April 2005.

[80] Crisis Group interview, an NGO worker with good connections in Anbar, June 2005.

[81] See, for example, *Los Angeles Times*, 8 May 2005; *The Washington Post*, 29 May 2005.

[82] For instance, well known Saudi *Ulama* issued a petition supporting the insurgency only weeks before the January 2005 elections. Far from being dissidents belonging to underground jihadi networks, they were officially recognised clerics. See "Top Sunni cleric calling Iraqis to unite against U.S. invaders' terror", *Arab Monitor*, 24 September 2004; see also *al-Ahram*, 2-8 December 2004.

[83] The following verses – all of which call on Muslims to fight unbelievers and defend Islam against the infidel – are unanimously referred to: *al-Baqara*, 191-193, 215-216; *al-Hajj*, 39-41; *al-Tawba*, 5, 24; *al-Qadr*, 10-13.

The insurgency's growing confessional character can be attributed to several factors. The alienation of the Sunni Arab constituency as well as the confessional character of both the political process[84] and counter-insurgency operations[85] are important but the role of religious jurists ought not to be neglected. Most fighters have been Sunni Arabs, and religious justifications emanated from salafi scholars; as a result, the armed opposition – though it continued to proclaim a pluralistic, cross-sectarian identity – increasingly became strictly Sunni Arab. There is no evidence of Shiite scholars ever being solicited for advice and rulings. The approach to the most fundamental questions – including how to deal with civilians caught in the crossfire – clearly drew on Sunni conceptions of jihad, in particular the notion that actions must be judged based on intent rather than outcome. Civilian casualties are thus justified so long as the attack targets the enemy rather than the civilian Iraqi population.[86] Moreover, in the event the enemy mingles with Muslims to use them as human shields, the so-called *tatarrus* rule validates attacks that take the lives of civilians; they, like the fighters who caused their deaths, are considered martyrs.[87]

The influence of Salafism reached beyond groups that formally identify themselves as such.[88] Salafism benefits from the strength of weak ties: the ability to bind together people who may share little else. On the one hand, requirements for being a "good Muslim" (and even the best of Muslims) are simple and easily met, since fighting a jihad satisfies the obligations of a pious life.[89] On the other hand, because the focus is on duplicating the personal behaviour and moral code of early Muslims (*Aslaf*), Salafism is an essentially apolitical doctrine and therefore avoids potentially divisive issues.[90]

Calling for a reinstatement of the caliphate (a reference to an idealised, distant era, which will not come about until Islam's ultimate triumph) is, in this sense, hardly a political program; it certainly does not have the same meaning, nor the same consequences, as describing a concrete, workable Islamic alternative to the current government. To this day, the armed opposition's avowed objectives have thus been reduced to a primary, unifying goal: ridding Iraq of the foreign occupier.[91] Beyond that, all is vague.

Religious arguments are founded principally on the nature of the foreign presence, deemed simultaneously an invasion (*Ghazu*), occupation (*Ihtilal*), and crusade (*Harb Salibiya*). Religious scholars distinguish the 1991 war in which Arab, non-Christian forces also joined. In contrast,

---

[84] See Crisis Group Middle East Report, N°34, *What Can the U.S. Do in Iraq?*, 22 December 2004, and Crisis Group Middle East Report N°42, *Iraq: Don't Rush the Constitution*, 8 June 2005.

[85] Initial misperceptions regarding Saddam's regime led coalition forces to anticipate a hostile reception in the so-called "Sunni Arab Triangle" (where in fact the least fighting occurred) and to adopt a far more aggressive attitude than in the South. In a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, this triggered resentment and support for the insurgency that might otherwise have been avoided. Subsequent resort to Shiite and Kurdish counter-insurgency forces also played a significant role in further alienating inhabitants of the area and solidifying the perception among Sunni Arabs that a sectarian war was being waged, against them. See Gilles Dorronsoro and Peter Harling, "Entre vision messianique et ajustements tactiques. La guerre américaine en Irak et en Afghanistan", *Politique Etrangère*, Winter 2005.

[86] To date, none of the armed opposition groups has openly claimed responsibility for attacks exclusively targeting civilians, including attacks targeting Shiites, although Zarqawi has used language indicative of such a strategy. See Section III A below. The insurgents' definition of civilians excludes all or most "collaborators", including anyone playing an active part in the U.S.-sponsored political process. That said, most groups progressively shied away from executing unarmed civil servants (including employees involved in the polling process), a frequent occurrence at one stage.

[87] This argument is explained at length in the September 2005 edition of *Jami'*.

[88] This has been confirmed by the Iraqi National Security Adviser. Crisis Group interview, Mowaffak al-Rubaie,

Baghdad, September 2005. Video footage frequently shows insurgents in traditional salafi dress code, in particular pants known as *Sarawil* that had virtually disappeared in Iraq. Foreign jihadis most likely at first played an inspirational role among other insurgents, posing as early Muslim warriors, duplicating their garb and religious practice, but also a set of traditional, quasi-martial values (for example, battle courage and cunning, self-sacrifice or abnegation) that play a large role in popular culture. Insurgents produced a lengthy, powerful video on this theme, which mixes contemporary footage of combat in Iraq with pictures from classical movies on the early ages of Islam. See, for example, *Ajdad wa Ihfad. Muqarana Bayn Madhi Al-Umma Al-Islamiya wa Hadhariha* (Ancestors and Descendants. Comparison between the past and present of the Islamic Nation).

[89] An important member of *Jaysh Muhammad* confided to a foreign journalist that he did not pray, although he claimed to be profoundly pious. See Molly Bingham, op. cit.

[90] Salafists simply reject the U.S. political model which they consider evil and hypocritical and which they contrast with the Prophet's ideal of justice and equality.

[91] As a self-proclaimed member of *Jaysh Muhammad* explained, premature politicisation of the jihad could be counter-productive and dangerous. See Ali Kais al-Rubai, "Islamists Pledge Continued War on Coalition", IWPR Iraqi Crisis Report, no. 63, 14 May 2004. Even Zarqawi's group, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, which is widely viewed as seeking to impose a Taliban-style regime, has publicly stated only three immediate objectives: to pursue the defensive jihad*;* to restore the golden age of the Islamic caliphate (which is not the equivalent of an Islamic republic since the caliphate had very weak institutions); and the physical elimination of apostates who have joined enemy ranks. See the inaugural, March 2005 issue of *Dhurwat Sanam al-Islam.*

the current insurgency qualifies as a defensive jihad aimed at protecting Muslim territory and broadly viewed by Sunni *Ulama* as a personal duty (*Fardh 'Ayn*) for anyone living under foreign occupation as well as a collective duty (*Fardh Kifaya*) for all other Muslims.[92] The notion that one can turn to a non-Muslim army in order to overthrow an unjust, tyrannical regime is widely rejected.

Likewise, the insurgents over time sought either to justify some of their more controversial practices or, in some cases, to regulate them. Hostages were tried by makeshift religious courts, confronted with professed evidence, and sentenced after an alleged investigation.[93] Carefully scripted videos exhibited such evidence (including identification cards or confessions), explained the religious basis for the conviction, and displayed highly ritualised beheadings purportedly replicating religious ceremonies; in a shift toward less controversial methods, recent executions have been patterned after military rites, most notably firing squads. Depictions and descriptions of beheadings, which had been widespread, virtually disappeared in the course of 2005; indeed, decapitations officially were restricted to members of the Badr Corps.

Armed groups also published handbooks and established specific rules, for example regarding the treatment of prisoners.[94] Responding to the chaos and growing public revulsion that marked the earlier phase, they standardised their practices, resorting to those deemed most legitimate and defensible pursuant to what Islamic jurisprudence calls the "ethics of jihad" (*Adab al-Jihad*).[95]

This convergence between insurgent groups and the increased uniformity of their discourse and – in appearance at least – practice are neither absolute nor, in all likelihood, permanent. The spectrum ranges between the more Arab nationalistic on the one hand, and the more jihadi religious on the other. But, contrary to common perception, these are at present more subtle nuances than rigid distinctions, with all groups mixing Islamic and patriotic themes in various proportions. Practically speaking, it has become virtually impossible to categorise a particular group's discourse as jihadi as opposed to nationalist or patriotic,[96] with the exception of the Baath party, whose presence on the ground has been singularly ineffective.

Even Zarqawi's *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, which regularly is described as a foreign, jihadi organisation, named its spokesperson Abu Maysara al-'Iraqi (Abu Maysara the Iraqi) and in 2005 chose an Iraqi to head its military operations – both apparent efforts to demonstrate its patriotic credentials[97] and deflect criticism that the armed opposition was led by a Jordanian.[98] Likewise, the names of several of its brigades – *Abu Ghrayb* (the infamous Iraqi prison which has become a symbol of U.S. abuse), *Tall 'Afar* (a town in Northern Iraq which underwent a major U.S.-Iraqi forces onslaught) and *Tahrir* (liberation) – were designed to resonate with the local population. The formerly widespread, open denunciations of Zarqawi and *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* by followers of other armed groups have practically ceased. (Private criticism reportedly remains prevalent).[99] Conversely, groups typically identified as national and patriotic, such as *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq*, both espouse a more salafist discourse and, in many instances, carry out similar practices. Groups purportedly as different as *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* and the more nationalistic *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* both announced the establishment of martyrs' brigades exclusively composed of Iraqis.[100]

---

[92] A collective duty can be performed by some Muslim volunteers in the name of all.

[93] While religious tribunals probably were put in place as early as 2003, the practice significantly expanded over time. See *Le Monde*, 20 September 2004. Several Iraqi and non-Iraqi hostages who ultimately were released have recounted the gruelling experience of interrogation. See "Narrow Escape From Insurgent's Bullet. Reporter Abducted and Held for Six Hours by an Armed Group near Fallujah Recounts his Ordeal", IWPR Iraqi Crisis Report, no. 87, 1 November 2004.

[94] U.S. forces reportedly uncovered several manuals in the Sunni town of Karabala, including "How to choose the best hostage" and "Rules for decapitating infidels". See *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 23 June 2005. *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* devoted a whole section of its booklet "Methodology of Jihad" (*Manhajiyat al-Jihad*), posted on its website in September 2005, to the rule that should be applied to hostage taking.

[95] This is a branch of jihad jurisprudence (*Fiqh al-Jihad*), which is dwelled upon extensively on the internet. See, for example, http://www.jehadakmatloob.jeeran.com/fekeh.al-jehad/adab_al-jehad.html (accessed on 15 January 2006).

[96] Significantly, the leader of *al-Jaysh al-Islami*, reputedly composed mainly of former regime elements, presents himself as emir. See his communiqué released on 2 January 2006.

[97] Likewise, *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*, which often is described as belonging to the same current as *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, relies on a mix of Iraqi patriotism, Arab nationalism, and salafism. See, for example, *al-Ansar*, October 2005.

[98] Such criticism surfaced regularly on internet forums sympathetic to the insurgency. As one Iraqi user put it, "that Jordanian would do better to get the Americans and the Jews out of his own country"!

