



# Global Jihadism After the Iraq War

Thomas Hegghammer

*How has the invasion of Iraq influenced global jihadist ideology? Based on primary sources in Arabic, this article highlights important ideological changes; Iraq is considered a crossroads in the global jihad against the “Crusaders.” New strategic dilemmas have caused divisions among militants, and Iraq’s attractiveness has undermined other battlefronts. A new “strategic studies” genre has emerged in jihadist literature. Countries in Europe and the Gulf are increasingly highlighted as enemies and potential targets.*

There seems to be a broad consensus among terrorism experts that the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 has contributed negatively to the so-called “global war on terror.” According to many analysts, the war and the subsequent occupation have increased the level of frustration in the Islamic world over American foreign policy and facilitated recruitment by militant Islamist groups.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Iraq seems to have replaced Afghanistan as a training ground where a new generation of Islamist militants can acquire military expertise and build personal relationships through the experience of combat and training camps.<sup>2</sup>

Most analyses, however, seem to stop at the ascertainment of a vague, almost quantitative increase in the level of anti-Americanism or radicalism in Muslim communities since the Iraq War in 2003. This article will try to delve deeper into the matter and explore the qualitative changes in radical Islamist ideology since 2003. The next few pages are therefore devoted to the following research question: How has the invasion and occupation of Iraq influenced the ideological development of the so-called global jihadist movement?

This question demands a closer examination of the writings and sayings of leading radical ideologues on the issue of Iraq since the autumn of 2002, when the pros-

---

Thomas Hegghammer (thomas.hegghammer@ffi.no) is a Research Associate at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment and a PhD candidate at the Institut d’Études Politiques in Paris. His recent publications include Gilles Kepel et al., *Al-Qaida dans le texte [Al-Qa’ida Through Texts]*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005); Stéphane Lacroix and Thomas Hegghammer, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004); Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies,” in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (2004). Mr. Hegghammer would like to thank Dr. Brynjar Lia, Petter Nesser, and Stéphane Lacroix for useful advice in preparing this article.

1. Richard Norton-Taylor, “Iraq War Has Swollen Ranks of al-Qaida,” *Guardian*, October 16, 2003.

2. Dana Priest, “Iraq New Terror Breeding Ground,” *Washington Post*, January 14, 2005.



pect of war caught the world's attention. Basing my analysis on key ideological texts, I will try to answer the following four subquestions: How important is Iraq to the so-called global jihadists? How united are the global jihadists in their view on the struggle for Iraq? How have the war and the occupation influenced their analysis of the overall confrontation with the US and the West? And how has their view of the enemy changed after the multinational invasion of Iraq? It must be emphasized that our focus will be on the militant and internationally-orientated Islamists, which means that moderate Islamist actors and nationalist Iraqi groups will not be considered here.

The research literature contains relatively few in-depth studies of post-September 11, 2001 ideological developments in radical Islamism.<sup>3</sup> This study is therefore almost entirely based on primary sources, mainly Arabic texts from radical Islamist Internet sites. These sources are often problematic and cannot provide the full answer to our research question, but they represent one of our only windows into the world of militant Islamism.

The key argument in this article is that the Iraq War gave the global jihadists a welcome focal point in their struggle against the USA, but that Iraq at the same time became so attractive as a battle front that it weakened terrorist campaigns elsewhere. Moreover, it is argued that the Iraq conflict contributed to the development of more sophisticated strategic thought in jihadist circles, and to an increase in hostility toward Europe and the Gulf countries. The main objective of this analysis is to draw a more accurate picture of the global jihadist movement and to illustrate how armed conflict can generate unexpected ideological changes within radical political movements.

### *AL-QA'IDA AND GLOBAL JIHADISM SINCE 9/11*

First of all, it is essential to define the notion of "global jihadism" and clarify its relation to other Islamist movements. "Islamism" — in itself a debated and polysemic term — is understood by this author as meaning "Islamic activism." It includes non-violent and violent, progressive as well as reactionary, political movements. Militant groups represent only a marginal part of the Islamist political landscape. Islamist militants relate to Islamism much in the same way that left-wing extremists and Marxist guerrilla groups relate to socialism.

Militant Islamism has its own intellectual history, in which so-called "global jihadism" represents a relatively recent phenomenon. The first modern violent Islamist groups appeared in the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s as radical expressions of broader socio-revolutionary movements. These groups struggled for state power

---

3. Notable exceptions include Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Guido Steinberg, *Der Nahe und Der Ferne Feind [The Near and the Far Enemy]* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005); Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam* (New York: Columbia, 2004); Dominique Thomas, *Les Hommes d'al-Qaïda [The Men of al-Qa'ida]* (Paris: Michalon, 2005); Anonymous (Michael Scheuer), *Imperial Hubris* (New York: Brassey's, 2004). See also Reuven Paz' numerous PRISM papers (available at <http://www.e-prism.org>) for excellent shorter analyses of ongoing ideological developments.



and their main enemies were the local political regimes. In the 1980s and 1990s, Islamism as an ideological framework was adopted by nationalist and separatist movements in many different parts of the world. This type of militant Islamist group, present in places such as Palestine and Chechnya, did not fight primarily for state power, but for a specific territory. Their principal enemies were non-Muslim states or communities that contested the same piece of land. In the mid-1990s, a third type of militant Islamism appeared, namely global jihadism. It emerged as a result of Usama bin Ladin's adoption of a doctrine in 1996 which emphasized the fight against the US over the fight against local regimes.<sup>4</sup> The global jihad doctrine involved a reversal of the priorities of the socio-revolutionaries and the nationalist-separatists. Global jihadist ideologues said that before an Islamic state could be established in Egypt, and before Palestine could be liberated, Muslims needed to defend the entire Islamic world against the imminent military threat posed by the US and the West.<sup>5</sup> Bin Ladin's brothers-in-arms, most of whom were veterans of the Afghan War in the 1980s, began launching terrorist attacks directly on Western targets in different parts of the world. These new jihadists were no longer struggling for a specific territory or for state power in a particular country. They were fighting to defend all Muslim territories at the same time. Their main opponent was no longer the local regimes ("the near enemy"), but the United States ("the far enemy") and its allies. The discourse of these global jihadists tended to highlight Muslims' suffering at the hands of the so-called Jewish-Crusader alliance. Their texts were characterized by long enumerations of places and events which demonstrated that Muslims were victims of oppression, occupation, and war.<sup>6</sup>

Global jihadism found its primary operational expression in the international terrorist activity of al-Qa'ida and the so-called Afghan Arabs from the mid-1990s onwards. The term "al-Qa'ida" is very problematic and is probably most relevant to describe the organization which took shape around Usama bin Ladin in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001.<sup>7</sup> Al-Qa'ida became a unique phenomenon in the history of

4. Usama bin Ladin, "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Two Holy Places," signed August 23, 1996 (Reproduced in Thomas Hegghammer, *Dokumentasjon om al-Qaida [Documentation on al-Qa'ida]*, Kjeller: FFI/Rapport 01393, 2002 [Available at <http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2002/01393.pdf>], pp. 123-140).

5. Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Fursan taht Rayat al-Nabi" ["Knights under the Prophet's Banner"], published as an article series in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 2-12, 2001.

6. For an overview of texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri in English translation, see Thomas Hegghammer, *Dokumentasjon om al-Qaida [Documentation on al-Qa'ida]* Kjeller: FFI/Rapport 01393, 2002 (Available at <http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2002/01393.pdf>), and Thomas Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, Kjeller: FFI/Rapport 01428, 2005 (available at <http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2005/01428.pdf>); See also Kepel et al., *Al-Qaida dans le texte*. Since this article was originally written, two new compilations of quality translations of Bin Ladin texts have been published: see Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World* (New York: Verso, 2005); and Randall B. Hamud (ed.), *Osama bin Laden: America's Enemy in His Own Words* (San Diego: Nadeem, 2005).

