



## Dissection of Foreign Salafist Jihadists in Iraq

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Analysis n° 260

March 26, 2008

The issue of influx of foreign Salafist jihadists has become a well-known reality since September 2007. Everyone seems to think that if this influx were stopped, it would substantially contribute to the resolution of this conflict. Because of this new reality, it is potentially easier to fight back. Anthony H. Cordesman's very well-documented analyses, published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington D.C., have contributed the understanding of complex issues such as the mysteries of Salafist jihadist terrorism on Iraqi soil [1]. However, the intervention by Coalition forces last September in Sinjar, about 10 kilometers from the Syrian border, unraveled a substantial file with more than 700 incidences of foreign jihadists arriving in the country since August 2006.

This has provided a vast amount of data giving information on issues such as origin, professional profile, and objective or links with this terrorist network [2]. It will undoubtedly help disrupt the access routes of terror to Iraq; moreover, it already has proved to be a helpful tool distinctly identifying the states where they come from and their points of transit. It forces them to make additional efforts in this task – a task that should translate into a united front against this atrocious form of terrorism threatening all of us. It is important to emphasize that getting such valuable information was not by chance. It happened as the result of a detailed investigation effort carried out with the intention of strangling the flow of foreign terrorists into Iraq – an effort where all states can contribute regardless of their attitude towards the United

States or the Government of Baghdad.

According to sources close to the case, it is significant that the network dismantled in Sinjar could be in control of 90% of the foreigner flow into Iraq – though we do not know yet if this control was total or partial. In spite of the authorities of states, such as Saudi Arabia or Libya, knowing perfectly well that Salafist jihadism is their main enemy – some of us have also known it for quite some time – it would be preferable that the enemy were clearly identified inside Arab-Muslim societies. It is common that the enemy be concealed or partially concealed behind the veil of an opposition varnished over with religious principles, or the legitimacy to fight against Western and/or Zionist occupiers. For the time being, it seems that the operation against the Sinjar network in Iraq is indeed allowing Iraqi and Coalition forces to be more effective in the fight against terrorism during recent weeks. They have made important arrests thanks to Operation Iron Harvest, launched in Northern Iraq at the beginning of January.

#### *Terrorists: Profiles, routes and objectives*

Detailed index cards were found. They once again, confirm the obsession of Salafist jihadists' top ranks with Osama bin Laden at the helm. Because of the good organization of the main undertaking two possible conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the scores of combatants fighting alongside the jihadist warriors are progressively decreasing. Secondly, the dominant national groups are

also changing, with Saudis, for one, always having been one of the groups with the most members; Maghrebians also occupy a prominent place, and Libyans have already replaced Algerians in prominence. Saudis and Libyans found on the index cards constitute 60 percent of the terrorists that arrived in Iraq during the year analyzed between August 2006 and September 2007.

While the efforts to stop the arrival of these foreign terrorists are paying off, and their influx has been reduced in the last months – from around 80 to 110 on record every month during the first half of 2007, to around 60 monthly between July and September, and in October down to 40 – one must not lower one's guard because it could mean a return to the nefarious situations previously experienced. Out of the 700 index cards found, 305 – 41 percent of the total – belong to Saudis. This fact says much about the need to intensify the war on terror in Saudi Arabia where this violent ideology has challenged domestic stability during many years – a war that should also include fighting against propaganda and proselytism [3].

We should not forget that besides Saudi officials, there are multiple individuals and charities that continue supporting terrorism at the same time that the pernicious idea floating in the air is that they must support Sunni combatants in order to avoid that the numerically superior Shi'ites end up taking control over Iraq. These Saudi officials – pressed by Washington to make an effort in a war on terror they must

fight – know that it is also in their own interest to do so since bin Laden and his henchmen consider the governing elite in Riyadh as apostate in the kingdom. Therefore, in operative terms, the abundant information found in those index cards is also useful for the war on terror undertaken by the Saudi Government since these ones reveal the presence of Saudi citizens: 45 come from Riyadh, 38 from Mecca, 20 from Buraydah, 15 from Al-Jawf and Sakakah, 13 from Jeddah and 12 from Medina.

Regarding the Maghrebian component – an ever-sensitive issue for countries such as Spain – it offers illustrative data about the implantation of Salafist jihadism in all the countries belonging to our neighboring North African sub region; 291 out of the 700 index cards belong to Maghrebians – 39 percent. Up to 137 of the detailed index cards analyzed – 18 percent – correspond to Libyan citizens, ardent enemies of the open-now-to-dialog Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi and his partners and allies – among which we are now. It is also significant to verify how 50 of those 137 Libyans come from the city of Darnah and its surrounding area – precisely one of the main Libyan jihadist hotbeds located in the unstable eastern part of the country[4]. The importance of Maghrebians from other origins remain because after Saudis and Libyans come the Yemenis in the third place (with 68 cards,) then it is the Algerians’ turn (64 cards) – they mostly come from el-Oued – Syrians (56 cards,) Moroccans (50 cards) – most of them coming from Casa-

blanca, Tetouan, and Tangiers – Tunisians (38 cards.) One finds far behind Jordanians (14 cards,) Turks (6 cards,) and Egyptians (2 cards.)