[99] Crisis Group interviews, several individuals claiming ties with the insurgency, December 2005 and January 2006. None of the groups scrutinised in this report have openly criticised *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* through official media outlets.

[100] *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, which claimed the 9 November 2005 attacks on three hotels in Amman, Jordan, attributed them to its new *Ansar* (Partisans) suicide brigade, allegedly composed exclusively of Iraqi volunteers. On *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*, see the communiqué dated 4 December 2005. Other groups, such as *Jaysh al-Rashidin*, have followed suit, recently announcing establishment of the *al-Firdaws* (Paradise) suicide brigade. One possible explanation could have to do with a decrease in the

How deep this unity is and whether it will last are other matters. The rapprochement is almost certainly tactical, motivated by the immediate priority of fighting the occupation. Nor can one exclude the possibility of behind-the-scenes tensions, various instances of which have been reported. Still, armed clashes between insurgent groups, widely noted in the first half of 2005, are not rampant,[101] nor do they seem to degenerate into enduring vendettas.[102] And, underlying friction aside, the harmonisation of their overt discourse is remarkable. Recent reports of negotiations between "nationalistic" groups and the U.S. over forming an alliance against foreign jihadis appear at the very least exaggerated; such duplicity almost certainly would have had an impact on, and most probably would have ended, the verbal status quo.[103]

There is an important consequence. The existence of an inherent, intractable and increasing rift between the national and jihadi strands of the insurgency has been an operating principle behind the counter-insurgency policy,[104] and, indeed, most expert analysis. While tensions may well exist,[105] for now the groups have proved unexpectedly

successful at transcending, defusing or at least containing them. In the longer run, of course, and particularly in the event the insurgency were to prevail, this superficial unity would expire. Jihadis see the struggle as part of a wider, open-ended and clear-cut confrontation between Muslims and infidels; their outlook rapidly would collide with the more pragmatic views of Iraqi fighters who, albeit religious, are more interested in Iraq's future than in the eventual spread and triumph of Islam.

C. PHASE 3 (MID-2005 TO PRESENT): CONFIDENCE

Having survived the initial phases of competition and consolidation, the insurgency appears to have gained measurably in self-confidence. Gone for the most part are earlier indications of hesitation and self-doubt. Extended self-justifications or validations of actions have become rarer; instead, the armed groups issue succinct and concise communiqués, claims of responsibility or, when faced with incriminating allegations, terse denials. On doctrinal issues, they now invoke a well established corpus of authoritative texts and documents.[106] The insurgency is acting as if it has already proved its case and demonstrated both the iniquity of the U.S.-sponsored political process and the threat represented by the Iraqi government, accused of undermining the country's unity and sovereignty.[107]

---

number of foreign fighters entering via Syria, which has been noted by U.S. military sources. There also has been an overall decrease in the total number of suicide attacks. Crisis Group email communication with a U.S. military analyst, February 2006.

[101] It is a fair assumption that, given the U.S. and Iraqi government focus on any possible rift between insurgents, significant clashes would have received copious coverage.

[102] In October 2005, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*'s killing of Hikmat Mumtaz, Shaykh of the Albu Baz, an important tribe in Samarra', led to violent, though short-lived, confrontation with other insurgent groups. See *The New York Times*, 12 January 2006. The fact that the murder of a prominent tribal leader was settled rapidly and with little bloodshed militates against the prospect of an imminent implosion. Events mentioned in the article have been confirmed to Crisis Group by an Albu Baz clansman with reputed ties to the insurgency. Crisis Group interview, January 2006.

[103] For further discussion of this point, see Section III A below.

[104] Dexter Filkins and Sabrina Tavernise, "Americans Said to Meet Rebels, Exploiting Rift", *The New York Times*, 7 January 2006.

[105] A strong indicator of remaining divisions is the fact that, despite the increase in the number of joint attacks and communiqués, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* remains excluded by such groups as *Ansar al-Sunna* and *al-Jaysh al-Islami*. On the other hand, new evidence suggests that these divisions may not reflect a simple nationalistic versus jihadi divide, despite persistent media reports to that effect. See, for example, Reuters, 22 and 24 January 2006; *Time Magazine*, 22 January 2006; *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 2006. By late January 2006, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* had received various signs of acknowledgment by groups of a more nationalistic bent. In a 7 January 2006 communiqué, *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* praised "the exemplary actions of our brothers from *Tandhim*". Several other groups, including *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura*, *Saraya al-Ghadhab al-Islami* and *Jaysh*

Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a, joined *Tandhim* in the Mujahidin's Consultative Council (*Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*), which a joint communiqué announced on 21 January 2006. The following day, a communiqué signed by *Tandhim*'s official spokesman, Aby Maysara al-'Iraqi, announced that the emir at the head of this council was an Iraqi, another sign of *Tandhim*'s ongoing efforts to "Iraqify" its image. Neither *al-Jaysh al-Islami* nor *Ansar al-Sunna* reacted to the creation of this new body. It is possible that the principal rift is between *Tandhim* and these two groups, not due to ideological divergence, but rather competition for power among three relatively large and autonomous groups.

[106] There was quick reaction to the document released in October 2005 by the office of the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, purported to be a letter sent by Ayman al-Zawahiri (al-Qaeda's number two) to Zarqawi calling into question his anti-Shiite strategy. Its authenticity was immediately challenged and denied by Zarqawi himself, claiming "these allegations are false and emanate from the imagination of politicians in the Black House [i.e. the White House]". He then referred to a list of internet sites containing his writings, so that readers could form their "personal opinion regarding his honesty and standing as a man of religion". See *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*'s 13 October 2005 communiqué.

[107] The way Iraqi governing bodies are portrayed in insurgent propaganda has changed dramatically since 2003. Members of the Interim Governing Council and the 'Allawi government were described as feckless and impotent exiles. Since the January 2005 elections, however, the government is seen as a Shiite,

The insurgents also display far greater confidence in the outcome of the military struggle, routinely belittling or ignoring apparent progress of the political process (elections or constitutional referendum) or reports of U.S. battlefield successes. There is a propaganda aspect to this, of course, as the groups seek to boost the morale of their troops while sapping their enemy's.[108] But it would be wrong to reduce it to that.

First, the insurgents' perspective has undergone a remarkable evolution. Initially, they perceived and presented the U.S. presence as an enduring one that would be extremely difficult to dislodge; they saw their struggle as a long-term, open-ended jihad, whose success was measured by the very fact that it was taking place.[109] That no longer is the case. Today, the prospect of an outright victory and a swift withdrawal of foreign forces has crystallised,[110] bolstered by the U.S.'s perceived loss of legitimacy and apparent vacillation, its periodic announcements of troop redeployments, the precipitous decline in domestic support for the war and heightened calls by prominent politicians for a rapid withdrawal.[111]

When the U.S. leaves, the insurgents do not doubt that Iraq's security forces and institutions would quickly collapse.[112]

Secondly, this newfound confidence is noticeable not only in the insurgents' official communiqués,[113] but also in more spontaneous expressions by militants and sympathisers on internet chat sites.[114]

sectarian front acting on behalf of an Iranian strategic vision and collaborating with the U.S. for purely opportunistic reasons.
[108] A key objective in this type of warfare is to demoralise the enemy: "Its practitioners seek to convince enemy political leaders that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit", Thomas X. Hammes, op. cit.
[109] Insurgent groups espoused the notion, widespread in the region, that U.S. troops intended to remain, a bridgehead of a new Western domination. Arguments typically deployed by the U.S. administration to justify the war (whether the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction or the stated goal of establishing democracy) were quickly dismissed; the costly U.S. invasion was said to make sense only as part of such a broader imperial effort. Crisis Group interviews with members of the armed opposition, November 2003 and May 2004. This interpretation of U.S. ambitions is still prevalent. What is new is the growing sense that these goals are being thwarted. See the January 2006 edition of *al-Fursan*, devoting an article to U.S. plans to "dominate the world by taking control of oil resources in Iraq and the region".
[110] *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*'s 3 January 2006 communiqué calls for intensifying attacks in the new year, arguing that "victory is at hand". Such upbeat declarations are a novelty.
[111] For instance, the January 2006 issue of *al-Fursan*, featuring a special report on why "America Has Already Lost the War", contains an upbeat assessment of the prospects for a U.S. withdrawal, seen as "inevitable". Among its featured articles is one entitled "A Single Major Operation every Month Will Suffice to Defeat the Americans", and another, "With the Coalition of Evil Unravelling, the Americans Will Remain Alone". See also *al-Ansar*, January 2006. *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, which espouses a more pan-Islamic outlook, also sees in the upsurge of anti-American attacks in Afghanistan as another encouraging sign of impending victory. See for instance its 23 November 2005 communiqué and its 19 January 2006 declaration, entitled "Victory is Ours".

[112] Although insurgents take some elite units seriously – chiefly those that are associated with sectarian and ethnic-based militias, such as the *Saqr* and *Dhi'b* commandos – the bulk of Iraqi forces are derided as incompetent and cowardly. Any sign of weakness, especially on the part of the reputedly efficient units, immediately is seized upon to mock the security apparatus as a whole. See for example *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*'s description of its attack against President Jalal Talabani's convoy on 25 August 2005, and the panicked reaction of his guards: "If the President's close protection acts this way, what about the rest of the security apparatus"?. In an article entitled "Who is protecting who?" published in its September 2005 issue, *Jami'* based its analysis of the insurgency's prospects on the premise that Iraqi forces would dissolve if they were not "protected by the Americans".
[113] Many accounts of military operations now come under the heading "signs of victory", an expression found with increased frequency as of mid-2005. See, for example, *Hasad al-Mujahidin*'s September 2005 issue, whose entries include *Basha'ir al-Nasr fi Madinat Haditha* (Signs of Victory in the City of Haditha) and *Basha'ir al-Nasr fi Madinat al-Musil* (Signs of Victory in the City of Mosul); see also "*Basha'ir al-Nasr wal-Tamkin fi Jihad al-'Iraqiyin*" (Signs of Victory and Strengthening for the Iraqis' Jihad), *Jâmi'*, July 2005 .
[114] On the basis of Crisis Group's monitoring of chat forums such as *Mundata al-Firdaws* (http://71.41.70.243/forums/), informal postings have become increasingly optimistic. Buoyant messages have fed into insurgent propaganda: the January 2006 edition of *al-Fursan* compiled quotes from internet users who visited *al-Jaysh al-Islami*'s official website, on which they "voted for victory".

III.   THE INSURGENTS' STATED STRATEGIES

Insurgent publications and internet communications often are dismissed as disinformation or examined, by the Western media in particular, principally for evidence of internal rifts or discord. Although both approaches are relevant, the data (and especially internet sites) examined in this report reveal another, critical dimension: an ongoing dialogue among armed groups on the one hand and between these groups and their fighters and supporters on the other. Issues that are raised include the nature of the conflict and strategies to defeat the enemy, as well as lessons learned both from other conflicts and from earlier battles in Iraq.[115] Information about new military techniques – notably the construction and handling of explosive devices – is disseminated through instructional articles, manuals, or video films.[116] Websites are used to announce new policy positions, alliances or strategic shifts, react to breaking news, or comment on how the Western media is addressing the struggle.