7. There has been a certain amount of debate over when, and if at all, al-Qa'ida ever constituted a coherent, self-aware organization. According to one version of history, al-Qa'ida was founded as an

*Continued on next page*



terrorism, because it enjoyed access to a territory, which it used to apply a unique organizational concept, namely an educational institution for global terrorism and guerrilla warfare. The organization itself remained relatively small (300-500 people), but the training camps were frequented by many more (10,000-20,000 people).<sup>8</sup> Radicalized Muslim youth from all over the world could travel to Afghanistan and spend time in these camps. Here lies the key to understanding the extremism and the internal cohesion of the so-called “al-Qa‘ida network.” The training camps generated an ultra-masculine culture of violence which brutalized the volunteers and broke down their barriers to the use of violence. Recruits increased their paramilitary skills while the harsh camp life built strong personal relationships between them. Last but not least, they fell under the ideological influence of Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who generated a feeling among the recruits of being part of a global vanguard of holy warriors, whose mission was to defend the Islamic world against attacks by the Jewish-Crusader alliance.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 denied al-Qa‘ida access to its territory, thus removing the basis for its unique organizational concept. Moreover, the top leadership was forced into hiding, presumably in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, while the mid-level leadership and the lower ranks sought refuge in various countries around the world. Post-9/11 security measures restricted their mobility, reduced the number of available meeting-places, and made long-distance communication more difficult. The result was a weakening of what had been the organizational “glue” in the al-Qa‘ida network, namely the strong personal relationships and the ideological unity. In 2002, the various local branches of the al-Qa‘ida network were strategically disoriented, and it seemed that old ideological debates and dividing lines started reappearing. Not everyone agreed that the liberation of Afghanistan was the most important issue. What about Palestine? And what about the struggle against the local regimes in the Arab world?

One might therefore say that the invasion of Afghanistan destroyed al-Qa‘ida as an organization in the analytically useful sense of the word. Instead an extremely diverse and loosely knit ideological movement emerged, which many continue to call al-Qa‘ida, for lack of a better term. However, the current author prefers the term “global jihadist movement,” because it better reflects the decentralized and multipolar nature of the phenomenon. This heterogeneous movement consists of actors with partially diverging political and strategic priorities. They are bound together by little more than an extreme anti-Americanism and a willingness to carry out mass-casualty

---

*Continued from previous page*

organization in the late 1980s, as an offshoot of the Services Bureau and the brainchild of ‘Abdallah ‘Azzam (see *9/11 Commission Report*; Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaida* (London: Hurst, 2002)). Critics, (see Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda* (London: IB Tauris, 2003)) have rightly pointed out that there are extremely few indications pre-9/11 that the name “al-Qa‘ida” was ever in use by the people whom we assume to be its members. What is clear, however, is that the organizational structures around Bin Ladin became markedly more extensive, complex, and hierarchical after his move to Afghanistan in 1996. There is no doubt that by 1998-99, Bin Ladin presided over a sophisticated organization, whether the name al-Qa‘ida was used internally or not.

8. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 67.



attacks on Western targets. In more concrete terms, the old al-Qa'ida network seems to have split up into five regionally-defined clusters, whose centers of gravity are in Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, Afghanistan/Pakistan, Southeast Asia, and Europe/North Africa.<sup>9</sup> These networks seem to operate relatively independently from each other, although transregional contacts are widespread. In some areas, such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, the global jihadists have formed identifiable organizations (“al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers” and “al-Qa'ida on the Arabian Peninsula”). In other places, such as Europe, the organizational structures are much more difficult to identify.

Two things make the global jihadists “more global” than other militant Islamists. First of all, they view the US and the West as the primary and immediate enemy, and they see their own military activity as part of a global confrontation with the Jewish-Crusader alliance. Second, their operational pattern is transnational, either in the sense that they prefer to strike at international targets in their local battle zone, or that they are willing to carry out terrorist attacks far outside of their territorial base, for example in Europe or in the US. In practice, however, the distinction between global and local jihadists is often difficult to make. For a start, all militant Islamist groups today, whether they are globally or locally oriented, use virulently anti-American rhetoric. Moreover, attacks on Western targets in places such as Iraq may also be carried out by groups with a primarily nationalist agenda. This illustrates more than anything else that the study of ideology is not an exact science and that our current concepts do not adequately capture the complex phenomenon of Islamist militancy.

These developments raise important questions. How do we identify the key ideological tendencies in a group of actors as complex and decentralized as the global jihadist movement? And how do we deal with the vast amounts of ideological material of different origin that is circulating on the Internet? A first possible step is to identify the main participants in the ideological debates. This author argues that there are five principal categories of actors that shape contemporary global jihadist ideology. The first category is represented by the leadership of the “old al-Qa'ida,” i.e. Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri. They have an almost mythical status in Islamist circles and still exert tremendous ideological influence. The two leaders communicate primarily through sound and video recordings diffused on Arabic television stations such as al-Jazeera and on the Internet. The statements by Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri are often quite general in content, and their main purpose seems to be to convince and motivate believers to take up arms against the enemy. Their approximately 40 statements since the autumn of 2001 have focused on the political reasons to fight the Crusaders.<sup>10</sup> They rarely provide specific strategic or tactical advice, and hence their declarations are always subject to interpretation by other writers.<sup>11</sup>

9. It must be emphasized that national and regional “clusters” have always existed within the al-Qa'ida network. See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

10. Hegghammer, *Dokumentasjon om al-Qaida* and Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*.

11. Reuven Paz, “Al-Qa'idah's Interpreters,” *PRISM Occasional Papers* 1, 1 (Available at <http://www.e-prism.org.il>).



The second category consists of the religious scholars. They are most often, though not always, older people with a formal religious education. The role of these “jihad shaykhs” is to issue fatwas clarifying what is religiously legitimate or necessary to do in the struggle against the infidels.<sup>12</sup> They are seldom directly connected to militant groups. Most of them have been based in Saudi Arabia, Britain, or in unknown locations. Since September 11, the vast majority of these scholars have been imprisoned, put in house arrest or otherwise silenced, but some are still active.<sup>13</sup> Their fatwas and books are published and distributed on the Internet by young and computer-savvy assistants drawn from the entourage of students that often surround these scholars.

The third category comprises the strategic thinkers. They tend to be in their twenties or thirties and are members of militant groups, but they are generally not involved in the front line of the military operations. They write articles and books about the best way — from a functional point of view — to fight the enemy. They are thus somewhat less concerned with theological aspects of the struggle. Their publications are also distributed on the Internet. Such strategic thinkers include Yusuf al-‘Ayiri, Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri, and Abu ‘Umar al-Sayf.<sup>14</sup> Some writers are completely

12. Radical Islamist ideologues themselves use the term “scholars of jihad” [*‘ulama’ al-jihad*], in opposition to the “scholars of the palace” [*‘ulama’ al-balat*] who side with the oppressive rulers. See Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet’s Banner*.

13. Examples of prominent scholars imprisoned in 2002 and 2003 include the Palestinian-Jordanian Abu Qatada al-Falastini (aka ‘Umar Mahmud Abu ‘Umar), held in the United Kingdom, and the Saudi Nasir al-Fahd and ‘Ali al-Khudayr (imprisoned in Saudi Arabia). Some important figures were imprisoned in the mid-1990s, such as the Egyptian ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman (imprisoned in the US) and the Palestinian-Jordanian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (aka ‘Isam al-Barqawi). Al-Maqdisi regularly releases texts, presumably smuggled out from his Jordanian prison by visitors. One of the last remaining “jihad shaykhs” is the Syrian Abu Basir al-Tartusi (aka ‘Abd al-Mu’nim Halima) who is based in the UK.