Regarding the terrorists’ access routes to Iraq and aside from the border with the inconsistent Saudi kingdom, it is important to emphasize that the operation against the Sinjar cell – a nearby village bordering with Syria – took place within the framework of the aforesaid investigation about the foreign terrorist penetration. That cell was in charge of the illegal passing between Qaim, in the Anbar province, and the border with Turkey. It is significant that Syria – traditionally a transit and entry country on the way to Iraq for these terrorists who have also been fighting the Assad regime for years – only contributes with 56 nationals to the Sinjar index cards, just eight percent of the total. Yet it does not mean that one should play down the importance of the Salafist jihadist activities inside and outside Syria. In Spain, we know it well having Abu Daddah and Mustafa Setmariam Nasar as prominent representatives of Syrian-Spanish jihadism directly connected with the al-Qaeda network.

There is no doubt this operation – which could yield new futures successes in the war on terror, combined with revolts by Sunni tribal groups and others against al-Qaeda Salafist jihadists in Mesopotamia – will help neutralize one of the instability factors in the country. Nevertheless, it is also convenient to stress that the capability of these terrorists to inflict damage by using several forms of attacks is still very impor-

tant just as reality shows us every day. Among other sinister objectives, suicide attacks are a priority as well as fueling the confrontation between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Although some sources emphasized that after the Sinjar operation the number of suicide attacks fell down to sixteen in October, the fact remains that the terrorists have resumed an increased pace of attacks, especially since Osama bin Laden himself called for intensifying the attacks on December 30. Together with the goal also sought in Pakistan to divide Sunnis and Shi'ites with blood [5], violence continues being fueled against Sunnis cooperating with the Baghdad Government and Coalition forces [6]. It is good to remember that before bin Laden, on December 16, his number two in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, had called on all Sunnis to be united in the fight against the efforts of normalization and integration in Iraq.

There is no doubt that the information contained on the Sinjar index cards has been, is, and will continue being enormously useful in the fight against Salafist jihadist terrorism inside and outside Iraq's borders [7]. This finding certainly serves to contradict Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, the Salafist jihadist chieftain in this Arab country. On December 4, he indicated that his fighting is mainly Iraqi and that foreign combatants under his banner would not surpass 200. With more than 700 index cards that even include addresses and telephone numbers of jihadists, it is clearer than ever that there are people outside Iraq wishing to deal a

blow to the efforts of peace in the country and that the initiatives of our law enforcement officers against terrorist cells threatening us while fueling jihadism in Iraq are not only legitimate and necessary, but they require all our support and understanding.

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### Notes

[1] See as example OBAID, Nawaf and CORDESMAN, Anthony H.: Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom's Response Washington DC, CSIS, November 19, 2005.

[2] The first to analyze such wealth of information so detailed and in the open was journalist Richard A. OPPEL: "Foreign Fighters in Iraq Are Tied to Allies of US" The New York Times November 22, 2007. <[www.nytimes.co/2007/11/22/world/middleeast/22fighters...>](http://www.nytimes.co/2007/11/22/world/middleeast/22fighters...).

[3] An important contribution to the war on terror from a religious per-

spective was the ruling dictated in October 2007 by the Great Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheik Abdulaziz Al-Asheik against those who send young people to Iraq "to commit heinous acts that in no way should be associated with Islam." Yet it would be even more important that such messages were non-stop and spread all over the country against this and other objectives that unfortunately are still considered legitimate at the present time.

[4] About the importance of this Libyan region in regards to the Salafist jihadist activism in the Maghrebian country, see ECHEVERRÍA JESÚS, C.: *El radicalismo islamista en el Magreb. Desarrollos recientes de un terrorismo persistente* Madrid, Instituto Universitario de Investigación sobre Seguridad Interior (IUISI), Analysis 18, January 1006, p. 14.

[5] As an example of a recent offensive against Shi'ites - Salafist jihadists consider them deviant Muslims and describe them as idolaters and apostates - see the suicide attack against a Shia mosque in the district of Kohati, in the Pakistani city of Peshawar. "Pakistán. 10 muertos en un atentado contra una mezquita" *El País* January 18, 2008, p. 10.

[6] Among the most recent attacks along these lines, one can highlight the suicide attack on January 17

against a group of Shi'ites in Baqubah during the Ashura celebration where eight people died and twelve were wounded. , Previously, on January 1, another suicide attack during a Shia funeral ended with thirty people dead and thirty-two wounded. See "Irak. Un ataque suicida contra fieles chiíes causa ocho muertos" *El País* January 18, 2008, p. 10 y "30 muertos en un atentado durante un funeral en Irak" *El País* January 2, 2008, p. 12. Regarding the offensive against Sunnis working with Coalition forces to fight al-Qaeda, it is important to highlight the murder of Colonel Rial al-Samarrai in a double suicide attack on January 9 in Adhamiya, a district in Baghdad. He was commander of the Sunni Sahwa militias in this district - a force created to fight off the bin Laden network. See "EEUU lanza en Irak una dura ofensiva contra Al Qaeda" *El País* January 9, 2008, p. 5.

[7] The Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point has already prepared its first analysis using this documentation and continues studying it in depth. See FELTER, Joseph y FISHMAN, Brian: *Al Qaida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* Military Academy Combating Terrorism Center, Report Number A 689474, 31 pages in <www.ctc.usma.edu>.

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