A.   POLITICAL STRATEGIES

The largest armed groups have shied away from articulating genuine political programs. They limit their stated objective to expelling the occupier without any further description of what exactly will replace the current U.S.-sponsored political process. In particular, there has been neither elaborate vision of a future Islamic Republic[117] nor extensive reference to restoring Sunni Arab rule,[118] nor calls to revert to a pre-war status quo.[119]

Instead, the insurgency principally has concentrated on the more operational, immediate aspects of the conflict. This was most evident during earlier phases, when insurgents believed U.S. forces would be present for an extensive period and thus conceived of their struggle as a long jihad. Adherence to such an outlook also was considered most likely to promote cohesion between groups held together by the vision of an untainted jihad transcending particular interests or ambitions. The shared objective simply was to prevent the U.S. from stabilising the situation, more concrete questions pertaining to the nature of a future government being left to an undefined future. The U.S. presence, in other words, reduced the issue to a simple, straightforward question (do you favour or oppose the occupation?), putting off the need to agree on a detailed political program.[120]

To a degree, the rising salafi influence also rendered superfluous the very notion of a political program. In contrast to political Islamists who seek power through political means and typically organise themselves as parties, salafists eschew such activism and focus on

---

[115] For example, the November 2004 battle over Falluja prompted an abundance of texts concerning lessons learned and triggered a noticeable evolution in the insurgents' military tactics and doctrine. "Lessons learned" analyses dwelt upon the strategic relevance of defending a town under siege and the optimal tactics in such a case (appropriate weapons, ambush techniques, the art of sniping, ways of countering enemy air dominance), as well as the factors that need to be taken into account (popular support, availability of weapon stockpiles, etc.).

[116] These range from videos on how to make improvised explosive devices from basic artillery rounds, then camouflage and detonate them, to filmed "conferences" in classical Arabic on the more sophisticated art of "daisy chain" techniques (multiple, interspersed and interconnected detonations). For recruitment purposes, some videos depict the last moments of a suicide-bomber, who presents his motivations, indicates where in his car he placed the explosives, explains the detonation system and then bids farewell.

[117] During the initial months of the occupation, some leaflets issued by the short-lived *Hizb al-Tahrir fil-'Iraq* (Liberation Party of Iraq) called for an Islamic caliphate. Others released by *Munadhdhamat al-Jihad wal-Tahrir al-'Iraqiya* (the Iraqi Jihad and Liberation Organisation) – an equally ephemeral faction – favoured an Iranian-style Islamic Republic. More significantly,

Tandhim al-Qa'ida has repeatedly advocated restoration of the caliphate, the idealised early days of Islam. Even these calls remain vague, however, and have yet to be accompanied by a credible political project. See also footnote 93 above.

[118] Redressing the current "anomaly" and restoring a "natural" Sunni rule undoubtedly have become part and parcel of the struggle. But this notion appeared only gradually as a result of the growing sense of disenfranchisement emanating from the political process. Crisis Group interview, Iraqi journalist with contacts to several insurgent groups, December 2005. Internet chat forums also display the increasing confessional nature of the insurgents' discourse. Nevertheless, none of the groups has stated as its objective the reassertion of Sunni rule.

[119] Groups such as *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*, frequently associated with former regime officials, display significant lucidity when it comes to admitting that the page has been turned. In a communiqué published on 3 January 2006, in response to the release of former officials who allegedly were consulted by the U.S. on how to mollify and co-opt their former colleagues turned insurgents, the group scorned the attempt. It qualified those officials as traitors, and described the notion of bolstering the government's legitimacy by bringing Saddam-era officials back to power as ridiculous. Underscoring that those times are gone forever, it claimed that "the future belongs to the resistance".

[120] A mid-2005 article headlined "The resistance and popular support" (*al-Muqawama wal-Ta'yid al-Sha'bi*) and found on *Jami*'s official website described the struggle for popular support as the "second battlefront" in the war between the "occupation" and the "resistance". The article explained that victory on that front depends on the insurgents' ability to focus on a single, unambiguous objective: defeating the occupier and freeing the country.

individual behaviour, seeking to replicate the practices of "pious ancestors" (*Salaf Salih*).[121] Tellingly, when in 2004 armed groups controlled Falluja for months, they made no notable effort to manage or organise the city. Rather, they exercised their authority by imposing strict mores, intimidating "bad Muslims" and, above all, through military coordination between various groups.[122] In this sense, jihad is more properly understood as an individual, not collective, duty that, insofar as inspiration derives from a strict, literalist reading of scripture (Koran, *Sunna* and *Hadith)*, does not require elaboration of a political program.[123]

Some important political corollaries nevertheless derive from the insurgents' overall outlook. The eviction of U.S. forces must produce a *tabula rasa*, wiping away all that has occurred since the occupation began. Invoking the Islamic precept that whatever stems from an illicit act is illicit, the armed groups argue that because the war was illegitimate both in terms of Islamic jurisprudence and international law,[124] the institutions and political process to which it has given rise are equally illegitimate and thus must go. In an article entitled, "The resistance, the occupation, and the struggle for legitimacy", *Jami'* objected to the January 2005 elections on the grounds that they were held under occupation, boycotted by Sunni Arabs and organised on the basis of confessional representation.[125]

Insurgent groups likewise verbally contested the October 2005 referendum, claiming that Sunni Arab regions were subjected to a de facto blockade, and Sunni Arab voters were harassed by occupation forces and their local allies.[126]

Iraq's new authorities regularly are accused of "barricading themselves in the Green Zone, in the company of the Americans, far from the Iraqi people",[127] of systematically adhering to U.S. positions, and, therefore, of lacking genuine sovereignty or independence. Armed groups condemn the constitution as a recipe for partition, a symptom of politicians' opportunism and selfishness and evidence of U.S. plans to break up the country.

On an issue that has prompted considerable speculation among Western observers – whether some insurgent groups are open to negotiations with the U.S. and Iraqi authorities – the armed opposition is also, at a minimum, displaying considerable surface unity. Despite repeated and, in recent months, increased reporting regarding such contacts, no armed group so far has even hinted in its media outlets at the possibility of negotiations.[128] On the contrary, they repeatedly denounce and target individuals or parties claiming to enjoy close contact with the insurgency and to be serving as mediators[129] or to speak on behalf of Sunni Arabs while participating in the political process.[130] In their public pronouncements, all insurgent groups not only categorically reject any cooperation with

---

"Extermination, Exile, and Exactions against the Sunnis" in its January 2006 issue of *al-Fursan*.

[127] See *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*'s communiqué on 7 November 2005.

[128] Reports of negotiations have been ongoing for months, see, for example, Reuters, 20 February 2005, with no notable results. This is not to say that negotiations have not taken place, but rather that insurgent groups are careful to deny that they have, and to denounce any who would engage in them. An Arab intellectual known for his close links to the insurgency asserted that while lines of communication had been established and preliminary talks had taken place between some unspecified armed groups and the U.S., the positions were too far apart to talk about negotiations. Crisis Group interview, December 2005.

[129] Claims by Ayham al-Samarra'i, a former Minister under the Interim Governing Council**,** that he "represents" the armed opposition's viewpoint and interests, prompted a joint denial on 30 June 2005 by three of the more important "nationalistic" groups (*Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna, al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* and *Jaysh al-Mujahidin)*. On 2 December 2005, *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* issued a communiqué threatening all those who claim to "represent" the armed opposition and who, instead, should "join its ranks".

[130] Several groups have accused the Iraqi Islamic Party (*al-Hizb al-Islami*), which has taken part in the political process since its inception and is widely depicted as representing Sunni Arab interests, of playing into the occupier's hands. In a 12 October 2005 communiqué, *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura* castigated the party as "non-Muslim and non-Iraqi" and "backing the Zionists' and unbelievers' constitution". On 19 November 2005, reacting to the Cairo reconciliation conference attended by the Islamic Party, *Jaysh Al-Mujahidin* condemned the "so-called representatives of the Islamic Party" as "usurpers who speak only for themselves". See also the 10 December 2005 communiqué of *Jaysh Ansar Al-Sunna*.

---

[121] See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit.

[122] As evidence of such coordination, insurgent groups put in place an impressive network of defences in preparation for the coalition's long-forecast November 2004 onslaught. See, for example, John F. Sattler and Daniel H. Wilson. "Operation Al Fajr: The Battle of Fallujah-Part II", *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2005.

[123] See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit.

[124] Insurgent groups also tend to berate international law and the international system as unjust and biased. The UN in particular is viewed as a mere rubberstamp for U.S. decisions.

[125] See also the October 2005 issue of al-Fursan, specifically the article entitled *Fiqh al-Hudaybiya* (al-Hudaybiya's Jurisprudence), which develops a similar analysis.

[126] See "Les sunnites d'Irak se sentent visés par les offensives", Agence France-Presse, 13 November 2005. In a long communiqué issued on 5 December 2005, *Jami'* argued that even massive participation in that month's elections would be futile given overall polling conditions designed to undermine Sunni Arabs. The analysis, signed by its political bureau, added that at least 230 of the 275 seats would automatically be bestowed upon the Shiites and Kurds, regardless of Sunni Arab turnout. For a detailed depiction of the atmosphere in which voting occurred in Sunni Arab regions according to *al-Jaysh al-Islami* see

the occupier, but castigate it as the ultimate form of dishonour.[131] Recent reports of negotiations between the U.S. and more "nationalistic" groups aimed at countering jihadists[132] appear questionable; although some forms of communication cannot be excluded, one would expect that any serious, protracted discussions would be reflected in insurgent communications (preparing the ground for an overt policy shift) and give rise to some form of criticism between groups.

Likewise, while insurgent groups may have differing tactical approaches as to how their supporters can best destabilise the political process – by participating and then subverting it from the inside, or simply by attacking it from the outside[133] – all seem to concur that the "game is rigged", suggesting that Kurds already have gained de facto independence and Shiites hold all positions of power. The most recent indication of this common attitude was virtually indistinguishable reactions both to the December 2005 elections and to the November 2005 Cairo reconciliation conference that preceded them. Although the conference, organised by the Arab League, purported to bring Sunni Arabs (excluding insurgent groups) into the political process and to co-opt their representatives, armed groups unanimously disavowed it as belated, superficial,

and detached from the "real problems caused and maintained by the ongoing occupation".[134]

Having until then carefully shunned defined political stances, the principal armed groups nonetheless were compelled in 2005 to stake out clearer positions, potentially heralding a new phase in their evolution. The January 2005 elections and October 2005 referendum were important in this regard. In January, despite common rejection of the poll and its legitimacy, groups differed as to how best to challenge it. *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* put up posters threatening voters and invoking religious arguments to justify resort to violence.[135] In contrast, groups such as *Jami'* ruled out attacks against civilians and polling places while urging sympathisers to boycott.