14. Yusuf al-‘Ayiri was a Saudi ideologist and veteran of the first Afghan War in the 1980s. From about 2000 until his death in late May 2003, he was Usama bin Ladin’s main contact in Saudi Arabia. He played an important ideological role as administrator of the website *Markaz al-Dirasat wa’l-Buhuth al-Islamiyya* [Center for Islamic Studies and Research] and as author of several innovative strategic studies. He is also believed to be the architect behind the terrorist campaign launched in Saudi Arabia in May 2003. Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri (aka Mustafa Sitmariam Nasir, aka ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Hakim) is a Syrian veteran from the first Afghan War who played an important role on the European jihadist scene in the 1990s, notably as Editor of the jihadist magazine *al-Ansar* [The Supporters] in London. He later disappeared from the ideological scene, only to reemerge with a much publicized “come-back statement” in December 2004. He is said by intelligence sources to have strong links to jihadists in Spain as well as to Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. He lived in Spain for several years in the 1990s and acquired Spanish citizenship by marrying a Spanish convert. See Lorenzo Vidino, “A Suri State of Affairs,” *National Review Online*, May 21, 2004. Al-Suri’s large ideological production is very influential and he was reportedly arrested in the Pakistani city of Quetta in early November 2005. Abu ‘Umar al-Sayf is a Saudi-born ideologist who is based in or near Chechnya. He is said to be one of the main ideological guides of Shamil Basayev’s radical faction of the Chechen resistance. His books are signed “Head of the High Court of cassation in Chechnya” [*Ra’is Mahkamat al-Tamyiz al-‘Ulya fi al-Shihan*] and he is described in the Jihadist literature as “Mufti of the Mujahidin in Chechnya” [*Mufti al-Mujahidin fi al-Shihan*] or “Chief Judge and Leader of the Courts in Chechnya” [*Al-Qadi al-Awwal wa Amir*

*Continued on next page*



anonymous and are known only by their nom de plume on the Internet, such as Luis 'Atiyat Allah.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth category of ideological actors include the active militant organizations. Groups such as “al-Qa‘ida on the Arabian Peninsula” and “al-Qa‘ida in the Land of the Two Rivers” often publish their own magazines and declarations with information about their operations and texts justifying their struggle.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of these publications is presumably to generate a maximum of publicity about the group’s activities in order to facilitate recruitment and fundraising. These texts, which are distributed on the Internet, provide important insights into how the struggle is perceived at the battlefield.

The fifth category is represented by what one might call the “grassroot radicals,” i.e., the thousands of anonymous participants on radical Islamist discussion forums on the Internet, such as *al-Ansar*, *al-Qal‘a* and *al-Islah* [the Supporters; the Citadel; Reform].<sup>17</sup> Every single day, hundreds of messages and commentaries are posted on these forums, which are primarily in Arabic. Subscribers can log on using fake identities and discuss politics, comment on news, and exchange rumours related to jihad fronts around the world. They can also download all the latest recordings and declarations by militant groups and leading ideologues. It is very difficult to know where these individuals come from or what they do in real life. It may seem, however, that the majority are “Internet radicals” who are not directly involved in terrorist activity.

### A NEW FOCAL POINT

The most obvious change in the global jihadist movement in recent years is that Iraq is now considered by far the most important battle arena in the fight against the Jewish-Crusader alliance. A study of the textual production of leading ideologists

*Continued from previous page*

*al-Mahakim fi al-Shishan*]. At the end of November 2005, there were credible reports on jihadist message boards that Abu ‘Umar had been killed by Russian troops. Al-Sayf is very well respected in the global jihadist movement.

15. See for example “*Maqalatuhu Tatalaqqafuha Andiyat al-Hiwar*,” [“His Articles are Taking over the Discussion Forums”] *al-Quds al-Arabi* [London], July 23, 2002. There has been much speculation about ‘Atiyat Allah’s identity; for a recent theory, see *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 2, 2005.

16. Al-Qa‘ida on the Arabian Peninsula published three different magazines: *Sawt al-Jihad* [Voice of Jihad] (published in 29 issues), *Mu‘askar al-Battar* [Camp of the Sabre] (22 issues) and *al-Khansa* [named for a seventh century female poet who converted to Islam and urged her sons to wage jihad] (one issue). Al-Qa‘ida in the Land of the Two Rivers publishes a magazine called *Dharwat al-Sanam* [Peak of the Hump], while the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) publishes *al-Jama‘a*. Several other magazines have been published by various groups in the past two years. Many of them are available at <http://www.e-prism.org.il>.

17. Other important forums at the time of writing include *Al-ikhlas*, *Al-hikma*, *Al-ma’sada Al-jihadiyya*, *Mufakkarat usama*, *Al-hisba*, *Al-tajdid*, and *Al-saqifa*. There may be as many as 100 jihadist discussion forums, but the majority of them attract relatively few visitors. The Internet addresses of most of these websites change so often that it would not be useful to include them here.



from 2001 until today clearly shows that the Iraq conflict became the most pressing single issue on the global jihadist agenda as early as the autumn of 2002.

The leadership of the old al-Qa'ida started referring to the looming Iraq War in early October 2002. At that time Ayman al-Zawahiri released an audio statement in which he said:

The campaign against Iraq has aims that go beyond Iraq into the Arab Islamic world [...] Its first aim is to destroy any effective military force in the proximity of Israel. Its second aim is to consolidate the supremacy of Israel [...] America and its deputies should know that their crimes will not go unpunished.<sup>18</sup>

Usama bin Ladin's first reference to the Iraq War came in the audio statement entitled "Letter to the Iraqi people" in early February 2003, which opened with the following words:

We are following up with great interest and extreme concern the Crusaders' preparations for war to occupy a former capital of Islam, loot Muslims' wealth, and install an agent government.<sup>19</sup>

Since then, the two leaders have issued at least 22 declarations, 17 of which make reference to Iraq, and seven of which have Iraq as its main topic. Out of the 12 statements released in 2004, only one did not mention Iraq. In comparison, Palestine is referred to in 14 of the 22 statements and was not the main topic in any of them.<sup>20</sup>

The religious scholars in the global jihadist movement also began dealing with the Iraq question at an early stage. As early as September 2002, the prominent radical Saudi shaykh Nasir al-Fahd released a book entitled "The Crusader Campaign in its Second Phase: The Iraq War."<sup>21</sup> In October 2002, al-Fahd and six other Saudi shaykhs issued a statement called "Fatwa on the Infidelity of Whoever Helps the Americans Against Muslims in Iraq."<sup>22</sup> Virtually all of the most prominent jihad shaykhs have

18. Hegghammer, *Dokumentasjon om al-Qaida*, p. 185.

19. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 12.

20. See Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*.

21. Nasir al-Fahd, *al-Hamla al-Salibiyya fi Marhalatiha al-Thaniyya: Harb al-'Iraq* [The Crusader Campaign in its Second Phase: The Iraq War], available at <http://www.tawhed.ws>. Nasir al-Fahd is a prolific and influential Saudi scholar who was the leading figure in the so-called Saudi salafi-jihadist current which emerged in Burayda and Riyadh from the late 1990s onward and which included scholars such as 'Ali al-Khudayr, Ahmad al-Khalidi, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Jarbu, and several others. They were all imprisoned in late May 2003.

22. Nasir al-Fahd et al., *Fatwa fi Kufr man 'Ana al-Amrikan 'ala al-Muslimin fi'l-'Iraq* [Fatwa on the Infidelity of Whoever Helps the Americans Against Muslims in Iraq], posted October 12, 2002 on <http://www.alkhoder.com>, now available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>; see Stéphane Lacroix, *Le Champ Politico-Religieux en Arabie Saoudite après le 11 Septembre* [The Political-Religious Field in Saudi Arabia after September 11] Master's degree thesis, Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, 2003.



since then issued statements on the necessity of fighting the crusaders in Iraq.<sup>23</sup> The most visible and prolific theologian on the Iraq question is undoubtedly the Kuwaiti scholar Hamid al-'Ali, who has written more than 20 fatwas on various aspects of the struggle in Iraq.<sup>24</sup>

The independent strategic thinkers have produced a large number of publications on how the jihadists should proceed to liberate Iraq. The first long strategic analyses that appeared in the autumn of 2002 focused on the strategic intentions behind the American campaign, and on the possible types of military operations the US might launch against Iraq.<sup>25</sup> Later analyses sought to provide concrete strategic advice on the way forward in Iraq. The most well-known titles include "Iraq and the Crusader Invasion — Lessons and Expectations" by Abu 'Umar al-Sayf, "Iraq — From Occupation to Liberation" by the editors of the jihadist magazine *Majallat al-Ansar*, as well as the anonymous work "Iraqi Jihad — Expectations and Dangers."<sup>26</sup> A good indication of the strong interest among

23. See for example Abu Basir al-Tartusi, *Bayan hawla Ghazuw al-Salibiyyin 'ala al-'Iraq* [Statement Regarding the Crusaders' Invasion of Iraq], available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Risalat Munasara wa Munasaha li-Ikhwana Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a fi'l-'Iraq* [Letter to Our Sunni Brothers in Iraq], available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>; Ahmad al-Khalidi, *Wa-Intaqalat al-Ma'raka ila Ard al-'Iraq* [The Battle Has Moved to Iraq], available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>; Sulayman al-'Ulwan, *Risala ila Sha'b al-'Iraq* [Letter to the People of Iraq], available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>.

24. Hamid al-'Ali is a Kuwaiti scholar and former leader of one of the two main moderate Islamist parties in Kuwait. His discourse turned noticeably more radical in 2002. Al-'Ali has emerged as the most important *mufti* for jihadist groups operating in Iraq. He was put under house arrest in the summer of 2004, and imprisoned in May 2005. See <http://www.h-alali.net>.

25. The very first strategic analysis of Washington's ambitions in Iraq appeared in August 2002 in Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi's, *Kharif al-Ghadab al-'Iraqi* [The Iraqi Autumn of Wrath], *Majallat al-Ansar* 16 (August 24, 2002). Later in the autumn of 2002, a larger and more influential work appeared, namely Yusuf al-'Ayiri's *al-Harb al-Salibiyya ala al-'Iraq* [The Crusader War on Iraq], which was published as a series of 11 articles on the website "Centre for Islamic Studies and Research."

26. Abu 'Umar al-Sayf, *Al-'Iraq wa Ghazuw al-Salib: Durus wa Ta'ammulat* [Iraq and the Crusader Invasion: Lessons and Expectations], available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>; Sayf al-Din al-Ansari et al., *Al-'Iraq: min al-Ihtilal ila al-Tahrir* [Iraq – From Occupation to Liberation], *Kitab al-Ansar* June 3, 2003, available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>; Anonymous, *'Iraq al-Jihad: Amal wa Akhtar* [Iraqi Jihad — Expectations and Dangers], posted on the website Global Islamic Media on December 10, 2003, now available on [http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00038/Jihadi\\_Iraq\\_Hopes\\_38063a.pdf](http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00038/Jihadi_Iraq_Hopes_38063a.pdf). One might also mention Yusuf al-'Ayiri, *Mustaqbal al-'Iraq wa'l-Jazira al-'Arabiyya ba'd Suqut Baghdad* [The Future of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula After the Fall of Baghdad]; and Anonymous, *Al-Khasa'ir al-Amrikiyya: mundhu Ghazwat Manhattan wa hatta al-'Iraq* [American Losses: From the Manhattan Raid to Iraq] originally published by *al-Nida* Website, now available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>. Among the many interesting articles on Iraq in the jihadist magazine *Majallat al-Ansar*, one might mention Abu Ayman al-Hilali, "Al-Hujum 'ala al-'Iraq: bayna Khalt al-Awraq wa Tartibiha" ["The Attack on Iraq: From Mixing the Papers to Organizing Them"], *Majallat al-Ansar* 19 (October 22, 2002); Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, "Al-Marhala al-Qadima" ["The Coming Phase"], *Majallat al-Ansar* 22 (December 5, 2002); Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, "Amrika wa Mabadi' al-Harb: bayna al-Nazariyya ila al-Tatbiq" ["America and the Principles of War: from Theory to Practice"], *Majallat al-Ansar* 24 (January 2, 2003); Abu Ayman al-Hilali, "Al-Muqawama al-'Iraqiyya wa Fashl al-Dhari' al-Mukhattit al-Amriki" ["The Iraqi Resistance and the Failure of the American Planning Arm"], *Majallat al-Ansar* 28 (April 3, 2003); and Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, "Limadha Saqatat Baghdad?" ["Why Did Baghdad Fall?"], *Majallat al-Ansar* 29 (April 17, 2004).

these ideologists in the Iraq issue can be found by conducting a bibliographical search in one of the most extensive online databases for radical Islamist literature, *Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad* [Pulpit of God's Unity and Jihad].<sup>27</sup> In October 2005, this database contained 59 titles that included the name "Iraq," ten with the name "Palestine," and eight with "Chechnya."

The militant organizations have written to a varying extent about Iraq in their publications, depending on their agenda and geographical location. It is interesting, however, to note that some jihadist magazines have increasingly made the jihad in Iraq the reference point for their own military activities. For example, the Saudi magazine *Sawt al-Jihad* (The Voice of Jihad) printed a number of articles in 2003 and 2004 which sought to explain how terrorist operations in Saudi Arabia supported the struggle in Iraq. They were thus legitimizing the terrorist campaign in Saudi Arabia by emphasizing its beneficial effect on the jihad in Iraq.<sup>28</sup>

The "grassroot radicals" also seem to have expressed gradually more and more interest in the Iraq question since 2003. Today, Iraq represents by far the most common topic of discussion on the radical Islamist Web forums. Vast quantities of videos, sound recordings, books, and declarations circulate today on these forums, and most of the material concerns the jihad in Iraq.

It is difficult to measure the evolution of the relative interest in the Iraq issue in these communities. This author made an attempt at quantifying this interest by examining the digital archive of the radical Islamist Web forum al-Qal'a. By reading all the messages posted on the 15th of selected months from October 2003 to January 2005, and by classifying them by theme, I generated a data set which can be used to make some interesting observations (see Table 1). There are of course significant weaknesses and problems with these data, especially given the time intervals between each count and the uncertainties regarding the identity of the participants. Nevertheless, the data seem to support the hypothesis that the relative interest in the Iraqi jihad has increased gradually since 2003 (see Figure 1). It also seems that the focus on Iraq increased the most in the period between April-August 2004, which corresponds to the most intensive phase of the campaign of abductions of foreigners in Iraq. One may also note that the number of postings was surprisingly low in late 2003, but this may have to do with the fact that the terrorist campaign in Saudi Arabia was attracting significant attention, and that the jihadist groups inside Iraq did not yet have a fully developed media apparatus.

27. The address of this Website is relatively stable: <http://www.tawhed.ws>.

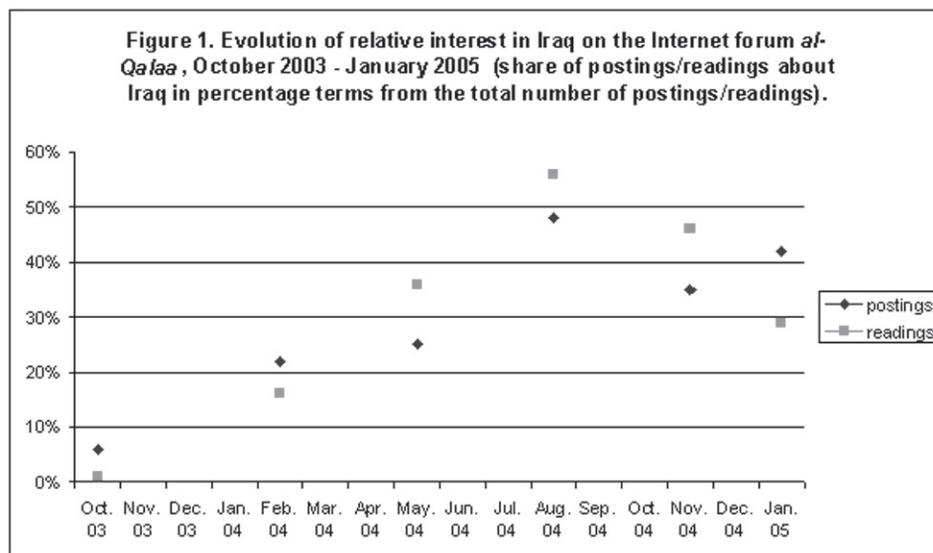
28. See for example Muhammad Al-Salim, "La Tadhabu li'l-'Iraq" ["Do Not Go to Iraq"], *Sawt al-Jihad* 7 (December 2003).