The result was massive confusion, with sporadic attacks that alienated the public, failed to disrupt the vote seriously and bolstered the Iraqi security apparatus's self-confidence and popularity. This in turn led all major groups to settle on a more uniform approach for October. Six of the most active organisations (*al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq, Harakat al-Muqawana al-Islamiya fil-'Iraq, Jaysh al-Mujahidin, Jami', al-Haraka al-Islamiya lil-Muqawama al-'Iraqiya* and *'Asa'ib Ahl al-'Iraq*) issued joint communiqués, first in favour of a negative vote, then, in a reversal justified by alleged harassment of Sunni Arab voters, in favour of a boycott.[136] *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, reputed for its intractability,

---

[131] Insurgents invoke historical parallels to denounce so-called collaborators. For example, they are described as sons of Ibn al-'Alqami, who long ago handed Baghdad – then under Abbasid control – to the Tartar invaders. Expecting to be named caliph, he was relegated to work in the stables. The armed opposition has ridiculed those who work with the occupier, asserting they too will be put to shame by history. See, for example, *al-Ansar*, number 12, October 2005.

[132] See, for instance, Dexter Filkins and Sabrina Tavernise, op. cit. This article was translated by *al-Jaysh al-Islami* and posted on its website, along with a joint denial communiqué signed by *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*, also mentioned by *The New York Times* as one of the groups taking part in negotiations. In an article entitled, "Why won't the Mujahidin engage in negotiations for the time being?", published in the January 2006 edition of *al-Fursan*, *al-Jaysh al-Islami* explained that the insurgency had no reason to negotiate as long as it was sure of victory. The disinformation and rumours surrounding this issue were only an indication of the enemy's desire to negotiate a face-saving exit.

[133] Whereas *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* categorically rejects the political process, others reportedly are encouraging Sunni Arab participation as a means of complicating and impeding the already difficult tasks of forming a stable government and modifying the constitution. Crisis Group interviews, two Arab intellectuals said to enjoy close ties with the insurgency, December 2005. In their publications, none of the groups described a Trojan Horse strategy, but the notion of making matters worse by entering the political arena clearly is stated. See *al-Jaysh al-Islami*'s 23 December 2005 communiqué, commenting on the election outcome.

[134] Insurgent groups certainly closely followed the Cairo conference. All major groups commented and issued official communiqués to explain their positions. They agreed on three central points: the conference came too late and its content was shallow; its principal purpose was to offer the U.S. an honourable exit; and its participants had no legitimacy since the "conflict's genuine protagonists, the Iraqi resistance and the U.S. occupier, were not represented". See, for example, *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* and *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* communiqués, respectively dated 19, 20 and 21 November 2005. None hinted at organising another, more inclusive conference.

[135] Regarding the climate of fear and intimidation instituted by some groups, see "Irak : attaques contre les bureaux de vote, menaces de mort contre les électeurs, Agence France-Presse, 25 January 2005; Liz Sly, "Fear eroding Iraqi's resolve to vote", *The Chicago Tribune*, 25 January 2005.

[136] These communiqués were issued on 18 August and 12 October 2005 (three days ahead of the vote), respectively. The last minute reversal was justified by the "pressures, harassment and harm" suffered by Arab Sunnis and aimed at preventing them from voting. Late issuance of the second communiqué led to a third one, immediately after the referendum, making clear that those who were unaware of the change would not be punished for voting. "Those who voted did it by mistake, or because they were compelled to do so in order to avoid police mistreatment. Therefore, they remain good Muslims, and the fact that they voted does not mean that they approve the constitution".

opted for – or was forced into – a policy of non-violent rejection,[137] and in sharp contrast to January 2005, denounced accusations that it had targeted voters as "crude propaganda".[138] Two other groups, *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* and *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansura*, instantly called for a boycott, claiming responsibility for attacks on election organisers while asserting that they were sparing other "civilians".[139] Taken together, these statements suggest implicit acknowledgment that they had committed a tactical mistake in January and help explain why the number of attacks on referendum day in October – and, again, during the December 2005 elections – dropped significantly.[140]

The December 2005 elections further substantiated this trend. *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* issued threats, but exclusively targeted at those who were "overly active in promoting" the elections.[141] *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* and *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* called on their militants to spare polling places in order "not to shed Muslim blood".[142] *Jaysh al-*

Mujahidin and *Jami'* argued for a boycott and "civil disobedience", i.e. passive resistance, by all involved government employees, but did not advocate steps to intimidate voters.[143] At the same time, all major insurgent groups challenged the vote's legitimacy and validity, making clear that their position did not constitute an endorsement of the political process.

Albeit still incipient, these developments point to the insurgency's increasing realisation that it must take account of political realities and cannot merely condemn the transition process as vacuous, focus on the military alone, and reduce the choice Iraqis face as being with or against it. There are other signs of the insurgency's possible politicisation. In October 2005, for example, *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* and *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* appointed a joint spokesman for political matters.[144]

The first to directly confront the issue of an alternative political program was *Jami'*.[145] A September 2005 article in its official publication's inaugural issue and entitled "Answers to rumours concerning the absence of a political program and of a vision for the future" made four points. First, one should not expect the armed opposition to act like institutionalised, legal parties. Secondly, liberation remains the armed groups' primary objective, and they will not unveil their specific political programs as long as the occupation lasts.[146] Thirdly, although the armed groups are indeed Islamic, none calls for the establishment of an

---

[137] See its communiqués of 30 June 2005 and 13 October 2005 in which the group thoroughly rejected the constitution and the very principle of the referendum without threatening to attack voters or polling stations. Ghaith Abdul Ahad, a journalist with some access to the insurgency, witnessed local representatives of *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* and militants who favoured participation in the referendum peacefully coexisting in a village near Baghdad on election day, despite underlying tensions. See his account in *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian* on 27 October 2005. Some sources claim that *Tandhim* came to that position unwillingly and under pressure from other groups. Crisis Group interviews, Arab and Iraqi intellectuals enjoying ties to the insurgency, December 2005. Its communiqués, even long before the date of the referendum, did not suggest a desire to pursue a strategy of disruption. Whether it was motivated by its own considerations or pressured by others, *Tandhim*'s ultimate policy suggests it is operating not as an isolated actor, but in a relatively coordinated and structured Iraqi environment.

[138] See 21 October 2005 communiqué.

[139] *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* claimed responsibility for the 13 August 2005 attack against Mosul's General Electoral Commission and the 19 August 2005 attack against the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Iraqi Turkoman Front. The statement underscores that there were no "civilian" victims – a term that excludes, in its view, at least some categories of government employees as well as members of "collaborating" parties, even when unarmed and having nothing to do with counterinsurgency intelligence work.

[140] According to U.S. military reports, the number of attacks on polling days decreased from 32 in January 2005 to 21 in October and to ten in December (with incidents relating in some way or another to the polling itself dropping from sixteen to thirteen, to seven). Crisis Group email communication, senior U.S. military analyst, January 2006. The decline in attacks also is explained by more robust security measures designed to protect voters.

[141] Communiqué, 11 December 2005.

[142] Joint communiqué, 12 December 2005. This joint communiqué, co-signed by two groups reputedly of very

different composition and divergent outlooks, is in itself indicative of the convergence noted above.

[143] Joint communiqué, 10 December 2005.

[144] See *al-Fursan*, October 2005.

[145] Earlier efforts in that direction emanated from groups only indirectly involved in the insurgency. In early 2005, the international Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir, which does not advocate violence or entertain overt relations with the insurgency, released its new "Constitution for Iraq". In November 2004, the People's Struggle Movement (*Harakat al-Kifah al-Sha'bi*), a grouping that backs the notion of "national resistance" against the occupation, launched a "political initiative" seeking a negotiated end of the U.S. presence. See also *Barnamij li-Mustaqbal al-'Iraq Ba'd Inha' al-Ihtilal* (Program for the Future of Iraq after the End of the Occupation) published in October 2005 by the Beirut-based Centre for Arab Unity Studies. All these proposals are premised on undoing all that has been accomplished as a result of the post-Baathist political process and thus hardly constitute acceptable ground for negotiations from a U.S. perspective.

[146] Other groups have since made similar statements. *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*, in one of its regular verbal attacks against the Iraqi Islamic Party (see footnote 132 above), challenged the need for such a party or for political representation at this time, noting that *Ansar al-Sunna* itself had already developed "its own [political] cadres, strategy, and program, which it would reveal in due time". See the filmed declaration of the group's emir, released on 3 January 2006.

Islamic Republic. As a result, "the spectre of an Iraqi Islamic Republic raised by the Americans is baseless". Finally, *Jami'* calls on Iraqis to read and comment on the 30-page charter ("Methodology of Jihad") posted on its website, which spells out the group's position on issues related to the armed struggle, such as the treatment of hostages. These signs remain inconclusive, and stop (voluntarily) far short of the presentation of a political alternative. Should they continue, however, the principal groups may well enter a phase of active – and divisive – politicisation.

B. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Over time, insurgents have developed a relatively homogenous discourse targeting a varied audience (supporters, other Iraqis and the West) and relying on unifying religious, historical or political themes least likely to foment internal discord. Some important features stand out:

❑ **Denial of anti-Shiite sectarianism.** Publicly, all groups deny involvement in attacks exclusively targeting Shiite civilians; Zarqawi himself has been careful to describe the enemy as *Rawafidh* (i.e. heretics) rather than as Shiites per se.[147] This in no

way disproves that Shiites are targeted as such, or that Zarqawi – as is almost universally believed by Iraqis, including Sunni Arabs – is seeking to foment a sectarian-based civil war. Nor are the numerous denials consistent with the myriad suicide operations targeting Shiite mosques. Still, Crisis Group has not uncovered a statement in which an insurgent organisation explicitly and unambiguously acknowledged that it or any other group was waging a strategy of ethnic or sectarian-based conflict. To the extent documents have been put forward by Western officials or media, the relevant insurgent groups have openly and swiftly challenged them.[148]

Likewise, Crisis Group could not find a videotaped execution in which the victim was killed exclusively on account of his religious or ethnic affiliation.[149] Despite otherwise comprehensive claims of responsibility, none of these groups takes credit for bombings targeting Shiites as Shiites (e.g, attacks against mosques or worshippers).[150] This applies in particular to Zarqawi's group, which has systematically denied the accusation.[151] Instead,

---

[147] Dictionaries tend to translate the noun *Rafidha* (plural *Rawafidh*) as heretic, and the adjective *Rafidhi* as sectarian. The word nevertheless is widely understood to designate Shiites. In an audio message carried on the internet on 14 September 2005 on the heels of coalition operations in Tall `Afar, Zarqawi declared a "comprehensive war" (*Harb Shamila*) on those he accused of fostering sectarian divisions and of having themselves declared a comprehensive war against the Sunni people of Tall 'Afar, al-Qa'im, and elsewhere. This appears to be the closest he has come to explicitly advocating the targeting of Shiites: in the statement, he used the word Shiite only once, coupling it with the word *Rawafidh*, which he typically invokes to describe Shiites who collaborate with the "Crusaders" and espouse "Persian" views and objectives, although the word's connotations easily encompass Shiites as a whole. In most utterances, he avoids using the word Shiites, relying instead on the more ambiguous *Rafidha* (one of his trademarks being the rarely used plural form, *Rawafidh*). The word's various meanings are important as Zarqawi plays on them simultaneously to attack Shiites and deflect criticism that he seeks to ignite sectarian conflict. Historically, it designates a school of thought born in the seventh century in reaction to some aspects of Sunni doctrine, which it radically opposed. It was initially applied to the Kharijite branch of Shiism. For Sunni theologians, the *Rafidha* are, unlike Shiites, heretics, on a par with Christian Crusaders. More recently, the word increasingly is used as a pejorative designation for all Shiites (see for instance the website http://dhr12.com). Zarqawi has used the designation to describe the main Shiites parties, SCIRI and Da'wa and anyone associated with them, ultimately including all who elected the Ja'fari government (arguably the vast majority of Iraqi Shiites). With such

formulations, Zarqawi thus tries to get an essentially sectarian message across while still being able to fend off accusations of advocating sectarian warfare.

[148] See footnote 108 above.

[149] Videos of executions systematically underscore the accused's "crimes" or treachery. See, for example, the October 2004 *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* video in which Imam 'Ali al-Maliki is presented as a "sectarian spy (*Jasus wa Huwa Rafidhi*) enrolled by the occupying forces to fight and eliminate Sunni personalities (*Ru'us Ahl al-Sunna*) in Iraq".

[150] This is the case on all the more authoritative sites typically used by groups to report their operations. See, e.g, the list of 80 operations claimed by *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* between 9 and 22 August 2005, published in *Hasad al-Mujahidin*. No attack against ordinary Shiites is included; in contrast, the list mentions myriad operations aimed at the Badr Corps, police stations located in Shiite neighbourhoods, party headquarters, convoys, and so forth. All other issues of *Hasad al-Mujahidin* refer exclusively to attacks of a military nature. Likewise, none of the groups openly welcomed the 31 August 2005 tragedy on the Khadhimiya bridge in which hundreds of Shiite worshipers died after word of a terrorist attack spread, and panic ensued.

[151] Numerous disclaimers have been published by *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* regarding attacks of a strictly sectarian nature. See for instance its communiqués on 19 July 2005 (following an attack in Musayyib three days earlier), on 2 September 2005 (concerning the Kadhimiya tragedy on 31 August, which was not an attack but was perceived as one by the victims), on 19 September (referring to an attack in Nahrawan on the 17th), on 7 October (two days after an attack in Hilla), and on 20 November (denying responsibility for the bombing in Khanaqin on the 18th). A typical communiqué was released on 8 January 2006 in reaction to the 5 January bombing in Karbala: "Regardless of *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*'s loathing for the *Rawafidh*, the organisation formally denies any involvement in the latest attacks in Karbala".

Tandhim al-Qa'ida and other insurgents regularly claim that their intended victims are members of the Badr Corps, spies, or applicants for security sector jobs – information that the U.S. and the Iraqi government are accused of deliberately concealing.[152]

In sum, while disagreements undoubtedly exist, and policies also likely differ, all insurgent groups take a similar public stand, adamantly rejecting the notion that they are deliberately stoking sectarian tensions. If anything, the insurgents' unanimous and swift denials demonstrate how sensitive the sectarian issue has become in their eyes. Groups that deliberately target Shiites clearly believe that the costs of openly claiming responsibility and calling on followers to wage an all-out anti-Shiite campaign outweigh the benefits.[153] Paradoxically, and for the time being at least, the insurgents' desire to preserve unity may be restraining the slide toward a fully-fledged civil war.

❑ **Focusing on credibility.** Displaying concern and even fascination for U.S. communications strategy,[154] the more significant armed opposition groups seek to back up their claims and refute those of their opponents by providing details and alleged evidence. Important resources are devoted to collecting and compiling data, for instance by dispatching cameramen alongside combatants.

Claims of responsibility typically include the day and time of the operation, hostages' identification cards, or graphic scenes of the attack. Some groups maintain statistics of their military deeds. "Evidence" frequently is marshalled in an attempt to disprove enemy claims, whether concerning the death toll resulting from military operations – the U.S. is charged with vastly undercounting its losses by excluding soldiers awaiting full naturalisation, paramilitary forces, truck drivers and other civilians in the coalition's employ[155] – or the arrest of major insurgent figures.[156] Pictures of destroyed enemy vehicles are prominently displayed, as are those of enemy losses.

❑ **Establishing the insurgents' "honourability".** Even as they engage in brutal forms of violence, insurgents appear increasingly concerned about their image – in sharp contrast, say, to some of the jihadi Algerian groups of the 1990s. Accordingly, they tend to react instantly and vigorously to accusations levied by U.S. and Iraqi officials as well as to televised confessions by captured insurgents, particularly when these concern charges of theft, rape, "depraved" conduct,[157] religious hypocrisy, ideological incompetence,[158] or indiscriminate killing of civilians.[159] All groups gloss over the

---

(This, ironically, gives another clear indication of Zarqawi's use of the term *Rawafidh* to denote Shiites). In a nonsensical attempt to refute the accusation that his group is trying to trigger a sectarian war, Zarqawi has argued that such a strategy would be manifested in a far greater number of attacks against Shiite marketplaces and mosques, two of the most vulnerable targets. See his 7 October 2005 communiqué.

[152] In "The resistance and the confessional card", published on the eve of the October 2005 referendum, *Jami*'s political bureau discussed alleged Western media bias. The article challenged anyone to prove the armed opposition's involvement in attacks against innocent Shiites, arguing that such attacks hurt the insurgents by pushing Shiites into the occupiers' arms.

[153] Individuals with contacts inside the insurgency assert that most armed groups and their sympathisers do not oppose targeting Shiites as a matter of principle, since many blame Shiites for their woes. Rather than being viewed as illegitimate (*Khata' Shar'i*), the practice is faulted for being a "tactical mistake" (*Khata' Taktiki*). Crisis Group interview, Iraqi journalist with contacts to insurgent groups, December 2005.

[154] This is true even of *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*. In a 29 October 2005 communiqué, its official spokesman analysed "one of the Crusaders' most efficient propaganda methods, which consists in revealing only part of the truth, spinning these selected facts to the point where the logical conclusions one can derive from them are the exact opposite of what is happening on the ground, and finally disseminating these conclusions, echoed in numerous analyses and studies, throughout the Muslim world".

[155] See, for example, 20 October 2005 communiqué by *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* concerning the U.S. death toll, the media's purported "lies" in this regard, and the systematic cover-up of the occupiers' "daily crimes". Insurgent groups also have produced documentaries purporting to show "mass graves" containing U.S. soldiers disposed of secretly to minimize their losses. Conversely, in a 5 October 2005 communiqué, *Tandhim* ridiculed reports of insurgent deaths during the coalition's "Iron Curtain" operation, challenging its enemy to show the bodies of the insurgents it claimed to have killed. According to the communiqué, the enemy only "struck frantically at unarmed civilians".

[156] *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* in particular has mocked repeated U.S. statements regarding the arrest of Zarqawi's various right-hand men. In October 2005, the group challenged the interior minister to present publicly any of the eight members it purportedly had captured. In its 18 October communiqué, Abu Maysara al-'Iraqi stated in response to the reported death of its local commander in al-Qa'im: "Our brother in Qa'im notified us today that he was still alive with God's help, yet another indication that it takes more than an official declaration to kill a *Mujahid*. Regarding the proclaimed captives, let the collaborating forces show them to prove that they say the truth! But they won't and can't do".

[157] Televised confessions often include allegations of insurgent homosexual behaviour.

[158] See, for example, Solomon Moore, "In brothers, two faces of the Iraq insurgency", *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 2005; Agence France-Presse, 14 March 2005.

[159] Typically, these accusations are denounced as pure fabrications. In September 2005, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* released the filmed confession of a Badr Corps member. He explained

most reprehensible aspects of their jihad, including ferocious violence, the monetary motivation behind some hostage-taking[160] and reported links to criminal gangs.[161] Other acts demonstrate the growing importance to the insurgents of their public image, an indication that they are progressively placing greater emphasis on public support, at least in zones in which they operate.[162] In some instances, insurgents have compensated civilians for war-related losses, including property damage[163] or arbitrary arrests as a consequence of insurgent activity in the area.[164] Insurgents – including among the more radical groups – are increasingly eager to publicise purported "good deeds"[165] and avenge allegedly "wronged citizens".[166] This remains a far cry from a systematic "hearts and minds" strategy; the emphasis continues to be on military operations, and insurgents appear to be banking on U.S. and Iraqi government failures and missteps to attract public support.

❑ **Criminalising the enemy.** In contrast with the armed groups' professed honourability, coalition

and Iraqi forces are accused of all kinds of misdeeds and offences, in order both to exonerate the insurgency and present the conflict in its starkest terms. Frequent communiqués purport to tally the number of civilian casualties resulting from coalition or Iraqi fire,[167] statements routinely describe their brutality, and publications reprint testimony of indignant citizens.[168] Far from seeking to democratise or rebuild the country, the U.S. is blamed by all insurgent groups – including the least radical – for trying to destroy and subjugate it with the help of "opportunistic collaborators".[169] Insurgents regularly invoke the metaphor of a "siege" (*Hisar*) to describe coalition policy toward Sunni Arabs, said to include various forms of discrimination, large-scale roundups, indiscriminate bombing raids,[170] arbitrary arrests, assassination of *Ulama*,[171] economic reprisals,[172] and desecration and destruction of mosques. [173]

---

that he was ordered to commit heinous crimes against civilians and then to blame the insurgents.

[160] Georges Malbrunot, a journalist who had indirect contacts with the insurgency and was himself a hostage, has analysed the financial objectives behind the kidnappings, *Le Figaro*, 14 April 2004.

[161] For an account of cooperation between an Islamist insurgent cell and a criminal known for operating in the local underground economy, see David Enders, "The business of Jihad", *The Nation*, 7 March 2005.

[162] According to a mid-2005 article posted on *Jami*"s website and entitled "The resistance and popular support", victory depends on the existence of a "sacred pact" (*'Aqd Muqaddas*) between the fighters and the civilian population. This in turn requires the insurgents to behave in a "morally irreproachable way", avoid as much as possible killing innocent Iraqis, protect the more vulnerable and make up for the government's deficiencies.

[163] During the second siege of Falluja in November 2004, some insurgents reportedly purchased civilian homes for military purposes. See Hussein Ali and Ali Marzook, "Insurgents Bought Homes of Fleeing Fallujans. Arab and Foreign Fighters in Fallujah Have Been Paying many Times the Market Rate to Rent and Buy Property", *Iraq Crisis Report*, n°89, 10 November 2004.

[164] See, for example, David Enders, op. cit.

[165] In its October 2005 issue, *Al-Ansar* claimed it was thanked by an Iraqi for setting free – at no cost – a family member kidnapped by criminals who demanded a ransom payment.