TABLE 1

Number of postings (P) and related readings (R) on different jihad fronts on the Internet forum *al-Qal'a* on the 15th of selected months between Oct. 2003-Jan. 2005

	Iraq		Palestine		Saudi Arabia		Afghanistan		Chechnya		Other topics	
	P	R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P	R
Oct 03	4	626	4	524	31	26871	0	0	0	0	28	14061
Feb 04	7	4120	1	464	7	12473	0	0	0	0	17	8265
May 04	13	11423	1	297	11	7443	0	0	1	689	26	12151
Aug 04	19	12666	2	469	3	1430	0	0	0	0	15	7532
Nov 04	6	5999	1	515	2	969	0	0	0	0	8	5652
Jan 05	18	4957	4	1258	4	2237	0	0	0	0	17	8486

TABLE 2





If it is the case that Iraq has gained the status as the most important battlefield for the global jihadist movement, it is natural to ask why this is so. How do the leading ideologues describe the struggle in Iraq, and what kind of reasons do they give regarding why Muslims should join the Iraqi jihad? This article argues that there are three major recurring arguments or themes in the global jihadist discourse on Iraq.

The first reason is that Iraq constitutes the best example today of Muslim suffering at the hands of Americans. Many ideologues emphasize that the US-led invasion of Iraq confirms Washington's evil intentions in the Middle East once and for all. The American-led coalition is described as having an appetite for Muslim territory as well as Muslim blood. In April 2004, Usama bin Ladin said:

America has attacked Iraq and soon will also attack Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan. You should be aware the infidels cannot bear the existence of Muslims and want to capture their resources and destroy them.<sup>29</sup>

In October 2004, he added:

[O]ppression and the intentional killing of innocent women and children is a deliberate American policy. [...] This means the oppressing and embargoing to death of millions as Bush Sr. did in Iraq in the greatest mass slaughter of children mankind has ever known, and it means the throwing of millions of pounds of bombs and explosives at millions of children — also in Iraq — as Bush Jr. did.<sup>30</sup>

The war and the occupation has created new and powerful symbols of Muslim suffering. Violent battles and American war crimes have introduced names such as Falluja and Abu Ghayb into the jihadist vocabulary. New visual symbols, such as pictures of American soldiers torturing Iraqis, have added to the images of orange-clad prisoners in Guantanamo Bay as powerful expressions of Muslims' suffering. These images are very widely used in propaganda films and declarations by militant Islamist groups.

The second major topic that permeates the writings of global jihadist ideologues is that the Iraqi jihad is a strategic crossroads in the overall struggle between Muslims and the Crusaders. Iraq's position in the heart of the Islamic world and the Arab cultural sphere makes the country an extremely important battlefield. In the jihadist literature, Iraq is presented as the final entrenchment in the defence against the US entry into the region. As Bin Ladin underlined in a statement in May 2004:

We are at a crossroads. [...] It is obvious that the great trick being promoted by the United States nowadays under the pretext of forcing the so-called reform on the greater Islamic world is a replica of Bremer's plan for Iraq, which pro-

---

29. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 30.

30. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 67.



## GLOBAL JIHADISM AFTER THE IRAQ WAR ★ 23

vides for excluding religion, plundering wealth, killing men, terrifying people, and transgressing on that which is sacrosanct.<sup>31</sup>

The outcome of this final battle will have enormous consequences. If the Jews and the Crusaders prevail, the path is open to the establishment of a Greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates. In February 2003, Bin Ladin warned that:

One of the most important objectives of the new Crusader attack is to pave the way and prepare the region, after its fragmentation, for the establishment of what is known as 'the Greater State of Israel,' whose borders will include extensive areas of Iraq and Egypt, through Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, all of Palestine, and large parts of the Land of the Two Holy Places.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, a victory for the jihadists would represent a major turning point in the overall war against the Jewish-Crusader alliance. It would turn Iraq into an important advanced base, from which the global jihadist movement can liberate Palestine and Saudi Arabia from occupation. In the text known as "Jihadi Iraq — Expectations and Dangers" written in late 2003, the anonymous writer explains that:

If the Americans lose (and that is what we wish from God the Almighty), then the doors will open before the Islamic tide and we will have, for the first time in our modern age, an advanced base for the Islamic renaissance and the Islamic struggle close to the Land of the Two Holy Places and the al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>33</sup>

The third major theme found in jihadist writings on Iraq is that the prospects of victory are considered higher than on any other jihad front. Prominent ideologues have cited several different reasons for this, but most point out that the enormous costs and commitments undertaken by the US in Iraq represent a significant strategic advantage for the jihadists. In September 2004, Ayman al-Zawahiri described how Iraq has become a quagmire for the United States:

As for Muslim Iraq, the mujahidin in it have turned America's plan upside down after the interim government's weakness became clear. America's defeat in Iraq [...] has become a matter of time, God willing. The Americans [...] are between two fires; if they continue, they will bleed until death, and if they withdraw, they will lose everything.<sup>34</sup>

Others again emphasize the fact that the US now has a large and historically unprecedented military presence in the Middle East, and that it has never been easier for the jihadists to strike directly at American targets. In December 2004, Bin Ladin summarized the strategic situation in the following passage:

31. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 60.

32. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 17.

33. Anonymous, *Jihadi Iraq — Expectations and Dangers*, p. 2.

34. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 63.



To the mujahidin: There is now a rare and golden opportunity to make America bleed in Iraq, both economically and in terms of human losses and morale. Don't miss out on this opportunity, lest you regret it.<sup>35</sup>

### DEBATE AND DISAGREEMENT

A second and seemingly paradoxical ideological development since 2002 is that the Iraq conflict introduced new dilemmas and debates that have caused a certain amount of disagreement and division among the global jihadists. Despite the consensus on Iraq being the most important battlefield in the war between the Muslims and the Crusaders, debates emerged on two new sets of questions. The first concerned the relationship between Iraq and other jihad fronts, whereas the second regarded how the war for Iraq should be waged.

From an early stage, the jihad in Iraq was considered by global jihadists as politically legitimate and theologically uncontroversial. The Iraq battlefield was also more easily accessible for the average foreign fighter than, for example Palestine, which is enclosed by Israel, and Chechnya or Afghanistan, which are geographically and culturally peripheral to most Arabs. This new and very attractive jihad front introduced a dilemma in jihadist circles worldwide: Should we fight at home or travel to Iraq? In 2003 and 2004 one could observe debates over this question in a number of militant communities.