[166] In a 24 August 2005 communiqué, *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* reported the execution of an Iraqi interpreter working with U.S. forces. He was accused of biased translations purportedly emanating from his "hatred" of Sunni Arabs and leading to unjustified arrests. According to the statement, inhabitants of the region expressed "their satisfaction and thanks" for being rid of their tormentor.

[167] *Jami*'s first issue, published in July 2005, reported that roughly 100 civilians had been killed in the course of massive aerial bombardments on the city of al-Qa'im; likewise, in a 2 September 2005 communiqué *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* claimed that U.S. forces had reacted to the killing of one of its soldiers with helicopter gunfire purportedly causing "numerous civilian victims". In a 4 September 2005 communiqué, indiscriminate firing by the Iraqi police was blamed for the death of tens of "innocent civilians in the marketplace and houses surrounding the police office of Yarmuk".

[168] *Al-Ansar* entitles one of its sections "Cries of distress". Its October 2005 edition devotes five pages to a woman's testimony regarding her husband's detention and interrogation. According to her account, his American captors threatened to rape her before his eyes, leading him to fanciful admissions of guilt and baseless accusations of others. She said the interpreter voluntarily mistranslated his words and was "even more aggressive than the unbelievers (*Kuffar*) themselves". She also claimed to have been arrested later and held for a week in an all-male cell.

[169] Insurgent publications regularly accuse the U.S. of promoting Israel's agenda. See, e.g, *Jami',* July 2005

[170] See, for example, the September 2005 video documentary on the bombing of Karabala, a small town in al-Anbar governorate, posted on the internet by an anonymous "inhabitant of this martyred town". The coalition and Iraqi operations in Tall 'Afar gave rise to several communiqués denouncing indiscriminate bombings. See *al-Jaysh al-Islami*'s 5 November 2005 communiqué or the communiqué *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* released the next day.

[171] Numerous assassinations have been reported since 2004. See *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 2004; Reuters, 25 December 2004. Armed groups have given wide coverage to the 24 November 2005 interview of Shaykh 'Abdul Karim al-Mukhtar, a member of the Muslim Scholars Association twice detained by Coalition and ministry of interior forces. He recounts not only the assassinations of Sunni religious leaders, but also their arbitrary arrests and the exactions committed against them in prison.

Mirroring the coalition's own accusations, the insurgency repeatedly charges its enemies with waging a "dirty war" in which U.S. forces engage in heavy military assaults while subcontracting torture and forced disappearances to local allies.[174] These include the Badr Corps, the Saqr and Dhi'b police commandos and the national guards.[175] The U.S. is condemned for relying on sectarian-based death squads and turning a blind eye to numerous crimes committed against Sunni Arabs in general.[176]

❑ **Reversing accusations of sectarianism.** Far from acknowledging charges that some insurgents are bent on fomenting a sectarian war, armed groups claim to be the guarantors of national unity and systematically accuse the U.S. of resorting to a traditional divide-and-rule strategy,[177] seeking,

along with Israel and Iran,[178] to subvert the nation. Similarly, and unlike the Kurdish parties,[179] the ruling Shiite parties are held responsible for seeking to dominate the country at the expense of Sunni Arabs and are charged with resorting to sectarian "cleansing" to that end.[180] Armed groups also claim that militias have massively infiltrated the security sector, especially units attached to the Interior Ministry, often described as a fiefdom of the Shiite Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

Although insurgent groups have stuck to a remarkably homogenous script, there are distinctions. All partially

---

[172] There have been reports that water has been withheld in advance of counterinsurgency assaults, a practice the U.S. military has justified as protecting civilians by getting them to flee the area. See for example, Agence France-Presse, 31 March 2005. For their part, insurgents describe wide-ranging economic sanctions designed to punish the Sunni Arab community collectively. The October 2005 issue of *al-Ansar* refers to Haditha, where allegedly water is cut off during the day and electricity at night, and food is arbitrarily destroyed on the grounds that it may be of use to the insurgency.
[173] Immediately after the November 2005 attacks on al-Qa'im (Operation Steel Curtain), various communiqués denounced the destruction of mosques.
[174] In October 2005, *al-Jaysh al-Islami* devoted a special edition of *al-Fursan* to the alleged massacre in al-Iskan, a Sunni neighbourhood of Baghdad. The article included details of an alleged joint operation of Interior Ministry forces and the Badr Corps on 11 August 2005. Insurgents claimed there were mass detentions, and they later uncovered near the Iranian border the desecrated bodies of those who had been arrested. Numerous videos purporting to document such crimes have been released by *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* and *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*.
[175] The Badr Corps regularly is dubbed the Ghadr Corps (meaning perfidious, traitorous, insidious); the National Guard (*al-Haras al-Watani*) is called the Pagan Guard (*al-Haras al-Wathani*).
[176] See *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* communiqué, 12 August 2005, alleging that the Badr Corps had engaged in atrocities "with U.S. blessing". The insurgents' claims undeniably have been served by actions undertaken by the Coalition and its allies. A forthcoming Crisis Group report will examine these actions in more detail.
[177] A tract issued by *Jaysh Muhammad* in the first half of 2004 asserted: "The American dogs have started spreading division among the people under the pretext of de-Baathification. Implicit in this is a plan for division according to the old slogan of 'divide and rule' so that the people will be busy fighting each other, and Iraq would become a playground for the American dogs and the traitors and agents. You will see how after a short period they will spread sedition between the Sunni and the Shiite, Kurds and Arabs, Muslims and other religions in order to make you fight in your homes. Father will kill his son, brother will kill his

brother". See also a March 2005 communiqué from *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*, "after the failed American elections in Iraq [in January 2005], they will now play the sectarian card. They are already sending their mercenaries to destroy churches and mosques alike in order to prepare the grounds for civil war and unrest. They will train more and more local traitors to conduct police operations and detain anyone who does not accept democracy imposed at the barrel of a gun. The local mercenaries will also act as sandbags to their masters, when we choose to strike". In the words of Salah al-Mukhtar, a former Baath Party propagandist turned insurgent supporter, "the main objective of the U.S. is to transform Iraq from a strong, unified state into a weak one. To do so it has to encourage all kinds of conflicts and disturbances, on the basis of sect and ethnic affiliation. Therefore, the United States is not interested in harmonising different agendas; instead it is working on an old agenda, which is the American-Israeli agenda, to divide Iraq into three tiny entities. Now, it is necessary to keep all parties fighting each other just to pave the way for full control over Iraq", *Arab Monitor*, 27 July 2005.
[178] Suspicion of Iran's intent has long been widespread among Sunni Arabs and openly acknowledged by leading dignitaries. Crisis Group interview, Shaikh Mahdi Salih al-Sumayda'i, a salafi Imam from the Ibn Taymiya mosque, Baghdad, October 2004.
[179] Interestingly, the Kurdish peshmergas, while charged with backing U.S. forces and facilitating their work, are not accused of taking part in a dirty war against Sunni Arabs, in part because they themselves are Sunni. See, for example, *al-Fursan*, October 2005. Insurgents also see Kurds as intent not on taking over the central government, but rather on seceding. In that sense, paradoxically, they constitute less of a threat. Insurgent communiqués on the Tall 'Afar operations pointed to the role played by Shiite militias, ignoring the critical role of the Peshmergas.
[180] See *al-Jaysh a-Islami fil-'Iraq* communiqué, 18 August 2005, alleging that Shiite parties gathered at a secret meeting in Basra, in late April 2005, agreed to implement a policy of "sectarian purification". According to the communiqué, Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'fari sought the return of two million exiled Shiites from Iran to southern Iraq, while the Badr Corps was asked to wage a campaign of political assassinations against Sunni personalities and their Shiite supporters – among these, followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, who is described as a "good Iraqi" and an ally.

target a Western audience but they do so with dissimilar objectives. Some hope to sway Western public opinion by presenting it with a different picture. Seeking to counter Western "disinformation", groups such as *Al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* have thus produced English-language videos explicitly addressed to the "people of the world"[181] and others that seek to describe the depth of the coalition's "quagmire" (*al-Wahal*).

Not so the more jihadi-oriented groups, which operate from the premise that it is futile to try to convince a Western audience with arguments, and that in any event citizens of a democracy must be held accountable for the actions of their elected (not to mention, as in the U.S. or UK, re-elected) leaders. For *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* in particular, the goal is thus to threaten and frighten.[182] The groups' differing approaches to hostage-taking aptly illustrate these divergent strategies: while the more nationalistic groups tend to use hostages as bargaining chips (demanding the withdrawal of certain troops or the release of specified prisoners), *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* generally uses filmed confessions and executions to prove its reach, power and intransigence.[183]

C. MILITARY STRATEGIES

Analyses of the insurgency's military strategy tend to focus on its technical innovations – principally improvements in the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs)[184] – and analyses of the number, type and location of its armed operations. In fact, the insurgents have produced copious internet documentation in which they assess past mistakes, evaluate their opponents' weaknesses and formulate

practical operational recommendations. While none of the major groups has publicised its strategy in detail, a military doctrine of sorts emerges from more informal internet chats and exchanges regarding specific military methods[185] or lessons learned from particular armed confrontations.[186] This shared doctrine rests on four basic pillars:

❑ **A war of attrition.** The armed opposition, determined to force the withdrawal of foreign forces, has opted for a strategy of steady and continuous harassment. The second siege of Falluja in November 2004 appears to have been a turning point, graphically demonstrating the futility of directly confronting U.S. troops or seeking to hold fixed positions. After a short albeit angry debate on this,[187] insurgents shifted toward a more fluid and flexible approach that sought to exploit enemy vulnerabilities. *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* issued an 85-page publication entirely devoted to the battle, with accounts of the siege, testimony on various aspects and practical conclusions. *Jami's* first issue, published in September 2005, included a long piece on the battles of Falluja, Karabala and al-Qa'im. U.S. tactics in retaking theses towns was scrutinised and dissected: initial, massive bombardment; entry into the town by elite units backed by tanks and helicopters; forced evacuation of the civilian population, gathered in large and exposed empty lots; completion of a comprehensive blockade, denying access to both civilians and the media; and finally use of incendiary munitions to mop up remaining pockets of resistance.

Tandhim al-Qa'ida recommended the following approach regarding urban zones: avoid direct

---

[181] In one instance, the English version deleted references to the "American-Zionist" plot that were included in the Arabic one. A March 2005 video produced by *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* begins as follows: "People of America, we would like to share with you some reflections about the war in Iraq".

[182] This comes through clearly in the numerous statements Zarqawi issued in 2005. The attacks on two hotels used as headquarters by Baghdad-based foreign media on 24 October 2005, which were claimed by *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, are another illustration. There, too, the objective was to use foreign journalists to intimidate their audience back home.

[183] These are, of course, general trends and patterns, rather than hard and fast rules. In a 5 January 2006 English address to the American people, *al-Jaysh al-Islami* stated: "The Iraqi people send you their greetings and thank you for sending your sons and daughters to become target practice to our ever-growing army. We promise you, 2006 will be far worse than 2005. Just wait for the coffins and body bags coming back home with the filthy remains of your loved ones inside".