The debate was strongest in Saudi Arabia. There, a group known as "al-Qa'ida on the Arabian Peninsula" had launched a terrorist campaign in May 2003 with a series of large-scale attacks against Western targets in the capital, Riyadh. The campaign was controversial in the wider Islamist community because the attacks and the ensuing clashes with police involved the killing of other Muslims.<sup>36</sup> The group behind the campaign was also criticized for undermining the jihad in Iraq, on the basis that the events in Saudi Arabia diverted media attention away from the developments in Iraq. In December 2003, the very influential Chechnya-based Saudi shaykh Abu 'Umar al-Sayf called upon the Saudi jihadists to end their terrorist campaign and travel to Iraq instead.<sup>37</sup> "Al-Qa'ida on the Arabian Peninsula" responded by publishing articles in their magazine *Sawt al-Jihad* arguing that the jihad in Saudi Arabia was beneficial to the struggle in Iraq because it put the US under pressure on several fronts. They also maintained that it was preferable for Saudi jihadists to stay and fight in the country they know the best.<sup>38</sup> The debate seems to have ended, at least temporarily, in the summer of 2004 in favour of fighting in Iraq only. By all accounts, this emerging

35. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 80.

36. Lacroix and Hegghammer, *Saudi Arabia Background: Who are the Islamists?*

37. "Al-Qa'ida Leader Calls for Attacks on Americans in Iraq Rather Than on the Saudi Government in Saudi Arabia," *MEMRI Special Dispatch* 635 (available at <http://www.memri.org>).

38. See for example Al-Salim, "Do not go to Iraq!"; Muhammad al-Salim, "Labayka ya 'Iraq" ["Woe to you, Iraq"], *Sawt al-Jihad* 11 (February 2004); Anonymous, *Tasa'ulat hawla Jihad al-Salibiyyin fi Jazirat al-'Arab* ["Questions Regarding the Jihad Against the Crusaders on the Arabian Peninsula"], *Sawt al-Jihad* 11 and 12 (February/March 2004).

consensus among Saudi militants has significantly undermined recruitment to “al-Qa‘ida on the Arabian Peninsula.”

We find indications of similar debates elsewhere, for example, in Jordan. In late 2004, Hazim al-Amin, a journalist from the Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat*, conducted a series of interviews with supporters of Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi in Jordan. In one of his subsequent articles, al-Amin wrote:

Many of the activists say they support Abu Mus‘ab’s war in Iraq, but oppose armed operations in Jordan. One of them, Muhammad, says Abu Mus‘ab made a mistake by sending al-Jiyusi to carry out an operation against the Jordanian security forces. The mujahidin do not have the capacity to open up new battle-fronts, even though the leaders in the given country are infidel despots.<sup>39</sup>

There are also symptoms of such debates in Europe. The European jihadists have lost most of their prominent ideologues and do not produce their own publications, so it is more difficult to follow their ideological development. However, radical Internet forums can provide a glimpse into ongoing debates. For example, one could follow a discussion on the French-language forum al-Mourabitoune in the spring of 2004 over whether it was better to fight in Iraq or in Europe. Most participants favoured Iraq, while a minority preferred Europe. Asked whether he was ready to go to Iraq, one participant wrote: “No. Because the Jihad will come to us.”<sup>40</sup> The many recent arrests of people involved in recruitment to Iraq also suggests that jihadists in Europe are investing considerable resources in the Iraqi front rather than terrorist operations on the European continent.<sup>41</sup>

The debate over whether Europe is a legitimate battleground in the struggle for Iraq has been most visible after the bombings in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005. The prominent strategic thinker Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri expressed certain reservations about the March 11 Madrid attack and admitted that some of its victims were innocent [abria’].<sup>42</sup> A similar though much more intense controversy emerged after the July 7 London bombings. While many Web forum participants applauded the attacks as a long-awaited punishment to Britain for its involvement in Iraq, the influential shaykh Abu Basir al-Tartusi issued a statement strongly condemning the attack.<sup>43</sup> The declaration caused disbelief and confusion among grassroots jihadists, some of whom accused Abu Basir of “selling out” in order to avoid expulsion from Brit-

39. *Al-Hayat*, December 14, 2004.

40. See <http://www.riibaat.org/services/forum/showthread.php?t=17206>.

41. “Terror Recruitment on the Rise in Europe,” *MSNBC*, January 25, 2005. Available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com>.

42. Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri, *Bayan Sadir ‘an Maktab al-Shaykh Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri* [Statement by the Office of Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri], dated December 27, 2004 and published on Islamist websites; See also Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri, *Da‘wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-‘Alamiyya* [The Call for Global Islamic Resistance], published on Islamist websites in December 2004, p. 1,392.

43. Abu Basir al-Tartusi, *Bayan hawla al-Tajjirat allati Hasalat fi Madinat Lundun* [Statement About the Explosions Which Took Place in London], posted July 9, 2005 on his website <http://www.abubaseer.bizland.com>.



ain.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, it may seem that the strong consensus on the importance of the resistance in Iraq has contributed — at least temporarily — to an undermining of other jihad fronts. It is reasonable to assume that radical forces are being diverted away from other terrorist campaigns that are considered by many as being strategically unproductive or theologically controversial. This does not mean, however, that other fronts are being abandoned. Many global jihadists still believe that it is perfectly possible to fight on several fronts simultaneously. This is not least the case in Europe, where authorities have averted a large number of terrorist attacks by militant Islamists in the past few years.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the Madrid and London attacks were carried out by people who no doubt saw their operation as an extension of the Iraqi resistance.<sup>46</sup>

The second major issue which has caused a certain amount of debate and disagreement is that of how to wage the jihad in Iraq. One of the main reasons for this is the overall brutalization of the methods used by militant Islamists on the Iraqi battlefield. Some groups have adopted unusual and controversial tactics, such as kidnappings and decapitations of civilians. With a few exceptions, these methods had not previously been used by radical Sunni groups before the Iraq War.<sup>47</sup> What is being discussed in global jihadists quarters is not so much the legitimacy, but the efficiency of such tactics. A few radical shaykhs, such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, have openly criticized these methods as counterproductive.<sup>48</sup> On radical Internet forums, some participants have expressed concern that the use of such methods might undermine support for the struggle. Some of the criticism seems to have been taken into account, because since the autumn of 2004, the bullet seems to have replaced the knife as the preferred means of execution among jihadist groups in Iraq.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the debates over methods, there has also been some disagreement

---

44. For a good summary of the debate, see Reuven Paz, "Islamic Legitimacy for the London Bombings," *PRISM Occasional Papers* 3, 4 (July 2005).

45. See Petter Nesser, *Jihad in Europe* (Kjeller: FFI/Rapport, 2004), available at <http://www.ffi.no>; and Petter Nesser, "Post-Millennium Patterns of Jihadist Terrorism in Western Europe" in *Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre*, May 31, 2005, available at <http://www.janes.com>.

46. This is clear from the bombers' own words; see "Full text: al-Qaida Madrid claim," <http://www.bbcnews.com>, March 14, 2004; Vikram Dodd and Richard Norton-Taylor, "Video of 7/7 ring-leader blames foreign policy," *Guardian*, September 2, 2005.

47. The Shi'ite Islamist group Hizbullah carried out many high-profile kidnappings of Western citizens in Lebanon in the 1980s. Some of the hostages were killed, though not by decapitation. The Algerian group GIA kidnapped and decapitated seven French monks in Algeria in the spring of 1996. In January 2002, the American journalist Daniel Pearl was abducted and beheaded by Sunni militants in Pakistan.

48. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Al-Zarqawi: Munasara wa Munasaha* ["Al-Zarqawi: Support and Advice"], published July 2004 on <http://www.tawhed.ws>. On July 3, 2005, after being temporarily released from prison, al-Maqdisi appeared in an interview on the Qatari television network al-Jazeera and criticized al-Zarqawi for his indiscriminate use of suicide bombings and mass-casualty attacks against civilian Iraqi Shi'ites. See Bernard Haykel, "Among jihadis, a rift over suicide attacks," *New York Times*, October 12, 2005.