[184] During the first six months of the occupation, IED's accounted for eleven U.S. deaths. Today, they are responsible for over 60 per cent of U.S casualties. *The Washington Post*, 26 October 2005.

[185] In a *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* video, masked "students" can be seen dutifully raising their hands to ask their instructors about how to build explosives. Iraq has many experienced fighters, arguably rendering superfluous the more basic jihadi military manuals found in other countries.

[186] In mid-August 2005, a former officer writing under the codename Abu Saqr al-Baghdadi posted on a chat forum a lengthy analysis of the insurgency's shortcomings in Falluja, with detailed recommendations: avoid frontal combat; do not hold ground; disperse forces; distract enemy air force away from the battle ground; lure the enemy out of his positions; block the progression of enemy convoys by simultaneously attacking them at the front and the rear; and evacuate the area before attacked convoys receive support.

[187] Before the attack, a split reportedly arose among insurgents controlling the city. Some advocated steadfastness, hoping that they could defeat U.S. forces or die trying. Others were prepared to negotiate or at a minimum redeploy and save the area from destruction. The massive damage inflicted on Falluja was bitterly blamed on those who backed the first approach and held entrenched positions in the city, leading to the U.S. onslaught. Crisis Group interviews, Iraqis from al-Anbar, January 2005.

confrontation and static positions; focus on quick, sharp armed operations in the heart of the targeted towns to avoid immediate airborne retaliation; vacate targeted cities prior to the onset of cordon and search and seize operations; once an enemy cordon is in place, attack from the outside, using rockets and snipers; and surround the enemy within the very towns it deems re-conquered and pacified.[188]

In scrutinising their adversary's weaknesses, the armed opposition relies heavily on empirical data[189] but also on documents ranging from *Black Hawk Down,* the famous account of the 1993 downing of a U.S. helicopter by Somali fighters,[190] to catalogues of U.S. weapons.[191] This strategy of attrition has yielded some important results, curtailing the freedom of manoeuvre of U.S. forces, putting them on the defensive and enhancing the perceived aggressive, provocative nature of their presence.[192]

❑ **Thwarting any normalisation.** As insurgents see it, a fundamental U.S. objective is to put in place a puppet government through which it would both rule and establish a semblance of normalcy. Attacks against national infrastructure and efforts to sabotage reconstruction are justified as necessary to pre-empt that outcome. While the armed groups deny any intent of depriving the population of water or electricity,[193] restraint does not apply to oil

installations, which are seen as part and parcel of American designs to exploit Iraq.[194] *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* in particular openly takes credit for recurring operations against oil pipelines and other infrastructure around Kirkuk.[195] Even one of the least radical groups, *Jami'*, which strongly denounced some of the insurgents' more extreme operations during the earlier stages, endorses this view.

❑ **Fighting the domestic enemy.** Hunting down armed "collaborators" has become one of the armed opposition's primary concerns, particularly as more capable Iraqi forces have emerged, and militias have assumed a greater role. Although efforts to intimidate and eliminate Iraqis cooperating with the coalition have been on the rise since 2003, the coalition-led operation against Tall 'Afar in early September 2005 arguably was the turning point. During that battle, Iraqi units for the first time played a decisive part, a fact highlighted in insurgent communiqués.[196] By October 2005, groups such as *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* and *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* clearly began to designate the "internal enemy" as their top priority target.[197]

Green Zone, while the people burn in the summer heat, without electricity or water".

[194] See, for example, James Glanz, "Insurgents wage precise attacks on Baghdad fuel", *The New York Times*, 21 February 2005. Insurgents evidently play on the widespread perception that the U.S. intends to control Iraq's oil. See *Jami',* October 2005, "The secret war to control Iraq's oil". Prime Minister al-Ja'fari's announcement that the oil industry would be privatised, made during a Washington visit in June 2005, was unanimously condemned by the armed groups.

[195] See its communiqués of August 2005, also its October 2005 video showing the interrogation and execution of two guards from the Kirkuk refinery.

[196] See the communiqués released by *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* and *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* on 10 and 11 September 2005 respectively, also the October 2005 issue of *al-Fursan*. Zarqawi's formal declaration of war against the "Shiite Rawafidh" closely followed the offensive, footnote 150 above.

[197] See *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* communiqué of 13 October 2005, arguing that the focus should turn to "collaborators working with the tyrannical occupation, whether Shiite collaborators or Sunni traitors". In October 2005, *Ansar al-Sunna* published an article entitled "Targets and goals of the jihad", asserting that a primary objective of the jihad was the fight against "collaboration forces" made up of "traitors" allied with the "Crusaders". Of late, this has become the self-proclaimed priority of all groups, including the most "nationalistic/patriotic". See for instance *Jaysh al-Mujahidin*'s 3 January 2005 communiqué, which urges fighters to concentrate attacks on collaborators and ministry of interior forces. A greater emphasis already been been placed on attacking collaborators after the June 2004 "reestablishment of Iraqi sovereignty". Figures provided by the U.S. military suggest

---

[188] The December 2005 attack on Ramadi claimed by *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* closely followed this script. In a show of force, the insurgents overran and then instantly vacated the city. See Ellen Knickmeyer, "Ramadi insurgents flaunt threat: U.S. dismisses reported display of force as hype", *The Washington Post*, 2 December 2005.

[189] Based on their experience, insurgents clearly identified the Humvee as a choice target, given its slow pace and armour deficiencies. In October 2005 *al-Fursan*, published by *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq*, devoted an entire article to it.

[190] Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down,* Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999. Crisis Group interview, Iraqi insurgent, a former intelligence officer in general security (*al-Amn al-'Amm*), November 2003. See also Major Adam Strickland, "Lessons Unlearned – Ignoring the Past", *Small Wars Journal*, 20 February 2005.

[191] According to a journalist with access to the insurgents, they systematically translate and study military magazines in order to gain better understanding of U.S. weaponry. Patrick Graham, "Beyond Fallujah: A year with the Iraqi resistance", *Harper's Magazine*, 18 November 2004.

[192] As noted by Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, a result of this strategy is that even "routine movements by U.S. troops are treated as combat patrols", op. cit.

[193] See, for example, "The resistance and public services", *Jami'* web site, mid-2005, where the occupier and "collaborators" are also accused of "taking refuge in an excessively air-conditioned

❑ **Spectacular operations and shows of force.** From time to time, the insurgency seeks to undertake large-scale operations requiring significant planning,[198] mobilisation of many fighters,[199] and even coordination between groups.[200] Targets in this case often have high symbolic value,[201] and the action is followed by exceptionally lavish communiqués and videos.[202] Unlike what have now become more routine, daily operations, these are meant to attract attention and grab headlines,[203] the purpose being to demonstrate the insurgents' untapped potential and ability to act anywhere, anytime, even at significant cost.[204]

that some 85 per cent of attacks target coalition forces, but it is difficult to assess the extent to which attacks on other targets (including political assassinations and killings of militia members) are taken into account.

[198] See, for example, the destruction of a British C-130 on 30 January 2005, the day of the first parliamentary elections. The attack involved multiple missiles to thwart the aircraft's defence system and strike it in five different places. For the results of the British investigation, see United Press International, 23 May 2005.

[199] See, for example, the 3 December 2004 attack on a Baghdad police station in which some 60 fighters participated. Jeffrey White, Todd Orenstein and Max Sicherman, "Resistance Strategy in the Trans-Election Period (Part II): Opportunities, Effects, and Implications", *PolicyWatch*, Number 948, 26 January 2005.

[200] See, for example, the joint operation between *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* and *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* against a U.S. helicopter in Baghdad, as pictured on video, 21 April 2005.

[201] For example, the attack on Abu Ghraib prison, Agence France-Presse, 3 April 2005.

[202] *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*'s video of the attack on a U.S. base in Mosul showed its different stages, from planning (20 December 2004), to execution (21 December), an explanation of the plan by an insurgent commander, ritualised farewells of suicide bombers and pictures of the explosion as well as the ensuing damage. *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* produced a one-hour video on the 8 October 2005 "'Umar Hadid" operation, a multiple, combined suicide attack on a U.S. convoy. "The first attack causes a diversion, the second strikes at the convoy's key defensive unit, the third targets one of the convoy's most vulnerable points, the fourth further opens the breach and the fifth reaches the heart of the convoy".

[203] These include, notably, the November 2005 double suicide attack against the Palestine/Sheraton and Hamra/Flower Land hotels, which generally house foreign journalists.

[204] Insurgent groups do not necessarily try to hide their high-profile casualties, turning them for propaganda purposes into larger than life leaders when their sacrifice appears meaningful. Thus, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* acknowledged the death of Abu Anas al-Shami although he was one of the groups icons, due to the reputedly outstanding role he played in the battles of Falluja, refusing to heed even Zarqawi's order to evacuate (according to insurgent folklore). He died while commanding a major offensive on 2 April 2005 against the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison, an operation which *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* describes as a success and

IV. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR COALITION POLICY

The current anti-insurgency approach does not appear to be working. To date, it has centred on three core pillars: the enemy's destruction (elimination of the largest possible number of fighters), decapitation (suppression of insurgent leaders and leadership structures) and dislocation (recovery of their sanctuaries and disruption of their lines of communication). Yet the armed opposition has been able to replenish its ranks and mobilise necessary (albeit limited) popular support. Even *Tandhim al-Qa'ida*, a prime target for both coalition and Iraqi security forces, has not displayed any sign of exhaustion.

The insurgency is built around a loose and flexible network, feeds on deep-seated family, tribal and local loyalties, with allegiance to a cause rather than to specific individuals. Insurgent leaders are an important part, but there is no evidence their individual roles are crucial; those who have been killed or captured have been swiftly replaced with no notable impact on any group's performance. The insurgents, meanwhile, have been both playing on and exacerbating Sunni Arab hostility, first toward the occupation, and now also toward sectarian Shiite parties seen as intent on taking over national institutions and resources, waging a dirty communal war and pursuing an essentially Iranian agenda. The combination of social networks, an ample supply of weapons, a powerful message and adequate funds has allowed the insurgency to maintain a relatively constant level of violence.

The armed opposition also has found ways around the coalition's attempt to dislocate it by regaining territory (e.g., Tall 'Afar and al-Qa'im) or disrupting internet sites. On the ground, the insurgency is responding to the U.S. strategy – "clear, hold, and build" – by one of its own: recoil, redeploy and spoil. Rather than confront the enemy head on, it is taking advantage of its military flexibility, the limited number of U.S. troops and the fragility of Iraqi security forces to attack at the time and place of its

refers to as "Operation Abu Anas". As reported by U.S. officials, it was certainly spectacular, well-planned and well-executed. Up to 60 insurgents were involved in the attack, which combined two suicide bombings, a mortar barrage of 40 shells and an intense infantry assault. See NBC News, 2 April 2005. Similarly, *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna's* 2 September 2005 attack against a convoy in Tall 'Afar was named after the head of the 30 fighters involved in the operation, who was killed in its course. U.S. forces recently have reported a decrease in such high-profile, complex attacks, though it is premature to reach any definitive conclusion. Crisis Group email communication, U.S. military analyst, February 2006.

choosing. Insurgent groups also have become proficient at maintaining internet communications despite coalition efforts to interrupt them.[205]

The content and evolution of the armed opposition's discourse carries important lessons in this respect. Over time, the insurgency appears to have become more united, confident, sensitive to its constituents' demands, and adept at learning from the enemy's successes and failures and its own. The trend remains fragile – the surface homogeneity in all likelihood conceals deep-seated tensions; the confidence may be short-lived; and the sensitivity has its limitations. But the U.S. needs to take these into account if it is to understand the insurgency's remarkable resilience and learn how to counter it.