49. Brynjar Lia, "Internationalist Jihadist Groups in Iraq," conference paper presented in Oslo Militære Samfund, January 25, 2005.

over the question of what represents legitimate targets. All global jihadists agreed very early on that Western military targets and Iraqi security forces constitute legitimate targets and that Iraqi Sunni civilians should not be targeted. Between these extremities, however, one finds several categories of targets that have been subject to debate, notably Sunni “collaborators” (e.g., drivers and interpreters), Shi‘ite civilians, and Western civilians (e.g., journalists and relief workers). The question of how to deal with fellow Muslims who in some way or other help the enemy is an old and recurring issue in the jihadist literature. In the summer of 2003, the Kuwaiti shaykh Hamid al-‘Ali was asked by jihadist groups in Iraq to clarify the matter. He responded in a fatwa saying: “all who serve in the enemies’ ranks as collaborators [...] should be treated like the enemy,” but he left it to the “fighters on the ground to” decide in each specific case.<sup>50</sup> The question of exactly what kind of activity constitutes collaboration has not been resolved and is a source for repeated debates. It is worth noting that Usama bin Ladin, who in the past always avoided calling explicitly for violence against other Muslims, has openly declared the new Iraqi regime and all its supporters infidels.<sup>51</sup>

Controversy also surrounds the targeting of Iraqi Shi‘ites by Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi and his organization “al-Qa‘ida in the Land of the Two Rivers.” In the past, the global jihadist movement emphasized pan-Islamism and unity among Muslims in the face of the threat from the external enemy. Although Salafi discourse has always been virulently anti-Shi‘ite, Arab Islamist militants have never in modern times targeted Shi‘ites on the scale we are now witnessing in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi most likely found inspiration for this strategy during his time in Pakistan, where anti-Shi‘ite violence has been common since the mid-1980s.<sup>52</sup> The mass-casualty attacks on Iraqi Shi‘ites have drawn criticism from a number of quarters. There are indications that the leadership in the old al-Qa‘ida has been sceptical to this development.<sup>53</sup> Some grassroots radicals have questioned the anti-Shi‘ite strategy in the discussion forums.<sup>54</sup>

50. Brynjar Lia, “The Rise of Salafi-Jihadi Groups in Iraq: Some Preliminary Observations,” unpublished manuscript from lecture at the University of Oslo, November 20, 2003; The correspondence between al-‘Ali and the jihadists was posted on the now-defunct website of the “Salafi Fighting Group of Iraq” [*Al-Jama‘a al-Salafiyya al-Mujahida - al-‘Iraq*] in the late summer of 2003.

51. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 46.

52. Author’s interview with Miriam Abou Zahab, Paris, October 26, 2005.

53. In January 2004, al-Zarqawi allegedly wrote a letter to Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri proposing a new strategy that involved provoking civil war in Iraq by launching large-scale terrorist attacks on Shi‘ites (“U.S. Says Files Seek Qaeda Aid in Iraq Conflict,” *New York Times*, February 9, 2004). We do not know Bin Ladin’s precise position on this proposal, but if al-Zarqawi did indeed write such a letter, it would indicate that he knew the content was controversial. However, the clearest indication of a disagreement on this issue was the so-called “Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi,” allegedly written in July 2005, in which al-Zawahiri expressed strong reservations about the anti-Shi‘ite strategy in Iraq (see [http://www.dni.gov/release\\_letter\\_101105.html](http://www.dni.gov/release_letter_101105.html)).

54. Critics on the radical forums use two kinds of arguments: either that attacks on Shi‘ites divert attention from the fight against the Crusaders (see for example <http://www.islah200.org/vboard/showthread.php?t=120251>); or that it is difficult to distinguish between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi‘ites, hence such attacks run the risk of killing Sunni civilians (see for example <http://www.qal3ati.net/vb/showthread.php?t=122778>).



However, the most notable criticism has come from the influential shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who has openly criticised al-Zarqawis indiscriminate attacks on Shi'ites in Iraq.<sup>55</sup>

### *MORE STRATEGIC THINKING*

The third important ideological change since the Iraq War is that so-called “strategic studies” have been significantly developed as a distinct genre in the jihadist literature. This genre differs from other types of texts (such as fatwas or recruitment propaganda) in that its main purpose is to identify the best possible military strategy to defeat the enemy.<sup>56</sup> Texts in this genre have three main characteristics: they are secular in style, academic in their approach, and objective in their assessments.

“Jihadi strategic studies” have existed as a genre and way of thinking since the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In jihadist publications from the 1980s we find many sober strategic analyses of the struggle between the Mujahidin and the Red Army in Afghanistan. In the 1990s, strategic studies were less common as a literary genre, but survived as an intellectual tradition, not least in al-Qa'ida's training camps. It seems that this way of writing was not systematically applied in the analysis of the struggle against the USA until late 2001. In early 2002, the al-Qa'ida-affiliated Internet site “Centre for Islamic Studies and Research” and the online magazine *Majallat al-Ansar* published several interesting articles in this genre.<sup>57</sup> It is worth noting that *Majallat al-Ansar* featured a regular column called “Strategic Studies,” starting from its first issue in January 2002. These articles avoided religious rhetoric and had no qualms about using Western news media and academic studies as references. They quoted classical military strategists like Karl von Clausewitz and used concepts like “fourth generation warfare.”<sup>58</sup>

55. Al-Maqdisi, *Al-Zarqawi: Support and Advice*; See also the television interview with al-Maqdisi on al-Jazeera, July 3, 2005.

56. This genre is also to be distinguished from the vast literature on paramilitary tactics that circulates on the Internet. See for example the Saudi jihadist magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar*.

57. “Centre for Islamic Studies and Research” (*Markaz al-Dirasat wa'l-Buhuth al-Islamiyya*) was a radical Islamist website, which became known after 9/11 as one of the Internet sites with the closest links to the senior al-Qa'ida leadership. It ceased to exist shortly after the death of its administrator, Yusuf al-'Ayiri, in late May 2003. *Majallat al-Ansar* was a jihadist magazine issued regularly in PDF format on the Internet between early 2002 and mid-2003. The most prominent contributors to this magazine were Sayf al-Din al-Ansari, Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, Abu Ayman al-Hilali, and Abu Sa'd al-Amili. The real identity and geographical base of these writers remains unknown.

58. Sample titles include Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, “*al-qa'ida wa fann al-harb*” [Al-Qa'ida and the Art of War], *Majallat al-Ansar* 1 (January 15, 2002); Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, “*hurub al-jil al-rabi*” [Fourth Generation Warfare], *Majallat al-Ansar* 2 (January 28, 2002); Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, “*hasad murr: al-hamla al-salibiyya ba'd sitta shuhur*” [Bitter Harvest: The Crusader Campaign After Six Months], *Majallat al-Ansar* 6 (March 29, 2002); Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, “*Amrika wa'l-Hamla al-Salibiyya: ila Ayna?*” [America and the Crusader Campaign: Where Now?], *Majallat al-Ansar* 11 (June 12, 2002); Abu 'Ubayd al-Qirshi, “*Dars fi al-Harb*” [“Lesson in Warfare”], *Majallat al-Ansar* 23 (December 19, 2002).