A central message is that the coalition's most effective tools have not been of a military but rather of a political nature. Televised confessions of insurgent combatants and accusations of sectarianism, brutality and depravity, as well as the various 2005 polls all had a visible impact on the armed opposition, bringing about tangible changes in its behaviour and rhetoric. This was only a start, but it suggests something more profound: the importance to the insurgency of its legitimacy, which essentially relies on opposition to the occupation, anger at its specific practices and the feeling shared by Sunni Arabs of being under siege.

Conducting an effective counter-insurgency campaign requires emphasising this political dimension, taking the armed opposition's discourse seriously, and directing one's efforts at the sources of its popular support. Excessive use of force by coalition troops, torture, resort to tactics that inflict widespread harm on civilians and reliance on sectarian militias simultaneously undermine U.S. legitimacy and boost the insurgents' own, thereby clearly outweighing any possible military gain.

For the U.S. and its Iraqi allies to prevail on this battlefront, they first of all must establish a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence – which means establishing the legitimacy both of the means being deployed and of the state on whose behalf violence is being exercised. That, to date, has been far from the case. Instead, the insurgency flourishes on widespread Sunni Arab perception of U.S. and official Iraqi arbitrariness and coercion. As a result, the U.S. runs the risk of seeing the armed opposition durably entrenched in predominantly Sunni Arab areas

which, in a vicious cycle, the central government can reach only through periodic assaults and repressive actions.

A first imperative, of course, is to reach out to the Sunni Arab community, amend the constitution and build a more inclusive polity.[206] But that aside, important steps must be taken to alter radically how the counter-insurgency campaign is being waged. For the U.S. and its Iraqi allies, this entails:

❑ closely monitoring, controlling and, if necessary, punishing, the behaviour of security forces;

❑ halting recourse to the most questionable types of practices, including torture and extraordinary methods of interrogation and confinement, collective punishment and extra-judicial killings;

❑ ending the use of sectarian militias as a complement to, or substitute for, regular armed forces and beginning a serious process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of militia fighters;

❑ the U.S. holding the new government accountable and making clear that longer-term relations, economic assistance and future military cooperation will depend on the steps it takes to rein in and ultimately disband militias, halt politically-motivated killings and respect human rights and the rule of law;

❑ the U.S. making clear its willingness, while it remains in Iraq, to negotiate openly the terms of its presence and its rules of engagement; and

❑ the U.S. making repeatedly clear at the highest level that it accepts that the oil resources of the country belong to the Iraqi people and no one else, and that it will withdraw as soon as the newly elected government so requests.

Amman/Brussels, 15 February 2006

---

[205] Although insurgent websites (whose content could readily reach a wide audience) have been shut down, email distribution lists and confidential chat rooms enable the insurgents to send their communiqués, videos and magazines to a smaller but particularly dedicated following.

[206] A forthcoming Crisis Group report will address these issues in detail.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF IRAQ

APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with over 110 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by Lord Patten of Barnes, former European Commissioner for External Relations. President and Chief Executive since January 2000 is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity), New York, London and Moscow. The organisation currently operates fifteen field offices (in Amman, Belgrade, Bishkek, Bogotá, Cairo, Dakar, Dushanbe, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kabul, Nairobi, Pretoria, Pristina, Seoul and Tbilisi), with analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents. In Africa, this includes Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, the Sahel region, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; in the Middle East, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in Latin America, Colombia, the Andean region and Haiti.

Crisis Group raises funds from governments, charitable foundations, companies and individual donors. The following governmental departments and agencies currently provide funding: Agence Intergouvernementale de la francophonie, Australian Agency for International Development, Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canadian International Development Agency, Canadian International Development Research Centre, Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Foreign Office, Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Agency for International Development, Republic of China (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom Department for International Development, U.S. Agency for International Development.

Foundation and private sector donors include Atlantic Philanthropies, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Compton Foundation, Ford Foundation, Fundação Oriente, Fundación DARA Internacional, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Hunt Alternatives Fund, Korea Foundation, John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Moriah Fund, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Open Society Institute, Pierre and Pamela Omidyar Fund, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Ploughshares Fund, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Rockefeller Foundation, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Sarlo Foundation of the Jewish Community Endowment Fund and Viva Trust.

February 2006

APPENDIX C

CRISIS GROUP REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA SINCE 2003

ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Islamic Social Welfare Activism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A Legitimate Target?, Middle East Report N°13, 2 April 2003

A Middle East Roadmap to Where?, Middle East Report N°14, 2 May 2003

The Israeli-Palestinian Roadmap: What A Settlement Freeze Means And Why It Matters, Middle East Report N°16, 25 July 2003

Hizbollah: Rebel without a Cause?, Middle East Briefing Nº7, 30 July 2003

Dealing With Hamas, Middle East Report N°21, 26 January 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Peacemaking, Middle East Report N°22, 5 February 2004

Syria under Bashar (I): Foreign Policy Challenges, Middle East Report N°23, 11 February 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Syria under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges, Middle East Report N°24, 11 February 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Identity Crisis: Israel and its Arab Citizens, Middle East Report N°25, 4 March 2004

The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth, Middle East Briefing Nº13, 7 June 2004

Who Governs the West Bank? Palestinian Administration under Israeli Occupation, Middle East Report N°32, 28 September 2004 (also available in Arabic and in Hebrew)

After Arafat? Challenges and Prospects, Middle East Briefing N°16, 23 December 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Disengagement and After: Where Next for Sharon and the Likud?, Middle East Report N°36, 1 March 2005 (also available in Arabic and in Hebrew)

Syria After Lebanon, Lebanon After Syria, Middle East Report N°39, 12 April 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Mr Abbas Goes to Washington: Can He Still Succeed?, Middle East Briefing N°17, 24 May 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Disengagement and Its Discontents: What Will the Israeli Settlers Do?, Middle East Report N°43, 7 July 2005 (also available in Arabic)

The Jerusalem Powder Keg, Middle East Report N°44, 2 August 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Lebanon: Managing the Gathering Storm, Middle East Report N°48, 5 December 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Enter Hamas: The Challenges of Political Integration, Middle East Report N°49, 18 January 2006 2006 (also available in Arabic and in Hebrew)

EGYPT/NORTH AFRICA

Algeria: Unrest and Impasse in Kabylia, Middle East/North Africa Report N°15, 10 June 2003 (also available in French)

The Challenge of Political Reform: Egypt after the Iraq War, Middle East/North Africa Briefing Nº9, 30 September 2003

Islamism in North Africa I: The Legacies of History, Middle East/North Africa Briefing Nº12, 20 April 2004)

Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt's Opportunity, Middle East/North Africa Briefing Nº13, 20 April 2004

Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page, Middle East/North Africa Report Nº29, 30 July 2004 (also available in Arabic and in French)

Understanding Islamism, Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, 2 March 2005 (also available in Arabic and French)

Islamism in North Africa IV: The Islamist Challenge in Mauritania: Threat or Scapegoat?, Middle East/North Africa Report N°41, 10 May 2005 (only available in French)

Reforming Egypt: In Search of a Strategy, Middle East/North Africa Report N°46, 4 October 2005

IRAQ/IRAN/GULF

Yemen: Coping with Terrorism and Violence in a Fragile State, Middle East Report N°8, 8 January 2003

Radical Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Mouse That Roared? Middle East Briefing Nº4, 7 February 2003

Red Alert in Jordan: Recurrent Unrest in Maan, Middle East Briefing Nº5, 19 February 2003

Iraq Policy Briefing: Is There an Alternative to War?, Middle East Report N°9, 24 February 2003

War in Iraq: What's Next for the Kurds?, Middle East Report N°10, 19 March 2003

War in Iraq: Political Challenges after the Conflict, Middle East Report N°11, 25 March 2003

War in Iraq: Managing Humanitarian Relief, Middle East Report N°12, 27 March 2003

Baghdad: A Race against the Clock, Middle East Briefing Nº6, 11 June 2003

Governing Iraq, Middle East Report N°17, 25 August 2003

Iraq's Shiites under Occupation, Middle East Briefing Nº8, 9 September 2003

The Challenge of Political Reform: Jordanian Democratisation and Regional Instability, Middle East Briefing Nº10, 8 October 2003 (also available in Arabic)

Iran: Discontent and Disarray, Middle East Briefing Nº11, 15 October 2003

Dealing With Iran's Nuclear Program, Middle East Report N°18, 27 October 2003

Iraq's Constitutional Challenge, Middle East Report N°19, 13 November 2003 (also available in Arabic)

Iraq: Building a New Security Structure, Middle East Report N°20, 23 December 2003

Iraq's Kurds: Toward an Historic Compromise?, Middle East Report N°26, 8 April 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Iraq's Transition: On a Knife Edge, Middle East Report N°27, 27 April 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?, Middle East Report N°28, 14 July 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Reconstructing Iraq, Middle East Report N°30, 2 September 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?, Middle East Report N°31, 21 September 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Iraq: Can Local Governance Save Central Government?, Middle East Report N°33, 27 October 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Iran: Where Next on the Nuclear Standoff, Middle East Briefing N°15, 24 November 2004

What Can the U.S. Do in Iraq?, Middle East Report N°34, 22 December 2004 (also available in Arabic)

Iraq: Allaying Turkey's Fears Over Kurdish Ambitions, Middle East Report N°35, 26 January 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?, Middle East Report N°38, 21 March 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge, Middle East Report N°40, 2 May 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Iraq: Don't Rush the Constitution, Middle East Report N°42, 8 June 2005 (also available in Arabic)

Iran: What Does Ahmadi-Nejad's Victory Mean?, Middle East Briefing N°18, 4 August 2005

The Shiite Question in Saudi Arabia, Middle East Report Nº45, 19 September 2005

Unmaking Iraq: A Constitutional Process Gone Awry, Middle East Briefing N°19, 26 September 2005

Jordan's 9/11: Dealing With Jihadi Islamism, Middle East Report N°47, 23 November 2005 (also available in Arabic)

OTHER REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS

For Crisis Group reports and briefing papers on:
- Asia
- Africa
- Europe
- Latin America and Caribbean
- Thematic Issues
- *CrisisWatch*

please visit our website www.crisisgroup.org

APPENDIX D

CRISIS GROUP BOARD OF TRUSTEES