Since the autumn of 2002, the number of texts in this genre has increased considerably. In the same period we can also observe a qualitative improvement in the strategic analyses presented in these texts. Some of them are remarkably sophisticated. A particularly interesting development is the widening of the notion of strategy to include much more than purely military factors. The analyses written since 2002 seem to put increasingly more emphasis on the political, economic, and psychological dimensions of the confrontation with the US.<sup>59</sup> A good example of this development is the text known as “Jihadi Iraq — Expectations and Dangers.”<sup>60</sup> Its central argument is that the only thing that will make the US leave Iraq is the economic cost of occupation. The best way of increasing the economic burden on Washington is to pressure its allies to withdraw from the coalition. The study then proceeds to a series of case studies of the domestic political situation in three European countries considered key members of the coalition. The author concludes that Spain is the most vulnerable link in the alliance, because the political leadership is weak and public opinion is massively against the Spanish presence in Iraq. The study, which was written in the autumn of 2003, recommends striking at Spanish forces at the time of the election in March 2004. The relationship between this text and the terrorist attacks on March 11, 2004 remains unclear, but “Jihadi Iraq” stands as good example of the evolution of strategic thought in the global jihadist movement.<sup>61</sup>

The intellectual processes behind this development were already underway when the prospects of war in Iraq caught the jihadists’ attention in late 2002. However, it is argued here that the war and occupation in Iraq contributed significantly to promoting strategic studies as a genre in jihadist literature. One reason for this is that the strong legitimacy of the struggle in Iraq reduced the need for texts justifying the fight on theological grounds. As a result, the ideologues could spend less time on the question of “why jihad?” and more time on that of “how jihad?” Moreover, the elimination in 2002 and 2003 of nearly all established “jihad shaykhs” left the ideological field more open to strategic thinkers. A second reason is that the consensus on Iraq as the most important battlefield stimulated a collective intellectual effort to resolve the question of how to evict the Americans from Iraq. Radical ideologues and strategists from all over the world have been able, by means of the Internet, to participate in a “global brainstorming” about the best strategy for liberating Iraq. A third reason is that the Iraq conflict may be said to represent a more concrete and approachable strategic problem than the global jihadists have faced in a long time. After the Iraq War, the US

59. See for example Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qirshi, “*Harb al-Athir*” [“Information Warfare”], *Majallat al-Ansar* 21 (November 20, 2002). It should be mentioned that the tactical jihadist literature has undergone a similar development toward a greater emphasis on psychology in warfare. For example, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Muqrin (the leader of al-Qa’ida in Saudi Arabia until his death in June 2004) wrote extensively on how to handle and exploit the media in connection with kidnappings. See ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Muqrin, *Al-Ulum al-‘Askariyya* [“Military Science”], published on the *Sawt al-Jihad* website in September 2004, pp. 55-60.

60. Anonymous, *Iraqi Jihad — Expectations and Dangers*.

61. Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* Vol. 27, No. 5 (2004), pp. 355-75.



found itself for the first time as a conventional occupying force in the heart of the Middle East. This gave the global jihadist movement a clearly defined military task: to force the Americans out of Iraq.

### *NEW ENEMIES*

A fourth ideological change in the global jihadist movement since the Iraq War is that their notion of the enemy seems to have been expanded and somewhat altered. One of the most conspicuous changes in the statements from the old al-Qa'ida leadership since the invasion of Afghanistan is that the number of specific countries highlighted as enemies has increased considerably. Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri used to speak in general terms about the “Jewish-Crusader alliance” or refer to a small group of specific countries (particularly the US and Israel, occasionally the UK and France).<sup>62</sup> From the autumn of 2001 onwards, more and more different countries have been declared legitimate targets, and this tendency continued further after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The following statement by Ayman al-Zawahiri from October 2004 is symptomatic:

We shouldn't wait for the American, English, French, Jewish, Hungarian, Polish and South Korean forces to invade Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, and Algeria and then start the resistance after the occupier had already invaded us. We should start now. The interests of America, Britain, Australia, France, Norway, Poland, South Korea, and Japan are everywhere. All of them participated in the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Chechnya, they also facilitated Israel's existence.<sup>63</sup>

One underlying reason for this development may be that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq involved broad coalitions of active and passive participant countries. Since 2003, it seems that there are particularly two categories of countries that are viewed by the global jihadists with more hostility than before. The first is America's European coalition partners and the second is Iraq's neighbours in the Gulf. After 2003, European countries seem to be described increasingly often as enemies, perhaps not only because many participated in the Iraq War, but also because they arrested and convicted large numbers of militant Islamists in recent years. Other important reasons include Europe's rejection of Bin Ladin's cease-fire proposal in April 2004, and France's ban on religious symbols in schools (known as the “hijab ban”). It should be mentioned that the global jihadists' view of Europe is not monolithic. There seems to be some disagreement, at least among the “grassroot radicals,” as to whether the different countries' positions on the Iraq question should be taken into account when selecting targets for terrorist attacks. When two French journalists were kidnapped in Iraq the autumn of 2004, some participants on the radical Web forums argued that French

---

62. Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes* (Washington DC: Brassey's, 2002), pp. 228-36.

63. Hegghammer, *Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004*, p. 64.



targets should be avoided on the basis that the French opposed the war. Other participants disagreed.<sup>64</sup> This is yet another example of the paradoxical ideological effect of the Iraq War: the overall enmity to European countries seems to have increased, but the jihadists are divided by new debates over strategy.

There is less divergence regarding the status of Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. Since 2003, there has been an increase in the number of texts and declarations condemning the Gulf countries' role as a military platform for the US-led campaign in Iraq. In their analyses of US military strategy in the region, jihadist strategic thinkers have emphasized Washington's partnership with the smaller Gulf states.<sup>65</sup> Some militant groups have called repeatedly for terrorist attacks in the smaller Gulf countries in order to liberate the entire Arabian Peninsula from Crusader occupation.<sup>66</sup> Postings mentioning Gulf states, which used to be a rarity on the jihadist discussion forums, seem to have become more frequent since the autumn of 2002. This interest has been further fuelled by the increase in the number of violent incidents in Gulf countries such as Kuwait and Qatar.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has argued that four major ideological changes have taken place in the global jihadist movement since the Iraq War. First, the invasion of Iraq gave the global jihadists a strategic and emotional focal point at a time when the movement was strategically disorientated, having lost its territorial base in Afghanistan. Second, the Iraq War and the occupation have introduced new dilemmas and questions that have caused debate and may have led to a channelling of radical forces to Iraq, possibly at the expense of other jihad fronts. Third, the occupation of Iraq contributed to the development and refinement of so-called "strategic studies" as a genre in jihadist literature. Finally, the Iraq experience has changed the jihadists' notion of the enemy and placed the Gulf countries and Europe more clearly in the spotlight.

Some of these changes were predictable before the war; others were not. Many analysts predicted that an attack on Iraq would constitute a propaganda coup for the global jihadists, who for years had been describing America as a warmonger with imperialist ambitions in the Middle East. Few people, however, had expected that Iraq would be so attractive as a battle front that it would weaken, at least in the short-run, terrorist campaigns elsewhere. And nobody could know that Spain would be the country in Europe to be hit first and hardest by Iraq-inspired terrorism.

64. See for example <http://www.al-qal3ah.net/vb/showthread.php?t=114188>.

65. See for example Yusuf al-'Ayiri, *Al-Tawajud al-Amriki fi al-Khalij: Haqiqatuhu wa Ahdafuhu* [The American Presence in the Gulf: Truths and Aims], published in May 2003 on *al-Nida* Website, now available on <http://www.tawhed.ws>.

66. See for example Anonymous, "*Al-Wujud al-Amriki fi al-Khalij: Tarikh wa Dalalat*," ["The American Presence in the Gulf: History and Evidence"], *Sawt al-Jihad* 2 (October 2003); Muhammad Al-Salim, "*Ya ahl al-Kuwait*" ["O Kuwaiti People"], *Sawt al-Jihad* 13 (March 2004).



These developments add to the many historical examples of unexpected ideological consequences of war that should inspire humility in even the most confident of analysts. Who could have known that the veterans from the first Afghan War would turn so quickly against America? Who could have predicted that the deployment of US troops in Saudi Arabia during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis would be interpreted by Usama bin Ladin as an occupation of Islam's holy places? Who realized that the start of the second Chechen War in 1999 would lead to such a dramatic increase in international recruitment to al-Qa'ida's training camps in Afghanistan?

We still do not know what the full consequences of the war in Iraq will be for the future of international terrorism. So far there have been surprisingly few cases of terrorism spillover from Iraq, but such attacks may very well increase in the future. What is certain, however, is that the consequences of the war will be long-lasting. Let us not forget that the current leaders of the global jihadist movement joined the first Afghan War as young recruits more than 20 years ago.